

*Christmas*

WITH

4 **TATTOO  
ARTISTS**

INTERNATIONAL BESTSELLING AUTHOR

**K. C. CROWNE**

# CHRISTMAS WITH FOUR TATTOO ARTISTS

A CONTEMPORARY REVERSE HAREM ROMANCE

K.C. CROWNE

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DESCRIPTION

**Four Scorching Tattoo Artists.**

**One truly unforgettable Christmas.**

Working at a tattoo studio is everything and more.  
Graffiti walls. Pulsating music. And four insanely HOT  
bosses.

Everything about them brings me to life.

Pierced tongues, playful smirks, and larger than life  
personalities.

My virgin skin becomes a canvas that ignites their fire...  
And the orders they give me leave me weak in the knees.  
But as I'm drawn deeper into their world of ink, sin, and  
danger...

A fierce biker gang threatens to take everything away.

**A Christmas miracle shows up in the form of a tiny beating  
heart...**

**And one thing becomes crystal clear:**

**These four daddies are fiercely protective of their family.**

*A full-length standalone reverse harem, holiday romance from  
the Forbidden Reverse Harem series. Each book can be read  
on its own. All books come with an oh so satisfying happily  
ever after. No cheating or cliffhanger!*

## PROLOGUE



“Are you ready for us?”  
My body tingled with a surge of exhilaration.

Empowered, I lifted my chin defiantly, locking eyes with them boldly.

“And what exactly are you boys planning for me?”

At my inquiry, Andrew’s grin grew more mischievous, almost devilish. “Our goal? To turn your most dirtiest fantasies into reality,” he declared, his eyes briefly darting to my lips with a hint of daring intrigue.

As Andrew and Kai turned their full attention to me, I was aware of every sensation where my skin met the cool air of the room and the heat radiating from their bodies.

Their eyes, those dangerously seductive pools of blue and gray, bore into me with a raw, undeniable hunger.

I bit my lower lip, every part of me crying out for them to take me.

Kai’s lips curved into a knowing smile as he spoke. “I’d say she’s just as ready as we are.”

I could hardly think straight as I was caught between the intense heat of their stares. There was a growing need in me that I never felt before, a wild and frenzied desire that seemed to mirror theirs.

Slowly, they closed the distance between us.

One by one they began to kiss my neck, my arms, my back.

The kisses searing my skin and fogging my mind.

Their hands were everywhere.

Gentle but insistent.

They slipped off my dress, leaving me in nothing but my lacy underwear.

I felt a thrill race down my spine at the approving growls they gave.

Their hungry eyes consumed me, and it was the most incredible feeling; I'd never felt more desired, more lusted after.

Andrew took one of my breasts into his strong hand, teasing my nipple until it went hard against his touch.

It wasn't long before Andrew and Kai were down to nothing but their boxer briefs, their erections straining against the fabric.

My heart pounded as I took in the sight of their chiseled bodies, a sense of awe filling my senses.

With a mischievous smile, Andrew pulled me closer. "Don't be nervous, beautiful. Your pleasure is all that matters," his voice thick with desire.

The men's eyes twinkled devilishly, the corners of their lips curling upward in knowing smirks.

They looked at each other as James pulled out several bandanas. He threw them over to Andrew and Kai with a grin.

"Show her how to give herself over," James said.

Andrew held up one of the bandanas, a red one. "What do you say? A little light bondage for tonight?"

Once more, the combination of nervousness and arousal that I'd been feeling since the night began rushed through me.

"Tie me up?" I asked, my voice coming out soft.

“Only if you want it,” James said. “Don’t worry, you’re in good hands.”

“Let’s see what you boys have in store for me.”

“Good girl,” Kai spoke, his voice a velvety purr that sent a rush of warmth through my body. “Let’s give the lady what she wants.”

He handed a bandana to Andrew, a wicked glint in his eye.

I nodded one last time, my heart pounding in my chest, a delicious cocktail of nervousness and anticipation swirling within me.

Andrew gently slipped the bandana over my eyes, the fabric cool against my skin, blocking out all light.

My breath hitched as the men’s hands expertly worked on my bra and panties, their fingers nimble and determined. The soft brush of their fingertips against my skin sent my heartrate rocketing, and I was acutely aware of every sensation as they stripped me down to nothing.

They bound my hands behind me.

I was restrained, my eyes covered and my wrists firmly cinched.

I was totally in their control. To my surprise, my arousal only grew, knowing that whatever happened next was up to them and I had no idea what was coming.

Their mouths found mine, hot, deep kisses of lips and tongues.

Their scent was intoxicating—a mix of subtle cologne, leather, and a hint of something spicy and masculine.

The inability to see made my remaining senses intense, almost overwhelming.

“God yes,” I moaned. “You boys are really turning me on.”

I felt a pair of hands, strong and steady, spread my legs apart. The scent of my arousal filled the air, and one of the men, I couldn’t tell who, growled with desire and moved

between my thighs, his hot breath fanning over the sensitive flesh of my clit.

I gasped, my body jolting when his tongue made contact, the sensation sending sparks of pleasure shooting through my limbs.

Another mouth moved over my body, kissing my lips, then my neck, then my collarbone, all the way down to my nipples. With my eyes covered and my hands bound, it was impossible to do anything else other than focus on the sensations of one pair of lips on my body, the other on my clit.

The man on the ground was sinfully skilled, lips and tongue began working me, sending me into an immediate frenzy. He swept his arms under my legs, draping them over his powerful shoulders as another man held me up from behind.

The man eating me out, moved one hand to spread my lips, while the other fingered me, hitting my G-spot in just the right way, his tongue making tight circles around my clit.

“Oh... Oh fuck,” I moaned. “Don’t-stop....”

Electricity ran through my body.

His lips sealing around my clit like a vacuum, sighing happily to himself. He reached up for a moment and teased my nipples with his fingertips.

His warm breath tickled my skin and made the butterflies in my stomach flutter. He dropped his hands to my ass, kneading the flesh there and holding me where he wanted me.

He peppered tender kisses onto my my hips, and then finally returned to between my thighs, gathering all of his love and attention to my clit.

There was no denying he was a master at this particular foray.

He understood me in ways that I didn’t even understand myself.

He knew when to apply pressure, when to ease up, when to tighten the circles he drew with his tongue, and when to tease

and explore. By the time he pressed his fingers into me, crooking them to sweep over my sweet spot, I was ready to unravel at the seams.

My fists tightened and I moaned, throwing my head back as a load groan ripped from my throat. “Oh God!!”

“Fuck, you taste so good. I could do this all fucking day.”

“Right there. Oh, fuck, I’m so close.”

“Don’t hold back. I want to feel you come on my fingers.”

As soon as he finished speaking, I came hard, hips bucking against his mouth as pleasure washed over me in massive waves.

It was bright and beautiful and brilliant, but even as the dust settled, I knew the night had just started with these four.

The lips left my body, a pair of hands guiding my legs down to the ground. My whole body felt electrified. There was something about not knowing which man had been the one to make me come that was inexplicably arousing.

“Andrew spoke. “We can untie you, bring you over to the bed.”

“Or...” Kai said. “We could keep you right here, have our fun with you the way we want, make you come over and over.”

Something about being tied up, totally giving myself over to them was so sexy that I could hardly think straight. All of my other senses were heightened.

The feel of the cool air against my heated skin, the sound of the men moving around me, knowing that their eyes were all on me... the entire situation was a potent aphrodisiac.

A warm, strong body pressed against my back. I could feel the hard muscles, the heat radiating off of him. A pair of hands roamed my body, tracing lines of fire across my skin, squeezing my breasts and teasing my nipples.

The intimacy of the position, the vulnerability... it was intoxicating.

My heart raced in anticipation for what was next.

Something told me this was going to be a long unforgettable night.

# CHAPTER 1

JULIA



### A Few Days Earlier

“Eyes up here!” I snapped, my patience fraying thin.

Steve Sharpe, a too-frequent visitor at Blackjack’s Tattoo Studio, flashed a smug smirk. “How about a festive smooch?” His crooked smile and oily charm sent waves of irritation through me.

“In your dreams, Sharpe.”

Steve edged closer, his eyes roving over my skin. “Your untouched virgin skin drives me crazy. You’re too refined for this joint. Bet the bosses don’t even know your worth.”

Annoyance thundered in my chest.

His leering was repulsive, skin-crawling.

Steve, known for his dogged persistence, seemed immune to rejection.

I felt like I was at the brink of losing my cool, frustration boiling inside.

Just as I was about to explode, the back office door flew open, and Kai Preston stepped out.

My breath hitched slightly. Kai’s presence was overwhelming.

Kai was one of four owners of Blackjack’s.

Hei had always been the epitome of charisma, standing a commanding six feet four inches tall. His dark hair, just the

right amount of disheveled, had always complemented those deep grey eyes that held a spark of intelligence and a dash of playfulness. Ever since I started working at Blackjacks, I've been captivated by his presence.

The way his crisp shirt and perfectly fitted jeans accentuated his muscular build always made my mouth water. His tattoos, visible beneath the rolled-up sleeves, added a layer of intrigue to his sophisticated yet rebellious style.

Each step in his leather boots exuded a refined confidence. He wasn't just handsome; he was a compelling blend of maturity and allure that I've been secretly crushing on for the longest time.

My heart hammered as our eyes locked.

There was something different in the way he was looking at me today - or was it just my imagination?

His eyes filled with determination.

Without a word, he strode over my direction.

Kai's expression was unreadable as he suddenly pulled me close, pressing his lips to mine in a fiery kiss.

Holy cow, was this a dream?

His lips crashed onto mine in an electrifying collision, igniting a blaze of passion that consumed my every breath. The kiss, fervent and intense, seemed to draw the oxygen from my lungs, leaving me breathless and aching for more.

The taste of him was a concoction, a perfect harmony of rich coffee and fresh mint that tantalized my senses.

Any sense of rational thought was swept away, replaced by the intoxicating essence of his presence.

I surrendered to the moment, my body instinctively melting into his. The warmth of his touch seared through me, his firmness providing a stark contrast to the gentle exploration of his lips.

When he finally withdrew, a soft moan of longing escaped me. The absence of his lips left a lingering ache, a sweet

torment that had me yearning for the return of his embrace.

My heart raced, pounding against my ribcage. My cheeks flushed with warmth.

He turned to Steve reminding me we weren't alone.

His gaze was steel, the softness that had been there a moment ago replaced with a warning.

“She’s off-limits. Cross the line again, and getting banned from here will be the least of your worries,” he warned, his voice a deep rumble.

Kai tightened his grip around my waist, causing a rush of heat between my legs, his gray eyes never leaving Steve.

“Now, unless you want to find out what happens when you really piss me off, I suggest you apologize to Julia and get the hell out.”

Steve turned toward me, his cheeks flushed a deep red, his hand moving to the back of his neck. “I... I’m sorry, Julia. I didn’t mean to... you know...” He trailed off, unable to meet my gaze. His voice was just a whisper, a stark contrast to his previous bravado and crude remarks.

“Good,” Kai said, his gaze still fixed on Steve, “and don’t forget what I told you. Julia’s off-limits. If I hear about you bothering her again, well, I’ll let you use your imagination.” He cracked his knuckles, making his point without needing to say another word.

Steve nodded frantically, his gaze flicking between Kai and me. Then he turned on his heel and made a beeline for the door.

After the door closed, we stood there in silence, the echoes of Steve’s humiliation hanging heavy in the air.

Kai turned his attention to me. His arm was still draped protectively around my waist, his eyes soft and concerned. “Are you OK, Julia?”

His genuine worry grounded me. “I’m fine,” I said, stepping back. “But why the kiss?”

Kai ran a hand through his hair, his eyes glinting. “Needed to shut him up. It worked, didn’t it?”

I nodded, still processing. The kiss had been a tactic, but it ignited something undeniable.

My heart was still beating wildly in my chest, a relentless drum that echoed the memory of his lips against mine.

He had managed to get rid of Steve, to silence his disrespect and unwanted attention, sending him packing, finally getting the point across. But that wasn’t what had me reeling. It was the spark that had ignited between us when our lips met, the undeniable attraction that had been unmasked by that single, fiery kiss, ploy though it may have been.

Kai flashed me another one of those devilish grins, a silent promise that left me both eager and terrified. “Take care, Julia,” he murmured, his gaze lingering on mine for a moment longer. Then, with a casualness that seemed impossible given the circumstances, he turned on his heel and disappeared back into his office.

As the door closed behind him, all I could do was stand there, my mind still reeling.

Alone, I pondered over the kiss and the unexpected feelings it stirred.

Kai was one of four compelling bosses who’d unknowingly fueled my fantasies.

His unexpected move blurred lines, igniting a mix of excitement and apprehension.

The risk of exploring this new dynamic was daunting, yet tantalizing. The taste of his kiss lingered, a tantalizing promise of possibilities.

Finn, Kai’s equally captivating twin brother was every bit as breathtaking; James, the charming flirt with a wicked sense of humor; and Andrew, the quiet, brooding artist with eyes that held a world of secrets. Four men who had unknowingly occupied my dreams and fantasy files, men who were off-limits.

Yet, Kai had kissed me. Not just a peck on the cheek or a friendly brush of lips. No, he'd kissed me with a fervor that had left me breathless, with a passion that was as intoxicating as it was surprising.

What the hell just happened?

I could feel the dampness between my legs.

This kiss was real, and it scared me just as much as it thrilled me.

A precarious line was forming, a dangerous game that could lead to disaster.

As I stood there, with the taste of Kai's kiss still tantalizing my lips, a question haunted me: was this Christmas the moment my most guarded secret would come undone?

My wildest dreams, about Kai, his twin Finn, Andrew and James turning them into a vivid reality.

As excitement filled me, so did a shadow of self-doubt.

Was I prepared for the fallout if everything came crashing down?

## CHAPTER 2

JULIA



**G**od, I hope today isn't too awkward.

Seated at my desk, my thoughts kept drifting back to Kai's kiss. The studio around me blurred into a vibrant, surreal dreamscape. It felt like time had slowed down to match the erratic beats of my heart, each second stretching out, filled with the echo of that unforgettable kiss.

My receptionist desk, positioned like a throne at the entrance, offered me front row seats to the daily show at Blackjack's Tattoo Studio, which meant being the first to see my four hot bosses grace me with their presence.

Nestled in Wynwood, Miami's art heartbeat, Blackjack's was like a neon sign in a sea of gray. Inside, the studio was a mashup of old-school tattoo charm and Miami's signature spice. Vintage tattoo flash sheets lined the walls, their bold colors popping against the industrial backdrop. Despite its modern look, the studio had an old soul vibe, with a mahogany counter that could tell stories to entertain all crowds, young and old.

With Christmas around the corner, Blackjack's had decked the halls in its own quirky style. Fairy lights zigzagged across the ceiling like a tipsy elf had a go at decorating, casting a cozy glow.

The Christmas tree in the corner was a testament to our unconventional spirit, decked out with mini skull baubles and tattoo machine ornaments, crowned with a Santa gnome that had more tattoos than most of our clients.

Every shelf sported a reindeer with a temporary tattoo, because I simply couldn't resist.

Tinsel draped over everything like shiny, festive snakes, and the windows boasted snowflakes with a cartoon tattoo gun leading Santa's sleigh - our nod to holiday traditions, Blackjack's style.

I wasn't sure how long I stayed in that daze, suspended in the afterglow of a kiss that shouldn't have happened. My head was spinning until the sound of the front door swinging open snapped me out of it.

I blinked several times, dispelling the last remnants of my daze, and forced a professional smile onto my face.

"Welcome to Blackjack's," I said, my voice surprisingly steady.

As I looked up, my smile slowly faltered. Standing in the doorway were Finn, James, and Andrew—the other three corners of my forbidden fantasies.

"Julia," Finn greeted, his voice low and gruff. His sharp gaze held mine for a moment, those gray eyes that mirrored his brother's reflecting a depth that always took me by surprise.

James flashed me a bright grin, his friendly demeanor a stark contrast to Finn's intensity. "Good morning, J."

Andrew nodded in acknowledgment, his quiet manner in line with his usual reserved self. His eyes, however, held a spark of something that sent a thrill through me.

My heart hammered in my chest as I returned their greetings, my mind still a whirlwind of confusion. "Finn. James. Andrew."

As they walked past me, their terse but professional greetings hanging in the air, I couldn't help but feel a flutter of anxiety. I had always managed to keep my desires in check, to maintain the professional relationship we had. But after the kiss with Kai, I wasn't sure I could keep up the facade any longer.

Kai came out of the office and greeted the rest of the guys.

“Come on,” he said, sweeping his hand back toward the meeting area. “Got plenty of shit on the agenda and I want to get right into it.”

None of the guys said a word as they formed up into a group, the foursome striding through the studio like gods as they made their way back into the office area. They briefly vanished behind the tinted windows until the flick of a switch turned it off.

The guys typically liked to have their meetings hidden away from the eyes of customers and the rest of the staff, but a quick glance from Kai let me know he likely wanted anyone who might try to bother me to see that the whole crew was there. Relief rushed through me at this small gesture of protectiveness.

My attention was abruptly stolen from the retreating figures of my bosses by the jingle of the front door opening again. Spinning around in my chair, I found myself looking into the mischievously twinkling blue eyes of Maddie Jones.

Maddie was one of the artists at Blackjack’s. Her short, jet-black hair was always styled to perfection—a short bob with perfect bangs that framed her face, somehow balancing between the lines of punk and chic. A myriad of colorful tattoos danced across her skin.

Her ears glittered with an assortment of piercings, one eyebrow and her lip sporting silver hoops. Her style was bold, a declaration of her rebellious spirit and the passion for her craft. But it was her eyes, those expressive blue orbs, which truly defined her. They held an irresistible sparkle, an infectious zest for life that warmed you from within.

“Morning, Jules!” she called out, her voice a pleasant chirp that cut through the studio’s usual hum. Maddie was a force of nature—a hurricane of sassy comments, contagious laughter, and an endless source of hilarious stories. She brought a vibrant lightness to our sometimes intense workplace.

“Hey, Mads,” I replied. Her arrival helped ground me back in reality, her presence like a shock of cold water, a welcome relief from the whirlpool of feelings that had threatened to drown me.

Maddie, however, was like a bloodhound when it came to sniffing out gossip. She had a knack for it that was both comforting and annoying at the same time. It didn’t take her more than a couple of moments to catch the offbeat rhythm of my behavior.

“Alright, spill it,” she demanded, propping her hip against my desk, arms folded across her chest. Her blue eyes were sharp and inquisitive.

“Maddie, I don’t—”

“You’re not fooling anyone, Jules. You’re as transparent as the front of this store.” She smirked, flicking a rebellious strand of black hair from her face.

Defeated, I relented, recounting the episode with Steve, choosing to conveniently omit the part where Kai laid one hell of a kiss on me, instead telling her that Kai had simply told Steve to get out. I watched as Maddie’s expressions shifted between disbelief, annoyance, and finally settled into concern.

“Thank God Kai was here.” She sighed, shaking her head. “Damn it, Jules, you can’t let creeps like Steve get to you. Next time, just call one of us, okay?”

“I know, I know.” I nodded as I spoke, appreciating her concern, but not really feeling up to a long conversation.

But Maddie wasn’t one to let a conversation die so easily. “Speaking of men,” she began, a teasing glint in her eyes. “How’s the love life? Any new conquests from the online realm?”

I rolled my eyes at her and shrugged. “Conquests? Funny. More like endless scrolling through profiles while trying to figure out why the hell I even bother. Part of me feels like I should just take a vow of celibacy at this point.”

She laughed at that, a bright, ringing sound that echoed through the studio. “Well, maybe we should work on your

online profile. Spruce it up a bit, make you irresistible. Here, let me see it...”

I handed her my phone and we went through my dating profile together, Maddie offering suggestions here and there. I tried to keep an open mind, knowing that Maddie was the type of girl who never seemed to have trouble attracting guys. I, on the other hand, seemed invisible to the few guys who happened to catch my eye, yet had a neon sign over my head for the worst ones imaginable.

Throughout the conversation, I kept stealing glances at the meeting area where the four guys were congregated, their voices a low murmur of conversation. Each time I looked, it seemed as though one of them was looking back, their eyes meeting mine with a level of intensity that had my heart racing. It was disconcerting, exciting, and terrifying all at once.

Something felt *different*, almost like the guys had picked up that I was into them. I didn't know what to make of it.

“Maddie, do you ever...” I began, trying to voice the confusing jumble of emotions swirling inside me. But the words seemed to get stuck somewhere between my brain and my mouth.

I gasped, realizing I'd come dangerously close to bringing up my little crush on the four bosses.

“Do I ever what?” she asked, tilting her head at me, her brow furrowed in concern.

“Never mind,” I quickly said, shaking my head. I knew it wasn't something I could voice, not without sounding like a teenage girl with a crush on her teachers.

“All right,” Maddie said, her eyes narrowing slightly as if trying to see into my thoughts. “Anyway, we'll get you a man before you know it. Just keep hope alive, you know?”

I smiled at her, appreciating the sentiment. But I couldn't shake the feeling that things were about to get a lot more complicated than anyone could anticipate. And I couldn't help but wonder if I was ready for the storm that was brewing.

Maddie's next client walked through the door, a curtain of silence descending on our conversation. She excused herself, a professional smile on her face as she welcomed the customer. Once she was out of sight at her workstation, I found myself alone once again at the reception desk, my attention drifting back to the meeting area.

Finn was the first one I noticed. How could I not? He was a beautiful paradox, a blend of raw power and brooding intensity that left me breathless every time I caught sight of him. Even from my spot across the studio, I could appreciate the rugged appeal he oozed.

At well over six feet tall, he was a towering figure, with long, raven-black hair that he often pulled back into a low ponytail, exposing the sharp angles and planes of his face. His gray eyes, so much like Kai's, were pools of cold steel, intense and arresting, piercing through your soul like an x-ray.

Finn's sense of style extended his bad-boy allure. His wardrobe seemed to mainly consist of worn-in jeans, hugging his muscular legs in all the right places, and plain tank tops that did nothing to hide the strength and power of his tattooed arms. Each piece of clothing he wore was an understated testament to his raw masculinity, simple yet impactful in portraying the unapologetically bold man he was.

The accessories he adorned himself with added a unique edge to his persona. A collection of silver chains hung around his neck, each one a different design, their metallic gleam catching the studio lights as they rested against his defined chest. The chains were often layered with dog tags, a personal touch that hinted at a deeper meaning kept close to his heart.

His wrists were often encircled by leather and silver bracelets, rugged and worn, much like the man himself. They clinked softly against each other whenever he moved, a harmonious rhythm that I'd come to associate with him.

And then there were the rings. Finn had an affinity for silver rings. He wore them on almost every finger, each one unique, some etched with elaborate designs, others plain and thick. They drew attention to his strong, artist's hands, hands

that created beauty with every stroke, hands that I often found myself fantasizing about running all over my body, teasing my nipples before venturing down to the warmth between my thighs.

His body was a living testament to his commitment to fitness. Muscular arms corded with strength, broad shoulders that spoke of power, and a torso that rippled with well-defined abs, Finn was a walking manifestation of masculine allure. But what truly drew the eye was the art that adorned his skin.

His body was a canvas of dark gothic artistry—each piece telling a tale, some indiscernible to the casual observer, others hauntingly clear in their intent. Portraits of menacing creatures, elaborate scripts that hinted at personal mantras, and graphic designs that showcased an eerie beauty... every tattoo was a piece of the enigma that was Finn.

I knew bits and pieces of his past, he and Kai had inherited the studio from their notorious father, Jack “Blackjack” Preston—the namesake of our establishment. They had stepped out of their father’s criminal shadow; however, creating a reputable and respected business, leaving behind only the name.

Yet, despite his intimidating exterior, Finn carried a certain charm, an undeniable magnetism that drew you in and kept you hooked. Every time our paths crossed or our eyes met, it felt like an electric shock jolting my senses, making my heart flutter and my skin tingle with anticipation.

I swallowed, realizing I’d been staring a bit too long. Before I could tear my eyes away, he turned to look at me, his gray gaze meeting mine across the room, and for a moment, time stood still. It was an unspoken conversation, a silent exchange that left me flustered and with a head full of fantasies I would never voice out loud.

Once Finn and I broke eye contact, my gaze roamed over to James Booth, the third owner of Blackjack’s. As always, James cut a striking figure, standing tall at around six-foot-two. His silhouette was leaner than Finn’s, more athletic than bulky, evident of his position as a decorated police officer. His

body was honed to perfection, sculpted by hours of grueling workouts and relentless runs, a symbol of strength and agility that made any potential criminal think twice.

He had the kind of broad shoulders that filled out his police uniform to perfection, highlighting his sculpted chest and the taper of his waist. Below the belt were long, muscular legs.

A constellation of tattoos decorated his arms, chest, and back—vibrant colors and intricate designs that painted a vivid picture against his fair skin. Unfortunately, the beautiful work had to be covered by long sleeves when in uniform.

When not in his uniform, James usually opted for jeans and casual T-shirts that hinted at his down-to-earth persona. He also had an undeniable penchant for athletic wear, often found in shades of gray and pale green, clothing that emphasized his active lifestyle.

His fiery ginger hair was usually kept short, a halo of copper against his pale skin. His eyes, though, were a startling green, sharp and piercing, giving away nothing and everything all at once.

Despite the intimidating facade, I knew James had a softer side. The way he would sit for hours under Finn's skilled hands, patiently getting a new tattoo, revealed a man with composure and tolerance. It was that dichotomy, a blend of hard and soft, that made James a person others gravitated to. I couldn't help but steal glances at him, drawn in by his mystique, warmed by his rare smiles.

The sight of him in the lounge area kicked my heartbeat into overdrive, and for a moment all I could do was drink in the sight of him, wondering what it'd feel like to run my hands over his tattooed skin.

The sight of Andrew Lansing was also something to behold. Nearly six-and-a-half-feet tall, the former Marine commanded attention effortlessly. The impressive build, the result of years of grueling physical conditioning, was enough to make your mouth water.

Andrew was more than just a well-chiseled body, though. His blonde hair was always kept short, framing his handsome face perfectly. The trimmed beard added a rugged charm to his striking features, and those bright blue eyes... they were like a slice of clear summer sky, intense and captivating, a sharp contrast against his bronzed, tattooed skin. But it was his smile that was the deadliest—a lethal combination of sweetness and seduction that could melt a woman's panties off in an instant.

His body was a canvas of ink, every tattoo telling a story of his life, his experiences. From clean-cut soldier to the tattooed bad boy, Andrew's transition was as fascinating as the man himself.

Andrew's wardrobe reflected his love for motorcycles. He had a penchant for leather jackets, the kind that looked like they had seen many adventures. His jeans were always worn-in and ragged, paired with plain T-shirts and heavy boots, a combination that highlighted his strong, muscular legs and long arms.

When he put on his full riding gear, he transformed into an intimidating figure, the wide shoulders and narrow waist making him look like a gladiator ready for battle. Yet despite his menacing appearance, there was a warmth to Andrew, a gentleness that shone through when you least expected it.

There he was, lounging with the others, an irresistible force of masculinity. My eyes drank in the sight of him, imagining what it would feel like to be held against that hard body, circled by those protective arms. I could almost feel the cool leather of his jacket under my fingertips, could almost smell the scent of his cologne mixed with motor oil, a uniquely Andrew fragrance that always set my senses on fire.

Just as my heart had started to settle into a steady rhythm again, the bell above the entrance door jingled, jerking me out of my fantasies. I turned to greet the visitor, but my voice died in my throat.

The door closed behind the towering figure of Klaus Henderson, a notorious name in Miami. He was the leader of

the Crimson Devils, one of Miami's most feared and dangerous biker gangs.

The daydreams, the fantasies, the fleeting touch of Kai's lips on mine, they all seemed like distant memories, buried under the weight of the looming stature of Klaus. I could only watch, breath held, as he stepped further into the tattoo studio, his boots hitting the floor with menacing hard thumps, tension mounting with each step.

He whipped off his sunglasses, a wicked grin on his lips.

“What the fuck does it take to get some service around here?”

## CHAPTER 3

JULIA



**K**laus Henderson was a man who stood in a league of his own. He was older than my bosses, in his late forties, but his physique showed no signs of his age. He towered over most men at well over six feet tall, the lean, rippling muscles of his arms exposed by cutoff sleeves an intimidating promise of brute strength.

Klaus had long, unkempt brown hair that fell haphazardly over his piercing eyes. He sported a full beard, enhancing his rugged, untamed aura. His body was covered in intricate art. And as ironic as it was, a good number of those tattoos had been etched into his skin by Finn, back before the days their camaraderie turned sour.

Klaus's entrance, like his personality, was ostentatious, designed to be the center of attention. Outside, the roar of motorcycles filled the air. My gaze shifted out the window, spotting a handful of men disembarking from their two-wheeled beasts and strolling toward the studio—clearly Klaus's crew judging by the telltale flaming devil's face patch on their leather vests. I swallowed down the lump forming in my throat as half-a-dozen rowdy, intimidating men poured into the space. Their laughter and banter echoed off the walls, turning the studio into a cacophony of boisterous chatter.

Klaus turned toward me, his boys forming up behind him with amused grins on their faces, a smirk playing on his lips. "We're here for some new ink, sweetheart."

I crossed my arms over my chest, raising a brow in irritation. Despite his intimidating manner, I wasn't all that

afraid of the man. “You should’ve made an appointment, Klaus. We’re booked solid. And don’t even start with that sweetheart shit. I’ve had enough of that for one day.”

His smirk turned into a full-blown Cheshire Cat grin, my backtalk clearly more amusing to him than anything else.

“Oh, that’s a shame. You know, I would’ve thought with how much money my boys and I’ve spent over the years in this joint, we’d be afforded, I don’t know, some kind of preferred customer privileges. Not to mention... is this any way to treat an old friend?”

His words, coated with faux hurt, made me roll my eyes.

“Now, that’s a fantastic suggestion, Klaus,” I said. “Tell you what—I’ll get you a pen and piece of paper, and you can scrawl that down and drop it in the suggestion box. Maybe we can do a punch card kind of thing, you know? Nine tats and the tenth is on us? Hell, maybe we’ll throw in a happy meal if you’re lucky.”

His boys chuckled at my sass, Klaus joining them. I was giving it right back to him, but Klaus wasn’t some overly-sensitive sort who’d lose his cool at the slightest poke; you didn’t run a crew of hundreds of hard-as-nails bikers without knowing how to handle yourself.

“Oh, and if you need help finding the suggestion box, it’s in the men’s room, the toilet farthest back. Just drop it in, flush, and we’ll get right back to you within three to five business days.”

More laughs from Klaus and the guys.

“A punch card, that’s cute. Not a bad idea, really. I mean, you would be showing a little appreciation for loyalty, after all.”

Displaying an unnerving amount of confidence, Klaus strolled over to my desk. I stood my ground, unwilling to let his arrogant swagger rattle me. He leaned onto the counter, flashing me a devilish grin as his gaze shamelessly roamed over my body.

“Now, Julia,” he began, his voice low and teasing, “Let’s stop screwing around. I’m sure you can squeeze us in somewhere. What do you say?”

I maintained my stern exterior, meeting his eyes with a steely stare of my own. “Actually, I can’t. We already have paying customers booked,” I retorted, matching his tone. I felt a sense of satisfaction seeing his grin falter for a moment. Tough as he was, men like him had limits when it came to back talk.

He recovered quickly, his eyes gleaming with a challenge. “Come on, babydoll, a pretty girl like you should have no problem persuading those bosses of yours to make some room for us.”

“First,” I shot back, leaning closer, “I’m not your babydoll.” That got some of the boys to let out *oohs* of amusement. “Second, this is a place of business. You can’t just come in here and expect to be moved up before clients that actually have appointments. We have rules, a schedule, *appointments*. You know, normal business shit?”

His laughter echoed in the studio, the sound grating on my nerves. “Julia, Julia. Always playing hard to get,” he mocked, the underlying aggression in his tone not lost on me.

The tension in the room was palpable and I could feel my heart pounding in my chest. Klaus was no ordinary client. He wasn’t a pushover like Steve. He was dangerous, his presence commanding, and the power he wielded was far greater than what met the eye. The man oozed charisma, charm, and persuasive power—the kind of evil dude who’d lead you to damnation with a wink and a smile.

“I wouldn’t call denying a walk-in for a whole damn group without an appointment playing hard to get, Klaus,” I retorted. “I’m just doing my job.”

“Oh, come on, darlin’, where’s the fun in playing by the rules?” Klaus shot back, his grin only growing wider as he leaned against my desk, disturbingly comfortable with the confrontation.

“Rules keep things in order,” I argued, holding his gaze, the mirth in his eyes not swaying me. “And if you really were a friend, you’d know that.”

Klaus’s chuckle echoed around the room, but his gaze never left mine. “Oh, I know Blackjack’s *rules*,” he said, placing no small amount of disdain on the word. “But I also know that every rule has an exception.”

“And what makes you think you’re the exception, Klaus?” I challenged. The truth was, I didn’t know how much longer I could hold off Klaus and his gang. They were not some nuisances like Steve that I could easily fend off.

Klaus opened his mouth to respond, but the sound of a throat clearing cut him off. Andrew had reached the front desk, his towering figure casting a shadow over our visitors. Finn and the rest of the guys were just behind him, Finn’s cold gray eyes shooting daggers at the intruders.

“Seems like we’ve got some uninvited guests,” Andrew’s voice resonated throughout the studio, his tone carrying a warning.

Klaus straightened, turning to face Andrew. The grin never left his face, but I could see a glint of defiance in his eyes.

A shared look of understanding passed between Andrew and me as he gave me a subtle nod of gratitude. That silent communication was one of the reasons why I had immense respect for my bosses. They were hard men, but they were also fair. They appreciated that I’d tried to handle the situation, but now, it was time for them to take over. A part of me breathed a sigh of relief while another part, the one that secretly relished the adrenaline of such tense moments, felt a pang of disappointment.

I discreetly withdrew, retreating to the safety of my desk while maintaining an inconspicuous distance to overhear the exchange. Klaus and his crew shifted their attention to the men who had now effectively taken command of the situation.

“Klaus,” Andrew’s tone was terse, his blue eyes glinting with a sense of control and authority.

“Andrew, Finn, James, Kai. What do ya know the whole fuckin’ gang is here,” Klaus acknowledged them with a slight tilt of his head. “Didn’t think you boys would be up so early.”

The air was charged with tension, an undercurrent of animosity that had its roots in the past. Klaus and the twins’ old man, Jack Preston, had a history. Jack had been a prominent figure in the criminal world of Miami before he’d turned his life around, left his days of crime behind, and opened the tattoo parlor. He and Klaus were two sides of the same coin; both men lived life on the edge, with their own rules and loyalties. They’d been partners in crime in another lifetime, a formidable duo in the city’s underworld.

But that was years ago. Jack had left that world in his past, had handed over the reins of the tattoo parlor to his sons. Yet Klaus seemed to harbor the illusion that his past camaraderie with Jack entitled him to some special privileges.

“Seems like you’re having some trouble understanding the rules of the place, Klaus,” Finn finally spoke up. His voice, deep and stern, echoed in the parlor.

Klaus scoffed, crossing his arms over his chest. “I was under the impression that old friends of your dad would always be welcome here.”

“And they are, as long as they respect the rules,” Kai retorted, his eyes never leaving Klaus. “No appointment, no ink.”

Klaus casually leaned back against the counter, his arms still crossed over his chest and shot Finn a lazy smirk. “You always did like playing by the rules, didn’t you, soldier boy?” He directed this comment at Andrew, a former Marine.

“Only the ones that matter,” Andrew retorted, his voice as cold as steel.

“Well,” Klaus chuckled, that self-assured smirk never leaving his face. “I think Jack would’ve seen it differently.”

“And yet,” Andrew cut in, his gaze on Klaus as frosty as Finn’s. “Jack isn’t here, is he? But we are. And we say no

appointment, no service. So unless you and your boys have business here, I suggest you turn around and leave.”

Tension filled the air. For a moment, I found myself wondering if a brawl was about to break out.

Finn suddenly turned to me. “Julia, how’s the schedule looking for the next few hours?”

I blinked at him, taken aback by his abrupt shift. I turned my gaze to the screen in front of me, clicking through the appointments. “Well,” I said, “It appears as though James’ appointment just canceled by email a few minutes ago. Oh, and Andrew’s too.”

“And look at that,” Klaus said, his hands on his hips. “Sometimes things just have a way of working out, you know?”

Finn shot me a brief nod before turning back to Klaus. “Klaus, listen,” Finn began, an uncharacteristic softness tingeing his tone. “If you boys are looking for something small, we can squeeze you in. But you gotta choose the designs right now, and next time, make a damn appointment.”

Klaus slowly turned around, his dark eyes meeting Finn’s with a calculating look. For a moment, he seemed to weigh his options, his gaze flitting from Finn to Andrew to me. Finally, a slow, triumphant grin spread across his face, his teeth glinting under the studio’s lights.

“Deal.”

## CHAPTER 4

JULIA



With the consistent hum of tattoo machines finally coming to a rest, I slouched back against the counter. The last few hours had been a roller coaster of unbridled testosterone, buzzing needles, and strained silence.

Klaus and his boys, their fresh ink gleaming under the sterile white light, looked thoroughly pleased with themselves. They chatted and joked, throwing appreciative glances at Andrew and James and the rest of the crew as they cleaned and packed away their gear.

“Thanks, boys,” Klaus said, giving a respectful nod to each of the men as he pulled on his leather jacket. The tension was still thick in the air, a thin string stretched taut between them, but it had been tempered, softened by the intimate act of inking skin. “Pleasure doing business with you.” He doffed an invisible cap before turning and gesturing to his crew to form up and head out.

Finn replied with a curt nod while Andrew just shrugged, his gaze flicking to me briefly. As Klaus and his crew strode out of the studio, the heavy door swinging shut behind them, I let out a sigh of relief. The roar of motorcycles ripped through the air, and I watched as Klaus and his boys peeled down the road and out of sight.

As if on cue, Maddie appeared by my side, a bundle of barely contained energy. “Well, that was intense!” she said, her blue eyes wide with excitement and curiosity.

“Something like that.”

“Got to say, Jules, that was impressive. Plenty of hard ass bikers in this town who’d pee their pants at Klaus freaking Henderson getting in their faces like that. But not you!” Maddie’s eyes lit up as she spoke, her gaze flitting over to where the guys were now lounging, their earlier tension eased by the departure of Klaus and the rest of the Crimson Devils.

Rubbing my temples, I let out a soft chuckle. “Well, Mads, I guess it’s just part of the job, right? Besides,” I glanced over at Finn, Andrew, James, and Kai, a small smile tugging at my lips, “I had backup.”

“Oh, that you did,” Maddie winked at me, her grin wide and teasing. As she scuttled off to clean her workstation, I found myself lost in thought. Backup indeed. But what exactly was my relationship with the four men who ran Blackjack’s Tattoo Studio? Was I merely just the receptionist? The question hung in the air, unanswered as ever, as I returned to the rhythm of my work.

The lull of quiet began to stretch, and Maddie and I eased the remaining tension in the air through idle conversation, our talk inevitably circling back to my disastrous romantic ventures.

With a half-hearted smile, I flicked through the prospects on my dating app while Maddie peered over my shoulder. “Oh, come on, Julia. What’s with all these beefcake gym rats? Is there any variety on this thing or what?”

I chuckled, swiping past a guy flexing his abs in front of a gym mirror. “Apparently not. Seems like protein shakes and bicep curls are in season.” I loved Miami, but something about the place attracted the kind of guys who loved to take mirror selfies with their tongues out and their shirts pulled up over their abs. In other words, not my kind of dudes.

Maddie let out a theatrical groan, nudging me in the side. “Okay, let’s be real here. You deserve more than a conceited flexing bodybuilder in front of the gym mirror.”

Before I could respond, a ping from my phone pulled my attention away. A message from someone named Tim had popped up. His profile was a collage of gym selfies, tank tops,

and oddly enough, a picture of him chugging down what appeared to be a protein shake. His bio wasn't much better, it was all about boasting his deadlift records and his "gains."

"Hey! We've got a live one!" Maddie exclaimed. "What's his deal?"

"Let me look..."

His message, as expected, was laden with bro-language and an overconfidence that only mirrored his self-proclaimed alpha status. He asked if I was free to chill that night.

Maddie and I exchanged glances, her mouth twisted in a smirk. "Well, what do you think, Mads? Should I give gains here a chance?"

Maddie let out a snort, her eyes filled with mischief. "Why not, Jules? If nothing else, you can always use a good laugh. Besides," she leaned in, her voice low, "Maybe you can at least get your kitty petted."

I couldn't help the laugh that burst out of me, the tension from earlier finally ebbing away. With a roll of my eyes, I replied to Tim, agreeing to meet up later that evening.

"This is going to be interesting," I muttered, locking my phone and tucking it back into my purse. "I'll let you know how it goes, but I'm not hopeful."

Maddie winked over her shoulder, laughing again as she disappeared into her corner of the studio. When she was gone, I found my mind drifting back to the owners. I stared at their retreating figures, my eyes tracing the outline of their muscular forms, my mind spinning the impossible thoughts that had kept me up late at night on too many occasions.

I let out a sigh, my heart aching with a longing I couldn't quench. I wanted the four of them, those unattainable gods of Blackjack's, but I knew better than to wish for the impossible. Kai, Finn, James, Andrew... they were my bosses, not my lovers.

My mind wandered down a darker, far more dangerous path. My breath hitched as I thought about what it would be like to be with all of them at once—an idea that had crossed

my mind more times than I could count. To be the object of their combined attention, their lust... to be claimed by them in every way imaginable.

Just the thought of it made my body throb with a heat that left me breathless. I indulged the fantasy, biting my lower lip, my heart pounding against my rib cage like a wild animal. I clenched my thighs, my cheeks flushing as I pushed down the desire clawing through every nerve ending.

Work. I needed to focus on work. I quickly turned away, my gaze falling on the abandoned corner of the studio where the crew had worked their magic on Klaus and his gang. I needed to clean up, to distract myself from the forbidden fantasies spiraling in my head.

As I worked, I allowed my mind to wander, drifting to the upcoming date with Tim. Already I knew it was nothing more than a diversion. A distraction. But from what? A fantasy? Or a reality that was too overwhelming to accept?

A slew of failed online dates scrolled through my mind like a hall of shame. There was the guy who'd had more interest in his own reflection than in me, the one who couldn't stop talking about his mom's home cooking, the so-called alpha who turned out to be a mere sheep in wolf's clothing... the list went on.

Each one of those dates had ended in disappointment, each one taking a little more of my hope with it. I tried to hold on to the shreds of optimism I had left, but the truth was, none of them compared to the four titans that dominated my fantasies.

As Maddie and the rest of the crew began to pack up for the night, I kept my eyes focused on my work, doing my best to keep my mind off the images that seemed so keen on keeping me in a constant state of need.

"Jules," Maddie called out, her voice pulling me from my thoughts. I glanced up, seeing her standing by the door with her bag slung over her shoulder. Her smile was warm, her eyes twinkling with that usual sassy spark. "Don't worry about the dates. One of these days, you're gonna find a guy who's just right for you."

I managed a half-hearted smile. “Hope so. Thanks, Mads. Goodnight.”

As the sound of the closing door echoed around the quiet studio, I found myself alone. The silence felt comforting in a strange way, giving me the space to reflect, to breathe.

Just as I was getting into my end-of-night routine, I heard a familiar voice behind me.

“Hey, Julia. Do you have a minute?” I turned around, my heart skipping a beat at the sight of Kai leaning against the doorframe of the back office, his eyes filled with an intensity that sent a shiver down my spine.

“Sure, Kai,” I managed to stammer out, my stomach fluttering with a mix of anticipation and anxiety. “What’s up?”

“The guys and I wanted to talk. You mind?”

“Yeah, of course,” I said. “Let me just shut the computer down.”

Kai nodded, then turned and disappeared back into the office, leaving me standing in the dimly lit studio, my heart pounding in my chest. I took a deep breath, attempting to steady myself before following him. I shut down the front desk computer, the screen going dark as it turned off. As I walked toward the office, my heels clicked against the hardwood floor, the sound echoing throughout the empty studio.

Upon entering, I was instantly hit by the undeniable masculine presence of the room. The office was a reflection of the men who inhabited it—full of deep, dark leather furniture, steel accents, and a distinct edginess that was undeniably raw and intoxicating.

I could sense their gazes on me as I took a seat on one of the worn leather chairs, the material cool against my skin. The room was filled with a mix of leather, ink, and something uniquely masculine. It made me dizzy, made me ache in places I hadn’t known could ache.

I could barely look at them. Their intense gazes were too much, causing heat to flood my cheeks. My heart continued to pound too hard in my chest, my breath coming out in short,

uneven puffs. I felt so exposed, so vulnerable under their scrutiny. I shifted uncomfortably in my chair, my skirt riding up a little too high for my liking.

“What’s up?” I finally managed to ask, breaking the silence that had filled the room.

Kai smiled slightly. “Promise you’re not in trouble.”

His intense gray eyes locked onto mine, and a shiver ran down my spine, his gaze so sharp and penetrating it felt like he was seeing right through me.

“Julia,” Finn began, his deep voice reverberating throughout the room, “We wanted to thank you for how you handled both Klaus and Steve today. They weren’t easy situations, but you handled them both with grace, tact, and a bit of your trademark fire.”

Kai chimed in, his eyes glittering with approval as he spoke. “Your ability to hold your ground and maintain control was impressive, to say the least. We’ve been in this business a long time, and we can tell you for damn sure that not many would have handled it as well as you did.”

My cheeks flushed with the praise, the words unexpected but undeniably welcome.

“We need someone who’s not afraid to take charge, someone who can handle tough situations and stand up to the likes of Klaus and Steve,” James continued, his voice firm but gentle. “After today, it’s clear to all of us that you’re the right person for that job.”

“And if it’s what you want,” Andrew, his bright blue eyes meeting mine, “We’d like you to consider a long-term future here at Blackjack’s.”

“Consider your three month probationary period over,” James added.

The room suddenly felt hotter, the air thicker as their words sunk in. A future at Blackjack’s? A future working closely with these four incredible men? The thought was intoxicating, causing an unfamiliar thrill to rush through me.

My heart pounded loudly in my ears, a slow, steady rhythm that seemed to echo my escalating desire.

“I... thank you,” I stammered, momentarily at a loss for words. The intensity of their gazes was overwhelming, stirring up a multitude of emotions within me. As I thanked them, my mind was racing, my heart fluttering in my chest, a warm, tingling sensation spreading through the rest of my body. I couldn't deny the excitement that bloomed inside of me at the prospect of a future at Blackjack's, a future with them.

As their words tapered off, an uneasy silence filled the room, enveloping us all. I could sense there was something else on their minds, an unspoken thought that was yet to be voiced. They glanced at one another, their eyes gleaming with a knowing look, sly smiles tugging at the corners of their mouths.

“What's going on?” I finally blurted out, unable to take the suspense any longer. It was then that I noticed the slight flicker of amusement in their eyes, and a flutter of anticipation twisted my stomach.

“So, about your date tonight,” Kai began, his voice nonchalant, but his eyes sparkling with mischief.

My eyes widened in surprise, “How did you...?” I stammered, then realization hit me. Maddie must have spilled the beans, probably loudly enough for the entire studio to hear. I groaned internally at her lack of discretion but kept my face neutral.

“Maddie isn't exactly quiet,” Finn chuckled, an easy grin spreading across his face. “We just thought it was interesting, you know, that you're looking for love online.”

Andrew picked up from there, a teasing glint in his bright blue eyes, “Yeah, we couldn't help but overhear about your... hmm, how did Maddie put it? ‘Absolutely fucked love life?’”

A flush crept up my neck, spreading to my face. They were ribbing me, but in a good-natured way. A strange, almost giddy sensation bubbled up inside me at their playful jabs. A part of me reveled in the attention they were giving me. Their

concern, as teasing as it was, sparked a warmth between my thighs. over

“Yeah, it’s been pretty abysmal lately,” I laughed, trying to play it cool. .

James finally spoke, his voice soft but the humor was evident. “Just remember, Julia, quality over quantity.”

“Though,” Kai added, “There’s something to be said for quantity.”

“Quality *and* quantity,” Andrew put in. “How about that?”

Their teasing had me laughing, a genuine, hearty laugh that echoed through the room. It was a sweet, intoxicating moment that only fueled my desire for them. It felt like a shared secret, a moment of camaraderie that sent a flutter of excitement through me. They might have been poking fun at my lackluster love life, but I couldn’t help but feel like there was something more lurking beneath the surface of their flirty jests.

Despite the fun I was having, a small part of me couldn’t help but wonder why we were having the conversation in the first place.

Deciding to take a lighthearted jab myself, I gave them a mock serious look and said, “Discussing my love life with my bosses, now that’s not very professional, gentlemen.”

They shared another glance, those knowing smiles now laden with something else,.. something I couldn’t quite put my finger on. Something that made butterflies dance in my stomach.

Finn was the one to break the silence, his voice steady but filled with an undeniable intensity. “Julia, you’re not just an employee to us.”

He paused, his piercing gray eyes meeting mine, holding my gaze captive. He leaned back in his chair, his muscular arms crossing over his chest. The tattoos on his arms stood out vividly on his skin, making him appear even more intimidating, and impossibly desirable.

Kai took over then, his dark eyes seeming to bore into my soul. “We’ve been thinking, and we’ve all come to a decision.”

My breath hitched as Andrew continued, “We all want you, Julia.” His bright blue eyes held a raw honesty that left me breathless. “And we’ve been wondering... do you want us?”

## CHAPTER 5

JULIA



As I finished closing the shop, my mind was stuck on replay, incessantly circling back to their words. They wanted to take me out to dinner. All four of them. They were offering an explanation, a chance to talk, to ask questions about their proposal.

My heart stuttered in my chest, the anticipation making me feel as though I was on a precipice, about to take a leap of faith. Suddenly, the familiar chime of my phone drew me out of my reverie. It was another text from Tim, the guy I was supposed to see in a few hours. He was checking in, probably pumped up about our planned date.

*Hey babe, ready for our big night? Got a wicked pump at the gym, better get ready to be impressed! Oh, and btw, got a special protein shake for after the date. Can't wait for you to give it a try.*

I couldn't help but laugh at how ballsy and inappropriate the text was. My eyes drifted over it, along with the annoyingly ample amount of emojis and winks following his juvenile play on words. The fact of the matter was that I'd felt a tinge guilty that I was going to cancel on Tim. But thankfully, he'd just sent me the perfect text to dispel those sentiments.

*Sorry, Tim. Something came up. Have to cancel.*

The relief was instant. I sent the text without a second thought, a sensation of freedom spreading through me. I felt another buzz in my pocket, no doubt Tim sending a panicked

reply. But I didn't care about anything he had to say—I was about to go on a date with four men who seemed to want me as much as I had fantasized about them.

I flicked off the lights, locked the front door of Blackjack's, and stepped into the cool evening air. The Miami night was a calming contrast to the heated rush of thoughts coursing through me, and I took a deep breath, feeling a thrilling sense of anticipation. The date with the guys was the start of something amazing. I could feel it.

Walking into The Razor's Edge, I immediately knew why the guys picked it. Right down the block from Blackjack's, the restaurant was cool personified. Its historic Art Deco building gave it an old-world charm that mingled perfectly with the modernity of the vibrant graffiti art splashed on the exposed brick walls.

Low, warm lights hung from the high ceilings, bathing the entire place in an intimate glow that was equal parts inviting and enticing. The low hum of classic rock seeping from the speakers was just loud enough to set the ambiance without drowning out the lively chatter of the patrons.

Kai, James, Andrew, and Finn were sitting in a corner booth, casual as could be, but radiating such intense masculinity it was almost tangible. Their eyes met mine, and a shiver raced down my spine, my palms, and my panties, growing damp with anticipation.

I approached the table, four pairs of eyes following me like a magnet.

"Evening, gorgeous," Finn said, his voice low and enticing.

Kai stood and I slid into the booth, wedged between him and Andrew. As I settled in, I couldn't help but laugh nervously.

"I have to admit, this feels like some sort of strange job interview," I said, glancing from one face to the next.

At my confession, they all broke into laughter. The sound was rich, deep, and utterly infectious. Kai nudged my

shoulder, his grin wide and warm. “No need to worry about that, J,” he assured me. “We’re past the interview stage. We already know we want you. And not just for your killer admin skills.”

His words ignited a fiery flush on my skin, but Andrew swiftly chipped in, lightening the mood. “The whole point of tonight is to have fun, whatever kind of fun we want.”

Their reassurances eased the tension knotting up inside me. I met their eyes and felt something like relief wash over me. It wasn’t an evaluation, it was a date. My blood warmed at the realization, and I found myself grinning back at them.

“Alright, I think I can handle that,” I replied, my gaze flitting between the four of them. “So, who’s buying the first round?”

Finn, with his devil-may-care smile, immediately raised a hand to catch the server’s attention. “That’d be me.”

“Why’s that?” I asked, turning my full attention to him.

“Because I’m the one who knows exactly what you’re going to love,” he responded with a confident smirk.

I laughed and shrugged. “Alright then, surprise me.”

From there, we fell into easy conversation that flowed as easily as the tequila, the casual banter stoking the slow burn of attraction coursing through me. James, the most reserved of the four, still managed to elicit laughs with his dry, sarcastic wit. Andrew was more outgoing, throwing around playful, teasing remarks with a devilish glint in his blue eyes. Kai’s comments were cheeky and provocative, pushing the boundary of propriety while still maintaining his charm. Finn, the one who understood the magic of anticipation, peppered his conversation with flirty innuendos that had me biting my lip and squeezing my legs together.

When our tacos arrived, the scent of spiced meat and fresh cilantro tantalizing my senses, the conversation took a more sensual turn.

“You know,” Kai began, a wicked grin on his face. “I’ve had the tacos here and they’re great. But not a chance they’re

going to be the most delicious thing I've tasted today.”

The guys chuckled at his words. No doubt he'd filled them in on that kiss of ours that I'd been thinking about nonstop.

The mere mention of it again was enough to make my pussy clench. I took a bite of my taco, the robust flavors of the juicy birria, tangy salsa, and creamy cheese creating a symphony in my mouth. I nodded in approval, taking a moment to savor the taste before swallowing. “They're definitely impressive.” The words tumbled dumbly out of my mouth.

It was Finn who spoke next.

“Let's cut to the chase. We've been wanting you since the moment you walked into Blackjack's to apply for the job,” he said, his gray eyes holding mine with an intensity that sent shivers down my spine.

His revelation was met with affirming nods from the others. Andrew spoke up. “We've been talking, trying to figure out how to approach this. We didn't want to scare you off or make you feel uncomfortable.”

“But we wanted to give you the option,” James added, his sharp, green eyes fixed on me with an intensity that made my breath hitch. “To choose whichever one of us you want, if you want any of us at all.”

The thought of choosing between them was overwhelming, yet the idea of not choosing at all seemed utterly impossible.

In the warmth of the restaurant, surrounded by twinkling holiday lights and the soft murmur of other patrons, James leaned forward and asked, his voice dropping a notch lower, “So, Julia, who's on your naughty list this Christmas?”

The question hung in the air, the playful inquiry an undercurrent to something far more potent. I blinked at him, a flush creeping up my cheeks, both at the question and the answer that was screaming within.

I felt a rush of boldness, fueled by desire and the heady taste of possibility. Taking in a deep breath, I met each of their gazes as I let the words spill out.

“I want all of you,” I said, my voice steady despite the nervous excitement. “In every which way possible. I want you to take me, to claim me, to do whatever you want with me.”

Silence fell after my proclamation, the words hanging in the air like a live wire. I was surprised by my audacity, my forthrightness, just how much honesty had burst out of me. But it was the truth, raw and unvarnished. I desired each of them, these four incredible men who had swept me up in a whirlwind of longing and shared dreams.

The silence stretched, and for a moment, I feared I’d overstepped, that I’d revealed too much, too soon. I almost regretted my bold words, but then I caught the spark in their eyes, the small smiles that tugged at their lips, the relief that seemed to ripple through them. And suddenly, I knew without a doubt, that I’d said exactly what they wanted to hear.

“Perfect,” Finn replied.

“Okay, then how does this sound?” Kai began, leaning forward, his taut forearm muscles tensing in a mouthwatering way. “We grab the check and then Christmas can come early this year, for all of us.”

I nearly choked on my bite of birria taco, the flavorful beef tender and juicy, when Kai laid it out in plain terms. Wiping the corners of my mouth, I regarded each of them incredulously.

“Wait, let me get this straight,” I said once I was able to swallow, “You guys all want me now?”

A chorus of “yes” and “hell yeah” echoed around the table. The anticipation was thick and heavy with potential.

It wasn’t what I was expecting when I’d walked into The Razor’s Edge. But as I sat there, feeling their eyes on me, their desire tangible, I couldn’t help but get excited.

“C’mon, you guys are messing with me,” I laughed, shaking my head, “This has got to be some sort of prank.”

“No prank, Julia,” Finn’s voice was laced with amusement and something sensual, more alluring. “We’ve been talking about this for the past month.”

I raised an eyebrow at his audacious declaration, though I couldn't help the burst of heat in my face and the quickened pulse in my veins. While I'd meant what I'd said before, reality was starting to creep in along with mild panic.

"So all of you. At the same time? You're telling me you guys share?"

James's lips curved into a devious grin. "We're not shy about that, Julia."

I burst into laughter, the ridiculousness of the situation making me giddy. "You're talking about this so casually, like it's no big deal."

"Because it isn't," Kai said. "You'd be surprised at just how easy it can be."

My heart hammered in my chest and a reckless thrill took hold of me. I couldn't believe I was even considering it, but their gazes, heated and sincere, told me they were not joking. They wanted me. All of them.

"Okay," I decided, "let's do this. I'm in."

Their approving smiles fanned the flames of my anticipation. I was about to embark on something crazy. Hell, the thought alone was crazy. But as I stood up, ready to get on the wildest ride of my life, I couldn't help but feel a rush of excitement.

Let the games begin.

## CHAPTER 6

## JULIA



Still buzzing with adrenaline and tequila, I stood outside with the four of them on the brightly lit Miami street. The cool December air was a delicious contrast to the fiery heat building within me. The streets were alive with the sounds of nightlife, and I couldn't help but grin as I felt four pairs of eyes on me, their attention heating my skin more effectively than the warmest flame.

There we were, a ragtag bunch under the dimly lit exterior of The Razor's Edge, still glowing from the buzz of the night's revelry and the tacit promise of what was yet to come. Suddenly, the thrilling question of where we would extend our evening unfurled between us.

"We could go to my place," Andrew offered, his deep voice sending ripples of excitement down my spine. "I always have good whiskey on hand."

"Whiskey?" I laughed, nudging him with my elbow. "I'm already hot enough without adding fire water to the mix." I couldn't believe the words coming out of my mouth.

Kai, the eternal flirt, flashed me a devilish grin. "Well, my place has a pool..."

"Kai, it's December," Finn interjected with an amused eye roll. "Even in Miami, a midnight swim sounds cold."

"We could always heat things up," Kai returned, his tone playfully suggestive, and I couldn't help but blush.

I looked at them, four intoxicating men who had chosen me, and said, "How about my place? It's just a block away. It's

small, but comfy.”

The men exchanged glances, and then all eyes were on me again. They all nodded approval, ready to follow my lead. The anticipation was evident, a sweet promise hanging in the cool Miami night.

Walking down the street flanked by four incredible men felt more surreal than anything I’d ever experienced. Each step was a moment in a dream from which I hoped never to wake from. Their towering forms on either side made me feel cherished, desired, and unbelievably powerful. The hum of the city faded into a background buzz, punctuated by the distant laughter of late-night revelers and the soft roar of cars and motorcycles cruising down the street.

December in Miami had its own kind of magic. The holiday spirit was alive in the cool air, vibrant and seductive. Storefronts were aglow with twinkling lights and tinsel-strewn windows, while palm trees lining the street were dressed in festive finery, blinking fairy lights wrapped around their tall, slender trunks. Each illuminated decoration we passed added to the captivating ambiance of the night, a stirring contrast to the darkened sky.

My apartment building loomed up ahead, a four-story art deco structure with faded brickwork that had seen better days. Not a palace, but it was home. I unlocked the front door, leading the guys up the common stairs and finally into my small but cozy living area. It was modest—full of second-hand furniture and lined with bookshelves that housed my eclectic mix of novels—but it was clean and welcoming. The lights from the nightlife below filtered through the blinds, illuminating my safe haven in a neon glow.

Andrew whistled low, appreciatively. “You’ve got a nice place here, Jules.”

As I shrugged out of my jacket, I glanced back at the guys, their presence transforming the room into a space that crackled with an energy it’d never known before. It felt like a dream come true, literally, seeing them standing in my living room.

I was on the precipice of a delicious plunge into the unknown. As I turned to face my guests, the men I'd fantasized about for the past few months, my pulse raced with a mix of fear and desire. The smile that played on my lips was part challenge, part invitation.

"So... welcome to my humble abode, gentlemen. Make yourselves at home. Can I get anyone a drink?" I offered, trying to steady my shaking hands, finding myself more nervous than I'd anticipated.

Kai, his eyes hooded with desire, stepped closer. When he spoke, his voice was a husky murmur that made my knees weak. "All I'm craving, Jules, is you."

My breath hitched, and I struggled to compose myself.

Reality took hold, and I tried to wrap my head around it, around how it would all work.

"Listen. I want to do this but, I mean, four of you at once?" I stammered, the gravity of the situation sinking in. "Isn't that a bit... I mean, *how*?"

The guys shared a look, grinning as they picked up on my apprehension.

"We had a feeling you might be a little overwhelmed when it came time to pull the trigger," James said. "So, we have an idea."

"How's this sound," Finn began, stepping forward, his voice low and reassuring. "Why don't you pick one of us for tonight, and the rest of us will just enjoy the view?"

I stared at them blankly, my mind whirling. It was a fantasy I'd harbored for the longest time but never thought would actually come true. Standing there in the midst of those four gorgeous men, the offer was just too tempting to resist. A thrill of delight surged through me as I considered my options.

"And you're all okay with that?"

James grinned. "Trust me, we know how to share. Not to mention, anticipation only makes things hotter."

I took a deep breath. “Okay,” I said, finally finding my voice. “I think I can do that.”

Just as I was about to voice my choice, Kai decided to tip the scales in his favor. With a smug grin, he pulled off his shirt, revealing a magnificent canvas of art. His torso was a masterpiece of ink and muscle, heat spreading from my pussy at the sight of him.

I laughed, thoroughly entertained by his boldness. But for reasons I couldn’t quite explain, it was Finn I was more drawn to. The silent strength in his gaze, the promise of protective care in his touch—it was irresistible. I turned to Kai, unable to suppress a cheeky grin.

“Sorry, Kai, but I’m not about to reward your cockiness.” I winked at him, then turned my gaze toward Finn, my pulse quickening as I made my choice clear. “Tonight, I choose Finn.”

Finn’s eyes flashed with undisguised satisfaction when I chose him, a slow smile creeping onto his ruggedly handsome face. The other guys groaned playfully, their disappointment clear but short-lived. Their expressions quickly shifted into acceptance and eagerness, the air full of exhilarating energy of what was about to happen.

As I nervously fiddled with the hem of my shirt, Finn stepped forward, his calming presence easing my anxieties. He was so close I could smell the earthy scent of his cologne and feel the heat radiating from his body. The electricity in the room was intense, and I was at its epicenter. My heart pounded in my chest like a war drum, my breath hitching as Finn leaned down to murmur in my ear.

“Julia,” his voice was a soothing rumble, steady and reassuring, “All you need to do is be your gorgeous self. I’ll take care of the rest.”

And just like that, my anxiety melted away, leaving behind excitement, curiosity, and an insatiable desire that threatened to consume me.

“Where do we start?” I asked, my voice trembling slightly with the enormity of what was about to go down.

Finn gave me an all-knowing grin, his blue eyes sparkling with mischief and desire. “I know exactly where,” he murmured, his voice deep and full of lust.

He leaned down, capturing my lips with his. The sensation was nothing short of electrifying. Finn kissed me like a man starved, his lips moving against mine with a fervor that was both intense and gentle. My senses were overwhelmed by him—his taste, his scent.

His hands roamed over my body as we kissed, skilled fingers working to remove my clothes. My shirt was the first to go, the fabric slipping from my shoulders and pooling at my feet. Next was my skirt, discarded just as quickly. I was left standing in my bra and panties, feeling both vulnerable and emboldened under the heated gazes of the four men. But Finn didn't leave me that way for long, pulling off his shirt and stepping out of his pants, his erection tenting his boxer briefs.

My breath caught as I took in the sight of him, his body as tense as a coiled spring, waiting for my next move. The other men watched us intently, their eyes never leaving my body.

It was an entirely new kind of high, knowing I was the focus of their attention. A heat rose within me, a flame fueled by my own arousal and the knowledge that I was turning them on just as much. It was as intoxicating as it was empowering, and it left me craving more.

“So fucking sexy,” Finn said, shaking his head as if in awe. “How the hell did I go so long without pouncing on you like a wild animal?”

Finn's hand traced a burning trail down my back, nimble fingers undoing the clasp of my bra with an ease that spoke of experience. My breath caught as the fabric fell away, exposing my breasts to the heated gazes of the men around me.

As he continued to explore my body, his hands slowly inching lower, I noticed a smirk playing on his lips. “Finn,” I

warned playfully, my voice breathy, “don’t you dare get cocky.”

His response was a low chuckle. “Wouldn’t dream of it, doll.” His voice was heavy with desire, the pet name sending a thrilling shiver down my spine. “Just enjoying the view.”

My heart pounded as his fingers found the waistband of my panties, his eyes never leaving mine as he tugged them lower, my last shred of clothing falling to the floor.

“And what a view it is,” Kai chimed in from the sidelines, earning a round of low chuckles from the others.

I shot him a mock glare, but any words of reprimand were lost as Finn’s hand slipped between my thighs. I gasped at the contact, my body arching instinctively into his touch.

“Finn,” I moaned, my voice husky as he explored my arousal.

“See,” Finn said, his lips brushing against my ear, “This is what I’ve been wanting. To make you feel this good.”

His words, coupled with his actions, sparked an even greater desire within me. I wanted him, wanted all of them, and I wasn’t about to hold anything back.

My heart hammered in my chest as I tentatively reached into his boxer briefs, my fingers encircling his rigid length. I glanced up, catching his gaze. The anticipation, the raw desire in his eyes made me break out into goosebumps.

The sight of his nakedness was intoxicating—strong, tattooed, and devastatingly sexy. I tightened my grip, eliciting a soft groan from him. The sound sent a wave of boldness through me, propelling me forward.

The sensation of him in my hand was almost too much. He was hard and hot, pulsing lightly under my touch. I marveled at the contrast between the roughness of his tattooed skin and the silky smoothness of his manhood. I moved my hand up and down, exploring his length, my eyes never leaving his.

Finn let out a soft grunt, his hand coming to rest over mine, guiding me. “Just like that, Julia,” he murmured, his

voice thick with desire.

Every nerve ending in my body was on fire, the weight of the other guys' gazes only adding to the heady atmosphere. As I held Finn in my grasp, the others watching in anticipation, I realized I was living out a fantasy I'd never thought possible. My mind was spinning, but one thought echoed louder than the rest—I was exactly where I wanted to be.

I kept stroking him, teasing his end and watching as his expression tightened with pleasure. Holding him in my hand like that, knowing I had the power to make him come, was almost too much to bear.

Finn must've felt the same way, his hand gently guiding mine off.

"You first, doll." With a grin and before I had a chance to reply, he moved his hand back between my thighs, spreading my lips and teasing my clit with the sort of expert skill you'd expect from a man who did fine work with his hands.

"Oh... oh my *God*."

The movement of Finn's fingers was relentless, driving me higher and higher toward an orgasm I knew was going to be explosive. Each stroke was perfectly timed, perfectly placed, and I found myself writhing against him, pressing into his touch.

"God, Finn," I moaned against his mouth, the feeling becoming almost too much. He chuckled low in his throat, caressing me in all the right ways, adding another layer of sensation that was utterly intoxicating.

"Let go, Julia," he urged, his voice a husky whisper in my ear. "We want to see you come undone."

The thought of the men watching us, their eyes tracking every move Finn and I made, sent an electric thrill through me. I couldn't deny the incredible turn-on that their gazes added to the situation.

The pressure coiled tighter and tighter, a knot of pleasure winding up inside of me, waiting for that final push to release.

And when it finally came, it was with a force that took my breath away.

I cried out, my body arching against Finn as wave after wave of pleasure washed over me. My skin was ablaze, every nerve ending tingling with satisfaction. As my climax ran through me, I caught the gazes of Andrew, Kai, and James, their eyes narrow, lustful, filled with yearning. It only amplified my pleasure, a feedback loop of desire that left me gasping for breath.

As my orgasm faded, I detected the low rumble of James's chuckle, the sound deep and amused.

"A show like this deserves a good drink," he declared, pushing up from where he was seated in an armchair. I watched, still panting and flushed, as he crossed the room to where a half-drunk bottle of whiskey sat on a side table. He uncapped the bottle, taking a long swig of the amber liquid before passing it to Andrew. "Share and share alike," he instructed, winking at me as he took his seat once again. The boys passed the bottle around, watching and waiting for whatever was next.

My body hummed with satisfaction. Finn was still with me, his body pressed against mine in a way that was both comforting and incredibly arousing. The look on his face told me he was far from done, and a thrill of excitement ran through me. In one swift movement, he scooped me up into his arms. I let out a little squeal of surprise, my arms automatically winding around his neck as he carried me toward the couch.

He laid me down, his eyes never leaving mine as he positioned himself between my spread legs, his long, thick manhood pointed directly at my pussy. I could see the hunger in his eyes, a ravenous look that made my nerve endings spark.

"More," I moaned. "Please, more."

"Oh, Julia," he murmured, his fingers tracing a path down my stomach, "we're just getting started." Then his expression took on a measure of seriousness, a thought occurring to him. "Protection."

I nodded. “I’m on the pill. And I’ve got condoms... somewhere... oh! The nightstand in the bedroom.”

Without a word, Andrew rose and went into my bedroom, returning a moment later with a silver strip of condoms. He ripped one off and tossed it over to Finn, who wasted no time opening it up and rolling it down his cock.

With a sense of urgency, I reached down between us, my fingers wrapping around Finn’s hard length. The feel of him, so hot and stiff in my hand, elicited another jolt of desire that shot straight to my core. I guided him to my entrance, our eyes locked in a heated stare as I positioned him against me.

“Someone’s eager,” he spoke, a wicked grin on his lips.

“And *someone’s* taking too long,” I shot back, matching his smirk with one of my own.

The moment he pushed into me was pure, unadulterated bliss. A gasp left my lips at the sensation, my body welcoming him in a way I hadn’t thought possible. Finn was big, filling me in a way that was both overwhelming and completely satisfying. I wrapped my legs around his waist, encouraging him to sink even deeper.

His rhythm was slow and steady at first, allowing me to adjust to his size. But as my body relaxed, his thrusts became more insistent, each one sending waves of ecstasy coursing through me. The feel of him moving inside me, combined with the incredibly erotic sight of him towering over me, was intoxicating.

It wasn’t long before I could feel the coil within me tightening again, the knot of pleasure growing with each stroke. I clenched around him, my body trembling as I neared my second release. My eyes fluttered closed, overwhelmed by the sensations coursing through me.

“Finn,” I gasped, my voice hitching as he hit just the right spot. My nails dug into his back, holding onto him as I rode the wave of ecstasy that was fast approaching. It was more intense than anything I’d ever experienced, my body

completely attuned to his as we moved together on the brink of release.

“Come for me,” he spoke, his tone deep and commanding as he pushed into me over and over. “Come for me now Julia.”

There was no denying him. I released, hot waves of pleasure rushing through me as I came for the second time, moaning and writhing underneath him. I took one deep breath after another as I finished, still wanting more.

Confidence and arousal flooded my body, pushing me to take control. I locked eyes with Finn, grinning devilishly as I pushed him to roll over, straddling him in a swift, fluid movement.

“My girl wants to take charge,” Finn murmured appreciatively, his hands immediately moving to my hips. His gray eyes were full of heat and admiration, sending another shiver of arousal through me.

“Better get used to it,” I retorted playfully, grinding my hips against him, “I plan to make a habit out of this.”

His response was a low growl, his grip on my hips tightening as he thrust upward into me. I gasped, my head falling back at the sensation. I could feel the gazes of the other men on my body, their undivided attention only serving to stoke the flames of my desire further.

With newfound determination, I began to move, rising and falling on him in a rhythm that had us both moaning in endless pleasure. The room filled with the intoxicating sounds of our indulgence, the whispered encouragements from the guys only adding to the erotic ambiance.

I could feel my body tightening around him, the pressure building once again. “Finn,” I panted, my fingers digging into his chest, “I’m close.”

“Let go, Julia,” he encouraged, his voice thick with arousal. “I want to see you lose control.”

His words were my undoing. With a final, desperate cry, I released around him once more, my body shuddering as waves of pleasure washed over me. I felt Finn tense beneath me a

moment later, his own climax hitting him as he released. Our bodies trembled together, riding out the storm until we were both spent and breathless.

I laid my head on Finn's chest as we recovered. He wrapped his arms around me, and for a moment it felt as if we were the only two people in the room. After a few moments we unraveled from each other and sat up on the couch. I was still flushed and high from the rush of the last climax, my body pleasantly tingling with the aftermath. I grabbed the blanket from the back of the couch, casually laying it across my body, much of my nakedness still exposed. My eyes met the intense gazes of Kai, Andrew and James, the silent promise of more in each one making my pulse quicken all over again.

James tossed me the half-empty whiskey bottle, a mischievous glint in his eyes. "You've earned it, darlin'," he drawled, a lazy smirk curling his lips.

I laughed, my hands slightly shaky as I accepted the bottle. The amber liquid was warm as it slid down my throat, the harsh bite of the alcohol a welcome contrast to the softness that had consumed me moments ago. I passed the bottle to Kai next, our fingers brushing in the exchange, the sensation hinting at what might be to come.

"What's on your mind, gorgeous?" Kai asked before taking a pull of the whiskey.

I grinned. "Just thinking about how much fun that was..." I trailed off.

"But?" Kai asked, raising an eyebrow.

I chuckled, not even sure how to continue. My mind was alive with fantasies, all of them dirty, and all of them very, very greedy.

## CHAPTER 7

## FINN



**W**as I already addicted?

Every detail of our night together was etched into my brain; her soft gasps of pleasure, the sight of her flushed skin in the dim light, the sensation of her writhing beneath me. The taste of her mouth, intoxicatingly sweet with a touch of the whiskey we'd shared, still lingered on my tongue. Even the sound of her sharp intake of breath when I'd filled her for the first time echoed in my ears.

Remembering how responsive she'd been, how she'd met my every thrust with one of her own caused a rush of desire to wash over me, more potent than any I'd felt before. Her fire, her spirit, had sparked something in me I hadn't felt in a long time.

I couldn't shake the image of the satisfied smile painted across her face as she basked in the aftermath of our shared climax. Her tousled hair splayed out over her shoulders, her chest heaving as she caught her breath, her eyes shining with a lustful gleam that mirrored my own... every single moment was a memory to be savored. And I couldn't get over the naughty grin that'd formed on her face whenever she'd caught the gazes of the guys during our fun. The woman loved being watched.

“Finn?”

The barista's voice yanked me out of my daydreaming. I looked up to see her holding a steaming cup of coffee, her eyebrows raised in anticipation. I blinked, coming back to the

present. The warm, inviting ambiance of the coffee shop was a stark contrast to the raw, unfiltered passion of my memories. The smell of freshly ground beans and the soft hum of conversation around me became a backdrop to the vivid recollection of sex with Julia.

Collecting my coffee, I settled into a high-top table, the hot ceramic warming my hands. I let out a deep, contented sigh. I hadn't been sure what to expect when we proposed the idea to Julia, but I'd be damned if she didn't blow away all of my expectations. If that night was any indication of what was to come, I was in for a wild, wonderful ride. The only question was when I would get to taste that intoxicating sweetness again. As I took a sip of my coffee, I couldn't help but smile. If it were up to me, it wouldn't be long.

Not long at all.

The guttural growl of a motorcycle cut through the quiet chatter of the coffee shop. My eyes remained on my cup, my mind still lost in thoughts of Julia, a smirk spread across my lips. I knew that sound well—the deep rumble of a custom Harley Davidson, as familiar as my own heartbeat. Andrew and his love for his bike were as legendary in our circles as our tattoo parlor.

The Harley was a gleaming beast of black and chrome, a true monster of a bike. Andrew had a penchant for the dramatic, and his motorcycle was no exception. It was custom-built to his specifications, aggressive and sleek, and it carried an air of authority that was as much a part of Andrew as his ink-covered skin.

A pair of softer engines followed close behind, no doubt Kai and James. Kai drove a matte-black Dodge Charger, an unapologetic muscle car, all horsepower and attitude. The low growl of its engine could get the adrenaline pumping in anyone, and Kai loved it.

James, on the other hand, favored the classic. His ride was a vintage Ford Mustang, cherry red and restored to its former glory. The car was a beauty, a testament to his love for the timeless.

The door to the coffee shop swung open abruptly, letting in a gust of cool December air. The three men made their entrance, an undeniable wave of energy radiating from them. Tattoos peeked out from beneath their leather jackets and shirts. Conversations dulled and attention shifted as they barreled through, their commanding presence swallowing up the small café.

The guys chuckled at the bemused looks on the barista's faces as they grabbed their coffees, then made their way to my table. Their boots thumped rhythmically against the wooden floor, adding a bass line to the soft jazz playing in the background.

"Look at lover boy over here," Kai started, slapping a hand onto my shoulder as he slid into the seat across from me. His silver-gray eyes were alive with amusement.

James chimed in next, a broad grin splitting his face, "Lover boy is an accurate description. Just look at the man, he's fucking smitten."

The words were spoken as a barb, but they carried the undertone of the kindhearted banter that went with our usual ball-busting.

I spoke as they dropped into their chairs. "Nah, it's not so serious. You assholes are acting like I'm writing her love poetry or some shit. Not love, more like pure, unadulterated lust."

A burst of laughter erupted from Andrew as he sipped his black coffee. He set his cup down, his laughter echoing around us. "Right. Just make sure you don't get the two mixed up, Romeo."

A lopsided smirk formed on my face as I took a satisfying sip from my own steaming cup of coffee.

"So, gentlemen," I began once they were all settled into their seats, my voice as smooth as the brew in my cup, "Did we all enjoy last night's performance?"

James rolled his eyes jokingly. "Oh, sure. Your total loss of self-control was a sight to behold, bro. Should've charged

admission.”

Kai and Andrew’s laughter joined James’, creating a chorus that resonated around our secluded corner. I chuckled along with them, taking their ribbing in stride.

Andrew spoke once the laughter finally subsided. His voice, always filled with a calm intensity, cut through the light-hearted atmosphere. “So, any thoughts on what’s next with Julia? Should we just let it ride out and have another improv session, or do we come up with a plan next time?”

I sat back, folding my hands over my stomach. “I say we treat her to a classy dinner, then check out that new nightclub downtown afterward.” The image of Julia, the city lights creating a glow upon her beautiful features, was already forming in my mind. Our desire for her was potent, but also laced with respect and care. We wanted her to know that we craved her like mad. At the same time, we needed to make sure that she knew she wasn’t just some toy to us. A classy date would be a good way to show that.

Kai’s eyes were ablaze with a spark that usually meant trouble though the good kind.

“What if we booked a luxury suite downtown instead?” he suggested.

His idea hung in the air, sparking a wave of anticipation. The thought of Julia, alone with us in a lavishly decorated suite, the Miami skyline providing the perfect backdrop... it was an image that stirred something deep within me.

Kai went on. “Hell, boys,” he said, his eyes dancing with humor, “I don’t think I’d last two seconds alone with her without wanting to rip her clothes off.”

James laughed. “You’re always such a fuckin’ hopeless romantic, dude.”

Andrew chimed in next. “How about both? Dinner and then the suite? Keep it classy but close quarters. Best of both worlds. Or, better yet, dinner *in* the suite.”

The suggestion resonated with all of us, the perfect blend of sophistication and intimacy. As the four of us sat there, lost

in thoughts of what lay ahead, I couldn't help but feel a stirring of excitement. It was like an undercurrent, an electric charge crackling in the air.

We all knew that deep down it didn't matter where we were or what we were doing, all that mattered was the woman we were doing it with. Julia was a fire, a force of nature that had all of us caught in her gravitational pull, and we were more than ready for it.

I swirled my cup of joe, staring into the deep void of the mug as though it held all the answers.

"You know," I began, "it's strange we haven't heard from Adele lately." The name was a blast from the past, a name attached to a face framed with long, platinum blonde hair, fair skin, and a mischievous smirk that I knew all too well.

The guys paused at the mention of Adele Sims, distant expressions shadowing their faces as they remembered our fiery ex-employee. Adele had been a part of our Blackjack's crew for a while, but her talent was more passion than precision. She wasn't cut out for the ink biz, and she found her fun in other ways, namely, Kai and me.

Kai chuckled. "Adele, huh?" He ran a hand through his jet-black hair, the tattoos on his arms glinting in the sunlight. "Haven't thought about her in a while."

"Can't say I miss her ink skills," James said, swirling his coffee. "But she sure livened up the place."

"That she did," Andrew agreed, a knowing smirk tugging at the corner of his mouth. His eyes met mine, a silent understanding passing between us. Adele had been a whirlwind, a wildfire that we'd tried to contain but failed, all four of us getting burned in the process.

"I'm guessing Finn here misses her most of all," Kai teased, grinning widely at me. "That and the discount to her OnlyFans."

I chortled, rolling my eyes at his typical provocations.

"Nah," I said, leaning back in my chair, my gaze fixed on the busy street outside. "She had her moments, but the drama

wasn't worth it, not even a little. Besides, she doesn't hold a candle to Julia.”

The moment I said her name, a silence fell over our table. It was as though the atmosphere shifted, my words stirring a current of anticipation, desire, and undeniable intrigue. We had all been ensnared by Julia's allure, her fiery spirit and bold sensuality. With her, there was excitement, a rush of adrenaline that made my heart pound in a way Adele never could.

And it wasn't just lust. Julia was different. She challenged me, captivated me, made me feel like I was standing on the edge of a cliff, my heart pounding with the thrill of the fall. I'd had fun with Adele, sure, but with Julia... it was like comparing a flickering candle to a roaring bonfire.

Kai, ever observant, arched an eyebrow at me, his grin softening into a knowing smile. “Julia's got you hooked, hasn't she?”

I shot him a look, choosing not to respond. But I couldn't deny the truth in his words. They knew me well enough to know the difference, and it was as stark as night and day. With a smirk, I lifted my coffee.

We all paused, the banter and memories dying away as another name surfaced in our conversation—Klaus.

“That son of a bitch is going to keep poking his nose in our business,” Andrew stated, his usual light-hearted demeanor darkening. “James, your badge can only protect us for so long.”

“Especially if he's not breaking any laws inside our shop,” he concurred, taking a long swig of his coffee.

Kai nodded in agreement. “We've faced worse,” he said, a touch of bravado creeping into his tone. “And we'll handle whatever Klaus or anyone else throws our way.”

I nodded, looking at each of my crew in turn. We were more than just business partners, more than friends. We were a pack, and we looked out for our own. “We keep our eyes open,” I said, my voice low and steady. “Gauge the situation, adjust as needed.”

A silence fell over the table, thick and heavy with unspoken promises and unshakeable resolve.

One thing was for certain: Klaus, or anyone else who threatened our business, our family, would learn the hard way that the four of us were a formidable team.

I could feel the collective shift in the conversation, an easing of the tension as we all allowed the reality of our situation to sink in. But Andrew, always the quickest to recover, sported a wicked grin as his gaze locked onto mine.

“Speaking of dirty business,” he drawled, raising an eyebrow provocatively, “Who do you think Julia will pick next?”

I chuckled, the images of our night together flashing behind my eyes. “Hard to say. Got the feeling she wants all of us, but...”

“Is she ready for all of us? That’s the question,” Kai said.

Andrew leaned back in his chair, the devilish grin never leaving his face. “We need to ease her into it, see how much she can handle at one time, make sure she’s comfortable. Adele could only deal with two of us before she started getting green eyes, trying to claim us like fuckin’ property.”

“No kidding,” I replied. “She wanted all the good parts of the arrangement, but none of the hard ones.”

Andrew nodded in agreement. “So far, Julia seems like she’s on board. But it’s all the more reason to take things slow, not overwhelm her.” He grinned. “All the same, I can’t wait to see what kind of animal she is. Got a feeling no man’s even come close to pleasing her in the way she needs.”

Kai chimed in. “You always did have a knack for spotting the wild ones, dude.”

“I’m just saying, the girl has layers,” Andrew retorted, holding up his hands in a defensive gesture.

I couldn’t help but laugh, their banter lightening up my mood. “Well, gentlemen, we’ll just have to see what layers Miss Julia wants to peel off for us.”

Every one of us was excited about the prospect of getting to know Julia more intimately, and I couldn't help but feel a certain sense of anticipation and satisfaction at what the future held.

## CHAPTER 8

## JULIA



**A**s I locked up the door at Blackjack's, I had to laugh at my reflection in the glass door. My grin was ridiculously wide, my cheeks flushed. It was like I was some giddy teenager going on her first date, not a grown-ass woman who'd just spent the night in the most sinfully delightful ways with four of the most tantalizing men she'd ever met. And I was about to get a repeat performance.

No sooner had I turned the key in the lock and stepped out onto the sidewalk than I saw them—Andrew and Kai, leaning nonchalantly against the wall, looking like they'd stepped straight out of a billboard ad for all things forbidden and tempting.

Andrew was all charm and charisma. His short blonde hair glinted in the fading sunlight but what really did me in were his eyes. A strikingly clear blue, they held a sparkle that was hard to miss, full of mischief and flirtation. Every time he smiled, I swear it got a little hotter, that sizzling grin of his absolutely lethal. If smiles could melt panties, Andrew was a walking, talking inferno.

“Evening, gorgeous,” he said, his voice low and deliberate.

Next to him, Kai was the perfect contrast. His dark hair was slicked back in a textbook blend of professional and rebellious. His eyes, a mesmerizing gray, were enigmatic, a perfect blend of stormy clouds and polished steel. His personality was as captivating as his looks. He was the silent observer, the intense listener, the man who knew how to say

more with a single look than most could with a thousand words.

“There’s the woman we’ve been waiting for,” he said.

Seeing them both sent my heart pounding, a rapid staccato against my ribs.

“Evening, fellas,” I greeted them, my voice steady despite the butterflies in my stomach.

The playful grins I got in return let me know right away just how the boys felt about seeing me.

Andrew looked me up and down, shaking his head. “It’s the goddess herself.”

I laughed at his exaggeration. “Goddess? You sure know how to lay it on thick.”

Kai chuckled, a low rumble that sent delicious shivers through me. “The man’s just saying what we’re both thinking.”

I shot him a sidelong glance, heat pooling in my belly at the intensity of his gaze. “Is that so?”

Andrew’s grin was positively devilish. “Oh, definitely. Our thoughts about you have been pretty sinful.”

I bit back a moan, feigning nonchalance. “Sinful, huh? And here I was thinking you were all good boys.”

Kai smirked. “And here *we* were thinking you were a good judge of character.”

I laughed. Andrew’s eyes sparkled with wicked delight. “Anyway, how do you feel about getting this evening started?”

The knowing look in his eyes, a look that suggested he knew exactly what direction he wanted the night to go, made my breath hitch. I felt the heat rise to my cheeks, meeting his gaze and tossing my head back with a confident grin.

“Nothing I’d love more.” God, there was something about these guys, something that made me feel like I was in heat the second I looked at them. “Well gentlemen, what’s on the docket for tonight?”

“We thought about going to that new club, *Dare*, over on Collins Avenue,” Kai started, his gaze never leaving mine. “You know, the one with the rooftop bar overlooking the city.”

“Then there’s a yacht party that James’ buddy invited us to,” Andrew added. “Always a good time. Toss in champagne and a starry Miami night and you have a pretty damn good combination.”

“There’s also that concert in the park downtown,” Kai mentioned, his tone casual, as if he were talking about the weather and not a series of dreamy date ideas.

They paused, their eyes twinkling with anticipation.

I raised an eyebrow at them. “But?”

Andrew kept right on grinning. “But we figured we’d skip all that.”

I blinked, momentarily thrown. “What?”

Kai nodded, his gaze dropping to my lips for a second before meeting my eyes again. “Definitely skipping it. All those plans are nice, but if you ask me, they involve way too much clothing.”

My heart skipped a beat, my breath hitching. I let out a surprised laugh. “Oh really?”

He went on. “We want you, Julia. All to ourselves. As quickly as possible.”

Andrew nodded in agreement. “And preferably naked.”

I sucked in a breath, my cheeks burning. These guys knew how to leave a girl speechless. I was completely caught off guard, but damn if I wasn’t also incredibly turned on. I was tingling between my thighs, my panties growing wetter by the moment.

“Well, when you put it like that...”

A moment passed in silence as I took in their proposition. Kai moved closer to me and I could feel the warmth radiating from his body, my heart doing a somersault inside my chest. He placed his hands on my bare upper arms, the feel of his

fingertips searing into my skin like a brand. An electric jolt shot straight down to my core, and I couldn't stop the gasp that escaped my lips.

Kai's eyes, gray and fiery, never left mine as he pointed toward the skyline. "See that building?" He nodded toward one of the gleaming skyscrapers piercing the Miami sky. "The silver one with the glass top?"

"Sure do." His touch was so intense that I could barely speak.

"We've rented the penthouse suite for tonight," he went on, his voice a rough whisper that slid over my senses like the smoothest velvet. "A night of no interruptions, no distractions."

His words hung in the air, his implication clear. I could already feel the anticipation winding tight inside me, a coil of need that only these men could release.

"And the other guys?" I asked.

A grin, slow and sinful, spread across Kai's face. "They're waiting. For you."

The thought of James and Finn awaiting me in some luxury suite, probably enjoying the finest whiskey while they anticipated my arrival, made my heart race.

"If you're ready, that is," he added, a challenging glint in his eyes.

I nodded. "Ready? Honey, I was born ready."

Andrew nodded toward his motorcycle, a Harley Davidson that was as much a work of art as it was a piece of machinery. A glistening beast of black and chrome that echoed raw power.

"Then let's ride," he said, his voice low and inviting.

Without a second thought, I hopped onto the bike, the cool leather of the seat a tantalizing contrast against my bare thighs. Andrew handed me a helmet, which I slipped on.

He swung his leg over the seat and settled in front of me. As I reached out to wrap my arms around his solid torso, I could feel tremors of expectation running through me. I took in the sight of his tattoos, many of them military-related. My sexy soldier boy. My fingers splayed across his stomach, feeling the hard lines of his muscles beneath the fabric of his shirt. A surge of arousal shot through me, pooling in my lower abdomen.

Andrew kickstarted the engine, and the bike roared to life beneath us. The deep, guttural growl of the motor vibrated up through the seat, a delicious promise of the night to come.

Kai slipped into his sleek, midnight black sports car, the engine purring like a satisfied cat. With a nod of his head, Andrew revved the bike, and together we rode off into the Miami night.

The city was a blur of neon and energy, a cacophony of sound, scent, and motion. Everything about Miami was alive, a wild dance of lights and shadows that mirrored the pulsing eagerness building inside me. We weaved through traffic, the sleek, dark form of Kai's car and the raw power of Andrew's bike a beautiful contrast against the Miami backdrop.

We drove through the sultry, humid streets, past glimmering skyscrapers, lively bars and clubs, and palm trees swaying rhythmically in the cool evening breeze.

There was no doubt that the night ahead was full of passion and heat. I couldn't wait to drink my fill.

## CHAPTER 9

## JULIA



With Andrew on one side and Kai on the other, I stepped into the grand lobby of the Elysian Sky, one of the most gorgeous and luxurious hotels in the city. The space was lavish—adorned with opulent chandeliers, ornate pillars, and plush, elegant furniture. Yet amidst the intimidating affluence, I felt completely at home. Not like a delicate, pampered princess but rather a respected, badass queen.

The stares of the more conventional guests followed us as we navigated through the expansive room. Our presence was eccentric and vibrant against the backdrop of their vanilla world, and I reveled in their curiosity, their muted envy.

As we approached the elevator, I felt both a rush of excitement and a fluttering of nerves. The reality of the situation was starting to set in. As the polished brass doors closed behind us, sealing us in our own private world, I felt Kai and Andrew closing in on me.

Kai turned toward me, a cocky grin tugging at the corners of his mouth.

“Buckle up, sweetheart,” he spoke, his eyes gleaming with mischief. “It’s going to be a hell of a ride.”

With that, he cupped my face, pulling me into a kiss that was all heat and pure, undiluted lust. He tasted of dark chocolate and reckless abandon, a flavor that I couldn’t get enough of. The connection was instantaneous and electrifying, setting every nerve ending in my body alight.

As Kai pulled away, a satisfied smirk was plastered across his face, his gray eyes sparkling with a devilish charm. “I hope you didn’t forget about me,” came Andrew’s teasing voice from behind.

I turned to face him, finding him watching us with an amused grin. His blonde hair was disheveled, and there was a glint of want in his vivid blue eyes.

“How could I forget about you, cowboy?” I shot back, grinning at him.

Andrew’s response was a slow, devastatingly sexy smile. He closed the gap between us, his hand resting on the small of my back.

His kiss was a stark contrast to Kai’s, slow yet insistent, brimming with a raw, primal desire. It was as if he was staking his claim, marking his territory. And I found myself responding to his kiss with equal fervor.

The elevator ride became a whirlwind of flirtatious banter, heated kisses, and gentle explorations. Between Andrew’s teasing and Kai’s confident advances, I was caught in a sexy tug-of-war that left me breathless and wanting more.

As the elevator chimed, indicating our arrival at the penthouse, we pulled apart, our eyes meeting in silent understanding.

The doors slid open with a soft, almost unnoticeable whisper.

I followed Kai and Andrew down the hall, the plush carpet of the corridor swallowing our steps. The thrill of the situation was intoxicating. I was in a high-end hotel with four drop-dead gorgeous men, about to explore pleasures I had never even imagined. The situation was utterly surreal, and I loved every moment of it.

We came to a stop outside a nondescript door, which Andrew unlocked with a sleek, black key card. Pushing it open, he revealed the penthouse suite in all its glory. A gasp tore from my lips as I stepped into the living area, the grandeur of the room knocking the wind out of me.

The suite was a blend of modern minimalism and lavish luxury. Rich, plush furniture in shades of cream and gold, a sprawling open-concept living area, floor-to-ceiling windows, and a stunning 180-degree view of the glittering Miami skyline. The city below was a sea of twinkling lights, the sight nothing short of breathtaking.

But as enticing as the penthouse and the view were, the real attractions of the evening were already there, waiting for me. Finn and James stood by the window, drinks in hand, the backdrop of the city making them look like conquering heroes. Finn, with his long, dark hair and brooding intensity, cut a ruggedly handsome figure, while James, with his clean-cut good looks and roguish charm, was just as tantalizing.

James swept his hand toward a lavish bar, filled with a collection of gleaming liquor bottles. “A drink to start, J?” he offered, his tone light, inviting.

I wanted to keep my senses, but a little something to ease my nerves sounded good. “Sure, why not?”

Andrew was the first to step forward, his confident grin doing wonders to soothe my nerves already.

“Relax, J. We’re here for a good time,” he said, his voice a low rumble that vibrated through me. “And nothing happens unless you’re cool with it.”

“Exactly,” James echoed. “You’re the one calling the shots here babe.”

Andrew nodded. “Right. You don’t have to worry about anything. Let go and let us do what we’ve all been thinking about since, well, the last time we were with you.”

“Think of it as a night of decadence, to be indulged in and savored,” Kai added, his dark eyes filled with the promise of pleasure. The tension seemed to drain from the room as his words lingered in the air.

Their reassuring words and the comfortable atmosphere they cultivated helped me settle in.

My nervousness faded, replaced by a rush of excitement. Feeling bold, I tilted my chin up and met their gazes head-on.

“So, what do you guys have in mind for me?”

Andrew’s smile turned downright wicked at my question. “We pick up where we left off in the elevator,” he proposed, his gaze flicking to my lips for a brief moment.

James’ and Finn’s eyes shone with mock disbelief as they poured themselves drinks.

“Wait,” said James. “You guys already got started without us?”

“Sure did,” Kai replied. “You think we could be alone with J and keep our hands off?”

Finn reclined on a posh couch while James leaned against the wall, both men ready to enjoy the show.

“Please, continue what you started then,” Finn said.

As Andrew and Kai turned their full attention to me, I was aware of every sensation where my skin met the cool air of the room and the heat radiating from their bodies. Their eyes, those dangerously seductive pools of blue and gray, bore into me with a raw, undeniable hunger. I bit my lower lip, every part of me crying out for them to take me.

Kai’s lips curved into a knowing smile as he spoke. “I’d say she’s just as ready to continue as we are.”

I could hardly think straight as I was caught between the intense heat of their stares. There was a growing need in me that I had never felt before, a wild and frenzied desire that seemed to mirror theirs.

Slowly, they closed the distance between us. Each kiss was like a burning star, searing my skin and fogging my mind. Their hands were everywhere, gentle but insistent. They slipped off my dress, leaving me in nothing but my lacy underwear. I felt a thrill race down my spine at the approving growls they gave. Their hungry eyes consumed me, and it was the most incredible feeling; I’d never felt more desired, more lusted after. Andrew took one of my breasts into his strong hand, teasing my nipple until it went hard against his touch.

It wasn't long before Andrew and Kai were down to nothing but their boxer briefs, their erections straining against the fabric. My heart pounded as I took in the sight of their chiseled bodies, a sense of awe filling my senses.

With a mischievous smile, Andrew pulled me closer. "Ready to continue, gorgeous?" he spoke, his voice thick with desire.

The men's eyes twinkled devilishly, the corners of their lips curling upward in knowing smirks. They looked at each other as James produced several biker bandanas. He threw them over to Andrew and Kai with a grin.

"Show her how to give herself over," James said.

Andrew held up one of the bandanas, a red one. "What do you say? A little light bondage for tonight?"

Once more, the combination of nervousness and arousal that I'd been feeling since the night began rushed through me.

"Tie me up?" I asked, my voice coming out soft.

"Only if you want it," James said. "Don't worry, you're in good hands."

"I want it."

"Alright," Kai spoke, his voice a velvety purr that sent a rush of warmth through my body. "Let's give the lady what she wants."

He handed a bandana to Andrew, a wicked glint in his eye.

I nodded one last time, my heart pounding in my chest, a delicious cocktail of nervousness and anticipation swirling within me. Andrew gently slipped the bandana over my eyes, the fabric cool against my skin, blocking out all light.

My breath hitched as the men's hands expertly worked on my bra and panties, their fingers nimble and determined. The soft brush of their fingertips against my skin sent my heartrate rocketing, and I was acutely aware of every sensation as they stripped me down to nothing. Next, they bound my hands behind me.

I was restrained, my eyes covered and my wrists firmly cinched. I was totally in their control. To my surprise, my arousal only grew, knowing that whatever happened next was up to them and I had no idea what was coming.

Their mouths found mine, hot, deep kisses of lips and tongues. Their scent was intoxicating—a mix of subtle cologne, leather, and a hint of something spicy and masculine. The inability to see made my other senses more intense, almost overwhelming.

“God yes,” I moaned. “Don’t stop.”

I felt a pair of hands, strong and steady, spread my legs apart. The scent of my arousal filled the air, and one of the men, I couldn’t tell who, moved between my thighs, his hot breath fanning over my sensitive flesh. I gasped, my body jolting when his tongue made contact, the sensation sending sparks of pleasure shooting through my limbs.

Another mouth moved over my body, kissing my lips, then my neck, then my collarbone, all the way down to my nipples. With my eyes covered and my hands bound, it was impossible to do anything else other than focus on the sensations of one pair of lips on my body, the other on my clit.

The man on the ground before me was sinfully skilled, lips and tongue working me into a frenzy. He swept his arms under my legs, draping them over his powerful shoulders as another man held me up from behind. One hand spread my lips, the other fingered me, hitting my G-spot in just the right way, his tongue making tight circles around my clit.

“Oh... Oh *fuck*,” I moaned. “Don’t-stop-don’t-stop-don’t-stop.”

It didn’t take much more of that before an intense climax overtook me. I moaned loudly, my body convulsing in bliss as the waves of orgasm washed over me.

The lips left my body, a pair of hands guiding my legs down to the ground. My whole body felt electrified. There was something about not knowing which man had been the one to make me come that was inexplicably arousing.

“Andrew spoke. “We can untie you, bring you over to the bed.”

“Or...” Kai said. “We could keep you right here, have our fun with you the way we want, make you come over and over.”

Something about being tied up, totally giving myself over to them was so sexy that I could hardly think straight. All of my other senses were heightened. The feel of the cool air against my heated skin, the sound of the men moving around me, knowing that their eyes were all on me... the entire situation was a potent aphrodisiac.

A warm, strong body pressed against my back. I could feel the hard muscles, the heat radiating off of him. A pair of hands roamed my body, tracing lines of fire across my skin, squeezing my breasts and teasing my nipples. The intimacy of the position, the vulnerability... it was intoxicating.

Then came the first touch to my pussy, teasing and tantalizing, sparking my senses into overdrive. My heart raced, my body already arching toward the source of the touch. I gasped at the sensation, the anticipation making me dizzy with need.

Soft moans escaped my lips. “Please... *please*. Just like that.”

Then, without warning, he thrust into me. The sudden sensation was a shock to my system, a sweet, almost unbearable pleasure that left me gasping. He moved in a rhythm that was nothing short of sinful, each thrust pushing me further and further toward the edge. I was so turned on that I was easily able to take his cock, thick and hard as steel. Whichever man it was glided inside with ease, stretching me out, his hands clasped onto my rear.

I could sense the men around me. The thought of them watching only served to heighten my pleasure. My senses were overwhelmed, the darkness amplifying every sound, every touch, every exquisite sensation.

I was completely consumed by the pleasure that was washing over me in waves. And I loved every second of it. The man's right hand lifted, coming down onto my ass and connecting with a clap. I gasped in surprise and delight, the contact intensifying the rhythmic thrusting.

"You like that?" James spoke from somewhere in front of me. "When he spansks you?"

"Yes!"

The man inside of me responded with a few more spanks for good measure, the sweet sting of his hands against my ass pushing the satisfaction up a few more notches.

The pleasure built within me, a simmering tension that threatened to consume me. I could feel him, every inch, every movement. Each thrust was purposeful, driving me closer and closer to the edge. My breath hitched, my body writhing in his firm grip. I felt his hold on me tighten as I matched his rhythm, the anticipation building of what was to come.

"There... right there. Don't stop, don't stop." I spoke the words almost in a chant, as if they could summon the release I craved.

Then, with one final, powerful thrust, his arm wrapped around me, he pushed me over the edge. The world shattered around me as I crashed into a blinding orgasm, my body shaking with the intensity of it. My cries of pleasure echoed through the room, drowning out his low grunts of satisfaction. His release followed mine, his body tensing against my back as he reached his own climax.

I could still feel him inside me, even as his breathing began to slow. Then, he carefully extracted himself, leaving me in the center of the room, my body still humming with the aftermath of the intense pleasure.

Before I could fully recover, I felt another presence behind me. The heat of the body against mine was unmistakable. His hands were on my hips, guiding me, turning me, positioning me how he wanted. The promise of more pleasure was enough to send a fresh wave of arousal coursing through me.

The idea of being taken again by another man so soon after the last was so dirty, so naughty, but so damn hot. Being shared by one gorgeous man after another as they made me come over and over, was something I couldn't believe I'd denied myself for so long.

"Who are you?" I whispered to the man in front of me. I sniffed the air, trying to discern him by his scent.

"Where's the fun in that?" I heard Finn say.

"Yeah," James added. "Just enjoy the moment."

They were right; the mystery of which man was taking me was part of what made it all so thrilling. I closed my eyes underneath the bandana and let out a long, slow breath, trying my hardest to push aside my desire to know everything, and to instead give myself over unabashed.

The new set of strong hands grasped the underside of my thighs, hoisting me into the air with ease. Reflexively, my legs coiled around his waist, my bound hands swinging behind me. His length pushed against my core, reminding me of the sensitivity that lingered from my previous climax. A wave of heated passion flushed through me, stoking the fires that had yet to be fully extinguished.

Without words, he plunged into me, drawing a gasp from my lips. His grip on my legs tightened, his rhythm methodical and relentless. Each thrust was like a spark igniting my body, the pleasure growing in intensity, radiating from my core to the tips of my toes.

"Yes... yes..." I was so gripped by pleasure that *yes* was the only word I could even think of saying. I lost myself in the trance of his thrusts, the feeling of his steel-solid manhood pushing inside, the tensing and flexing of his muscles. The sheer strength he had holding me up without my ability to wrap my arms around his neck was impressive.

I could feel the familiar buildup of pressure again, the tension coiling tighter and tighter. His pace quickened, matching the pounding of my heart. He grunted in pleasure, his body responding to the friction, to the heat. And then, just

as I was about to tumble over the edge, he held me tightly, his body tensing as he thrust one final time.

A blinding wave of bliss washed over me, my body convulsing in his grip. I heard him gasp, his own climax mirroring mine. His seed warmed me within, marking me as his, at least for the moment.

As our bodies descended from the peak of our orgasms, he held me close, his breathing ragged against my ear. The intensity of the moment lingered, the echo of our shared release reverberating in the quiet room.

He then withdrew, and all I could think was how I wanted him back inside me. My body hummed from the intensity of the orgasm, and as I stood there, another man came over, gently placing his hand on the small of my back in a calming, reassuring way. Someone else approached, undoing the bandana at my wrists.

I was so spent that I tumbled forward, my legs weak underneath me. The man in front caught me with ease, a smile spreading across my face as I realized they were ready to care for me after the intensity of the lovemaking.

“Can I take the bandana off?” I asked, my voice soft.

Nobody responded, instead one of them slipping a thumb underneath the bandana and lifting it. My eyes took a moment to adjust to the light, and when they did, I saw that I was being lifted by Kai, Andrew at my side.

“How’re you feeling?” Kai asked as he carried me over to the bedroom while the others followed.

“Spent... but good. So good.”

James and Finn shared a look, as if that were exactly what they’d wanted to hear. Once I was seated on the comfy bed, James and Finn flanking me, Andrew handed me a glass bottle of cool water. I wasted no time cracking it open and taking a sip, restoring myself.

“Did you like that?” Finn asked.

I smiled. “I *loved* it. It’s unlike anything I’ve ever done before. Something about losing control, giving myself over... I can’t explain it but I already want more.”

“Then I’ve got good news,” Andrew said as he took a seat on the edge of the bed. “Sharing women isn’t the only sexual twist we like.”

“Is that right?” I asked.

Kai nodded. “Yup. What you just experienced was, well, let’s call it a sample of what we’re into.”

My eyes flashed with surprise and excitement. “Really? What else do guys like?”

The men shared a look, wry smirks forming on their lips.

“You’ll just have to wait and see, won’t you?” Kai replied.

“In good time,” Finn added. “For now, let’s take baby steps.”

Andrew lifted his eyes to me. “And if you’re ever not comfortable with anything, just say the word. It’s only fun when everyone wants to play.”

I smiled, nestling into James’ shoulder. What I’d just done was unlike anything I’d tried before, but I loved it, and each little bit of giving myself over to the men felt right. It wasn’t just about them claiming me, though I loved that part. I was in a position of power, too. I was the nucleus of this... whatever it was. They all craved me, eager to pleasure me as if they were my sexual servants treating me as though I were their queen.

Sated and glowing, I found myself cocooned in the midst of the four men. Our limbs entwined lazily on the expansive bed, skin on skin, the faint scent of sex and sweat lingering in the air. The luxury suite seemed to vibrate with the residual heat of our passion.

The five of us settled into the oversized bed, our bodies forming a perfect tangle of sated softness. The luxurious sheets below us were as disheveled as my tousled hair, but I wouldn’t have it any other way. The lingering burn between

my thighs, the warmth the men had left inside of me, were delicious reminders of our shared pleasure.

It wasn't long before my eyes began to droop heavily, the day's events finally catching up with me. I felt one of the men adjust his position to accommodate me, allowing me to nestle further into his warmth. Sleep tugged at me, pulling me toward its comforting darkness. And as I succumbed, I found myself enveloped in a blissful sense of peace, my lips curving into a content smile.

## CHAPTER 10

## JAMES



**I**n the thick of my slumber, my mind spun fantasies where Julia was center stage. She was bucking and gasping under me, her body meeting mine in a primal rhythm. The sweet cries of her pleasure filled my dreams, echoing again and again as I led her to climax after blissful climax.

But an enticing pressure dragged me from my dreams. A warm, insistent sensation around my manhood, pulling me back to reality with a pleasure so raw and intense, it could outshine the best my imagination had to offer.

I grunted, blinking away the remnants of sleep. I took in the morning light seeping through the vast expanse of windows, casting long shadows around the luxurious room. And then I saw Julia, in all her naked beauty, positioned between my spread legs, her lips wrapped around me.

A low, approving growl rumbled in my chest. She looked up, her eyes sparkling with a devilish delight that matched the sly grin on her lips. The sight of her, bare and bent on making me lose control, sent a surge of raw desire coursing through me.

“Morning, sweetheart,” I said, my voice rough with sleep and arousal. She shot me a smirk that promised more sweet torture and returned to her delightful task, her lips moving up and down, up and down. I was one lucky bastard.

I took a quick glance around the room, seeing that the guys were still asleep. Finn was in the other bed, Andrew was out

on the couch, and Kai was on the floor with his head resting under a pile of pillows.

Julia's head bobbed up from its previous position and she gave me a sexy smirk, her eyes dancing with mischief and delight.

"Morning, handsome," she purred, the husky tone in her voice hitting me straight in the gut, amplifying the already potent desire coursing through me.

I smirked back at her, running my fingers through her tousled hair. "You always wake up this motivated?"

God, she looked perfect. Her ripe, round ass was up in the air, her breasts hanging down where I could take hold of them. Her lips were wet, matching the glistening of my cock.

She laughed, a light, throaty sound that vibrated all the way down to where she had me wrapped up in her luscious mouth moments ago. The sensation made me twitch, eliciting a wicked grin from her.

"Only when I find a particularly appetizing snack in bed with me," she shot back, her gaze dropping to the place where my body was still humming with the remnants of her attention.

Before I could craft a suitable response, she dipped her head down again, effectively silencing me. A low, rough moan escaped my lips. I decided to let her have the last word that time.

My heart pounded in my chest, the rhythmic thud matching the steady bob of her head. She was skilled, sinfully so, and my grip tightened in her hair as she brought me closer to the edge. I heard stirring from the rest of the suite, the rustle of sheets and soft, sleepy groans alerting me to the fact that our companions were waking.

The exhibitionist in me thrilled at their sleepy, heated gazes as they came to, taking in the sight of Julia pleasuring me.

My breath hitched as I caught sight of the others, the looks they shot us serving to only amplify the coil of heat in my gut. They didn't try to hide their arousal. The sight of Julia

between my legs, sucking my cock with abandon, stirred them as much as it thrilled me.

“Someone woke up on the right side of the bed,” Kai said with a smirk.

“No kidding,” added Andrew. “And look at her, girl’s a damn pro.”

Finn said nothing, watching with a smirk and smoldering eyes, no doubt imagining what his cock would look like in her mouth.

The mood in the room quickly shifted from sleepy morning contentment to something more primal, wild and intense.

Julia glanced at the guys, a smirk playing at the corners of her lips before she looked up at me, meeting my gaze with a glint of triumph in her eyes, her mouth full of my cock. She knew what she was doing, and she was damn proud of it.

I clenched my jaw, my breaths coming out in shallow pants as the pressure built up. A sensation of pleasure surged through me, tipping me over the edge as her name left my lips in a choked growl. I focused on the sensation of her lips around me, her tongue teasing my ridge, her hand gently squeezing my balls.

It didn’t take much more before I came hard. She kept her mouth latched onto me as I grunted and rode out the climax, her eyes locked on mine as she swallowed every last drop. Julia didn’t stop until I was thoroughly spent, my heart pounding and my mind spinning from the blissful pleasure.

“Delicious,” she said. She turned her eyes to the rest of the gang. “Who’s next?”

## CHAPTER 11

## JULIA



**S**lipping through the doors of Blackjack’s, I could still feel a soft thrumming coursing through me, a delightful hangover of the previous night’s—and morning’s—exploits. My muscles protested with each movement, sore but serving as a glorious reminder of the wild night spent tangled in a mess of strong, sexy men.

Maddie, seated in the waiting area, glanced up from her laptop as I sauntered in. Her eyes narrowed at my state—hair disheveled, skin glowing, a ridiculous smile still plastered across my face.

“Well, someone certainly had a good night,” she said, an unspoken understanding flashing in her eyes.

I rolled my eyes at her, though the stupid smile remained. “You could say that” I replied nonchalantly, settling onto the stool next to her.

Shaking her head, Maddie chuckled lightly, returning her attention to the computer screen. “See?” she asked. “Told you those muscle-bound himbos can be good for something.”

My heart skipped a beat at her words as I realized that Maddie thought that Tim was the reason for my just-been-screwed look.

“What can I say?” I asked. “Never doubt the great Mads.”

She grinned. “Now you’re learning.”

With that, she and I reviewed her schedule for the day before she hopped over to her workstation to prepare for her

first client.

Before too long we opened for business, a steady buzz of energy already filling the air. The aroma of freshly brewed coffee from the breakroom lingered enticingly, mixing with the familiar scent of ink and sterilizer. The hum of tattoo guns hadn't begun yet, but that familiar sound would soon be in full swing.

The jingle of the door opening interrupted my morning routine, and I glanced up to find the most striking older man I'd ever seen. He had a shock of steel gray hair, cut short, and stormy eyes to match... very familiar stormy eyes.

The man was well into his sixties but maintained a physique that would give any twenty-something a run for their money. His toned arms and broad shoulders were showcased beneath a fitted black Iron Maiden tee, revealing a canvas of vibrant tattoos snaking down both limbs. He wore combat boots and black jeans the same ink-dark color. It was none other than Jack Preston, the original owner of Blackjack's and father to Finn and Kai.

"Jack," I greeted him with a warm smile, rising to my feet. "Good to see you. Welcome."

He returned my smile, kindness igniting in his eyes. He was a former bad boy who'd settled down with age and though he looked hard as they came, there was a softness to his features that always managed to put me at ease.

"Good to see you, too, Julia." His voice was as warm and rich as aged bourbon. He stopped at my desk and looked around. "Place looks to be in ship-shape. I see those four haven't driven it into the ground just yet." He grinned, letting me know he was only messing around.

"Not yet. Been pretty damn busy, actually."

"So I hear. And I also hear you've been kicking ass."

A tinge of red formed on my cheeks. "I'd like to think so."

"I knew you'd be a good fit from the moment I laid eyes on you," he said. "You've got that rare intuition and spark in

you. That combination isn't easy to find." He winked, and I laughed.

"Thanks, Jack. Anyway, I'm sure you're here to see the guys?"

"Sure am. Wanted to chat about a few things before the day got going. Those boys of mine around?"

"Yep. Let me call them for you."

I patched into the office through the intercom, letting Kai and Finn know their old man was there.

"Send the old fart on back," Kai said, his voice piping through the intercom.

Jack let out a loud bark of a laugh at the barb.

"Thanks, darlin'." He winked as he headed past, onto the main floor of the shop.

Jack sauntered over to his sons as they emerged from the office. I watched as the shop momentarily halted its work, the crew instantly perking up at his presence as he said his hellos. There was an undeniable shift in energy as they exchanged greetings, his sons and the other artists showing a level of respect and admiration that was reserved solely for Jack.

As Jack neared Finn and Kai, their rough edges seemed to diminish. I'd only met Jack once before, but that was more than enough to know their father was an icon in their eyes, a man who had defied norms, made a name for himself, and created a legacy that they now proudly carried on. They greeted one another with big, back-clapping hugs, the three of them making their way back toward the office.

"So, heading to Napa again?" I heard Kai ask as he broke away from the embrace.

Jack nodded, a fond smile playing on his lips. "Yeah, the vines ain't gonna prune themselves."

"Napa Valley?" Maddie asked, curiosity piqued.

"Yep," Jack spoke in his gruff voice. "Got myself a little vineyard and I've spent plenty of holidays there over the years,

back when Grace was still around.”

Finn chuckled. “Remember the last Christmas with Mom, when she had us decorate the whole damn property?” A smile ghosted his lips. “And Kai fell off the ladder trying to put up the star, landed right on his ass.”

Kai rolled his eyes, but his grin betrayed his fondness for the memory. “Yeah, because you surprised me right when I was on the top of the fuckin’ thing.”

Jack chuckled. It was a rare, heart-touching moment, hearing the three of them reminisce about such precious memories.

Watching them, I felt a pang of longing for something I never had—a close-knit family. A home full of laughter and love, and memories that made me smile just thinking about them. It helped me understand the Preston boys a bit more, their sense of loyalty, their fierce protectiveness over those they cared about.

“Alright, memory lane time’s over,” Jack said. “Let’s get to why I came here.”

He clapped one hand on each of the boys’ shoulders and the trio made their way into the office. Within minutes their expressions hardened and turned serious, their conversation dropping to a whisper. I strained to catch their words from across the room, but only one word filtered through—Klaus. A ripple of unease coursed through me at the mere mention of his name.

As if to emphasize the gravity of the situation, the windows tinted at the press of a button and the door was closed. I was left standing at the reception desk, curiosity gnawing at me. A chill of worry worked its way down my spine. Was this related to what had happened the other day?

I tried to push the matter out of my mind as best I could. After all, I didn’t have any business with Klaus. All the same, I felt connected to the shop, connected to the boys, in a way I hadn’t before. Was I getting sucked into their world in a way I wouldn’t be able to come back from?

After a time, the chime on the front door sounded as a pair of customers entered. When I turned my gaze toward the entrance, I was met with a chilling sight. Two men had entered radiating an aura of malevolence that couldn't be ignored. The insignia emblazoned on their leather vests confirmed my fear—they were Crimson Devils.

They sauntered in like they owned the place, their eyes scanning the shop with casual interest. The room grew tense, the air crackling with a silent alert as if every person present sensed the impending danger. I swallowed hard, steeling myself for the confrontation that was sure to come.

Their gazes landed on me and for a brief moment, their intimidating facade faltered as they took in my presence. Their lips curled into smirks, and they headed straight toward me. It was clear these men were here with an agenda, most likely at Klaus's bidding.

“Can I help you?” I asked, putting on a bored face.

There was an arrogance to them that was hard to ignore, their presence filling up the room and casting a pall over the previously lighthearted vibe. I recognized them instantly from their last visit with Klaus, and I internally nicknamed them ‘Henchmen One and Two.’

In a way that exuded calculated nonchalance, they swaggered up to the front desk, the taller of the two leaning in a little too close for comfort. “We want new ink,” Henchman One demanded, his beady eyes raking over me with a disturbing insolence.

“Well, congratulations. You managed to find a tattoo parlor,” I shot back. They didn't crack a smile, their expressions stony.

Henchman Two extended his arm across the counter, the fresh ink on his arm still raw and angry looking.

“Looks to me like you need to let your last piece heal before you go adding anything new. You know, take it easy, do some Netflix and ice cream, maybe with one another?” I suggested, fighting to keep my tone light.

But they didn't budge, their hardened expressions making it clear they were there for more than just a friendly chat about their next tattoo. My heart began to race, my instincts screaming at me that trouble was brewing and about to boil over.

"Yeah, I remember you," Henchman One said. "Smartass chick without a drop of ink on her."

Henchman Two looked me over. "Not even a piercing." He grinned. "How about I pop that cherry of yours, doll? Come back to my place, I'll give you a *piercing* you won't forget."

I snorted. "Yeah, I bet it's small enough to make a nice, tiny hole."

Two narrowed his eyes, One laughing his ass off. "Screw you," he said.

His gaze didn't falter, and I could tell neither of them had any intention of backing down. An uneasy tension coiled in the air, whispering of the brewing storm. Before I could toss another snarky comment their way, the office door opened, and Jack, Kai, and Finn burst out.

Jack's gaze went from the Devils to me, then back to the Devils. He didn't need more than a second to assess the situation. His eyes hardened into steel, the air around him screaming authority.

"I think you boys have taken a wrong turn," he said, his voice as sharp as a razor. "Blackjack's isn't your playground."

The taller one started to retort, but Jack cut him off with a raise of his hand. "You better respect my employees and leave. I've known Klaus long enough, but that won't stop me from teaching you a lesson in manners."

The silence in the shop was deafening. I could almost hear the Devils' bravado crumbling under Jack's unwavering gaze.

"Well if it isn't the man himself," One finally said.

"The *old* man," said Two.

"Not too old to whoop your asses," Jack shot back. "Now, turn tail and scam. And tell Klaus to cut out whatever shit

he's trying to start. He won't like what happens if he pushes me or my boys far enough."

One smirked. "Oh, we'll let him know."

"And we'll be back to tell you what he has to say about it," Two added.

With that, they turned and left, their threat lingering in the air.

As the door closed behind them, Jack wasted no time heading over to me, concern replacing the earlier hardness. "You okay, Julia?"

I let out a breath I didn't realize I'd been holding. "Yeah, I'm good. Thanks, Jack."

The lingering shadow of the Crimson Devils seemed to cling to the space even after they'd gone.

Jack scrubbed a hand down his face, his worry lines deep. "Finn, we need to chew on this Klaus crap," he said, the weight of his years heavy in his voice. "Lunch?"

Finn merely nodded, his expression mirroring his father's concern.

"I'll hold down the fort," Kai said, his gaze flicking between his brother and father.

"Good idea," Jack replied. "We need someone here in case those assholes darken our door again. We'll loop you in on what we talk about."

"Sounds good," Kai responded.

With that, Jack and Finn headed out and Kai turned to me.

"We're full up now, right?"

"Yep. Maddie, Shadow, and Quinn are with clients. Nobody else on the schedule for another hour."

"Good. Not in the mood for uninvited guests at the moment. Plus, there's something I want to talk to you about in the office." Kai flipped the 'Open' sign on the door to 'Closed.'

Kai flashed me a heated grin over his shoulder, one that caused my pussy to clench. I had a damn good feeling what it was he wanted to ‘talk to me’ about in the office.

Kai was waiting for me behind his desk, his back toward the door, his powerful posture creating an air of stern authority. Just the sight of him was enough to make my pussy ache with desire. As he turned to face me the office felt suddenly smaller, filled to the brim with a potent cocktail of raw masculinity and piercing sexual tension.

“You wanted to speak with me, boss?” I asked. My knees were already weak. I wanted him like mad.

He stepped toward me slowly, his dress shoes echoing on the floor.

“One-on-one meetings,” Kai began, a slow, sinful grin spreading across his face, “Can be quite productive.” His eyes glinted with humor, but the spark in his gaze told me he had more than just business on his mind.

“That’s what I hear.”

“Please, close the door and come in.” I did as instructed.

“First, I want to make sure you’re OK. Those boys give you a bad time?”

“I’m fine, thanks. And not too bad. More bark than bite, I think.”

“Good, good.”

Without another word, he closed the distance between us, his hands finding my waist and pulling me flush against him. His body was a furnace, radiating an almost unbearable heat that seemed to seep through my clothes, leaving me flushed and flustered.

“In that case, we can discuss more pertinent matters.”

“Perfect. I’d love nothing more than a little face time with the boss.”

He leaned in, his lips brushing against mine in a tantalizingly slow kiss. The world narrowed down to the feel

of his body pressed against mine, the sweet taste of him, the intoxicating scent that was uniquely Kai. His hands roamed over my body, exploring every inch, inciting a riot of sensation within me.

His fingers quickly worked the buttons on my shirt, the fabric falling away, leaving my skin bare under his touch. His hands felt like magic, each caress igniting a spark that coalesced into a blazing inferno within me. He was everywhere, his hands, his mouth, leaving a trail of heat in their wake.

We moved together in a rhythm that was as familiar as it was intoxicating, our bodies aching for each other. There was an urgency, a raw need that eclipsed all else. I buried my fingers in his hair, pulling him closer, desperately seeking more of him. He groaned into my mouth, the sound a raw, primal plea that sent shockwaves of desire through me.

My hands fumbled at the front of his pants, working his belt, zipper and button open enough to take out his long, thick cock, his manhood already hard for me. I stroked him, Kai groaning as he took himself by the base. He reached forward, slipping his fingers into my panties and inside of me, the pad of his thumb giving my clit the attention it needed. I moaned as he quickly brought me to my first orgasm. I knew that the walls of the office were soundproof, so I didn't hold back a bit.

“I want to come inside you,” he said as the orgasm faded. “I want to fill you full.”

His words were enough to make me moan just as surely as if he'd entered me. I answered him by taking hold of his cock again and guiding it toward my entrance. The room echoed with our heavy breathing and the soft rustling of clothing. Kai turned me, pressed me against the wall, and pulled down my panties, his body a solid wall of heat and muscle against mine. I turned my head toward him and he kissed me again, deeper, the head of his cock pressing against my folds.

With one thrust he entered me, the sensation of him stretching me out beyond satisfying.

“God, you feel like heaven,” he moaned, his voice low.

He slowly moved in and out a few times, letting me get used to his size. But I was so slick, so turned on, that I was able to take him with ease. It wasn't long before he was driving into me with piston-strength, his cock splitting me in half again and again.

With a sudden twist, he spun me around, picking me up and carrying me over to the desk. My heart pounded in my chest as he pressed himself against me, his hands trailing down my sides then coming to a rest at my hips, holding me in a seated position as he stood in front of me, his cock filling me over and over.

We were a tangle of limbs and raw need, the outside world forgotten. There was only Kai and the fire he sparked within me, a flame that threatened to consume us both. The only thing I cared about in that moment was Kai's breath on my skin, his hands everywhere. All I wanted was him, just as much as he wanted me.

“There,” I moaned. “Kai, you're gonna make me...!”

I came hard, and he joined me. With a groan and a shudder, Kai drained his seed inside, his warmth filling me. I rested my head against his powerful shoulder as the orgasm ripped through my body, the sensation almost too much to bear.

It was over too soon, leaving us both breathless and flushed, the office filled with the lingering remnants of our passion. Kai pressed a kiss to my cheek, his breath hot against my skin. “Productive meeting,” he spoke, a hint of amusement in his voice.

I couldn't help but laugh, the sound echoing in the office. “Very. Covered a lot of ground.”

There was a satisfied silence in the aftermath, save for the rustling of clothes being readjusted and our staggered breaths returning to normal. We stood close, the air between us crackling with an intimate energy. Kai's fingers traced absent

patterns on my waist as I ran a hand through my hair, trying to tame it into some semblance of modesty.

The silence was broken when Kai cleared his throat, a flush on his cheeks that made him look all the more handsome.

“Julia,” he began, his voice huskier than usual. “We’ve... the guys and I... we’ve been thinking.”

I arched an eyebrow at him, a playful smile tugging at the corners of my lips. “That sounds dangerous.”

He chuckled, the sound warm and comforting, despite the heat that still lingered between us.

“Quite the comedian,” he said, before his expression turned serious again. “Listen, we’re planning a holiday getaway. Just the five of us.”

A getaway? With all of them? The idea sent a thrill through me, images of a cozy cabin and snow-covered landscapes filling my mind. Not to mention the late-night snuggling sessions and all the naughty fun we could get up to.

“Would you be open to that?” Kai asked, watching me closely for my reaction.

My grin must have been wider than a Cheshire cat’s. “Hell yes,” I practically purred. The boys wanted to whisk me away for a sexy holiday retreat. Who was I to refuse such a tantalizing offer?

I winked at him, letting my fingers trace down his chest as I stepped away, sauntering toward the door. “Tell the boys to count me in. I can’t wait to get on Santa’s naughty list, and his lap.”

## CHAPTER 12

ANDREW



Later that day...

“I can’t believe you still had that much energy after such a long day,” Julia teased, her breathless voice still filled with lingering pleasure.

Strolling out of the office together, an undeniable sense of satisfaction hummed in my veins. It wasn’t just the post-coital buzz, although that was most definitely part of it. But there was more to it. There was the thrill of having had Julia to myself for a while, the pleasure of knowing I had satisfied her, and the amusement of seeing her trying to gather her bearings after our passionate encounter.

We’d only finished our session moments ago, but already my mind was filled with images of her gorgeous face contorted in orgasmic delight as I came hard into her, her nails digging into my back and her legs wrapped around my waist, guiding me to sink deeper, to fill her with my seed.

I smirked, tossing an arm around her shoulders and drawing her close. The smell of her hair was intoxicating, reminding me of the taste of her skin. “What can I say? You inspire me.”

Her eyes sparkled at that, and I felt my chest tighten at the sight. She was breathtaking, all fiery spirit and sexy as hell. There was something about the way she carried herself, the way she challenged me and matched my intensity. It was addictive.

“I hope you’re ready for more inspiration later,” she teased, her eyes alight with mischief. The sight of it sent a jolt of anticipation coursing through me. With Julia, every moment was an adventure—a chance to explore, to push boundaries, and to savor the exhilaration of the unpredictable.

“You know it.” I reached over and grabbed her little round ass through the short, black tennis skirt she had on, a squeal of surprised delight sounding from her. She turned, the two of us stopping and gazing into one another’s eyes. I chuckled, pressing a lingering kiss to her forehead. “Trust me, gorgeous, with you around, I don’t think I’ll ever run out.”

We were alone in the shop, the last staff member having clocked out what felt like a lifetime ago. The quiet around us was punctuated by our shared laughter and flirtatious banter, the camaraderie between us making the empty shop seem less lonely.

“Where are the rest of the guys tonight?” she asked, hopping up onto her desk, a flash of her black lacy panties visible as she crossed her legs. God, I’d come only a few minutes ago and already she was making me want more.

“Kai and Finn are with their pops,” I said. “James is on duty.”

“That means I’ve got you all to myself,” she said, a devilish little grin forming on her lips. “That is, if you want that.”

I stepped over, my cock hard again and straining the denim of my jeans. I grabbed her hips, inching up her tennis skirt and revealing those luscious thighs. “You even need to ask?”

She grinned, biting down on her lower lip as I ground my hard-on into her pussy through her panties. “Maybe we should take this back to your place, then.” Julia flicked her eyes up at the security camera in the corner of the reception area. “Where we’re not being recorded.”

I chuckled. “Good call. Why don’t we—”

*VROOM, VROOM.*

The echo of the motorcycle engines rumbling down the street cut me off from finishing my sentence. A series of guttural roars echoed through the silent street, growing louder and more menacing with every passing second. My heart clenched at the sight of five bikes pulling up in front of the shop. I recognized the emblem on their jackets immediately—Crimson Devils.

A sudden rush of adrenaline surged through me as I took in the familiar faces. These weren't just bikers looking for late-night tattoos; these were men looking for trouble.

I'd forgotten to lock the door in the aftermath of our passionate rendezvous, an oversight that suddenly seemed all too costly. The men dismounted, the gruff sound of boots hitting pavement sending chills down my spine. Their swaggering entrance was an ominous sign, and I couldn't ignore the knot of dread tightening in my stomach.

"Julia," I barked, my eyes never leaving the gang of bikers making their way towards us. "Go to the office and lock the door. Now."

"But—"

"Now."

I saw a flicker of fear cross her face, but she nodded, wasting no time following my orders. I felt a surge of relief as she disappeared behind the office door, leaving me to deal with the imminent threat.

My adrenaline-fueled heart pounded in my chest. As the men approached, I steeled myself for whatever was coming. Despite my simmering anger at their intrusion, a part of me was calm and centered. Julia was safe, hidden away from the potential danger.

My heart pounded with the rhythm of a tribal drum, echoing in the silence as the bikers stepped further into the shop. "We're closed," I said, squaring my shoulders and standing up straight, unyielding in front of the intruders.

The leader of the pack, a burly brute with a scar marring his rough face, sneered. "Door wasn't locked," he drawled, his

gaze slowly traveling around the place, eyeing our studio as if it was already theirs. “Nice spot you got here.”

The words were spoken casually, but they carried the weight of an unspoken threat. The rest of the Devils snickered, their amusement echoing unpleasantly off the walls, amplifying the tension.

“Klaus sends his regards, by the way,” another of the Devils chimed in, a nasty grin splitting his face. “Heard this place is gonna be his soon.”

I felt a rush of anger at his words, my fists curling at my sides. “Over my dead body,” I hissed, shooting him a look that I hoped conveyed my full meaning.

I fought to keep my composure, to not let them see the rage bubbling inside me. “Get out,” I growled, refusing to give them the satisfaction of a reaction. “You’ve seen enough.”

Their laughter filled the shop. “Don’t worry, we’ll be seeing a lot more of this place soon,” one of the Devils promised, his gaze filled with dark satisfaction.

They didn’t get a chance to say anything more. The *whoop* of a police siren filled the air, and seconds later a Miami PD squad car pulled to a stop next to the Devils’ bikes.

It was then that the distinctive figure of James stepped out from the patrol car, his partner Carlos Diaz, a muscular, imposing figure with eyes that missed nothing, following suit. The glare in James’ eyes sent a silent but unmissable message to the Crimson Devils. The shop was our territory, and they were not welcome there.

The looks on the faces of the Devils made it clear that their fun was over.

“Shame we can’t stay longer. It’s been a real pleasure.” the Devils squad leader snarled as his eyes flicked over to the advancing figures of James and his partner.

“Next time, don’t bother coming at all,” I spat, venom on my words, feeling a wave of relief wash over me as the flashing blue and red of the cruiser’s lights lit up the shop.

James and Carlos made their way toward the entrance with slow, authoritative strides.

“Evening, boys,” James spoke, his gaze hard as he took in the scene. “Interesting time for a social visit, wouldn’t you say?” His tone was nonchalant, but the tension in his posture told a different story. James had his cop face on, cool and professional, but simmering with a readiness to handle trouble.

“Yeah, well, we were just leaving,” the leader muttered, his grin faltering under James’ steely gaze.

“Good,” Carlos chimed in, his Spanish accent thick, his tone sharp as he shot them a no-nonsense look. “You know the way out.”

The Devils exchanged a glance before they filed out, a whirlwind of snide smirks and bitter chuckles. But beneath the bravado, I noticed a flicker of unease. They weren’t used to being ushered away, especially not by the likes of James and Carlos.

“Stay out of trouble,” the leader called over his shoulder as they mounted their bikes. “We’ll be seeing you soon.” The threat hung in the air long after the rumble of their engines faded into the distance.

“Thanks, guys,” I said to James and Carlos once they were gone, my adrenaline finally starting to come down.

“Not a problem,” Carlos replied.

“Just doing our job, dude. Happened to be in the area when we heard those bikes, figured we’d stay by the shop just in case,” James replied, his gaze lingering on the spot where the Devils had left. He sighed, shaking his head. “Klaus. He’s planning something.”

“No doubt about that,” I replied.

The echo of the Devil’s threats played in my mind. I nodded to myself, my mind already racing with plans. We had to prepare for what was coming. And whatever it was, we would be ready. Because if Klaus thought he could take what was ours, he’d be in for a surprise.

Right in that moment, I caught sight of Julia peeking out from behind the office door, her eyes wide and full of concern. My chest tightened, not just at the sight of her obvious distress but at the realization of just how much I wanted to protect her, to make sure she was safe.

Without a second thought I strode over to her, my steps heavy, determined.

“Julia!” I called out, my voice echoing in the mostly empty shop. Her gaze darted up to meet mine, a breath catching in her throat as she took in my hardened expression.

As I closed the distance between us, I noticed her body was taut, rigid with anxiety. I pulled her against me, my arms firm around her. Her fingers gripped my shirt, her knuckles whitening from the pressure.

“Those men,” she said, barely able to get out the words. “I thought they were going to...”

There was no doubt she’d been more worried about my safety than hers.

“Listen,” I spoke into her hair, breathing in the sweet scent of her perfume. “I got you. Always.” It wasn’t just a promise, it was a fact.

I felt her relax against me, the tremors slowly fading away as she allowed herself to relax into my embrace, a small nod against my chest confirming she got the message.

It was there, in the echoing silence of the shop, with her body nestled against mine, that a strange realization hit me. My heart was thumping louder than it should have been. My arms were holding her tighter than any woman I had held before. I was falling for this girl, and there was no denying it.

Pulling her closer, I traced a circular pattern on her back, a silent reassurance, a claim. The situation was foreign to me, I’d never been the kind of man to catch feelings, and yet there I was, falling head over heels for Julia. It was madness, it was chaotic, it was... right.

With her, things were different. She was more than just another woman, more than just a hot body. She was slowly

becoming the center of my world, the one constant in my wild life. I wasn't about to give up on that. Not then, not ever.

## CHAPTER 13

## JULIA



A couple of weeks can sure pack a punch, especially when they're filled with the kind of delicious mischief I'd been getting up to with the guys.

Four unique personalities, four distinct flavors of pleasure, and I'd been savoring each one.

Finn's slow, deliberate touch had a way of winding me up until I was ready to snap. He'd tease me to the edge of madness and then push me over, leaving me breathless and begging for more.

Andrew's roughness was another world altogether. A wild ride that would leave me aching in the best way possible. Last time we'd been together he'd had me up against the wall, the cold surface pressed against my back, his body a furnace against my front. His hand found its way to my throat, squeezing just enough to make my pulse quicken, my breath catch. No room for pretense or hesitance; with Andrew, it was all raw and real.

Kai's creativity never ceased to amaze me. He had a way of turning ordinary experiences into extraordinary ones. Like that morning in the kitchen when breakfast turned into a buffet of sensation. Sticky syrup, cold ice, hot breath; he used them all to paint my body with pleasure. I never knew what to expect with him, and that was half the fun.

James's soft-spoken dominance held a fascination for me. He was a man of few words, but the ones he chose had a way of commanding attention. A lingering look, a whispered

command, and I was his to do with as he pleased. He had this knack for knowing exactly what I needed, even when I didn't know myself.

Through each encounter, I felt a connection growing, not just in the bedroom but beyond. Shared glances, inside jokes, a lingering touch. The guys had a way of making me feel seen, appreciated, and desired in a way I hadn't felt before.

But despite all the exploration, all the discovery, I had yet to experience all four of them together. The thought lingered in the back of my mind, a tantalizing 'what if.' I couldn't deny that the idea was intriguing, but was I ready for it?



Miami nights had a way of heating things up, even before stepping into the sultry haze of a club. The city burned with a seductive energy that seeped into your very bones, making you feel alive in a way that no other place could.

The guys informed me that they had something special planned. As we drove through the streets, illuminated by the neon glow of clubs and streetlights, the anticipation was almost unbearable. The five of us, dressed to kill, were headed to a place where desire was not only welcomed but celebrated.

"Welcome to Obsidian," Andrew said, his voice dripping with sensuality as our car pulled up in front of the sleek black building.

The club's exterior was a study in dark allure, all glass and black chrome, reflecting the vibrant neon city lights. The line to get in wound around the corner, but we bypassed it, our names on the exclusive list. A knowing smile from the bouncer, and we were ushered into another world.

Inside, Obsidian was a labyrinth of temptation. Low, throbbing beats echoed through the dimly lit rooms filled with people lost in their desires. Leather, lace, and a sense of the forbidden permeated the atmosphere. Within those walls there were no judgments, only a shared understanding of pleasure in all its forms.

The guys led me to a private, second-floor room that looked out over the main space, and I took in the mesmerizing scene. Dancers swayed in cages, couples whispered in dark corners, and everywhere I looked, there was a dance of dominance and submission happening in real time.

My heart raced as I realized what the place was about. It wasn't just a night out; it was a test, a game.

“So Julia,” James began, his eyes gleaming with mischief, “Tonight, you get to be the judge. Each of us will perform for you, and you have to grade us. Think you can handle that?”

“And there's more,” Finn said, leaning forward. “We're going to show you our more personal interests, kinks that we don't share with just anyone.”

I squirmed in my seat, barely able to control the eagerness building inside of me, a tingling warmth spreading out from between my thighs. “Bring it on, boys.”

Kai rose, a devilish grin on his face. “Lucky for me, I get to go first.”

He stepped over to me and lowered himself down, bringing his lips to mine. As we kissed, his hands expertly worked at the clasps and fastenings of my clothes. Soon, we were both down to just our underwear, and I couldn't help but drink in the sight of his body.

God, he was gorgeous. A living canvas, adorned with tattoos that seemed to tell a story with every curve and swirl. His muscular chest, defined abs, and strong arms were a feast for the eyes, and I felt a familiar heat stir within me as he looked at me with those intense, gray eyes.

“Ever played with fire and ice, gorgeous?” he asked, his voice dripping with seduction.

I arched an eyebrow. “I have not.”

His lips curved into a wicked grin as he began.

Kai's fingers traced a tantalizing path along my collarbone as he explained. “Temperature play is about exploring sensations. It's about contrasting the feelings of hot and cold

against the skin. Think of an ice cube gliding over your body, chilling your skin, making it sensitive, followed by warm, heated oil that soothes and teases.”

My breath caught at the imagery, my mind racing with possibilities. “That sounds intense.”

He nodded, his eyes darkening with desire. “It’s more than just a physical sensation. It plays with your mind, heightening your awareness, making you more receptive to every touch, every kiss. It can be a slow tease or a wild ride, depending on how we play it.”

My heart pounded, and I knew I was sold. “Alright, Mr. Artist, I’m game. Let’s see if you can make me feel the heat... and the chill.”

With a knowing smile, Kai dimmed the lights, and the room took on an intimate glow. I could see him moving, arranging things, and then he was back, holding a bowl filled with ice cubes in one hand and a bottle of heated oil in the other.

He started with the ice, trailing it down my neck, between my breasts, along my stomach. The cold was a shock, a thrilling tingle that sent shivers down my spine. I gasped and moaned, writhing beneath his touch as he explored, the ice melting and dripping along my heated skin.

Then came the warmth. He poured the oil slowly, teasingly, letting it glide over the areas he’d just chilled with ice. The contrast was mind-blowing, pleasure and surprise intertwining, leaving me panting and wanting more.

The finale was the wax. He lit a scented candle and allowed the wax to melt. With expert precision, he dripped it onto my body, making me jolt and then sigh as it cooled and solidified. The sensation was indescribable, a dance of pain and pleasure that left me aching for more.

By the time he was done, I was reduced to a whimpering, begging mess, craving the satisfaction only he could give me. Kai’s eyes sparkled with triumph as he leaned down, his lips a breath away from mine.

“Ready for the real fun?” he whispered, his voice a sexy rumble that promised everything I wanted and more.

Kai moved over to a small table where a ceramic dish of fragrant oil sat atop a warmer. He dipped his fingers into the oil, testing the temperature. When he was satisfied, he motioned for me to lie back down on my stomach.

I did as instructed, excitement building. He took a small amount of the heated oil into his hands, rubbing them together to spread it evenly. Then, with a look that promised pure pleasure, he placed his hands on my body.

The sensation was unlike anything I had ever felt. The warmth of the oil, combined with his skilled touch, was both relaxing and arousing. He started at my shoulders, massaging the heated oil into my skin, then moved down to my back.

I let out a moan of pleasure, my body surrendering to the sensation. The heat was intoxicating, and I could feel my muscles relaxing under his expert touch.

“You like that?” he whispered, his voice tinged with amusement.

I opened my eyes to playfully glare at him but ended up just smiling. “Do you really need to ask?”

He laughed and continued his exploration, his hands moving lower, the heat following his touch. It was a dance of temperature and desire, and I was completely enthralled.

When he reached my thighs, his touch became more intimate, more intentional. The heat of the oil was now combined with a different kind of heat, one that only he could invoke.

He poured a small amount of the heated oil directly onto my inner thighs, and I gasped, the sensation both shocking and thrilling. His fingers followed the path the oil took, moving closer and closer to where I wanted him most. He spread my lips, his fingertip teasing my clit. Between the oil and my arousal, he was able to enter me with total ease, gliding inside of me with a pair of fingers and hitting my G-spot in just the way I wanted.

“Kai,” I moaned, the pleasure building.

“Shh, just feel,” he said, his voice soothing and seductive.

And feel I did. When he finally brought me to climax, it was with a crashing wave of warmth that washed over me, leaving me spent and utterly content.

I gave myself a moment to recover from the incredible orgasm, my chest rising and falling, my legs shaking. When I was ready, I rolled over, turning my attention back to the guys.

“Alright, lover,” Andrew’s voice was a mix of amusement and challenge as he eyed me from across the room, “I hope you’re ready for something a bit different.”

I raised an eyebrow, the memory of Kai’s hot oil still fresh in my mind. “You’ve got my attention.”

Andrew’s smile broadened, and he tossed a bag on the bed. “I’m into role-playing. I’ve got a scenario in mind, and I think you’ll enjoy playing your part.”

I looked at the bag, curiosity piqued. “Oh? Do tell.”

His eyes sparkled with mischief. “Picture this. I’m the successful CEO of a tech company, and you’re my new, highly efficient, and irresistibly attractive personal assistant. We’ve been working closely for weeks, and the tension’s been building. Tonight, we’re both working late, and well, things get a little out of hand.”

I laughed, loving the concept. “You’ve thought this through, haven’t you?”

Andrew’s grin was downright wicked. “Oh, I’ve thought about this a lot. And I think it’s time we bring it to life.”

I opened the bag, finding a tight-fitting pencil skirt and a button-up blouse. “You even brought the outfit?”

“I come prepared,” he said with a wink.

After cleaning up the leftover oil with a nearby towel, I dressed in the provided clothes, admiring myself in the mirror. The outfit was sexy and professional, perfect for the role. I put

on the pair of high heels I had worn to the club for good measure then turned to face my ‘boss.’

Andrew had changed into a tailored suit, looking every bit the powerful CEO. The transformation was incredible, and I felt a thrill of anticipation. The guys watched as an audience, and I was ready to perform.

“Ready, Ms. Smith?” he asked, his voice taking on a formal tone.

“Ready when you are, Mr. Johnson,” I replied, slipping into character, a sly smile on my lips.

We were no longer just Andrew and Julia; we were playing a game, and the sexual tension was downright suffocating.

He moved closer, his voice dropping to a whisper. “You know, Ms. Smith, I’ve noticed how you look at me during meetings. And I must confess, I’ve been having some rather inappropriate thoughts about you.”

I feigned shock, playing along. “Mr. Johnson! I’m a professional. I would never—”

He cut me off with a kiss, his mouth demanding and hot, his tongue finding mine for a few glorious moments. “Don’t lie to me, Ms. Smith. I know you want me just as much as I want you.”

Our dialogue continued, the role-play heating up as we explored the scenario. The fantasy added an element of excitement, and our words became actions.

As the role-play continued, the lines between fantasy and reality began to blur. Andrew, or should I say, Mr. Johnson, sat down in his office chair, a smirk on his face. “I think it’s time for you to show your dedication to this job, Ms. Smith.”

I sauntered over, playing the part to perfection. “And what does that entail, Mr. Johnson?”

He leaned back, his eyes dark with desire. Andrew placed his hand on his cock, already hard and tenting the fabric of his slacks. “I think you know.”

Kneeling between his legs, I looked up at him, staying in character. "I'll do whatever it takes to please my boss."

His breath hitched, and I slowly unzipped his trousers, my eyes never leaving his. His cock was thick and long and already dripping just for me. The sound of his sharp intake of breath filled the room as I took him in my mouth, exploring him with a deliberate slowness that had him squirming in his chair.

The room was filled with the sounds of pleasure as I teased him, his hands fisting in my hair, guiding me. I could feel his need growing, his body tensing as I brought him closer to the edge.

But Andrew was not ready just yet.

"Enough, Ms. Smith," he growled, pulling me up and kissing me fiercely. "I think it's time I showed you how a boss takes care of his best employee."

He lifted me up and sat me on the desk, hiking up my skirt. He dropped to his knees and his mouth found my heated core, his tongue expertly teasing and tantalizing me. The tip of his tongue made tight circles around my clit, his fingers moving in and out, the twin sensations bringing me closer and closer to orgasm.

I moaned, lost in the sensations he was creating. Andrew knew exactly how to touch me, how to make me writhe and beg for more. His hands gripped my hips as he feasted on me, taking me to heights I'd never known.

"Mr. Johnson," I gasped, feeling that familiar buildup of pleasure. "Please, I need more."

He chuckled, his breath hot against me. "As you wish, Ms. Smith."

He brought me to a crashing climax, my body shuddering with pleasure as he continued to lick me. When I was finally sated, he stood, pulling me into his arms.

Andrew pulled me close, his eyes soft. "How was that?"

I laughed, the real Julia resurfacing. “I think I may have found my new favorite kink.”

He kissed me, the taste of our shared pleasure still on his lips. “Well then, Ms. Smith, I guess we’ll have to do this again sometime.”

“Hell yes, Mr. Johnson,” I replied, my voice full of sass. “Hell yes.”

James stood next. “Hope you’re not spent, baby.”

“Right,” Finn added. “Because you’ve got two more contestants to judge.”

## CHAPTER 14

## JULIA



James was all smirks and swagger as he led me to a side room.

I shot him a challenging look, matching his confident tone. “I can handle anything you throw at me, handsome.”

He chuckled, a deep, rich sound that sent a shiver down my spine. “We’ll see about that.”

The rest of the guys joined us, taking seats around the space. As always, I loved the feeling of their eyes on me.

The room was equipped with various restraints and sensory tools, all meticulously arranged. He guided me to a specially designed chair, its back arched to accommodate an all-fours position. I looked at it curiously, raising an eyebrow.

“Trust me,” James said, his voice a silky promise as he placed his hand on the small of my back.

I allowed him to position me, my arms and legs bound securely, my body open and vulnerable. It was an intense feeling, one that both excited and unnerved me. James seemed to sense my mixed emotions, his touch gentle yet firm as he secured the restraints, finally wrapping a bandana around my eyes.

Then he began.

The deprivation of sight and movement heightened my other senses, making me acutely aware of every touch, every breath. James was a master of his game, knowing exactly how to push my limits without crossing the line.

He teased me, his hands and mouth exploring my body, bringing me to the edge only to pull back, leaving me aching and desperate for more. My mind was a fog of pleasure, my body thrumming with need.

“Please, James,” I begged, my voice raw with desire. “I need you.”

He only chuckled, continuing his slow torture, driving me to the brink of madness. I could feel him, his heat, his strength, but he remained just out of reach, denying me what I craved.

“Patience, doll,” he spoke, his lips brushing against my ear. “I’ll give you what you want, but you’ll have to earn it.”

And earn it I did. I heard the unzipping of his pants, followed by the feel of his head against my wet lips. He teased me, entering me a bit and then pulling out. If my hands had been free, I would’ve grabbed him myself and guided him inside. But I was totally bound, totally at his mercy.

When he finally relented, giving me what I so desperately needed, his cock effortlessly gliding inside and stretching me out, it was with a force and intensity that left me breathless. I could feel every inch of him, every thrust and pull, amplified by the sensory deprivation.

Pure bliss consumed me completely as James took me higher and higher, his rhythm unrelenting. I was lost in the pleasure, the world reduced to the sensations he was creating.

The climax hit me like a tidal wave, a powerful, all-consuming force that left me gasping and trembling. James was right there with me, his own release mingling with mine as he drove us both over the edge, his seed draining into me, filling me with his warmth.

He quickly undid my restraints, untied my blindfold, and pulled me into his arms. The room was filled with the sound of our ragged breathing, the intensity of what we’d just experienced still lingering in the air.

“You okay?” he asked, his voice soft and tender.

I looked at him, my eyes wide with wonder and satisfaction. “That was... incredible.”

He kissed me, a gentle, lingering kiss that spoke of more than just physical pleasure. “I’m glad you liked it.”

When I was ready, I turned my attention to Finn and smiled.

Finn was last, and after James’ sensory rollercoaster, I was both excited and nervous to find out what he had in store for me. His eyes twinkled as he led me to yet another side room, this one more subtly furnished but still filled with hints of tantalizing pleasures.

“Julia,” he began, his voice laced with an intriguing blend of sternness and mischief, “Have you ever heard of delayed gratification?”

I cocked an eyebrow, my curiosity piqued. “You mean making me wait for what I want?”

“Exactly.” Finn’s grin was devilish.

My breath caught in my throat at the promise in his eyes. Finn had a reputation for being a bit more restrained than the others, but I had a feeling I was about to find out just how wild he could be.

He directed me to a luxurious bed and instructed me to lie down. I complied, my heart pounding in anticipation. Finn’s movements were deliberate and measured as he began to explore, his touch lingering, teasing.

The way he looked at me, the hunger in his eyes, sent a thrill straight through me. He was taking his time, savoring every moment, every reaction. And I knew then that he would indeed make me wait for my pleasure, to build it up until it was almost unbearable.

He used his mouth and hands to explore my body, always stopping just short of where I needed him most. His touch was masterful, knowing just how to push me to the edge without letting me fall.

“Finn,” I moaned, my body writhing under his expert skill. “Please, don’t tease me like this.”

“Patience, darlin’,” he whispered, his lips trailing down my neck, his breath hot on my skin. “You’ll get what you want, but not until I say so.”

I whimpered, my desire mounting, the pleasure almost too intense to bear. Finn was relentless, his touch both gentle and demanding, his control absolute.

When he finally entered me, it was with a slow, deliberate thrust that had me crying out in pleasure. But even then, he didn’t give me what I wanted, not yet.

He moved inside me with a maddening slowness, each thrust calculated to drive me wild. I could feel the pleasure building, a storm inside me waiting to break, and Finn was the master of it all, holding the reins, guiding me where he wanted me to go. His cock was perfectly long and thick, pushing all the way until I was filled deliciously full.

“Please, Finn,” I begged, my voice breaking with desperation. “Let me come. I need you. I need it.”

He leaned down, his lips brushing against my ear, his voice a husky whisper. “Are you sure you’re ready, Julia? Are you sure you can handle it?”

“Yes,” I gasped, tears of frustration and pleasure in my eyes. “Please, Finn, please.”

With a triumphant smile, he gave me what I wanted, his movements suddenly fierce and unrelenting, his body driving into mine with a force that took my breath away.

The orgasm was earth-shattering. Finn held me as I came, his arms strong and comforting. He spilled deep inside me as I reached the peak of my climax, warmth trickling down my inner thighs.

I looked up at him, my heart still racing, my body still tingling from the unbelievable ecstasy he’d just given me. “That was incredible.”

He kissed me, his lips soft and lingering. “Only the best for you, Julia.”

After Finn's mind-blowing demonstration, I was a tangled mess of satisfaction and need, still yearning for more. The guys had shown me their individual kinks, and with a fierce determination in my eyes, I faced them all.

They gathered around me, their arms warm and comforting, their bodies strong and reassuring. I was the focus of their attention, the recipient of their desire.

"Feeling good?" Andrew asked, his voice filled with satisfaction.

I could only nod, my mind still reeling, my body still quivering from the pleasure they'd given me.

"You're incredible, Julia," James murmured, his lips brushing against my forehead.

I looked up at them, my eyes filled with gratitude and something more, something deeper. "Thank you," I whispered, my voice breaking. "Thank you for this. For everything."

They held me, their touch gentle, their presence soothing. I knew then that I had found something special, something unique. These men, with their individual kinks and their shared passion, had given me an experience like no other.

As we all lay together, our breaths slowly returning to normal, a playful smile crept across my face. "So, gentlemen, I suppose you're all dying to know who won this little competition of yours."

Their eyes sparkled with curiosity and amusement, each of them waiting for my verdict.

"Well?" Kai prompted, his voice teasing.

I propped myself up on one elbow, surveying them with a faux-serious expression. "It's a tough call. You've all shown incredible... talents." I let my eyes linger on each of them, my voice dripping with innuendo. "But I'm afraid I can't make a decision just yet."

Finn raised an eyebrow, his lips curving into a smirk. "Oh really? And why is that?"

I leaned in closer, my voice dropping to a conspiratorial whisper. “Well, you see, I think I need a few more demonstrations. You know, to be absolutely sure.”

Andrew laughed, his eyes twinkling with mischief. “A few more, you say. How many is a few?”

I pretended to ponder, tapping my finger against my chin. “Oh, I don’t know. A couple of weeks’ worth, maybe. I want to be *very* thorough, after all.”

James chuckled, pulling me closer. “Thorough, huh? We can definitely do thorough.”

“Oh, I know you can,” I replied, my voice full of confidence. “But the question is, can you do it well enough to win?”

They exchanged glances, a new determination in their eyes. “Challenge accepted,” Kai declared.

I settled back down, nestling into their arms, a triumphant smile on my face. They thought they were competing for a prize, but the truth was, I was the real winner.

## CHAPTER 15

## JULIA



The day after our little competition, work at the tattoo parlor was buzzing with the usual energy. Finn and Kai were engrossed in business talk in the back office, papers spread out everywhere and pens flying. Andrew was busy tattooing a client, the rhythmic buzz of the machine mingling with Judas Priest playing in the background.

James was on duty but was expected to come by later, we had plans to see a movie and grab a bite. I was beside myself with excitement in the way I always was at the idea of spending time with the guys.

Maddie was standing at my desk attempting to get me to give her some details about what was happening in my private life. “Alright, Jules, spill the beans,” Maddie said. Her blue eyes sparkled with excitement as she leaned against the counter. “What’s got you so giddy today?”

The idea of revealing what had been going on with me and the guys was almost too much. Normally, I’d never come out with such personal information at work—especially when the dudes I was hooking up with were my bosses, not to mention Maddie’s.

I tried to suppress a giggle but failed miserably. “God, if I told you, you’d never believe me.”

My comment only piqued her curiosity more. “Try me.”

I took a deep breath, feeling the heat rising in my cheeks. “Okay, don’t judge, but...”

Her eyes widened as she leaned in. “*But...?*”

“I’ve kinda... sorta... been hooking up with a few different guys.”

She pumped her fist, as if the idea of me finally getting some action was the best news she could’ve hoped for.

“Atta girl! Hooking up with different men isn’t weird. I mean, I’m usually juggling a few different guys at a time. Why commit, you know? It’s 2023, ethical non-monogamy and all that!”

“No, that’s not what I meant. I’m hooking up with a few different guys who are all, uh, friends.”

That got her interest. “Ooohhh, so you’re worried about them finding out. Now it’s getting juicy.”

“Still wrong. They’re all friends and everything’s out in the open, you know? They’re sort of sharing me.” I kept my voice nice and low. No one was near enough to listen in, but all the same, gossip was the last thing I wanted circulating around the shop, for obvious reasons.

Maddie’s jaw dropped, her eyes widening with shock. Then, she burst into laughter, her face turning a delightful shade of red. “You’re *what*? Jules, that’s insane! But also kind of... hot? So it’s like, a poly thing?”

“You don’t know the half it. These guys, they’re *amazing*. They’re all insanely sexy, and each of them has their own little kink that they’ve been introducing me to. One’s into light bondage, one’s into teasing and denial...” I trailed off, the memories of the night with the guys at the club coming back, my pussy clenching.

“So fucking hot.” She shook her head. “Guys can be so boring when it comes to spicing things up. And here you’ve more than one who is into trying different stuff. Lucky girl...”

“I know, right? But here’s the thing...”

“Oh no, there’s a thing?”

“Kind of. I think I’m catching feelings for them. All of them. They’re just so good to me, and each one has something special that I like.”

Maddie nodded, as if trying to wrap her head around my situation. “Yeah, that could get tricky.”

She leaned forward as she spoke, catching sight of what was on my computer screen. It was a Word file, one I quickly closed.

Maddie grinned. “That doesn’t look like Blackjack’s schedule.”

My face turned a deep shade of red. There was something about the subject of what I had been writing that made me feel tense, embarrassed, even.

“That’s because it’s not.”

She cocked her head to the side, sensing right away my change in mood.

“What is that? I mean, I don’t want to pry, but I’m totally prying.” Her eyes flashed. “Unless it’s something super private.”

Part of me wanted to play it off, but I liked Maddie, felt like I could tell her things. “Just some story that I’ve been writing.”

Another flash of excitement. “Writing? Are you serious?”

“Shh! I don’t need everyone to know. People find out you’re a writer, an amateur one in my case, and next thing you know they want to read your stuff. I definitely don’t want that happening.”

“OK, fair enough. But that’s so cool! I had no idea you were into writing. I mean, I know you do your freelance stuff, but stories are a whole other thing.”

Maddie’s charm was working its magic on me, and by that point in the conversation I felt comfortable enough to tell her more.

“I’m working on a story to submit to *The Green Harbor*. You know that super famous literary magazine?”

Maddie’s eyes lit up. “*The Green Harbor*! Shit, they’re almost as big as *The New Yorker*. Jules, that’s huge! I hear they

pay a lot for their stories.”

I nodded, excitement bubbling within me in spite of the shyness I usually felt when it came to the subject of my writing. “Exactly. It’s a crazy-big opportunity.”

“And you’ve got the perfect material!” she exclaimed. “Bet the Harbor readers would go crazy over a tawdry love story about a girl and multiple handsome men.”

I laughed. “No way. It’s not that kind of story.”

“Then what kind is it?”

“It’s personal. Sorry to be coy, but I’m just kind of a dork about my writing like that.”

She nodded in understanding. “I totally get it. I never let anyone look at my tattoo designs until I’m one-thousand-percent happy with them. But this is so cool! You need a pair of eyes, just let me know.” Maddie winked. “And in the meantime, your secret’s safe with me.”

I smiled. “Thanks, Mads.”

I felt a ton better until my sense of peace was shattered when the door chimed, a blonde, tattooed woman strolling in like she owned the place. She was dressed in a short, tight dress, her eyes hidden behind giant, gaudy designer sunglasses. Ink peeked out from underneath the very short hemline of her dress and snaked up and down her arms.

“Oh, you have got to be kidding me.” Maddie shook her head slowly as she spoke. “*Adele?*”

The woman smiled primly as she approached the counter, as if she were some rich heiress strolling into the lobby of a seaside condo and expecting prompt, dutiful service.

“Madeline,” she said, not even turning her head toward Maddie. “I would say it’s good to see you, but...”

Maddie snorted. “You know, I’d say you had balls coming back in here, but with how tight that dress is, I’m pretty sure I’d be able to see them if you did.”

Adele turned to me. “Hi, counter girl. Would you mind running back and fetching the boys? Thanks.”

*Counter girl?*

Adele. The name sounded familiar. Then it hit me—she’d been the subject of a lot of gossip that I’d overheard from the artists. Apparently she used to work at Blackjack’s, before my time.

Adele was beautiful in an overdone, cover girl kind of way. If the gossip I’d heard from the crew was true, she was a former runway model who had dabbled in the porn industry. Her body was a work of art, no doubt the result of hours in the gym, along with no small amount of carefully chosen plastic surgery and intricate tattoo art that adorned her skin like a masterpiece.

Her light blonde hair was styled to perfection, pin-straight and reaching all the way down to the small of her back. Her blue eyes sparkled with crafty cunning, and her lips, filler-plump and perfectly painted, were turned up in a snooty little smile.

Adele’s outfit was as scandalous as the woman herself. She wore a skimpy short dress that barely covered anything, paired with high heels that added an extra edge to her already tall frame. Jangling jewelry adorned her wrists and neck, and I had no doubt that underneath that dress, she was wearing something raunchy and provocative.

“Adele?”

I turned to watch as the guys emerged from the back. Adele didn’t speak another word to me before zipping around the counter toward them, her tall heels click-clacking on the floor.

“Hey, boys!” she cooed, her voice dripping with honey as she sauntered over. “I’ve missed you all so much!”

Before any of the guys had a chance to say a word, Adele threw open her arms and hugged Finn and Kai.

“Fucking hell,” Maddie said. “There goes the goddamn neighborhood.”

“What’s her deal?” I asked.

“You’ve heard the stories. But summed up, that girl’s too much drama with too little talent wrapped up in a body with the most over-the-top Brazilian butt lift I’ve ever seen.”

“Addy.” Finn put his hands on his hips and looked Adele up and down. “What’re you doing here?”

“Oh, I was just out for a little shopping trip and I passed by the place. It’s been almost a year since I’ve been in this part of Miami and God, just one look at this place brought so many memories flooding back!”

“Memories huh?” Finn asked. “Yeah, got a few of those.”

“No kidding,” Kai added.

Adele, undeterred by the men’s frosty welcome, went on. “I was just going to come in and say hi. But the more I thought about it, the more I realized how much I missed working at this place. I’d do anything to work here again.”

“Are you serious, Addy?” Kai asked. “That’s not going to happen.”

Adele’s lip quivered, and I got the sense right away that I was about to hear an Oscar-worthy sob story.

“Oh, guys,” she began, her voice shaking as if on the brink of tears. “I don’t know where to start. Life has just... it’s been so cruel to me lately.” She paused, biting her plump lower lip and looking down at the floor.

“I lost my last job,” she continued, her eyes welling up. “The office said they had to downsize, and just like that, I was unemployed. I’ve been trying so hard to find something new, but nobody’s hiring.”

Adele’s hands shook as she wiped a tear from her cheek. “My landlord’s threatening to evict me if I don’t come up with the rent. I don’t know what to do. I’ve got nowhere else to turn. There’s work I can do, but it’s not the kind of work I like, if you know what I mean. And I know it’s the kind of work that you guys don’t like me doing.”

She looked up at the guys, her eyes wide and pleading. “I know what happened before was messy, but I’ve changed. I’ve learned my lesson. I just need a chance to prove myself. Please, if you could find it in your hearts to give me a second chance, I promise I’ll be the best employee you’ve ever had. I’ll do anything, absolutely anything, to make it right.”

Adele’s performance was complete with the perfect balance of desperation and determination. It was a story designed to tug at the heartstrings, and from the looks on the guy’s faces, it was working.

“Oh no,” Maddie said to me. “Don’t tell me they’re going to fall for that.”

The thing about sob stories, though, is that they only work on those willing to believe them. And as I watched from the sidelines, my gut churned with the sense that Adele was playing them all. Her story was too perfect, too convenient. But what could I do? Call her out? Accuse her of lying? I didn’t even know the woman aside from the rumors I’d heard and the terrible first impression she’d given me.

“Come on, boys,” Adele purred, leaning in close to Finn, her hand trailing down his arm. “You know I’m the best at what I do. Let me prove it to you.”

“The best,” Maddie scoffed. “Come on.”

Adele must’ve heard Maddie’s comments. She shot a withering look over her shoulder in our direction.

“Mind if we talk in private, guys?”

The men shared a look.

“Fine,” Kai said. “Just five minutes. And no promises.”

“That’s all I ask.”

I watched as they walked into the meeting room. Thankfully, they left the tint off so I could still see inside. They sat down, Adele going right back in to her sad tale, her arms gesturing wildly.

“Ridiculous,” Maddie said, shaking her head. “I’ll give Adele this much—she may be a mediocre tattooist and a total

garbage person, but she sure has a skill at wrapping those guys around her finger. I don't know what it is they see in her."

I said nothing, watching the group speak in silence. The guys had hard expressions, but at the same time, there was no doubt there was a softness there, a kindness they didn't let just anyone see. Was Adele about to exploit it?

I didn't have much time to mull it over. The door opened, and the group came back out.

"Alright, Addy," Finn said, his voice kind yet guarded. "We'll give you another chance. We'll start you off part-time, see how things go."

Adele's face lit up like she'd just won the lottery, and she threw her arms around each man.

"Thank you so much! I promise, I'll be the best damn employee you ever had!"

I watched as Adele floated around the shop, her eyes sparkling with victory, introducing herself to the staff, acting like she was everybody's best friend. It was nauseating.

I caught Finn's eye, and he shot me a reassuring smile, as if to say that everything would be fine. My gut told me another story, however.

This was not good. Not good at all. And I had a feeling that things were about to become a whole lot more complicated.

## CHAPTER 16



A week had slipped by since Adele's reentry into our lives, and I couldn't help but sense a shift in the dynamic of the studio. The days flowed smoothly enough, with Adele settling back into her role as a tattoo artist, taking on clients and handling the day-to-day tasks that the job entailed. She was friendly, cooperative, and did her best to fit in with the team.

But I knew there was more to it.

I could see it in Adele's eyes every time she looked at Julia; a flicker of doubt, a trace of unease, a tinge of envy. We hadn't said a word to Adele, or anyone else for that matter, about what was going on between us and Julia. But Adele wasn't stupid, and no doubt she'd noticed the way we were with each other at work.

I wanted to believe that we'd made the right decision in giving Adele a second chance, but I couldn't shake the feeling that something was off. And I knew Julia felt it too.

Finn and I had talked it over, weighing the pros and cons. We'd both long moved past our history with Adele, and we wanted to believe that people could change. But that didn't make the decision any easier. I found myself questioning our motives, wondering if we'd let sentimentality cloud our judgment. Still, when she told us that she was out of options, that it was either work for us or she went back to porn, it was hard not to want to give her the benefit of the doubt.

It wasn't that I didn't trust Adele. Or maybe it was. I wasn't quite sure. What I did know was that our relationship with Julia was starting to strain under the weight of it all. The easy camaraderie, the playful banter... it all felt a bit forced after Adele's return.

I watched as Julia chatted with Maddie at the front desk, a smile on her face but not in her eyes. I wanted to reach out to her, to reassure her that everything would be okay. But the words always seemed to get stuck in my throat.

Adele breezed past, her laughter filling the room as she joked with a client. I watched her closely, trying to see past the veneer, to understand what was really going on beneath the surface.

Had she truly changed? Or was it all just an act, a well-rehearsed performance designed to win us over?

I couldn't say for sure.

What I *did* know was that I wasn't willing to jeopardize what we had with Julia.



The next morning, my quiet office was interrupted by Adele's voice, rich with warmth and charm, as she greeted me with a bright smile. "Morning, Kai! I thought I'd surprise you with some coffee," she said, extending a steaming cup toward me.

I accepted it, appreciating the gesture but not without skepticism as to what was behind it. "Thanks, Adele. That's thoughtful of you."

"Americano black," she said, winking. "Just the way you like it."

"Appreciated."

"Say," she began, a hesitant look on her face. "I was just wondering..."

Before she had a chance to finish, Julia walked in, her eyes widening as she took in the scene. In her hands, she held

another cup of coffee, evidently prepared for me as well.

“I guess I’m late to the party,” she said, her voice laced with a mix of amusement and irritation.

I looked from one coffee to the other, then back at the two women, a smile tugging at the corners of my mouth. “Looks like it’s a two-coffee kind of morning for me.”

Adele laughed, her eyes sparkling, while Julia’s smile was more restrained, her gaze flickering between the two of us.

“Uh, so.” Both women said at the same time. Julia hurried over and set the coffee on my desk.

“I’ll let you get back to it,” she said, her face somewhat tense as she hurried out, Adele’s eyes never leaving Julia.

“Anyway,” Adele continued. “Now that we’re alone...” She glanced away, tapping her fingertip on her chin in a coy manner. “You know what? I guess I forgot what I wanted to say.” She leaned forward again, this time tapping on the top of the coffee lid. “Just enjoy. And think of me while you do.”

As she turned, she swung her arm in such a manner that bumped Julia’s coffee, sending the brew toppling over and right into the trash can next to my desk.

“Damnit, Addy!”

“Oh, look at that!” Adele said, putting her hands on her hips. “God, I can be such a klutz. See you later, boss.”

With that, she headed out, glancing at me one more time over her shoulder before leaving me alone.

What a goddamn mess.

The moment passed, the day unfolded, but the awkwardness lingered, a subtle undercurrent that I couldn’t quite shake.

That afternoon I found myself alone in the quiet of my office once again and I knew what I had to do. The tension was building, the rift widening, and I needed to find a way to bridge the gap.

I opened my laptop and typed, my mind made up. A holiday getaway, just us and Julia.

Montana seemed like the perfect destination—a rugged landscape, untamed and unspoiled, a reflection of our own wild hearts.

The arrangements fell into place quickly, a cabin tucked away in the mountains, far from the distractions and the drama.

I closed my laptop when I was done, a sense of purpose settling over me. We needed a break from the daily grind, a chance to rediscover ourselves, and each other.

But most of all, we needed to show Julia that she was the one who mattered, that no one else could take her place.

I looked down at the two coffee cups, one on the desk and the other in the trash, wondering what the hell we were thinking bringing Adele back into our lives.



I was working on some designs late in the day when Adele sauntered into my office, leaning against the doorframe, a casual smile on her face.

“Hey, Kai, how’s your afternoon going?” she asked, her voice lilting and light.

I looked up, meeting her eyes. “Good, Adele. How about you?”

She shrugged, taking a step closer. “Oh, you know, same old.” She smiled, shaking her head. “I was just thinking about how much things have changed around here.” Her eyes roamed the room, finally settling on me. “And how much they’ve stayed the same.”

I nodded, unsure of her intention but feeling the stirrings of unease. “Change is inevitable, I guess.”

She tilted her head, her eyes narrowing slightly. “But some things shouldn’t change, don’t you think? Like friendships,

connections...” Her voice trailed off, her smile turning somewhat wicked.

I leaned back in my chair, choosing my words carefully. “Friendships are important, Adele, but they also evolve. What’s most important now is maintaining a professional relationship. We’re coworkers, and that’s the way it should stay.”

Her eyes widened for a moment, and then she laughed, a little too loudly. “Oh, Kai, always the serious one. I was just trying to catch up, you know, see how you’ve been. But of course, a horndog like you would think that I was coming in here to slip under that desk and, I don’t know, do something naughty like suck your cock.” She laughed, just long enough for it to be awkward.

“Addy,” I said, my voice a low warning.

Her eyes flashed. “I’m totally joking,” she retorted. “Sorry, sorry. I’m being totally inappropriate, and I deeply apologize.”

I grumbled, shifting in my seat. There was a major tinge of disingenuousness to her “apology.” But I was willing to take it just to end the conversation.

“I appreciate that,” I replied, my voice firm. “But let’s keep our conversations focused on work, okay? It’s best for all of us. No joking around, not like that.”

She looked at me for a long moment, her smile fading, replaced by a look I couldn’t quite read. “Sure, Kai. I understand.”

A beat of awkward silence passed.

“Anything else you wanted?”

“Nope! Bye.” She quickly spun around and was gone.

I was frustrated. Each conversation with Adele made me more and more certain we’d majorly fucked up bringing her back, falling for her sob story.

Before I could spend too much time thinking the matter over, a scream pierced the air, sharp and urgent, shattering my thoughts.

My heart leapt in my chest, and I was out of my chair in an instant, adrenaline surging through me as I ran toward the scream.

What the hell was happening? All thoughts of Adele and our uncomfortable conversation were forgotten as I raced to find the source of the scream, fear and confusion battling within me.

I skidded into the reception area, my eyes quickly finding Julia, her face pale and her hands trembling as she stared down at an open box on her desk. I could tell what the contents were even from a distance, and a chill ran down my spine. Animal entrails, bloody and grotesque, filled the box, and my stomach turned at the sight.

“What the hell is this?” I yelled, rushing to Julia’s side, my mind racing.

She looked up at me, her eyes wide with terror. “I... I don’t know. It was just delivered by a courier. I thought it was a supply order, but then...”

She didn’t need to finish. I could see the horror in her eyes, and I felt it too. It wasn’t just a prank. It was a warning.

I noticed a note on top of the disgusting mess, and I reached in, my hand steady despite the revulsion I felt. I unfolded the paper, my eyes scanning the crudely written words.

*LEAVE BEFORE IT GETS WORSE.*

I felt a surge of anger, hot and fierce. I knew exactly who was behind it—Klaus. That twisted bastard was trying to scare us, to drive us out.

My jaw clenched as I looked back at Julia, her eyes still wide and her face pale.

“Come on,” I said, putting my hand on her shoulder and turning her away from the mess of gore. “Let’s go back into the office.”

Maddie hurried over. “I’ll deal with this crap,” she said.

“You sure?” I asked, my pulse still pounding.

“Totally sure.” Without a bit of apprehension, Maddie closed the box and picked it up. “Used to hunt with my old man back in Gainesville. Not the first gory mess I’ve seen.”

“Thanks, Mads.”

“You got it, boss.”

I walked over to the front and flipped the closed sign before returning my hand to Julia’s shoulder and leading her to the office.

“It’s going to be okay,” I said, my voice calm and reassuring even though my mind was anything but. “We’re going to deal with this.”

“How?” she whispered, her voice shaky. “What exactly is this, Kai?”

I took a deep breath, forcing myself to think clearly. “It’s a threat, Julia. But we’re not going to let it scare us. We’ve worked too hard to let that prick Klaus take it all away.”

I knew that the bloody box was just the beginning. Klaus wouldn’t stop. He would keep pushing, keep trying to intimidate us until we backed down. But we wouldn’t. We couldn’t.

I looked at Julia, her fear so palpable I could almost feel it myself. I took her hands in mine, squeezing them reassuringly. “We’re going to pull some serious muscle into protecting this place. We won’t let him win.”

I knew that the road ahead was going to be tough, filled with uncertainty and danger. But we had come too far to give up now. We would stand strong and united, and we would fight back.

Klaus had just started a war. And we were going to finish it.

## CHAPTER 17

## JAMES



**I**t was late at night in the studio, the day's work done and the customers long gone. I found myself leaning back in my chair, my arms crossed, listening to the banter between Kai, Andrew, and Finn. There was a heaviness in the room, a tension that'd been building ever since that damn box had arrived.

We'd talked the matter to death. There was no doubt it was Klaus, no doubt it was a signal that he was escalating his designs on the studio.

Kai rose. "I need a fucking drink. You guys want anything?"

A little booze sounded like heaven. "Yeah, grab that Maker's in the back."

Kai gave me a thumbs-up as he stepped out of the meeting room, disappearing around the corner then returning moments later with the red-topped bottle and four glasses. He filled each glass with the smooth bourbon before passing them around. The room grew quiet, each of us taking slow, thoughtful sips as we considered the day's events.

But it was only a matter of time until the issue we really wanted to discuss came up.

"So, we all like Julia more than we should, right?" Finn finally broke the ice, his eyes scanning our faces.

I chuckled. "And there it is. Was wondering when she was going to make it to the conversation."

“Seriously, we’re all into her,” Finn said. “I don’t even need to ask the question.”

“Yeah,” Andrew replied, his voice a little hesitant. “I mean, it’s more than just fun. She’s different.”

Kai nodded in agreement, his eyes thoughtful. “We’ve shared like this before, but with her, it feels like it’s something special. It seems natural.”

I grumbled my agreement, my mind wandering to Julia’s face, her smile, her laugh. It was more than just physical attraction. There was something about her that’d gotten under my skin, something that was pulling me in deeper than I’d ever intended.

“What about the future?” Kai asked, his voice serious. “Where do we go from here?”

“I don’t know,” I admitted, my voice rough. “I never thought I’d be in a situation like this, falling hard for someone we’re all sharing. But fuck if I can’t stop thinking about her.”

“Same here,” Finn said. His gray eyes were clouded with uncertainty. “But what happens when she wants more? What if love enters the picture?”

We all fell silent at that word, the weight of the question hanging heavy in the air. It’s something we’d all thought about but hadn’t dared to speak aloud. It seemed too intense, too heavy. But damned if it wasn’t clear our minds had all been going in that direction.

“I don’t think she’s looking for that,” Andrew finally said, breaking the silence. “She’s independent, focused on her career. But I won’t lie, the thought kinda scares the shit out of me. None of us were planning on this to happen, you know?”

“It scares all of us, man” Kai added, his voice somber. “But we need to be honest with ourselves and with her. We can’t keep going on like this without knowing where it’s leading.”

I nodded, my mind reeling with the uncertainty of it all. We were in uncharted territory, navigating a relationship that

none of us fully understood. But one thing was clear—we all cared for Julia, more than we'd ever expected.

“We'll talk to her,” I said, my voice firm. “During the holidays. We'll figure this out, together.”

The others nodded, a sense of determination settling over us. We were in this together, and we'd find a way to make it work, no matter what the future held.

Before we could say anything else, the room was flooded with the bright glare of headlights. We all turned, our eyes widening as we witnessed a sea of lights approaching the studio. Engines roared, growling like hell beasts as they approached.

We all stood, moving toward the window, our minds racing. The headlights were getting closer, the ominous glow growing brighter with each passing second.

“It's Klaus,” Kai said, his voice filled with certainty. “He's making his move.”

A chill ran down my spine, and I knew that he was right. Klaus was coming for us, and this time, he wasn't playing games.

“Get ready,” I ordered, my voice cold and hard.

We moved into action, running into the back office and grabbing pistols from our strongbox, preparing for a fight. The future with Julia might have been uncertain, but one thing was clear: we'd do whatever it took to protect what was ours.

The headlights became static, the roar of engines filled the air, and I knew that the battle had just begun.

We rushed out of the shop, the growl of engines and the smell of exhaust overwhelming as we came face-to-face with half of the Crimson Devils. Klaus was front and center, his eyes narrowed and filled with malice, his lips twisted into a wicked grin. They revved their engines, the noise deafening as they tried to intimidate us. But I had prepared for this. I'd known this day was coming.

“You like our little gift?” Klaus spoke, his booming voice carrying over the sound of the engines. “An early Christmas present for you!”

I grinned. Klaus caught sight of me, the smirk vanishing from his face.

“What the fuck are you smiling at?” he asked.

“Nothing,” I replied. “Just thinking about *your* Christmas present.”

It was time. I signaled to my right, toward the patrol car in the alley.

Suddenly, the side streets came alive with the flashing red and blue lights of a group of squad cars. They rolled out, one after another, their sirens wailing, joining us in a show of force. A SWAT van followed, the heavy doors swinging open as uniformed officers poured out, weapons at the ready.

Klaus’s smile faltered, his eyes widening as he took in the scene. He clearly hadn’t expected such an ambush. He’d thought he could bully us, threaten us into submission. But he’d underestimated us, and now he was the one on the back foot.

“What’s the matter, Klaus?” I called out, my voice dripping with contempt. “Didn’t expect us to be ready for you?”

He glared at me, his face twisted with rage, but he didn’t say anything. Swarming us with his crew wasn’t against the law, but no doubt he understood that one wrong move would have MPD on his ass right then and there. No doubt he knew he’d been beaten, for now at least.

The standoff lasted for what felt like an eternity, the tension thick in the air, a powder keg ready to explode. For a moment, I wondered if Klaus was ready to start a war on the spot, damn the consequences.

“Move out, boys!” Klaus finally called out, gesturing for them to turn and leave.

Slowly, reluctantly, the Crimson Devils backed down. One by one, they revved their engines and peeled away, the noise fading into the distance as they retreated.

Klaus was the last to leave, his eyes locked on mine, a promise of revenge in his gaze. But I didn't flinch, I didn't back down. I stared him down, letting him know that I was not afraid.

He finally turned away, his bike roaring to life as he joined the others, disappearing into the night.

I let out a breath I hadn't realized I was holding, my body still humming with adrenaline. The police dispersed, the squad cars and SWAT van pulling onto the street, leaving us alone.

"Is it over?" Kai asked, his voice tinged with uncertainty.

"For tonight," I replied, my eyes still on the spot where Klaus had last been. "But this is far from over. He'll be back, and he'll be ready."

"We'll be ready too," Finn said, his voice firm. "We won't let him win."

"We can't," I agreed, my own voice heavy with resolve. "We've come too far, fought too hard to let him take everything away from us. We'll stand together, and we'll fight. No matter what it takes."

The Crimson Devils may have thought they could intimidate us, but they were wrong. We'd face them head-on, and we'd come out on top. We'd protect what was ours, and we'd do it together.

## CHAPTER 18

JULIA



I was all kinds of frazzled as I strode into the studio the next morning, running late for the emergency meeting the guys had called.

As I stepped through the door, I was expecting the usual bustle and energy, but instead I was greeted by an overwhelming gloom. The lights were dimmed, the laughter absent. Faces were drawn and serious as my four guys huddled together, their voices hushed. The rest of the staff was there along with them, not a smile to be seen. The vibe was beyond grim.

“Sorry for running late,” I said as I stepped inside. “What’s going on?”

“Just finished up our meeting. We’re closing the shop for the holidays,” James said, his eyes shadowed. “In light of what happened yesterday, we think it’s the best move for everyone’s safety until things cool down.”

Finn and Kai shared a look, their expressions grave. “We’re considering reaching out to some relatives,” Finn began, his voice heavy.

“Ones with special skills,” Kai added, a note of reluctance in his voice.

James’ jaw tightened. “No, we’ll handle this legally. We don’t need to go down that path.”

I glanced around the room, noticing Adele, Maddie, and the rest of the artists all wearing expressions of concern. Adele, in particular, was being extra touchy-feely with Finn

and Kai. It made my blood boil, but since nobody knew about my situation with the guys, I couldn't exactly call her out on it. Maddie rose and stepped over to me, squeezing my arm.

"You OK?" she asked.

I nodded. "Yeah. Going to take more than some gore to scare me."

Maddie smiled. Before she could say another word, Adele's voice broke the silence.

"Kai, baby, you must be so worried after all that's happened!" she cooed, brushing Kai's arm sympathetically. "Why don't you let me make you a relaxing cup of herbal tea? Chamomile is perfect for calming the nerves. I think I saw some in the breakroom, probably from the last time I worked here."

"Uh, thanks, Addy, but I'm good for now. We've got things under control," Kai replied.

Adele wasn't deterred, turning right to Finn with a simpering smile. "And Finn, sweetheart, you look like you could use a massage. I took a few classes while I was trying to figure out what to do after I quit here. Come on, I know all the right techniques to make you feel better." She placed her hands on his shoulders, but Finn wasted no time moving out from under them.

His response was polite but firm. "I need to focus right now. Thanks, but no thanks."

Ignoring the refusal, Adele moved on to James, her eyes wide with feigned worry. "How about a nice home-cooked dinner tonight? I could come over and whip something up."

"Not necessary. We've got plans already," James said, his voice firm.

I watched the exchange, seething internally. Adele's concern was obviously nothing but a thinly veiled attempt to worm her way back into their lives. Her over-the-top doting was insincere and irritating.

“Come on, Andy, you’ll let me pamper you a bit, right” Adele continued, undeterred. “I could do some shopping for you. You know how much I adore taking care of you guys.”

“We’re managing just fine,” Andrew firmly stated, not as politely as the others.

My jealousy flared, despite the greater part of me knowing how cloying and irritating Adele was being, and how the guys weren’t even pretending to humor her. All the same, I was suddenly aware of how deeply I’d fallen for these men. Not just one of them—all of them. And there I was, helpless to do anything while our world threatened to unravel.

“I think I’d like to take a couple of weeks away from the studio,” I finally said, my voice more strained than I’d intended. “Maybe a little time past the holidays.”

The guys turned to look at me, their eyes filled with worry.

“You okay, Julia?” Andrew asked, his brow furrowed.

I forced a smile, though I knew it didn’t reach my eyes. “I’m fine. Just need some time to think things over. This whole situation has me on edge.”

“You’re not the only one,” Maddie said, her voice weak.

“We’ll get through this,” Kai assured us, his tone confident but his eyes betraying his concern. “We’ve faced challenges before. We’ll face this one together, like we always do.”

I wanted to believe him. I wanted to wrap myself in his arms and pretend that everything would be fine. But the truth was, we were in uncharted territory, and the path ahead was murky at best.

“Hey, Jules,” Finn said. “Why don’t you come back to the office while the rest of the crew gets the place ready to close up. We’ll catch you up on what you missed during the meeting.”

Maddie squeezed my arm one last time as I stepped over with the guys, the five of us heading back. In spite of the tension gripping my gut, being in the middle of my men as we

formed up and headed back put me at ease. I could feel Adele's gaze burning me, but I put that out of my mind as best I could.

Once inside the office, Kai shut the door and the guys turned toward me. They wore matching expressions of determination, their eyes filled with a warmth that melted my resolve.

"You aren't going anywhere, Julia," Kai said, stepping close and taking my hand in his.

"Except Montana," Finn added, a mischievous glint in his eye.

I blinked, confusion muddling my thoughts. "Montana?"

James grinned, his arm wrapping around my waist. "That's right. We've got a special trip planned for you this Christmas."

Andrew chimed in, his voice gentle. "We want to take you away from all this craziness, even if it's just for a little while."

My heart swelled, and tears burned my eyes. But even as excitement bubbled within me, doubt lingered, a shadow in the back of my mind.

"You guys really don't have to do that," I said, my voice soft.

"We want to," Finn insisted, his eyes searching mine. "We want to spend this time with you, away from all the stress and worry."

"And we think it'll be good for you, too," Kai added, his thumb gently rubbing the back of my hand.

I couldn't help but smile, touched by their thoughtfulness. A part of me still held back, wary of giving myself over completely to the unconventional relationship. My heart had already become more entangled than I'd intended. What if I ended up getting hurt?

"Promise me something," I said, looking at each of them in turn.

"Anything," James murmured, his eyes sincere.

“Promise me that no matter what happens, we’ll always be honest with each other. That we won’t let anything come between us.”

They nodded, their expressions solemn.

“We promise,” Andrew said, his voice firm. “We’re in this together, Julia. All the way.”

I let out a breath I hadn’t realized I’d been holding, feeling a sense of relief wash over me. These men were my rock, my safe haven. And I was theirs.

I leaned in, kissing each of them in turn, feeling a renewed sense of connection and trust.

“Montana it is,” I said, smiling. “And thanks, guys. I know you’ve got a ton on your minds, but the way you’re taking the time to think about me, it means a lot. Whatever this thing is that’s happening between us, it’s making me all kinds of happy.”

“We wouldn’t have it any other way,” Kai said, his voice filled with conviction.

Still, as we settled our plans for our Christmas getaway, I couldn’t shake the nagging doubt that still lingered in my heart. I wanted to believe that everything would work out, that we could have our happily ever after. But life had taught me to be cautious, to guard my heart.

One thing was clear—I was in deeper than I’d ever been before. And no matter what happened next, there was no turning back.

I just had to hope that we were strong enough to weather whatever storms lay ahead. Because I knew, without a doubt, that I wasn’t ready to let go of what we’d found together.

## CHAPTER 19

JULIA



Montana was a winter fairytale when we arrived on Christmas Eve. The second I stepped out of the car and took in the breathtaking view of the mountains blanketed in snow, a shiver of delight raced through me, and it wasn't from the cold. I'd never been one for overly sentimental musings, but there was something about the pristine landscape that tugged at the strings of my heart. Maybe it was the way the fresh snow sparkled in the soft glow of the setting sun or the towering evergreens draped in their frosty blankets. Or maybe it was the guys, each wearing a grin that made my insides flutter, making it all seem like a dream.

The cabin Kai rented was nothing short of gorgeous—a luxurious blend of rustic charm and modern comfort, two stories and six bedrooms, with plenty of room for all of us to stretch out and get comfy. The warm ambiance of the wooden interior, the crackling fireplace, the cozy armchairs and sofas adorned with plush cushions—it was everything I'd ever wanted in a winter getaway.

I watched as Andrew unpacked a collection of tacky Christmas sweaters, each more absurd than the last. From reindeer to snowmen, adorned with bells, ribbons, and all the festive trimmings you could imagine. The guys chuckled as I held one up, my eyebrows raised in mock indignation.

“You *cannot* be serious!” I exclaimed, my voice dripping with feigned disbelief.

“Oh, we're dead serious,” Kai's eyes twinkled with mischief. “It's not Christmas without a little tackiness.”

Christmas Eve had a special kind of magic all its own. As the sun dipped below the horizon, casting a soft, ethereal glow over the snowy landscape, the anticipation in the cabin grew of what was yet to come. The guys had gone all out to make it an evening to remember, and I couldn't help but feel like a giddy kid as they laid out their plans.

Finn and Kai were in charge of the Christmas feast. The twins went right to work marinating a prime rib, the guys talking nonstop about how tender and succulent it'd be, the meat infused with a blend of herbs and spices, the recipe having been handed down from Jack himself.

Andrew and James had taken on the roles of chief decorators, transforming the cabin's living room into a winter wonderland, complete with twinkling lights, evergreen garland, and a majestic Christmas tree that reached the ceiling. They'd even found a place in town that rented ice skates and planned a late-night skating session on a nearby frozen pond. The idea of gliding across the ice, hand in hand under a starlit sky, made my heart skip a beat.

We settled in, the guys doing all the work of unpacking and prepping the cabin for the days ahead. The sky darkened with snow-laden clouds, and as much as I wanted to help, the boys insisted that I relax and enjoy a cup of spiked hot chocolate on the heated second-floor balcony. The view up there was endless and sweeping, the clouds roiling over the mountains in the distance, the valley in front of the cabin blanketed with frosted trees.

Christmas Eve dinner was a feast fit for royalty. The clinking of silverware against plates mingled with the soft murmur of laughter and conversation filled the room as we settled into our meal. The prime rib roast was, as the twins had promised, a culinary masterpiece, succulent and rich, paired perfectly with creamy mashed potatoes, roasted vegetables, cranberry sauce, and a bold red wine. The mood was light, filled with the joy of the holiday season.

And then there was the eggnog. Rich, creamy, and spiked with just the right amount of rum. I could feel the warmth of it spreading through me, loosening the knot of tension that had

lingered since Adele's return to the studio and the unpleasantness of the Klaus situation.

As we sat around the table, laughing and toasting to new beginnings, I couldn't help but feel a surge of gratitude. The guys had given me something special, something I'd never dared hoped for. A Christmas surrounded by love, laughter, and the sense of belonging that I'd been searching for all my life.

But even in that picture-perfect moment, with the glow of the Christmas tree lights reflecting in their adoring eyes, I couldn't shake the nagging feeling that something was amiss. It was a thought I pushed aside, determined to enjoy the winter fairytale they had created for me. After all, Christmas was a time for joy, not worry, and I had every intention of embracing it to the fullest.

It was James who first brought up the subject of the tattoo studio, his expression turning dark as he did.

"I've got some guys back in town keeping an eye on things," he said, slicing into his roast with a determined look in his eyes. "No signs of the Crimson Devils snooping around since that night. I think they got the message."

"Yeah, well, they better have," Andrew chimed in, his tone serious but his eyes twinkling. "No one messes with our family."

Kai reached across the table to squeeze my hand.

"Hey, don't look so grim," he said, smiling warmly. "We've got this under control."

Finn nodded, his mouth full of food as he gestured with his fork. "Kai's right. We're not letting anyone push us around. The studio is our home, our legacy."

"Are you sure you don't need to, you know, call in some favors?" I asked, concern creeping into my voice. "I mean, from your relatives?"

Kai shook his head, still holding my hand. "No. Like James said, we don't want to go down that road. We want to

handle this the right way, legally and without any shady dealings.”

“But what if it’s not enough?” I pressed, my heart aching at the thought of losing something that had become so precious to all of us.

James spoke next. “It will be enough,” he assured me, his eyes meeting mine with a fierce determination. “We’re strong, and we’re united. There’s nothing we can’t handle together.”

“Yeah,” Andrew added, his voice softening. “We’ve got each other’s backs, and that’s all that matters.”

Finn grinned. “Let’s talk about something more pleasant, shall we?”

“Sounds like you guys are already thinking about the night ahead,” I said with a grin.

“You bet your gorgeous ass we are,” Andrew replied.

A wicked smirk formed on Finn’s lips. He took his glass of wine and raised it into the air.

“To unforgettable nights.” Finn’s toast was met with hearty approval, our glasses clinking in perfect unison.

“You boys certainly know how to make an impression.”

Kai’s eyes twinkled, his lips curling into a knowing smile. “Is that a complaint, Julia? You seemed quite taken with our creative talents the other night.”

“Creative talents? Is that what we’re calling them now?” I replied. “This is starting to sound more complicated than one of Andrew’s tattoo designs.”

Andrew’s chuckle was low, a sensual sound that resonated with the warmth in his eyes. “Complicated can be fun. Keeps things interesting.”

“Interesting? Yeah, I guess if by interesting you mean having my senses scrambled like eggs.” My retort was swift, but the gleam in my eyes betrayed my amusement.

Finn leaned in, his eyes dancing with mischief. “Well, we did warn you, didn’t we? We’re full of surprises.”

“Oh, that you are,” I conceded, smirking. “And I must admit, you have a unique way of expressing yourselves.”

James finally broke in, his rough voice tinged with warmth. “And what about you, J? You seemed to enjoy our unique tastes. You managed to keep up pretty well.”

I laughed, tossing my hair back with a flip of my hand. “Keep up? Darling, I’m the one setting the pace. Don’t get too comfortable thinking you’ve got me all figured out.”

Their laughter filled the room, a symphony of camaraderie that was as comfortable as it was intimate.

The conversation flowed, each of us taking turns reminiscing, teasing, and laughing. We were in our own little world, where the troubles of the tattoo studio and the threats looming over us seemed a world away.

The fire’s glow flickered and danced, casting a warm, golden hue over the room. The wine had been working its magic on me, and I found myself craving more than just conversation from my boys.

“So, Julia,” James began, his eyes darkening as he leaned back, studying me. “If you’re setting the pace, what’s next?”

I tilted my head, a slow, wicked smile spreading across my lips. “Who says I’m going to tell you?”

Kai’s laugh was rich, a sound that somehow managed to be both sophisticated and sensual. “Well, we’ve seen how you like to play. Maybe we want in on the game.”

“The game?” I feigned innocence, a hand to my chest. “Oh, I don’t *play* games, boys. I annihilate them.”

Andrew’s hand found my knee, his fingers trailing upward, eyes locked with mine. “We’re not afraid of a challenge.”

“Good, because you’ve got one,” I replied, the heat between us electric.

Finn was the next to move, leaning in to capture my lips with his. It was a gentle, probing kiss that promised more. I met him with equal passion, our tongues tangling, exploring, as the others watched.

Kai's voice was husky when he finally broke in. "I think we've had enough talk."

I pulled away from Finn, a little breathless, but still sharp. "I agree."

There was a collective, charged moment of agreement before Andrew was kissing me, his mouth demanding, insistent, and so utterly delicious. James and Kai were on either side of me, their hands wandering, caressing, teasing. I was in the eye of a sensual storm, and I had no desire to escape.

We moved together, a dance of bodies and desires, leaving the dinner table for the plush rug before the fireplace. The flames seemed to roar approval as clothing was shed, kisses shared, and boundaries forgotten.

Every touch, every kiss was a continuation of our conversation, a dialogue without words that explored our deepest desires. We knew one another, and yet there was still so much to discover, so many hidden facets to uncover.

I reveled in their attention—strong hands on my body, warm lips seeking out sensitive spots—making me feel wanted, cherished, and powerful all at once.

But I was not a passive participant. I knew what I wanted, and I wasn't afraid to take it, directing them with words and touches, claiming my pleasure.

And they were more than willing to give it to me.

## CHAPTER 20

## JULIA



The flickering glow of the flames illuminated their faces, casting shadows that danced over their strong features. It was an intimate setting, and the tension in the room was thick, crackling like the logs in the hearth.

Kai was the first to break the silence, his deep voice resonating through the cabin. “Are you sure, Julia?” His eyes searched mine, looking for any sign of hesitation.

With a nod, I reached out to him, my hand sliding up to grasp

the back of his neck. I pulled him down to me, our lips meeting in a heated kiss that seemed to echo throughout the room. The taste of him was intoxicating, a potent mixture of wine and a flavor that was uniquely Kai.

I felt hands on me, helping me undress, their touches gentle and careful. Kai broke away from our kiss to watch as I was revealed to them, his gaze dark with desire. Andrew was next to claim my lips, his kiss softer, but no less passionate. As I kissed him back, I felt hands trailing over my skin, making my body tingle in anticipation. He teased my nipples, and I moaned as they went hard against his touch.

James took his turn, pulling me toward him. He kissed me, slow and deep, his hands wandering over my body. He was gentle, his movements careful and considerate. I melted into him, surrendering to the sensations that were sweeping over me.

“You ready to give yourself over, baby?” he asked, taking his lips from the curve of my neck for long enough to speak. “Because we’re ready to make you ours.”

“So ready.”

The silence and gruffness of Finn didn’t extend to the bedroom. As he kissed me, I felt him open up, the intensity of his kiss speaking volumes about his feelings. I was swept away in the whirlwind of passion that he invoked in me.

As I took turns kissing each of them, I felt hands, lips, exploring every inch of my body. The guys were constantly checking in, making sure I was ready and that I was comfortable.

And I was. More than I’d ever been in my life. It was right and it was what I wanted, for all of them to take me, to claim me at once.

I let my gaze wander over them, appreciating the sight of their naked bodies, their long, thick cocks pointing straight up.

“Two feasts in one night,” I said. “One for my belly, the other for my eyes.” There was a moment of heated silence before Andrew broke it.

“We’re about ready to feast again ourselves,” he said, his eyes moving hungrily over me.

“Only question is where to begin,” Finn added, the corners of his lips twitching up in amusement.

“How about seeing how well she can obey?” James suggested.

Kai nodded. “I like that. If she’s going to have all of us at once, she’s going to need to know how to be a good girl who does what she’s told.”

I reached out, my hands exploring their bodies. “I think you know how good of a girl I can be.”

“Get on your knees,” James said.

I was helpless before the commanding tone of his voice, my pussy so wet and yearning that I could barely think. The men took their seats, and I eyed up their cocks eagerly, licking my lips in anticipation, their lengths thick and hard and ready.

It was a dance, a choreography of desire and need, as I took turns pleasuring each man with my mouth. I loved the taste of them, the feel of their bodies shuddering under my touch, their groans filling the room. They were responsive, their hands on me as I moved between them, each man making sure to keep me close.

I was teasing them, taking my time, relishing the intimacy of the act. I loved the feel of them in my mouth, their taste, the sounds they made. I loved the power I held over them, and the pleasure I was giving them.

They watched me, their eyes dark with desire, their bodies straining with need. But they waited, letting me take control, letting me set the pace.

When I finally pulled away, they moved in. Their hands were on me, their bodies pressing against mine, their mouths finding the most sensitive spots on my body. James was between my legs, his tongue skilled as he brought me to the edge.

I gasped, my body arching as the pleasure washed over me. My hands clung to them, my nails digging into their skin. I could feel their bodies tense as they watched me climax, their eyes on me as I writhed beneath their touch.

“God, I could taste you all day,” James said. With a swipe of the back of his hand, he cleaned my juices from his lips.

I had never felt so desired, so wanted. It was intoxicating, overwhelming, the connection I felt with them.

They moved in, one after the other, each man taking his turn with me. I had never experienced anything like it, the pleasure building with each man, each position.

Finn was first, his strong, tattooed body moving above me. His rhythm was slow and steady, his eyes never leaving mine. The sight of his powerful body, the feel of him inside me, was

enough to bring me to the edge once again. James kissed me as my orgasm approached, the twin sensations of his lips on mine and Finn's cock buried deep inside almost too much to take. Finn's climax followed mine, his body shuddering above me.

Next was Kai, his energy different from Finn's. He was passionate, his movements more erratic and heated like he could hardly control himself. He took me from behind, his hands gripping my hips as he thrust into me, Andrew's cock entering my mouth as Kai bucked hard. It was a wild ride, our bodies moving together in a rhythm that was all our own. Kai gripped my ass as he came, my orgasm rising and falling with his.

James was different yet again, his approach soft and sensual. He took his time, his touches tender. We made love slowly, the pleasure building gradually. Kai kissed my nipples as James held me in spoon position. By the time he climaxed, I was ready for another release, and he took me there with him.

Andrew was the last, and by that time, I was spent. But he was patient, his movements slow and deliberate. He made love to me in a way that was deeply intimate, his hands and mouth worshipping my body. His climax came with a deep growl, and I followed suit, my body shaking as I came for the last time that night.

I lay there, a satisfied mess in a tangle of muscular limbs, sweat-slicked bodies, and spent masculinity. The firelight flickered across our skin, casting shadows and highlights that danced in a hypnotic rhythm. A soft quiet settled over us, the silence only broken by our shared heavy breaths. Each of the men had drained into me, and I felt so full, so satisfied, that all I could do was smile.

Outside, the snow fell in a silent dance, covering the world in a blanket of pure white. The sight was enchantingly beautiful and serene, contrasting with the heat and raw intensity that just transpired within the cabin's walls.

I watched as the flames danced in the fireplace, their warmth seeping into me, entwined with the comforting heat from the bodies surrounding me. Their hearts beat in a

comforting rhythm against my body, lulling me closer and closer to the edge of sleep.

As my eyelids grew heavy, I found my mind drifting, my thoughts filled with the events of the day, and most prominently, the night. I'd never felt happier. There was something profoundly right about being there, in that moment, with those men. Their touch, their laughter, their acceptance. It felt like home. It felt like I was where I belonged.

As sleep claimed me, the last coherent thought that drifted through my mind was that maybe, just maybe, I'd found my place in the world. In their arms, under their protection, I found peace. And for a woman who'd known little more than struggle and survival, the tranquility was more than I'd ever dared to dream of. It was happiness, pure and absolute.

## CHAPTER 21

## FINN



The first light of morning bled into the living room, painting everything in a lazy orange hue, the color matching the fading embers in the fireplace. Everybody else was still asleep on the rug, pillows and blankets all around us. I let my eyes linger on Julia, her sleeping face almost too beautiful to be real.

I smirked to myself as I sat up, leaving the others tangled together in the aftermath of a night filled with passion and pleasure. One hell of a Christmas Eve. I turned my eyes to the tree, neatly wrapped presents tucked underneath it. My mind was a whirl, but one thought dominated it. Coffee. I needed coffee.

I stretched as I stepped into the kitchen, my joints making satisfying cracks. Once I was at the counter, I went through the motions, filling the pot, spooning in the ground beans. The machine grumbled to life, a comforting, familiar sound.

As I stood there, the smell of coffee slowly filling the air, my gaze landed on Julia's laptop, open on the table at the breakfast nook, left there from the evening before. I moved to close it and accidentally jostled it, the screen blinking to life. A text document glowed in the dimly lit room and I froze, the words demanding my attention.

The story unfolded before me, the point of view of a young woman who moved to Miami, her tone tinged with loneliness and longing. I found myself caught in the prose. It was good. Powerful even. It was so damn good, in fact, that I poured

myself a cup of coffee, sipping the steaming brew as I allowed myself to read a couple more pages.

After a time, however, I forced myself to tear my eyes from the screen, guilt gnawing at me. This was private, and I had no right to read it.

Conflicting emotions ran through me as I stood before her laptop. There was so much more to Julia than I'd realized. Layers I hadn't even begun to uncover. I wanted to solve the mystery of her, to understand what made her tick.

But that would have to wait.

I sipped my cup of coffee, the warmth spreading through me, my thoughts still on her story. I yearned to talk to her about it, to understand what had inspired her. But that was for another day.

Before I could give the matter any more thought, the kitchen door swung open, and the guys stumbled in, a mess of disheveled hair and sleep-softened expressions. I looked up from my coffee, arching an eyebrow at their entrance. I closed the laptop the second they stepped over the kitchen threshold.

Too late, of course. The looks on their faces made it clear they'd seen what I'd been doing, that I'd been poking around in Julia's private business.

"What's the matter? You boys never seen a man drink coffee before?" I drawled, taking a slow sip.

Andrew shot me a knowing look. "More like, I've never seen a man so guilty try to look so innocent."

I snorted, flipping him off. "Fuck off. I just happened to come across something she wrote. She left it open."

"Well," Kai said. "How was it?" The rest of the guys went to work pouring themselves coffee.

"Good. Damn good."

Kai's eyes narrowed, clearly intrigued. "Oh? What was it? Poems or something?"

“Short story,” I replied, sitting down and leaning back in my chair. “And she’s got major talent.”

James leaned against the counter, his arms folded across his chest. “A writer, huh? Makes sense. She’s got that kind of mind, you know?”

I could see the guys’ curiosity piqued, their expressions softening as they fit this new bit of information into place.

“Where is she, anyway?” I asked, glancing around the room.

“She’s upstairs,” Kai answered. “We took her up to her bedroom, told her to sleep in.”

My mind went back to her story, the raw emotion in her words. “You guys know anything about this writing of hers?”

They all shook their heads, their expressions thoughtful.

“I’ve seen her typing stuff at the computer during downtime at work,” James replied. “Didn’t occur to me that she was writing stories.”

“We should ask her about it,” Andrew said. “Maybe she’s got some published stuff.”

James shook his head. “Nah, not a good idea. It’s best not to let her know we pried into her personal stuff.”

I nodded. “Yeah, but this shit was good. I’d love to read more. And I’m not a huge story reader.” Something else occurred to me. “You guys ever notice how she never talks about herself? Like her past, or deep, personal things?”

The guys exchanged glances, a shared realization dawning on them.

“We don’t know much about her past,” James said, his voice contemplative. “She’s always so in control, so guarded.”

“It’s like she just dropped from the sky one day. Landed on the street outside our studio and came into our lives.”

“Yeah,” Kai chimed in. “But there’s something underneath, something she’s hiding.”

“Yeah, she’s private. But we don’t need to pry,” Andrew said. “If she wants to keep her past to herself, that’s her own damn business.”

I leaned forward, my elbows on the table, my eyes fixed on each of them.

Kai snorted. “Now what?”

“You guys ever stop to think about what we’re doing? With her, I mean.”

They all fell silent, the weight of my words settling over the room. It was clear I’d touched on something that’d been on all of our minds.

“Kinda wrapped up in it,” James admitted. “Haven’t really taken the time to sit and give it thought.”

“We should, though,” I said. “Whatever’s happening, it’s a hell of a lot more serious than anything else we’ve known before. Damn sure a hell of a lot more than that thing with Adele, or any other woman.”

Silence fell as our thoughts raced. It was as if we all knew the answer, but nobody wanted to say it out loud.

“I think we’re falling for her,” Andrew finally said, his voice barely above a whisper.

I looked at him, then at James, then at Kai. The truth was there, in their eyes. We were all falling for her. Hard.

It was a dangerous game we were playing, a tangled web of emotion and desire. But there was no denying the connection, the way she made us feel.

“We need to be careful,” Kai warned, his voice tight with emotion. “If we’re not, we could end up hurting her. And ourselves.”

I nodded, my thoughts a jumbled mess. Falling for her was never part of the plan, but there we were, all of us caught in her spell.

“We need to talk to her,” I said. “Find out what she wants, what she expects from this.”

They all agreed, a sense of determination settling over the room. Whatever was happening between us, it was real, and it was powerful.

“We’re not going to ruin this trip by overthinking things,” Kai stated firmly, breaking another heavy silence that had settled over the room. “This Christmas is about relaxing and letting go of everything weighing on our minds, not adding more to them.”

I had to agree with him. As much as our feelings for Julia were growing into something we couldn’t ignore, it wasn’t the time to dwell on it. We were there to enjoy ourselves, to celebrate the season, and to take a break from the chaos back home.

“You’re right,” I grumbled, pushing myself up from my chair. “Let’s just enjoy the weekend.”

A sly smile spread across Andrew’s face. “Speaking of enjoyment, who’s hungry?”

The question instantly lifted the mood, the guys’ eyes lighting up at the mention of food. We were all big eaters, all big men.

“I could eat,” James said, rubbing his hands together.

“What do you say we go all out?” Kai suggested, already heading toward the fridge. “Eggs, pancakes, sausage, bacon... the whole works. I mean, it *is* Christmas morning.”

I grinned, the idea appealing to my stomach and my need to take my mind off things. “Sounds perfect.”

The next hour was a whirlwind of activity as we threw ourselves into cooking. The kitchen became a symphony of sizzling, chopping, and laughter as we worked together to create a feast fit for a king—or in our case, a queen.

As the food came together, the rich scents filling the cabin, I couldn’t help but feel a warmth spread through me. This was what Christmas was all about—good food, good company, and the simple joy of being together.

When everything was ready, we loaded it onto a tray, our mouths watering at the sight of the piled-high plates.

“Should we call her down?” Andrew asked, glancing toward the stairs.

I shook my head, my heart swelling with affection. “Nah, let’s surprise her.”

We made our way up the stairs, the tray balanced precariously between us. I could hear Julia’s soft breathing as we approached her room, the sound sending a thrill through me.

With a shared look, we pushed open the door, the sight of her peaceful face making my breath catch.

“Hey, sleepyhead,” I called softly, nudging her awake. “We brought you something.”

Her eyes fluttered open, her lips curving into a sleepy smile as she took in the sight of us, and the tray of food.

“Oh, come on,” she said with a sexy, sleepy smile. “Don’t tell me you guys made breakfast.”

“Merry Christmas,” Kai said.

“You guys are amazing,” she replied, pushing herself up as we brought the tray over.

We settled around her, plates in our laps, forks digging in. The conversation flowed easily, the earlier tension forgotten as we lost ourselves in the food and each other’s company.

I glanced at Julia, her eyes sparkling with happiness, her cheeks flushed with joy, and I knew we’d made the right decision.

This Christmas was about us, about enjoying the moment and each other. The future could wait. In that moment, we had everything we needed, right there in that room.

We settled into eating, scarfing down our grub with gusto. We laughed and joked and flirted as we chowed, snow beginning to softly fall outside.

Julia's eyes sparkled with mischief as she playfully swiped a piece of bacon from my plate, her tongue darting out to catch a drop of syrup from her lips. The sight sent a jolt of desire through me, and I knew I wasn't the only one feeling it.

The air in the room grew charged, the conversation taking on a more sensual tone as we finished our breakfast. Glances were exchanged, touches lingered, and the unspoken promise of what was to come hung heavy in the air.

Eventually, the plates were pushed aside, forgotten as we drew closer together. Our hands found each other, our bodies gravitating toward the connection that was growing stronger by the day.

## CHAPTER 22

JULIA



**W**e were all bundled up, fresh from an epic snowball fight outside. Snow was still clinging to our boots and jackets, and our cheeks were flushed from the cold as we settled back into the warmth of the cabin.

The living room was a mess of torn wrapping paper and empty boxes. The scent of freshly brewed coffee filled the air as we all sat down, cozy in our sweaters, watching the snow fall outside.

The guys had outdone themselves with the presents, all of them giving something thoughtful and unique.

We were all in high spirits, teasing each other and laughing, enjoying the simple pleasure of one another's company.

That was, until Finn spoke up.

"I saw that story you were working on this morning," he said, looking at me with an appreciative smile. "It's really good."

I froze, my coffee cup halfway to my lips. My heart started pounding in my chest as my mind raced. The guys all shot the same hard look in his direction, as if he'd said something he shouldn't have.

He'd read my writing. My private, personal thoughts and feelings, laid out on the page for him to see.

I set my cup down carefully, my hands shaking slightly. "You what?"

“I saw it on your laptop,” Finn replied, his smile fading as he realized I wasn’t pleased. “I didn’t mean to read it. I just happened to catch a glimpse when I was closing it.” He pursed his lips, as if realizing in the moment he’d screwed up. “I’m sorry, I shouldn’t have said anything.”

I took a deep breath, trying to calm my racing heart. It was just Finn. He wouldn’t judge me. He wouldn’t use my words against me.

But still, the invasion of my privacy stung.

“That’s okay,” I said, forcing a smile. “Just please, next time, ask before you do something like that.”

Finn nodded, his face serious. “Of course. I promise, I won’t do it again.”

I could see the curiosity in their eyes, a spark of interest that wouldn’t be quenched so easily.

My stomach knotted with a mix of excitement and fear, and the next words just tumbled out.

“So you really liked it?”

His face lit up, his earlier caution gone. “Liked it? It was amazing, Julia. You have some real talent. Your words were so vivid, so real. I could feel the loneliness of the character, her longing and her need for more.” He smiled, as if realizing something in the moment. “It’s weird. The character was a young girl, but all the same, I felt like I was in her shoes, feeling what she went through.”

Andrew laughed. “That’s called empathy, dumbass.”

James nodded. “Yup. It’s also the sign of a damn good writer when they can make you feel the character’s emotions from words on a page.”

I couldn’t help but beam.

“Thanks.” I blushed, a warm glow spreading through me at his praise. It was one thing to write for myself, but to have someone else appreciate my work was something else entirely.

“I can’t help but wonder though...” Finn continued. “I got the sense there was some of you on that page.”

“It’s just something I’ve been working on,” I said, brushing it off with a wave of my hand. “Based on my first month or so in Miami, the way I felt when I first moved there from Washington. Just a story, nothing more.”

The room was silent for a moment, and then Andrew spoke.

“You know, we realized we really don’t know all that much about you.”

I shifted uncomfortably in my seat, my joy at Finn’s compliment overshadowed by the realization that he was right. The subject of my past was always an uncomfortable one, filled with memories I’d rather leave behind.

“I mean, you know a lot about us,” Andrew continued, his eyes on me. “But you, J, you’re still a mystery.”

James reached over, squeezing my hand reassuringly. “Hey, you don’t have to get into any of it if you don’t want to. We’re not trying to pry.”

I looked around at their faces, seeing only genuine curiosity and concern. These were my friends, my lovers. They deserved to know about me, just as I knew about them.

I took a deep breath, steeling myself. “No, it’s only right that you know,” I said, my voice steady. “With all that I know about the four of you, it’s only fair.”

They looked at me, their eyes wide, waiting for me to continue.

The room was silent as I gathered my thoughts, my heart pounding in my chest. It was one thing to know your own story, to live it every day, but to put it into words, to share it with others, was something else entirely.

Finally, I took a deep breath and began, my voice barely above a whisper. “I come from a broken home. Both of my parents died when I was barely ten. Car accident.”

“Shit,” Kai said. “I’m sorry.”

I pursed my lips and nodded in response. It'd been over a decade since I'd lost Mom and Dad, but the pain was still fresh. Wounds like that never really healed, no matter how thick the scar was.

“I've been on my own since I was sixteen.”

Their faces were filled with concern, with care, and I pressed on, not wanting to lose my momentum. “When they passed, I got tossed into the foster care system. No aunt or uncle was fit to take me, most of them drunks or addicts or something just as bad. I went from home to home, never really fitting in, never really finding a place where I felt I belonged.”

I looked down, my hands trembling as I remembered those dark days. “I kept my head down, made it through until I was sixteen. After that, I emancipated myself. I moved out and started from scratch with nothing more than the clothes on my back and a determination to make something of myself, to not have to rely on anyone else. I found a tiny studio apartment with money I'd saved from a paper route, finished high school, and put myself through community college, working two restaurant jobs just to make ends meet.”

The words were coming easier now, the dam having broken, my story pouring out of me. “I love to read. Books were always my escape, ever since I was a kid. Kind of my way of leaving reality behind, if only for a little while. And somewhere along the way, I realized that I wanted to write. I wanted to become an author. I don't know, I guess I figured that if there was anyone else like me out there, a girl who'd lost everything, she could read my story and realize she's not so alone. Maybe it'd help her be a little less scared.”

I looked up, meeting their eyes, seeing the respect and admiration in their faces. “So I spend most of my spare time writing. Blog posts, articles, anything that pays. I write for cash on different freelancing networks, scraping together every penny I can, hoping that someday, I'll be able to make a living doing what I love.”

The room was silent when I finished, the weight of my words hanging heavy in the air.

“You’ve got the talent,” Kai said. “Not a damn bit of doubt about it.”

I don’t know what it was. Maybe it was thinking and talking about my past, maybe it was how vulnerable I felt, maybe it was the faces of the guys as they looked at me, admiration and care written in their expressions.

The tears surprised me, slipping down my cheeks before I had a chance to stop them. I’d never been the type of woman to cry in front of anyone, always the strong one, always in control. I had to be. But as the memories of my past washed over me, as the pain and the struggle and the loneliness came flooding in, I found myself unable to hold them back.

“I’m sorry,” I choked out, wiping at my tears, feeling foolish and vulnerable. “I don’t know what’s gotten into me.”

They were on their feet in an instant, surrounding me with their strong arms, words of comfort and reassurance filling my ears.

“It’s okay,” Finn whispered, his voice gentle. “You don’t have to be strong all the time. Not with us.”

“You’re free to be who you are,” James added, his hand on my back, his touch warm and comforting. “You don’t have to hide anything.”

I leaned into them, letting their strength support me, allowing their affection and acceptance to wash over me. Something profound and deep inside me shifted.

For the first time in as long as I could remember, I felt truly seen, truly understood. I felt a connection, a bond that went beyond the physical, beyond the superficial. I felt a sense of belonging, a sense of being part of something bigger than myself.

I’d exposed myself, not just through my writing, but through my story, through the very essence of who I was. I’d laid myself bare, and to my surprise, instead of judgment or rejection, I’d found acceptance.

As the tears continued to flow, as the guys continued to hold me and comfort me, I realized that I’d found something

else, too.

I'd found a home.

Finally, the tears subsided, and I pulled away, wiping at my eyes, feeling a sense of peace and contentment that I hadn't felt in a long time.

"Thank you," I said, my voice soft, my words filled with gratitude. "All of you. Thank you for being here, for accepting me for who I am."

"You know, Jules, with a story like that, we might have to start calling you the Jane Austin of Miami," Andrew quipped, winking at me.

"I don't know about that," I shot back, grinning. "Let's see if anyone actually wants to pay to read what I've written before I start thinking about titles, as appealing as that one might be."

Laughter and joy filled the room, warm and comforting, and I felt my sadness fading, replaced by the happiness of being with them, the contentment of knowing that I was truly accepted.

The moment was shattered by the sharp ring of James' phone. He glanced at the screen, his brow furrowing, his expression darkening.

"Shit, it's Carlos, gotta take this." He raised the phone as he stepped away, his voice tight as he answered.

We all fell silent, watching him, sensing that something was wrong. His conversation was brief, his words clipped and tense, and when he hung up, his face was ashen, his eyes filled with anger and confusion.

"What is it?" Kai asked.

James took a deep breath. "The shop. It's been wrecked."

## CHAPTER 23

JULIA



“Son of a bitch. They didn’t hold back, did they?” Barely contained rage painted James’ face as he took in the sight of the ruins of Blackjack’s.

The exterior of the shop was enough to rip my heart out. It was as if a storm had torn through the place, leaving nothing but devastation in its wake. The once vibrant and artistic front had been marked with crude spray-painted curses. The windows were shattered, fragments of glass littering the sidewalk, glinting in the harsh sunlight. The door was off its hinges, leaning grotesquely to the side.

“Those motherfuckers.” James growled the words, his hands clenching into tight fists.

The men formed up around me protectively as we stepped through the threshold.

The smell of charred wood and chemicals hit me the moment we stepped inside. Miami had never felt so cold and unwelcoming. The place that had been a second home to me was now a war zone. A chill ran down my spine as I took in the extent of the destruction.

This was Klaus’s doing. There was no doubt about it. They’d started a fire inside, but thank God, the automatic sprinkler system had stopped it from spreading beyond the lounge area. Everything else had been tossed and thrown around, the artwork defaced, the equipment destroyed. The windows were smashed, obscenities and threats spraypainted all over the walls. My front desk was a disaster, the computer

flipped onto its back, the monitor smashed as if a big, gloved fist had been brought down onto it.

“They wanted to send a message,” Kai said, his voice tight. “They wanted to make sure we get that they’re serious.”

“Oh, we get it,” Finn growled, his eyes blazing. “We get that they’re a bunch of cowardly pricks who don’t know how to fight fair.”

Andrew was quiet, his face pale, his eyes wide as he took in the wreckage. It was clear that he was struggling to come to terms with what he was looking at.

“It’s going to take at least a week to clean up,” I said, my voice cracking. “Just to clean up. That’s not even considering the repairs, the rebuilding.”

“We’ll do it,” James said, determination bracing his words. “We’ll do whatever it takes. We’re not letting them win. We’re not letting them take this from us.”

“But at what cost?” I asked, my voice rising. “How far is this going to go? How much are you willing to risk?”

“We’re not backing down,” Finn said, his voice filled with conviction.

Kai agreed. “We’ll do whatever it takes to protect what’s ours.”

But as they spoke, as they made their declarations of strength and resolve, I couldn’t shake the feeling of dread that settled in my stomach. I knew that they were right. I knew that we had to stand up to Klaus and his gang, that we couldn’t let them win.

But I also knew that this was becoming dangerous. That it was a game that could have serious consequences, a fight that could ultimately cost us everything.

The guys were furious, their faces contorted with rage and disbelief, cursing under their breath as they looked over the wreckage of their shop. I could feel their anger, their frustration, their helplessness, but I was too numb to share in it. I was lost in my thoughts, unable to shake off the sudden

feeling of being an outsider, a stranger in a place that had once felt like home.

As we stood there, surveying the wreckage, the sound of hurried footsteps drew our attention to the entrance. Adele, breathless and eyes wide, rushed toward us.

“Finn! Kai!” she exclaimed.

Finn turned to her, his eyes flashing with surprise as she ran over and threw her arms around him.

“I came as soon as I heard,” she said. She let go of Finn, hurrying over to Kai and giving him the same tight hug.

Finn put his hands on his hips. “This is a fucking nightmare. It’s all ruined.”

“It’s going to take forever to clean up and rebuild,” Kai added.

Adele’s eyes shimmered. “Oh, my boys. I’m so, so sorry. I know this place was everything to you.”

Her words were pumped full of sympathy, but something about them seemed off, almost calculated.

“We’ll figure it out,” Finn said, his voice tight. “We always do.”

Adele pulled back and looked at them, her hands lingering on their arms. “You know I’ll help in any way I can. We’ve been through so much together.”

Kai nodded, but his eyes were distant. “Thanks, Addy. We appreciate it.”

“You don’t have to thank me,” Adele insisted, her voice soft. “We’re still connected, in our own way.”

I watched the exchange, feeling a sudden sting of jealousy and suspicion. The way Adele was with them, the intimacy, the closeness... it felt wrong. A play for something more, something she once had with them but no longer existed.

Andrew and James were busy discussing the damage, their voices fading into the background. I felt like an intruder, an outsider looking in on a moment I couldn’t fully understand.

Adele's eyes briefly met mine, a flicker of something unspoken passing between us, the first sign since she'd arrived that she'd even noticed my presence. Was it triumph? Jealousy? Whatever it was it was gone before I could decipher it.

"Come on," Adele said, placing a hand on each of the guys shoulders. "Let's go into the office, talk things over."

Finn nodded.

Without another word, Adele led the pair through the wreckage and toward the back office. James and Andrew were off in their own world, speaking to one another in hushed tones about what to do next, who to call.

I was alone. Granted, I knew I was far from the most important thing there. All the same, I stood solo, not sure what to do with myself.

I didn't want to draw attention, didn't want to make myself the center of the show. I slipped away, flagging down a cab and climbing inside, a strange, horrible hollowness forming in the pit of my stomach as the cab moved forward, the wreckage of the shop vanishing around the corner.



I barely had time to slam the door shut when a wave of nausea hit me like a punch to the gut. Stumbling into the bathroom, I scarcely made it to the toilet before the contents of my stomach forced their way out. My body heaved, and my mind spun, disoriented and scared.

This was the third time in the past week.

Wiping my mouth, I sank down onto the cold tile floor, feeling weak and overwhelmed. A horrible realization crept into my mind, settling in with an undeniable truth.

My period was late.

*Oh, no.*

The words echoed in my mind, each repetition a heavy blow. It couldn't be. It just couldn't be. I'd been careful, hadn't I? I knew the risks, knew the consequences. But something deep inside me whispered that careful wasn't enough.

I stared at my reflection in the bathroom mirror, my eyes wide with shock and terror. This couldn't be happening. Not now. Not when everything else was so chaotic.

Somehow though, deep down, I knew it was.

## CHAPTER 24

JULIA



Walking into the tattoo studio was a punch to the gut, just like before. The scent of burnt wood, ruined equipment, and a melancholy heaviness filled the air. But in addition to all that was another turmoil brewing inside me.

Three pregnancy tests. Three positive results. *Fuck.*

As I stepped around shattered glass and toppled furniture, the weight of it all pressed down on me. The guys were under so much stress already; I couldn't be the one to add another crisis to their growing list.

I noticed Kai, diligently picking up ruined sketches from the floor, trying to salvage what he could. Andrew was on the phone, sounding like he was trying to get a contractor for the smashed windows. Finn and James were talking in hushed tones, occasionally glancing at the remnants of Klaus's graffiti handiwork still very much evident on the walls.

And there I was, hiding a secret that could potentially change everything between us.

I clutched my bag closer, inside which were the damning tests. Thoughts of fleeing to another state and working another job far from all the mess started to take shape in my mind. Maybe I could waitress again, write a book about my Miami adventures, anything that didn't involve dropping a baby bomb on four already overloaded guys.

As if on cue, Adele swayed in, the door chime announcing her entrance. With every flick of her hair and swish of her hip, she was on a mission. Her eyes locked onto Finn first, her

hands resting on his shoulders as she murmured something in his ear. He tried to pull away, clearly distracted with the task at hand, but her persistence was unnerving.

I watched as she moved next to Kai, the same sly smile, the same touchy tactics. Her fingers fluttered down his arm, and he flinched away, but it didn't deter her. Then, she turned her attention to Andrew and James, a touch more blatant, making it clear she was playing no favorites.

With a deep breath, I decided to busy myself with the cleanup. Maybe if I kept my hands moving, my thoughts wouldn't spiral out of control. But every glance toward Adele was a sharp reminder that maybe I wasn't enough for them. Maybe, with this new revelation growing inside me, I'd become a liability.

The possibility of them rejecting me and our unborn child tore at my insides. My hands shook as I tried to pick up some ruined sketches, tears threatening to spill.

I thought of telling them right then and there, blurting out the truth amidst the wreckage of our shared life. But I knew the timing wasn't right. They had too much on their plate. I needed to figure things out on my own first, get a plan in place in case they wanted nothing to do with me or the baby.

I tried to stay focused on my task, cleaning up the remnants of a life that felt like it was crumbling around me.

Despite the circumstances, the studio was a hive of activity, the whole crew there helping to clean up. Shadow muttered curses under his breath as he mopped up ink spills. Mick, his tattoo sleeves depicting colorful koi fish and Japanese waves, was in the process of helping the guys haul out the burnt chairs. And Josh, with his shaved head and Maori-inspired tattoos, was busy cataloging what supplies they'd lost and what they needed to replace.

Maddie was there too, of course, her goth style a fitting look for the somber occasion as we all worked to clean up the horrible mess Klaus and his prick crew had made of the reception area. I could tell she sensed my distress, that

something was wrong. One searching look with those blue eyes and I felt like she knew the truth I was hiding.

“Everything okay, Jules?” she asked, her voice filled with genuine concern, eyes scanning my face for signs of distress.

I tried to muster up a reassuring smile. “Just worried about the shop, you know?” I hated lying, but for the moment, it was my only option.

Maddie’s eyes flashed with realization. “Don’t tell me you’re falling hard for one of those guys you’re seeing?”

The four guys appeared in my mind, the smile that formed on my lips a genuine one.

“Something like that. But... let’s talk about it later when we’re not tidying up a warzone.”

Maddie nodded. “Good idea.”

A few moments passed as we picked up a few bits of scrap here and there. After a short time, Maddie cleared her throat and spoke up again.

“Well, despite everything that’s happened, you’re looking pretty damn good. It’s like you’re glowing.”

She dragged the last word out, drawing attention to the unintended irony of her comment.

The weight in my chest tightened. *Glowing*. That’s what they said about pregnant women, wasn’t it?

Trying to keep my composure, I forced a chuckle. “Glowing? In this mess? You need glasses, Mads.”

She winked, her gaze never leaving mine. “I know that life’s a shitshow right now, but seriously, you’ve got this weird radiance going on. New skincare routine or something?”

I shook my head. “Nah, maybe I just got some extra sun.”

The lightheartedness was a mask, but Maddie seemed to accept it for the time being. Still, I could see the wheels turning in her head, she knew there was more to it than what I was letting on.

Brushing a stray strand of black hair from her face, Maddie pursed her lips for a moment, as if giving something a second of thought.

“You know, if there’s ever anything you want to talk about, I’m here.”

I chuckled, grateful for the momentary distraction from my own turmoil. “Thanks, Mads. I’ll keep that in mind.”

The door chimed again.

“My fucking studio!”

The whole crew looked up to see Jack shuffling into the shop, his eyes widening in disbelief at the scene before him. He moved as if in a daze, shaking his head at the wreckage. Jack was one of the hardest men I’d ever met, but in that moment, I could see the pain in his face. The destruction of his shop definitely broke a piece of him.

“Oh, dear God,” he breathed, his gray eyes misting over. “What’ve they done to this place.”

Finn and Kai approached him gently, their respect and affection for the old man clear in their softened expressions.

“Pops,” Finn began, placing a comforting hand on his shoulder, “You shouldn’t be here. This isn’t something you need to see.”

Jack’s gaze met Finn’s, a look that hinted at the depth of history between the father and son, a quiet strength tempered by sorrow and time.

“No. I built this place with my own two hands,” he said. “Whatever state she’s in, I need to know.” Jack shook his head, anger gradually replacing the sadness on his face. “They did a fucking number on her. Made sure we’d feel the hurt when we saw the carnage.”

Kai chimed in, his voice low and soothing. “We’ll rebuild, Dad. We’ll bring it back better than before. You have my word.”

Jack gave a shaky nod, patting Kai’s shoulder. “I know you will, kid. I’ve seen this place rise from the ashes before. But it

just ain't right what those motherfuckers have done.”

From the corner of my eye, I watched as Adele sashayed toward Jack, her demeanor oozing fake sweetness. The mood in the room shifted instantly. Everyone, especially those who'd been around the block a time or two, was hip to Adele's ways. She was like a cat—always landing on her feet and rubbing up against unsuspecting victims, trying to gain their trust.

“Jack,” she purred, sidling up close to him, “you must be devastated. Let me take you out for a coffee. You need to take your mind off this.”

*You've gotta be fucking kidding me, I thought. She's putting the moves on Jack now?*

I gritted my teeth. The audacity of the woman! Even in the midst of such devastation, she was working her angles, preying on someone at their most vulnerable. How the hell hadn't the guys realized what kind of person she was?

But Jack, for all his years, was made of tougher stuff than she'd reckoned. He glanced down at her, his face unreadable. “Girl, I've been around long enough to know trouble when I see it. And right now, I'm looking it dead in the eye.”

His voice held a steeliness that silenced Adele. The rest of the room, sensing the tension, paused momentarily, eyes darting between the two.

Adele, caught off guard, blinked in surprise. “I just thought \_\_\_”

“Save it,” Jack cut her off, his gaze unyielding. “I've known real heartache, real pain. And what I need right now isn't you or your games. It's to see this place rise from these ruins.”

I couldn't help but grin, loving the way he saw right through her bullshit and told her right to her face what he thought of her pathetic attempts at manipulation.

But when Jack turned his attention back to the wreckage of the shop, it was almost too much to bear. He was visibly shaken.

“Damn it, boys,” Jack growled. “We can’t let these bastards get away with this.”

Kai stepped forward, a mirror image of his father but younger, placing a steadying hand on Jack’s broad shoulder. “Dad, we’ve got it under control. We need you to head home though, stay safe.”

“Your mother would have hated seeing it like this,” Jack spoke, a rare crack in his usually steadfast demeanor.

Finn, trying to ease his pain replied. “We’ll handle it, Dad. Just... take a break from all this for now.”

Jack’s eyes swept across the studio, taking in every piece of shattered glass, every drop of spilled ink. The place was his legacy, handed down to his sons. It wasn’t just the physical damage; it was the violation of memories, of years of dedication.

As he made his way out, he paused beside me, placing a heavy hand on my shoulder. “Keep your chin up, kiddo. We’ve weathered storms before, and we’ll weather this one too.”

His eyes held a fierce determination, a silent promise that we weren’t in this fight alone.

My voice, though choked with emotion, found strength in his words. “We will, Jack.”

Maddie pulled me close as Jack walked out the door, offering a silent pillar of support.

“We’ve got this, Jules,” she whispered.

I nodded, taking in the chaos that surrounded us. This was more than an act of vandalism, it was personal and it cut to the bone of every one of us. Although the road ahead was uncertain, Jack’s words rang in my ears and I knew we would indeed weather the storm.

## CHAPTER 25

ANDREW



The rain streaked down, warping the neon lights of Miami into a smeared display of color. From up in my penthouse, the hum of the city's nightlife reached me as a distant murmur, overshadowed by the storm raging in my mind.

Leaving the Marines had been more than just shedding a uniform. It was meant to be a fresh start, a chance to leave the horrors of the past behind. Memories of the desert, of the weight of the sniper rifle snug against my shoulder, still haunted my nights. I thought I had left all that behind.

I drew a deep breath, letting the scent of rain and the sights of the city lights ground me. My fingers tapped a restless rhythm on the windowpane, the beat echoing my agitation.

*Why the hell did it have to come to this?*

Life had been good since I left the service—running the tattoo parlor with my friends, losing myself in the buzz and rhythm of the workday. But the wreckage Klaus left behind was more than just a random act of vandalism. It felt personal, a call to arms.

In the dim light of my penthouse, memories swarmed me like hornets. During my time in the Corps, I'd been a dealer of death. My hands, skilled and precise, had taken lives, decisions made in split seconds, ones I'd justified as necessary for the greater good. But it wasn't long after returning home that the faces of those I'd killed began to haunt me, to become my nightmares.

I'd made a solemn vow to myself—never again would I pick up a gun with the intent to kill. It was a promise I'd clung to, a lifeline to my humanity in a world that had often felt devoid of it. But with danger casting its dark shadow over those I cared for, I could feel the boundaries of that vow blurring. The chilling realization that I might have to break it weighed on me, a familiar dread settling in the pit of my stomach.

Pulling myself away from the window, I moved to the dimly lit corner of the living room. Hidden beneath a stack of clutter, was a custom case, a part of me I thought I'd buried. It took only a moment's hesitation before I popped open the case. The cold metal of the sniper rifle gleamed, untouched since my last mission.

The fact that I even had my service weapon was a sick joke; my CO had given it to me to keep off the record, marking it as lost in action. "A sniper with your skills should never be without his weapon of choice," he'd said.

In quiet moments, alone in my apartment, I'd often find myself staring at the rifle case. Many nights, I'd question why I still held onto it. It wasn't nostalgia or a memento of the past; rather, it was a tether. A symbol of the brutal necessity from a time when my life—and the lives of those around me—depended on my skill with it. It was a reminder that, no matter how hard I tried to escape, some facets of my past were anchored too deeply within me.

Its familiar weight settled in my hands as memories flooded back. If I was considering the rifle, it wasn't for show. James had tried handling things the legal way, as he always did. But it seemed the law wasn't enough for Klaus. Maybe my way would be.

I worked through the process of assembling the rifle, muscle memory guiding each movement. I never thought I'd actually be holding the weapon again, but for my family, for my brothers, I'd wade back into that world of shadows.

Looking out over the rain-soaked city, one thought filled my mind.

*Klaus, you've just made the biggest mistake of your life.*

Outside, the rain began to ease up on the streets of Miami, but the real storm, the one brewing inside of me, was only growing stronger.

All of the anger, frustration, and desperation swirling within became a pang of something deeper, something raw, and something that gripped me the hardest—love. Love for Julia.

She was a hurricane, bold and fierce. And yet beneath that tough exterior, I'd glimpsed her vulnerabilities, cracks in her armor that drew me in deeper, especially after sharing her story. We all had, in some way or another. But she had this uncanny knack to make me feel seen, *really* seen, in a way I hadn't felt in years.

The thought of losing her felt like a weight on my chest, making each breath labored. And it wasn't just the love; it was also the fear. Seeing Adele worm her way back into the group, especially around Kai and Finn, left a bitter taste in my mouth. And what if Julia saw that as a reason to keep her distance, to retreat from the chaotic world we were embroiled in? The very thought sent a shard of ice through my heart.

Every moment, every laugh, every touch we'd shared replayed in my mind. That soft glint in her eyes, the way she'd lean into my touch, the joy in her laughter—it all felt like a dream I was on the precipice of losing.

My hands tightened around the weapon. I found myself at a crossroads where the line between right and wrong seemed blurred. For my friends and for her, I was willing to cross that line.

The weight of the rifle was both a comfort and a dread, a tool that could protect but also destroy. Would I use it? Could I? If it meant securing a future with Julia and my friends by my side, the answer was clear. And yet the thought of ending up behind bars and losing everything cast a dark shadow over that clarity. A tough cross to bear.

I found myself pacing the length of the room, wrestling with my conscience. Jail was a tangible consequence. But the intangible ones—the loss of self-respect, the haunting memories, the irrevocable change it would mean for who I was—that’s what truly terrified me.

I took a deep breath, my reflection in the window distorted by the streaks of rain. The neon lights below painted a picture of a Miami that was alive and vibrant. But it would become hollow if that life didn’t have Julia in it.

Collapsing onto the couch, I buried my face in my hands. I’d been trained to face the harshest of enemies, to navigate the most treacherous terrains. Yet there I was, torn asunder by love, loyalty, and the grim choices that loomed ahead.

## CHAPTER 26

## JULIA



The hum of the coffee shop was a comforting melody against the chaos of my life. Maddie and I found a cozy corner, out of the eavesdropping range of anyone who might be interested in our conversation. God knew the last thing I needed was more rumors circling about.

I took a sip of my decaf black coffee, the bitterness reflecting my current mood. Maddie looked at me, her eyes filled with warmth and concern. “So what’s going on, Jules? You’ve been off lately.”

Where did I even start? I was an absolute trainwreck between the tangled mess with the guys, what was going on with Klaus, and the biggest secret of all—the baby growing inside of me.

I stared into my coffee cup. Maddie was quickly becoming my confidante; somebody I’d grown inseparably close to over the last couple of months. And for someone like me who didn’t exactly make friends easily, let alone hold onto them, it was a foreign dynamic. I felt a weight in my chest, a mixture of excitement and fear. Telling her and speaking it aloud meant acknowledging the reality of the situation.

Could I trust her with my monumental secret? My hand instinctively touched my abdomen, a gesture of comfort and protection. A deep breath, and the words were on the tip of my tongue, waiting for the courage to let them out.

I let out a shaky breath. “I’m pregnant, Maddie.”

Her eyes widened, and for a moment, she seemed at a loss for words. I half-expected a judgmental reaction or a ‘told you so’ remark. But Maddie surprised me, as she always did.

“Julia,” she began gently, reaching across the table to squeeze my hand, seeming to sense my worry. “First, breathe. Everything is going to be okay.”

I choked back a sob. “I don’t even know how to handle this, Maddie. The guys, they have so much going on right now. And with the shop, and Klaus, and everything else...” I trailed off, feeling the walls closing in on me.

“The guys?” she asked.

A quick surge of panic ran through me as I realized that I might’ve just made a major faux pas. I scrambled for an excuse.

“Yeah. An emotional pregnant employee is probably the last thing they want to deal with right now. Not even six months at the job and I’ll already need to be asking about maternity leave.”

Maddie’s voice was firm. “One step at a time. Forget the guys for a moment. Forget the shop, forget Klaus. What do *you* want to do? How do you feel about this?”

Tears welled up in my eyes. “Scared, mostly. I never expected this. I was so careful. But now, the reality is setting in, and I don’t know what to do.”

She tilted her head, her eyes searching mine. “And the father?”

My mouth went dry. “Well, I’m not sure who it is.”

Maddie, looking thoughtful, took a sip of her latte. “Well, that’s going to be a conversation, isn’t it?”

“Understatement of the century,” I muttered.

She looked at me with unwavering support. “J, regardless of the situation, you’re not alone. You have me, okay? And we’ll figure this out together.”

I looked at her, gratitude flooding me. “Thank you, Maddie. Really, thank you.”

She grinned. “What are friends for? And if you need a cool aunt for your kid, just let me know.”

“Deal.”

I smiled, and in that little corner of the coffee shop, amidst all the uncertainty in my life, Maddie became my anchor.



The resolve that brewed in me after my chat with Maddie propelled me straight to Kai’s office. My heels clicked purposefully against the tiled floor, echoing the rhythm of my heartbeat. I could do this. I had to.

As I stood outside the office door, a whirlwind of emotions consumed me. The familiar scent of ink and leather from within tugged at my heartstrings. Thoughts raced through my mind; what if they didn’t want this? What if it changed everything between us? But buried beneath the anxiety and trepidation was a steadfast conviction.

This was our child, our future, and they had every right to know. Despite the overwhelming fear that threatened to paralyze me, there was an underlying certainty that telling them was the right thing to do. I needed to be brave for the life growing inside me, for the new journey we were all unknowingly embarking on. Taking a deep, steadying breath, I pushed the door open.

Nothing could’ve prepared me for what I saw on the other side.

Adele, clad only in her impossibly tight jeans and a black bra, was sitting on Kai’s lap. Kai sat in his chair, looking utterly befuddled, eyes wide, and jaw slack, his gaze going from Adele to me. The room felt colder, the air charged with an electricity that made my skin tingle.

A few beats of awkward silence stretched, feeling like eternity.

I crossed my arms, eyebrows raised. “Apparently I’m interrupting something.”

Adele, with her trademark giggle, hopped off Kai’s lap and began gathering her discarded top, all while sporting a mischievous smirk.

“Just showing the boss here my latest piece,” she purred, slowly dragging her fingertip over a tattoo that curved around her ribcage.

Kai, still seeming to process the situation, finally cleared his throat. “Julia, this isn’t what it—”

I held up a hand, silencing him. “Save it. Not the time.”

Adele, slipping into her top, cast a sly glance in my direction, clearly enjoying the power she thought she wielded in that moment.

“It’s my fault for not knocking.”

As she sashayed past me, the scent of her heavy perfume lingering, I took a deep breath to steady myself.

“We’re not done here,” I hissed quietly, though whether it was a threat or a promise, even I wasn’t sure.

“We’ll see about that,” she muttered, flashing me one last smirk before departing.

When the door clicked shut behind her, I turned to face Kai. He ran a hand through his tousled hair, looking every bit as lost and confused as I felt.

“Julia,” he began, his voice hoarse, “I swear, nothing happened. She came in, wanting to show me her new tattoo, and before I knew it—”

I pressed my fingers to my temples, trying to chase away the budding headache. “Kai, I came here to talk to you about something important. But now? I don’t even know if I have the energy.”

Adele’s charade had only solidified a growing suspicion in my mind. Her sudden reappearance, her seemingly innocent flirtations, her involvement in our lives... it wasn’t

happenstance, it was calculated. She was playing a game, and I'd be damned if I let her win. The woman's tenacity, however misdirected, was admirable. But there was a line, and she had just crossed it.

I realized in the moment there was no sidestepping what I'd just walked in on. I needed to know what really happened.

Taking a deep breath, I tried to steady my voice. "Do you still have a thing for her, Kai?"

He ran his fingers through his disheveled hair, clearly flustered. "What? No. She was just showing me a new tattoo. That's all."

I raised an eyebrow, the disbelief evident in my voice. "In your office? Half-naked? On your lap?"

"I didn't ask her to take off her shirt and plop down on my lap," he said. "It all happened before I could do anything and seconds before you came in."

"I don't know if I believe that."

Kai avoided my gaze, his jaw clenching. "Our studio was just trashed. We're on the edge, and you want to bicker about Adele?"

The weight of everything we were facing pressed down on me, but I wasn't going to be sidetracked.

"This isn't just about Adele. It's about trust, Kai. It's about you letting her waltz back in to your lives, disregarding my feelings and the bond we've built."

He sighed, frustration evident. "Now's not the time, Jules."

Defiant, I stood my ground. "When is the right time, Kai? When she's taken everything from us? Including you?"

His temper flared. "Damn it, Julia! We have bigger problems right now, this isn't worth talking about."

Angry tears welled up. "You're right about one thing, we do have bigger problems. But if you're not willing to confront them, then what are we even doing?"

Without another word, I turned on my heel and left, the chilly air outside a stark contrast to the fiery tension I'd just left behind in Kai's office.

Back home, I felt a mix of anger and sadness wash over me. I was on the verge of breaking down. Adele was just a symptom of a larger problem. Everything was falling apart, and I felt like I was standing at the center, desperately trying to hold it all together.

I had come to share the most intimate news of our lives, the existence of our unborn child, and his behavior cast a shadow of doubt over my decision. After what had just happened I wasn't sure I could trust him with my revelation. Would he react with the same indifference and distance, treating our shared secret like some trivial matter?

Pulling the covers around me, I let the tears flow. My heart ached with the weight of the secrets I held, and the realization that I might have to face them alone. The soft glow of the streetlights outside provided little comfort as I drifted into a restless sleep, haunted by thoughts of the unknown future ahead.



The hum of Miami's nightlife was a soothing backdrop to my restless dreams, the sporadic noise of traffic and the occasional shout from the street filtering through my bedroom window. The quilt wrapped around my body felt stifling, my skin slick with a thin layer of sweat from a particularly intense nightmare. I was on the brink of consciousness when an unfamiliar scraping sound made my heart race. It was soft, yet distinct against the night's usual lullaby.

Half-asleep, my eyes struggled to adjust to the dim light filtering in from the streetlamps. But as the scraping grew louder, every instinct in me screamed danger. And then, just as the realization hit, my window burst open. Three figures, dressed in black from head to toe, flooded into my room like night itself.

Adrenaline pumping, I bolted upright, seizing the heavy lamp on my bedside table. With a guttural scream, I swung it at the first intruder, catching him square in the head. He stumbled back, cursing, his hands flailing to shield his face. The glass shattered on impact, raining shards everywhere.

Before I could react further, a second figure lunged, his hands clamping down on my wrists, pulling them behind me. I kicked, screamed, and tried to twist free, but he was too strong. I bit down hard on his hand, drawing blood, causing him to roar in pain.

The third man, while I was distracted, moved in to secure my legs, rendering me immobile. I continued to scream, but my shouts were suddenly muffled when a rough hand pressed a cloth over my face, its pungent chemical scent making my eyes water. The acrid scent of chloroform invaded my senses, and my strength began to weaken. My vision swirled as the world around me began to fade, but not before I spotted a familiar inked insignia on one of their wrists—the Crimson Devils logo.

## CHAPTER 27



The evening's shadows draped over the studio, the faint glow from the streetlights cutting into the room through the gaps in the blinds. On the worktable lay scattered tattoo sketches, the images distorted under a fine layer of ash residue from the arson. The air was thick with tension, the darkness shrouding the room caused by more than just the evening sky that was settling outside.

Finn's face was contorted in a scowl, his hands flexing as if itching to punch something. "So, what the hell was that about, Kai? Adele half-naked in your office?"

I exhaled deeply, rubbing my temples. "Fuckin' Adele came in without knocking, started rambling about some new tattoo, and next thing I know, she's taking off her shirt to show me and jumping onto my lap. I was so in my own damn world that I was barely aware of what the fuck was going on. I tried pushing her away, but she was relentless."

Finn's jaw tightened, his eyes flaring with anger. "You could've called one of us. You could've thrown her out."

"It's not like I wanted her there, Finn!" I shot back, my frustration evident. "I've got enough on my plate dealing with the shop and the shit with Klaus. The last thing I need is Adele playing her mind games!"

After relaying the events to the guys, a sinking feeling settled heavily in my chest. The more I talked, the clearer the picture became. I had let the moment, and the shock of Adele's intrusion, cloud my judgment. My dismissal of Julia, someone

I deeply cared for, now stood stark in my mind, a glaring fuckup that gnawed at my insides.

She'd come to me stating she had something important to discuss and no doubt I'd seen it in her eyes. But I'd brushed her off, casting her feelings aside. I replayed the scene, the hurt etched onto her face, and it felt like a punch to the gut. How could I have been so blinded by the moment that I'd mistreated her so? An overwhelming need to make things right consumed me.

Andrew stepped in between Finn and I, sensing the rising tension. "Guys, let's keep our focus. Adele is a small problem compared to everything else that we're dealing with."

James, his stern expression unchanged, chimed in. "Kai, I get that things are tense right now, but you've got to be smarter. We can't afford distractions, especially not with Klaus out for blood."

I raked my fingers through my hair, feeling distant. "I know. I messed up. I let my guard down with her, and I shouldn't have. She's clearly trying to worm her way back into our lives, and I played right into her hands."

Finn's stance softened slightly, the raw fury in his eyes replaced by concern. "Just promise me you won't let her pull this shit again. I can't stand seeing her trying to get between us."

I nodded. "I promise. I'll deal with Adele, and I won't let her antics jeopardize what we have."

Andrew clapped me on the back. "We've got bigger fish to fry. Let's keep our heads in the game. If we let Adele or Klaus split us apart, we've already lost."

The air in the room began to clear, the group pulling together, unified in our determination to protect what was dear to us. There was a silent understanding—distractions and mistakes had no place in our fight for survival.

The weight of it all bore down on me, oppressive and suffocating. The studio, once a symbol of ambition and camaraderie, felt desolate. The grief I felt wasn't about the

charred walls or the lingering stench of smoke; it was the realization that someone wanted to destroy something we'd poured our souls into.

I glanced at James, Andrew, and Finn, reading the same story in their faces that I felt in my chest. Pain. Resolve. Fight. Determination.

“We need a plan,” I spoke, breaking the silence. “A patch-up job on the shop isn't enough. Klaus won't stop until he's taken everything.”

Finn's eyes flashed. “We've stood up to gangster shitheads like Klaus before, but this feels different. This feels like a personal vendetta against us.”

Andrew was already a step ahead. “We have to think differently. Maybe it's time to change things up, become less predictable.”

James nodded, the gears in his mind turning. “I've been talking to a few folks, thinking about upping our security. We can't get blindsided like that again.”

Thinking of the studio was one thing, but another thought gnawed at me, raw and painful. “It's not just the shop. It's our lives. Julia's life. We can replace property, but we can't replace people.”

Feeling a warm, firm grip on my shoulder, I turned to see Andrew. His eyes, steady and reassuring, met mine. “We're in this together. We won't let him win.”

We sat in silence, the weight of the conversation pressing on us. The road ahead was treacherous, but our bond was unwavering.

Breaking our silence, Finn voiced what we all felt. “This studio is more than brick and mortar. It's us. Klaus thinks he can tear through it, tear through us. But every man has a breaking point.”

Meeting each of their gazes, I spoke. “We find his, and we use it. We make him wish he'd never fucked with us.”

James leaned in, a fire kindling in his eyes. “I’ve got contacts, people in places he won’t expect. We pool everything we’ve got.”

Drawing strength from the men around me, I once again realized what an unbreakable force we were.

As the night deepened, the four of us plotted and planned. Klaus had thrown down the gauntlet, but he was about to discover the true grit of the men he’d challenged.

The harsh ring of the front bell jolted me from my thoughts. The four of us turned to the entrance. A shadow of a man stepped into the dim light of the studio, his eyes cold and calculating.

The Devil himself.

“Evening, boys. Mind if we have a little impromptu pow-wow?”

He carried himself with the swagger of a man who thought he was in control, with an attitude that was dripping cockiness. The self-satisfied expression on his face made it clear Klaus believed he held all the cards.

A thick tension settled over the room. His entrance was calculated, a brazen challenge. It seemed the snake had finally come out of his lair. He put his hands on his hips and stood with a wide stance, the body language of a man pleased with himself.

“You motherfucker!” The words exploded out of my mouth as I flew from my chair, eager to punch the prick’s face in.

But a hand around my upper arm stopped me in my tracks. I turned to see James behind me.

“Don’t give him the satisfaction,” he said, his tone low. “Last thing we need is an assault and battery charge.”

My anger boiled, but James was right—laying into Klaus like that would’ve only created more trouble. Not to mention that the Devils would no doubt return the favor ten-fold. And, as if on cue, the roar of motorcycle engines filled the air. A

squad of a half-dozen Devils pulled to a stop in front of the shop, letting us know that Klaus's presence was backed with the threat of violence. He held up his hand, the Devils hanging back, waiting for his next command.

"There you go, Kai" Klaus said to me. "Hang back before you get all riled up, sink your teeth into something you can't chew."

"What the fuck do you want?" I shot out.

He chuckled. "Just wanted to stop by and wish you a pleasant evening, gentlemen," he drawled, his eyes sweeping over the devastated space. "Gol-ly! This place has seen better days, huh?"

James clenched his fists, his restraint evident. "Say what you came to say and get the fuck out."

Klaus smirked, looking all too happy.

"I thought I'd pay you all a little visit, discuss some... business." He paused, his gaze settling on me. "Maybe some décor tips, too. Lord knows this place could use a little touching up."

James flashed me another look that seemed to say, *he's trying to bait you, don't fall for it.*

Biting back the anger boiling inside me, I responded. "Cut the shit, Klaus. Why are you here?"

His grin widened, revealing a row of yellowing teeth.

"Well, since you asked so nicely," he began, producing a phone from his pocket. My heart lurched in my chest as the screen came to life.

The video began, and my breath hitched.

Julia.

Bound. Gagged. It was like a fist to the solar plexus. My hands tightened into fists, the whites of my knuckles standing in stark contrast against my tanned skin. Rage boiled within me, hot and fast, but it was quickly overshadowed by a sinking

feeling of guilt. I'd been so dismissive earlier, and now she was in a horrible and dangerous predicament.

A muscle in my jaw twitched uncontrollably. How could I have let my guard down? Every fiber of my being was screaming to fix this, to get her out. I swallowed hard, fighting to keep my emotions in check, but my eyes betrayed me, filled with a tempest of pain, anger, and determination.

"You bastard!" Andrew growled, taking a menacing step forward. James gave him the same treatment as me, putting his hand on his shoulder and sending a wordless message.

Klaus chuckled, pausing the video. "Such a fiery spirit she has, this one. Oh, and did I mention? She's pregnant. Went through her purse, found these."

He reached into his inner jacket pocket and withdrew three white plastic sticks, tossing them onto the ground with a clatter.

Pregnancy tests.

"A pity if something were to happen to her and the little one."

Finn's face paled, his voice barely above a whisper. "What have you done?"

I wanted nothing more than to rip Klaus apart, piece by piece.

Klaus shrugged nonchalantly. "She's safe. For now. But that could change."

He leaned against a ruined tattoo chair, looking right at home. "Here's the deal, gentlemen. I want this studio. Hand it over, and maybe your little plaything and her unborn child remain unharmed."

Every instinct in me screamed to charge at him, to tear him apart with my bare hands. But with Julia's life in the balance, the risk was too great.

"And if we refuse?" I asked, my voice barely concealing the rage I felt.

Klaus smirked. “I think you know what’ll happen.”

Silence enveloped the room, punctuated only by the sound of our collective, ragged breathing. The weight of Klaus’s words hung in the air.

James broke the quiet, his voice icy. “You’ll get the studio over my dead body.”

Klaus sighed theatrically. “Oh, I was hoping you’d say that.”

For a long moment, the room was still, a powder keg waiting to explode. But Klaus, with a flick of his wrist, motioned to the crew outside. The men stepped off their bikes, and for a moment I wondered if a fight was about to break out. But another gesture from Klaus stopped them in their tracks.

“Consider my terms,” he said, turning to leave. “You have forty-eight hours.”

With that, he was gone. He called out to his men, the Devils revving their bikes and peeling off. Klaus mounted his own and gunned the engine, racing into the night.

As we watched them drive away, the reality of our situation hit with full force. Julia was in the hands of a madman, and the clock was ticking.

Finn, his face still pale, whispered, “We need to find her, Kai.”

I met his gaze, determination burning within me. “We will.” I declared, “And when we do, Klaus will regret ever crossing us.”

## CHAPTER 28

JULIA



**M**y vision blurred as consciousness gradually seeped in. The sticky humidity of Florida clung to my skin, a familiar discomfort both reassuring and alarming. I was somewhere I recognized, but in circumstances I didn't. The walls around me were stained with nicotine and years of neglect. The mismatched curtains, likely a shade of canary yellow once, hung dulled and dusty, allowing a sliver of muggy sunlight to filter through.

Blinking, I realized my surroundings. I was in a low-rent motel room. The kind that saw more hourly guests than nightly. How cliché. Panic rushed through me, but I did my best to calm it down.

The distant thrum of the city reached my ears—horns, faint music, the rattle of a train. Miami's heartbeat. I knew it intimately. I tilted my head to catch a muted conversation, drifting in through the thin walls from the adjacent room. Spanish, fast-paced, the distinct twang of Miami's dialect.

*Focus, Julia. Think. Try to figure out where you are.*

Pulling my thoughts together, I sniffed the air, catching the familiar tang of salt and brine carried by a soft breeze from a not-so-distant ocean. The wind direction and that specific scent told me I was likely on the outskirts of Miami. Not in the city's pulsing heart, but close.

Panic began to set in as the familiar roar of motorcycles pierced the atmosphere. That deep, rumbling sound that I'd come to associate with danger as of late. The Crimson Devils.

The noise grew in volume, making it clear they were positioning themselves. I was being guarded—and heavily.

I could hear faint laughter, the clink of beer bottles. Likely they were enjoying themselves, thinking they had the upper hand. Well, the joke would be on them soon.

Carefully, without making a sound, I began to test my bindings. My wrists had been secured to the chair legs with zip ties and my hands tied behind my back. My fingers brushed against my back pocket. Remembering an extra hairpin I'd tucked in there earlier, I began to maneuver it into my hand. Falling asleep fully dressed would come to my advantage.

Just as the edges of a plan began to form in my mind, the door to my dingy prison was thrown open. The room's dimness was invaded by the early evening sun and the imposing silhouette of Klaus.

He swaggered in, a sinister smile curving his lips, his eyes raking over me with malicious satisfaction. "Sleeping Beauty awakens," he drawled. "You have a nice nap?"

I glared back at him, my hatred unmistakable. "What do you want, Klaus?"

He chuckled, taking a seat in a chair across from me, his proximity making my skin crawl. "Oh, you'll see. We've got plans for you, darling."

"You think this will stop them from coming after you?" I snapped, jerking my chin toward the faint sounds of his gang outside. "You think you've won?"

Klaus leaned in, his foul breath mingling with the room's musty scent.

"Oh, I know I've won," he whispered. "You're the bait, and they'll come running. And when they do..." His laughter sent shivers down my spine.

Drawing up all the courage and disdain I could muster, I spat words right back at him. "You underestimate them. And you underestimate me."

His eyes flashed with a dangerous gleam. “We’ll see about that.”

Silence settled between us, thick and tense, and I steeled myself for whatever was to come next.

Klaus leaned back, the creaky chair protesting under his weight. He crossed his legs, placing one heavy boot over a knee, his eyes never leaving mine. That triumphant, self-assured glint in them sent a fresh wave of fury through me.

“You know, Julia,” he began, his tone dripping with casual malice, “I have to admit, you’re full of surprises.” He paused, waiting for a reaction, which I refused to give him. “The baby, for instance.”

For a brief moment, my world tilted. My heart lurched into my throat. How the hell did he know? I’d barely had time to process the news myself, let alone share it with anyone beyond Maddie.

Seeing the shock on my face, Klaus grinned wider, clearly delighting in the upper hand he seemed to think he held. “Oh, you didn’t think I had sources? People who talk? The evidence I found in your purse only confirmed it.”

It took all my strength to maintain some semblance of calm, but I could feel the edges of panic creeping in. “What do you want, Klaus?”

His grin became positively predatory. “It’s simple, really. Your precious boys give up the studio by midnight tomorrow, or you and that little unborn surprise of yours become shark chum in the Atlantic.”

I inhaled sharply, willing my racing heart to calm, but it was a losing battle. He’d just played a card I hadn’t expected, and the implications of it were terrifying.

With a smug satisfaction that made me want to lash out, he continued, “See, darling, it’s not just about the studio. It’s about power. About control. It’s about making sure everyone in this town knows who’s really in charge.”

Biting the inside of my cheek to keep from screaming, I managed a brittle retort. “And you think this is the way to do

it? By kidnapping a pregnant woman?”

Klaus laughed, the sound hollow and cold. “Whatever it takes, hot stuff. The Crimson Devils aren’t your regular Sunday bike club. We have reach, influence.” He leaned closer, so close I could count the yellowing stains on his teeth. “I’ve got police officers, local politicians, all in my pocket. Your little band of tattoo artists doesn’t stand a chance.”

Anger bubbled up, overriding my fear. “So why covet our studio so much, Klaus? You’re telling me in this big fucking empire of yours, a single tattoo shop matters that much?”

His eyes hardened. “That studio sits on prime real estate, baby. It’s about expanding my empire, controlling the territory. That spot? It’s the last piece I need.”

I stared at him, taking in every detail. The man was a monster, and he had me right where he wanted me. But I wasn’t about to let him see how deeply he’d rattled me. Drawing a shaky breath, I locked eyes with him. “You might have me, Klaus, but you’ll never break me.”

His eyes darkened. “Time will tell.”

I said nothing, staring him down as best I could, trying to convey every ounce of hate and defiance in my gaze. Whatever came next, I was going to fight with every fiber of my being.

Klaus, seemingly satisfied with the terror he’d sown, rose from the chair, the echo of his boots on the cheap linoleum sounding out.

The dim lighting of the room did nothing to diminish the terrifying gleam in Klaus’s eyes. His smile was nothing short of sadistic as he slid a large knife from its sheath on his hip, brandishing it with a twisted delight. Every inch of me wanted to recoil, to scream, to flee, but I was bound. His gaze drifted to my belly, and a cold, dread-filled pit opened up in my stomach as the tip of the knife drew closer.

“Don’t think for a moment I wouldn’t,” he hissed, voice dripping with menace.

I closed my eyes, waiting for the sharp bite of pain. But instead, the biting pressure of the zip ties around my wrists vanished. My eyes snapped open, and there was Klaus, a smug, self-satisfied smirk plastered across his face.

“See how nice I can be?” he purred mockingly. “All you need to do is be a good little girl.”

I rubbed my wrists, my heart beating so hard I felt like it might explode. Never in my life had I been as scared as I was in that moment. Knowing there was a life inside of me took my sense of self-preservation to another level.

“Remember, sweet thing,” he sneered, “you’re here on *my* terms. No one leaves this place without my permission.” His gaze settled on me for a long moment, and I felt like a rabbit caught in a snare, a meal for a ravenous wolf. “Behave yourself, and maybe, I’ll think about letting you see another sunrise.”

With that, he turned and strolled to the door, but not before throwing one last glare over his shoulder. The door slammed shut with a finality that made my stomach churn, the bolt on the other side driving the point home. I was trapped.

As his footsteps faded, replaced by the distant hum of the Devils’ motorcycles and the low, muttered conversations of the guards outside, I finally let the walls come down. I crumbled, tears stinging my eyes and spilling over.

It wasn’t just the fear or the anguish over my situation. The burning question, the one that was gnawing at the edges of my sanity, was how? How in the hell did Klaus know about the guys and me? The only person I’d confided in was Maddie, but even she didn’t know who exactly it was that I was seeing. Or had she seen something? Figured us out? My heart didn’t want to believe it, but my mind kept playing the traitor, circling back to her again and again. Did Maddie, my only friend, betray me?

I choked back a sob. Maddie had been by my side since my first day at Blackjack’s, through thick and thin. The idea that she might’ve turned on me, even inadvertently, was a wound deeper than anything Klaus could inflict.

The more I thought about it, the more the doubt grew. I told her because I trusted her. Memories of our conversations, of her seemingly innocent curiosity about my relationships and her surprise when I told her about the baby, danced in front of my eyes. Was it all an act? Or did she innocently mention it to someone, having no idea the chain of events it would set off?

*But*, another voice whispered, maybe it wasn't Maddie at all. In this fucked-up world of gang rivalries and backstabbing, there were a hundred ways Klaus could have found out. He'd bragged about his sources, after all.

Taking a shaky breath, I forced myself to calm down. Crying wouldn't get me out of there. I needed a plan. I needed to keep my head down, bide my time, and above all, hope that my guys were coming for me.

## CHAPTER 29

## FINN



The morning light filtering through the blinds in the studio seemed gray and dim, devoid of warmth. The destroyed tattoo chairs seemed the perfect representation for the overall feeling in the shop.

James paced, running a hand through his hair with a frustration we all felt. Andrew looked like a wild animal caged, every muscle coiled, ready to strike. His hands clenched and unclenched, and that dark look in his eyes told me everything I needed to know about where his thoughts were.

Kai slumped against the broken reception desk, looking for all the world like he was nursing a hangover from hell. But it wasn't alcohol that had him so out of it. It was pure, unadulterated fear.

"We need a plan," I began, trying to keep my voice steady. The metallic taste of fear and anger lingered on my tongue. "Klaus has always been a wildcard, but this... this is a new low, even for him."

James stopped pacing. "Our contacts, our allies... it's like everyone's turned a blind eye. No one wants to go against the Crimson Devils."

Andrew's eyes flashed with a dangerous fire. "Then let them come," he growled. "Let me at them. I'll snipe that bastard from a mile away. He won't see it coming."

Kai straightened up. "As much as I would love to see Klaus dead," he said, his voice low and even, "We can't risk a

full-on war with the Devils. Not with Julia in the crossfire.”

“We have to get her out first,” James stated, a determined glint in his eye. “We find her, and then we deal with Klaus.”

Andrew scoffed, his frustration evident. “It’s not that simple. They’re not amateurs. They’ve got their bases covered.”

I took a deep breath, feeling the weight of our situation. “We can’t just go in guns blazing. We need intel, a solid plan, and most importantly, we need to stay calm. Julia’s depending on us.”

The room went quiet, the gravity of the situation sinking in. The steady hum of the fluorescent lights and the distant murmur of Miami outside were the only sounds.

“We can’t go to the cops,” James muttered. “At least, not the ones I don’t personally trust. We tell the wrong badge and word will get right back to Klaus. Off the record, I’m sure that he’s got some of my department in his pocket.”

“Yeah, well,” Kai began, a hint of bitter laughter in his voice, “We’re going to need numbers. Four of us against a hundred Devils... it doesn’t matter how fucking determined we are, that’s a suicide mission.”

Andrew pushed off the wall, his expression hardened. “Then we need to get creative. We find out where Julia is, get her out, and make sure Klaus regrets the day he was born.”

“We’re with you,” James said, nodding. Kai and I echoed the sentiment.

We were a team. We’d been through hell and back together. And for Julia, we’d willingly march into the inferno again.

The clock on the wall ticked away the precious seconds, each one punctuating the heavy weight of our circumstances. Kai looked defeated. His fingers drummed on the glass counter, his face etched in deep lines of concern.

“I can’t believe I’m saying this, but maybe we should just let the studio go,” Kai spoke. His voice, usually firm, was

broken with doubt. “It’s bricks and mortar. We can build again. We can’t replace Julia.”

“Not a chance,” I said. “We’re not giving up.”

James was glued to his phone, dialing number after number, desperation evident in his eyes.

“Damn it! Why isn’t anyone answering?” he growled under his breath, the frustration clear. “I’ve got contacts at the fuckin’ Bureau; they’ve got to be good for something.”

I took a moment, leaning back in my chair, letting the events sink in. The walls of the studio, once covered in vibrant art, seemed to be closing in on me. But it wasn’t the art or even the physical place itself that mattered most—it was what the studio represented. Family, loyalty, a life earned the hard way. It was our father’s legacy. And above all, it was our sanctuary, our haven against the outside world.

Knowing that Kai was even considering giving it up was a stab in the chest.

Julia’s safety, however, eclipsed all of that. The thought of her, scared and alone, made my blood boil. The raw, visceral need to protect her was overwhelming.

“I get it, Kai,” I began, keeping my voice steady despite the volcano ready to erupt inside. “But walking away doesn’t guarantee Julia’s safety. What’s stopping Klaus from coming after us again, wherever we are? He’s made this personal.”

Andrew, who’d been silent, his gaze distant, nodded slowly. “Finn’s right. We can’t just pack up and hope he leaves us be. Once he’s got us on the ropes it’s only a matter of time before he moves in for the kill. We need to make our stand here and now.”

A heavy silence settled over us, but it wasn’t long before I broke it. “We need to face this head-on, take Klaus out once and for all.”

James sighed, rubbing his temples. “If my contacts don’t come through, we’re on our own.”

I stood, feeling every ounce of my responsibility as a leader, as a protector. “Then let’s prepare for that. We have connections too, even if they’re not in law enforcement.”

Kai looked up, determination slowly replacing the desolation in his eyes. “What’re you suggesting?”

I met his gaze squarely. “We rally our allies. We have friends, customers, and others who owe us favors. We’re not as alone as Klaus wants us to believe.”

James pocketed his phone, nodding slowly. “He’s right. We don’t give up. We fight—for Julia, for the studio, for us.”

Andrew clapped his hands together, an eager glint in his eyes. “So, what’s the plan?”

A smile tugged at my lips, even in the face of such adversity. We were more than friends; we were brothers. Bound by ink and blood.

“First, we find Julia. Then we send the Devil back to hell.”



Hours later, we were working with the rest of the crew, cleaning and packing up our gear, preparing to put it into storage for the time being.

But our attention wasn’t on the happenings around the studio, our eyes were on Maddie.

“Say it again,” I growled. “Start from the beginning.”

The room fell silent, tension hanging heavy as Maddie’s words echoed.

“Apparently, while Julia and I were at the coffee shop where she told me that she was pregnant, a so-called friend of Adele’s was sitting nearby. Although we were speaking barely above a whisper, this ‘friend’ must’ve overheard us, immediately taking the news back to Adele.” The weight of that revelation pressed down on all of us. Maddie continued. “An old acquaintance of mine runs in the same circles as Adele’s ‘friend,’ or should I say ‘mole,’ that she planted.

We've kept in touch on and off over the years so she knew how to get a hold of me. When she heard Adele's minion talking about Julia's pregnancy, that Adele knew about it, and that Adele had been seen chatting it up with some of Klaus's crew, she felt it was important to let me know, in case something sinister was being planned."

Trust, once betrayed, always changes the dynamic. Glances were exchanged, a mixture of disbelief, concern, and an underlying current of fear. The implications were immense.

Maddie looked at me, her face ghostly white, her pupils dilated with fear. "I had no idea that Julia and I were being spied upon. Looking back now I do remember a girl that seemed to be leaning toward our table and eyeing us suspiciously. But I didn't think anything of it at the time."

Adele had been conveniently absent since Julia's abduction, her phone going straight to voicemail, and her texts remaining unread. It was unlike her to drop off the grid entirely, especially with how desperate she'd been for our attention over the past couple of weeks. The initial concern had quickly turned to suspicion as the hours ticked by.

And now with Maddie's revelation, the pieces began to align in a haunting jigsaw. Could Adele truly be involved in Julia's kidnapping and the destruction of the studio? The idea seemed ludicrous initially, but the mounting evidence was hard to dismiss. Our faces all wore the same dawning realization—Adele's potential involvement with Klaus's twisted plot was beginning to look more and more likely.

I could feel my jaw clench, every muscle in my body going taut. Betrayal was a bitter pill, especially when it came from those you'd considered allies.

Kai stepped in and spoke, his voice even but cold. "However it happened doesn't matter. We can't undo what's been done. What matters now is getting Julia back."

Andrew's eyes narrowed into a glare that could freeze fire. "Adele's lucky that's our priority right now."

A bitter taste rose in my mouth. My fingers curled into tight fists, nails biting into the palms.

“I knew Adele was up to something,” I growled. “I should’ve acted on my instincts earlier. Now, we’re neck-deep in this mess.”

Kai spoke again, his voice tinged with anger. “We can’t keep pointing fingers. It won’t help Julia. We need to act and act fast.”

I nodded, letting the anger momentarily subside. “Kai’s right. We need a plan, and a good one.”

Andrew’s eyes fixed on mine. “What do you suggest?”

Taking a deep breath, I leaned against the counter. “We need leverage. Something Klaus wants as much, if not more, than the studio.”

Kai leaned against the wall, his hands in his pockets, his expression clouded with a mix of worry and determination.

“So, bro,” he began, his voice strained, “what’s the play here?”

I stared at Kai for a long moment, the pleading in my brother’s eyes telling me everything I needed to know. I straightened up, eyes blazing with resolve.

“We end this. All of it,” I declared. “If we get Julia back without taking out Klaus, it’s only a matter of time until he’s back. And I don’t know about you guys, but putting our girl and our child in danger is something I’m not going to be able to forgive.”

Kai and the rest of the guys agreed.

“We take out Klaus,” I said sharply. “He’s the beating heart of that damned gang. We want our lives back? We want safety for Julia and the baby? Then we rip that heart out, once and for all.”

## CHAPTER 30

## JAMES



The studio was silent, and the scent of ink and antiseptic mingling with char still hung heavy in the air. We'd long sent everyone home, leaving just the four of us to grapple with what we had to do, shadows cast by the dimming daylight.

For a time, no one spoke. The news of the pregnancy was still in the air like a heavy cloud, casting a strange mix of joy and dread. Kai looked at the ground, his knuckles white against the edge of the counter. Andrew's eyes were ablaze, a burning intensity that spoke of fury and fear. Finn's face mirrored mine, a cocktail of emotions we couldn't quite articulate.

"A kid..." Andrew murmured, breaking the heavy silence. His voice was filled with wonder, a stark contrast to his rugged demeanor. "We're going to have a kid."

I nodded slowly, the reality settling in. "Not just any kid," I replied, voice rough. "*Our* kid."

I ran my fingers through my hair. Finn spoke, his voice edged with worry, "One of us is going to be a father."

Andrew, leaning back on the couch, raised an eyebrow. "Does it even matter? We've always had each other's backs. Every fight, every victory, every loss. This is no different."

I nodded in agreement, looking each of them in the eye. "It's not about who the biological father is. We're a family. That baby will have four fathers. Four protectors."

Finn chuckled, his nerves evident. "And a hell of a lot of love, too."

Kai smirked, “An overload, I’d say.”

I couldn’t help but smile, even amidst the tension. “Can you imagine raising a kid? Teaching them to ride a bike and all that?”

Andrew chuckled. “Or hell showing ‘em how to throw a proper punch?”

Kai smiled. “Hey, gotta ensure the kid can stand their ground.”

I smirked. “Let’s get this kid walking first before we teach him how to kick ass.”

“Or *her*,” Kai corrected.

Finn spoke, his voice serious. “First, guys, we’ve got a job to do. We have to get Julia back, safe and sound.”

A newfound determination settled within us, solidifying our resolve. Kai added, “She’s our priority right now. Her and the baby.”

I clenched my fist, feeling the heavy weight of responsibility.

Finn smiled weakly, rubbing the back of his neck. “She’s not just carrying our future, she’s also the woman we all love.”

Kai lifted his head. “We always knew there were stakes involved. But this... this adds a weight I never imagined.”

My mind raced. Julia, fierce and vibrant, carrying our child. The thought brought both exhilaration and gut-wrenching fear. Our joy was tainted by the knowledge that Klaus had her. That monster had her and was using her, and our unborn child, as leverage.

“We’re going to get her back. No matter what it takes,” Andrew stated, voice deadly.

Finn sighed, running a hand through his hair. “That bastard has no idea what he’s awakened.”

I could feel the rage simmering, a potent force ready to explode. “We’re most definitely going to get her back,” I vowed, my voice dripping with promise. “And when we do,

Klaus will pay. Every single thing he's done to us, to her... he's going to regret it."

We stood in a circle, the weight of our promise clear. Each of us was committed, driven by a fierce protectiveness we hadn't known before. The time for talk was over.

My phone buzzed, and I pulled it from my pocket, glancing at the screen. It was a text from one of my Bureau contacts.

"Heads up," I said, reading the text aloud. "*We're on to something. Update soon.*"

The others watched me, waiting for an explanation. I took a moment, gathering my thoughts.

"I bugged Adele's purse a few weeks back," I said calmly, gauging their reactions.

Andrew frowned. "You did what?"

Kai looked surprised, but Finn's face was stoic, almost prideful.

"I had a feeling," I explained, my voice cold and steady. "I didn't trust her from the get-go, from the moment she walked into this place begging for her old job back."

Finn chuckled darkly. "Always the detective, aren't you? Trust no one and all that shit."

I nodded. "Sometimes it pays off."

"Is that even legal, James?" Kai asked, eyebrows raised.

I smirked. "Let's just say it's a gray area. And right now, with Julia's life on the line, I couldn't care less about the technicalities."

Andrew leaned against a wall, crossing his arms. "So, what did our little spy device pick up?"

"Well, I've been collecting information. Most of it was irrelevant—Adele chatting about her latest shopping spree or gossiping with her girlfriends. But occasionally, I'd pick up snippets of her talking to someone, telling them about what

was going on at the studio. I wasn't sure who it was, fucker was always too quiet. Looking back, no doubt it was Klaus."

Kai narrowed his eyes. "That bitch! Right under our fuckin' noses."

Finn clenched his fists, eyes cold. "It's one thing to play games with us. It's another to involve an innocent woman and an unborn child."

I couldn't have agreed more.

"I didn't mention it before because, honestly, I was waiting for a more direct connection. I wanted to ensure I wasn't overreacting and accusing without enough evidence. But now," I held up my phone, "this might be the breakthrough we need."

Andrew looked skeptical. "So, this FBI contact of yours, can we trust them? Can they help us get Julia back?"

I hesitated, weighing how much to reveal. "They're not directly involved, but they're keeping an eye on things for me. Let's just say they owe me a favor. As for trust? Right now, it's our best lead. And I'd take a shaky lead over none at all. Not to mention that if we can connect Klaus to a kidnapping, that opens his sorry ass up to a world of hurt."

Kai released a heavy sigh. "It's a start. We'll use whatever we've got."

I nodded. "For now, let's keep this between us. I'll update you as soon as I know more."

The air in the room felt bleak, the gravity of what was happening pressing down on us. It was a game of cat and mouse, and we were done being the prey. No matter what the cost, we were going to bring Julia home.

## CHAPTER 31

## JULIA



I sat in the dim room, hands trembling. The weight of my situation felt suffocating. Tears streamed down my face as I tried to stifle the overwhelming fear clawing at me.

The same thoughts kept spiraling through my mind. My writing, the dreams of publishing my work, the ambition that drove me... all of it began to feel like a distant fantasy. Even a potential book deal that could have become the pinnacle of success felt trivial, nothing more than a reminder of everything I stood to lose.

And the baby. *My* baby. The tiny life growing inside of me, unaware of the danger swirling around it. The emotions were all-consuming: fierce protectiveness, guilt, anguish. The sheer unfairness that an innocent being might never get to experience the world beyond the confines of the godforsaken room I was being held in.

I took shaky breaths, trying to push back the rising tide of despair. Drowning in sorrow was not an option. It would make me vulnerable, and vulnerability was a luxury I couldn't afford.

The room was bathed in a sickly yellow glow from the one dim light above. I could still hear the muffled voices of my captors outside, the distinct rumble of bikes in the distance. I knew the odds were stacked against me, but there was no way in hell I was letting that room become my grave.

I had to fight. For my baby, for the love I shared with my four men, and for my very existence. The resolve began to

form, my brain ticking through possibilities. I wasn't done yet. Not by a long shot.

A faint knock interrupted my thoughts, and the door creaked open. Adele sauntered in, her heels clicking against the grimy floor. Her typically gaudy makeup was even more pronounced in the dimness of the room, and she looked around with barely concealed delight at the state I was in. I wish I could say I was shocked to see her, but it all made a sick sort of sense—of course, she'd been involved all along.

“Look at you,” she sneered, a venomous smile crossing her face. “Queen of Blackjack's, reduced to this.”

I glared at her, the cold fury evident in my eyes. She was there to rub salt in the wounds, and I was in no mood for her games. But I'd have to hear her out if I was going to find a way out of this.

“What the hell do you want?” I snarled.

Adele took her time, relishing the moment. She circled me slowly, her heels echoing through the room. “You thought you were so special,” she said, leaning in close enough for me to gag on her overpowering perfume. “Stealing glances from them, hogging all their attention, attention that should've been mine!”

“You're delusional,” I shot back, not willing to let her have her moment entirely. But she only chuckled, stepping back to study me as if I were an interesting specimen under a bell jar.

“I never planned on betraying them, you know,” she twirled a strand of her dyed hair. “But they had the audacity to reject me. Me! And then you waltz in, getting all those stolen looks, and I realized it wasn't just about business or friendship. You were their little secret.”

I grit my teeth, trying to hold back my rising anger. It wasn't the time to lash out. Adele was loving this too much, and I wasn't about to give her the satisfaction of breaking me. “So what? Is this your way of getting back at them for spurning you?”

She smirked. “Oh, it’s not just about revenge, darling. It’s about power. The guys had something I wanted, and when they didn’t give it to me willingly, I found another way.”

The room grew heavy with tension. The betrayal ran deeper than I thought. I had to get more out of her. “Why tell Klaus? Why not just confront me?”

Adele leaned closer, her voice dripping with malice. “Klaus had been trying to find a way to break the guys, and all he needed was a soft spot. What’s softer than their woman? And once I figured out you were pregnant, it was the perfect play.”

My heart raced, fear and anger intertwining. But I felt a flicker of hope. If Adele was there gloating, it meant she felt she had the upper hand. It meant she might be willing to let something more slip.

“And what’s in it for you?” I asked, trying to keep my voice steady. “You think Klaus will reward you?”

Adele laughed, a cruel, cold sound. “Klaus doesn’t have to reward me. The satisfaction of seeing you like this? That’s reward enough. All the same, he’s going to take care of me, he was *very* clear about that. As for the guys, they’ll realize they made a mistake in rejecting me. And when they do, I’ll be waiting.”

“You’re completely insane if you think they’ll ever forgive you for this,” I spat.

Her smirk only widened. “We’ll see about that.”

She leaned against the wall, her silhouette framed by the dim light filtering in.

“By the way, do you really think Klaus will just let you go once he gets the studio?” she began, her voice dripping with mock sympathy. “Oh honey, you’re in for a treat. Klaus gets what he wants, and then he snips off any loose ends. That’s how he’s always operated.”

Tears welled up in my eyes, but I blinked them away, refusing to let her see my fear.

She chuckled again, tilting her head to one side as she studied me. “It’s simple,” she purred. “Once Klaus gets the studio and you’re... out of the picture, those boys will be devastated. Shattered. Vulnerable. And I’ll be right there ready to comfort them.”

My stomach churned with a mixture of disgust and rage. “You think they’ll turn to you? After everything you’ve done?”

She smirked, a wicked glint in her eye. “Pain has a funny way of making people seek comfort, darling. And who better to provide that comfort than someone familiar? I’ve known Finn and Kai forever. And James and Andrew aren’t too shabby either. They’ll be mine before too long.”

I shook my head in disbelief. “You’re deluded. Totally fucking deluded. You’re honestly okay with murdering a defenseless child?”

But Adele just laughed, the sound grating on my nerves. “Oh don’t be so dramatic. I bet they don’t even want the little brat. They’ll be relieved and then all I have to do is bide my time. It might take a few months but I can be a very, *very* patient girl.”

The reality of the situation hit me like a ton of bricks. Adele had played all of us, using information as her weapon. The future she painted was a bleak one, and a cold dread settled in my chest. She wasn’t just playing a short game; she was in it for the long haul.

“You might have your plans,” I said, voice quivering but filled with a resolve I didn’t know I had, “but you’re underestimating them. And you’re definitely underestimating me you twisted bitch.”

Adele’s eyes darkened, but she didn’t flinch. Instead, she gave me a lingering look that spoke of defiance. “I guess time will tell, huh, Julia?”

Before she could say anything else, a commotion sounded from outside, men yelling.

The door nearly flew off its hinges as it slammed open, the hulking figure of Klaus dominating the frame. His presence, like a storm cloud, instantly swallowed the room's atmosphere. But even more startling was the sight of him roughly grabbing Adele by the arm and tossing her out as if she weighed no more than a ragdoll.

"How about some privacy?" he snarled.

"Klaus, what the hell—" she shrieked, but he slammed the door behind her, cutting off any further protest. Klaus's sinister shadow now stood between me and the exit.

I tried to steady my racing heart, force some semblance of calm over my panicked thoughts. The last time we were in that same room, he had been in control, toying with my emotions, leaving me shattered. He was there yet again, gun in hand, and the ferocity in his eyes spoke of a rage barely contained.

It was clear from his expression that whatever had just happened outside, it wasn't part of Klaus's plan.

"You don't have to do this," I whispered, my mind racing to find any way out of the immediate threat he posed.

Klaus prowled closer, circling me like a hungry wolf, a smirk plastered across his face.

"You know, little lady," he began with a sneer, "you've caused me a lot of trouble. Maybe *too much* trouble."

I clenched my teeth, refusing to let him see me waver. The image of Adele's sinister gloating was still fresh in my mind, and now Klaus was taking over the role with unnerving delight.

"Maybe I should kill you now, let the guys think you're still alive. By the time they realize the truth, it'll be too fuckin' late." As he was about to continue his menacing tirade, an echoing bang rang out, causing both of us to flinch. Then, suddenly, the room was plunged into darkness, the lights completely snuffed out. The sudden shift from relative light to total blackness was disorienting. My heart raced in my chest, and for a split second, the playing field seemed level. The predator, for just a moment, seemed as disoriented as the prey.

“Stay right where you are!” he shouted, springing toward me. “Don’t make a fuckin’ move!”

Klaus lunged closer, and although I couldn’t see it, I knew the cold steel of the gun was inches from my face. I could sense the weight of it, and I knew the power it held. A single squeeze of the trigger, and everything would be over.

But despite the fear I felt, I couldn’t shake the notion that the blackout hadn’t been a coincidence.

## CHAPTER 32

ANDREW



Ten minutes earlier...

The wild hues of orange and pink painted the Miami skyline, creating a beautiful yet haunting backdrop as I settled on the rooftop. The contrast between the city's serene beauty and the grim urgency of my task was striking. Through the scope of my sniper rifle, the grimy motel became sharply in focus. Every flutter of a curtain, every glow of a cigarette; the details were almost painfully sharp. Memories of past missions came flooding back, the weight of what I was about to do pressing heavily on me.

I began counting Crimson Devils. Their movements were cocky, predictable, their stupid swagger evident even as they patrolled. "Six outside, two on bikes circling," I reported into the earpiece.

"Seems low," James said. "Stay frosty, there might be more. And remember, non-lethal shot. We don't want a bloodbath."

Kai's nervous voice crackled through, "Any sign of Julia from your angle?"

"Not yet" I responded, adjusting the lens. The tight knot of anger in my gut grew. Why did it have to come to this? All roads led to Klaus. "Got a room I think she might be in, but the curtains are drawn. No way to see inside but I just spotted Adele going out and Klaus going in a few moments ago. Almost certain that's the one."

"We need a distraction," Finn mused over the connection.

Breathing deeply, I took in the city's mixed scents—car exhaust, the distant aroma from various food trucks, and the ocean's unmistakable saltiness. "There's a transformer near the east end. Blow it, and the motel goes dark."

A brief silence ensued before Kai gave the order. "Do it."

I took aim at the transformer, remembering the rhythm: breathe in, aim, breathe out, shoot. When I was ready, I pulled the trigger slowly.

*Boom.*

The explosion followed immediately, a shower of sparks streaming out of the transformer as the shot hit its mark. Darkness consumed the motel.

The Crimson Devils erupted into chaos, their shouts carrying across the distance. "Move now!" James commanded.

My finger rested lightly on the trigger, every heartbeat a testament to what was at stake.

"This is for Julia," I whispered.

The colors in the sky had deepened, and the city's ambient light provided just enough visibility. From my vantage point, Kai and Finn appeared as shadows, moving stealthily amidst the motel's patchy illumination.

Kai approached the first Devil from behind, his movements fluid. A sharp twist and a sudden, choked-off cry ensured the man wouldn't be raising any alarms. He went limp and unconscious, Kai's arm around his neck, dragging him silently behind a row of shrubs.

Finn waited for another thug to pass by. Just as the man tossed away a lit cigarette, Finn lunged, ramming the heel of his hand into the guy's nose. The Devil crumpled to the ground, his cigarette still burning on the concrete. He'd feel that one in the morning.

I tracked their progress, impressed despite the dire circumstances. These two had always been adept at hand-to-hand, but the urgency of the situation sharpened their movements.

James, on the other hand, was more direct, no-nonsense. I watched as he made his way toward the room where we believed Julia was being held. A solitary guard, larger and more formidable than the others, stood there.

James halted for a split second, assessing the situation, then lunged forward, producing a small taser from his jacket. The guard barely had time to register the threat before James jabbed it into his side. The man's limbs locked, and he toppled, his massive frame creating a substantial thud.

I tightened my grip on the rifle, my attention shifting from one man to the next, ensuring that no Devil would blindside them. Every passing second, the risk grew, but I had to trust that the guys had it under control on the ground.

A noise drew my attention to the left, and I zoomed in on a lurking figure with a radio. A potential informant. I had no choice. Taking a slow, controlled breath, I aimed and squeezed the trigger. The radio jumped from his hand as the shot hit, and James was near enough to finish the job with a quick and silent chokehold.

Above all, I remained hyper-aware of that particular room's window, ready to unleash hell should anyone inside decide to harm Julia. The tension was overbearing, every nerve in my body on high alert, knowing that we were racing against time. Knowing that any slip, any minor oversight, could cost Julia her life.

Then I spotted something.

Through the crosshairs of my scope, I could see Klaus bursting out of the room, his hand gripping a gun, its cold metal gleaming against the faint light. The intensity of the moment tightened my grip on the rifle, my finger on the trigger. Every second counted. A tinge of relief washed over me, Klaus's presence all but confirming the room where Julia was being held.

"Just had eyes on Klaus!" I snarled. "Room two-forty!"

Then, the door burst open to an adjacent room, and Adele staggered out, her expression a mix of fear and confusion. It

would have been satisfying to see her disheveled state under any other circumstance, but the raw urgency of the situation left no room for such feelings. All the same, she was no danger. I took the crosshairs off her and back onto the door.

Suddenly, the night erupted with the guttural roar of motorcycles, their headlamps slashing through the dim surroundings, illuminating a sea of Crimson Devils jackets. A chilling realization took hold. This wasn't just a few bikers; this was a full-blown cavalry charge. The Devils had come in force.

"Guys," I hissed into the earpiece, "We've got a serious problem. The Devils are rolling in, and they're rolling in deep."

A brief pause followed, then Kai's voice, strained and urgent, crackled in my ear, "Can you give a count?"

I quickly scanned the area, trying to determine their numbers. "Too many. At least two dozen, maybe more."

James cut in, his voice filled with tension. "We can't handle those numbers, not without backup."

Finn responded, sounding grim. "Then we make our move fast, grab Julia, and get the fuck out."

I shifted my focus back to Klaus inside the room. The weight of my responsibility pressed down hard. My position gave me a clear shot. It was a temptation, but it was also a risk. If I took the shot and missed, or if Klaus didn't go down immediately, Julia would be in direct line of fire.

But the thought of that bastard threatening her, along with everything else he had done, made my blood boil.

"Keep me updated," I told the guys, my voice steel-edged. "I've got eyes on Klaus. If he so much as flinches in Julia's direction, I'm taking the shot."

The commotion below grew louder as more Devils dismounted and began to spread out. I could feel the weight of our dire situation, the odds heavily stacked against us.

One thing was clear, I wasn't going to let anything happen to Julia, or to any of my friends. This was our family, and the Crimson Devils were about to find out just how far we were willing to go to protect our own.

## CHAPTER 33

## JAMES



The weight of the silencer at the tip of my tranquilizer pistol steadied my nerves. Creeping up on another pair of unsuspecting Devils, I made quick work of both, dropping them in swift succession with a dart each to the neck. As I pulled back into the shadows, the faint reflection from Andrew's scope on the rooftop caught my eye. I felt an instant wash of calm, knowing he had our backs from the high ground. He was our guardian angel, watching, waiting.

But that calm was short-lived. The unmistakable roar of engines grew louder, more intense, with each passing second. A quick scan of the area confirmed my worst fears. More Devils, too many to count, were storming the motel grounds. With the sheer number of them, I could only guess there had to be a stash house or base nearby.

Taking cover behind a rusty, old van, I barely managed to dodge a flurry of bullets aimed my way. The sound of gunshots rang in the night, deafening and chaotic. A bullet grazed my shoulder, the pain sharp and immediate, but I shook it off, trying to remain focused on the next step.

Nearby, I caught sight of Finn and Kai, pressed up against the wall of the motel, guns at the ready. I darted through the maze of cars and bikes, finally reaching them, our backs pressed together as we faced the onslaught of the Devils.

"We're crazy outnumbered," Kai shouted over the noise, sweat and dirt marking his face.

Finn was already thinking three steps ahead. “We need to regroup and get to Julia somehow. All this noise might make them cocky. And they’ve got numbers, but no coordination. They’ll make a mistake.”

I nodded. “Andrew’s got our backs from above. We need to distract them, get them into the open.”

I reached around my back, touching the handle of the Glock 17, my service pistol, that I’d brought with me. The plan was to make things non-lethal, but it gave me some comfort knowing I had the option.

Finn peeked around the corner, his face tightening at what he saw. “There’s a gas tank a few yards from the main group. If we can hit that—”

Kai finished his brother’s thought, “It’d create a big enough distraction.”

“But who’s going to make the shot?” I asked.

Before either of them could respond, a bullet hit the wall above us, causing bits of plaster to rain down.

“I’ll do it,” I declared, determination filling me. “You two, get to Julia.”

Finn looked like he was about to protest, but Kai’s hand on his shoulder stopped him. “We trust you, James,” Kai said, eyes locked onto mine. “Get it done.”

Without waiting for a response, I pulled my weapon and darted out, drawing the fire toward me. Every muscle in my body tensed, every fiber screamed for survival. The gas tank was in sight, and with a deep breath, I aimed and fired.

A massive explosion ripped through the night, sending Devils scrambling. The fiery inferno provided the exact distraction we needed. From the corner of my eye, I saw Kai and Finn sprinting toward Julia’s room.

I dove behind a vehicle for cover, reloading and preparing for the next wave. With Andrew above and the chaos below, we were making a stand. This was our fight, and the Devils

were about to learn what happened when they crossed the wrong crew.

The scorching flames provided the break we needed. With the Devils disoriented and confused, we took our chance. I made a beeline for the hotel room where Julia was being held captive, hot on Finn and Kai's heels.

Adele emerged out of nowhere, stumbling in her expensive heels, her mascara smeared with tears. "Please, don't hurt me!" she begged, grabbing onto Finn's jacket, her voice thick with desperation.

We brushed past her, with Finn almost throwing her off him. The room's door was flimsy at best, and it took a single, powerful kick from Kai to bust it open.

Time seemed to slow the moment we entered the room. There she was, looking terror-stricken yet fierce. But my heart plummeted at the sight that followed. Klaus, with a maniacal glint in his eyes, had a gun pressed tightly to her temple.

"You think you're heroes, huh?" Klaus sneered, backing up toward the room's window, dragging Julia with him. "You think this changes anything?"

The room was a vortex of tension, every breath held, every muscle coiled and ready to strike. In that moment, an idea struck me. The window. If I could give Andrew a clear line of sight...

As subtly as I could, I edged my way toward the window, never taking my eyes off Klaus. The curtains were drawn, blocking Andrew's view. My fingers itched to open them, but I needed to be careful.

"Klaus, it's over. Let her go. We can sort this out," Finn reasoned, his voice level, but the strain evident.

Klaus laughed, a chilling sound that echoed in the compact room. "You think it's that easy? After all that has happened? You think I don't know you'll kill me?"

While they conversed, my hand slowly inched toward the curtain cord. A quick tug, and they would fly open.

I didn't want to force Andrew's hand to make a kill shot, but it appeared I had no other choice.

With a sudden yank, the curtains flew open. The world outside was clearly visible, and more importantly, the room was exposed to Andrew's watchful eyes.

Klaus momentarily blinked in response to the act, his grip faltering on Julia just a bit.

Kai lunged, trying to use the momentary distraction to his advantage, but Klaus was quicker, pulling Julia closer, the gun still menacingly aimed at her head.

"We'll all die before I let you take her from me," Klaus hissed, desperation and madness evident in his tone.

A cold, hard lump settled in my stomach. I didn't want it to come to this. I didn't want Andrew to pull that trigger. I had seen the aftermath of the last time he'd been forced to kill—the sleepless nights, the haunted look in his eyes. It tore him apart then, and I feared what it would do to him now.

But as I looked at Julia, her life hanging in the balance, I knew what the priority was. If it came down to it, as much as it would pain all of us, Andrew would have to make that shot. For her, for us.

The motel room was thick with angst, an unbearable torment about to unleash. Klaus's grip on Julia's arm tightened, his face contorted with fear and determination.

"I've given my life to the Crimson Devils," Klaus spat, his eyes darting between us. "I won't be fucked over by you or anyone else."

Finn's usually calm demeanor was replaced with raw frustration. "This isn't about the damn club, Klaus. This is about a woman's life, innocent and pregnant. She doesn't have anything to do with the conflict between you and us."

Kai chimed in. "You can have the studio. We'll leave but let her go. No one needs to get hurt here."

I watched the scene, acutely aware of Andrew's scope trained on the room. Every second that passed was another

moment he struggled with the weight of the choice he might have to make. To save Julia, he'd pull the trigger, no question. But that act might leave scars too deep to ever heal.

But Andrew wasn't the only one willing to go to extremes to protect the ones we loved. As I listened to Finn and Kai plead, I knew Klaus wasn't going to budge. He was too far gone. It was clear to me what had to be done.

I began to slowly lower my gun, hoping the movement would register as a sign of surrender and not alert Klaus. "Okay, okay," I said, voice measured and steady. "Let's talk. No more guns. Let her go, and we can sort this out."

Julia's curious eyes met mine, searching, wondering. With the subtlest of nods, I signaled her. She tensed ever so slightly, a clear indication she understood my intent.

For what felt like an eternity but was probably only seconds, we waited. Klaus's grip on Julia faltered as he seemed to consider my words. Then, in an explosion of movement, Julia drove her elbow into Klaus's ribs with all her might. Caught off guard, he grunted and stumbled backward.

That was my opening.

In one fluid motion, I raised my weapon and fired a single, fatal shot. Klaus's eyes widened in surprise and disbelief as the bullet pierced his heart. He hung still for a moment, shock painted on his face. Then he crumpled to the floor, lifeless, a pool of crimson forming around him.

Outside, Adele's scream pierced the relative silence, her wail a stark contrast to the heavy roar of motorcycle engines approaching. The cavalry had arrived, and from the sounds of it, they were in greater numbers than we had anticipated.

Julia, still trembling from the ordeal, ran into my arms, her body shaking. "Thank you," she whispered.

I held her tight for a moment, trying to calm her. "We need to move," I whispered back.

The roar outside grew louder. There wasn't a second to lose. We had taken down Klaus, but his followers were still very much alive and out for blood.

## CHAPTER 34

## JULIA



The room spun. The echo of the gunshot still reverberated in my ears, a haunting memory of the fatal moment. My fingers clenched, nails digging into my palms, trying to ground myself in the horrific reality of it all. The dank smell of the motel room was suddenly more overpowering, every small stain on the carpet and chipped paint on the walls becoming excessively vivid.

My gaze lingered on Klaus, as if I didn't quite comprehend that he was dead. But there he lay, still as a stone.

I ran to James, Kai and Finn at my side in an instant. Their solid presence was both soothing and deeply necessary. They formed a protective barrier, shielding me from the immediate danger. I could feel the heat of their bodies, the rhythmic pounding of their hearts, offering me some measure of comfort.

"It's okay," Kai whispered, his breath in my ear. His voice was hoarse, strained, but the conviction in his words was clear. "We're going to get out of here."

"We've got you," Finn added, his hand finding mine and giving it a reassuring squeeze.

My eyes, heavy and brimming with tears, flitted to Klaus's lifeless form once more. The reality of the moment felt like a disjointed nightmare. There he was, sprawled out, blood slowly pooling around him, evidence of the finality of his fate. It was a sight that would be etched into my mind forever.

The commotion outside was a deafening, chaotic mix of shouts and engines revving. The door burst open, and another form entered my periphery. Adele.

Her face, usually so composed, was a storm of emotion. Hatred. Despair. Panic. She rushed forward, as if in some last-ditch attempt to be the heroine of her own twisted story.

But James was ready. With an agility I'd come to expect from him, he stepped in front of her, capturing her wrist in a vice-like grip. With a swift movement, he pushed her to the ground, swiftly cuffing her hands behind her back. It all happened so fast; I could barely process it.

"You can't do this!" Adele screeched, her voice filled with a mix of fury and fear. Her eyes darted around the room, likely searching for an ally. But none came to her aid. "I didn't do anything wrong!"

"Conspiracy, aiding and abetting in kidnapping and providing intel to a known criminal. Should I go on?" James' voice was icy, devoid of any emotion. His gaze locked onto her, and for a moment, they were the only two people in the room. It was a standoff, a battle of wills.

Adele spat in defiance, but her eyes betrayed her. They shimmered with tears, and I could see the dawning realization of the magnitude of her actions. She had gambled, thinking she'd come out on top. But she found herself as the pawn in a deadly game that had spiraled out of her control.

"We need to move, now!" Kai's urgent voice pulled me back from the scene. Finn and James nodded in agreement.

As we began our precarious journey out of the motel, I took one last look at Klaus's body and the defeated Adele. A bitter cocktail of relief, rage, and sorrow coursed through my veins.

The sensation of victory was short-lived. The atmosphere outside the motel room felt like walking into a thick fog, cold and overwhelming. The roar of motorcycles grew louder, filling the air with a sense of danger. Before my brain could

even process it all, the motel was drowned in a sea of angry red.

The club's arrival was like a storm. Dark clouds of mayhem and violence settling over the parking lot, an open arena for the impending showdown. Their guns, glinting in the weak lights of the fading sun, were held with a confidence that sent chills down my spine.

A deafening explosion of shots rang out. Instinctively, I ducked, pulling Kai and Finn down with me. The pop-pop-pop of gunfire felt like it was everywhere, echoing and bouncing off the walls of the motel and the parked cars. I saw James dive behind a nearby dumpster, weapon drawn, ready to return fire.

But as the first of the bikers began to fall, their confident sneers replaced by grimaces of pain, a realization clicked into place. Each Devil was hit in the shoulder or the hip, strategic shots meant to incapacitate rather than kill.

Andrew.

His position atop the nearby building, combined with his unmatched sniping skills, had turned him into our guardian angel. He was a shadow, invisible and deadly, ensuring none of the Devils got too close to us. I sent a silent prayer of gratitude to him. We needed every advantage we could get.

I could hear the sounds of their pain-filled grunts, their anger boiling over as they tried to figure out where the shots were coming from. It was the perfect diversion.

“Move!” James shouted from his position, signaling for us to get to the car.

With Kai and Finn acting as shields on either side, I darted forward. The night air was filled with a cacophony of anguish, gunshots, and roaring engines.

A few yards away from the car, a stray bullet whizzed past me, its close proximity causing a rush of adrenaline. The realization that death was so near, lurking in the shadows, waiting for one wrong move, was sobering.

Kai grunted, pulling me close as Finn unlocked the car. “Stay down,” he murmured in my ear, his voice filled with the kind of intensity only life-threatening situations can create.

The back door flew open, and James was right behind us, pushing me inside. As the tires screeched, and we sped away from the scene, the world outside blurred into a frenetic mess of colors and sounds.

For a split second, time slowed down. We were on the run, our lives hanging by the thinnest of threads, and the relentless pursuit of the Crimson Devils was a persistent nightmare. But in a sudden moment of clarity, I realized that wasn't it. That wasn't going to be where our story would end.

Like a symphony reaching its crescendo, the drone of helicopter blades roared through the sky, silencing the commotion of gunshots and engines. Massive spotlights from above cut through the darkness, bathing the entire motel in a stark, white brilliance.

A barrage of SWAT vans burst onto the scene, rolling through with an unmatched momentum that left no room for resistance. They were closely followed by sleek, imposing FBI SUVs, cutting off any potential escape routes for the bikers. The operation was methodical, swift, and ruthless.

The transformation of the motel parking lot was rapid. No longer a battleground, it became a theater of law enforcement. Officers, clad in full tactical gear, descended upon the Crimson Devils, neutralizing the immediate threats with a combination of gunshots and powerful tasers. Those that weren't instantly subdued were quickly tackled and handcuffed, a sea of black leather and gleaming chrome quickly giving way to dark blue uniforms and the iridescent sheen of badges.

In the midst of it all, the sheer force of everything that was unfolding became too much. Finn and Kai, with their ever-present protective instincts, closed in around me, their warmth providing a much-needed anchor. My knees felt weak, and the weight of the past hours pressed down hard.

I was shaking uncontrollably. Tremors of shock, fear, and overwhelming relief ran through me. Tears, which I'd been

holding back for longer than I cared to admit, poured freely now. Encased in the protective circle of arms and the assurance of safety, it felt as though a dam had broken inside me.

“You’re safe now,” Finn whispered into my ear, his voice breaking through the fog of emotions that threatened to drown me. His grip tightened, as if trying to pull me back to reality.

Kai gently brushed away the tears from my cheeks, his touch gentle yet filled with an intensity that sent waves of comfort down to my core. “We’ve got you, Julia. It’s over.”

“Yeah,” James said. “And we’re never letting you go.”

As the last of the bikers were being arrested, the entire place buzzing with activity, it struck me. What just happened wasn’t just a random FBI swoop-in. It was a well-planned, calculated sting, a culmination of all the covert operations, the careful preparation, and the risks that people like James had taken to bring the Devils down.

The nightmare was finally over, and the dawn was sure to arrive.

## CHAPTER 35

## JULIA



The events of the day left me feeling like I had been trapped inside a damn washing machine, tumbling end over end, then spit out, dazed and disoriented. The motel, the gunshots, the terrifying certainty of impending doom... it all played out in my mind like a horrifying, disjointed film reel.

However, the night couldn't have been more different. It was as though someone had taken the color palette of my life and painted it anew. We found ourselves in one of Miami's swankiest hotel penthouses. High up in the sky, it seemed as if the city itself was laid out at our feet. The skyline stretched out in all directions, skyscrapers rising like glittering stalagmites, their windows shimmering with a thousand different stories. Beyond, the Atlantic sprawled, a vast stretch of black velvet under the moon, the waters twinkling with reflections of the distant city lights.

The penthouse itself was no less impressive. Open-plan, with glass walls offering an unobstructed 360-degree view. Plush velvet couches, a grand piano in the corner, and modern art pieces dotting the space. It exuded luxury. I didn't need it, but the guys said I deserved it after everything I had endured.

Finn had brought in a tray filled with all my favorites—steak, fries, and a rich, decadent chocolate mousse—for the baby, of course, he'd said with a smile. Kai had run a bath for me, the heady scent of lavender essential oil filling the room. Andrew and James took turns massaging my aching shoulders and feet.

“You guys,” I began, an uncomfortable feeling pricking at me. It was too much. I wasn’t used to such unadulterated pampering.

Andrew interrupted with a chuckle. “Don’t say a word. Just sit back and enjoy. You’ve been through hell. Besides,” he said, winking, “you’re relaxing for two now.”

James’ face was serious. “Jules, after what happened today... let us take care of you, okay? Just for tonight. Tomorrow, you can go back to your independent self.”

I couldn’t help but smile. “Alright,” I sighed, mock exasperation in my voice. “If you all insist.”

They did. In fact, the entire evening became a blur of food, laughter, and an outpouring of emotions. There were moments of deep introspection, where we reflected on how close we had come to losing everything. But for every one of those there were light-hearted moments, filled with playful jabs and shared memories.

The penthouse became a sanctuary of sorts, a place where the outside world, with all its perils and disorder, couldn’t touch us. We were a makeshift family, bound by ties stronger than blood.

The evening’s earlier events mellowed into a languid haze, all of the fear and tension gradually lifting, replaced by warmth and love. Wrapped up in a plush, white robe on the opulent sofa, I could feel the weight of their gazes on me, the depth of their emotions. Each man was unique, each a different chapter in the novel of my life.

I wasn’t sure if it was the aftereffects of adrenaline or the sheer gratitude for our collective survival, but an overwhelming wave of emotion washed over me. My heart swelled, pressing against my chest as though it could burst. The room seemed to blur, and all I could focus on were their faces, their eyes. A thought swirled in my mind, one that I had kept locked away, like a secret treasure.

Before I even realized what was happening, the words slipped from my lips, sounding foreign yet so very right.

“I love you. All of you.”

It felt as though time had momentarily paused. The world around us seemed to fade, the city lights dimming, and the hum of Miami’s nightlife falling silent.

I’d been trying to decipher my feelings for them for so long, but there it was, laid bare, an irrefutable truth. The weight of the confession settled between us, a soft echo in the vast room.

Kai was the first to break the spell. He leaned in, his blue eyes reflecting sincerity. “Julia, from the moment I met you, I felt a pull I couldn’t explain. You’ve been a force, a storm, and a comfort all rolled into one. Your strength, your passion... it’s been our anchor.”

Andrew, usually so stoic and reserved, let out a small, almost relieved laugh. “You know, for someone who’s always got something to say, you’ve left me speechless. I love you too, Julia. Always have, in my own way.”

Finn’s hand found mine, and he intertwined our fingers. “You’re like the melody to a song I never knew I was humming. I can’t imagine my life without you.”

James, who had been surprisingly quiet, looked down for a moment. When he finally met my gaze, his eyes were moist. “I’ve fought plenty of battles, faced down death, but admitting this feels like the bravest thing I’ve done. I love you, Julia.”

Their words, so raw and honest, enveloped me like a warm embrace. My heart raced, not with fear or adrenaline, but with pure, undiluted emotion. Without needing any further cues, we moved closer, the distance between us shrinking. What began as tender, almost chaste kisses, soon deepened, fueled by the passion and intensity of the day’s events, and the confessions that followed.

Each kiss, each touch, was a reaffirmation, an oath, a promise. There in that luxurious penthouse, high above the world, we forged a bond that was unbreakable, sealing our fates and intertwining our destinies.

The warmth of the room, both figuratively and literally, caused a soft mist to form on the large windows, the city lights blurred into a soft haze. What began as a meeting of lips, soon progressed to a dance of passion and desire.

The hands that once held me with gentle protectiveness now roamed with a newfound urgency. Fingers deftly worked on the fabric that separated skin from skin. As one hand worked to untie the robe, another slipped underneath to trace the curvature of my spine. Goosebumps rippled across my flesh as James pulled the robe away, exposing my collarbone, which Finn eagerly latched onto, his teeth grazing lightly against the sensitive skin.

Kai helped me wriggle out of the robe fully, while Andrew's hands moved higher up, cupping my breasts. My own hands weren't idle, either. I pulled Kai close, fingers working on the buttons of his shirt, basking in the feel of his toned chest against my palms.

I was surrounded, cocooned in a whirl of sensations. There were fingers, firm and demanding, slipping between my thighs, exploring and teasing. Soft moans and deeper groans intermingled, creating a symphony of lust and longing.

Andrew took the lead, capturing my lips with his. It was a deep, soul-searing kiss that rendered me breathless. He tasted of familiarity, of home, of something indefinable that pulled me closer to the precipice of pure, complete contentment.

While Andrew consumed my mouth, James took the opportunity to run his fingers over the curves and valleys of my body, pausing only to caress and knead. The world became a haze of touch and sensation, of lips and tongues and roaming hands.

Every movement, every touch was a dance of intimacy and trust, of love and lust. It was overwhelming, a potent mix of emotion and carnality that threatened to sweep me away. The weight of their gazes, the intensity of their touch, was almost too much to bear.

The barriers of fabric between us grew fewer, and the men reveled in unveiling the beauty of the woman they adored,

each competing to provide the most pleasure, to hear the sweetest moan, to draw the most prolonged sigh from my lips. I wrapped my hand around one erect cock and then another, stroking them slowly.

Lost in the sensory overload, I let myself be taken, cherished. In that room, suspended high above the world, the five of us became one, bound by shared emotions, shared experiences, and a deep-seated desire to belong to one another in every conceivable way.

Amidst the dim lighting and soft hum of the penthouse's ambiance, I felt a profound awareness wash over me. Those moments were unlike any others we had previously shared. The air between us was electric, yet tender. Each glance, every whispered word, held a promise of not just passion, but of profound connection.

James moved over me, his deep blue eyes gazing down into mine, revealing depths of emotions he usually kept guarded. "You sure about this?" His voice was thick with need but underscored with genuine concern. "Been a long day. I'd understand if you just wanted to rest."

"Never been surer," I breathed, pulling him closer.

His kiss was a slow burn, deep and lingering, making me feel every ounce of his desire. Every movement was deliberate, slowly drawing out each sensation.

He pushed inside of me, his thickness stretching me out, filling me full. The slow rhythm he set was maddening, yet exquisite, and it didn't take long for him to send waves of pleasure cascading over me. When I came, he did too, his seed spilling inside, warm and rich.

Then there was Finn, fiery passion gleaming in his eyes. His approach was different—direct and purposeful. "Think you can keep up?" he teased, his fingers tracing patterns on my skin.

I arched an eyebrow, challenging. "Always."

The confidence in his touch was intoxicating. Finn seemed to know every secret part of me, every hidden desire, and he

played them like a master. His fingers, lips, every part of him worked in tandem, driving me to a peak so intense I could barely breathe. He took me from behind, his hands on my hips as he pushed in again and again, the sounds of flesh against flesh filling the air. I moaned like mad, the delight almost too much to take. As the waves of pleasure broke over me, he leaned in, his breath hot against my ear as he erupted deep inside.

Kai had always been the mystery, the one who spoke more with his actions than his words. As he moved above me, his touches were gentle, but filled with raw emotion. Soft words flowed from his lips, making me melt further into the bed.

“You have no idea how beautiful you are,” he whispered, his movements slow and deliberate, worshipping every inch of me. I climbed on top of him, lowering myself down onto his manhood, a sigh pouring out of me as I took in his inches. When I was full of him, I leaned forward, placing my hands on the hard plane of his chest. The intensity of his gaze, his soft, measured touches, built up another crescendo within me, and when it broke, I felt as if I were floating, his hands gripping my hips tightly as he drained into me.

Lastly, Andrew’s approach was one of controlled passion. The weight of his past seemed to add layers to his every touch, his every movement. “Tell me,” he rasped, holding back, making me squirm in anticipation. “Tell me what you want.”

“You,” I panted. “Just you.”

That devilish smirk appeared, and he lost all restraint as he bucked, my legs spread wide open to accept him. The world around us blurred as he drew another climax from me, his own release joining mine.

Exhausted, sated, and surrounded by the warmth of the men I loved, I was reminded that what we had went beyond just a physical connection. It was the binding of souls, the intertwining of hearts. I felt seen, cherished, and loved in ways words could never capture.

As the emotional whirlwind of the evening began to quiet, we all settled into the plush expanse of the bed, limbs

entangled. The city lights outside painted a surreal, panoramic backdrop. Kai, tracing patterns on my stomach, suddenly broke the silence. “How are you feeling about the pregnancy?”

James grinned. “Yeah, having a baby is a pretty big deal. And we haven’t had the chance to discuss it with everything that happened.”

I chuckled. “Honestly, when I first found out, I was scared,” I began, the words forming a bridge to a vulnerability I often masked. “I wasn’t sure how you’d all feel about it. I wondered if you guys would see it as a burden. Or something that was going to tie you down.” The last part was whispered, the unspoken fears of potential rejection looming large.

A heavy silence followed, punctuated only by the distant hum of Miami’s nightlife on the streets below. Finally, Finn spoke. “Julia, do you really think we’d leave you to handle this on your own?”

Andrew, gently turning my face toward him, his eyes filled with a seriousness that always made my heart skip a beat, whispered, “Every challenge we face, we face together. It’s us against the world, remember?”

Kai’s playful demeanor sobered up. “The baby is part of you, Jules. And whatever is a part of you, we’ll love and cherish, unconditionally.”

“You’ve been kidnapped, shot at, and thrown into our chaotic world,” James began, his eyes sparkling but his tone dead serious, “and through it all, you’ve stood tall, never once faltering. We adore you. If that baby has even a fraction of your spirit, he or she will be a force to be reckoned with.”

My heart swelled with emotions so vast, they quickly overcame me. Tears formed in my eyes—not of sadness, but of an overwhelming love. “You guys... I don’t know what I did to deserve you.”

Finn, pulling me close, whispered, “You existed. That’s all it took.”

Kai, James, and Andrew nodded, their agreement silent but potent.

For a moment, the world stood still, as the weight of their words sank in. I was loved, valued, cherished. They weren't just with me because of the baby, or out of some misplaced sense of obligation. They were with me because they genuinely wanted to be.

As the evening slipped deep into night, I basked in the warmth of their collective embrace. The promise of a future together, of facing whatever challenges lay ahead as a united front, wrapped around me. In that moment, I truly understood the depth of our bond. Whatever happened, we'd face it together and overcome, just as we had done with Klaus. For the first time in my tumultuous life, I knew I was exactly where I belonged.

## EPILOGUE I

JULIA



One year later...

The sun glinted off the glass windows of the downtown café, the world bustling by in a symphony of laughter, chatter, and the faraway sounds of traffic. Maddie and I were in our usual corner booth, surrounded by the aroma of freshly ground coffee and pastries. A year had passed since the harrowing events involving the Crimson Devils, but looking at us now, no one would ever guess that we'd lived through anything more stressful than deciding on our coffee orders.

"Spill it, Mads. How was last night's escapade?" I prompted, raising an eyebrow.

"Oh my God, Jules," Maddie burst out, her laughter infectious. "This guy strutted around in these neon-colored shoes, like he was one of those sneakerhead streetwear dudes. Oh, and by the way, they matched his mom's."

I almost choked on my coffee. "Matched with his mom's? You're joking. Wait, how did you even know?"

"Wish I was joking," she giggled, taking a sip of her iced latte. "But he was definitely a mama's boy. He took me *and* her to dinner. Surprise! It's a double date. Said that he never takes a girl on date number two unless she's Mom-approved."

I rolled my eyes dramatically, though the grin plastered on my face betrayed my amusement.

"I swear, one of these days you need to settle down, put these app guys behind you for good."

She shot me a cheeky grin, her eyes sparkling with mischief. “Oh, come on. I mean, you know what I always say—why settle for one flavor when you can have the whole freaking gelato shop!”

“Maddie!”

She laughed again, and I couldn’t help but join in. But then her gaze shifted to a somber, but tender expression.

“Seriously, J, seeing you so happy, especially with that adorable family of yours... I don’t know, maybe settling down isn’t such a bad idea.”

I blushed, thinking of Kai, Finn, Andrew, and James. Our unconventional family was thriving, stronger and closer than ever. “They are something special,” I admitted. My heart swelled with pride and love at the mere mention of them.

“Hmm, you say it so casually,” Maddie teased. “Four drop-dead gorgeous men and the cutest baby girl? Chica, you hit the *jackpot*.”

I chuckled. “Well, when you put it that way...”

Our laughter and reminiscing were interrupted by the chime of my phone. Glancing down, I saw a text from Kai light up the screen.

*We’re ready.*

My heart fluttered, a tinge of excitement coloring my cheeks. The text was simple, but its meaning profound. It was time for the next chapter in our life.

Maddie’s eyebrows knitted together, her gaze sharp with curiosity. “What’s up?” she pressed, sensing my excitement and electric energy.

With a sly smile tugging at the corners of my mouth I leaned in, mischief glinting in my eyes. “It’s time.”

Her eyes widened in realization, a gleam of excitement mirroring my own. “Oh, hell yeah. Let’s move!”

I threw a few bills onto the table, more than enough to cover the bill and tip, and we quickly exited the café. The sun

immediately warmed our skin as we stepped outside, its brilliance seemingly reflecting our current mood.

Walking a few steps ahead, I unlocked my new car, a sleek, cherry-red Expedition. I'd never been much of a car girl, but the guys had said I'd needed something safe to drive our precious daughter around in and roomy enough to accommodate all of us. It was also decked out with every bell and whistle I could ever want or need.

"Those boys are taking care of you," she said.

"They insisted," I replied.

Starting the engine, I felt the familiar thrum beneath my fingertips. The streets beckoned, and as I merged into the flow of traffic, the vibrancy of the city enveloped us.

A light breeze tousled my hair as I rolled down the windows, letting the rich tapestry of city sounds fill the car. The rhythmic beat of Latin music from a nearby club, the distant sound of waves crashing, children laughing, and the occasional shout from a vendor selling fresh mangoes or chilled coconut water.

Driving past Ocean Drive, the iconic strip with its art-deco buildings and lively beach vibes, I couldn't help but feel a sense of contentment. This was my city, a place I'd grown to adore with every fiber of my being.

It was my *home*.

"We're almost there," I announced as I brought us into Wynwood, the familiar signboard of Blackjack's coming into view.

The tattoo parlor looked more magnificent than ever. After the renovations, it exuded a revitalized and modern vibe. The freshly painted walls bore witness to its metamorphosis, and the neon sign declaring its name sparkled brilliantly. Newly acquired leather lounge chairs awaited outside beneath a large awning, providing clients a space to relax and choose their designs, while chic pendant lights dangled from the interior ceiling, enveloping the place in a soft, welcoming radiance.

Parking the car, Maddie and I exchanged a look, the weight of the moment sinking in. We'd been through hell and back, but there we were, ready to embrace the future.

We pushed the door open and headed in, the smell of fresh paint still in the air, and there, in the midst of it all, were Kai, Finn, and Andrew but no James. Their faces lit up at the sight of us, their smiles echoing the love and warmth I felt.

Maddie nearly lost it. "Oh my God! This place is unreal!" she exclaimed, eyes darting around in wonderment, taking in every detail of the redesigned space. She darted over to Finn first, throwing her arms around him in a tight embrace. Kai got a hug too, and Andrew, not one to be outdone, playfully spun Maddie around.

"You guys outdid yourselves," Maddie laughed, stepping back and taking it all in again. "This place... I can't even. It's amazing."

"Glad you like it," Finn said.

"We always said you'd have a home here," Kai remarked, nodding toward an empty inking space near the window. A small sign next to it read "Maddie. Reserved."

Maddie clasped her hands over her heart. "Oh, you guys! I can't wait to get back to work."

I chuckled at their antics, but my eyes scanned the room, searching. "Where's James?"

Kai grinned mischievously. "Picking up the princess," he replied, his voice laced with amusement.

"Should be here any minute," Finn added.

"In fact..." added Andrew.

He nodded toward the door and I turned to see James coming in, my heart and soul in his arms.

My heart skipped a beat, a rush of excitement washing over me, just like it always did at the mere sight of my little girl.

Rowan.

That was the name we'd chosen for her. It resonated with the strength of ancient trees and whispered tales of Celtic myths. Rowan signified a protector, a guide against evil forces, and it was already clear our girl was destined to be a force like none other.

As James walked in, Rowan's tiny head peeked out from her infant carrier, her thick, dark hair tousled in cute disarray. Those arresting gray eyes—a shade that she'd most definitely not received from either James nor I—stared back at me with an intensity that always startled me. People said babies that age didn't focus, but Rowan seemed to have a perpetual focus, always alert and always aware, like she was trying to soak in as much of the world as her young mind would allow.

James had a little smirk on his face, like he knew he was carrying the most prized possession between us, and he wasn't wrong. Before he could say anything, I walked over and took Rowan from her carrier, burying my nose in her sweet baby scent. God, I could never get enough of it.

The guys, tough as they were, all gathered around, cooing and making those ridiculous faces that adults only seem to make around babies. It was heartwarming, seeing such rugged men become absolute puddles around our tiny human.

After securing Rowan in my arms, I turned to James, leaning in to give him a quick peck on the lips. "You took your time," I teased.

"She needed a change," he shot back, that playful glint in his eyes.

Our banter was cut off by Rowan's little coo, drawing our attention back to her. No matter what was happening, she had an uncanny ability to make everything about her, and none of us minded in the least.

Maddie was next, leaning in to play peek-a-boo, making Rowan smile in delight. The sight was infectious, spreading smiles around the room. The past year had been a whirlwind, but that moment, with my friends, my loves, and my beautiful daughter, was what made every challenge, every fear, worth it. The tattoo parlor wasn't just a business. It was a symbol of our

resilience, our family. And with Rowan in the mix, the picture was finally complete.

As I gazed around the room, my eyes settled on the freshly inked sign spelling out “Blackjack’s.” A feeling of protective fierceness bubbled up within me, even amidst the serenity of the moment. The last year had been a wild rollercoaster full of incredible highs and harrowing lows. Yet with everyone I cherished in one room, I felt a deep sense of gratitude and belonging.

Little Rowan’s tiny hands wrapped around my finger, grounding me. It amazed me how such a small being could mean the entire world to me. Her smile was infectious and healing. She was my legacy, the tangible proof of the love shared between me and the men who had stood by my side.

Taking in the restored studio, I was overwhelmed with nostalgia. These walls had seen countless stories, each person looking to etch their personal journey into their skin. The studio stood not only because of the recent fixes but because of the resilient spirit that vibrated within its very foundation.

So much had changed in the last year.

A smirk danced on my lips, thinking of how Klaus met his bitter end. The once-feared leader of the Crimson Devils was now buried and forgotten. Knowing that his reign of terror had ended brought an undeniable satisfaction. With him gone, his band of goons had been arrested or hightailed it out of the city, lost without their ringleader.

My thoughts briefly lingered on Adele. She’d served a few months in county lockup and disappeared without a trace after her release. Good riddance. Occasionally, the night’s silence would make me wonder about her, perhaps plotting some vengeance. But in the reassuring light of day, surrounded by my fierce family, I felt invincible.

With the downfall of the Devils, the power vacuum needed filling. That’s where Jack’s old mob connections came into play. They moved in swiftly, ensuring Blackjack’s remained untouchable. We were under the wing of the law while

simultaneously being protected by an age-old underworld code.

It was a delicate balance but somehow, it worked perfectly.

Finn, always sensing my moods, wrapped an arm around me, his lips pressing a kiss to my temple. “Penny for your thoughts?” he teased.

“Just taking it all in,” I murmured, leaning into his embrace.

Kai, ever the inquisitive one, asked, “Thinking about?”

“How fortunate I am. And how much of a force we’ve become,” I replied with a playful wink.

Holding Rowan close, I was certain of one thing: my baby girl would grow up surrounded by an unyielding love, strength, and unity.

The sound of roaring engines interrupted our intimate moment. Turning, I spotted Jack leading the charge, a massive grin on his face, flanked by the crew from Blackjack’s, along with some of the guys’ outlaw buddies. Their bikes lined up in front, glinting under the evening sun like loyal steeds awaiting their knights. Everyone dismounted, arms full of booze, bags of takeout, and whatever party supplies they’d been able to grab.

“Thought you’d start the party without us, huh?” Jack boomed, pulling me into a bear hug, which I returned with equal vigor.

“Wouldn’t dream of it,” I laughed.

The atmosphere in the room grew infectious. Rowan, with her big gray eyes, was doted upon by every crew member. Each biker and artist took their turn, gushing over her tiny fingers and soft coos. That kid had a way of charming even the hardest of hearts.

The hours rolled on, the party growing louder and more boisterous. Drinks flowed, stories from the good old days were shared, and there was a collective sense of relief in the air. Blackjack’s was back, and it was better than ever.

Somewhere in the midst of the festivities, Finn tapped me on the shoulder. “Hey,” he said, nodding upwards. “The guys and I wanted a word. Upstairs.”

Maddie took charge of Rowan and I followed Finn as he weaved through the crowd, Kai, Andrew, and James following suit. We emerged onto the roof, and the Miami skyline stretched out before us, the sun beginning its descent, painting the horizon in shades of orange and pink. I breathed in deeply, taking in the salt-laden air. It was quiet up on the roof and I took it all in, knowing that it was only a matter of time before the party spilled up there.

For the moment, however, it was just the five of us.

Kai stepped forward, clearing his throat. “Julia,” he began, “From the moment you stepped into our lives, you’ve been a damn hurricane. Challenging us, loving us, fighting alongside us. I can’t imagine my life without you.”

Andrew took a step closer, “You’ve become the heart of our world, Jules. You’ve shown us what it means to be fearless, to tackle every obstacle head-on. I’ve seen some tough people in my life, but none as resilient as you.”

Finn’s gray eyes locked onto mine, his voice soft yet filled with emotion. “You’ve been my anchor, Julia. On the darkest days, your spirit, your drive, it’s what pulled me through. I need you with me, always.”

James approached last, holding a small velvet box. “Julia,” he said, eyes glistening, “with you, I’ve found a home, a purpose. I’ve known love, true and deep. We all have. Together, we’re a team unlike any other. And so, on behalf of all of us,” he opened the box, revealing a stunning ring, “Will you marry us?”

For a moment, everything stopped. The distant chatter from the party downstairs, the hum of the city, all faded into oblivion.

“Yes,” I whispered, tears spilling over. “A million times, yes.”

And as the sun set on Miami, painting the sky in a blaze of color, it marked the beginning of our new chapter, one filled with promise, love, and unbreakable bonds.

## EPILOGUE II



Three years. That's how long it had taken us to move from the chaos of our past into a sparkling new future. And as I stood at the edge of the balcony of our massive, newly finished penthouse, the Miami skyline sprawled out in front of me like a shimmering tapestry of lights and dreams, I couldn't help but marvel at the journey.

Our new home was the embodiment of success and fresh starts. Spanning two stories, the living room was drenched in natural light, the floor-to-ceiling windows offering an uninterrupted view of the city. Every piece of furniture was chosen with care, an amalgamation of Julia's taste and ours, melding into an eclectic yet cohesive style.

There was an open kitchen with an island so vast it could seat all of us comfortably for breakfast. And then there were the bedrooms—each tailored to our personalities yet bearing a universal touch of sophistication. There was also plenty of room for Rowan to play.

Julia's laughter floated back to me, pulling me from my thoughts. She was looking radiant, her dress catching the Miami sunset in a myriad of colors. I couldn't help but smirk as I took in her proud stance.

"You do realize we're about to be invaded by an army of literary snobs, right?" I quipped, adjusting the cuffs of my tux.

She shot me a teasing look, her eyes twinkling in amusement. "Oh, baby, don't worry. All you have to do is flash those pearly whites, charm them with that brooding look,

and you'll have the New York literary elite eating out of your hand."

I chuckled. "Are you implying my rugged charm won't be enough?"

She leaned in, her lips brushing against my ear. "A man who looks as good as you in a tux doesn't have to worry about a thing."

A comfortable silence enveloped us as we both took in the vast expanse of the city. Every light, every sound seemed to narrate a tale of our journey. From the dingy streets where we battled for survival to this lofty haven in the sky, we'd come a long way.

"This is it, isn't it?" I murmured, pulling her close. "From dodging bullets to dodging champagne corks. Quite the journey."

She nestled into my chest, her voice muffled but full of emotion. "It's our story, Kai. And thanks to you and the others, it has a happy ending."

I kissed the top of her head, my heart swelling with pride. Tonight wasn't just a celebration of Julia's book, it was a testament to our unwavering bond, our resilience, and our love.

Julia's eyes darted, her lips parting as if she was about to share a secret, but then, as swiftly as the impulse came, she shut her mouth. I raised an eyebrow, curiosity piqued. "What's on your mind?"

She hesitated for a moment, her gaze distant. "I want to share something, but I think it would be better if all the guys were here."

I nodded, willing to give her the space she needed. "Alright, spill when you're ready."

The doors swished open, revealing the rest of our motley crew, dressed to the nines. "Damn, look at you guys," I teased, giving a whistle. "Who knew you all could clean up so well?"

Finn smirked, doing a mock twirl. “One night without denim and tattoos, just for you.”

Rowan came prancing in, her little feet making soft sounds against the marble floor. She was wearing a flowing white gown, with delicate lace details, looking every bit the princess of the penthouse.

Julia scooped her up, her face lighting up. “How is it possible that you manage to look like every one of your daddies at the same time?” She chuckled, planting a soft kiss on Rowan’s cheek. Our little girl giggled in response.

Dad followed her in, a large box in tow. With practiced ease, he began laying out copies of Julia’s book. The matte black cover, embossed with a golden title, the edges bordered with classic tattoo styles: “From Ashes to Ink: My Life in Miami.” Julia picked up a copy, her fingers tracing the title, emotion evident in her eyes.

“You’ve earned this,” I whispered into her ear, placing a supportive hand on her shoulder. The other guys nodded in agreement, forming a protective circle around her.

“To think,” Finn began, his voice deep and ruminative, “that we’re all a part of this story.”

Julia took a deep breath, blinking back tears. “Couldn’t have written it without each and every one of you.”

Rowan, in her adorable gown, broke the silence, curiously tugging at Dad’s tuxedo jacket.

“Why’re you dressed like that, Grampy Jack?” she inquired, the usual spark of mischief in her eyes.

Dad knelt down to her level, a playful grin on his face. “Well, little raven, we’re having a party, and for parties, sometimes we dress up all fancy.”

Rowan looked at James and then to Finn. “Are you all gonna dance like the people on TV?”

James chuckled, lifting her onto his hip. “Only if you lead the way. Think you can show us some moves?”

She giggled, nodding confidently. “Mmm-hmm! But you can’t be too slow! I’m a super-fast dancer.”

Andrew, overhearing the conversation while adjusting his cufflinks, smirked. “I think between all of us, Finn’s got the best moves.”

Finn feigned shock, hand over his heart. “I’m honored. Though, watch it, or I might just steal the spotlight tonight.”

Before anyone could say another word, the doorbell rang. This time, it was the caterers, wheeling in trays upon trays of gourmet delicacies and bottles of champagne. The room was soon filled with the clinking of glasses and the rich aroma of food.

Maddie darted in behind them, helping coordinate the setup. “These book snob types are in for a treat tonight!” she exclaimed, eyeing the spread approvingly. Jace, her artist beau of a year now, entered behind her. Just like us, Jace was the type of guy not exactly comfortable in a tux, his long hair pulled into a ponytail. He flashed us a smile and a shrug, and we nodded back, letting him know we were all feeling like fish out of water.

Julia squeezed my hand, her earlier secret momentarily forgotten in the whirlwind of the evening’s preparations. And as everyone busied themselves, ensuring everything was perfect for the evening, I couldn’t help but marvel at our shared journey.

Before we knew it, the place was ready and the guests began arriving. The sophisticated hum of conversation and clinking glasses filled the room. Guests came in droves, and while the guys and I were no strangers to a crowd, this was an entirely different scene. Writers, journalists, literary critics... definitely not what we were used to. We stuck out like tattooed thumbs amidst the black ties and gowns, but we made the best of it.

James, with a mischievous glint in his eyes, leaned in to whisper, “I swear, if one more person asks me if my tattoos are real...”

I chuckled, patting him on the back.

Our light banter and drinks in hand helped us navigate through the night. The guys and I moved through the room, making the rounds, perhaps at times laughing a bit louder than the rest, but keeping the atmosphere alive and electric.

Eventually, a tall, graceful woman with silver hair and sharp eyes stepped forward, clinking her glass. The din of the party settled into a hush, the volume of the music decreasing until there was total silence.

“Ladies and gentlemen, if I could have your attention,” she began. It was Diane Schwartz, Julia’s editor, evidently a huge name in the New York literary scene. “I’ve had the pleasure of working with many authors in my time, but few have captured the raw, unfiltered essence of life the way Julia has in *From Ashes to Ink*. Her words don’t just paint a picture; they immerse you, drown you in the depths of emotion, and uplift you all at once. It’s been an honor, truly, to be a part of this journey.”

A ripple of applause washed over the crowd, but Diane raised her hand for silence. “Now, while tonight is certainly a celebration of Julia’s triumphs, there’s one more piece of news. I’m thrilled to announce that Julia’s work is being considered for the prestigious Peabody Award.”

The room erupted in applause, with the loudest cheers undoubtedly coming from our corner. Julia looked stunned, her face pale but eyes shining, lost for words. We were all ecstatic, pride swelling in our chests.

As the night wore on, music and laughter continued to fill the air, but for little Rowan, it was well past her bedtime. Dad, with the practiced ease of a doting grandfather, gently lifted her into his arms, and we all made our way to her room.

Tucking her in, Julia whispered a lullaby, brushing strands of hair from Rowan’s face. Each of us leaned in, placing a soft kiss on her forehead. “Night, little one,” I murmured, my tough exterior softening just for her, as it always did.

With Rowan sound asleep, Dad headed back downstairs, and the gang and I made our way to the penthouse's highest point—a secluded spot that offered a panoramic view of Miami's glittering skyline. Away from the clamor of the party, we could have our private conversation, our moment of reflection on the whirlwind journey we'd been through.

Amidst the neon glow of the Miami skyline, our group huddled together, the wind brushing past as we gathered in our new favorite spot atop the penthouse. James was the first to break the silence, his eyes gleaming with barely contained excitement. "Alright, before Jules dives into her news, we've got something to share." He grinned, pausing for dramatic effect.

"We just got the green light," Finn began, "for our new studio on Miami Beach. Construction kicks off next week."

The air was electric. The journey from our battered studio to a prime location in Miami Beach was nothing short of a dream. Julia's eyes shimmered with happiness, her hands instinctively reaching out to grasp mine. "Oh, guys, that's just... Holy shit!"

Andrew, unable to hide his grin, chimed in, "And if Miami Beach turns out to be a success, our next stop is Blackjack's: New York City."

Before the excitement could reach its peak, I raised a hand, motioning for everyone to calm down. "Alright, alright, all this is great, but Julia's got something for us." My voice was thick with curiosity and anticipation.

She laughed softly, a hint of nervousness in her eyes. "I don't even know how to start," she said, looking each of us in the eye.

As we exchanged puzzled glances, she reached for her phone and swiped the screen a few times before showing us a picture. The image was clear enough—ultrasounds, two tiny figures distinctly visible.

"Twins," she whispered, her voice laced with a mix of awe and happiness.

The realization hit us like a tidal wave. The rooftop erupted in whoops, cheers, and laughter. James and Andrew were the first to engulf Julia in a bear hug, their eyes suspiciously moist. Finn, always the cool one, held onto Julia's hand and gave it a gentle squeeze.

One by one, we took our moment, murmuring words of love and congratulations. When it was my turn, I pulled her close, whispering, "God, you're incredible. I can't wait for this family of ours to get even bigger."

With the emotional whirlwind subsiding, James winked at Julia. "You know, the party's great and all, but I reckon we could sneak away for a quick celebration before anyone notices we're gone."

His words hung in the air, filled with mischief and promise. The glint in Julia's eyes met with our collective grins, signaling her agreement. In this life filled with danger and thrill, love was the constant that held us together. And as we left the rooftop, ready to embark on another new chapter, it was evident that our journey was far from over.

## The End

Thank you for reading Christmas with Four Tattoo Artists  
If you loved this book, then you will love [Four Daddies for Christmas](#).

Here's what readers had to say:

*"If you're looking for a sweet and hot read, this one will do the trick."*

*-Aunt G., AMAZON VINE VOICE REVIEWER*

*"A delightful RH story with lots of love and steam." -Thea K., Goodreads Reviewer*

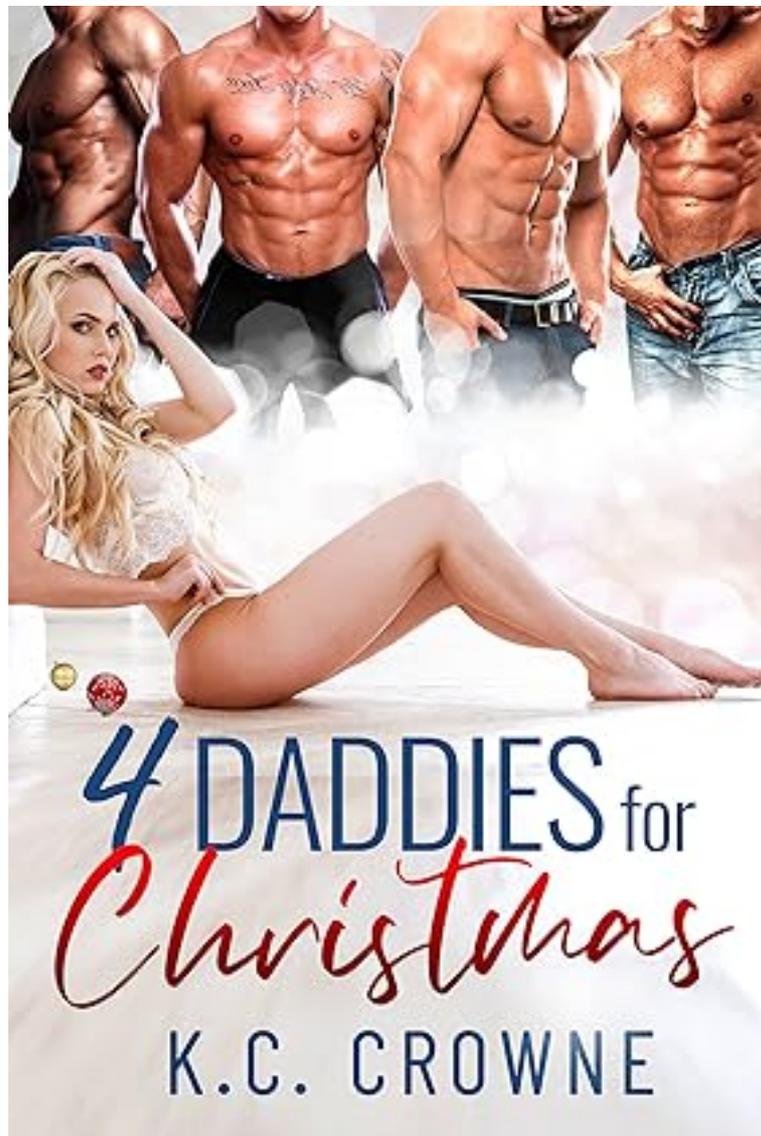
*“The one to one intimate scenes were just as heated as the group scene and were explosive enough to keep me squirming in my seat.” -Korkoi, Goodreads Reviewer*

*“Great characters and incredible storyline.” -Patricia, Goodreads Reviewer*

**[Click here and get Four Daddies for Christmas](#)**

**I've included a sneak peek into that story on the next page.**

# FOUR DADDIES FOR CHRISTMAS (PREVIEW)



**Four untamed ex-military brothers.**

**One very unassuming girl.**

**Who said Christmas miracles don't exist?**

My family's failing farm and my father's debt has me on edge.

Luckily, a chance rescue could be my ticket out.

An adorable set of twins need childcare.

And their legal guardians are four insanely HOT uncles.

**THREE reasons why this can't work:**

1. All four brothers are constantly working out in their mansion.
2. They're older and more experienced in ALL facets of life.
3. It appears I've ignited a desire in them that can't just be brushed under the rug.

And if I'm being completely honest...

I'm beyond turned on by *all* four of them.

**But the weather calls for a scary winter storm.**

**A storm brings that brings all sorts of trouble...**

**Not to mention unexpected surprises.**

# CHAPTER 1



“George! You get your big, fat butt down here, *now!*”

As soon as the words left my mouth, I realized how insane the situation was. It was Thanksgiving in Maryland, the sky a deep gray, the chill wind whipping snow all around me—snow that was accumulating at my feet more and more with each passing second.

Instead of being back at the farm in front of a crackling fire with a big plate of turkey and stuffing and all the fixings in front of me, I was out in the cold chasing around the unruliest llama I’d ever known in my life. And in my line of work, I’d met a lot of llamas.

“George!”

He didn’t care. The big, white beast glanced in my direction from a hundred paces away for just long enough to snort, his big tongue hanging dumbly out of his mouth. If I didn’t know that this particular goofy expression was his default look, I would’ve sworn that he was mocking me.

I broke into a run, trying to cut the distance between us a bit. As soon as he realized what I was doing, however, he broke out into a trot, heading further up Halbrogk Trail, the wooded path that seemed to be his favorite place to go when he pulled one of his frequent escape acts.

“Ah, hell.”

I took off my hat, shaking the snow out of the brim before starting after him. My mouth was watering as I hurried, thoughts of buttermilk biscuits topped with fresh clotted cream

and homemade jam filling my mind. My best friend and roommate Aggie and I had decided to go all out this year, waking up at the crack of dawn to prepare the feast of a lifetime. We'd stocked up at the store in anticipation of the snowstorm ahead, both of us looking forward to a few days of burrowing in, eating our leftovers, and watching whatever was good on Netflix in front a roaring fire.

Sounded like heaven. That is, until I happened to look up through the window over the kitchen sink to see that George was missing.

“George!”

I was beyond frustrated. I'd been chasing the animal for a good half an hour, and my legs were starting to burn underneath me. Wanting to get to him as fast as possible, I broke out into a jog, heading up the snaking path of Halbrook Trail, the winding, snow-dusted dirt road leading me up through the hills overlooking the land I called home.

A few minutes of jogging and still no sign of the jerk. Needing a bit of a break, I reached into my pocket and took out the small thermos of cider that Aggie had sent me off with. I unscrewed the cap and sipped, the warm, tart deliciousness washing over my palate. As I enjoyed the cider, I took a moment to look out over the rolling expanse of my land.

Downing Farm, named after the man who'd started it all the way back in colonial times, was a hell of a place. Situated in the hills of the central Maryland panhandle, it was a little slice of heaven that had been in my family for generations, passed down to me when my father died last year.

It was a hell of a lot of work. Chasing down ornery llamas was the least of it all. As I stood there at the middle point of Halbrook Trail, admiring the view of the seemingly endless landscape dotted with birch, cedar, and butternut trees, with small ponds here and there looking like little teardrops, the daily grind of keeping the place up and running seemed to fall away.

I could spot the farm itself from where I stood, the two-story farmhouse situated in the center of it all, the big red barn

off to the side. Truth be told, Downing Farm was more of a ranch these days, with more space dedicated to pigs and cows and, of course, llamas, than crops. But shaking off an old name like that was no small thing, so I let it slide.

Another chill wind hit me as I stared out onto the landscape, reminding me of the task at hand. I pulled my scarf tight around my neck and returned my attention to the trail, catching a quick flash of George's white-and-black-spotted fur as he peeked around the trunk of one of the many trees.

"George!" I called out as I hurried in his direction. "You get back here *now* or no more play time for you and Larry for the next... hundred years!" Larry was George's brother, and by this point I was damn sure that the two of them got a sick thrill out of egging one another on, each encouraging the other to get up to the sort of trouble that kept me up all damn night with worry.

More snow began to gather, and I broke into double-time pace as I hurried up the trail. My neck of the woods could get some serious storms, and the last thing I wanted was to freeze to death in the process of chasing down a damn llama.

"George!" I shouted up the hill. "Alright, you drive a hard bargain, but here it is—you come out now and make this easy for me, and I'll make you a little plate of Thanksgiving goodies. No telling Larry about it though, got it?"

No reply, of course. I kept on trudging, the snow deepening by the second.

Right in the middle of my trek, however, I heard something strange. At first, it sounded like the groaning of a branch about to give way under the weight of snow. A quick glance up let me see that, while the snow was gathering, we were still a ways off from that sort of thing happening.

I held my position for a moment, trying to catch another bit of the strange noise I'd heard.

Nothing. I sighed, chalking it up to one of the animals in the area. Then, right before I took a step, I heard something else. This time, there was no mistaking what it was.

The sound was the soft sobbing of a child.

A whimper drifted through the air, catching my heart and attention. The whimper was followed by sobs, then a gentle, “*oww.*”

My heart racing fast, my eyes wide, I listened carefully. More whimpering sounded from what seemed to be to my left, near the ravine along the hills of Halbrook Trail.

I cleared my throat and spoke. “Is someone there?”

The whimpering stopped, like a plug had been pulled. I listened some more, hoping to hear it again so I could pinpoint the direction.

Finally, the whimpering started again. Now there was no doubt where it was coming from. I glanced down the path one more time in the direction George had gone, as if he might’ve decided to have some sympathy on me and come back down. No such luck. If I headed toward the whimpering instead of George, there was a good chance that damn llama might be lost for good.

Didn’t matter—if there was a kid around, I was going to find him, or her.

I started off to the left, weaving through the thick knots of trees, stepping carefully not to slip on the snow. I gripped the trunks of the birches around me, focusing on each step. Halbrook Trail was lovely, but once you were off the safety of the path, it was more than a little treacherous. Last thing I wanted was a broken ankle.

“You there, kid?” I called out as I stepped. “Hey, I know you’re scared, but I’m here to help, OK? No one should be out here in the middle of a blizzard, especially on Thanksgiving.”

I had no idea if I was helping or hurting. I didn’t have kids of my own, and I was an only child, talking to little ones didn’t exactly come naturally to me. All the same, I figured some little kid out lost in the middle of nowhere was a hell of a lot more important than any of my animals.

I broke through the trees and stepped out onto the edge of the ravine.

That's when I spotted him. The boy was laying among the rocks in the dry creek. From where I stood, about a hundred feet away from him, I could see that he was dressed in dark pants and a big puffy coat, his hair dark and matted with sweat and snow. A small smear of blood was on his forehead, giving me a start.

Finally, he opened his little mouth and called out.

“Help!”

## CHAPTER 2

AUBREY



The sight of the little man in pain was heart-wrenching. I broke out into a run, hopping down into the ravine and made my way toward him, carefully moving down the stony slope.

“Hey, kid!” I called out, my voice carrying along the dip of the dry creek bed. “Stay right there, alright?”

The boy turned toward me. There was fear in his eyes, eyes that I could tell were a gorgeous hazel even from a distance. His hair was semi-long, the ends curling at his collar. Between his hair and the outfit of jeans, boots, and a tiny flannel, he looked like an adorable little rancher. His clothes were a bit dirty from his fall, but other than that, he appeared well-groomed. That meant he was almost certainly well taken care of.

Most importantly his forehead was smeared with blood. Although I’d never been all that much of a kid person, the sight of a hurt little boy activated a protective feeling in me like no other.

He didn’t reply. So, I called out to him once more.

“Are you alright?” I asked, my voice projecting down the ravine. “Say something, will you?”

He didn’t, and I was beginning to get the sense that he was more worried about the strange lady flying toward him than he was his injury. I closed the distance, dropping to my knees once I got to him.

“Let me get a look at that, OK?” I asked.

The kid regarded me with a wide-eyed expression, his mouth formed into a flat line. The boy was totally adorable, the kind of kid you could already tell was going to grow up into a very handsome man.

I reached for his forehead, and he responded by turning his body away from me.

*Think, Aubrey. This little guy's far away from home, and now some crazy woman is looming over him trying to look at his wound.*

I paused, closed my eyes and took a deep breath. After that I smiled and placed my hand on my chest.

“Hey, there. My name's Aubrey Downing. What's yours?”

He said nothing but turned back toward me.

I pointed off in the direction of Downing Farm. “You know that little place that's just over there? That's my farm, Downing Farm, just like my last name.” I swept my hand toward the land around us. “This is all my property. I saw you here, and I wanted to make sure you were OK. That make sense to you?”

That got a little nod out of him.

“So, how about you start with telling me your name?”

He pursed his lips, and for a moment I was worried that he was about to clam up again.

But he didn't. Instead, he put his tiny hand on his chest, like I had, and spoke.

“Henry.”

Relief washed over me; we were finally getting somewhere. A big smile took hold of me.

“Henry! That's such a cool name. Like King Henry, right?”

He nodded, still regarding me with skepticism, as if he weren't sure whether he ought to be talking to me.

“You're a stranger.”

The realization of what he'd said hit me like a sack of bricks upside the head. Of course, he was going to be hesitant talking to me—I *was* a stranger. Being wary of strangers was the first thing any parent worth his or her salt taught their little one.

“I know. But you can just call me Aubrey.” I grinned, maybe a little too much.

“Aubrey.”

I laughed. It was so damn cute.

“There you go! Said it like a pro. Now, Henry, I've got two things I want to make sure of. First is that you're OK. Second is that we get you back to your mommy and daddy.”

He shook his head. “Uncles.”

“Your uncles?”

He nodded.

“Alright, I'm going to make sure you're A-OK, then get you back with your uncles. First, let's get you sitting up. Can you do that?”

“Yeah.” With a bit of effort, he was able to push himself up without any help from me. It was a good sign that whatever he'd done to his head hadn't hurt him too badly.

“Awesome. Now, can I get a closer look at that?” I nodded toward his forehead.

“Um, OK.”

With that, I leaned in and peeked at the injury, yanking my red-and-white bandana out of my back pocket and gently wiping away the blood.

“Look at you, not even flinching a little bit. You're a tough guy, you know that?”

My words managed to get a smile out of him. Henry sat patiently as I cleaned him up a bit. Once the blood was gone, I was able to get a good look at the wound. Relief washed over me as I realized that it was nothing more than a scuff, barely a surface injury. There was a chance he might've banged his

head around a little from the fall, but so far, the evidence pointed in the direction that it was nothing more than the sort of war wound common to rambunctious kids.

“Can you stand up?” I asked.

To help guide him along, I rose to my feet and offered my hand. Once up, I took a quick look around to see that the snow was getting worse by the minute. The sky was the sort of deep gray that promised more white stuff to come.

“Uh-huh.” Without taking my hand, he pushed himself to his feet. I chuckled at his insistence on doing it all alone. Once he was up, I was even more relieved to see that he was able to stand steady.

“Nice job!” I said, bending over and giving him a little pat on the shoulder. “Nothing stops Henry.”

“Nope!” he affirmed with a big, toothy smile.

“Now, next step is figuring out where you need to go. This snow’s getting bad, so I’m thinking we can head back to my farm and wait there with my friend Aggie. What do you think?”

“I’m hungry.” He placed his hands on his tiny, round belly.

“You’re hungry? OK, I think I’ve got something here.” I reached into the little canvas pack that I always carried whenever I stepped out, unbuckled the front and stuck my hand inside, feeling around for the baggie of granola I’d put in there. Once I found it, I handed it over to Henry. “Here, this is good stuff. You like granola?”

“Does it have chocolate?” he asked, his big hazel eyes going wide at the possibility.

“Oh, you bet it does. There’s white *and* dark chocolate. And my roommate makes it herself, so it’s extra good.”

“What’s a woo-mate?” he asked.

“She’s my best friend and she lives on my farm with me. She’s super nice.”

He opened the bag up happily, stuffed his tiny hand into it and pulled out as big a portion of granola as he could grasp. Then he shoved the food into his mouth and chomped eagerly.

“Careful now,” I said. “I know you’re hungry, but make sure you chew it up good before you swallow, alright?”

“OK.” His eyes were on the bag as he spoke, his hand going in for another grab.

I sat there full of curiosity as he ate. Who was this kid? How did he end up on my land? And who were these uncles he was talking about? Part of me wanted to launch a barrage of questions at Henry, but I decided to let him eat in peace, as the snow fell all around us. He seemed to be in good shape and good spirits, but I knew a kid as young as he was wandering around in a blizzard-in-the-making was not a wise thing to do.

The first and most important step was to take him back to the house, get him cleaned up and his scuff disinfected and covered with a Band-Aid. Once that was done, Aggie and I could start the work of figuring out who little Henry belonged to.

Before I could give the matter too much more thought, Henry lifted the bag and stuck it out in my direction.

Kind of.

He held it out toward me, but a little off to the side. My stomach tensed at the sight. Had he banged his head to the point of being that uncoordinated? Was he seeing double? If that was the case, I’d need to get him to the nearest hospital as soon as I could.

“Henry? Thank you, but I’m over here.” I placed my hands on his gently moving them in the right direction.

He quickly moved them right back. “Not for you! For him!”

“Him?”

“Yeah! Right there!”

I turned, my heart nearly jumping into my chest as I saw George standing just over my shoulder, about twenty feet back

at the tree line. He had the usual dopey look on his face, his tongue hanging out of his mouth.

“There you are!” I called out, turning toward the animal. “Buddy, I swear.”

I started toward him. Before I took a step, however, I thought of Henry’s offer.

“That’s my buddy George,” I said. “He’s a llama.”

“A llama?”

“Yep. He’s really nice, but he’s a troublemaker. I came out here to bring him home. Want to help?”

“Yeah!”

“Alright. Come with me and let’s give him some chow. He eats everything, so he’ll go crazy over that granola. Then, once we’ve got him, we’ll go back to my place, where we will get you cleaned up, you can meet my roommate and we’ll try to find out where you belong”

“I want to see my uncles,” he said, a touch of worry to his face.

“You live with your uncles?”

He nodded.

“Well, once you’re cleaned up and have some real food in your belly, we can get in touch with them and get you home, OK? But it’s getting super snowy out, so we shouldn’t be outside.”

The worry stayed on his face. “You’re a stranger,” he said for the second time.

“Only for now, buddy! We’re neighbors! Once we get to know each other, we won’t be strangers anymore, we’ll be friends.”

He regarded me with a bit of hesitation, then nodded. “OK.”

“Perfect.” I held out my hand to his, and he took it.

Together, we made our way over to George, the llama's big, black eyes still locked onto the baggie of granola.

"George! I'd like you to meet my new friend, Henry." George said nothing, of course, his eyes on the food. "Henry, this is George. Why don't you introduce yourself?"

"Hi!" Henry said. "Do you want some food?" He stuck out the bag, George doing a little excited hop in response. Henry laughed. "He does."

"Pour some of it onto your hand, like this." I took the bag from Henry and dumped a bit of granola onto my hand. That done, I lifted the food up to George. The animal wasted no time sticking his tongue out and cleaning off my palm with a single slurp.

Henry laughed again. "He's really hungry."

"He sure is. He likes to run off, but he always comes back when he remembers that I'm the one who gives him his food. Now, you try. Put a little on your hand and stick it out to him."

Henry, a huge, excited grin on his face, did just that. George lowered his head and stuck out his tongue, wrapping it around Henry's hand and licking off all the granola.

That got a huge laugh out of Henry. "It tickles!"

"I know, right?"

Henry turned to me. "Can we give him more?"

"Yep, but let's save a little for the trip back. George can get a little distracted, so we should save some food to make sure he doesn't wander off again. OK?"

"OK!" Henry looked up at me. "Can I ride him? I ride our ponies."

"You can't really ride llamas. If you try to jump on his back he'll buck you right off. But if we get going, I bet he'll let you pet him a little."

"OK!" That seemed to go over just as well with the little man.

I grabbed George's collar, leading him and Henry through the woods and back onto the trail. The snow was picking up more and more, but all I could feel was relief. Not only was Henry safe, but George was, too.

"There's my place," I said, pointing off toward the farm in the distance once we reached the hill I'd been looking out from before. "Nice, huh?"

"Yeah." He sounded a tad underwhelmed. "Our house is bigger."

I couldn't do anything but laugh at the example of kid honesty.

"Well, it's cute and cozy and it works for me." Just as I opened my mouth to say more, something clicked in my head.

Henry said he lived in a big house. He had to have wandered off from somewhere nearby. There was a large house in the area, a huge mansion about a half mile west. The place was ginormous— seated on about a thousand acres of primo land. I didn't know a darn thing about the house or who lived there, it was so far off that I'd never needed to. However, it made perfect sense to where Henry must have come from.

"Hey, Henry, do you live in that huge house over that way?" I pointed in the general direction of the place.

His eyes lit up. "Yeah! With my uncles and my sister."

More relief took hold. "Well, that's perfect." I dropped into a squat and put my hands on my knees. "How about this—I'll take you over to my place, get you cleaned up, then I'll drive you home. Sound good?"

"Yeah!"

The situation was becoming more and more manageable by the second. George's collar still in hand, I led us down the trail and back onto the main grounds of the property. The house was about twenty minutes off, and once we got going, little Henry proved himself to be quite the chatterbox. He told me about his uncles, how they worked on the ranch with all the animals, how they took care of him and his sister, Hattie.

About halfway into the walk, a gruff voice stopped me dead in my tracks.

“Hey, there. Going someplace with our boy?”

My heart skipped a beat. The voice was low and deep and impossibly masculine, with just a bit of gravel to it.

I turned slowly, confronted with the sight of two men, both tall, both insanely handsome. They were dressed in the same style as Henry, wearing rugged jeans, brown leather work boots, and flannel shirts under half zipped parkas. They both wore rancher-style hats like mine, snow collecting in the brim.

One look at them was enough to see that they were related not just to each other, but to Henry. They were both tall—one of them appeared to be just a little under six and a half feet with dark hair and hazel brown eyes, his angular face brooding and his facial hair cleanly groomed into a neat stubble. It was a bit hard to tell, but I guessed he was somewhere in his mid-forties.

The other wore his light-brown hair just long enough to hang down the sides of his face. He was clean shaven, with male-model-gorgeous features, and a cocky smile on his face as if he knew something that I didn't. I noticed that his eyes weren't hazel brown like the other man's or Henry's. They were a stunning forest green, the color of my land's grass during the brightest part of summer.

“Now,” spoke the taller one. “You want to tell us what the hell you're doing with Henry?”

## CHAPTER 3



She was so damn gorgeous that I hardly even noticed the llama next to her.

That is, until the big, black and white beast let out a snort.

“Easy, George,” she said, putting her hand on the back of the creature’s neck and stroking him gently. “They’re friends. At least, I think.”

It took me a moment to collect myself. The woman standing about thirty paces from Adam and me seemed to be in her late twenties and was absolutely stunning. She was tall and slim, wearing light-wash jeans that hugged hips that were nice and round in spite of her athletic shape. She had on cowboy boots and an orange and red flannel with a shearling jean jacket, the buttons of her flannel tenting just a bit over her breasts.

The woman wasn’t just beautiful, she was uniquely so. Her skin tone was olive, her hair dark and curly with faint, copper highlights that I could tell was obviously wild even under her hat. Her chocolate-colored eyes were almond-shaped, her lips full and her cheekbones sharp. Her eyebrows were arched in mild surprise, though I got a sense that they were normally that way.

“We’re friends,” Adam said, an easy tone to his voice. “But I gotta say, that llama looks a little on the vicious side.”

The woman allowed a small smile to form on her plush lips. Adam had always been good that way, able to diffuse tension with a well-placed joke or two.

“He is,” she said. “And he’s especially mean to trespassers.”

As if to make her point, the llama let out another snort. I couldn’t help but laugh.

“Hen,” I said, turning my attention to our boy. “You alright?” I looked closer, seeing a small scuff on his forehead, a tiny bit of dried blood around it.

“He’s fine,” the woman said. “He—”

I raised my palm. “He’s more than capable of speaking for himself.”

The woman narrowed her eyes. I could already tell she wasn’t the type to be talked to like that. All the same, she seemed to have the good sense to understand that she was with a child that didn’t belong to her.

“I’m OK!” he said. “I fell down. But Aubrey helped me.”

Now I had a name.

“Is that right?” I asked. “She was nice to you?”

“Uh-huh.”

“That’s what I would’ve said,” Aubrey added. “If you would’ve been *oh-so-kind* enough as to let me speak.”

Adam raised his palms. “Easy now, all of us. This is obviously an awkward situation for all parties concerned. Listen, thanks for taking care of Henry. He’s a good kid, but he’s got what you might call a predilection for wandering.”

“You turn your back on him for a second and he’s gone,” I added.

“I can see that,” she replied.

“And” Adam continued, “To make things clear, that’s the only reason why we’re on your land. We’re not the trespassing type otherwise.”

She nodded. “Fine. And in the spirit of explaining ourselves, the only reason why I was taking Henry here to my

place was to get him cleaned up and give him something to eat before getting in touch with you all.”

I stuck my thumbs into my front pockets and shifted my weight from one foot to the other. “Fine. Now that it’s all settled, we’ll be taking our boy and heading home.”

Her beautiful face flashed with an expression I’d seen before. It was the look people never failed to give when my brothers and I referred to Henry or Hattie as ours.

“No!” shouted Henry.

“You don’t want to come?” Adam asked, surprised.

Henry stepped over to the llama. “George was lost. He has to go home.”

“This woman here’s George’s owner,” I said. “She’ll see him the rest of the way.”

Henry shook his head. “I want to help.”

I glanced over at Adam, and it seemed as if both of us understood what was going on. Aubrey had helped Henry, and now he wanted to help her.

“Come on, now,” I said. “We don’t need to take up any more of her time.”

He only shook his head.

“Sorry,” Adam said. “Kid’s stubborn as the rest of us.”

“We always teach him and his sister to pay it forward—someone does something nice for you, you do the same for them in return,” I said.

Aubrey pursed her lips, giving the situation some thought. “You know, if Henry here wants to help finish the job, my ranch is only another ten minutes that way. You all could come with, make sure George here gets his furry butt back where it needs to be.”

“Sure,” Adam acquiesced. “Sounds good to me. And we are neighbors, after all. I suppose it’s as good a time as any to get to know one another.”

I winced. Everyone was waiting for us back home. We didn't have time to escort some llama to another ranch, even if that was what Henry wanted.

Aubrey smiled and nodded. "Then let's get moving. Just a short trip that-a-way." She nodded in the direction she'd been going.

"Fine," I said. "Let's move."

"Yay!" Henry shouted. "Come on, George!"

Aubrey pulled George back in the direction of the farm, Henry turning with her. I shot a hard look in Adam's direction. When he noticed, the smile faded from his face and he mouthed, "what?" I shook my head, picking up the pace of my walk in order to catch up with the trio.

My stomach grumbled. Now that we'd solved the mystery of where Henry had gotten off to and we'd confirmed he was safe and sound, my attention went back to the meal waiting for us at home. Marcus had taken the ATV to scope out the rest of the property in search of Henry, while Tyler had gone back to the house with Hattie to finish up the rest of the Thanksgiving preparations. We were all pretty handy in the kitchen, but Tyler had always had a knack for cooking.

"So," Adam said. He placed his hand on his broad chest. "My name's Adam MacDaniel. That there's my older brother Jonathan. But we just call him *Mac* for short."

"I can introduce myself," I grumbled.

"Like he said, I go by Mac."

"Short for MacDaniel, I assume?" Aubrey asked.

"Yeah. I was the first of the four of us, so I got the nickname."

"Four of you, huh?" she asked, an intrigued smile on her face. "My name's Aubrey Downing."

"So, you're the new owner of Downing Farm?" I asked. "I've been wondering just who was going to be moving into that place."

“Well, you’re looking at her. Hope I am everything you boys were expecting.”

My eyes flicked down to her perfect ass, the shape just visible under the hem of her coat. God, it was hard not to stare.

“Didn’t have much in the way of expectations,” I replied. “Though it’s good to know that you’re the type who’d help a child in need.”

“Oh, of course. Doesn’t hurt that Henry’s as cute as they come.”

Henry flashed a broad smile, happy as always to be the topic of conversation.

“I’m having fun,” he said. “And George, too.”

Adam and I shared another look, this one communicating something different. Henry was a good kid, and quite social once he warmed up to someone. That warming-up process could take some time, however, and it was unusual to see him becoming comfortable with Aubrey so quickly.

“You boys are over on the big farm?” she asked. “The huge, thousand-acre place? What do you all call that chunk of land, anyway?”

Adam laughed. “We call it ‘Thousand Acres Ranch.’ Our great grandpa might’ve been a hell of a rancher, but he wasn’t the most creative when it came to naming.”

Aubrey laughed too. “Hey, makes it easy to remember the name. And it’s apropos.”

“That it is,” I agreed.

We approached her place which was a respectable-sized bit of land, I guessed around fifty acres. The main house was two stories, there was a big barn off to the side, and a good number of animal pens. The small road connected to Washburn, the main drag into the nearest town.

One of the pens had a handful of llamas within its confines.

“Interesting choice for animals,” I said, stepping over to the wooden fence around the llama pen. There were five in total, including George. I placed my hands on the wood and looked at the animals. “Can’t say I’ve seen many llamas here in Maryland.”

“Hey, you might think they’re a little silly, but they’re worth their weight in gold. Yuppies over in DC pay a *huge* premium for real llama-wool sweaters. Plus, they love the cold—they’re happy as clams outside even when it’s snowing.”

Adam and I shared another look, this one suggesting that maybe this whole llama thing was worth looking into. I chuckled, leaning forward on the fence and watching the animals do their thing.

“Alright, Henry,” I said. “We led George back home. Let’s let Aubrey here get back to her holiday.”

“He’s not home yet!” Henry exclaimed. “He has to go inside.” He pointed to the pen.

“He can help,” Aubrey said. “Don’t worry, they’re all gentle.”

Adam glanced over at me, and I nodded.

“Sure. I suppose it’s good for the kid to meet new animals when he can.”

Aubrey smiled, reaching into her pack and pulling out a ring of silver keys. “See this one here, Henry? That’ll open the lock. Go ahead and do that, then push open the door. Once it’s open, step into the pen and call out for George. He should come to where you are.”

“OK! I can do that!”

She handed over the keys and Henry took them, stepping over to the gate. The big, silver lock was just out of reach, so I stepped over and hoisted the little man up by his waist. Henry let out a laugh as he worked the key into the lock, opening it. I helped him with the latch, and once that was open, he pulled the gate.

“Ready, big guy?” I asked.

“Yep!”

I set him back down, backing up as Henry entered the llama pen. The other llamas watched skeptically, as if wanting to wait and see what was going on with this new, tiny person in their zone.

“Come on!” Henry said. “George, get your big, furry butt in here!”

“Hen!” called Adam as I let out a big belly laugh. “Is that a nice thing to say to George?”

“Aubrey said it!”

Aubrey arched her brows in surprise. “Um, well, it’s true. I *did* tell him that his butt was big. And furry.”

“Whatever gets the job done,” I said, shaking my head in amusement.

George took a second, but after a little more calling and waving from Henry, he eventually got the hint. The animal made his way into the pen, stepping over to Henry and giving his hair a sniff. Henry laughed, petting George’s chest.

“There you go, big man,” I said. “Now, get on out here and finish the job.”

“Say bye to George!” Aubrey called out.

Henry grinned at us before climbing the fence and waving at George.

“Bye-bye! Bye-bye!”

In response, George trotted over and began licking Henry’s hand. Henry let out a big laugh, reaching over and stroking the llama’s fur.

“Looks like these two don’t want to part,” Aubrey said as she came over to me.

“Maybe we ought to set up a sleepover?” Adam said with a grin.

“Why not?” she asked. “Your place is sure big enough for a llama to run around in.” As Henry said his goodbyes to

George, Aubrey turned to us, putting her hands on her hips and giving us a once-over, as if sizing us up. “Henry mentioned he lived with his uncles.”

“Yes, that’s right. The four of us, Henry, and his twin sister,” I replied. “One big, happy family.”

“Sounds like it.” She nodded toward the house. “Here at the humble Downing Farm, it’s just me and my friend Aggie.”

“You do all the work here yourself?” I asked. “Just the two of you?”

She offered a challenging grin. “What, you don’t think two women can handle it?”

“It’s not that at all. I’m actually impressed, more than anything.”

Henry let out a laugh, still having fun with George.

“Alright, bud!” I called out. “Time to get moving; you’ve been enough of a handful for Miss Aubrey here for one day.”

Adam stepped over to Henry, lifting him off the fence.

“Aw!” Henry said. “I want to play with George! And his friend Larry!”

“How about this,” Aubrey began. “If you want, you can come back and visit. Maybe when the weather’s a little nicer. That is, if it’s OK with your uncles.”

Adam lifted Henry higher, putting the boy on his shoulders. Henry replied with an excited giggle.

“Don’t see anything wrong with that,” I said.

“OK, great. We can work out the details later. Anyway, can I send you boys off with some food? Aggie and I kind of went a little overboard and we have more than enough to spare.”

“Famous last words,” Adam said. “All four of us are huge eaters. Trust me—even just the two of us would be able to eat you out of house and home.”

“He’s right. Once we get going, we don’t stop until the pantry’s bare. Even Henry’s been known to put it all away.”

“Can we eat?” Henry asked, placing his hands on his belly as Adam held him by the ankles on his shoulders.

“Sure can,” I said. With that, I pulled off my glove and stepped over to Aubrey, offering my hand. “Pleasure to meet you, Aubrey. And thanks again for handling our boy.”

She smiled, taking my hand. “It was a pleasure. Come back any time.”

“I’d shake,” Adam said, “but, uh, I’ve got my hands full.” Instead, he bowed a bit forward, Henry laughing.

“You boys have a good Thanksgiving, alright?” She glanced one more time at all of us before tipping her hat and turning back toward the house.

I watched her as she left, her ass swaying from side to side in a way that begged my eyes to stay locked on it.

She was going to be trouble.



*END OF PREVIEW*

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