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of **NATURE**

A DARK TABOO ROMANCE

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FORCE of NATURE

What's born in darkness can still blush with the dawn...

It was supposed to be our last camping trip, a final sendoff before my daughter flew off to college. Then four men stepped out of the shadows and into my worst nightmare.

I knew what those bastards had in mind before they sat down at our fire. Forcing me to watch as they tormented her wasn't enough. They wanted to break her, and they wanted me to be the first to do it.

Impossible. I could never harm my own child. But regardless of the sickening betrayal, I can't help how my body responds. She can't possibly want this either, so why does it seem like she can't get enough?

The twisted desire we feel can only be wrong. But in the wilderness, the rules of men no longer apply.

Out here, we live by the laws of nature.

Hunt or be hunted.

Take or be taken.

Kill or be killed.

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Independently Published

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TRIGGER WARNING

Please be aware that this book is very dark, and I don't mean slightly darker than my usual fare. I mean DARK. The main characters are blood related (father/daughter) and the sexual assaults are described in graphic detail.

It is possible to avoid the most graphic sexual assault content involving the villain characters by skipping chapter 4. However, the events are still referenced throughout the book. If you're at all uncomfortable reading about SA, incest, and violence, I strongly urge you to take care of yourself and sit this one out.

Complete list of triggers:

Incest (dad/daughter)

Age Gap (20+ years)

Noncon + Dubcon

Sexual assault by multiple men

Physical violence

Weapons (gun, knife)

CHAPTER 1

WILLOW

THE SCENT OF SPRUCE AND SAGEBRUSH FILLED MY LUNGS AS I stood in the knee-high river, resisting the lazy pull of the current around my legs. There was something satisfying about withstanding the water's sluggish tug. I hadn't bothered to remove my trail shoes or to roll up my hiking tights; the late-summer heat would take care of the lingering dampness quickly enough.

My dad paused beside me.

"Don't quit on me now," he said. "Mr. Bubbles is waiting."

I rolled my eyes at his attempt at a joke but couldn't suppress my smirk. Our goal for the afternoon was a natural hot spring called Mr. Bubbles and I was looking forward to a relaxing soak.

Dad continued toward the riverbank, but I caught the peaceful smile on his face. He appreciated the scenery just as much as I did. It's why we kept coming back to Yellowstone National Park every summer, year after year. Not only for the beauty and grandeur, but for the chance to escape the constant hum of city life and reconnect with nature, as well as each other.

We'd parked at the ranger station two mornings ago and spent the past couple of nights at different campsites along the

trail. We'd been hiking for most of the day today. Both of us were in excellent shape from living active lives, but three straight days of walking—sometimes on uneven terrain—can make anyone's muscles sore.

I met my dad on the bank of the river where he was putting his socks and shoes back on.

“Do you need a break, Willow?” he asked, now with genuine concern.

It was tempting to roll my eyes at him again, but I held back. Dad could be overprotective at times, but I knew that his need to control stemmed from a place of love. He just wanted me to be safe and happy. When I was younger, it drove me crazy. At eighteen years old, I had a better perspective. My dad didn't set out to raise me on his own, but then my mom died in childbirth. It'd been the two of us from the very beginning.

Of course, that's what made this trip so bittersweet. It was set to be our last hiking trip before I left for college. As soon as we got back home, I would only have a few short weeks to prepare for the cross-country move that would separate me from my dad for the first time ever.

I hadn't planned to attend college so far away, but my dad insisted. He said he wanted me to be independent. I couldn't help wondering if part of him wanted a little bit of breathing room for himself. He hadn't dated in years and didn't go out much on his own. Maybe he was just waiting for me to move out so that he could start living his life.

Of course, he'd never explicitly said anything to make me think this way, but I knew it couldn't have been easy raising me on his own. Even a well-behaved kid was a big responsibility for one person to shoulder. If anything, my good

grades and lack of an arrest record were a testament to his parenting. Which is why I agreed to apply to colleges on the east coast. My dad had sacrificed a lot to be there for me while I was growing up. How ungrateful would I have to be to insist on going to a local college so I could continue living at home?

I was going to miss him though, so much.

“I don’t need a break,” I said, adjusting my backpack so that the straps were no longer digging into my shoulders. “Let’s go. I want to soak in the hot spring for as long as possible.”

I started off down the trail, with him trekking behind. I knew that he’d stay close. We’d never been separated on one of these hikes before, but we always had a plan in place in case it happened. In the event that we somehow managed to lose each other, we were to head for the old fire tower just north of Douglas Knob Meadow. The fire tower was unmaintained and closed for public use, but it was tall enough to be seen for miles, which made it the perfect meeting spot.

The trail took us past gorgeous waterfalls and gurgling pools of steaming water. It didn’t matter how many times we hiked here, the scenery never got old. I could still be moved to tears by the vibrant colors of a sunset.

About half a mile from the hot spring, we veered from the main trail onto the well-trodden path that would take us to Mr. Bubbles. On the way, we passed more pools of water, some of them colorful in a way that seemed almost unnatural. Vibrant blues, deep oranges, and golden yellow rings lined the edges of the pools. I could feel the scalding heat rising from them, though we were careful not to get too close. A breeze blew in from the forest around us, tousling the fine auburn hairs that had escaped my ponytail.

When Mr. Bubbles finally came into view, I couldn't help smiling from ear to ear. A glance at my dad confirmed that he was just as pleased to have reached our destination.

Most of the hot springs in Yellowstone were too hot or too acidic to soak in, but Mr. Bubbles wasn't technically a spring so much as a natural pool where the hot spring mixed with cool river water, turning it into nature's perfect hot tub. The pool was large enough to comfortably fit at least thirty people, but there was no one else in sight. We had the place to ourselves for now.

We wasted no time moving to the pool's edge and dropping our packs. Knowing that we were planning to hit up the hot spring today, I'd put on my black two-piece swimsuit under my clothes this morning. Dad had apparently done the same, I noted, as he stripped off his clothes to reveal blue swim trunks underneath.

The first time we came here, I was so cautious. Dad had made sure to stress that Yellowstone could be dangerous; people had died swimming in hot springs. Mr. Bubbles got its name from the bubbles gurgling up from the natural steam vent in the center of the pool. Back then, I'd held my hand over the surface of the water to test the heat before dipping a finger in to make sure it was safe.

This time, I headed straight into the water with confidence, though careful of my footing. Mr. Bubbles was only a few feet deep, but I still didn't want to risk slipping on a moss-covered rock. I picked my way toward one side of the pool where I knew I'd be able to see the thermal feature that poured additional hot water into the area. Scalding water fell in a foamy sheet over rocks before streaming into the main pool.

I settled into a comfortable spot that was just the right temperature for me and allowed myself to relax. My dad let out a satisfied groan as he claimed a spot closer to the bubbling center. His strawberry-blond hair looked even lighter in direct sunlight. He closed his eyes, tilting his head back with a smile that convinced my own lips to curve.

We were different here—not that we weren't happy back at home. But something about being in the wilderness changed our behavior. I became less anxious and more spontaneous. I walked with a spring in my step. Dad became more contemplative and introspective, almost withdrawn. I didn't mind the stretches of quiet. We understood each other well enough without having to use words. Out here we were just animals, no different from the elk and bison we spotted along the trail.

Dad stretched into a back float, letting his arms and legs drift lazily in the shallow water. I liked seeing him relax. He worked hard in his professional life as an arborist for the city of Walla Walla, Washington, where we lived. As my gaze trailed down the length of his body, my attention lingered over the muscled planes of his chest and stomach. Climbing trees was certainly one way to stay in shape.

He noticed me staring and lifted his head.

“What is it?” he asked.

I glanced away, embarrassed. It wasn't the first time he'd caught me watching him since we arrived in Yellowstone. I didn't know what it was about this trip, but I found myself feeling restless. Part of me wanted something from him that I couldn't put words to. Some kind of unspoken acknowledgement, a sign that he was going to miss having me around. I knew if I asked him, he would've said, *Of course I'm*

gonna miss you, kiddo, right before launching into a hype speech about how much I'm going to love being on my own.

"Nothing." I had my sunglasses perched on the top of my head and I pulled them down over my eyes. Dad sat up and shook his wet hair out of his eyes like an animal. I chuckled.

"All right," he said with a crooked smile. "That doesn't sound like nothing. Have mercy on your old man, Willow. Is there bear scat on my face?"

I laughed harder. "No. You just look like a wet dog."

"A wet dog." He scoffed, but I could tell he wasn't serious. "High praise from my only child. What about now?"

He whipped his hair from side to side, spraying water everywhere, including my direction. Laughter bubbled up from my chest as I squealed.

"Stop!" I raised my arm like a shield in front of my face.

"If I'm a wet dog, what does that make you, huh?" He grasped my ankle underwater and towed me toward the center of the pool. I made a half-hearted attempt at escape before I let him pin me against his wet chest. He cupped his hand in the water and then poured the water over my head. "Looks like I've caught myself a drenched puppy."

"Could you be any cringier, Dad?" I sharpened my tone with false annoyance. The truth was, I enjoyed his bad jokes and the fact that he still wanted to play with me.

"Is that a challenge?" he asked, his warm breath tickling my ear.

I let my head fall back onto his shoulder. "Please, no. I'll die of embarrassment." I winced as he gently removed my

sunglasses and then slid them over his own eyes. They looked comically small on his head.

“How about now? Am I cool yet?”

“The coolest.”

He probably expected me to pull away from him the instant the playful tone dissipated, but I liked having his strong arms wrapped around me. It felt good. I closed my eyes and focused on the rhythmic beating of my dad’s heartbeat against my back.

But the calm was short-lived as I found myself imagining another woman in my place. I had a gnawing suspicion that as soon as I stepped out of the picture, I’d be replaced. A great man like my dad wouldn’t stay single for long once he put himself out there. Soon enough, someone would catch his eye and he’d begin doing whatever it took to make her happy. I should’ve wanted that for him. My father deserved to be happy, too. So why did the thought of him holding a stranger in his arms make me want to curl up and die?

The sound of men’s voices reached us through the trees. I glanced in the direction the voices were coming from just as four men emerged from the forest. One of them stopped short when he saw my dad and me, prompting the others to do the same. Their laughter and conversation trailed off. Maybe it was just my imagination, but it seemed as if their stares lingered on me longer than necessary.

My dad must have noticed it, too, because his body instantly tensed. He released me, handing back my sunglasses before positioning himself at my side just as the group of men reached the pool.

“Hey, there,” said a pale, dark-haired man. He raised his hand in greeting. “Nice day for a dip, isn’t it?”

“Perfect,” Dad agreed. He was smiling pleasantly, but I knew him well enough to pick up on the tension in his voice.

The men began to undress. It quickly became apparent that they hadn’t bothered to wear swimsuits under their clothing like we did. I looked away, my cheeks burning as they took their time changing into their trunks.

I had only seen a naked man once before in real life, and I used the term *man* loosely since he was around my age. The senior guys on my high school’s track team had dared their slowest sprinter to streak across the football field during homecoming. But that was just a prank. This felt different, awkward... I kept my gaze trained on the bubbles in the center of the pool until one of the men—the dark-haired one who’d said hello—called out to us, his voice closer.

“Where are you two from?” the man asked.

I glanced up to see that the whole group had joined us in the water, though two of them kept to the other side of the pool. I wasn’t very good at guessing people’s ages, but they all seemed at least ten years older than me, maybe in their late twenties.

“Washington,” my dad said. Before the man could request specifics, he added, “You?”

“East coast, mostly.” He pointed to a preppy-looking blond guy across the pool and said, “Zeb’s from New York. Ox is from Jersey.” The man he called Ox certainly lived up to his name; he was the largest member of the group, both in terms of height and build. “Martin just moved to Florida, lucky bastard.”

It wasn't until the talkative guy pointed him out that I noticed the bald man with glasses—Martin—staring at me in a way that made my skin crawl. He continued to stare even after I acknowledged him. I instinctively pressed closer to my dad's side. Dad hooked his arm around my shoulders, blocking Martin's view of my face with his fist.

“And what do they call you?” he asked the first man.

“My god, how could I forget.” The talkative man waded over to shake my dad's hand. “I'm Duke.”

“Erik,” my dad said. “This is my daughter, Willow.”

Duke fixed his gaze on me, and I instantly felt cold. Up close, his eyes were like two dark wells rimmed with ice that you could tumble down forever without reaching the bottom. How had my dad managed to hold this man's gaze so steadily and for so long?

“Nice to meet you both,” Duke said, settling into the water. “Is this your first trip to Yellowstone?”

“Actually, it's our fifth,” I replied.

“Wow. You two must know your way around.”

Dad continued to make small talk with Duke about Yellowstone and our experience on the trail. Thankfully the man hadn't spared me a second glance since we were introduced, but I couldn't shake the sensation of an unwelcome gaze upon my skin. Sure enough, when I peered over my dad's clenched fist, Martin was still watching me intently.

I didn't have a chance to react before Zeb, the blond one, arrived at Duke's side.

Duke snickered. “You and Ox done placing your bets already? That must be a record.”

“Well, I couldn’t let you monopolize our charming new companions now, could I?” Zeb winked at me. He was easily the most attractive man in the group, tall and athletic looking with an even tan that showed no signs of stopping at the low-slung waistband of his swimsuit. He must sunbathe naked, I realized, which made me blush.

Duke introduced us to Zeb, who kissed the back of my hand instead of shaking it.

“Aren’t you a sweetheart,” Zeb purred, tilting his lips into a boyish smile that made my belly flutter. His gaze wasn’t cold like his friend’s bottomless stare. It was warm and inviting, like the pool we were lounging in.

“How do you all know each other?” my dad asked. He grasped the hand that Zeb had kissed and lowered it into the water, running his thumb over the spot.

Zeb chuckled, obviously amused.

“We’re old college buddies,” Duke said.

“What school did you all go to?” I asked.

Zeb said, “Yale,” just as Duke began to say something completely different. Zeb waved his hand dismissively. “We didn’t actually go to the same school, but we knew each other through friends and extracurriculars.”

“What kind of extracurriculars?” my dad prodded, betraying only the barest hint of tension in his voice.

Duke grinned. “Chess club.”

“Anyway,” continued Zeb, “we can’t all hang out as often as we’d like to now that we’re scattered, but we try to plan a

camping trip every year.”

I could tell they were waiting for one of us to respond.

“That sounds nice,” I said.

“It *is* nice, sweet Willow.” Duke leaned back in the water, wetting the crown of his head. “There’s nothing quite like escaping into the wilderness where the laws of men are forced to submit to the laws of nature.”

My dad squinted. “Pretty sure the laws of men still apply here, bud.”

Duke didn’t let my dad’s pragmatism discourage him. “Oh, please. You think a few signs reminding people to pick up their trash will protect you from a grizzly? No. Out here, the only thing standing between your sweet little Willow and the Big Bad Wolf is a can of bear spray and some dumb luck.”

“You’re forgetting one thing,” Dad said.

“Oh yeah? And what’s that?”

“Me. As long as I’m standing, nothing will touch her. Nothing and no one.”

Duke’s sharklike grin made my pulse jump. He cocked his head slightly. “Are you sure that’ll be enough?”

“How old are you, Willow?” Zeb asked, staring freely at my chest.

I didn’t have much in the way of cleavage, but it was gratifying to have a hot older man take an interest in what little I had to offer. But that fleeting sense of pride was where my excitement ended and anxiety began. I wasn’t used to being the object of *so much* attention. I could still feel Martin watching me, and a glance across the pool confirmed that the big guy, Ox, had taken an interest, too.

I felt like a deer caught in a hunter's scope.

"She's eighteen," my dad answered for me. "Not that it's any of your business."

Duke chuckled, and Zeb raised his hands.

"I meant no disrespect," said Zeb. His handsome smile seemed practiced now. "I was just thinking about what an exciting time this must be for you, Willow. You've got your whole life ahead of you."

"Where do you go to school, Willow?" Duke asked.

My dad growled, "Don't answer that." His grip on my shoulders had tightened to the point of discomfort. He was a rubber band doomed to snap at any second.

Martin ambled toward the center of the pool on his knees, as though he intended to check out the bubbles. But the way he positioned himself, directly in my line of sight, told a different story. I couldn't look up without seeing his sweaty reddened face staring back at me.

Disgust pinballed around my stomach.

"So young," Duke said. "So many rites of passage lined up in front of you like dominoes, begging to be knocked down."

Zeb and Ox laughed as if Duke had just told a hilarious joke. Nothing had changed about the men's demeanor, but I sensed the pressure mounting beneath my father's outward calm.

"It's time to go, Willow." My dad rose from the water, hauling me up alongside him. I winced as he seized my arm in a viselike grip.

"But we were just getting to know each other," said Zeb.

My dad ignored his words. I nearly lost my footing trying to keep up with my dad as he steered me out of the pool on a roundabout path that wouldn't bring us closer to the men.

As soon as we reached our bags, my dad wedged his feet into his boots without bothering to put on socks. He stuffed his clothing into a side pocket. I had just pulled on my hiking tights when he shoved my trail shoes into my hands.

"You can put your socks on later," he rumbled. "We have to go now."

The sense of urgency in his voice made my hands tremble. I fumbled with my laces. He sighed, dropping to one knee, and brushed my hands out of the way so he could tie my shoelaces himself.

"Dad, I've got it—"

"No, you don't. If you did, they'd already be tied."

"Now that's adorable," Duke shouted. "Does he wipe your ass for you, too, little Willow?"

Their laughter licked at my skin like flames threatening to burn me alive.

"Dad, please—"

"Ignore it," he barked.

More laughter. More jeers.

I stood there like a little kid waiting for my dad to finish tying my shoes so I could go and play. As soon as he completed the final knot, I threw on my backpack and set off down the path that would lead us to the main trail.

"Watch out for those grizzlies," Zeb taunted as we reached the trees.

“Don’t look back,” my dad growled. I suppressed a shiver, bristling at his commanding tone. The jagged edge to his voice had nearly rendered the sound unrecognizable. He’d never snapped at me like that before. Was he pissed at me? What for?

I wanted to kick the nearest hornet’s nest and direct the swarm to Mr. Bubbles. Everything had been perfect before those guys showed up. Now it was all ruined—the priceless memory I was meant to carry with me to college, something to look back on when I was alone in a strange city surrounded by strange people.

Those creepy assholes robbed me of that comfort and laughed about it.

Against Dad’s orders and my better judgment, I pivoted at the last second and raised my middle finger in a final fuck-you.

CHAPTER 2

ERIK

I WRAPPED MY FIST AROUND WILLOW'S SMALL HAND AND dragged it out of sight.

“Stop fucking around,” I warned her. She took her hand back, hitting me with a look of righteous fury.

“But those guys were assholes,” she said.

I pressed on Willow's lower back, encouraging her to walk faster. “It doesn't matter. The last thing we need is for one of them to take your offensive gesture personally.”

“You don't think they deserve it?”

Of course they fucking deserved it. They deserved a hell of a lot worse than a simple fuck-you. Anger throbbed in my temples as I recalled the way those bastards had salivated over my teenaged daughter. I didn't have to be psychic to discern the fucked-up fantasies playing out like porn in their minds. They weren't just checking her out. They were tracking her, hunting her, skinning, field dressing, and devouring her with nothing but their eyeballs.

“That's not the point.” I glanced back to make sure we weren't being followed. “Reacting aggressively would have escalated the situation. They were baiting us, and you just gave them exactly what they wanted.”

“A one-finger salute?”

“An excuse,” I said firmly.

“So now it’s my fault if they come after us?”

I forced myself to take a few deep breaths before I continued. “That’s not what I meant. None of this is your fault. I’m not angry with you.”

“But you are still angry,” she mumbled.

I wasn’t just angry. I was furious, but Willow didn’t deserve to bear the brunt of my wrath. I fell into step beside her as we emerged onto the main trail.

“Yes, I’m angry, Willow. But it’s not because of anything you did or said. If either of us should feel responsible for what happened, it’s me, okay? Not you.”

“Why should you feel bad?”

“Because I let the situation drag on longer than it needed to. I should’ve gotten you out of there as soon as that nosy bastard started asking questions.” From the moment I locked eyes with Duke I could tell that something wasn’t right about him. I tried to give everyone the benefit of the doubt, but an alarm went off the instant I shook his hand.

Warning. This fucker is pure evil.

I wasn’t a religious man. I didn’t believe in angels or devils, just people who did bad shit for selfish reasons. Lately I’d been trying to rein in my inclination to jump in and take charge of every situation, at least where Willow was concerned. I knew I could be overprotective and that wasn’t going to help her make good decisions when she was on her own.

But boy, did I regret not listening to my instincts about Duke and his friends.

“What made you decide to get up when you did?” she asked.

Relief washed over me. I let my shoulders relax a little. If she was asking about it, then that meant she hadn’t seen it.

When I realized those assholes were hemming us in on purpose, I began mentally searching for a way out. I fought hard to keep my shit together; I didn’t want to make Willow more nervous than she already was. All the while, my body was preparing to either grab my girl and bolt or start throwing punches.

Then that bald fucker—Martin, I think was his name—decided to find himself a better vantage point. He thought he was being stealthy, but I caught the ripples his underwater movements stirred up and saw how his arm trembled from all the frantic tugging. The red-faced piece of shit was jacking off to my kid right in front of me, eye-fucking her over the frames of his fogged-up glasses.

Never in my life had I come so close to inflicting serious bodily harm. I wanted to separate his pathetic organ from the rest of his body with my bare hands.

“Dad,” Willow said when I hadn’t answered her after a while. I shook my head to loosen the muscles in my neck, dispersing some of the tension.

“I saw a chance to get out and I took it,” I said. In the end, it was a blessing that Martin had decided to switch spots because it opened a safer pathway out of the pool. As much as I wanted to teach those fucks a lesson in hot-spring etiquette, removing Willow from the situation was priority number one.

And let's be real, I wasn't convinced that I could take all four of them on my own. Maybe if they'd been horny frat boys drunk on too much Fireball, I would've stood a chance. But these guys were predators. I wasn't about to risk letting Willow become their next meal.

Christ, if they were shameless enough to harass her in front of me, who knew what other sick shit they were capable of.

About half a mile down the main trail, I motioned for us to stop. I needed to put my socks back on to avoid getting blisters and I figured I might as well put on a shirt.

"Drink some water," I said to Willow, knowing she hadn't had a drop since before we reached Mr. Bubbles. She didn't argue. Her hands shook as she worked to unscrew the cap on her water bottle. I laid my hands on top of hers. "Hey, it's over now. You're safe."

She glanced in the direction we'd just come from. "What if they come looking for us?"

"They don't know which site we're headed to or which direction we came from." I smoothed the stray hairs around her face that had come loose from her ponytail. "Forget about those guys. Focus on moving forward."

She nodded. "Yeah, okay. Sure."

Gazing into my daughter's sky-blue eyes, I could tell she was only pretending to be reassured. Still, even a forced smile was a good start.

I pressed my lips to her forehead. "That's my brave girl."

We set off at a brisk pace to get our blood pumping. I kept my eyes and ears tuned to the forest, scanning for threats and signs of pursuit while Willow chattered about the scenery and how much she was looking forward to cooking dinner over an

open fire. She'd assumed the responsibility for preparing food for this trip all by herself, balancing healthy, heartier options with camping staples and sweet treats. I caught myself smiling as I recalled her tossing the bag of marshmallows into the grocery cart yesterday morning. She never ate marshmallows at home, preferring whipped cream and cinnamon with her hot cocoa. The only time she ate marshmallows was in front of an open fire with me.

Would she continue to avoid them at college, or would she keep a bag in her room to remind her of our nights spent by the fire?

Pain echoed like a shout in the hollow of my chest. I wanted to believe that we'd always maintain this summer camping tradition, but that was probably naïve of me. Willow was going away to college on the other side of the country, starting a new chapter in her life. Would she still want to rough it the wilderness with her old man when she had a summer job to focus on? Not to mention plans with friends. A boyfriend—

Just the thought of her being alone with a guy had my hackles rising. I'd gotten off easy for the most part. While she admitted to being attracted to boys, she hadn't shown much interest in dating throughout high school. But my luck was destined to run out sooner or later. Of course I wanted her to experience love and pleasure. But those guys at the hot spring weren't unique among men. There were going to be plenty of others who looked at her and saw nothing but a body to use as they pleased. What if she trusted the wrong person and wound up getting hurt?

I wouldn't be there to protect her anymore.

But that was the natural way of things, wasn't it? Whether I liked it or not, Willow was growing up. I could only hope

that I'd raised her to be cautious and alert, though part of me feared that my overprotectiveness had left her too innocent. Would her inexperience render her more vulnerable to creeps and abusers?

Oh look, another bullet point to add to the list of things a father should worry about...

We reached our campsite just as the sun was beginning its descent across the sky, leaving us plenty of time to get set up. I'd reserved the site a year ago; a shady section of flat, mostly cleared land in a patch of forest, nestled between two small meadows and a stream—perfect spots for spying on wildlife. Willow and I worked together to erect our pop-up tents a good distance from the designated food-prep and storage areas. Afterward, Willow went to look for kindling on the edge of camp while I rearranged the heavy logs around the firepit and cleared away the debris. She returned with an armful of small twigs and dry leaves for kindling, laying her bounty on the ground near the pit before announcing that she was going to look for firewood.

“Don't go too far,” I told her.

“I won't. Promise.”

I continued setting up the campsite while periodically scanning for Willow's silhouette among the trees. All of the campsites along the trail employed a Leave No Trace policy for trash. Everything carried into the park must be carried out. I secured a plastic bag to a tree for our garbage and filled a collapsible bucket with dirt, just in case we needed to quickly smother the fire for any reason.

When I scanned the trees again, I didn't see Willow.

“Willow,” I called out, my voice bouncing off the trees.
“Willow, where are you?”

No response. My heart rate kicked into overdrive as I made a beeline for the last place I had spotted her. Panic seized my throat. She wasn't there. I nearly jumped out of my skin when a crow took off from a nearby tree branch with a blaring caw.

“Fuck,” I muttered. I was breathing so heavily that I almost missed the trill of feminine laughter.

“Jesus, Dad. What did that crow do to you?” Willow stepped out from between two pine trees, her arms loaded with firewood. The sight of her safe and sound sent a flood of relief through my bloodstream.

Still, I scowled.

“Why didn't you answer when I called for you?” The words came out sounding a lot harsher than I intended them to, but goddamn it, she'd scared the hell out of me.

Willow froze, startled.

“Sorry. I guess I didn't hear you.”

“You should've stayed where I could see you.” I snatched the wood from her to give my hands something to do. She stared at me, clearly confused. I felt like an ass.

“Are you okay, Dad?” she asked.

I wasn't okay, but I also knew that I was overreacting. After encouraging Willow to forget about what had happened, I didn't want to admit that I was still worked up over it. We'd met all kinds of people on the trail before, some friendlier than others, but none had ever given us that much trouble. The chances of running into those guys again in such a huge park were slim. We were more likely to encounter a grizzly.

That statistic shouldn't have brought me comfort, but it did.

“I just want to get our site set up before sundown,” I said by way of explanation. I wasn't sure if she bought my excuse, but I was grateful that she didn't question me further.

CHAPTER 3

ERIK

BACK AT THE FIREPIT, I ARRANGED THE LOGS IN A TRIPOD configuration over the kindling. While I got the fire started, Willow tackled the food. I watched her reach into the food bag—specifically designed to hide the scent of whatever’s inside—and pull out the foil packets for tonight’s meal. I forced myself not to step in when she struggled with setting up the line for the pulley system that would raise the bag at least twelve feet off the ground. By the time she succeeded in bear-proofing our food stores, I had the fire going strong.

“I’ll take it from here,” she said. It was then that I noticed she’d changed out of her swimsuit into a T-shirt and shorts.

“You do that,” I said. “I’m gonna change.”

I zipped myself into my single-person tent, taking advantage of the momentary privacy for a quick mental reset. After a series of deep, grounding breaths, I swapped my trunks for a pair of cargo shorts. When I emerged from the tent, Willow had dinner cooking over the fire. I filtered water from a nearby stream and refilled our bottles while she worked, watching the sun sink below the tops of the trees.

We ate dinner by the fire as the shadows deepened around us.

“This is good,” I said, spearing a chunk of steak with my fork. “You’re going to be the most popular person in your suite.”

“What do you mean?”

“At college. Your dorm suite has its own kitchen. You’ll have a meal plan, of course, but I bet you’ll want to make your own food occasionally.”

“Right.”

Willow stared into the campfire, her expression blank. I wasn’t blind. I’d noticed a long time ago that she wasn’t all that excited about going away to school.

I decided to keep trying.

“I know change can be scary, but college is the best. You’ll make new friends and take interesting classes. The whole world is going to open up to you.” I felt another jolt of anxiety at the thought of her out in the world, unprotected, but I worked my ass off to hide it.

“Yeah, I know,” she said with a sigh. “I just keep thinking that I don’t actually need to move all the way across the country for that. I could get the same experience a few hours from home.”

I nodded. “Sure, but the college you’re going to has the program you want. It’s one of the best schools in the country.”

It was hard to force those words out of my mouth and not just because I was concerned about her safety. The thought of putting Willow on a plane and not seeing her again for three months was devastating. But I didn’t want her to wake up one day and resent me for not pushing her to be independent.

“I guess so,” she said, still unconvinced. “It’s just *so* far away.”

“Think of it as an opportunity to spread your wings.”

I won’t hold you back. That’s what I wanted to tell her, but why should she believe me when I’d been holding on too tightly for the past eighteen years? Encouraging her to move away for college was my way of making amends. I wasn’t going to be around forever; she needed to be able to stand on her own. It would be good for both of us—at least, that’s what I kept telling myself. Part of being a good parent was making tough choices, even when those choices broke your heart.

For now, I let the subject drop. College and independence could wait. We were together now, under the stars, in one of our favorite national parks. That called for a celebration.

I got up to retrieve the s’mores supplies from the food bag. When I came back to the fire and saw Willow’s bright smile, I knew I’d made the right call.

“I don’t know about you,” I said. “But I could definitely use a sugar fix after all that walking.”

“I’ll get the sticks!” She practically sprinted to the brush pile.

Mentally patting myself on the back, I laid out the ingredients and began opening packages. This kind of thing was exactly why we were here. After today’s terrible weirdness, we needed to feel normal.

I kept the conversation light as we made the s’mores and ate them. When I’d had my fill of toasted marshmallows, I considered turning in. But Willow was wide awake, gazing up at the stars with a look of satisfaction.

“Remind me which one that is again,” I said, pointing to a T-shaped grouping of stars. I knew the answer. At the tender age of six, my daughter was already a budding astronomer. That’s how our camping tradition started, with me promising to take her places where she could see the Milky Way.

“That’s Cygnus,” she said. “And there’s Pegasus, and that bright star over there isn’t a star. It’s Jupiter.”

I should’ve been watching the sky, but instead I found myself captivated by my daughter’s features. By the apples of her cheeks and rose-pink lips. Her wide, probing eyes. I was struck speechless by a sharp sense of loss. When had she changed from the curious little girl I used to carry on my shoulders into this bright young woman? With each second that passed, she wasn’t just growing up. She was slipping through my fingers.

“Well, well, well. Would you believe it, boys, we’ve found our old friends.”

My whole body went rigid at the sound of the familiar needling voice. I instinctively reached for Willow’s hand as Duke and his men emerged from the trees like my worst nightmare come to life.

The fear in Willow’s eyes struck me somewhere primal. My daughter was terrified. I had to do something, but what could I do against four men? First, I needed to stay calm and avoid escalating the situation. Then I could come up with a plan.

I attempted to stand, but Duke motioned for me to stay on the ground.

“Please, don’t get up on our account,” he said. “We’ll join you.”

Duke and Zeb sat beside me, while Martin settled on the other side of the firepit, probably to get a better view of Willow. The reflection of the flames dancing in his glasses made his hungry gaze even more sinister.

“We brought refreshments,” Ox said in a deep, rumbling baritone. He dropped a red cooler on the ground and then sat down next to Willow.

“Have a beer, Erik,” Duke said.

I shook my head slowly. “No thanks. We were just about to go to bed.”

“Come on,” said Ox. “Don’t be a bitch. It’s early.”

“Yeah, *Dad*.” Zeb sneered. “Loosen up. The night is young.”

“Just like your girl,” said a soft-spoken voice I didn’t recognize; it took me a second to realize it belonged Martin.

I clenched my jaw, biting back the urge to tell them where they could shove their beers. Had I been on my own, I might’ve tried a more direct approach just to gauge their reaction. But I needed to consider what was best for Willow. These men were dangerous, and they seemed to enjoy playing with us. For now, we had to play along.

Ox offered a can of beer to Willow. “How about you, kid?”

She glanced at me. I shook my head.

“I’m n-not old enough,” she stammered.

Duke laughed. “That don’t matter out here, little Willow. We abide by nature’s laws, remember? Hunt or be hunted.”

“Kill or be killed,” said Zeb.

Their ominous laughter made my hands curl in on themselves. I held my daughter against my side as if my body were capable of absorbing hers.

If only we weren't outnumbered...

“Duke’s right.” Ox sipped his beer. “Out here, there’s nothing to stop us from taking what we want. No cops, no witnesses.”

“I wouldn’t say that,” I said. “There are over two thousand campsites scattered across the park. Scream loud enough, someone will hear you.”

“Scattered being the operative word,” Duke said. “With that many campsites, how would you even begin to pinpoint the sound?”

“I think *Daddy* wants to get rid of us.” Zeb leaned back against the log and crossed his legs at the ankles. The fucker was making himself comfortable.

“Don’t be silly,” Duke said, the challenge clear in his gaze. “We just got here. Toss another log on the fire. Let’s swap stories. Erik, you go first.”

I swallowed my aggressive response. “Fine. What do you want to hear?”

“Tell us about your first kiss,” Zeb said, his tone wistful.

“Fuck that,” said Duke. “Tell us about the first time you nutted in a bitch’s mouth.”

Willow gasped. Neither of us liked where this was going.

“That’s not appropriate,” I said.

“I think Willow should tell us about the first time she sucked a cock.” Ox dragged the tip of his meaty finger up

Willow's calf.

She jerked her leg away from him.

“Don't fucking touch her,” I barked before I could temper my response.

The four of them exchanged glances. No one said anything.

Then.

Laughter.

“This fucking guy,” Ox howled.

Martin folded onto the grass, grasping his side. Zeb slapped his own knee.

“Did you hear that?” Zeb cackled. “Don't fucking touch her.' Classic.”

Duke wiped a genuine tear from his eye. “I know. I fucking love that shit.”

Strands of fear coiled up my spine like ivy. These guys were fucking nuts. I scanned the ground, taking note of every rock and pointed stick, anything I could use as a weapon. Why the hell didn't I bring a knife? But wait, I did bring one—a utility knife, but it was in my pack inside the tent. I should have strapped the damn thing to my belt the second we left the hot spring.

How the fuck could I have been so careless?

“Wait, wait, wait,” said Duke, pausing to catch his breath. “Let's not get distracted. Tell us, Willow. How big of a slut are you?”

“That's enough,” I shouted.

No one even flinched. They just looked at her expectantly, as if she were a juicy piece of meat and they were a pack of hungry wolves.

“I-I’m not,” she spluttered. “I don’t...”

“You don’t remember how many cocks you’ve sucked?” Ox chuckled. “Must be a big number if she’s that confused.”

“No way,” said Zeb. “We’ve bagged ourselves a good girl.”

“A virgin,” Duke agreed. “Ripe for the picking.”

“Not for long,” Martin said softly.

Rage coursed through my veins like acid.

I shot to my feet.

“All of you, shut the hell up and stay the fuck away from my kid.” There was no point in keeping up the pretense now that they’d made their intentions known. If I couldn’t bluff my way out of this situation, these men were going to rape my daughter. “Whatever you think is going to happen here *isn’t* going to happen. Now get the fuck out of my camp.”

Ox and Martin chuckled. Zeb pretended to be shocked.

Duke bared his teeth and said, “And what if we don’t leave?”

“Then I’ll *make you* leave,” I replied, sprinkling some extra gravel onto my voice.

The other three men seemed to hold their breath while Duke got to his feet. I shifted into a defensive stance while I waited for him to throw the first punch. I was pretty sure that I could take him, though I doubted the others would wait patiently for their respective turns. But Duke didn’t move to

attack me. Instead, he reached behind him and pulled out a black handgun he must've had stashed in his waistband.

Dread settled in the pit of my stomach. Willow cried softly, touching her small hand to my knee.

“Go on, Dad,” said Duke. “*Make us.*”

CHAPTER 4

WILLOW

MY THROAT CLENCHED SO TIGHTLY I COULDN'T BREATHE. Duke was pointing a gun at my father.

This can't be happening.

But it was happening. No matter how surreal it felt or how unthinkable the circumstances seemed to my rational mind, these men weren't just a bunch of assholes. They were monsters and they wanted to hurt us. To hurt *me*.

Zeb, Ox, and Martin rose to their feet. I clung to my dad's leg as if I could disappear behind him, as if his physical presence alone could protect me. It didn't matter that Duke was the only man holding a weapon; the odds were still four against one. They had planned this, and they weren't going to leave until they got what they came for.

"What do you want?" I asked. Being the only one still seated on the ground made me feel more vulnerable than I already was. Summoning all my strength, I compelled myself to rise on trembling legs. Dad angled his body in front of me.

"We just want to have a little fun, sweetheart," said Zeb.

I couldn't believe I had ever found him attractive. He looked like an evil Ken doll.

Dad took a step toward Duke. I wanted to yell at him to stop, but my heart had already lodged itself in my throat like a cork. I stood frozen in place, terrified that I was about to watch my father get shot.

But then Duke took a step back, and the other men surged forward.

Zeb punched my dad in the face. He went down but recovered quickly enough to deliver an avenging blow to Zeb's middle before the blond man could dodge. But my dad's upper hand was short lived. While Zeb was doubled over in pain, Ox hooked his beefy arm around my dad's neck and squeezed. Panic clawed at my insides as I watched my dad grapple for the other man's arm, his face growing redder. I screamed as I ran toward them, then halted instinctively when the gun swung in my direction.

"Stay back, little Willow," Duke mocked. "Daddy just needs to realize who's in charge."

"Leave him alone," I shouted, but they ignored me.

Ox knocked my dad to the ground, shoving a knee into his back, while Martin produced a handful of cable ties from the cooler. I watched helplessly as they restrained my dad's hands at the small of his back, afraid that trying to help him would end with at least one of us getting shot.

What could I do anyway? I was fast but nowhere near strong enough to shove even one of them away from my dad. But it destroyed me to watch my dad being brutalized. He was a decent person who never went out of his way to be cruel to anyone. He didn't deserve this.

Ox and Martin sat my dad on the ground, propped up against one of the big logs by the fire. His chest heaved with

the effort of trying to catch his breath. I could already see the bruise forming on his cheekbone from where Zeb had punched him.

“Now that Dad’s taken care of, we can have some real fun with baby girl,” Duke said. “That means you, little Willow.”

I blinked at him. He’d tucked the gun back into his waistband, but that didn’t mean he wasn’t dangerous.

“W-what do you want me to do?” I stammered.

“Strip.”

My stomach churned. I hugged myself and shook my head.

“Please,” I whispered. “No.”

“Leave her alone, you fucks,” Dad cut in. He tried to stand, but with his hands tied behind his back, it was easy for Martin to shove him down.

I expected Duke to threaten to shoot me, but instead, he walked slowly over to my dad. I trembled as Duke yanked my dad’s head back by his hair and pressed the gun barrel against his temple.

“This is the last time I’ll ask nicely,” Duke growled. “Take off your fucking clothes.”

There was nothing else I could do. I had to strip, or he was surely going to shoot my dad and then tear my clothes off anyway. There was no doubt in my mind that this monster was capable of ending someone’s life. I could tell by the lack of hesitation in his eyes. No second-guessing. No conscience to appeal to. And the rest of them looked just as merciless.

I couldn’t help thinking that they’d done this before.

Slowly, I slid my feet out of my hiking shoes, trying to drag out the process as much as possible. But I didn't want to piss them off either. Barefoot, I grasped the hem of my T-shirt, pulling it up and over my head. My dad kept his gaze on my feet out of politeness while the others stared at me with a hunger that made my skin crawl. But I kept going, sliding my shorts down my legs. Soon I was left with nothing but my white cotton panties and a sports bra, not the kind of underwear meant to seduce or excite, but that didn't seem to bother these men. Martin licked his lips while Ox cupped his erection through his pants. It was disgusting.

“Keep going,” Duke commanded.

Swallowing my disgust, I lifted my bra over my head. The cool night air hit my skin, making my nipples pebble. I aimed my eyes at the ground, unable to stand looking at their excitement. Finally, I let my panties fall down my legs.

I stood before them all, naked and trembling. I'd never been this exposed in front of *anyone*, much less my dad and four cruel strangers. My skin prickled with goosebumps. It was mortifying.

“P-please,” I said, unable to resist covering my breasts with one arm and laying a hand over the auburn curls between my legs. “Just leave us alone.”

Duke tucked his gun away as he stalked toward me. I flinched as he grabbed my wrist, tearing my hand away from my pubic mound. “Look at this, boys! The carpet matches the drapes.”

“It's too bad her tits are so small,” Ox said. “I like to watch 'em bounce.”

My cheeks burned with embarrassment. I bit the inside of my cheek, annoyed that my traitorous, insecure girl brain could be made ashamed by anything these monsters had to say about my body. I struggled to free my wrist from Duke's grasp, but he was too strong.

"I think her tits will bounce just fine," Zeb said, approaching me. I cringed as he pried my other arm away from my chest. The next thing I knew, Martin and Ox were in front of me as well.

My heart hammered against my sternum as I tried to wriggle away. Suddenly, Duke's fist closed around the base of my ponytail, forcing my head back sharply. I cried out at the pain in my scalp.

"God, I love that sound." Duke licked a line up my neck, leaving a wet trail. I shuddered, sickened. "Makes my dick so fucking hard."

I yelped as his teeth clamped down on my earlobe. Somebody chuckled. I was quickly distracted from the pain by a large hand groping my breast. But I couldn't see who was touching me because Duke was already shoving his tongue into my mouth. Gagging, I fought to turn my face away, but Duke wouldn't be refused. His grip on my hair tightened, bringing tears to my eyes. The message was clear.

Resistance will get you hurt.

But I didn't kiss him back. I kept my lips stiff and tongue limp as Duke explored my mouth. If he cared, he didn't show it.

When he pulled away, I saw that it was Martin fondling my breast. His attention homed in on my nipple; I shrieked as he pinched it.

“Get the fuck away from her,” my dad yelled.

“Someone shut him up,” grumbled Zeb.

I opened my mouth to assure my dad that I was fine, but the lie died in my throat. I couldn't bring myself to act like this wasn't horrifying, not even to save my dad from being roughed up.

“You're a bunch of sick fucks,” he added.

“Ox, take care of him.”

“No, don't,” I begged. “Leave him alone.”

They ignored me. Duke still had a tight grip on my hair, so there was no getting away, and nothing I could do as Ox stomped over to my dad. Gripping his shirt collar, Ox lifted him up off the ground before driving his fist into his face. My dad's body fell back onto the ground, blood pouring from his nose.

“Stop, please,” I cried.

Zeb laughed. “You really should worry about yourself.”

I sobbed as Ox delivered a kick to my dad's stomach. But the meaning behind Zeb's words became all too clear as I felt his hand slide between my legs. He found my entrance and wedged two fingers inside me without finesse.

Stinging, searing pain ripped through my pelvis.

“Oh, god, stop!” Fresh tears sprang to my eyes. I'd never been touched like this before by another person. I wasn't ready.

He didn't care.

“Get a look at this, Daddy,” Duke called out.

I didn't want my dad to see me like this, but I couldn't stop myself from seeking his familiar gaze. Ox had given him a black eye to go along with his bloody nose. He panted, still leaning against the log, with Ox crouched beside him, forcing him to watch what they were doing to me. There was pain and fury in my dad's expression, as well as remorse. I'm sure it killed him to watch me being fondled by these men while he sat there helpless.

Closing my eyes, I tried to distract myself by reciting the periodic table of elements in order. *Hydrogen. Helium. Lithium. Beryllium...* But the rough, unfamiliar touches kept dragging my attention back to the present. These men seemed to like hurting me. They got off on it.

Tears tracked down my cheeks. I'd never felt so scared or so trapped in my life.

Zeb's fingers continued to thrust in and out of my body. After a while, it stopped hurting so much, but it still didn't feel good, the way that it did when I'd experimented on my own.

"She's a tight little thing," he said. "I knew you were a virgin. You know what that means?" He brought his face close to mine. "Ox owes me twenty bucks."

"I'm not giving you a dime until I see blood," said Ox.

The pain returned when Zeb began moving his fingers harder and faster. I was so distracted that I didn't realize what Martin was trying to do until his mouth closed around one of my nipples. He circled the sensitive bud with his tongue, and I felt a shameful jolt of pleasure between my hips.

No, no, stop, I don't want this. Not with them. Not like this...

I cried out in pain as Martin bit my nipple, putting an end to my internal shame spiral. My dad cursed loudly, but I couldn't bring myself to look at him again. Not when there were so many strangers' hands and mouths on my body. Zeb pulled away, holding up his fingers, tinged red with my blood.

"Proof is in the pink," Zeb crowed. "Prepare to pay up, big guy."

"Not so fast," said Ox, having moved closer. "I'm going to need independent verification."

Ox's thick fingers forced their way inside me. Duke jumped at the chance to shove his tongue down my throat again just as I was starting to sob. It was all too much. I felt like a rag doll. I wasn't a person to these men. I was a thing to be used. Abused. Violated.

When Duke finally let me breathe again, I noticed that Zeb was standing back from the others, unzipping his pants.

Oh my god.

His erection was pointing straight at me. I told myself to look away as he began to stroke it, but I couldn't take my eyes off it. I'd never seen a man get hard in real life before. I didn't want to be even remotely curious about this monster's anatomy. But there it was. I watched him through wet eyelashes while the other men stepped away from me. I nearly lost my balance as Duke let go of my hair, and I was forced to depend on my own strength to stay upright.

"Since you're a virgin, I'm going to assume you don't know what to do with this," Zeb said with a smirk. He stroked himself faster, his gaze roaming across my body. "It's simple, baby. First, you're going to get down on your knees, right next

to dear old dad over there, and then you're going to suck my cock."

I took an uneven step back, but Duke was right there to stop me. He wrapped his arm around my waist, resting his palm on my stomach. In his other hand, he held a knife in front of my face.

"Ain't she a beauty?" he rasped in my ear. "Guns are good for crowd control, but I'll tell you, this knife is my favorite toy. If you don't do what Zeb says, I'm going to start carving pictures into your pretty, virgin skin. How do you think Daddy will like that?"

The look of dread on my dad's face told me exactly what he thought of that potential scenario. My stomach lurched at the idea of taking Zeb's cock into my mouth, especially in front of my dad, but I knew there was no point in refusing. If I didn't do it willingly, they would make me do it. Still, even though I hadn't refused, I wasn't submitting quickly enough for the men's liking. Duke shoved me toward Ox, who dragged me over to my dad and forced me to my knees.

"Scooch over," Zeb said. "Get nice and cozy. I want him to be close enough to hear you choke on it."

I chanced a glance at my dad's bruised and bloodied face. It looked even worse up close. The skin around his eye was swollen and there was dried blood from his nose stuck to his facial scruff. Thankfully, the bleeding seemed to have stopped.

"It looks worse than it is," he mumbled, but I suspected he was only saying that to make me feel better.

Zeb grasped my chin and forced me to look at him. I flinched at the sight of his erection, so close to my face. "Open up. And watch your teeth if you want to keep them."

Zeb wasted no time pressing the head of his cock between my lips. With his hand at the back of my head and his dick in my mouth, I braced my hands on his thighs to keep my balance. But there was nothing I could do about the speed and force with which he drove into my mouth. I let out a muffled cry of surprise and tried to pull back, but Zeb just chuckled.

He held my head in place and began to pump his hips, hitting the back of my throat with every pass. I tried to push him off, panicked by my inability to breathe, but that did nothing to deter him. All I could do was open my mouth wider and try to pull in some air every time he pistoned back. Within seconds, I was a drooling, gagging mess.

Tears streamed down my cheeks. My jaw ached. Zeb was already moaning, clearly enjoying himself, while I was trying to keep my dinner down. It was horrible, but I just kept telling myself that I had to get through it, give them what they wanted. If they got what they came for, they'd let us go.

I had to believe that.

At some point, I felt the heat and pressure of my dad's leg pressed against mine. I knew it must have been torture for him to watch them hurt and humiliate me. But even that slight touch was enough to reassure me that I wasn't alone in this. We would do what we had to do to make it out of here alive. Together.

It seemed to take forever for Zeb to finish, and when he finally did, he buried himself in my throat and held me in place for a long moment, cutting off my air supply. I slapped his thighs as black dots appeared in front of my vision. I frantically tried to shove him away, but it was useless. I thought I was going to suffocate.

I heard my dad say, “She can’t fucking breathe,” before I felt the splash of wet heat at the back of my throat. I had no choice but to swallow it all. It was either that, or choke.

Finally, Zeb released me, and I fell back onto my bare ass, gasping for air.

“Are you okay?” my dad asked. “Willow, look at me.” But I was too ashamed to even look in his direction, much less respond.

“I think you were right, Duke,” Zeb said. “She’s definitely worth all of this effort.”

“Told you,” Duke replied, crouching down beside me. He cupped my cheek, running his thumb over my swollen lips. “God, she’s gorgeous when she cries.”

His voice was almost tender. I met his cold, bottomless gaze and felt my insides clench up instinctively as his lips curved in amusement.

“There’s just one thing we need to figure out,” Duke continued. “Who’s going to be the first to test drive this cunt?”

“No,” my dad said. “You don’t have to do that. You’ve fucked with us and had some fun. Just let us go. We won’t tell anyone.”

“You think this is all the fun we had in mind?” Duke twirled his knife in the air. “We’re just getting started.”

“I could give you money. Name your price.”

I knew that we didn’t have a ton of money. We weren’t struggling by any means, but I doubted he could get his hands on whatever insane amount of cash it would take to buy these assholes off. My chest tightened. He was grasping at straws, offering anything he could think of to try to save us. But after

everything we'd already been through tonight, I knew these men wouldn't take the bait. They didn't come into the wilderness for money. They wanted blood, tears, and pain.

The men laughed as if my dad's suggestion was hilarious. Duke quieted first, and I couldn't help noticing the evil glint in his already terrifying eyes.

"I have an idea," he said. "I think Daddy should do the honors."

My thoughts screeched to a halt. I looked to my dad for reassurance that I'd misheard Duke's suggestion, but the shock and revulsion were scrawled across my father's face beneath the dried blood.

"Oh, shit," Zeb said behind his fist. "That's messed up."

"Sick and twisted. I like it," said Ox.

Martin didn't say anything. Judging by his pursed lips and sour expression, he wasn't a fan of the idea. However, Duke had spoken, and while these guys might not respect the laws of men, it appeared that one man's word was still law, even in the wilderness.

"Fuck yeah," Duke said. "We're getting a show tonight, boys."

As the men hooted and hollered, I didn't know what to feel. Horror? Disgust? Yes. Those seemed like normal emotions to cycle through, given the context. The thought of losing my virginity to one of these monsters was... unthinkable.

But not as unthinkable as having sex with my dad.

I loved my father more than anyone else in the world. He was my best friend, my protector, and my biggest fan all at

once. To even entertain the idea of crossing the line with him was shameful and wrong. There was absolutely no way he'd ever willingly do something like that.

But where does the line between willing and unwilling fall when you have a knife to your throat? Could I forgive my father for hurting me if it meant saving me from an even more devastating fate or saving our lives? Could he forgive himself?

In the end, I was going to be violated no matter what.

CHAPTER 5

ERIK

I WAS TRAPPED IN A NIGHTMARE. I COULDN'T DO THIS. I couldn't fuck my own daughter.

“No,” I rasped.

Duke chuckled. “What’s the matter? You don’t think she’s hot?”

“Fuck you. I’m not doing this.” I met his steely gaze with my own, all too aware of Willow on the ground beside me, naked, vulnerable, and tear streaked from the rough treatment forced upon her by these animals. I wanted to die watching them grope and penetrate her with their dirty fingers. I almost slit my wrists on the plastic cable ties trying to free my hands while she suffocated, her airway blocked by a cock that shouldn’t have been there. How could I have let this happen? I should have stopped them, should have torn them apart before they got within ten feet of my Willow.

Duke pulled out his knife, flipping it in the air and catching it by the handle.

“You’ll do it, or you’ll watch me slice her up.”

The motherfucker was a straight-up psycho. I was wrong to call these men animals. Nothing native to this wilderness could ever abuse my daughter the way that these bastards

have. I didn't doubt the authenticity of Duke's threat for a second. He looked way too comfortable with that knife in his hand.

"Don't worry, Dad," he said, moving behind me. "We can start slow. Get her nice and ready for you. I bet you won't need much convincing once you've had a taste."

He shoved me forward so he could sever the cable ties around my wrists. My pulse spiked. Was this moron freeing my hands? As much as I wanted to grab the knife the instant the ties were cut, I couldn't risk fucking up what would most likely be Willow's only chance at escaping this nightmare.

"You sure it's a good idea to untie him?" Zeb asked.

"Why not," said Duke. "Dad knows that if he so much as twitches in my direction, I'll cut his throat and pop his daughter's cherry with my gun barrel while he bleeds out all over the dirt. At least with his hands free, we won't have to help him thrust."

I bit back a groan as the blood came rushing back into my hands, making them cramp up. Martin had made certain to secure the cable ties good and tight. I looked at Willow, still on the ground with her arms wrapped around her knees. More than anything, I wanted to gather her up and carry her as far as my legs would take me. That wasn't going to be possible anytime soon. But mark my words, I was going to make Duke regret underestimating me.

"On your back, bitch," Duke said. When Willow didn't comply, he turned to me. "Put your brat on her back, Erik. Unless you'd prefer to hit it from behind."

Zeb and Ox laughed while Martin sulked. I was sure Martin was pissed that Duke hadn't offered to let him have

Willow first. *Too fucking bad, you sick piece of shit.* I flexed my aching fingers but couldn't make them act. The thought of maneuvering her into position after everything she'd already been through seemed monstrous.

"I-I can't," I said, despising the weakness in my voice. What they were asking for felt impossible. She was my *daughter*, for fuck's sake.

"Boys, hold her down."

At Duke's command, the others converged on Willow. Martin and Zeb pulled at her legs, pinned them to the ground. She shrieked as Ox twisted her upper body, holding her down by her shoulders. She resisted, but the men were stronger than she was. I wanted to chop off their hands, but Duke was at my side, holding the knife.

"So, what's it going to be?" he asked. "Are you going to bury your face in your daughter's pussy, or would you rather watch me do it? And let me warn you, I'm not afraid to use my teeth."

This evil fucker... I was going to kill him. I didn't know when or how, but I was going to stop his heart from beating one way or another.

For now, I had no choice but to obey his orders and pray that Willow would forgive me someday in the future, far from here. I shifted onto my hands and knees and crawled between her legs. I couldn't bring myself to look at her face, so I fixed my gaze on what was in front of me. My daughter's soft, pink lips were spread open by the men pulling at her legs. She was as beautiful down here as she was everywhere else.

I despised myself for noticing that.

“I’m sorry...” I slid my hands up her inner thighs and lowered my head.

Everything about this was wrong, from the way that these sick fucks were staring at us to the fact that she smelled incredible. But I worked hard to push all of that out of my mind as I licked up her center, getting my first taste of her secrets.

“Attaboy,” said Zeb, or maybe it was Duke. Whoever it was clapped me on the back as if we were bros. I suppressed the urge to whirl around and punch someone.

Willow gasped as I flicked my tongue over her clit. The possibility that I could make her feel something other than pain filled me with a sense of purpose. I decided to do whatever I could to make this good for her. If they were truly going to force us to fuck, she needed to be wet enough to take me.

Christ, talk about making the best of the absolute worst situation. Was this survival mode or was I always a little bit twisted?

I focused on bringing Willow pleasure, tuning out the taunting words of the men surrounding us. I dipped my tongue inside her opening as I slid my hands between her ass and the ground, lifting her to grant me better access to her sweetness. She moaned, and the men mocked her for it, but I could tell that her body liked what I was doing.

A strange sense of pride filled my chest, knowing that I was pleasing her. I tried to ignore the voice in my head that was screaming at me to stop, reminding me over and over again that she was my daughter and I was hurting her, even if my actions brought her pleasure in the moment.

Willow began rocking her hips, though her range of motion was limited by the hands pinning her down. Her shallow breaths grew into whimpers. I hovered my mouth over her clit, pulling the sensitive nub between my lips and sucking gently, as I slowly urged a finger inside of her. She was so tight that I became lightheaded.

I felt a rush of blood and a subtle throb below my belt. No, that wasn't possible. I couldn't be getting hard from this.

What the fuck was wrong with me?

I swirled my tongue over her clit a few times, and then suddenly she was coming, her pussy clenching around my finger as she moaned. I couldn't resist glancing up at her face, wanting to see for myself that it was true. But instead, my view was blocked by the arms of the assholes fondling her breasts.

Seeing their hands on her body made me jerk back.

"Get your hands off her," I snapped, rage coursing through me.

Of course they didn't listen. Ox smirked, pinching Willow's face between his thumb and fingers, forcing her lips to part. Bringing his face close to hers, he spit into her mouth. She cringed and tried to turn away while he held her tightly and laughed in her face.

Fury brought me to my feet. I was ready to attack the man, despite the beating he'd already given me. But I didn't get that far. Duke grabbed the back of my shirt and then cut through it so effortlessly that I didn't realize what he'd done until he pulled the split shirt off me.

"What the fuck are you doing?" I snarled, whirling to face him.

“Getting you ready to pop your little girl’s cherry,” Duke said. “It seemed unfair that she was the only one without clothes on.”

The desire to wipe the smug grin off his face was so strong that I nearly punched him, despite the fact that he had multiple weapons and a team at his disposal. But Willow’s cry of pain adjusted my priorities. They’d repositioned her onto her knees, and one of her nipples was red and distended, as if someone had just tugged on it.

“Fuckers,” I muttered.

“Pants off,” Duke said, poking me in the back with the tip of the knife. I flinched as he broke the skin, just barely.

I unfastened my belt quickly and without complaint to avoid further prodding with the knife. I needed to focus. I couldn’t risk letting my anger get the best of me again. If I became incapacitated too soon, there would be no helping Willow escape these men, and that was my number-one priority. I had to play along until an opportunity presented itself.

I shoved my shorts and boxers down my legs and then stepped out of them. I was ashamed to find that my cock wasn’t entirely soft after having licked my daughter’s pussy. However, it definitely wasn’t ready to perform the job they intended it for.

“Looks like Daddy’s having a little performance anxiety.” Zeb sneered. “Lucky for you, she’s a talented little cock sucker.”

“You heard him,” Martin said, shoving Willow forward. “Use your mouth to get him hard.”

Willow avoided my gaze as she moved toward me on her knees. I couldn't help noticing the way her breasts trembled with her movements.

Stop it.

I knew what these men wanted. I'd even resigned myself to the truth that she was going to be better off getting fucked by me than one of these cruel bastards. But I couldn't stop thinking about what a betrayal it would be if I got hard from this. Being turned-on by my daughter's body, her cries of pleasure, her mouth... It felt like crossing a line that we wouldn't be able to come back from.

But when she took my dick in her hand and pressed a kiss to the tip, I felt a zip of electricity through my veins. Her red-rimmed gaze flicked up to meet mine, and I saw acceptance there. She knew as well as I did that we didn't have a choice.

So she did what she had to do: she opened her mouth and took my cock inside.

Don't get hard. Don't get hard.

But no matter how many times I repeated the mantra, I couldn't help myself. The warmth of her mouth. The brush of her soft, wet tongue along the underside. The sight of her lips stretching around my shaft as it thickened.

Fuck.

My cock hardened despite my best efforts to keep it soft. It had been too long since I'd been inside a warm mouth. I closed my eyes and tipped my face skyward. If I couldn't stop this from happening, I could at least pretend it was someone else—anyone else—giving me a blow job.

Yet I couldn't even manage to do that. Behind my closed eyelids, all I could think about was Willow's pussy in front of

me and her pleading moans, the taste of her as I made her come with my tongue.

Goddamn it, how did I let this happen? It wasn't just the physical act of having my dick sucked that was getting me off. It was the fact that Willow was the one doing it. I opened my eyes and saw her as if for the first time, not just beautiful, but sexy and sensual. Now that I knew how good she tasted and had felt her from the inside, I couldn't go back to seeing her as anything else. She wasn't just my little girl anymore. She was my little girl with my cock in her mouth and a glint in her eye that seemed to say, *It's all right, Daddy. I still love you.*

Willow drew back until only the head of my dick remained between her lips. I groaned as she fluttered her tongue over the slit.

“Look who's finally enjoying himself,” Ox said, snickering.

“Jesus, he's huge,” Martin added. The envy in his voice was palpable. I always knew that I had a big cock, but since I hadn't dated in over a decade, it wasn't something I thought about.

“Good,” Duke said. “That fucking thing will split her in half.”

His sick excitement at the thought of Willow being hurt by my dick was almost enough to detract from the pleasure I felt. But then Willow sucked me in deep enough that I could feel the back of her throat, and all other thoughts flew away.

She gripped the base of my cock, pumping along with her head bobbing back and forth. This was nothing like the blow job Zeb had forced upon her. She was putting effort into this, as if she enjoyed it. Was that possible?

The idea that Willow might be getting pleasure from sucking me off had me throbbing so hard that I nearly shot my load into her mouth. But Duke must have sensed what was happening because he pulled her off me, throwing her onto the ground.

“Time to fuck your baby,” he said with far too much enthusiasm. I tensed as I heard the purr of a zipper being lowered, followed by a few more. Within seconds, they’d all pulled out their cocks and were stroking them. Duke slapped his dick against his palm. “Then we’ll all get a turn.”

CHAPTER 6

ERIK

I KNEELED IN FRONT OF WILLOW AND GENTLY SPREAD HER legs. She didn't fight me.

"I'm sorry," I said, as if saying it again would prevent her from hating me when this was all over. I wouldn't blame her if she did. Using my mouth on her at knifepoint was terrible enough, but fucking her required a higher level of participation. The fact that I was hard was physical proof that at least one part of me wanted this to happen.

Clear fluid dripped from my cock onto her inner thigh. My body craved her, no matter how wrong it was to lust after my own daughter. It didn't matter if I never admitted the truth out loud. Willow could see and feel the evidence for herself.

I didn't want to look into her eyes and find betrayal there, so I focused on aligning my cockhead with her entrance. I was shocked to feel how wet she'd become. Was all of that honey from the orgasm I gave her earlier, or had she truly enjoyed sucking me off? When this was all over, would she punish herself for having taken pleasure in something forbidden? I hoped not. None of this was her fault.

"Quit stalling," said Duke. "Get your fucking dick in there."

I took a deep breath and began to push my way inside. Willow gasped and immediately tensed. I froze, not wanting to cause her more pain than was necessary. I still couldn't get over how tight she felt around me. She'd never taken a cock before, and I'd already done all that I could do to make this process easier.

"Dad," she whispered. "I'm scared."

I covered her body with mine, bringing my mouth close to her ear. "It's going to be okay. Just keep breathing."

"It hurts."

"I know, baby, I know," I said, struggling to marshal the words to comfort my daughter when I was the one causing her pain. "We just have to get past this part. Then it won't hurt anymore." I had no idea if that was going to be true for her, but I prayed it would be.

She laid her trembling hands on my shoulders.

"Okay. Keep going."

I rocked my hips toward her, sinking my cock a few inches deeper. Her body tensed again, and I bit back a groan of pleasure as I felt her muscles twitching, straining to adjust.

"This is shockingly boring," said Duke. "Fuck her like you mean it, or I will."

Fuck these sadistic bastards. Gritting my teeth, I pulled back and then surged forward, continuing to push even when she dug her nails into my shoulders.

"Dad, wait... It's too much."

"Just a little more, baby. You can do this." I pressed a kiss to her cheek. With a final thrust, I buried the rest of my shaft to the hilt inside her.

Willow yelped. I hated myself for doing this to her. How fucking unfair that my pleasure could only come at the expense of her violation. I groaned through clenched teeth before I could stop myself.

“I’m so sorry, Willow. You’re such a brave girl.”

“Oh god,” she breathed. “Oh god, oh god, Dad...”

“Now that’s more like it,” said Zeb.

I tried to ignore the sound of the four of them jacking off around us. Instead, I focused on my daughter’s whispers and the wet heat throttling my cock. I wanted to wait a few seconds before moving, give her some time to get used to being filled. But Ox made it clear that time was a luxury we couldn’t afford.

“Fuck this,” he said. “If he’s not going to rail her, I’ll break her in myself.”

She gasped as I began rocking my hips, pulling back and driving forward. I was willing to do whatever it took to make sure no one else got inside her, even if it meant being less than delicate her first time around. Guilt pierced me, not only because I was fucking Willow against her will, but because it all felt so damn good that for a moment, I struggled to remember why I shouldn’t be doing this.

“Dad... It... *Unnhh...*” She half whimpered something indecipherable between gasps and grunts.

“It’s okay,” I lied. “It’ll be okay.”

“Put her on top,” Zeb demanded. “I want to see those tits bounce while she rides you.”

God help me, I wanted to see that too.

I flipped us so that I was lying on my back but I didn't force her to sit up right away. With an arm around her waist and my hand on her ass, I let her lie on my chest with her face pressed to my neck while I did all the work. I was amazed by how wet she still was, given that I was most likely hurting her.

Willow tried to sit up, but I held her down. I needed to tell her the plan while she was still close enough to hear it. Thankfully, the bastards watching us seemed distracted by the sight of my long, fat cock pummeling her pussy from below.

"We're gonna get out of this," I hissed into her hair so that those assholes couldn't hear me. "When I give you the signal, run as fast as you can. Don't look back."

"No." She squeezed my shoulders, her whole body shuddering with the force of my thrusts. "I... won't... leave you."

"I'll be right behind you, I promise." It was a necessary lie. I knew I'd have to stay back and fight to give her even half a chance of getting away.

A loud smack echoed throughout the campsite. Willow screamed, her pussy tightening around me in a way that pulled a moan from my lips.

"Ride him," said Duke, spanking her hard. "Show your daddy a good time."

Willow braced her hands against my chest to balance herself as she sat upright on my cock. I brushed the sweat-dampened hair from her face. She looked depleted, but somehow, she still found the strength to lift up and then slam back down. Her movements were jerky and uncoordinated, but I couldn't have cared less. She was beautiful, flushed from her cheeks to her pretty pink nipples.

“Touch her tits.”

I didn't bother looking to see who the command had come from. I just complied, reaching up to cup Willow's breasts. Her hard nipples tickled my palms like they were trying to tease me. I squeezed her breasts gently, loving how they fit just right in my hands.

Willow shrieked as Duke spanked her again.

“Faster, slut.”

I growled in anger, struggling not to appreciate the way her inner muscles tightened when he spanked her.

“Leave her alone,” I spat.

“I'm doing you a favor. Don't you want to come?”

The others laughed. I knew he was only trying to get me off quicker so that they could take their turns with her. I had to hold out for as long as possible, until I was ready to put my plan into action.

But I was losing focus. Willow's pussy felt too good, especially when she did speed up in response to Duke's continued abuse of her ass. Everything about my daughter—her scent, her voice, her skin—turned me on and made my heart beat faster. I looked up into her face, expecting to find her miserable, but despite the horror of the situation, she looked captivated. Her blue eyes had grown darker, and she was biting her lip. Each time she bottomed out on my dick, she ground against my pubic bone like she was trying to stimulate her clit. Experimentally, I licked my thumb and touched it to the button between her legs.

A breathy moan fell from her lips.

Willow wasn't just working hard to get me off. She was fighting for her own climax. All this time, I'd thought I was torturing my daughter. But there was a part of her—like the twisted part of me—that couldn't resist stealing a moment of bliss within this never-ending nightmare.

I stroked her clit while I fucked her, driving up into her every time she dropped down onto me. The sex was rough and wild. We weren't just doing this for the men who had put us here any longer. We were doing it for ourselves. I sat up and pulled her closer, catching her lips with mine. She didn't hesitate to open her mouth to me as I deepened the kiss.

“That's right,” Duke rasped. “Make her taste herself on your tongue.”

Willow panted around our tongues as I guided her up and down on my lap at a frenzied pace. Her nipples grazed my chest with every bounce. I broke away from kissing her and took one of them into my mouth, swirling my tongue around the stiff flesh and coaxing a moan from her throat. She threw her head back as she came, grinding her hard, pulsing clit against my thumb.

“Oh my god. Fuck... *Oh fuck... Dad...*”

That last word should have pulled me back to reality, but it didn't. Her pussy throbbed around me. I squeezed her ass and kissed her lips as I felt my own end approaching, my brain no longer in control. She held me tightly. I groaned as my climax swept through me, my body going rigid as I pumped my release into Willow's hot core.

When it was over, she collapsed against me, tremors still rippling through her body. Between the two of us, there was so much fluid that her pussy couldn't hold it all. I felt some of it drip onto my sack.

That's where you came from. I drifted in that liminal space between coming and coming to my senses. But soon enough, my rational mind took control again.

I had never felt so conflicted.

But there wasn't time to dwell on the ethics of what I'd just done. I had to create a distraction that would allow Willow to get away before these guys could continue hurting her. The plan had to work because if they tied me up again, or worse, there'd be no second chances.

Willow stiffened in my arms, and I was sure that reality was rushing back to her as well. I cradled the back of her head and urged her to rest her chin on my shoulder.

"You know where to go," I whispered.

"But what about you?"

The lie fell easily from my lips.

"If I'm not there by morning, keep going south until you get to the ranger station. I'll find you."

I felt wet drops on the back of my shoulder. Tears. She sniffled.

"Okay."

"Good girl." I kissed her cheek. "I love you."

"Me, too."

I wanted to ask, *how? How can you still love me after everything I've done?*

Blinking back tears, I lifted her by the waist, shuddering as my cock left her body. She rose on shaky legs. I wanted to hold her as I got to my feet, but I couldn't waste time. I had to focus on immobilizing the men who still wanted to hurt her.

Martin had obviously finished while watching us, based on the mess on the ground and the limp worm in his hand. That left the other three to argue about who would get to fuck her next.

“This shit is why I keep saying that we should always look for a group of women,” said Ox. “Whoever goes last is going to end up with a sloppy hole.”

The way they talked about her made me sick, but I recognized this distraction for the opportunity it was. They believed they’d neutralized me, broken me down. They couldn’t have been more mistaken.

“You guys are forgetting that she’s got one more perfectly good hole,” Duke said, grinning wickedly. “Too bad for you, it’s all mine.”

Their argument dragged on.

I scanned the ground for a rock that looked like it could crush bone and spotted a long branch sticking out of the firepit. The branch appeared fresher than the rest of the firewood, less dried out, which explained why it hadn’t burned very well, but for the glowing end half-buried in embers.

A plan unfolded in my mind as I stared at the branch. A rock would deal more damage, but to use it, I would have to get much closer to the knife in Duke’s hand. The fact that the branch was still smoldering gave it a leg up on most other options. It didn’t have to knock him out to be effective.

Then a miracle happened. Martin left to take a piss. I took it as a sign from above.

Slowly, I knelt as if I intended to sit back down, closing my fingers around the unburnt end of the branch. I raised it slightly, testing the weight—heavy enough—and waited to see

if it would snap in half. When it didn't, I gently freed it from the coals. I made sure no one was looking at me as I stood back up.

My pulse kicked like a horse and continued to gallop. I looked at Willow and mouthed the word *run*.

I swung the branch at Duke's head.

He must have noticed movement in his peripheral vision because he turned to look at me just before the branch made contact. The glowing red end smashed into his temple, knocking him down. The smell of burning hair filled the air as the other two men shouted in surprise. I was already reaching for the gun tucked into the back of Duke's pants. The second after I grabbed hold of the grip, I was tackled to the ground by Ox.

I landed hard, barely keeping the gun in my grasp. I didn't get a chance to recover before I was punched in the kidney by the huge asshole who had already beaten me once.

"She's running!" Martin yelled as he jogged back toward the firepit, struggling to zip up his fly.

"Help Ox," Zeb shouted. "I'll get her."

Fear for Willow almost made me panic, but I tamped it down. Her survival depended on my ability to distract as many of them as I could for as long as I could. I managed to roll away from Ox as he tried to land another blow. My lower back screamed in pain. I scrambled to my feet, taking note of Ox's position on the ground and Martin flanking me.

I didn't see Zeb anywhere, so I could only assume he'd left to chase after Willow. I reminded myself that she was fast and smart, then focused on the two men who still posed a threat to me. If I died right now, there would be no one to go after Zeb.

With no time to strategize, I made a split-second decision based on who was the bigger threat. I pointed the gun at Ox and fired twice, just as he was getting to his feet.

The big guy's mouth fell open in shock as he was knocked backward by the force of the bullets. He touched his chest and then looked at his hands, now coated in blood. A second later, his eyes rolled back in his head and he followed them, all the way to the ground.

"You fucking killed him," Martin said, his jaw hanging in disbelief.

I stared at Ox's limp body. For some reason, looking at him made me think about the hunting trips I'd taken with my father when I was a boy. This wasn't my first kill, but it was the first time I had shot a man. I couldn't help thinking that his death felt more justified than all the ones that came before it.

Martin lunged at me. I didn't have time to aim the gun at him before he was already knocking it out of my hand. I lost track of the weapon in the dim light of the dying fire. Martin tried to throw a punch, but he wasn't nearly as fast or as strong as Ox, so I was able to dodge easily. I was still naked, which made me vulnerable, but I was also beyond furious. That fury gave me the strength I needed to knock Martin's ass to the ground. He landed on his back.

"Come on, man. We were just messing around."

"Is that what you call it? When you and your friends put your hands on my daughter, when you forced her to suck my cock, forced me to fuck my own kid?"

I drove the heel of my foot between his legs, stomping on his balls. He wailed like a bugling bull elk, curling into a fetal position. I punched him hard in the side and then the back,

once, twice. Hurting him filled me with grim satisfaction, though it barely scratched the surface of what he deserved. I cast my gaze over the ground, in search of the gun.

“Looking for this?”

I spun around.

Duke’s sneer looked even more sinister in the low firelight, and the burn on the side of his head looked like raw beef that had fallen off a picnic table. My guts clenched when I saw the gun in his hand. This was it, the end of the road. I only hoped I’d done enough to help my daughter escape.

Please let Willow get away...

I expected him to pull the trigger. Instead, he flipped the gun so that he was holding the barrel and pistol-whipped me so hard that I saw flashes. Pain, dizziness, and the force of the impact drove me to my knees.

“I’m going to find your daughter and drag her back here so that you can watch me fuck her in every hole she’s got before I put a fresh one in her head.”

He spat on me and then hit me again.

Everything went dark.

CHAPTER 7

WILLOW

MY LUNGS BURNED AS I RAN THROUGH THE WOODS. I DIDN'T slow down for anything as I headed in the direction of the old fire tower. I barely felt the branches scratching at my bare skin or the rocks and sticks on the ground that bruised my feet.

Adrenaline fueled me. I had to get away from those monsters at any cost.

My life depended on it.

I had a pretty good idea how to get to the fire tower from our campsite, but panic scrambled my thoughts. I paused at the edge of a meadow just long enough to use the stars to navigate. Polaris—the North Star—sat close to the horizon this time of year but I found it using Ursa Major as a reference, the way my dad had taught me.

A sob lodged in my throat at the thought of my father, but I forced it down. I couldn't fall apart until I was safe.

I didn't hear anyone chasing after me. I was sure that at least one of them had pursued me from the campsite. The darkness and my familiarity with the area had undoubtedly helped me evade whoever was after me. That, plus my dad's distraction.

But those gunshots I heard... What if he hadn't been the one to fire them?

No. I can't think like that.

Crossing the river naked was a lot easier than crossing with a pack. I didn't care about how much of my body ended up wet. I crouched low in the water and used my hands to pick my way across so that I wouldn't have to worry about balancing on slick rocks in the dark.

Finally, the fire tower came into view. What had once been the clearing around the tall structure was overgrown, but I still booked it from the tree line to the stairs in case someone was watching. If this were a normal situation where my dad and I got separated, I'd wait for him at the base. But I couldn't risk that. I needed the high ground so I could see anyone coming.

The tower had originally been used by lookouts to report wildfires in the surrounding forest. They would spend months at a time living in the tower, watching for signs of wildfires or lightning strikes in stormy weather, calling in if they saw any trouble. The base consisted of massive wooden stilts surrounding a staircase with a cabin at the top, surrounded on all sides by a platform. Dad said the tower had been closed for at least a decade; it was clear that no one was maintaining it. On my way up the stairs, I passed several signs illuminated by the bright full moon telling me that the tower was dangerous and I wasn't allowed to be up here.

Well, it was pretty dangerous to be on the ground right now, too.

In its prime, this place had most definitely sported a railing all the way around the platform, but when I reached the top, half of it was missing, probably rotted away. I took careful steps around the cabin in case some of the platform's beams

had rotted as well, keeping close to the sides of the cabin. This high off the ground, the wind was a lot colder and more intense; it whipped my damp hair into my face and made me shiver.

While I much preferred being cold up here to being a sitting duck on the ground, I was still completely naked. When I'd checked each side of the tower three times and saw no signs of pursuit, I decided to break into the cabin to get out of the wind. The door was locked so I needed to find another way inside. Although the walls were made up entirely of windows, not all of them opened. More than a few sported promising cracks in the glass, but I didn't want to risk cutting myself. Instead, I tested the latches on the frames that were meant to open until I found one that felt like it was barely holding on.

Climbing onto the sill, I pushed on the frame until the latch came loose and then squeezed my upper body through the open window, using my hands to stop my fall onto a table below. There wasn't much furniture in the cabin since the place had sat empty for so long. There was the wooden table and some old radio equipment—dead, I checked—plus a cot and a scuffed metal cabinet sitting on its side on the floor. I opened the cabinet, expecting to find nothing but spiderwebs. To my surprise, I found a man's T-shirt, a pair of pants, and a plastic first aid kit. The clothes were old and a little musty, but it was better than being naked and vulnerable. I pulled on the shirt, which fell to my thighs. The pants were way too big for me, but they'd fit my dad well enough.

Come on, come on. Where are you?

I sat on the floor in the dark, dusty cabin, worried that I'd be too visible on the cot. As the wind rattled the windows, I

took a moment to catch my breath. I was alive. I was safe—for now, at least.

Suddenly, everything that happened to me in the last few hours washed over me.

The terror I felt when those men beat my dad, the horror of their hands on my body, Zeb's cock choking me—

And finally, the fact that my dad had been forced to take my virginity.

Tears poured down my cheeks. There was no stopping them, but I managed to cover my mouth with both hands to muffle the sobs.

My body could hardly contain the cocktail of emotions coursing through me. I cycled through my feelings like seasons. From anger to grief, from grief to panic, then panic to anger again. I was furious at my dad for making me leave without him. I grieved for the loss of our innocence, just as I grieved for my own gullibility and faith in people's innate goodness. I panicked over not knowing where he was or if I would ever see him again.

Beneath the sharper emotions there oozed a thick, stodgy undercurrent of shame. Shame for doing nothing while those men groped and entered me, for getting on my knees for them. Not talking back, not fighting harder... My dad said I was brave, but I didn't feel brave crying alone in a dilapidated tower. I felt like a coward and a victim, but worst of all, I felt like the thing those monsters had called me: a *slut*.

What else do you call a girl who comes while her own father screws her?

Hugging my legs, I rocked back and forth to soothe myself. The memories burned just as much coming up as

they'd seared going down. I had endured the men's perverse attention for what felt like hours by the time Duke announced he wanted my dad to be the first to have me. By then, I was already broken, helpless, and desperate for any scrap of comfort.

Of course I didn't want to have sex with my dad. I mean, he was *my dad*. He'd taught me to walk and talk and tie my shoes. He'd taken me to doctor's appointments and cheered me on at all of my track meets. I trusted him completely, and it was that trust in him that pushed me to entertain thoughts that would have otherwise sickened me. If this was going to happen, wasn't it better to be at the mercy of someone who loved me?

That's how I sold myself on the idea. It was the only way to get my mind and body on board with the inevitable. I convinced myself that sex with my father was the lesser evil.

So, when I felt his tongue touch down between my legs, I was already resigned to the idea that I was lucky to have him there, not the others. When he raised my ass so that he could reach every inch of me, his tongue making me feel things I'd only ever aroused in myself, I didn't fight him. I took the pleasure he gave me, grateful to experience something other than fear and pain.

Returning the favor didn't seem so disturbing after that. I'd been forced to suck Zeb's cock and nearly choked to death. Having the freedom to control how hard I sucked and how deep I took my dad's cock gave me back a sense of control, however false. Instead of feeling disgusted, I felt guilty for making *him* feel good, for sharpening the weapon that was meant to pierce me.

I wasn't ready to be completely honest with myself, but if I was, I might confess that I liked how big he was. After what happened with Zeb, I should have been scared, or at least intimidated, but I knew my dad wouldn't try to choke me. So, I let myself play and experiment, keeping track of what made him twitch and groan, and then doing more of that, but faster, tighter.

But the awful reality of our situation began to creep back in when it came time for him to enter me. I'd never had anything that thick inside of me before and I was afraid of how much it would hurt. It didn't help that those assholes were telling him to go faster, threatening to take his place if he refused. Mercifully, my defense mechanisms kicked in again, turning the pain into an obstacle to overcome. I just had to get through the first few inches, the first ten seconds, the next five thrusts. After a little while, it stopped hurting and started to feel okay, then it felt good—*really good*. My dad was touching my breasts, rubbing my clit, and bouncing me on his lap.

Then, he kissed me. They didn't tell him to do it; he'd made the decision all on his own. At that point, everything else fell away until it was just the two of us among the trees, fucking each other like it was the most natural thing for animals like us to do in the wilderness. It wasn't supposed to be like this. My first time should have been with a boy my age in a dim, smoke-filled dorm room, not at knifepoint with my dad, in the middle of the forest, surrounded by monsters. But that's how it happened, and we couldn't take it back. I would carry the memory of this first—my first time—inside me for the rest of my life.

I wanted to scream, but I didn't dare make a sound. I sobbed harder into my hands. Part of me felt like I should hate my dad for what he had done to me, but even with the storm of

emotions raging inside me, the one feeling I couldn't summon was hatred. I could never hate my father. It didn't matter that he had been the one who'd technically raped me because he was also the one who saved me.

Was he still breathing? *God, I hoped so...*

He'd said he would try to meet me here, but I couldn't imagine those assholes letting him go without a fight; he would have to hurt them badly enough that they couldn't pursue him. After having the crap kicked out of him all night by Ox, did he have the strength to overpower them?

I had my doubts.

I wasn't sure how long I sat there sobbing, but by the time the tears dried up, I had a headache, and I was still just as terrified as I was before I sat down. Shouldn't my dad have been here by now if he managed to get away? He did say he'd meet me at the ranger station if he wasn't here by morning. But it would take me almost three days to hike back there, with no shoes or gear, unless I happened to run into a park ranger or someone with a satellite phone.

What will I do if he doesn't show up?

A loud creak sounded from somewhere below. Then another, and another, getting closer.

Someone was climbing the stairs to the tower.

Panic seized my throat. Frantically, I searched the cabin for a weapon of some kind, keeping my head low. Luckily, my eyes had already adjusted to the shadows, and I could see well enough by the moonlight streaming in through the many windows. Under the table, I spotted a metal dowel rod almost as long as my arm. I snatched it up with shaky hands, holding

tightly to the rusted piece of metal as the footsteps crept closer to the wooden platform.

I wanted to throw up. I held my breath in case whoever had just reached the platform could hear my breathing. A long, ominous shadow crept across the floor, trailing the mystery guest as they circled the cabin.

The doorknob rattled. I scurried into a corner, staying low, so I wouldn't be seen. With so little furniture, there was nowhere to hide if whoever was out there decided to break down the door or come in through the window.

“Willow?”

My heart leapt into my mouth at the sound of a familiar whisper.

I was on my feet in seconds, rushing to the door and fumbling with the ancient deadbolt. I managed to get the door unlocked and tore it open to reveal my dad standing there, dressed in jeans and hiking boots. Relief poured over me as I threw my arms around his neck. I was so happy to see him that I started crying again. His shoulder muffled my sobs.

Dad ushered us inside and shut the door behind us, locking it again. His hands shook as he tentatively laid them on my back. I remembered the gunshots I'd heard and pulled away to check him for injuries.

Dark blood coated the side of his head.

I gasped. “Oh my god, what did they do to you?”

“Duke pistol-whipped me pretty good,” he said, touching the wound and grimacing. “Knocked me out. That's why I took so long to get here, but it's also the reason I got away.”

“What does that mean?” I asked, leading him over to the cot. Now that my dad was here and obviously injured, I wanted to take care of him, even if it meant being a little less careful about keeping our heads down. Dad sat on the cot with a heavy sigh. I noticed the bruises forming on his back and the matching ones on his ribs.

“What happened?” I asked. As much as I hated Duke and the others for what they’d done to me, I hated them even more for what they’d put my dad through. He’d tried so hard to protect me, and I knew he was blaming himself for failing to stop them from touching me in the first place.

“They left me tied up at the campsite alone. I’m guessing they went off to look for you and figured I wasn’t much of a flight risk. I managed to worm my way over to Ox’s body and found a tactical knife in his pocket.”

“His body?”

After a long pause, he admitted, “I killed him.”

The searching look he gave me made my chest hurt. Was he afraid his confession would change my opinion of him? I wouldn’t so much as flinch if he told me he’d killed all of them with his bare hands. Whatever he did was undoubtedly more merciful than what they planned to do to us come morning.

“Good,” I said.

Whatever he saw in my eyes seemed to reassure him.

“Yeah.” He exhaled, gingerly touching his head wound. Suddenly, I remembered the first aid kit I’d found in the cabinet.

“Wait, I’ve got something.” I dashed to the cabinet and back, praying there was still something useful left in the kit.

Inside, I found gauze, single-dose painkiller packets, alcohol wipes, tweezers, and some small bandages.

I did my best cleaning and dressing his head and face wounds and then used an alcohol wipe to cleanse some of the dried blood from his face. He didn't say anything the whole time I tended to him, and neither did I.

Finally, I said, "I don't think you should sleep until we see a doctor. You might have a concussion."

"Don't worry. I won't be sleeping while those guys are still out there looking for us."

The reminder sent a cold ripple down my spine.

"Do you think they'll find us?"

"I don't know. But I'll do whatever I have to do to keep you safe. Like I should have done..."

The regret in his voice made my eyes sting. "You did everything you could've done for me. None of this was your fault, Dad."

"None of it?" he said curtly. "Are you forgetting what I did to you?" He was angry, but I knew his anger wasn't directed at me.

I reached for his hand. "You did what you had to do to keep us alive. We *both* did."

My dad closed his eyes. He had to be thinking the same thing that was going through my mind. Performing the mechanical act of sex was one thing. But we'd both come, which meant on some level that we enjoyed it. Despite that fact, I refused to let him carry all the guilt for harm that neither of us had willingly caused.

“You don’t have to let me off the hook,” he said bitterly, sliding his hand out from under mine. “You have every right to hate me.”

“Hey,” I croaked, my voice thick with emotion. “I could never hate you.” What I couldn’t handle was my dad pulling away from me. I needed his care and his closeness, now more than ever, to help me survive the night. “I love you.”

He looked directly at me for the first time since he’d arrived. I held his gaze, begging him to recognize the truth in my eyes. He must have felt something because he immediately pulled me close. We sat facing each other on the cot with my arms around his waist and my head buried in the crook of his neck and shoulder. He ran his hands up and down my back in a soothing gesture.

“I love you, too, Willow, and I’ll make sure those bastards never touch you again.”

“I know, Dad. I know you’ll keep me safe.”

His arms tightened around me. I inhaled his familiar scent, and whether it was from muscle memory or a biological tic, I felt a flicker of desire in my belly.

I pressed a kiss to his neck in the spot where my lips were already resting.

Tension pooled between my legs. I was sure my dad could feel my heart beating faster against his chest. He had to know that I didn’t blame him for what had happened to me, not even the acts he’d participated in, and that I still loved him with my whole heart. I needed him to know this, to understand that I wasn’t angry with him.

I kissed his neck again.

His breathing stuttered. I felt his lips on my shoulder where the oversized T-shirt's neckline had slipped down. The gentle touch and his warm breath made me shiver. The memory of his lips between my legs was suddenly all I could think about. He kissed my shoulder again, a spot closer to my neck, then followed the kiss with the gentle graze of his teeth.

I gasped. He drew back to look at my face in the moonlight. The uncertainty was clear in his gaze, but there was something else there too. I saw my own need reflected back at me, a longing for reassurance and the comfort of each other's touch.

Were we crazy enough to do this on our own without threats or weapons forcing us? Under normal circumstances, it would be unthinkable. Even now, it was still wrong, but our bodies disagreed. His big, warm hand slid down my side as he trailed kisses up my neck. I tilted my head to grant him better access to the sensitive skin on my jaw.

I gasped. He froze for a moment, seemingly worried about my reaction.

“Please,” I whispered. “Don't stop.”

Gazing into my eyes, he cupped the side of my face.

“I don't want to hurt you again,” he said. But I knew that he wanted this. I could hear it in his voice and feel it in his touch.

“You didn't. You won't.”

I kissed my father's lips. Gripping the back of his neck, I encouraged him to kiss me harder. After a moment's hesitation, his tongue grazed my lower lip, and I opened my mouth to let him inside. His kiss was intoxicating. I wanted more, and I wasn't the only one.

My dad pulled me onto his lap so that I was straddling him. I could already feel his erection growing inside his pants, pressing against my core. His jeans felt rough against my skin, but I rocked against him anyway, craving contact.

He trailed his lips along my jaw and down my neck with a groan. It felt like he was purposely retracing the path Duke's mouth had taken earlier. I wanted nothing more than to replace those bad memories with good ones, and to exchange the bad men's uninvited fingerprints with my dad's welcome ones. He slid his hands up my thighs, beneath the hem of my oversized shirt. I raised my arms, impatient for him to take it off me. Once I was naked again, he let out a raspy sound from the back of his throat as he lowered his mouth to my breast.

I whimpered as he sucked on my breast, flicking his tongue over my nipple. He gripped my hips firmly as I ground against his bulge. I was probably soaking the front of his jeans with my wetness, but I didn't care. I was too needy, too desperate to feel every inch of him.

"Oh god," I said in a harsh whisper. "Please, I need more."

The next thing I knew, I was lying on the cot with my dad kneeling above me. He tore open the front of his jeans, and I used my legs and feet to help him shove them down his thighs impatiently. I wanted him to fill me up again, by choice this time. I wanted to forget about what we were forced to do and just lose myself in the pleasure that I now knew he could bring me.

He covered my body with his own, keeping the bulk of his weight off me with one hand braced on the cot's frame. I felt the head of his cock at my entrance, soft and hard and hot at the same time. I was so wet for him that he slipped in with

almost no resistance, sinking in slowly, inch by inch, until he was buried inside.

I gasped at the fullness and the pleasurable ache in my muscles as they stretched around him. There was no one around to taunt us, no one threatening our lives. I could give him my full attention. I watched his face twist with pleasure and listened to his ragged moans.

“Fuck, Willow,” he ground out between clenched teeth. “You’re so perfect. I had no idea...”

He pulled back and then sank deep inside me again, drawing a moan from my lips.

“You feel so good, too, Dad. Please, show me how good it can be.”

He sat up and lifted my legs, placing them on his shoulders. I was practically bent in half as he leaned forward, sinking deeper inside me than before. Stars went supernova behind my closed eyelids as he pounded into me, hard and slow. It felt like he was aiming for a specific spot deep inside that sent ecstasy charging through my veins each time he hit home.

Whimpering, I held on to his biceps, digging my nails into his skin as he began to move faster. Sweat coated our bodies as he took me hard, the way I never knew I wanted it before I’d had him this way. It felt incredible, like he was rubbing my clit from the opposite side. I reached between us to touch myself.

“That’s so fucking hot, baby,” he rasped. “Is that how you do it when you’re alone?”

“Uh-huh.” I nodded. It’s how I’ve always done it, alone in my room, trying desperately not to make a sound because I knew my dad was asleep on the other side of the wall. How

many nights had he done the same? Taken his big, hard cock in his hand, stroking himself and holding back groans so I wouldn't realize what he was doing.

What would I have done if I'd heard him touching himself? Would I have died from embarrassment? Blushed and pretended I hadn't heard anything? I certainly wouldn't have rubbed my clit faster, imagining that my fingers were his tongue, or tiptoed to his bedroom and slipped inside so we could help each other.

But that was before we'd crossed a line, before we knew how easily wrong and dirty and forbidden could become good, right, and exactly what we needed. What would happen next time?

I wasn't sure. All I knew was that I didn't want my dad to stop fucking me.

He squeezed my breasts and played with my nipples as he ground me into the creaky cot. I was already so close to coming. I arched my back, struggling to catch my breath as my peak edged toward me.

“Fuck, Daddy, I'm going to...to...”

Words failed me as the force of my orgasm threatened to overwhelm me. But he understood what I was trying to say.

“Come on my cock, Willow. Milk me with your pussy, just like that...”

I'd never heard him talk like that before, and his dirty words sent me hurtling over the edge. He covered my mouth with his hand to muffle my cries of pleasure as I bucked and writhed beneath him. In the throes of my climax, I felt like I was floating above my body. I was flying and grounded at the same time, my heartbeat throbbing in my chest cavity. He

didn't stop thrusting into me as I came, which made my orgasm feel like it could go on forever. Then his movements became jerky and erratic.

"I'm going to fill you up." He panted. "Oh, fuck, I'm coming. Forgive me, baby..."

I slid my legs off his shoulders so that his body could fall forward, and I could reach his lips. I kissed my dad hard as he came, cutting off any more sentiments of guilt or regret. I didn't want to hear them. His cock pulsed inside me, and I ached from satisfaction. I'd helped him set aside his fear, pain, and anger for a little while, just like he'd helped me forget mine.

When it was over, he pulled out of me, but I didn't let him go right away. I kept my arms and legs wrapped around him, cherishing the comfort his closeness provided. Somewhere in my mind, I knew that this was wrong, but I couldn't make myself care enough to stop it. We deserved to feel good after the hurt we'd suffered. No one—not even my dad—could convince me otherwise.

He pulled his pants back on before helping me sit up. Exhausted, I allowed him to put the T-shirt back on me without much effort on my part. He smoothed my tangled hair and pressed a kiss to my forehead, then urged me to lie back down on the cot.

"Try to get some sleep," he said. "I'll keep watch."

"Are you sure?" I asked through a yawn.

He nodded. "We'll go get help in the morning."

"Okay." My eyes were already closing. Despite everything, I felt safe enough to fall asleep because I knew my dad would never allow anything to hurt me again.

CHAPTER 8

ERIK

I SLAPPED THE METAL DOWEL AGAINST MY PALM A FEW TIMES as I gazed out at the moonlit landscape. I was bone tired, but there was no way I could fall asleep tonight. Hours had passed since I put Willow to bed, and I'd run through the day's events a dozen times, trying to decide if I was the worst father in the world, or a victim of circumstance.

Had I taken advantage of my daughter's compromised mental state, or were we both so broken and desperate for consolation that we had no choice but to seek it from the nearest source?

I convinced myself to stop dwelling on the rights and wrongs after a while. It was something I could try to work through later, when we got back to our normal lives. Until then, there was no point in letting doubts distract me from what was important.

Duke and the other two were still out there, which meant that Willow wasn't safe yet.

The eastern horizon was just barely beginning to lighten. I must have been keeping watch for at least four hours without any sign of the men. It seemed naïve to hope that they'd given up on us. I glanced at the cot where Willow was still asleep, my heart swelling with love for her. She was somehow both

outstandingly brave and the most precious thing in my life. I'd never forgive myself for letting Duke's crew touch my daughter, but I was determined to make sure it didn't happen again.

Before last night, I always considered myself to be a reasonable guy. I didn't shit talk or stomp around looking for a fight, and I preferred to avoid unnecessary conflict. But my experience last night awakened something dark and dangerous inside me. I was ready to do whatever it took to protect the person I loved most, and as far as I was concerned, Willow would never be safe as long as Duke and his cronies were still breathing.

Which is why part of me was glad to hear voices drifting up from the clearing below.

"I'm tired, guys. Maybe we should just go."

I didn't need to strain to identify Martin's whiny voice. Slowly, I crept closer to the open window to hear them better. It sounded like they were standing at the base of the tower.

"Fuck that," Duke snarled. "I'm not leaving until we find them and finish this."

"We've been searching for hours."

"That piece of shit killed Ox," Zeb pointed out. "We can't let him get away with that. Besides, what the hell are we going to tell the cops? We drove here in Ox's truck."

"We'll have to stage it the right way," Duke said. "Wipe off the prints and put the gun in Erik's hand or something."

"Isn't it registered to you?" Martin asked.

"Don't be an idiot. I bought that gun years ago, after we offed those MILFs in Death Valley. Those sluts were almost as

big of a pain in the ass as these two are turning out to be.”

My hand cramped as I squeezed the metal dowel rod. I had suspected that this wasn't their first rodeo, but to have my suspicions confirmed by the devil himself was chilling. One wrong move and that could have been our fate tonight.

“I can't believe that asshole got the drop on you,” Zeb said, snickering. “You look like barbecued shit.”

“Fuck you,” Duke snapped.

“Are we checking the tower or what?” Martin whined.

“Is this you volunteering?”

“Fuck no. The damn thing looks like it's about to fall apart.”

“Quit being a bitch,” said Zeb.

Clearly, they weren't going to give up and leave. They'd either search the tower together or send one or two guys up to check the place. Whichever option they chose, I was going to make sure it was the last thing they ever did.

I'm coming for you sick fucks...

I treaded softly to the cot and placed my hand over Willow's mouth. She awoke with a start. The fear in her eyes faded as she recognized who was touching her. I held a finger to my lips to indicate that she had to be quiet. She nodded. I removed my hand from her lips and pointed downward. Her eyes widened. After a few seconds, she heard the voices, too.

Zeb and Martin were arguing over who was going to make the climb. The fruitless search had obviously taken its toll; they were turning on each other, which could only be a good thing. My mind raced to come up with a plan of attack. We

had to take them by surprise, just like I'd managed to do back at the campsite.

I helped Willow slide silently onto the floor and then whispered, "I'm going to take these guys out, but I need your help."

"What can I do?"

"We're going to sneak out onto the platform. They won't be able to see us from the base or the stairs unless we lean over, so we should be covered." I pointed to the old radio equipment on the table. "I want you to take that radio receiver, the big boxy piece, and throw it off the tower, into the woods, as hard as you can."

"Okay." She squinted. "Wait, why?"

"Because we need to draw at least one of them away before I try to sneak down. We're about a hundred feet up, so it should make enough noise to get their attention."

"But there'll still be at least one of them down there," she said. "Won't it be dangerous?"

"No more dangerous than waiting for them to find us."

Willow paled at that scenario, then nodded.

"That's my brave girl," I said. Without thinking, I kissed her quickly on the lips. She smiled warmly at me and then flinched at the sound of the creaking stairs.

Someone was coming up.

"Let's go," I said.

I opened the door and let her slip out first. She padded around the platform to the other side of the cabin, farthest from the hatch that led to the stairs. I went in the opposite

direction, then paused, waiting for Willow to perform the task I'd given her.

Time seemed to slow. I was on edge as the creaks grew louder. I adjusted my hold on the dowel rod in my hands, the weight of it strengthening my sense of purpose. I wasn't much of a match against a guy with a gun. My only hope was to catch him off guard. I should be able to knock him on his back, I thought, and hopefully get him to drop the gun before he knew what hit him.

I heard a crash somewhere far below, on the eastern side of the tower. The boom was louder than I anticipated, and I wondered if the radio receiver had exploded upon impact with the ground.

Good girl... Now just stay out of sight.

"What the fuck was that?" Zeb barked. Based on the volume of his voice, I determined that he was at least halfway up the tower stairs.

"It came from over there," Martin yelled, sounding farther away.

"I'll go check it out," Duke said from far below. "You two check the tower, then come find me."

I spotted Duke's silhouette making its way across the clearing, gun in hand. I held my breath, praying he wouldn't turn around and see Willow on the platform. He disappeared into the trees. Exhaling, I returned my attention to the creaking stairs.

"You really think we should keep pursuing these two?" Martin asked.

"Are you really asking me if I think we should keep looking for the people who can identify us? Fuck, man, we

gave them our first names. Do you want to go to prison? Or worse?”

“Does Wyoming even have the death penalty?”

“It’s Wyoming. They probably just feed you to a bear.”
Zeb was close now.

I flattened myself against the cabin’s exterior, holding my weapon with both hands like a bat.

“Just shut the hell up and get your head in the game—”
Zeb flung open the hatch at the top of the stairs.

I didn’t hesitate to swing.

The blow sent him flying back down the steps. I was sure I’d done some serious damage, but there was no room for error; I had to be sure. I jogged after him, powered by a foreign, bloodthirsty feeling. Zeb tumbled down three flights of stairs, nearly crashing into Martin’s legs as he finally came to a stop.

“Holy shit,” Martin said as I came charging toward him with my weapon raised.

I took advantage of his shock, swinging the rod at his face.

Martin dodged at the last second, but I managed to hit his shoulder hard enough that he yelped. I leapt over Zeb’s body as Martin turned tail, fleeing down the stairs faster than a guy his size had any right to move. I made it two steps before a hand closed around my ankle. I fell, landing hard on the stairs, sending a shock of pain through my already sore ribs. But I didn’t let the pain stop me. I was rabid. Feral. The only thing that could put me down was a bullet to the brain. I prayed it wouldn’t come to that, for Willow’s sake.

I rolled over, using the rod and the stair railing to help me get back on my feet. Zeb's face looked like something out of a funhouse mirror. Both the metal rod and the wooden stairs had done a bang-up job rearranging his pretty-boy features. His nose was crooked, his eyes practically swollen shut, and it appeared that most of his teeth were now scattered to the wind.

Blood poured from Zeb's mouth as he screamed at me. The sound was barely human. My stomach churned. I hesitated for a second, letting my conscience weigh the potential damage that killing another man would leave on my soul. But the memory of Zeb shoving his cock down Willow's throat was too fresh in my mind. I brought the rod down on his head twice, busting his skull open.

I licked my lips and tasted metal.

Now... Where the hell did Martin slink off to?

Dawn was fast approaching. I scanned the clearing and spotted Martin heading for the trees. I jogged down the stairs, grateful that my encounter with Zeb had only cost me a couple of minutes. As soon as my feet hit the ground, I broke into a run. For a guy who didn't like climbing stairs, Martin had a ton of stamina. I chased him through the trees, dodging fallen limbs and underbrush, until we burst out into a grassy area. I didn't notice the steaming hot spring until Martin finally came to a stop beside it.

When I reached him, he was bent over and wheezing, but I didn't let his showing of weakness make me soft. I tackled the winded son of a bitch to the ground. He landed with a huff, and recovered surprisingly quick, slamming his elbow into my chest and knocking me off his back.

I lost the dowel rod somewhere in the dark, but that didn't matter. I was ready to kill Martin with my bare hands if that's

what it took. Back on my feet, I aimed a kick at his head. His hands shot up to block me, knocking me off balance. It gave Martin just enough time pull himself together.

He took up a fighting position, raising his fists in front of his face and weaving back and forth.

“What?” Martin panted. “You thought Ox was the only one who knew how to fight? There’s a reason we’ve been able to do this year after year. We train for it.”

“You’re full of shit,” I said, trying to gauge his reaction. Maybe Martin did know how to fight, but if he was so confident in his ability to kick my ass, why did he waste so much energy running?

“You got lucky at the campsite, caught us off guard when we were too distracted by your kid’s tight pussy. But that won’t happen out here. It’s just you and me.”

I barely dodged his right hook. Okay, maybe he wasn’t bluffing. I didn’t have any formal training myself, but what I did have was more important. I had something worth fighting for, someone depending on me. I had to get back to the tower before Duke found Willow, which meant I needed to put an end to Martin quickly.

With that thought in mind, I took a swing at him. He managed to duck, and I stumbled. Martin jammed his boot into the side of my knee. I cursed as I went down, pain radiating throughout my leg. This fucker wasn’t holding back. I had to roll toward the steaming hot spring to avoid a kick to my already battered face.

With the arrival of the dawn, I could now clearly see the bright orange ring around the edge of the pool, and the rolling boil spitting foam at its center. Stones glinted in the loose dirt

close to my face. Martin moved to straddle me just as I grabbed a handful of dirt and flung it at his face.

“Shit,” he cried out, covering his eyes.

Taking advantage of his impaired vision, I shoved him away, slipping out of his reach. He rubbed his eyes and staggered to his feet.

“Hey, asshole,” he shouted, throwing punches at the wind when he thought he could sense me nearby. “You’re wasting your time on me. Duke’s probably got your girl on her knees already.”

Technically, Martin was right. I needed to get back to Willow. In an instant, the solution to my current problem became clear as a crystal spring.

“You’re right,” I said. “It’s time to end this.”

Charging forward, I rammed him with my shoulder, sending him flying into the hot spring. I scrambled back to avoid being splashed by the scalding water. Martin flailed and shrieked, struggling to swim in the shallow water. But the superheated temperatures fried his nerves and he quickly lost control of his limbs.

I’d heard a story once about a hiker who slipped and fell into one of these hot springs. He died almost instantly. Due to the acidity, his body dissolved before rescuers could fish out his remains.

Martin’s screams only lasted a few seconds.

When I was sure that he wasn’t coming out of there uncooked, I turned and sprinted back toward the tower. I didn’t have a weapon or a plan for facing Duke and I debated whether I should return to Willow or head in the direction that she threw the radio in the hopes of confronting him far away

from her. But a high-pitched shout drew me straight to the clearing. I saw the tower in the distance and two figures at the top.

No, no, no. I had to get up there.

I pushed my body to its limits, tearing through the trees as fast as my legs could carry me. A fist closed around my heart as the sounds of the commotion grew closer. Duke was up there with Willow. I watched, helpless once again, as they struggled. It was impossible to make out the details of the fight from the ground. Fear slid down my spine like oil as I leapt onto the stairs, taking the steps two at a time.

Willow screamed. I'd only made it halfway up the tower when I saw a body go flying off the edge of the platform.

For a second, it was only a dark form against the blinding dawn. I clutched the railing—the only thing stopping me from collapsing under the weight of my own fear.

Why did I leave her alone?

Then I heard Duke's deep bellow of terror.

Relief. That's what I felt when he landed in the dirt with a sickening thud.

I bolted up the stairs, leaping over Zeb's dead body without so much as a glance at his ugly corpse. At the top, I found Willow standing on the platform by a section without a rail. She was looking down, unmoving, as her red hair danced in the wind.

"Willow," I said. She didn't move. I touched her shoulder, and she spun around, hands poised and ready to strike. I caught her by the wrists. "Baby, it's me. It's Dad. You're okay."

“Dad...” Blood dripped from a small cut on her bottom lip. She blinked a few times and then sighed, lowering her arms. “I knew you’d come back.”

“Are you okay?” I drew her away from the edge of the platform so that I could look her over somewhere safe. “You’re bleeding.”

“I’m all right. It’s nothing.”

I pulled her into my arms. “I’m so sorry. I shouldn’t have left you alone.”

“But you got Martin, right?” She gazed up at my face. I expected to see tears in her eyes, but they were dry. She offered me a small smile.

“Yeah,” I said. “I got him.”

“Then the plan worked.”

She was right. It *had* worked.

And yet...

I wiped the drop of blood from her chin and looked deep into her blue eyes.

“Did Duke touch you?”

“No. He wasn’t up here for long. I heard him coming up the stairs and then hid until I saw a chance to knock the gun out of his hand.”

“Where is the gun?”

She shrugged. “Somewhere on the ground? Anyway, he hit me, and I pretended to pass out. When he turned his back on me, I pushed him.”

My head swam as I mentally rifled through all the ways that situation could have gone differently. All things

considered, it could have been a lot worse. I felt lightheaded all of a sudden, and I almost started laughing. It didn't help that I'd had no sleep and was running on rage and adrenaline—and the trauma. Couldn't forget about that.

I kissed her forehead and then her lips.

“I'm so proud of you, my brave girl.”

The nightmare was finally over. We had nothing else to fear out here in the wilderness. We'd survived the most difficult test of our lives.

But I had to wonder how this experience was going to change us.

Could we live with the people we'd become?

CHAPTER 9

WILLOW

DESPITE EVERYTHING MY DAD HAD BEEN THROUGH, HE insisted on carrying me back to our campsite. He didn't want me to bruise my feet further by walking back barefoot through the woods. I laid my head on his shoulder and closed my eyes, lulled into a state of detachment by the reassuring crunch-crunch of his boots. Being carried through the woods felt like floating through a dream. I wished it had all been a bad dream.

Well, maybe not all of it...

It took us a few hours to reach the campsite. While neither of us said as much, I knew we both wanted to get out of there as soon as possible. I couldn't glance at the firepit without shivering. After changing our clothes and packing up the gear, we ate a quick breakfast of granola bars and then set off down the trail, back toward the ranger station. I wasn't looking forward to the three-day hike ahead of us; I just wanted to be home, in my own bed, surrounded by familiar things.

"Speak up if you see anyone," he said. I assumed he was just warning me to stay alert until he added, "They might have a sat phone we can use."

"Use for what?"

"To call the Park Service. We have to report this."

I almost lost my breakfast. The thought of relaying all the terrifying, disgusting, and embarrassing details to a stranger made me feel sick. Realistically, I knew my dad was right. Our DNA was all over the campsite and the fire tower, not to mention the bodies of the men who attacked us. As much as I wanted to leave it all behind and forget, it wouldn't look right to the investigators if we left Wyoming without saying anything.

We hiked in silence, stopping only to filter and refill our water bottles. Neither of us was in a particularly talkative mood. I got the feeling we were both trying to process the last twenty-four hours now that the adrenaline had worn off.

Afternoon bled into evening. We picked a random spot at sundown and set up the tents but didn't start a fire. Technically, boondocking—camping on public land outside of a designated campground—wasn't allowed in Yellowstone, but recent events had obviously messed with our itinerary. We wanted to cover as much ground as quickly as possible and get back to the ranger station. And if we happened to attract the attention of a ranger out on patrol? Even better.

I made it twenty-three minutes by myself in my own tent the first night before I begged my dad to join me. I didn't plan to have sex with him again. It just happened. Pressed up against him in the dark, listening to the rain patter on the rainfly, I felt his cock harden against my hip through his clothing. Simply knowing he was aroused made my clit pulse and my insides tighten. I slid my hand along his abdomen and kissed his neck. He tensed for a moment before reaching down to tease me through my leggings while I rubbed him. Soon, our tongues were tangled like our clothing at the base of the tent.

“Oh god... It’s too good,” I huffed, as his fingers curled inside me while his thumb simultaneously caressed my swollen clit.

“Do you want me to stop?”

I shook my head. I didn’t care how wrong it was. It felt right at that moment to be pinned between the hard ground and my dad’s long, thick fingers. My hand tightened around his cock as he thrust into my fist. He made me come twice that night, once on his fingers and then again while taking me from behind.

We didn’t even bother setting up the second tent the next night.

My anxiety spiked when we finally reached the ranger station. I knew I would have to talk about what happened that night. The ranger working the front desk looked horrified at the sight of my dad’s bruised face, and her reaction only intensified as we told her the highlights of our story.

We might have left a few things out...

The ranger called an ambulance, and we were taken to the nearest hospital. There were more questions there, as doctors examined our wounds and park police from the Investigative Service Branch of the National Park Service showed up. Dad’s wounds were worse than mine. I managed to get out of this with just a few scrapes and bruises, mostly from my naked run through the woods. Even my altercation with Duke on the tower hadn’t resulted in more than a split lip that had pretty much healed on the hike back to the station.

We told the park police what had happened, including the parts about them forcing us to have sex with each other. I knew they were going to want to collect evidence from our

bodies and I didn't want to risk them finding my dad's semen and thinking the worst.

I was quickly overwhelmed by the sheer number of people fluttering around us, taking my dad's vitals and asking us the same questions, over and over again. Dad had to stay in the hospital for a few days because the doctors were concerned about his head wound, plus dehydration and exhaustion. I slept in a chair beside his hospital bed. No matter how hard he tried to convince me to get a hotel room, I refused to be apart from him. I was still scared, even though I knew that the men who had hurt us were all dead. The park police had recovered their bodies within a day of our report—

Well, most of their bodies. Apparently, all they could find of Martin was a single hiking boot floating in a hot spring.

Strangely, I didn't start to really feel ashamed until I saw the looks on the hospital staff's faces. How disgusting, they must have thought. How traumatic to be forced to have sex with your own father. The fact that I refused to leave his bedside seemed to confuse them. I saw more than one of the nurses giving him side-eye, as if they didn't believe he could have physically performed the act unless he wanted to hurt me. Never mind that he was also a victim.

After four days, the hospital finally released him, and the park police gave us the okay to return home, warning us that they might call if they had further questions. At first, it had seemed as if they didn't fully believe our story. But something my dad overheard the men saying about other victims in Death Valley had helped point the investigators to another unsolved murder case, plus a slew of similar disappearances in parks around the country.

The thought that we could have met a similar fate if my dad hadn't done what was necessary to save us gave me the strength to endure the looks of pity as I dozed in a chair beside the man who had fought and killed for me.

WE MADE the eight-hour drive back to Washington in my dad's car, arriving in Walla Walla just as the sun was going down.

That first night, I tried to sleep in my bedroom, but I tossed and turned. Every bump in the night was Duke trying to break in. Every shadow, Zeb's ghost, coming to choke me again. I knew they weren't really there, but it still didn't feel right to be by myself, not when my dad was asleep on the other side of the wall. I tiptoed into his bedroom, the only place where I felt safe. I slipped under the covers and slept in his arms.

Nothing else happened between us that night. We were both exhausted and emotionally raw.

The next morning, over breakfast, he suggested that we both look into seeing a therapist to help us work through our trauma. After telling our story a dozen times to the police, I wasn't ready to relive it all again so soon. But I promised I'd think about it because I knew my dad was worried about me.

"It would be good for you to talk to someone before you leave for school," he said.

My piece of toast froze halfway to my mouth. On the long drive home, I decided for myself that I wasn't ready to jump into full-time coursework, especially if it meant living so far away from my dad.

“Actually, I was thinking I’d defer until next semester, and maybe look for a school closer to home.”

“Why would you want to do that?” He squinted at me as if I were a complicated logic problem.

I set the piece of toast back on my plate, my appetite thoroughly quashed. “I guess I’m just not ready.”

He nodded like he understood my reasoning. Then he said, “I don’t think you should be making any big decisions yet. You’ve still got a few weeks left ’til move-in day.”

My hand shook as I reached for my cup of lukewarm coffee. How did we end up back here after everything we’d been through? Was he really that eager to be rid of me?

“I doubt a few weeks are going to change how I feel.”

“Maybe, maybe not,” he said in a put-on patient tone that made me feel twelve years old. “Look, Willow, I’m not going to push you to do something you don’t feel ready for—” He winced, his choice of words undoubtedly hitting close to home. “—but I also don’t want this experience to stop you from living your life.”

“I am living my life,” I said. It was because of him that I was sitting here alive right now.

“Just give it some time. You might welcome the change of scenery.”

Dad left the table to go rinse off his breakfast plate.

I stared at his back, feeling blindsided and confused. Was I being overly sensitive, or was he acting weird? Maybe weird wasn’t the right word. If anything, he was acting too normal.

“I thought you wanted me to find a therapist,” I said. “What’s the point of looking for someone around here if I’m

just going to have to find a new one when I leave?”

“Don’t most therapists offer online appointments these days?”

“Obviously I wouldn’t know.” I blinked back the tears before they could breach my eyelids. How could he still be adamant about sending me away after he’d almost died trying to bring me home?

The days blurred together. Dad went to work as usual, came home as usual, ate dinner with me and then tinkered in the garage doing his usual dad stuff. Before the camping trip, I had a part-time job at a bookstore. But being around a lot of people made me anxious. I was convinced that they could tell who I was, even though the police had done a good job keeping our names and faces out of the media. I quit the same day I went back.

I spent my days sleeping, streaming movies, and doing chores around the house. The kitchen and bathrooms had never looked so spotless. Dad continued to push for therapy but he didn’t seem eager to find a therapist for himself.

We didn’t talk about what happened, not in so many words. We talked over it and around it, under it. Meanwhile, the memories sat between us like a ghost on the couch.

Sometimes my dad looked at me so intently that I swore he hated me. The idea wasn’t so far-fetched; after all, my presence was a reminder of the worst night of his life. I imagined him counting down the days until I moved out.

My feelings about leaving didn’t change with time. But I promised myself that I would be strong, just like my dad had been strong for me. I would pack my things and go off to

college across the country, like we planned. I would give him the space he obviously wanted.

It was easy to make plans in the daylight, but at night, in the dark, I was weak. Sleep eluded me. Herbal tea and relaxation videos didn't help.

The only place where I felt safe enough to fall asleep was in my dad's bed.

No matter how mundane or awkward things were between us in the daytime, when the sun went down, we came together like puzzle pieces. We couldn't help ourselves. It felt right to slip under my dad's covers and let him touch me, taste me, fuck me. And he never denied me. He took me like it was the last time every time.

I craved it all the time. His love made me feel alive in a way that nothing else could. In the cold light of day, I was a walking corpse, but at night, between my father's hands, I was molten. I poured myself all over him, and he drank up every drop.

More than that, the things I needed from him made me realize how much that night in the woods had broken me. Like shards of glass reheated to thousands of degrees until they flowed like lava, my desires had taken on new and twisted shapes. The vanilla fantasies I used to masturbate to were wholesome compared to the things I asked him to do to me. I didn't just want my dad to fuck me. I wanted him to strip away my control.

"You asked for this," he'd growl, as he entered me from behind with his arm around my neck. "If you didn't want Daddy to fuck this pussy, you should have done a better job of hiding it. You know the shorts you wore today don't cover shit."

He only admitted to wanting me when we were already in bed, but I knew he watched me constantly. All I had to do was crawl into his bed to find him hard and aching to punish me for torturing him all day with my clothing choices or my bad habit of leaving the bathroom door open. I knew part of him felt guilty for the things he did and said, even if I came harder when he pinned my hands above my head or wrapped my hair around his fist.

But then the sun would rise, and he'd pull away, leaving me to wonder if any of it was real or if it was all just a dream.

I HELD the ticket in my hand as I watched the sunlight creep across my bedroom wall the day before my scheduled departure. Tomorrow I'd board a flight that would take me thousands of miles away. I really should have started packing sooner, but I kept putting it off, despite my resolve to give my dad the distance he wanted.

My suitcase sat empty beside me on the bed. I glanced at the jewelry on my dresser, the hair products on my desk, and the folded clothes in the laundry basket on the floor.

Who had I been kidding all this time? I was never going to leave. I wasn't strong enough.

I didn't have to get up to know who was knocking at my door.

"Come in," I called out.

My dad opened the door but didn't step inside.

"I made lunch," he said. "Are you hungry?"

“No.” I couldn’t stomach eating right now, not when I knew I was about to disappoint him.

“You haven’t packed,” he said calmly.

“No, I haven’t.” It was pointless to put off telling the truth when it was strewn all around me. “I’m not leaving tomorrow.”

He came into the room. “Why not?”

I tried to gauge his mood based on his tone and the weight of his steps, since the look on his face wasn’t telling me much of anything.

“Because I don’t want to.”

He stood in the middle of my room as if he was afraid to come all the way over to the bed. “You know, everyone gets nervous when they move away from home for the first time.”

“I’m not nervous.”

“It’s fine if you are, though.”

“I know.”

He nodded. I was surprised when he closed the distance between us and sat down on my bed. “What can I do to make you feel better about this?”

I shrugged. It hurt to be so close to him and yet so far. More than anything, I wanted to throw myself into his arms, but I knew my heart would shatter if he didn’t hug me back—or worse, if he hugged me and then told me to leave anyway.

“Come on, Willow,” he said, nudging my arm. “You worked your ass off to get into an Ivy League school. This is an amazing opportunity, a chance to start fresh in a new city.”

For a second, he looked like he was struggling to believe his own words.

“I don’t want a fresh start.”

My nose burned. The urge to cry was almost impossible to resist, but I didn’t want to turn into a blubbery mess. I couldn’t stand the thought of him caving and letting me stay just because he felt sorry for me.

“Do you really want me gone that badly?” I asked, struggling to keep my voice steady. “You really can’t stand to have me around anymore, can you?”

“What?” He looked confused, but I didn’t dare trust my eyes.

“I get it,” I said, standing. “Seeing me reminds you of things you’d rather forget. You had to kill people to protect me. You had to...hurt me, and every night since we got back, I’ve asked you to keep hurting me. I can’t imagine how painful that must be for you.”

My dad’s confused expression shifted to a look of devastation so quickly, I almost burst into tears. I’d been so selfish these past few weeks, trying to get closer to him when all he wanted was to go back to the way things used to be.

He got up from the bed and walked over to me, taking both my hands.

“I’m sorry.” I couldn’t stop the tears from streaming down my cheeks. “I’m sorry I’m like this—”

“Shh, hey...” He wrapped his arms around me. “It’s okay.”

“No, it’s not okay. Nothing is okay. I’m sick and broken and I want you to be sick and broken with me because I love

you and I want to be with you, but I don't know how to be normal around you anymore, and now you hate me.”

“No, Willow. I don't hate you. I could never hate you.” He brushed his thumbs over my cheeks, but the tears kept coming. “I love you so much. So fucking much, I swear I'm going insane.”

“Then why don't you want me to stay?”

“I *do* want you to stay.”

“What?” I blinked until my eyes were dry enough to see his face clearly. “You've been encouraging me to look at schools on the east coast for years now.”

“Yeah, because I know I can be overprotective. I didn't want you to look back on your life and resent me for not pushing you to be more independent. If it was up to me, you'd stay here forever.”

I shook my head. “That's... Are you saying that all this time, you've been trying to get rid of me for my own good?”

“I'm not trying to get rid of you.” He cupped my face in his warm palm. “I'm worried about you, Willow. You haven't left the house in weeks. You're spiraling after what happened and I don't know how to help you. I thought going back to our old routines would give you a sense of normalcy and encourage you to start participating in life again. But I'm afraid that being around me isn't good for you.”

“The only time I feel like myself is when I'm around you.” Beneath my confusion, I felt a surge of love for my dad that was stronger than anything I'd ever felt before.

He touched his forehead to mine.

“I know,” he said. “I feel the same way about you. But what if I’m the thing that’s making you feel sick and broken?”

“No, Dad, it isn’t you. I’m the one who can’t get off unless you pretend to force me. It’s *me* who crawls into *your* bed.”

He sighed heavily, his warm breath washing over my lips.

“Willow, the night that you don’t come to me will be the first night I come to you, and I won’t be coming to tuck you in.”

My face and chest flushed at the forbidden promise in his words.

“And let me be clear,” he continued. “You’re not the only one who likes it rough. The truth is, I come harder when you beg me to stop. You say you don’t know how to be normal with me, but it goes both ways. Nothing feels the same since we got back from Yellowstone.”

I gasped as he pulled me closer, the hard warmth of his body filling me with a sense of security and pleasant danger. For weeks, I thought I was the one pulling my dad toward the darkness, an inescapable black hole where my soul used to shine. It turns out we were both being drawn to the same event horizon.

“I know this thing between us won’t stop unless you want it to,” he said. “That’s why you need to go. Because I don’t have it in me to leave you alone.”

“Then don’t leave me alone. Ask me to stay.”

His lips brushed mine. I smiled as he kissed me in the daylight for the first time since that morning on the tower.

“Stay,” he whispered. “Stay.”

I didn't need to respond with words. I simply parted my lips and let him slip his tongue into my mouth, as he slotted his thigh between my legs. I pressed against him. Pleasure flared in my lower belly as I handed off control to the man I trusted to look after my heart even as he ravaged my body. I yelped as he tossed me like a doll onto the bed. He pulled down my pants and underwear, then maneuvered me onto all fours and spread my legs. I felt his tongue on my pussy and arched my back.

"Daddy, no..." It felt so good to know that he wanted this just as badly as I did, that we weren't just fucking on borrowed time. He ignored my pleas, drawing his tongue from my clit all the way to my back entrance. I writhed as he circled the tight hole.

"Struggle all you want," he growled. "You're not going anywhere." He flipped me onto my back and then pulled my shirt up, baring my breasts. "No bra, baby girl? It's almost like you planned for this."

I whimpered as he licked my nipple, teasing the other one with his fingers. I made a half-hearted attempt to push him away.

"Don't," I whined.

My dad squeezed both my breasts and then pinched my nipples, drawing a loud cry from my lips. I was already desperate for him to touch my clit and we'd barely gotten started. He pinned my wrists to the bed as he alternated between licking and biting my breasts.

"If I reach between your legs, am I going to find you soaking?"

I shook my head no, then gasped as I felt his fingers slide down my abdomen. Smirking, he ran two fingers along my folds, spreading my slickness.

“What’s all this, baby? I thought you said you weren’t enjoying this.”

I moaned as his fingers found my clit and began rubbing in tight circles.

“Listen to you. My own little slut.”

“Please, Dad. I don’t want to.” Pleasure radiated throughout my pelvis. I could feel my muscles clenching with every stroke.

“You don’t want to come?” He batted my hands away from my pussy, capturing both my wrists in his big fist. There was something shockingly sensual about the way he was looking at me, as if he’d finally accepted the parts of himself that craved this delicious cruelty. “You’re all mine now, Willow. I gave you a chance to get away, but you didn’t take it. Now you’re going to come for me.”

“No, Daddy. I can’t... Please don’t make me.”

I covered my face in mock shame as he rubbed my clit faster and harder, demanding that I finish right then and there. My climax slammed into me. I moaned loudly, trembling as my clit pulsed beneath my father’s fingertips.

“That was beautiful.” He slid his fingers through my folds and then brought them to my lips. I shook my head, refusing to open my mouth. “Is that how you want to play this?”

He pinched my nose firmly, forcing me to take a breath. I panted as he pressed his fingers to my tongue before I could even begin to protest.

“That’s right, lick them clean,” he rasped. “You can say you don’t want it, but we both know you love the taste.”

It was true, and I especially loved the taste of my own pleasure when he was the one serving it. I swirled my tongue around his fingers, feeling so dirty and so free at the same time.

My dad’s gaze darkened as he watched my face. “Get on your hands and knees,” he said.

I didn’t move.

Sighing, he pulled his shirt off and then reached for his belt. I stared, my gaze riveted, as he pulled his pants and boxers off and stood at the foot of my bed with a massive erection. The way it pointed straight at me, like a promise, made my heart pound.

“Oh god,” I whispered. “Oh god, oh god... I can’t... I won’t”

“Won’t you?” He climbed onto the bed as I scrambled toward the headboard.

I shrieked as he grasped my ankle.

“Daddy, please don’t fuck me,” I begged. The intensity of the moment and the fact that we were doing this for real, in the daylight, on my bed, made it easy to muster tears.

“Don’t you see what you’ve done to me, Willow?” He dragged me toward him and then turned me onto my stomach. “Can’t you feel how much I need you?”

I felt his cock at my entrance as he pulled me onto my knees.

“Please,” I whined. “Don’t...” I moaned as he pushed his full length into me in one thrust. I was used to him taking me

hard, but the first few seconds always hurt just a little bit as my muscles stretched to adjust. It was my favorite part, that dull, throbbing ache, when I didn't have to fake being caught off guard.

“Fuck, you feel so good.” He ran his hand down my spine before bringing it down hard against my ass.

My moan sharpened into a yelp.

“Daddy, that hurts.”

“I know it does, baby. Did you know that this unbelievably tight pussy clenches even tighter when I spank you?” He slapped my ass again in the same place and groaned. “Oh my god, it's fucking incredible.”

He rocked his hips, fucking me in long, firm strokes, as he continued to spank me whenever he felt like he needed a little extra tension. I couldn't stop myself from arching my back and grinding onto my dad's cock.

“I wonder,” he said. “If spanking makes you clench tighter, what would a finger do?”

I froze in genuine surprise.

“What do you mean—” My words cut off with a strangled moan as he answered my question by sliding a spit-slickened finger into my ass.

It felt so strange and wrong to have anything in there, and I instinctively began to crawl forward. But my dad wouldn't let me get away. He used his free hand to grip my hip, holding me in place as he drove himself into me harder and faster, moving his finger in and out of my ass to match the pace.

“Dad...” I whimpered, hardly able to catch my breath with the punishing rhythm that he'd set. “I don't know how I feel

about that.”

“You don’t have to know anything, baby. Daddy knows exactly what you need.”

He sounded so sure. I breathed deeply, allowing my rear muscles to relax, and let him take full control of me. I knew in my heart that I could trust him with my body. He knew every inch of it as well as I did by now.

After all, he’d helped make it.

Laying myself at my father’s mercy sent a jolt of electricity through my veins. My whole body buzzed like a live wire, and I could feel energy gathering in the pit of my stomach. I was going to come hard and soon, with his finger in my ass.

It was so dirty, so wrong.

And so incredibly perfect.

My moans and his grunts mingled with the sound of our bodies slapping together. Everything else faded away until nothing existed outside of this room. It was just me and my dad with stars in our eyes and nothing but love for each other.

Then he slid a second finger to my ass, and my mind exploded.

My whole body went rigid, every muscle seizing up. Dad continued fucking me through the throbs and the moans, until I collapsed onto the bed with my face in the pillow.

He pulled out suddenly, and I could hardly bring myself to react in the afterglow of my orgasm.

“I hope you liked what you tasted earlier,” Dad said, flipping me onto my back. “Because you’re about to suck yourself off my cock.”

I sat up as quickly as my tired bones would allow.

“Open your mouth for me, Willow.”

I didn't have it in me to pretend not to want it. He slid his wet cock into my mouth until it touched the back of my throat. I gagged, and he immediately pulled back a few inches.

“Use your tongue. I want you to lick me clean before I come all over you.”

I swirled my tongue around the head of his cock, savoring the taste of my pussy and the salt of his pre-come. Gripping the base, I licked my way up the underside and then took as many inches as I could handle. The sound my dad made, a rough exhale and a groan rolled into one, filled me with renewed power.

“That's it,” he said. “Such a brave girl.”

His praise encouraged me. I eagerly ran my tongue over every inch of his cock, until he grabbed me by the hair and forced me to stop. He took over stroking. I watched, fascinated by the way he orchestrated his own pleasure.

“Open your mouth,” he growled.

I had only just parted my lips when the first spurt landed on my tongue. I closed my eyes, allowing him to splatter my lips and chin with his release. When it was over, I met his gaze and caught him staring at me with something close to awe.

“I still can't believe that I get to keep you. It just doesn't seem fair to the rest of the world.” He gathered up the come that had landed around my lips and then held out his fingers for me to suck.

I knew without being told that he wanted me to swallow it, so that's exactly what I did.

“Believe it,” I said, licking my lips. “You’re stuck with me now.”

“I can get behind that.”

Arousal throbbed in my belly at the thought of him taking me from behind again. He must have noticed a change in my face because he chuckled.

“Ready for more already? You’re going to kill me, baby.”

“No way,” I said. “Neither of us is allowed to die anytime soon.”

“All right, no dying.”

Dad stretched out on the bed and opened his arms to me so we could snuggle. I laid my head on his chest, thinking back to simpler times when we’d cuddled under the stars—fully clothed.

No one could have guessed we’d end up like this, but then who could have imagined we’d go through hell and manage to escape with our lives?

“What do you think about moving somewhere nobody knows us?” he said suddenly. “Somewhere we could be together without having to hide.”

“I don’t know. I’ve never lived anywhere else.” If I was honest, I hadn’t actually thought that far ahead. I was just happy not to be getting on a cross-country flight tomorrow.

“It would be a big change,” he said. “But since when are we the kind of people to back down from a challenge?”

True. We’d already proven we could handle the worst that fate might throw at us. We were survivors. Dirty, sick, and twisted, but also brave and fierce.

“I’m sure we could handle it,” I said.

My dad stared into the middle distance, stroking my arm.

“But first we should both get therapy.”

EPILOGUE

WILLOW

Three Years Later

I TURNED THE VOLUME UP IN THE CAR AS I GLIDED DOWN THE highway, singing along to a song with the windows rolled down. My hair whipped around my face; it was going to be a crazy mess by the time I got home, but I didn't care. It was nice to feel the wind and the sunshine on my skin.

The weather in California was amazing. I was skeptical at first, when my dad suggested we move to Pineridge two years ago. But the prospect of starting over somewhere we could be a real couple was too tempting to pass up. We bought a three-bedroom house on the outskirts of Yosemite National Park, and Dad took a job as an arborist working for the National Park Service.

As for me, I was studying astrophysics at a university in Santa Cruz. The drive to and from campus took about six hours in total, but since most of my classes were online, I only needed to be on campus once a week. I didn't mind the long drive. It gave me time to think. Dad was concerned about the distance and even suggested we rent an apartment closer to school, which I was open to looking into; at least it wasn't the east coast. Still, nothing could beat the rolling hills and proximity to hiking trails that Pineridge afforded.

But the best thing about Pineridge had to be the fact that nobody knew us. Here, we were able to live as a couple instead of father and daughter. I started calling him Erik in public, and we introduced each other as husband and wife. The only thing that raised a few eyebrows was our age difference, but most people kept their opinions about that to themselves.

Turning off the highway, I followed the country road for a couple of miles before pulling into a tree-lined driveway. I loved our property with its bubbling creek and mountain views. We'd put a lot of sweat equity into making it exactly what we wanted. I couldn't help smiling as our two-story house came into view.

I pulled into the circular gravel driveway and parked in front of the garage. After pausing to savor a breath of clean, fresh air, I went straight into the kitchen, already anticipating finding my dad there.

"Hey, baby," he said, flashing a killer smile that made my insides tighten deliciously. "I hope you're hungry."

I popped onto my tiptoes to kiss him.

"Starving," I confirmed. "You want some help?"

"I'd never say no."

I washed my hands in the kitchen sink and then went to the refrigerator to fetch the sides.

"Veggie skewers?" I asked.

"Sounds good."

"Extra tomato on yours," I said, already anticipating his reaction.

"You'd better not. Unless you want to be punished."

I was tempted to do it just to give him a reason to bend me over his knee, but I decided not to waste the tomatoes. We chatted about our day while he seasoned our steaks, and I worked on the vegetables. I told him about what I was learning in my cosmology class, and he regaled me with some riveting details about a grove of Joshua trees that needed thinning.

It was all so easy, a perfectly natural exchange with my husband, who also happened to be my dad. We had changed addresses, but at our core, we were still the same people who had fought for our lives against a group of sadistic killers and lived to tell the tale. Well, most of the tale. We tended to brush over a few key details.

Most people wouldn't understand our relationship even if they knew the full story. But that didn't matter to us. We were sick and twisted, but also happy.

Dad brought the steaks and veggies out to the grill while I grabbed us beers from the fridge and my tablet from the living room. I settled into one of the cushioned patio chairs and watched him cook, appreciating the view. When the food was done, we sat at the table and I turned on the tablet.

"So, where are we on the list?" Dad asked as he cut into his steak.

"Shenandoah National Park in Virginia," I said, scrolling down the list of places we wanted to camp this summer. Most of the sites booked up months in advance, so it was never too early to get a jump on reservations.

Even after everything that happened to us in Yellowstone, we were still determined to take our annual camping trips. It took some intensive outpatient therapy, but we both agreed that we weren't going to let our run-in with Duke and the others dictate how we spent our time together, whether that

time was dedicated to camping or fucking in the great outdoors.

“I think we should aim for mid-September,” Dad said. “We can beat the crowds and still see some nice color.”

“Works for me.” I made a note on the digital list. I’d worked hard over the last two years to get a handle on my anxiety around crowds, but I still preferred to avoid congested trails. “That leaves August open.”

Dad sipped his beer and then set the bottle down with a decisive thunk.

“What about Yellowstone?”

“Bechler Canyon?” I asked, and he nodded. “You’re sure you want to go back?”

We hadn’t returned to Yellowstone since the incident, but we’d been talking about it more and more since they revamped the fire tower and made it available for guests to rent overnight. I was pretty sure I could handle staying there, but I didn’t want to push him. He’d never fully managed to stop being overprotective, but these days, I did my best to look out for both of us.

“I’m sure,” he said. “I miss it.”

“Me, too.” I smiled. “Should we hit up Mr. Bubbles?”

“Of course. And I look forward to seeing what they’ve done with the fire tower.”

I glanced up from my plate at the unmistakable change in his tone. We both knew what would happen if we spent the night in the tower. The heat in his gaze made me press my thighs together.

“Looks like they put in some real beds,” I said. “Might be fun to break them in.”

“Before or after I edge the fuck out of you all the way up the stairs?”

I bit my bottom lip, my hunger morphing into a craving that had nothing to do with food. My dad must have seen that look in my eyes because he chuckled and pointed his fork at my plate.

“None of that until after dinner,” he said.

“Fine, Dad,” I mumbled. Even as I continued to eat, I couldn’t resist scrolling through the fire tower’s booking information.

Yellowstone National Park, here we come.

[Read about Erik and Willow’s return to Yellowstone in the spicy bonus epilogue.](#)



ABOUT MARGOT



USA Today Bestselling author Margot Scott writes boundary-pushing forbidden romance that ranges from light and smutty to dark and taboo. When she's not tethered to a coffee IV, dreaming up wildly inappropriate age-gap relationships, you can find her tucked into a quiet booth at the nearest sushi place.

