

WHEN THERE'S EVERYTHING TO LOSE.....

A woman with long dark hair, wearing a dark top hat and a black top. Her face is painted with white skull makeup, including the eye sockets, nose, and mouth. She has a serious expression. Her left arm is visible, showing a tattoo. The background is dark and textured, possibly a wall with some faint, illegible markings.

GAME  
OF  
*Survival*

AMBER NICOLE  
JENN BULLARD

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# GAME OF SURVIVAL

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**Game Of Survival**

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**Formatting: November Sweets**

*To all of our readers who are survivors. This is for you.*

# Contents

[Blurb](#)

[Author's Note](#)

[Trigger Warning](#)

[Prologue](#)

[Chapter 1](#)

[Chapter 2](#)

[Chapter 3](#)

[Chapter 4](#)

[Chapter 5](#)

[Chapter 6](#)

[Chapter 7](#)

[Chapter 8](#)

[Chapter 9](#)

[Chapter 10](#)

[Chapter 11](#)

[Chapter 12](#)

[Chapter 13](#)

[Chapter 14](#)

[Chapter 15](#)

[Chapter 16](#)

[Chapter 17](#)

[Chapter 18](#)

[Chapter 19](#)

[Chapter 20](#)

[Chapter 21](#)

[Chapter 22](#)

[Chapter 23](#)

[Chapter 24](#)

[Chapter 25](#)

[Chapter 26](#)

[Chapter 27](#)

[Chapter 28](#)

[Chapter 29](#)

[Chapter 30](#)

[Epilogue](#)

[Did you survive the game?](#)

[Acknowledgments](#)

[About Author Amber Nicole](#)

[More From Amber Nicole](#)

[About Author Jenn Bullard](#)

[More from Jen](#)

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## Blurb

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*Things aren't always what they seem.  
A past so perfect until it's ripped at the seams.  
A friendship ruined.  
Lies spoken.  
Hearts broken.  
But that was then...*

*A game has been created to get some truths and bloody  
revenge.  
But who is the one behind the wall?  
Watching as the pieces on the chessboard fall.  
Laughing as they scream and beg.  
Orchestrating all the fear and death.  
The only way you'll know is to open up these pages.  
Face the lies and make amends.  
Maybe they will spare your life.  
Or you will die at their hand.  
There's only one way to find out...  
Are you ready to play a game?*



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## Author's Note

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### Author note

Okay let's start off by saying this book is dark. If you have ever read my unpublished series Perfect Mistake or any of Jenn's books you know that we can get a little dark and twisty.

This is all of that on steroids.

That said, we hope you enjoy our take on a SAW retelling.

This book has a lot of triggering content, so please do not ignore the warning list below. Also this book has MM/MMM content. If you do not like MM, then this book is not for you.

Also as with all my books, I can't forget my disclaimer.

We are not liable for any broken husbands or significant others, devices being thrown, or therapist bills. But we do permit being messaged and yelled at.

Thanks so much for reading another one of our books.

Love you all,

Xoxo

Amber & Jenn

The paradox of trauma is that it has both the power to destroy  
and the power to transform and resurrect.

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## Trigger Warning

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Underaged Drinking, Underage Sex, Drugging of a minor, Rape of a minor, Non-Con, Dub-Con, Suicidal Thoughts and Ideation, Suicide, Severe Bullying, Victim Blaming, Un-aliving, Mentioning of loss of child/Miscarriage, Graphic Scenes, PTSD, Fat Shaming, Torture, Child Abuse, BDSM-lite, Manipulation, Cheating (not MCs)

If any of this is triggering, please turn back.

Your mental health is important to us, so please don't continue reading if any of this content will disturb you.

This book is dark, but just as spicy. That said, this does have MM/ MMM, and has group scenes in it as well.

# PART ONE



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## Prologue

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I watch as they run blindly through the halls, trying to find a way out. Little do they know, there isn't one.

They signed the contract.

Now, they're mine.

Their screams echo around me from the speakers in the room, and it's like music to my ears.

All of the hours I spent crying are now being repaid in full.

I want them to feel just an ounce of the pain and misery they caused.

Innocence was ripped to shreds. A life ruined and another lost.

I was too weak back then to do anything, but things have changed.

We have a plan, a team, and now the only thing that matters is that they play.

Buckle up, the games are about to begin.

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# Chapter 1

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# Meyers

## Age twelve

I watch as a moving truck pulls up to the curb of the McGinty's old house and chew on my lip as I step outside, wondering who bought the home across the street.

"Meyers!" one of my two best friends that live next door shouts. We all grew up together, and the truth is that this is the most exciting thing that's happened to us this summer.

Bates tosses his blond streaked hair out of his sky blue eyes. I don't think I know anyone else with his color eyes. In the winter he lives with a beanie over his hair, but his parents confiscate them in the summer. It's so hot here.

"Yeah," I grunt, raising my hand toward the house across the street to show him what I'm looking at.

"I'll go get Chuck," Bates mutters, knowing I'm going to plant my ass on the porch steps until I find out who is moving into our neighborhood.

Please don't be someone weird.

Five minutes later, Bates and Chuck stomp up onto my porch steps, flopping down lazily. It's ninety degrees outside, but Chuck is still wearing his hoodie. His tawny blond hair is hidden underneath it, his dark eyes peeking out as he watches with us.

"I hope they have kids," he grunts.

"Have the movers started pulling things out yet?" Bates asks. I can already tell this is going to become a guessing game. The people moving in haven't arrived yet, and I wonder if that's why the movers haven't started unloading.

“Boys, are we going to play professional stalkers today?” my mom asks. I smirk because she’s not wrong.

“There’s nothing else to do,” I complain, trying not to whine. Big kids don’t do that, and I don’t want my friends to tease me. I don’t think they would though, because I can shove harder than them.

“Chuck, give me your sweater. It’s too hot for it,” Mom says sternly.

Chuck sighs heavily. “But—” I know his parents aren’t the best, and it’s why he’s always over at my house. I also know my mom, though. She won’t let up.

“Mom, can we have some lemonade while we’re hanging out please?” I ask. Chuck gazes gratefully at me, his dark eyes glinting. It must have been pretty bad, because he’s seconds away from his tears overflowing.

Turning, I look hard at my mom. There are times where we can almost communicate without speaking. Her eyes narrow, but she nods. Thank God.

“I’ll be back with cookies too,” she mutters. “Lemon or chocolate chip?”

“Lemon, please.” Bates groans, rubbing his stomach excitedly. My mom is a teacher, home during the summers and well loved by my friends.

“I’ll be back,” she promises. The moment the porch screen door slams behind her, Chuck drops his head into his hands.

“I can’t take this off, Meyers,” he says in a groan. “Dad didn’t hit my face, but my arms are all bruised. I almost didn’t come out with Bates today.”

“It’s okay,” I promise, hoping something interesting gets us off these porch steps. “I’m sorry he’s like this.”

“Dad... is mad all the time.” Chuck sighs. “My mom was working late, and I took too long in the shower. It was my fault.”

“No, it’s not,” Bates barks. “We have a few more days before school starts. Spend the night at my house. Both my



parents are out of town right now anyway.”

Fudge.

“You’re not supposed to be home alone,” I remind him with a sigh. “Wear a long-sleeved pajama shirt and stay with me, Chuck. Both of you.”

My voice is stern for a twelve year old, but I’m the glue between the three of us. They depend on me to make decisions and keep them safe. It really upsets me that I can’t beat Chuck’s father with a baseball bat. I don’t even know if I would go to jail, but I refuse to make my mom cry because I lost my cool.

A blue Ford Explorer catches my eye as it drives down the street. Frowning, I lean forward since it’s not a car I recognize.

“Did someone get a new car?” I ask. Chuck and Bates shake their heads, swiveling around to look too.

The SUV has dark windows, irritating me because I can’t see in. How am I supposed to figure out who is inside this way? Tint that dark should be illegal. After swinging into the driveway, a large man gets out of the vehicle.

“Woah,” Chuck whispers, his voice tinged with fear. I hate that men scare him now.

The man who is now our neighbor walks down the driveway to speak to the movers, leaning toward the window. He’s not large as in fat; he looks as if he played sports at one time, his muscles rippling as he moves.

The other doors open, and I crane my neck to see who it is. Unfortunately, the truck with all of their belongings fills the space in front of the driveway, cutting off my view. Groaning, I mutter words of annoyance.

“Have you been able to find anything out?” Mom asks, coming out onto the porch.

“One of our neighbors is the man over there. I saw the other door open, but the darn mover truck is in my way,” I complain.

“That’s unfortunate,” she says, squatting to put down glasses of lemonade and a plate of cookies. “Finish these and I’ll make you a plate to bring them as a welcome gift. Will that satisfy your curiosity?”

“We’ll have to talk to people, though, Ms. Kay,” Chuck says softly. I really think he’s scared of how big our neighbor is. I’m not looking forward to going over there either, if I’m honest.

“You talk to people all the time,” Mom admonishes. “It’s either this or you take the sweater off right this moment. What’s it going to be?”

“I’m sure they’ll love your cookies,” he grumbles. “Can you add some chocolate chips too?”

“Nice doing business with you,” she teases. Standing, Mom sashays back into the house, making us laugh.

Bates takes a bite of the lemon cookie and groans. “I don’t know what she puts in these, but they’re amazing.”

“She won’t even tell me her secret ingredient.” I sigh. “I think Mom enjoys holding it over our heads.”

“Your mom is amazing,” Chuck grumbles. “I know she worries about me—”

“She does,” I cut him off. “Stay the night and I’ll ask her if we can have pizza.”

“Ugh, for real?” Chuck grumbles. I’m not above blackmail either. I know what all of his favorites are, and Bates smirks knowingly at me.

“Here she comes,” I hiss, glancing over my shoulder.

“I really hope this is worth it. Our neighbor looks scary as... you know,” Chuck says sheepishly as the screen door reopens.

We try really hard not to get caught cursing around our parents. My mom is scary when she yells, but the worst part is how disappointed she looks. No thanks, I’ll watch my mouth.

“I’m sure he’s perfectly nice. I think I heard Mrs. Weathersby say the other day that he has a little girl your age when I went to the grocery store,” she whispers conspiringly.

Mrs. Weathersby is old. She also seems to know all of the best gossip in town.

“You couldn’t tell me this earlier?” I complain. Mom is notorious for hiding little nuggets of information like this.

“Shhh, we know now,” Bates hisses. “Thanks, Ms. Kay. We’ll go over and welcome them to the neighborhood.”

“Yeah, that,” I mutter, standing to take the plate of cookies from my mom. She can barely contain her amusement, her eyes sparkling. I can’t even imagine being mad at her for this. “Thanks, Mom.”

“You know I live for this,” she giggles. “Be nice. I heard she’s pretty.”

“I just hope she’s nice,” Chuck says honestly. “The last thing we need is a stuck up girl who’s too good to ride their bike through mud puddles and play.”

God, he’s really not wrong.

“You’ll never know if you don’t ring the bell,” Mom teases him.

As a unit, we walk over as if we’re walking to the gallows. Nerves eat at my stomach, and I partially wish a boy lived here. Why is it so hard to navigate being a preteen? It’s really fucking weird.

“Hello, Sir,” I call out as I see the huge man who’s my new neighbor. He frowns, making me gulp. Damn, I’m tall, but I still have to look up to see his face once I’m standing in front of him. “I’m Meyers. I live across the street and wanted to welcome you to the neighborhood.”

“Why?” he grunts.

“Jax, stop scaring the neighborhood kids,” a woman scolds, rushing out of the open garage. I can see that the movers are going through the front door and garage to unload furniture.

“I’m not, I swear, Mabel,” Jax says, rolling his eyes. “Look, kids, it’s nothing personal, I’m just not used to being greeted by a welcome wagon. We’re moving here from Chicago. People tend to keep to themselves there. It’s real nice here, though.”

Mabel shakes her head, taking the plate of cookies. “I swear he’s not as scary once you get to know him. Jax is a police officer, so the man always has his resting cop face on,” she says, making a face similar to the man’s.

Bates hides his smile, and Mabel grins. “Our daughter, Carrie, is inside deciding where she wants her bookshelf. Would you like me to see if she’ll come out to say hi?”

“Ugh, Mabel. I’m sure Carrie can make friends just fine once school starts,” Jax tells her.

Chuck bites his lip, looking between them. “Is she going to Reutman Middle?” he asks.

Jax nods, his forehead creasing. Chuck stands tall, his hood falling back. His tawny hair is short and perfectly in place, despite not having done much to it.

“We’ll take care of her, help her find her way. I know she may be used to being at bigger schools, but the three of us wouldn’t mind at all. It’s just part of being a decent neighbor,” he says with a shrug. Chuck rarely says very much to strangers, especially people who scare him.

Jax stares at him for a moment longer before picking up a cookie and biting into it. “Holy shit,” he mutters as he chews. The guys and I hide our smiles, knowing exactly how amazing the cookies are. “Who made these?”

“My mom,” I tell him, nodding behind me at my house. She’s gone inside now, so the porch is empty.

“These are amazing,” he compliments with a nod. “Okay, look. I’m suspicious of everyone. Comes with my job, and Carrie is my only kid. I don’t want to hover, but it’s really difficult not to when you’ve seen some of the shit I have.”

“He deals with the really difficult cases,” Mabel explains. “The three of you are young, and you don’t need to hear how

bad the world can be. Carrie really didn't want to move, but a job opened up near here that Jax couldn't refuse. It would be nice for her to have a friend or two before school starts."

"People don't mess with us," I offer. We started playing football last year, and the three of us are really good at it. Something shifted in our classmates when they saw what we can do out on the field. It's an odd feeling.

Our coach is talking about how incredible we'll be in high school, how important we are, and I can see it in how even our teachers treat us. I personally don't give a shit outside of it keeping us safe. Maybe we can help Carrie too.

Jax stares at us for a moment before pursing his lips.

"What's your name?" he asks Chuck.

Swallowing hard, Chuck answers. "Chuck Mapleton, Sir. I live at 522 Triple Walk, just over there."

"Does someone who lives there hurt you, Chuck?" Jax asks. Bates and I suck in a breath, eyes growing huge. Damn, maybe this was a bad idea. "The hooded sweatshirt in this heat is a dead giveaway, son. There's also a bruise healing on your jaw. Carrie can't go over there, is that understood?"

"I don't even want to go over there," Chuck blurts out. "I spend a lot of time at Bates' and Meyers' houses."

"Good. That shit won't fly while I live in this neighborhood, is that understood? If I hear something, I'm coming over with my gun and fixing it," Jax says.

"I... Thank you," Chuck mutters. I can hear the emotion in those words, and wonder who the hell this guy is.

"I'm going to go grab Carrie. Don't rush off now. Mabel, let's give them a minute. I know I'm a lot to deal with." Carrie's dad chuckles. "You'll get used to my overbearing ways."

"I had to." Mabel snorts. "Jax means well, he's just a lot."

I think he's kind of awesome. Chuck's dad has been a problem for a really long time. Putting my hand on Chuck's shoulder, I squeeze gently as they walk inside.

“You good?” I ask softly.

“Yeah, most people look the other way,” he tells me. “During football season, I just tell people I had a rough practice, or that I got into a fight.”

“I hope you won’t have to deal with that anymore real soon,” Bates sighs. “I’ll leave my mom a note to tell her we’re staying with Meyers in case they come home early.”

Bates’ parents are never home because his dad is a lawyer and his mom is a nurse. I swear they’re married to their jobs instead of each other.

“Fuck, I hate crying,” Chuck whispers, wiping his cheeks quickly. I would understand if he was crying over nothing, but I know he’s hiding a lot of pain, so I don’t care if it leaks out here and there.

“Here she comes,” I warn.

Carrie walks out in a pair of black shorts, a *Pink Floyd* band T-shirt, and black canvas sneakers with butterflies on them. My lips part when I see her honey-blond hair and hazel eyes.

“Hey.” She grins widely. Her teeth are perfectly straight, and I don’t think she’ll ever need to deal with braces. My mind is a mess of tangents today.

“Hi,” we intone breathily. This girl is so pretty.

Jax ambles over quickly, his eyes bouncing between the four of us.

“Carrie, this is Bates, Chuck, and Meyers. They seem like good kids. I know unpacking is boring, so if you want to play while Mom and I work, I’m good with that,” he says. “Please be home by dinner.”

Carrie turns to gaze at him, eyes wide. “But Dad...”

“Nope, I got it,” he says, shaking his head. “It’ll be good for you to make some friends before school starts, anyway. Meyers, please thank your mom for the cookies.”

Damn, this man moves fast.

“What did you do to my dad?” Carrie asks, her lips curling into a smile. “He’s the most paranoid man in the entire world.”

“We promised him you’d be safe with us,” I say simply. “Want to go for a bike ride? We can go to the park or throw on our bathing suits and go to the lake near here.”

“It’s so much hotter in Texas than it is in Chicago.” She laughs, nodding. “I’d love to head to the lake. Let me change and clear it with my dad? I know he said it was fine, but I still can’t believe it. How far is the lake?”

“Right behind the houses,” I explain, pointing past the cul-de-sac into the woods. “Five minute walk, if that.”

“I swear, if you kill me and cut me up into pieces, Meyers, I’ll come back to haunt you,” Carrie threatens as she turns and runs back into the house.

“That was oddly specific,” Bates snorts.

“There’s no way we’d ever hurt her,” I swear, watching as she disappears.

“Never,” Chuck says, shaking his head. “We’ll burn shit down for her.”

Even just meeting her, I feel protective and I have a feeling Carrie Campbell is going to change everything.

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## Chapter 2

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# Carrie

## Two years later

Walking through the halls on my way to my first day of freshman classes, I try to quiet the thumping of my heart. Everyone knows everyone, and while Bates, Chuck, and Meyers have done a lot in helping me acclimate, I still feel like an outsider. I've lived here for the past two years and I'm still not used to it.

"Carrie!" a girl calls out, making me turn around. Her name is Laurel, and I definitely think of her as popular.

"Yes?" I ask, forcing myself to smile. Meyers says I look less intense when I do, so I'm making an effort. I think people who think I'm scary are weak, but what do I know?

"Are you sitting with Meyers at lunch today?" Laurel asks, walking closer to me. I'm pretty sure she has a crush on him, but he hasn't really given her the time of day.

"Probably, I haven't seen him today," I explain. My dad wanted to drive me to school, and reminded me not to take shit from anyone. He is going to be out of town for a few days, so he wanted to give me a pep talk.

"Cool," she offers with a smile. "Tell him I was looking for him if you do?"

*I knew it.*

Forcing my saccharine smile to stay on my lips, I nod as I turn around. Frowning, I continue on my way. I think the best part of Reutman, Texas is my friends, but not for the reasons everyone else is obsessed with them.

I don't care that they are football gods at just fourteen years old. They're beautiful boys, but I like them because they

take really good care of me, and know what I need before I do. The four of us are a unit.

I'm so in my head, I don't realize my canvas sneakers are walking me straight into someone until I hit a solid chest.

"Oof," I mutter, stumbling.

"Carrie, you need to look up when you're walking," Bates teases me. "I swear, you need a clip for your bangs or something."

My caramel blonde hair is really long now and my bangs are swept across my face. He's definitely not wrong, but I'll never admit it.

His strong hands right me, making sure I don't hit the ground. Tossing my hair out of my face, I look up at his amused gaze as he checks out my outfit. I chose a pink and black plaid skirt, white shirt, and cute suspenders.

"You're already turning heads, Short Stuff," he murmurs, throwing his arm around my shoulder to keep me near him.

"I'm not responsible for people's eyes," I remind him. "My clothes cover all the important things."

"Mmhmm," Bates chuckles. "Are we driving you home today?"

"Yes, please. Dad had to go out of town for a few days for work, but wanted to drive me to school today," I explain.

"Jax still scares the shit out of me," he snorts. "We'll walk across to see Ms. Kay and she'll drive us home like usual. I'll walk you to your homeroom."

"Thanks." I sigh. "I didn't expect a new school to unnerve me so badly."

Fisting my hands so no one can see them shaking, I lean into Bates. His familiar, smoky boy scent surrounds me, relaxing me.

"I know. Meyers is meeting with Coach. Tryouts are in a couple of days, but he lives and breathes it," he explains with a shrug.

The crowds part as Bates walks, and I know they'd never do that for me. People are nice enough to my face, but it's only because of my connection to the guys.

"Sit with us at lunch, yeah?" he asks, stopping at my classroom.

"How did you know this is my class?" I ask half-heartedly. The guys take being my friend very seriously, so much so I feel as if my ass is Lo-Jacked.

"Short Stuff, you wound me." Bates smirks. "I had the front office assistant give Meyers, Chuck, and me copies. I'll see you in Math class later. You have English with Meyers, and Debate with Chuck."

"That boy can argue his way out of a paper bag," I say around a giggle. I definitely can see him going to law school, especially now that his father is out of the picture.

Bates brushes his lips along my forehead before stepping away with a grin. "Football and pissing people off are what Chuck does," he says. "Be good, Short Stuff."

I slip into the classroom, my cheeks flaming with color. The three of them do this, and I'll never get used to it. During the summer we're still thick as thieves. They never make me feel less than since I'm not as popular, and they all have a cute nickname for me.

I finally got the nerve up to ask Meyers why they act the way they do around me, and he shrugged, saying, "You're ours to protect. It's really that simple, Carrie. I don't care what other people think. Two years ago, we claimed you as ours. You just fit with us. Most importantly, you know who we are and couldn't give two shits about football."

Checking to see if there's a seating chart, I slide into a chair in the middle. I don't like to be too close to the front of the room, but dislike the chatter from the popular kids at the back. Soon the room fills, getting loud as everyone finds their seats.

"Welcome to the first day of freshman year," the teacher says loudly. "Morning announcements will begin soon. Take

this time to orient yourselves before we switch classes. This will be a hectic first day, freshies!”

My lips twitch at her words, even as I take a deep breath, hiding behind my hair. Freshman year indeed.

## Chuck

I'm late to meet Carrie after her Social Studies class. The guys and I broke up her class schedule so she won't have to walk alone today. I know she could make it on her own, but our class has some of the cattiest girls in our town. I don't trust them at all.

"Shit, please don't be gone yet," I mutter. We have Debate together, and it's the last class of the day.

It takes me a second to process what I'm seeing when my eyes finally land on Carrie. She's leaning against the wall looking uncomfortable as Johnson leans over her. He's a junior and has no business being anywhere near her.

"Carrie," I bark, louder than I expected to. She jumps, her eyes wide and pleading when they meet mine. I force myself to stay calm, even though the blood is roaring in my ears. I've never wanted to hit someone outside of my father as much as I do right now.

It also scares the shit out of me. I don't want to *be* him.

Ambling closer, I'm aware of my size. I had a growth spurt over the summer, and I'm just going to keep getting taller. I'm still on the lanky side with rippled muscles, and though I've never lacked for girls talking to me, I only want to speak to my girl. Fuck, I'm not supposed to want Carrie like this, though my best friends and I have claimed her as ours.

"I didn't mean to run late," I try again, my tone rumbling but softer.

Carrie smiles at me, and the whole world feels better. I hate when she broods.

"I knew you were coming," she reassures me. "I got a little caught up myself." Carrie juts her chin toward Johnson, and it's clear to me that he's practically pinning her against the wall.

This asshole needs a lesson in giving a girl space.

“I’m here now,” I rumble. “Want to let her out so I can walk her to class?”

“Why can’t I walk her?” Johnson complains, pushing away from the wall.

I didn’t want to piss on her on the first day of school, but fuck it. “Carrie belongs to Meyers, Bates, and me,” I grunt with a shrug, throwing my arm over her shoulder once she’s close enough. “I don’t make the rules, they just are what they are.”

Johnson looks confused, but my patience is rapidly running out. Continuing to walk, we quickly leave him behind.

“I’m really sorry I was late,” I murmur softly, leaning down so my lips touch her temple.

“It wasn’t your fault,” she dismisses. “Does your dick hurt?”

“Excuse me?” I ask, amused. I’m ready to defend myself by turning my leg inward in case she decides to junk punch me. I am no longer surprised when it comes to my Spitfire. She’s liable to do anything.

“You pissed on me so hard, I’m worried you may have hurt yourself,” Carrie teases, her lips pressed together to hold back her laughter.

“I couldn’t help it,” I groan. “I told myself not to, but it was a runaway train. Johnson is an asshole. Please tell me you don’t like him?”

I have no idea what’s come over me, except that I can only be real with her and the guys. The rest is bullshit.

“No,” Carrie says adamantly, gagging. “Absolutely not. He smells funny, leans in too close, and thinks he’s God’s gift to football.”

“Clearly, that’s us,” I snicker.

“I don’t understand football at all, but you have talent. Meyers, Bates, and you are dedicated to practice and clearly

love it,” she insists. “Everyone else wants the fame of a small town.”

I don’t care about that, not really. It’s nice to have shit handed to you; teachers give you leeway, but I also work my ass off in my classes. I know there’s more than Reutman.

“I want to play ball, go to college, and play professionally,” I tell her honestly. “The four of us, together, forever. The rest is window dressing and pig shit.”

Carrie’s arms go around my trim waist, squeezing me. “You could talk your way out of anything,” she says. “Thank you for saving me.”

“Anytime. It was my fault for leaving you alone.” I sigh. “I really do suck.”

“Eh, shit happens.” Carrie is easy to talk to. Her long caramel blonde hair tumbles down her back, and her bangs are always in her face. She smiles easily with the three of us, but looks annoyed at the rest of the world. Meyers asks her to work on it, while I think she’s perfect.

That’s what “mine” means, after all.



“HE DID WHAT?” Meyers barks, making me wince. Carrie is home, while Bates and I are in Meyers’ back yard throwing a football around. It looks lazy, but every throw is perfect. We have positions on the high school football team to step into, after all. It’s rare for three high school freshmen to play their first year, but we aren’t normal.

“I was running late,” I grunt. I don’t wear my hoodies to hide as much anymore, but I wish I was now. “Johnson was leaning over her, though I don’t know what he said to her. Carrie acted as if he was a nuisance more than anything else.”

“No one bothered asking her out before this,” Bates says, throwing the football to me. “She’s beautiful, and that fucking skirt she was wearing gave me blue balls all day.”

He's not wrong. Carrie's skirt flirted with danger all day, especially because she hops when she's excited. I'm careful to keep her near my side, and never in front of me—so if I pop a boner, I won't embarrass myself. Her blushes are adorable, but I don't want her to feel uncomfortable around us.

"Is what we're doing fair?" I blurt out, tossing the football with precision to Meyers. "What if she wants to date?"

"Mine," he growls. Damn, caveman.

"Calm down, she's ours," Bates says with a lazy grin. "Chuck has a point. What'll we do if someone wants to date her?"

"I'm not suggesting anyone outside of the three of us date her, by the way," I say, shaking my head. "This is so fucked..."

"I don't want her to have to choose. It'll screw everything up," Meyers says, looking at the ground. "I'm not ready for things to get complicated."

"Do we want to date other people?" I push. I like to poke and prod when I find an issue, and tend to make people crazy. Bates and Meyers just follow me down the rabbit hole.

"I don't," Meyers denies, shaking his head. "Girls throw themselves at me, but I'm really not interested. I haven't even had a first kiss either."

We met Carrie just as we started discovering girls, and she was immediately it for the three of us.

"Ours means...?" I ask.

"We can't protect her if she's dating a douchebag. Johnson is older than her. He oozes sleaze and compliments," Meyers says, shuddering as if that's the worst thing in the world.

"Carrie said he smelled weird and wouldn't back up to give her space," I report. I really need them to understand what's happening. "We need to walk her to every class, make sure people know she's untouchable. Even the girls."

Bates wrinkles his nose, squeezing the ball now in his hands. "You really think she's into girls? I've never gotten that



vibe man.”

Oh, my God. “No,” I grit out. “Have you not realized how petty the girls in the freshman class are?”

“They wouldn’t do anything serious, would they?” Meyers asks, looking equally confused.

“We’re football royalty, or at least that’s what people whisper when they think I’m not listening,” I explain. “We are really damn good at this sport, the girls want to be a part of that.”

“It won’t be that serious,” he grunts. “I want to deal with Johnson, though. I don’t want him to even think about looking in her direction again.”

“What if she wants friends outside of us?” I ask, chewing my lip. It’s always been the four of us. Carrie fits perfectly into our group, but while we have superficial friendships at school, though Carrie doesn’t seem to be interested.

“We’ll deal with it when we come to it,” Bates mutters. “No male friends. If our— Hi, Ms. Kay.”

Fuck, I hope she hasn’t been listening for long.

Turning, I smile at Meyers’ mom. “Hey.”

“Hi, Mom. Is it time for dinner?” Meyers asks nonchalantly. He always has this ability to push out calm energy, no matter what’s happening.

“Almost,” she says softly, looking at the three of us. “I know Carrie means a lot to the three of you, and you’re all at a new school. No... Listen for a second.”

Ms. Kay leans against the porch railing as she thinks. “Carrie has this glow few people have. She’s kind, sweet, and dances to the beat of her own drum. Small towns aren’t always easy for people like her. You three would be in the same boat if you weren’t God’s gift to football,” she scoffs. Meyers’ mom dislikes how jocks skate through school, which is why we meet here after school to do homework every night.

“Don’t abandon that girl,” Ms. Kay insists. My eyes widen, because we would never. “Fame. Power. None of that

matters without people who love you. Carrie adores you. Don't fuck it up."

Our mouths drop open in surprise as she stomps back into the house, slamming the porch door behind her.

"She can't believe we actually would do that, right?" I gasp.

"Ours," Bates grunts, as if it's as easy as that. "I don't know how, but she is. We'll figure out what that all means later. For now, let's remind your mother that we're not assholes."

Meyers stares at the empty porch, shaking out his hands. "Carrie is ours to protect, and that's what I plan to do. No one will touch a hair on her head. I swear it."

I shiver as he says this, feeling as if a ghost walked through me. I don't know any dead people, other than my father who was murdered in prison after he tried to kill me last year. May he suffer in Hell.

"Let's start making the rounds at school," I suggest, hoping I'm doing the right thing. "No one asks Carrie out, no one fucks with her."

"Done," Bates says, putting out his fist. Meyers and I bump it, nodding. I hope we aren't going too far, but Ms. Kay's words fucked me up.

We can't lose Carrie. She's too damn perfect, just the way she is.

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## Chapter 3

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## Bates

I swear, Carrie keeps getting prettier every day. She's singing in the car next to me as Ms. Kay drives us into school, and I can't stop smiling. No one gets to see her goofy silliness except us.

"You can seriously sing, Short Stuff." I grin as the song changes to the next. Blushing, she shrugs as if she doesn't have the voice of a damn angel.

"You're in the Chorus at school, aren't you?" Ms. Kay asks, and I can tell she's fishing for information. Carrie still has her tight-lipped moments.

"I am," Carrie affirms. I only know this because we pulled her schedule for the second half of the year too. "I had to audition in December during lunchtime, and to be honest, I didn't think I'd get in."

"You can't believe that," Meyers groans, tipping his head back to look at us. "You have the world's biggest 'I don't care what people think about me' sign on your forehead. Your voice is amazing. Why didn't you think you'd get in?"

"The Chorus teacher isn't particularly fond of me," she says.

"Who—" I can't place who that teacher is, mostly because I haven't had a reason to care.

"Mr. Roberts is Gabby's father, and she's decided to hate my guts," Carrie explains. "Every time the man sees me, he glares at me. Before winter break, he tried to send me to the principal's office because my hair was too 'emo' and outside of the school dress code."

"He what?" Chuck growls.

I frown as I tug my beanie over my hair. No one gives me shit for my flannel shirts over inappropriate T-shirts or ripped

jeans. So Carrie's hair is always in her face, who the fuck cares?

"It's not a big deal." Carrie shrugs. "Between the glares of the girls in our freshman class to uh, other things... I'm just counting down the days until summer break."

"I'm sorry school is rough right now." Ms. Kay sighs. "What do you think changed Mr. Roberts' mind?"

Turning in my seat, I notice Chuck does the same.

"Guys, you're so intense. Give the girl a chance to answer," Meyers' mom complains. She says it goodnaturedly though, because she knows we aren't going to let up anytime soon.

"They don't bother me," Carrie sasses, rolling her eyes. My hand twitches, and I fist it as I force myself to breathe. Day after day, it's harder and harder to be her friend. Her pouty pink lips even make my dick hard.

"Mr. Roberts heard me sing at auditions and got this odd look in his eyes. I have no idea what it was about, but he approved my class choice for Chorus," Carrie says.

She still sounds confused, and my brows draw down. I don't like the sound of that. I need to find out if he's a creep or not. I look up, catching Ms. Kay's gaze. She nods at me as if she already knows what I'm thinking. I'm unsurprised, because I'd swear Meyers' mom is a mind reader.

"I get sketched out sometimes when he looks at me. I make sure I'm never in class without someone else... I'm a cop's daughter, I know how to read the room and follow my instincts," Carrie insists, feeling the tension rising in the car. "God, I feel dumb now. I don't need to sing this badly. I should drop the class."

"No," Ms. Kay barks. "Absolutely not. The boys are going to help me dig a bit more into this teacher, and I'll keep my ears open for any town gossip. You shouldn't feel as if you're doing something wrong. Keep following your instincts, Carrie. We'll figure it out."

Carrie gives a shaky breath with a nod. This town is supposed to be safe. I know it's one of the reasons Jax moved his family here, but every town has its secrets. I don't know if Mr. Roberts is one of ours, but I plan to find out.

"Yep," Meyers grunts. "I'll pick you up after sixth period on Tuesdays and Thursdays when you have Chorus."

"We'll manage just fine," I reassure her, squeezing her hand. "If there's any issue, we'll sic your dad on him."

Carrie chuckles weakly, knowing exactly how he'll take care of it. "Alright, yeah. Here we are."

Ms. Kay pulls into the middle school parking lot where she works, and we pile out. It's a two minute walk to school from here.

"Thank you for the ride," Carrie says politely.

"Thank you," the guys and I chorus.

"See you kids later." Ms. Kay smirks.

"I feel silly now," Carrie mutters as we walk.

"You have really great instincts," Chuck grunts. "Don't fuck up a good thing. Pay attention to them. Enjoy singing. Do you guys have concerts and shit? I want to come."

Meyers and I nod, even though a Chorus concert sounds boring as fuck. Yet, Carrie came to every one of our football games, even though she doesn't understand it all. Sometimes friendship means cheering for your best friend, even if you don't understand their excitement.

"We got you, Short Stuff." I grin.

"I'm not that short," she says, rolling her eyes. Fuck, there she goes again. Swallowing hard, I throw my arm around her shoulder.

"The guys and I will be six feet tall by the end of the year," I remind her. "You're always going to be five foot nothin'."

"The most adorable pocket pixie ever," Chuck teases her.

This is our normal. This feels right. Dicks get hard. It doesn't have to mean anything, right? Yet, my heart flip flops as I watch Chuck and Meyers, entranced by her every word and movement. What if she chooses one day? What if our obsession with our best friend is too much for her?

When I walk into school, it feels like there's hundred pound weights on my ankles. This is the last place I want to be today, but it's the only place I can be. I can't skip school.

It's chilly in January, and Carrie is wearing a slouchy gray sweater dress with a pair of combat boots and tights that I'm pretty sure have middle fingers woven through the material. It's no wonder the teachers have a field day with her clothing, but I love her style.

"I'll take the trouble maker to her locker and homeroom," I tell the guys, knowing they both have things to do today.

"You sure? I have to get this paper in," Chuck says, wincing.

"I can walk myself," Carrie begins to say, but we ignore her. I squeeze her upper arm to show I heard her, though. I try not to be a total ass to her.

It's the second semester, and she's just now telling us about Mr. Roberts. My emotions are mixed up, but I feel a lot of anger and frustration toward her.

"I see your legs wrapped in your inappropriate fucking tights, Short Stuff," I murmur, pulling her to start walking with me as I wave goodbye to the guys with two fingers. I don't remember what Meyers is doing this morning, and can't say I care.

"The three of you are insufferable," Carrie grumbles.

"Don't talk so dirty to me," I moan as I walk past a group of girls who I know aren't kind to her. Gabby is best friends with Laurel, but I can't imagine another reason for her to dislike my girl.

"Oh, my God," Carrie hisses, shoving me with her side and hip. I don't move at all, outside of continuing to walk, smirk

firmly in place. “Why are you such a tank? It’s incredibly unfair.”

Her whine is even cute. Jesus Christ, I’m in so damn deep.

“I’m a linebacker, Carrie.” I chuckle darkly. “I get hit every damn day. It’s my job not to move.”

“I can’t even junk punch you anymore,” she huffs. “You move too damn fast.”

“My dick thanks my fast reflexes,” I tell her, enjoying our banter. My cock perks up at our talk, and I tell it to sit its ass down. Carrie isn’t ready for any of that.

“Hey, Bates! Got a second?” Neumann, one of my teammates, asks, jogging up to us. He nods at Carrie, but doesn’t speak to her like the good man he is. Chuck, Meyers, and I have been spreading the word that Carrie is untouchable.

“Yeah, I have to get Carrie to class, but you can walk and talk,” I rumble, my steps never faltering.

“I’m having a party this weekend, celebrating the first one of the new year. Will you and the guys come?” he asks. There’s confidence in his voice. If I say no, it’s not the end of the world, but he expects that I’ll agree to go.

I love a good party, and so do Chuck and Meyers. Maybe I can use this party to get Carrie to come. She tends to bow out of every invite we offer her. The jersey chasers end up in our laps most of the night, and I’m honestly a little burned out on the attention.

They just want the notoriety of riding our dicks, and there’s only one person I want to do that.

“Yeah, I’ll consider it,” I tell him with a shrug.

Neumann’s eyes narrow, and his eyes land on Carrie. “Do they have plans with you this weekend?” he asks.

Eyes widening, she jerks in surprise. Carrie usually zones out when I talk to people as I walk her to classes, mostly because she finds small talk boring. I envy her often.

“Outside of the usual? No,” she says, shaking her head.



“Why don’t you come with them then?” he asks. “It’s important to me that they be there, and it’s more likely to happen if you’re coming too.”

Ha, the kid is smarter than people give him credit for.

“I... I haven’t been to a party yet,” she says carefully, watching his reaction to her admission.

Neumann shrugs. “Everyone needs a first. Let me pop your party cherry,” he chuckles.

“Goddamn, stop flirting with the girl. You know better,” I grumble. “We’ll come.”

“Sometimes shit falls out of my mouth that I’m not responsible for,” he winces. “Will you come too, Carrie?”

“Yeah, maybe,” she murmurs. Huh, thank God. I’m actually looking forward to this party now.

“See you all there,” Neumann grins, walking away now that he’s gotten what he wanted.

“Your dad will be cool with it?” I ask, stopping at her locker.

“Yeah. He’s home this weekend, but as long as I pop pepper spray in my combat boot, he’ll be fine with it. If I decide to go, that is.” She winks.

Snorting, I watch as she packs up her stuff, returning books she doesn’t need right now.

“I love knowing you can defend yourself,” I whisper against the shell of her ear. “Now, let’s get moving before you’re late.”

Squeaking, she nods, slamming the door of the locker closed and slinging her backpack over her shoulder. “Okay, okay. Let’s go.”

Walking together, I watch her go into her room. Pulling out my phone, I text the guys in our group chat.

Me: Let’s skip Homeroom and have a chat with the Chorus teacher.

Knowing they'll agree, my feet take me where I need to go while my mind drifts. Gabby's dad won't have a class right now, and it'll be the best time to chat him up. Maybe drop a strongly worded message with a few threats as well.

We don't fuck around when it comes to Carrie's safety.

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## Chapter 4

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## Chuck

My blood boiled when Carrie said she was having an issue with a teacher. I can't say something cliché like "that doesn't happen here" when it can happen anywhere.

"He may be giving her shit because Gabby doesn't like our girl," I grunt. I'm not usually the logical one, and it makes me yank on my sweatshirt uncomfortably.

"Do you believe that?" Meyers asks. We're standing outside the door, whispering furiously together. We're going to attract unwanted attention soon. "You know, of all people, how fucked up things can get behind closed doors. Are you saying we should walk away?"

"Fuck, no," I grunt, shaking my head. "Look, I wanted to see how it felt to try to be logical, and it felt like shit. He's a grown man. He shouldn't be making Carrie feel uncomfortable."

Pushing off the wall, I walk into the classroom. The teacher isn't at his desk, making me frown. The door is wide open; where the fuck is he?

"Where is he?" Bates hisses, echoing my thoughts. Holding my hand up to quiet him, I amble to the back of the classroom where there's a supply closet. Sometimes teachers go back there to catch a quiet moment, and it's something Meyers' mom has told us she does regularly.

"Oh, fuck," grunts a voice, making me stumble as I get to the slightly open door. I somehow doubt this is what Ms. Kay was talking about.

"What the fuck?" Meyers mutters.

"Oh yeah, such a tight little pussy. Fuck, I bet it's pink and pretty," the man groans.

I feel sick, wondering what the fuck is happening. I grab onto my friends' arms to keep myself steady. The three of us

are virgins, and this kind of depravity isn't something we're familiar with. This man is a goddamned teacher!

I can hear the scaly sound of him fucking his dick with his palm, and I swallow hard around the bile threatening to claw up my throat. I've been masturbating for a few years, but listening to this makes me feel gross. The man starts to choke, and Meyers curses under his breath, yanking the door open.

Mr. Roberts... There are no words. My jaw drops as I see he's managed to wrap his belt around his neck and looped it over the wire shelving so he can choke himself as he masturbates. His face is red, his Adam's apple straining to swallow around where he's wrapped it around his throat.

His hand is wrapped around his cock as he works it from root to tip, stuck in his delusional spank box material. I didn't know people actually did this in real life. The Chorus teacher hasn't noticed we're watching him, his eyes closed.

"Fuck, yeah. Carrie, you're such a little slut for me, aren't you, baby?" he grunts. His cock is average sized, and he's really going to town as he gets off on fantasies of our girl.

Pulling out my cell phone, I take a photo in my disgust, while Meyers loses his temper and kicks the teacher in the dick. Mr. Roberts' eyes pop open, his knees buckling on him so he's being choked out in a decidedly unpleasant way.

"Should we leave him here to die?" I sneer. I'm so angry, all I can see is red. "She's fourteen, you bastard!"

"We should let him hang for a bit, basking in his own stupidity," Bates says, gritting his teeth. His jaw pops in the face of his ire. "The door to your classroom was still open, you nutless dipstick. Anyone could have walked in here. Do you really hate your job that much?"

"As of this moment, he no longer has one," I declare. "He's going to agree to resign, or die with his dick out."

Mr. Roberts grabs the belt above his head, pulling up on it to catch a breath, feet scrambling to stand. Meyers does the honors of kicking them back out from under him, and the sorry excuse of a man can't hold his body weight up.

“Should have hit the gym more instead of exercising your right hand so much,” Meyers jeers. “You shouldn’t work near kids, or around Carrie Campbell. She’s much too good for an old, wrinkled piece of shit like you.”

“This photo isn’t very flattering of you.” I sigh sarcastically, showing him the photo I took. His eyes bug out in anger more so than the lack of air as he chokes. “Agree to walk your ass to the principal’s office right now, keep Carrie’s name out of your mouth, and leave town, or I’ll send this photo to Patsy Malone. You know she’ll send it down her phone tree, alerting everyone of the predator the community has let into their school.”

The asshole finally gets his feet underneath his body, pushing himself up to take a breath. “That’s quite enough!” he roars.

It would be a lot more impressive if his now limp dick wasn’t still hanging out of his pants. This shit is just sad.

“It is quite enough,” I agree. “Are you going to agree to our terms, or is Miss Patsy going to have to wash her eyes with alcohol after seeing this shit? I don’t know if her heart can take it, man.”

Bates smirks, knowing full well that Patsy runs a spicy book club on Tuesday nights that Ms. Kay attends with Mabel.

“Homeroom is going to end in a few minutes, and I need to walk Carrie to her next class,” Meyers says in a bored tone. “We need to wrap this up. Are you going to man up and resign, or are we blowing your life up? You’re married, aren’t you?”

At the mention of his wife, his eyes widen. “I’ll do it,” he gasps. Mr. Roberts finally gets his body to work right, yanking the belt from around his neck and throwing it to the ground. Tucking his dick back into his pants, he buttons up. “Are you fucking happy, you goddamned assholes?”

“We didn’t do anything except come speak to you, and find an esteemed member of the faculty indulging in a morning delight,” Bates says, rolling his eyes. “Off you go. I

expect you to leave town by the end of the week with your wife and bitchy daughter.”

“For fuck’s sakes. You’re just kids. You shouldn’t be able to literally run me out of town,” Mr. Roberts rumbles. I save the photo in several places, making sure to email it to myself as well.

“Patsy and my mom are great friends.” Meyers shrugs. “You’ll never be able to meet anyone’s eye ever again after this stunt. Make sure your tiny dick isn’t peeking out, and go handle your shame.”

“Fuck me,” the soon to be ex-Chorus teacher grumbles. I hope they find a replacement soon, our angel deserves to sing. “I’m going!”

Mr. Roberts storms out of the room, and the bell rings.

“I’m up,” Meyers says, eyes wide. “Damn, time went by faster than I thought it would.”

Remembering how much shit he gave me when I was late meeting Carrie, I smirk as he races out of the room.

“Our girl really does have great instincts.” Bates sighs, walking out with me. “I hate that she almost didn’t tell us about this. It makes me wonder what else she isn’t telling us and why.”

“I think the girls are fucking with her,” I explain. “I’m not sure why I have this feeling, but I do. We can’t watch her every moment... We’ll do the best we can. Carrie knows we’re busy. We need to show her we’re never too busy for her, though.”

“Neumann asked me to come to his party,” Bates says, chewing on his lip as he messes with his beanie. “Let’s see if she’ll come with us? I know she told Neumann she would, but I think she was just shutting him up. I know it’s not her scene, but I want to dance with her, show her a good time.”

“Yeah, I’m in.” I grin. “There’s going to be one less bitch at the party, and we’ll keep her close. It’ll be great.”

“Cool.” Bates nods. “Now to get her to say yes.”

“I’ll ask her,” I suggest. “I rarely ask her for anything, maybe she’ll take pity on me.”

“Poor, poor Chuck,” he snorts. “Fuck, you may as well use your good looks on someone.”

Barking out a laugh, I brush off his comment. It’s not the first time he’s mentioned my good looks, but I’m awful at taking a compliment. All the years my father would demean me and yell at me have taken their toll.



## Carrie

It's just my luck that just as I nail my audition for the Chorus and get accepted, the teacher mysteriously resigns. To be honest, I'm kind of glad they'll be hiring a new teacher, even though it may be temporary. Mr. Roberts really did get under my skin.

"I heard he was having an affair with a teacher," Laurel hisses to her friend as we sit in class today. We were supposed to start working on a new piece, but that's not going to happen.

"I heard he was fucking a student," Braxton says smugly. The air is filled with rumors, as is the norm in a small town. I just want to go home. Dad is supposed to get a break from the job he's been on the last few days. I miss him.

"That's enough!" Principal Gallagher calls out. She's babysitting our class this period, though she has the open position listed for interviews. "May I suggest working on homework instead of gossiping like people four times your age?"

Everyone groans, but starts to pull out books. It is the start of a new semester, but Reutman High School doesn't fuck around. I already have a test slated for Friday. I need another vacation already.

The next hour flies by as I study, and the bell takes me by surprise.

"You were in the zone there," Lock teases. I'm surprised there are so many jocks in this class, to be honest, when you actually have to be talented to get a spot.

"I was," I smile shyly. "I have a test at the end of the week. Figured I'd get a jump on it."

Cleaning my things up, I figure the conversation is over.

"So, you're kind of a nerd?" Lock presses. I've always gotten good grades, though I don't really go in for labels.

“I would say I care about my grades,” I correct, slinging my backpack over my shoulder as I stand. It’s cool today, so I wore ripped black jeans with tights under them, canvas tennis shoes, and a light purple sweatshirt that says, “Should have come with a warning.”

Just because I’m five-foot-nothing doesn’t mean I’m a pushover.

“Whatever you say.” He chuckles, reading my sweatshirt. “Since you’re such a badass, is there a reason you have bodyguards?”

“What do you mean?” I scoff, making my way to the door. Bates leans against the wall, his feet kicked out in front of him.

“That,” Lock grunts. “They’re always around. Don’t you ever want to just be? Take a breath, and talk to someone? Maybe go on a date?”

Wrinkling my nose, I shake my head. I can’t think of anything I want less. When Bates, Meyers, and Chuck are in the same room with me, all I want is them. I know they are always touching me, walking me to classes, and are wherever I am, but I wonder if they feel the same way I do. I’m too chickenshit to ask them myself.

“No.” I shrug. “I’m absolutely fine not dating.”

As if the words summoned him, Bates glances up. “Short Stuff!” he calls out, straightening. “Was class a total waste of time?”

Hands shoved in his pockets, he ambles over to us. Bates doesn’t just move, I swear he stalks. There’s no other way to explain it. With his gray beanie pulled low over his hair, his favorite plaid flannel thrown over his T-shirt, Bates is a whole mood. There’s no one else like him.

“Principal Gallagher had us focus on schoolwork,” I explain. “I started studying for that Math test I have Friday.”

“Good use of time,” he says mildly. “Hey, Lock. Thanks for walking my girl to me, you’re not needed any more. Buh-bye.”

Bates throws his arm around my shoulders, pulling me along to walk with him. I look up at him in shock. He's often rude, but I feel as if I've been peed on.

"Did you enjoy marking your territory?" I ask him, eyes wide.

"I rather did, actually. Thanks for asking, babe." He smirks. "I don't like when guys talk to you. It makes me want to hit them, and the school frowns on behavior unbecoming to their mission. Therefore, I metaphorically piss on you whenever I get the chance."

"You're impossible," I tell him, lips twitching.

"You love me," he says dismissively. My heart flip flops, because that's more true than he knows. "Since you're ahead on your homework now, why don't you come to Neumann's party with us this weekend? You'll be with us the entire time."

Chewing my lip, I think about it as we walk to my last class of the day. The guys attend parties with the team, but I typically stay home when they do. They invite me, I just haven't taken them up on it. I think part of me worries I'll have to see them with other girls.

The other issue I have is that I don't have friends outside of the guys. They consume all of my time, so I haven't really been able to hang out with anyone else.

"Hi, Bates," Nicky simpers at him, batting her eyelashes.

"Uh, hey. What's up, Nicky?" he responds with a lopsided smile. This is the stupid hot persona the guys put on with the rest of the world. I'm the only one who gets Bates' head dropped in my lap to play video games and bike rides to jump in the lake. Maybe I don't need girl friends if all they want is to get into Bates' and the others' pants. A ball of jealousy burns in the pit of my stomach, making me shift uneasily under his arm.

"Are you going to Neumann's party?" she asks, playing with the end of her hair. Bates pulls me to the side to talk to her so we aren't blocking the hallway. Not that it would matter, people typically just go around him.

“It depends on Carrie.” Bates shrugs. “Are we going?”

My mouth drops open, and he gently swipes my bottom lip with his thumb.

“Oh,” Nicky says, surprised. “Well then, Carrie, don’t leave us waiting with bated breath.”

Her sarcastic tone makes Bates frown at her, to which she gives a saccharine smile. There’s nothing sweet about this girl.

“If it’s up to me, we can go,” I agree. “I’ll need a day of vegging after this, though.”

Shrugging, Bates pushes his finger under my chin so I’ll meet his gaze. “Video games and homework at Meyers’ work for you, Short Stuff?”

Grinning, I nod excitedly. Studying isn’t exciting, but I love spending time at Ms. Kay’s house. She makes sure the guys actually do their homework with me, and always bakes us treats while we game. “I’m in,” I promise.

“You’re adorable, and so easy to keep happy,” he says while chuckling. “We’ll see you there then, Nicky.”

“Great...” she mutters, looking deflated.

Bates simply ignores her, slipping back into the hallway filled with bodies.

“Thank you for agreeing to come with us,” he murmurs, his lips close to my ear. Bates has to lean down to do this with the difference in our height, and it feels so intimate. “You could have said no. I put you on the spot there.”

“I don’t love crowds.” I sigh. “I also really dislike most of the people we go to school with, so hanging out with them outside of here isn’t usually my idea of a good time.”

“Ugh, now I feel like an asshole. I thought there was maybe another reason you didn’t want to go.” Bates sighs. “We don’t like leaving you at home when we go out. We miss you. Look, if it’s a shit time, we’ll go grab burgers and shakes at King’s Diner, okay?”

Damn, he's really pulling out all the stops today. I'm usually a homebody, but I love the food at the diner.

"It's not fair," I huff, snuggling into his side. He always smells so good. I breathe in deeply, and Bates doesn't call me out on smelling him. "Yeah, I think that's a good trade off."

"Good girl." He grins. Stopping at my classroom, Bates gives me a proper hug, burying his face in my hair. What I failed to mention earlier is Bates doesn't call me out because he does the same thing to me. "You always smell like sugar cookies. Damn, I may need to beg Ms. Kay to make some. She usually bakes them during the holidays. I'll see if she'll make an exception."

My body wash and lotion is scented of sugar cookies, and I wear it year round because I'm obsessed with it. I secretly love that Bates is so obsessed with it, too. Though it's making it harder to remind myself that we're just friends when he does this. The three of them smudge the boundary regularly.

"I'm sure she will if you ask nicely," I say knowingly. Ms. Kay spoils us rotten.

"We'll see. I need to butter her up. I think I'll ask if she needs us to do some yard work," he murmurs. Meyers' dad works in town as a manager of a bank, so while he'll usually do those things for her, the guys always pitch in where they can.

"I think I saw their oak tree starting to grow over the sidewalk," I offer. "It would be quick work to trim it with a little help from Meyers and Chuck in exchange for sugar cookies."

"Yes," Bates hisses gratefully, straightening up. "You're the best. Speaking of which, you're on Chuck's way out, so I'll see you at the front after school."

"How many feet do I have?" I ask, fisting my hands on my hips.

"That's a silly question, Carrie," he drawls, walking slowly backward. "You have two, but it'll be a moot point if I suggest

Chuck throw you over his shoulder to cart you out. They could both suddenly stop working.”

A growl pops out of my lips, making color bloom over my cheeks and neck. God, he really knows how to get under my skin. Why is it so hot? I should just be annoyed, right?

“Oh yeah, feral pixie is my favorite thing ever. I’ll mention it to Chuck. Later, Short Stuff.” Bates turns, disappearing into the sea of people, leaving me bemused.

Slipping into class, I ignore the stares from my classmates. I’m aware people see how I act with Bates. It’s the same with Chuck and Meyers. We all bonded hard after the day we met, and even as the years have gone by, we’re still thick as thieves. I keep waiting for something to change. They’re incredibly popular, while I’m not at all.

People know who I am because everyone in this small town knows who everyone is. Especially when they look as different as I do.

Sitting heavily at my assigned desk, I pull out my science book. Mrs. Katz is a hard ass, but I genuinely like her. She doesn’t drone on, gets to the point, and lays out what’s expected of us.

“Alright, everyone,” she says as the bell rings. “Let’s go ahead and see how much you remember after the long break. Pop quiz!”

Groans sound, but I hide my smile. This is exactly her style, after all.

Class goes by quickly, and I’m pretty sure I aced the pop quiz. Mrs. Katz made it eligible for a grade. People were pissed about that, but I try not to get irritated at things out of my control. Life really is too short to worry about these things.

Gathering my stuff, I’m not paying attention as I stand, ignoring the giggling around me. The shove comes out of nowhere, and I gasp as I fall down hard on my side.

“Ow,” I complain, barely having time to keep my face from hitting the ground. My things fly everywhere, my face flames. Can I graduate yet? Better yet, can we all grow up?

“Carrie, are you okay?” Mrs. Katz asks wide-eyed, looking suspiciously at whoever is behind me. Twisting to look, I see Laurel, Terri, and some of the popular girls are giggling to themselves. At the teacher’s glare, they struggle to sober.

“She tripped, I swear,” Laurel gasps, and I close my eyes in annoyance. I really don’t want the rest of my high school career to continue like this. I fucking hate bullies. I’m going to have to talk to my dad. If I end up punching one of them, I need him firmly in my corner.

Ready to go home, I pick myself off the ground, hissing as my hip complains. I’m going to end up with a bruise. Unfortunately, I also managed to show everyone my cheeky Sailor Moon panties since I’m wearing a long-sleeved dress today with thigh highs. Making sure I stay covered, I pick up my things.

“Here,” offers one of the jocks with a small smile. His name is Ian, I think. While everyone knows who I am, there are still people in this town that I don’t interact with enough to remember their names. I also don’t have the slightest clue what he plays, but I take the notebook with a grateful nod. Stuffing it into my backpack, I rise from my awkward crouch.

“Thank you,” I murmur. People walked past me the entire time I was picking things up, a few kicking my things. This guy was the only one who stopped, and I don’t know why. I guess sometimes people can do things just because it’s the right thing to do?

I’m distrustful of most people, and I can have my father to thank for this. I’ve overheard way too many cases based on Mafia connections to believe in rainbows and unicorns. I’m glad we moved, because I was starting to worry about whether or not he’d come home every time he walked out the door.

Suppressing a shiver, I walk away, jerking in surprise as I see Chuck standing outside the door with a confused expression on his face.

“I tripped, and all of my things flew everywhere,” I lie, my head tipping back to look at him.

“Don’t protect people who don’t deserve it,” Ian growls, stomping over to us. “The girls are out of control, man. They shoved her. It’s just bitchy behavior at this point.”

“Mr. Matthers,” Mrs. Katz calls out, raising her brow.

“I’m sorry, ma’am,” he rumbles.

“While his word choice is lacking, he’s not wrong. I didn’t see it, but I’m a science teacher. The force with which Miss Carrie went down doesn’t lend itself to tripping,” she grumbles. “If I could prove it, I’d be writing them up. Unfortunately...”

“Thank you, Mrs. Katz,” Chuck says with a sigh. “If we could move her seat away from them to keep this from happening again, I would very much appreciate it.”

Chuck has the ability to be incredibly polite when he wants to, and Mrs. Katz eats it up with a smile.

“I feel like a new assigned seating chart is necessary.” She winks.

“Thank you,” I whisper, tears starting to prick my eyes. I feel humiliated by the girls’ stunt, pissed I’m letting it get to me. Kindness is the icing on my fucked up cake today, and my walls are tumbling around me.

Swallowing hard, I sink my teeth into my bottom lip, struggling to orient myself.

“That’s quite enough of that, sweet girl,” Chuck mutters, pulling me into his arms. As I cling to him, Chuck drops a kiss on my forehead. “I hope you don’t need anything out of your locker, because we’re going out the side door today. Thank you for your help today, Mrs. Katz. We’ve had enough of this school for now.”

I don’t hear what she says as he drags me out of the building. As soon as we clear the doors, he drops my backpack in favor of sweeping me into his arms. Once I’m secure, my face buried in his neck, he picks up my bag, slinging it over his back.



“Let it out, baby. Today sucked, huh?” he croons. Blaming the sweet words, I sob into his skin, nodding. “It’s okay, shit days happen. You don’t need to talk about it if you don’t want to. Crying is good for the soul, Carrie.”

His legs eat up the ground as he walks. People rarely use this exit, and he cuts across the parking lots to get to the middle school where Meyers’ mom works.

“How long have the girls been bullying you?” Chuck asks. His voice has a low, dangerous lilt, making my body stiffen. “I just want to know. If you had your own reasons for keeping it from me, it’s okay. I don’t like it, but I respect it.”

“I... It’s not that bad,” I rasp. “This is the first time someone pushed me, but they’ve always said shitty things to me. It’s typical mean girl crap.”

“If it’s typical, why are you crying?” Chuck asks gently.

“It was humiliating.” I sniffle. “I hurt my hip, and my dress flew up. I’m pretty sure everyone saw my panties and thigh highs. Not to mention, my books were kicked out of my hands by everyone as I went to pick them up.”

“Fucking bitches,” he growls. “It doesn’t sound typical to me. Instead, it sounds like something that’s escalating. Let me handle it.”

“Chuck,” I whisper. “It will make it worse. They all seem to think I’m cock-blocking you three somehow, I think. They ask me to tell you they said hello or to save them a seat. Honestly, it’s a little sad.”

“It is sad,” Chuck grunts. I can’t ask him which part is sad, because we’ve arrived at the car, the guys waiting next to it. “We have a problem, boys.”

“What’s wrong, Short Stuff?” Bates asks, coming closer. Chuck carefully puts me down, but my hip is sore, and it makes me hiss.

“I fell,” I try, sighing when Chuck fucking growls at me. I’m surrounded by cavemen.

“Uh-uh,” Meyers mutters, his finger tilting my head up to him. “Let’s try that again, please. Beautiful, you have to stop lying to us. Seriously. How are we going to help if you don’t tell us the truth?”

“Maybe you can’t help?” I offer, my voice nasally from crying. I instantly feel like shit for saying that, because they are always there for me. “I shouldn’t have said that.”

Meyers meets Chuck and Bates’ gaze, shrugging. “You can tell us whatever you need to. It looks like you’ve cried. Need to beat the shit out of something?”

“Maybe when my hip doesn’t hurt from falling in front of everyone.” I sigh. “I just want to get in the bath and sleep.”

“No sleeping in the bathtub,” Bates immediately snaps. “Do you need supervision, Short Stuff?”

“I... Not while naked, thank you,” I respond primly, eyes wide. Damn, usually the boundaries are a little better defined.

Bates snorts. “I wasn’t even thinking about that. I don’t want you to drown, so if you need someone to hang out with you to soak today away, we got you.”

I’m pretty sure I just went from sad to being lit on fire. Fuck, my panties are utterly destroyed. “Thank you,” I rasp, my voice almost a whisper. He smiles knowingly just as Ms. Kay arrives at the car.

“I’m so sorry I’m running late,” she groans, pulling out the keys. Taking a look at my face, her eyes narrow. “I promise to make sugar cookies if someone tells me what on earth happened.”

“Mr. Roberts resigned, the girls in our year are psychotic, and Carrie was pushed in class,” Bates answers so quickly I swear he doesn’t take a breath.

“Dude,” I hiss. “Are you serious right now?”

“I know who the weakest link is, darling. Give him some slack. Get in the car, I’ll order pizza while you all do homework at my house,” Ms. Kay promises.

Mmm, pizza. “I guess pizza trumps a bath,” I agree, getting into the car.

At her incredulous look, Meyers fills her in as he gets in next to me. “Carrie was pushed so hard she banged her hip and everything in her hands went flying,” he explains.

Ms. Kay mutters under her breath as she puts her things away before getting into the car. “Boys,” she says as she turns over the ignition. “They listen to you. Stop this. Carrie could get hurt. Today shouldn’t have happened. I want details later on why Mr. Roberts resigned.”

“He had to leave town pretty suddenly,” Chuck says nonchalantly. “Maybe someone’s sick? We really need a new Chorus teacher.”

I feel as if I’m in the twilight zone, and as if I’m only working with half the pieces. What am I missing?

“That’s a pity,” is all Ms. Kay says as she pulls away from the school.

Yeah, small towns and their secrets are very odd.

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## Chapter 5

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## Meyers

Mom drops Carrie off at her house to say hi to her dad, and the guys and I go inside. “We need to talk to the girls,” Chuck grumbles before the front door is even closed. “This shit needs to stop. Seeing Carrie so sad...” He shakes his head and Bates nods.

I know how he feels, I have never been good seeing her cry either. It makes me want to burn down the world, or start slashing people.

“Boys, before Carrie comes over, do you want to fill me in on her teacher leaving?” my mom asks as she moves into the kitchen, pulling out some sheet pans and moving over to the pantry.

I sigh and drop my backpack on the floor by the wall. Chuck follows, and Bates moves down the hall to the bathroom. “He’s a pervert and got everything he deserves,” Chuck grumbles and my mom’s eyes get huge.

“He... he didn’t touch a student? Right?” she mumbles, and her face is white. I shake my head and she takes in a breath.

“He was caught with his pants down, literally, in the supply closet while he touched himself to thoughts of Carrie,” Bates says as he joins us. The bowl my mom was holding slips from her hands and shatters on the tile floor.

I rush over and grab a broom as my mom covers her mouth with her hand and her eyes fill with tears.

“I don’t want to know anything more, but I’m proud of you boys for protecting Carrie,” she says, then carefully moves away from the glass and leaves the kitchen.

I know she will be back after she’s composed herself. It’s hard to hear the town she loves so much, gives her heart and

soul to, has such depraved people in it. I wish I had it in me to lie to her, but I can't.

"I hate hurting your mom." Bates sighs, grabbing the dust pan to help me finish sweeping up the glass. "This town... It's amazing how many secrets people manage to keep even though everyone is such a busybody."

"Mr. Roberts was asking to get caught," Chuck scoffs. "It was the middle of the day today, and he was beating his tiny dick. Do you know where he lives, by chance?"

Grinning evilly as Bates tosses away the last of the glass, I nod. "He lives off of Rhodes and Pine. What are you thinking?"

"I want to make sure he leaves town, is all. The way he was fantasizing about our girl makes me want to puke," Chuck explains, shivering.

"Speaking of which, care to take a bike ride to see Laurel? You know they're probably all over there hanging out," I remind them. "I want to stop whatever they are planning before this weekend. We also have to go now if we want to be here when Carrie comes over."

"What do you have planned?" my mom asks, coming back into the kitchen. While she's still a little pale, she looks more pulled together. Bates grabs her a soda to help her shock, opening it as he hands it to her. "Thank you, this is exactly what I need. So..."

"Mom, I love you, but I'm going to do something that may make you less than proud of me," I tell her truthfully, wincing.

Wrapping her arm around her waist as she sips her drink, she arches her brow in such a way that the three of us cringe. Damn. The reason my mom is so damn scary is because her disappointment has the weight to crush us.

"Spill," she insists.

"The girls in our year seem to believe Carrie is taking too much of our time," Chuck begins immediately. He has always feared my mom's ability to take away his sweets. I can't even fault him for it. "That being said, they've been bullying her

and are cruel. Even Mrs. Katz couldn't do anything today because she didn't see it. We want to end it."

"I trust you," Ms. Kay says simply. "Are you riding your bikes?"

"We are," Bates confirms. I watch my mom closely, trying to figure out what's going on in her head.

"This town clearly isn't the safe place I've always thought it is," she says. "It's up to you to make it safe. Don't get caught, and don't hurt anyone too badly. I'll have Carrie help me bake cookies if you're still gone. Any suggestions?"

"Sugar cookies?" Chuck asks hopefully, making my mom's lips twitch in amusement.

"You three have it so bad for that girl," she chuckles. "Don't hurt her. This could get messy if you all like her..."

"We do," we grunt in sync and blush. We've always been close, why wouldn't we share a girlfriend, too? It could be easier than trying to find time to hang out while we date three different girls while also juggling school and football.

"We don't want to hurt her," Bates promises. "I know this isn't conventional or normal..."

"All things that are severely overrated," my mom snorts. "Your dad called and told me he has to go visit the bank two towns over to train new employees, so he'll be out of town for a few days."

"There's some yard work I saw that needs to be done," Chuck offers. "Maybe I can come by with Bates and the three of us can take care of it?"

Mom's eyes soften as she nods. "I'm definitely making you sugar cookies now," she teases him. "Off you go. You have my permission to make them cry if it drives the point home, boys."

Damn, Mom's got claws. I know today has her anxiety going off, but usually she's against violence unless it's on the field. I'm a growing boy and I have to get it out somewhere, after all.

“Love you, Mom,” I tell her, hugging her hard. She gives me a hard squeeze back, hiding her eyes.

“Group hug!” Bates crows, trying to lighten the mood a bit, and I brace as he and Chuck pile in. Mom squeaks as we hug her, but we’re very gentle with her.

“We’ll be back in a bit,” I promise, letting her breathe.

“Take your phones, and turn the location on,” she demands. Nodding, I show her as I do. I know she’s feeling extra mama bear after everything today. I don’t even feel like reminding her I’m in high school.

Clearly, bad shit can happen at any time. Sighing, I walk out the door with the guys, grabbing my bike from the garage.

“I’ll meet you back here in a second,” Chuck says, and Bates raises his hand in agreement as they both walk to their homes to grab their bikes.

“Going somewhere?” Jax calls out from across the street. He’s pulling out bags from his truck, and I run over to see if he needs help.

“We’re just going for a bike ride,” I explain. “Carrie is free to come over any time. She doesn’t have to wait for us to get back. We’re having pizza for dinner, doing homework, and then gaming.”

“Full afternoon planned,” he teases me. “I heard her Chorus teacher resigned and some of the girls are twats in school. Want to fill me in?”

“The teacher is leaving town by the end of the week, and the girls are who we’re going to see,” I explain immediately. He can decide if he wants to tell Carrie. I don’t want to hide things from her, but I also don’t want her to tell me she can handle it.

“The shit with the girls have anything to do with you?” Jax asks, slinging a bag over his shoulder.

“Kind of. Only in the way that they’re jealous Carrie spends so much time with us. I refuse to give her up,” I grunt, shrugging. “Carrie... She’s started keeping things from us. She



almost didn't tell us her Chorus teacher made her uncomfortable, and it could have been really bad."

"How bad? I won't tell her if she doesn't need to know, but I need to know," he insists.

Sighing, I pull out my phone. Chuck sent me the photo he took, and I hand it to Jax.

"Fuck," Jax shouts. "Why are all the perverts teachers?"

"We went to talk to him during Homeroom. We skipped class, but he had the door wide open. We found him like that in the supply closet, saying Carrie's name," I confess, wincing as red spreads up Jax's neck and to his face. I don't blink as he turns toward the porch's railing and takes a swing at it.

I wait for him to calm before moving. Jax scares the absolute piss out of me, and I don't want to set him off. Taking a few breaths, he turns back to me, giving me my phone from his non-threatening hand.

I'm surprised Mabel or Carrie didn't come out during that commotion.

"I can't be here all of the time. I'm trusting you to watch over my daughter. I can see how much you care about her. In the meantime, I have some friends in a motorcycle club not far from here. I'll make sure they visit this Mr. Roberts to ensure he does leave town... Or maybe he doesn't," he growls. Jax will always be a scary fucker. He adores his daughter, and I know what we did is only a small part of what Mr. Roberts is about to face.

"You did real good, kid. Thanks for watching out for my girl. As for her hiding things, I don't think she wants to bother you. Carrie thinks these things are petty high school bullshit."

"It is petty, but that doesn't mean it didn't break my heart when her face was covered in tears earlier today," I grumble. "I want her to have a good high school experience, not be afraid people are going to hurt her because they're jealous."

Jax raises his eyes to where Chuck and Bates now sit on their bikes in front of the house.

“I think she will because you guys care. If something happens, we’ll take care of it,” Jax promises. “I’m finding out shit happens everywhere, not just big cities. Keep showing up for my daughter.”

“We will,” I promise, taking a step back. “Let her know we’ll be back? Mom is baking sugar cookies if she wants to help.”

Jax snorts. “I’ll let her know. What would you do if I insisted she use another lotion and body wash?”

“God, is that why she smells like cookies?” Chuck groans. “Please don’t do that. Sugar cookies are my favorite.”

“Off with you,” Jax chuckles, shaking his head. “You’re lucky I like you three. I swore I’d scare the shit out of anyone who sniffed around my girl.”

Getting on my bike, I shrug. “We’re already scared of you, big man. I don’t think you need to try much harder.”

“Yep. Mission accomplished,” Bates agrees as we push off with a wave. Jax’s bark of laughter follows us up the street as we head to Laurel’s house.

There’s a few bicycles in the front yard, cluing me in that I was right. Laurel definitely is having her own mean girl planning session. God, I’m already exhausted.

“They’re probably in the backyard, having a hot girl villain moment,” Chuck snorts.

There are a few masculine looking bikes as I set mine in the yard, and my forehead wrinkles. “I don’t think just the girls are over,” I mutter.

Bates and Chuck put their bikes up, looking for cars, but in true fashion, Laurel’s parents aren’t home. It’s one of the reasons her friends tend to come over here. Her parents always have the bar fully stocked, and tend not to care what they do.

With our luck today, we may end up walking in on some fucked up kind of orgy and blinding our eyes. The guys and I have had our first kisses already, though I think we all wish it had been with Carrie. For me, it happened at a party after a

football game toward the end of last quarter. Overexcited girls push their way into our space, forcing kisses and gropes, making it hard to push them away with their spider monkey holds.

If I could go back in time, it would always be her I'd want to kiss instead. Unable to change this, I trudge to the back yard where the gate is open. Rolling my eyes at how trusting everyone is in Reutman, I decide to make sure I lock all the doors tonight before bed.

“...think she's a virgin?” Neumann asks, snickering.

I tripped over my own feet, and Chuck grabs me by the back of my band shirt. Bates puts his hand up, pushing his back against the side of the house. I follow, deciding I very much want to know what the fuck they're talking about. I have a feeling I already know who.

“I don't think the golden boys have fucked her yet,” Laurel scoffs. “I'm sure she's the perfect virgin pussy for one of you. But... who?”

Her voice is coy and teasing, and I hear someone kissing. It's all tongue and sounds very wet. Gross. I don't really want to worry about cleaning my chin of saliva after kissing.

“Settle down,” Marcus chuckles. “I don't think I've ever had sex with a virgin.”

“They're so tight,” Prince, another of our football teammates, groans. “It's even better than fucking a tight little ass, I'd say. Do we just free for all this shit? Should we make a schedule? She's always with Meyers, Chuck, or Bates. Honestly, they're scary fuckers.”

“Damn, have you seen her dad? I'm pretty sure he's some kind of cop. He doesn't work for our town, though, I don't think.”

Jax is an undercover cop, but I'll never do or say anything to jeopardize his life by telling these assholes. My body is tightly coiled, and I want to beat the shit out of them. These are my teammates, guys I trust on the field. I didn't think they would be talking like this about my girl.

This is why we're so possessive and territorial.

"What if we make a bet?" Johnson says slyly. I'm still hiding against the side of the house, but I know these guys. I grew up with them. I spend a good portion of my time with them.

I'm disgusted.

"What are the stakes?" Laurel giggles. "I wish I had a penis now."

"I don't." Neumann snickers. Looking around into the backyard, I see Laurel snuggling in his arms. Michaela is watching the football players talk about this with wild eyes, while Victoria and Nicky look excited.

"Carrie is a damn cock block," Nicky scoffs. "No offense, but I want one of the golden boys. If I can choose, I want Bates. I want to mess up his pretty hair that he keeps under his beanie."

Bates makes a nauseated grimace, and I know he would never touch her voluntarily. Nicky is pretty with all that long red hair, but she's not Carrie.

"First guy to fuck the emo loser gets \$300. Double or nothing if she's spit roasted. I bet those pretty pink lips would look real good wrapped around my cock," Johnson smirks, adjusting himself.

Yep, I'm done. Three hundred dollars? Fuck off. Our girl is worth more than that. She ultimately deserves to feel safe. Chuck loosens his fist around the back of my shirt, and my feet are moving before I fully realize that they are. Bates and Chuck flank me, anger clear on their features.

"What the fuck is going on?" I roar, surprising them. "Carrie is a human, and one of the best people I know. She's not up for fucking auction, nor will anyone be fucking her."

"This is disgusting," Bates sneers. "She's fourteen, guys. All of you are fifteen, and forcing yourself on her is called rape."

My teammates flinch, eyes wide. “No one was talking about forcing her,” Johnson gasps. “We’re your fucking teammates. What the fuck? Do you really think we’re capable of that?”

“I didn’t think you were capable of the conversation I just overheard, either. Yet, here we are,” Chuck growls. “This isn’t happening. Are we clear? I’ll protect her with my last breath.”

Johnson stands just as Prince does, both appearing annoyed. “You can’t just corner the market on pussy,” Johnson complains. “Everyone wants to date you or fuck you. The three of you act as if the sun shines out her ass. Laurel wants her out of the way, so how are you going to ensure that happens?”

Before I say anything, Nicky jumps up. “If you want to keep her from being fucked with or fucked, I have a solution,” she says with a dark smile.

“Nicky,” Laurel complains, clambering off Neumann’s lap. “I want to see the stupid, vapid bitch get what she deserves.”

I don’t know who she’s calling those things, but I think she needs to look into a mirror.

“Just wait,” Nicky says. “What if the little emo cock tease lost her protectors? She doesn’t have any other friends.”

“Go on,” Victoria giggles, leaning in eagerly. I’m not sure what Carrie ever did to these girls, but they look excited by what Nicky has to say.

“I’m not giving up Carrie,” I deny. Chuck and Bates nod, their faces thunderous.

“You’re going to have to, or I’ll ensure the football team runs a train on her,” Nicky says sweetly. “You can’t be everywhere. One day she’ll sip her water bottle, or her coke, or be at a party. Someone will slip something into her drink, and she’ll think she wants it. No one will ever be able to prove otherwise.”

“Again, you’re talking about rape!” Bates roars. “What the hell is wrong with you? This is an innocent girl we’re talking about.”

“Gabby is my best friend,” Victoria pipes up. “I heard something happened with her dad, and I feel like Carrie was involved. I want my friend back, but that’s not going to happen. Someone needs to pay for that. I don’t care if it’s you or Carrie.”

These people are insane. Chuck’s teeth grit together, and I know he’s about three seconds from throwing Victoria in Laurel’s pool and holding her under.

“What do you want?” I growl.

“Ooh, that’s sexy,” Nicky coos, walking up to me to touch my chest. “I bet you’re a fucking beast in the bedroom. Here’s the deal. You’re going to dump the emo bitch and date us. I don’t care if we take turns, but you’re ours. In return, Carrie will have an uneventful life. She’ll become a pariah. No one will look at her or speak to her.”

Victoria giggles excitedly, but she sounds like a hyena. It makes goosebumps crawl up my skin, and I fight back a shiver. I won’t look weak in front of these people.

“Carrie is not to be touched,” I confirm. Chuck’s eyes cut to mine in horror, but I can’t back down. We agreed Carrie would always be protected. “No one speaks to her. No one pushes her into lockers or shoves her to the ground. Everyone keeps their dicks away from her.”

“Including you,” Laurel adds, her hips swaying as she walks up to us.

“So what, we’re your own personal whores?” Bates growls.

“Yes,” Victoria says, shrugging. “We’ll pass you between us, compare notes, maybe fuck you together.”

“I’ve always wanted a football sandwich,” Nicky muses. “Do we have a deal?”

I turn back to Chuck and Bates. The light starts to die in their eyes, knowing this is all we can do. Protecting her means walking away. Somehow, I doubt this is what my mother meant when she told me to do whatever it takes.

Nicky pinches me hard, making me hiss as I turn back toward her. “This ends when we graduate high school,” I rumble. “I will not give up my entire life so you can get off on your power high.”

“Of course,” Laurel giggles, shrugging. “We’re not that crazy.”

“The deal is off if you touch her,” Prince reminds me. He and my good for nothing teammates look pissed off, but that’s not my fault. I’ll make them pay on the field during practices. Bates, Chuck, and I will become their worst nightmares.

Swallowing back the bile, I nod. “We swear.”

Laurel, Nicky, and Victoria squeal in excitement as the guys grunt in disgust. It’s done. I hope Carrie can forgive us.

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## Chapter 6

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## Carrie

I'm baking cookies with Ms. Kay when the guys come home. They say hello to her, ignore me, and go upstairs, leaving me stunned.

"Did I do something?" I ask in a small voice. Ms. Kay is glaring at the counter as she cleans up. Her gaze softens as she looks over at me.

"You could never do anything wrong," she says gently. "I'm not sure what's going on, but I do know they don't deserve cookies for being so rude. Why don't you take them to your dad when they're done, and I'll find out why my son and his friends have decided to grow a second personality. I've taught the three of them better."

"Are you sure?" I ask, second guessing my day. Maybe I did something to upset them. "Meyers' eyes were so cold. It was as if I wasn't even here," I grumble, trying to think.

Chuck looked sad and guilty when he looked over at me, and Bates looked as if someone had killed something he loved. What happened? Where did they even go? I don't understand any of this. Why are they acting this way?

If it were any other time, I'd go upstairs and yell at them. Unfortunately, I think I've lost my ballbusting abilities. I'm too scared of what they'll say to me.

Ms. Kay walks upstairs, and it's so quiet as they talk. My hands fist as I try to quieten my pounding heartbeat and gasping breath. The world is spinning off its axis, and I don't know how to fix it. How did I let those boys become my entire existence?

I don't have any other friends. My days start and end with them in it. I don't... I can't...

I think I'm dying, and I don't even know what's happening yet. Tipping my head back, I force air into my lungs. It could

all be a mistake. Maybe I made them mad and I can apologize. Please, let me be able to fix this.

Ms. Kay starts to yell, startling me. I closed my eyes at some point, and the bright kitchen light feels incredibly harsh. I can't make out everything she's saying, but I hear her scream, "You promised!"

Fuck, I want to go upstairs so I can hear better, but I'm a chickenshit. What if the guys think of me the way the rest of the school does? I hear what they say. It never bothers me much, because the guys are the only people whose opinion matters.

I made three teenage boys my entire life. I'm so stupid.

Creeping out of the kitchen, I sag against the living room wall, tears starting to fall. I can't hold them back. I'm freaking out, and feel as if I've already lost something.

Maybe it's because today has been so weird. My teacher leaving, getting pushed and humiliated, and my emotions are spiraling out of control.

Ms. Kay slams the door to Meyers' room, forcing me to straighten. I don't want anyone to see how upset I am, I've already been enough of a crybaby today. Swiping away the tears, I wait for her to jog down the stairs. She looks as if she's aged in the last few minutes.

"Carrie, honey," she looks defeated, sad, and worst of all, resigned.

"I just don't understand," I whimper, my teeth sinking into my bottom lip.

"I don't either, not completely. I promise, it's for the best for right now though. This town, it's not what I thought it was. I always believed Reutman was filled with good people, and I'm realizing they're worse than some of the bigger cities." She sighs. "Please be careful, Sweetheart. Don't trust anyone outside of the guys. They're going to be absent, they won't talk to you, but I swear they're still good people."

"Then why does this feel like goodbye?" I sob. Something breaks upstairs, and I wrap my arms around myself.

“Get her out of here, Mom!” Meyers screams. Ms. Kay closes her eyes, but I don’t miss the tears falling down her cheeks. It breaks me. What is going on? Meyers never raises his voice to me, is never rude. My heart is breaking. Who is this person? How could he have changed in just a few hours?

“Come with me,” Ms. Kay whispers, tugging me toward the door. “She’s going!” she yells, tipping her head back toward Meyers’ room.

“Thank fuck!” Chuck groans so loudly I can hear it. My tears are falling so quickly, I can barely see.

On the porch, Ms. Kay shuts the door behind both of us. “My children have been abducted by pod people.” She sighs, wiping her own tears away angrily. I know she counts Bates and Chuck as hers as well. They’ve pretty much grown up at her house between Bates’ absent parents and Chuck’s abusive father. Now that his dad is gone, Chuck’s mother works insane hours, so he’s still over here often.

“I didn’t do anything wrong, did I?” I whisper dejectedly. I know I’m on borrowed time. I have to go home and get used to life without my best friends. I was foolish. I knew this would happen. It was only a matter of time. “They’re tired of me now that the school worships them all.”

“No,” Ms. Kay says, shaking her head. “They adore you, things are just complicated and it’s not my place to explain it. They can’t be friends with you anymore or be seen with you. If you see them, don’t talk to them. It’s important, okay? Promise me.”

Her voice has an edge of desperation that makes me nod.

“I’ll miss seeing you every day,” I cry, hugging myself. I feel as if I’m losing my best friends and my bonus mom all on the same day.

“I’ll miss you,” she says sadly. “I have your number. I don’t like hiding things from them, but I feel less bad about it because they’re being douchebags.”

Ms. Kay never speaks like this, but I guess everyone is allowed an off day. It may as well be today.

“Let your mom know we’re about to be best friends,” she says, her lip twitching. “I hope she’s ready to start hosting town bake sales and rummy.”

A surprise laugh sputters out of me. We are *not* bake sale people. However, if it means I’ll get to keep Ms. Kay in my life, I know my mom will agree to it.

“I’ll let her know,” I tell her with a weak smile.

“I’m so sorry, honey,” she says sadly, giving me a hug. “I promise nothing is what it seems, but it’s still going to hurt. Keep your head down, finish school, then maybe you’ll be able to find each other again.”

We’ve only just started high school. That’s forever from now. How am I supposed to go about my days all alone and then forgive them at graduation? They are abandoning me.

I give her a short nod, then turn and run back to my house. I just need this day from Hell to be over. Slamming the door open, then shut, I ignore my dad yelling my name and stomp up the stairs.

Once in my room, I lock the door and throw my body onto my bed, and cry until my eyes are swollen and I’m too tired to fight the sleep that’s taking me over.

## Bates

We wait until Carrie is in her room before closing the blinds to Meyers' bedroom window. He has a perfect view of her bed and I'm already hanging on by a thread. Seeing her sob isn't helping.

"What the fuck have we done?" I mutter and Chuck sighs. He's been silently crying, sitting on the floor against the door. Ms. Kay storming in was expected, but I think the disappointment on her face made his guilt worse.

"Why can't we all just pack a bag and run away? It's not too late to apologize to Carrie. We can leave this town and all be together," Chuck whispers and I laugh. It's hollow and a little maniacal.

"We're too young. What's done is done," Meyers croaks, dejectedly. "We made a deal with the devil and now we have to live with it."

I stomp over to him and punch him in the face. I know what he did was the only choice, but I'm still fucking pissed that he didn't even let us discuss it.

Meyers wipes the blood from his upper lip and nods before walking to his bathroom and slamming the door. I know I should leave, not that anyone is home right now, but the thought of walking past Ms. Kay as I can hear her crying downstairs has me feeling like I'm going to throw up.

"She will forgive us one day, right?" Chuck asks me, and I shrug.

"This is only the beginning. If you think the girls are seriously going to not throw this in her face and parade us around, then you're not paying attention. Nicky is fucking sick, man."

The bathroom door swings open and Meyers walks out then over to his bed. He doesn't say a word, but he pulls out

his phone and starts texting someone.

“We may not be able to talk to her, but we can make sure she’s not completely alone.” Chuck looks at me, but I have no clue what he’s talking about until Meyers flashes his phone at us. He’s got his social media open, but it’s to create a new account.

“You want to catfish our best friend?” I grunt and he rolls his eyes at me.

“I want to be able to keep an eye on her and make sure she’s not completely alone,” he mumbles before typing in some random information. I move closer and sit beside him on the bed. Chuck follows and we try to come up with a name.

“Maybe we should pretend to be a girl? I don’t think she’s going to want to talk to any guys right now,” he suggests and I agree.

“But make sure she’s not fucking preppy. Add similar things that Carrie likes.” Meyers grunts, then smiles. It’s not a big one, but it’s there. I doubt we will smile much anymore thanks to those skanks.

Ms. Kay knocks on the door before walking in. She has a box of pizza in one hand and a plate of cookies on top. “I’m not going to punish you boys because I know you would never intentionally hurt that girl. I’m not happy right now, but I know you all must be just as heartbroken, so I brought you grease and sugar. I’m going to bed,” she says, then leaves the food and walks out.

“Should we tell her about what we’re doing?” I ask, and Chuck shakes his head.

“If we want this to work, no one can know. We can never speak about it either,” he says, then groans. “How did things get so messed up?” he asks, and I close my eyes. I can still see Carrie running across the yard as she broke down.

“This is just the beginning, but at least now she won’t be alone. Margo Krueger is about to become her best friend.”

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## Chapter 7

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## Chuck

Carrie didn't come to school the rest of the week. I know it pissed off Laurel and Nicky, but it's not like we could force her to attend. I'm almost glad she did skip. The girls have been relentless. Always touching us, or announcing to any and everyone that we are now dating.

I know it's inevitable, but I'd rather not cram our deceit down her throat. She's always been so good to us. She doesn't deserve this. But I refuse to let those bitches and assholes hurt her.

We swore to protect her, and this is how we need to do it for the time being. "There you are, Honey buns," Laurel says as she sidles up to me. I bite my inner cheek and try not to scowl at her.

Bates has been talking back and not as submissive as they would like, and Nicky threatened Carrie again. I don't know how we got into this situation. I weigh a hundred pounds more than these girls, but they have us down on our knees and kissing their feet.

We're their slaves, all because we love a girl.

"So, I was thinking that we need to go on a date. Just the two of us. Pick me up for the movies at eight," she says before leaving. She doesn't wait for a response because she knows I'll be there.

"I fucking hate those bitches. I want to slit their throats and hang them from the flag poles," Meyers grumbles from beside me and I grunt.

"Did Margo get a new friend?" I ask quietly, and he shakes his head.

"I think her phone is off," he says, then sighs. He has dark circles under his eyes that I know match mine. We're fucking kids, we shouldn't be dealing with all this stress.



Not that I've ever been a kid. My dad started hurting me as soon as I could talk.

“Did anyone else get fucking roped into a date tonight?” Bates growls as he walks over to us. His beanie is half on his head and his hair is sticking up. He also has a huge hickey on his neck.

I nod and he groans, fixing his hair. “Nicky attacked me as I left English. She shoved me inside the girls’ bathroom and tried to rape me. I don’t know how I can do this when my dick doesn’t even twitch for another girl,” he grumbles, and I sigh.

“Maybe they will get bored and move on if we don’t fuck them. Just the thought of one of them touching me like that has me wanting to bathe in bleach,” I say with a shudder, and Meyers agrees.

“I told Victoria that I was waiting until after high school to lose my virginity. She laughed and said that was cute, but it still didn’t mean that my tongue or fingers had to stay virginal. What is wrong with these girls?” Meyers grumbles, and I shake my head, then shrug.

“How much longer until graduation?” I ask, and Bates pulls out his phone—he has a countdown downloaded. I’d laugh if this wasn’t so fucking sad.

He flashes it to us. The bell rings and I grab my backpack, then head to gym class. I look around for Carrie, but I know she’s not there.

Nicky is in this class and she skips over to me, grabbing my arm and pulling me over to the bleachers. No one has changed for class yet. The gym teacher, our coach, and principal are all standing in front of us.

I frown when the rest of our freshman class starts to walk in. Bates and Meyers plop down on either side of me.

“Do you know what’s going on?” I ask, but they shake their heads. I have a bad feeling all of a sudden as we wait for one of the teachers to speak. They seem to be in a deep discussion with each other, and Coach grimaces.

When the bleachers are full and all of my teachers are leaning against the wall, the principal moves closer to us and clears his throat.

“We’ve gathered you all here today because we have some sad news to report.” He takes a breath, then continues. Sweat beads on my temples and lower back. My heart is racing and I feel like I might vomit. “One of your classmates has sadly passed away this morning. We don’t have all the details and we won’t be disclosing her name at this time, but due to the circumstances of her death, we have decided to do some group therapy sessions and all the counselors are available. If anyone has thoughts or indications of hurting themselves, please speak up.”

He leaves us with that and Bates starts to shake. “You don’t think... He wasn’t talking about...” He can’t finish his sentence, but I know what he’s trying to say.

“No, Carrie would never...” I cover my mouth with my hand as the bile in my stomach finally makes an appearance. I shove Meyers aside and race down the aisle and to the stairs, barely making it into the trash can.

I can hear some of the students talking about who it could be, and Nicky laughing hysterically, hoping it was Carrie. My head spins and I jump when someone touches my back.

“Shh, it’s okay, Chuck. It’s just us,” Bates says quietly and I relax.

When my stomach is emptied, I take the bottle of water Meyers has and rinse out my mouth.

“We need to go talk to your mom,” I grunt, and he nods. If something happened to Carrie, she would be the one to know.

Fuck, please let her be okay... I don’t think I could live in a world without Carrie Campbell in it.

## Meyers

I'm trying to keep my shit together for Chuck and Bates, but inside I'm a fucking mess. We leave the gym, ignoring Coach yelling for us and walk out down the empty halls, past the office, and to the front door.

I know I could probably just call my mom, but I need to see her face to face. It's almost lunch time, so I know she won't be too mad that we're interrupting her lesson. We cross the road and enter the middle school.

"Meyers, Bates, Chuck," the guard at the door says with a smile, but I'm too ruined to even give him a grunt. "Shouldn't you boys be in class?" he continues to question us, but I think I may be in some form of shock.

"I need my mom," I whisper, and he takes a step back. I'm on the verge of tears, and I don't care if that makes me less than a man. "Please," I croak, and he nods, taking his radio off his belt and talking to someone in the office.

"Please advise Ms. Kay that her son and his friends are in the main hall requesting her," he says and then waits for confirmation.

"Thank you," I grumble, then grab Chuck's arm and pull him over to the bench they have against the wall. The security in this place is insane for such a small town. Usually I would just sign in and grab a visitor's pass, but I don't want to walk down the halls that hold memories of Carrie and I.

It doesn't take long for my mom to meet us at the front. She has her bag and keys in her hand, and she nods to the front door as she walks out of it.

Heading straight to her car, she unlocks the door and climbs in. I take the passenger seat as the guys climb in the back. When all the doors are closed she turns to look at me.

"What happened?" she asks, and I break down.

“Someone committed suicide, but we don’t know who... It wasn’t Carrie, right?” I ask as tears run down my face and my throat gets choked up.

“Oh, sweetheart, no. It wasn’t Carrie. Jax took her and her mom out of town to see his sister.” She sighs and rubs her eyes. “Carrie’s grandmother passed away the night that you went to Laurel’s house. That poor girl has had a very bad week.”

“So, Carrie is okay?” Chuck blurts, and my mom nods.

“Yes, she texted me this morning. She’s staying in Florida for a few more days, then returning.”

“How is she?” Bates asks quietly.

“She’s heartbroken, but Carrie is a strong girl. She will be okay. Now, I think we all just need a day off of school and work.”

She pushes the start engine button and the car roars to life.

“So, if it wasn’t Carrie... who died?” I ask, and my mom shakes her head.

“I don’t know her name, honey. Just that she was a freshman and very troubled.” I lean back against the seat and close my eyes. I try to take some deep breaths, but something is still bugging me.

Bates and Chuck talk quietly in the back seat, and my mom hums to the radio. Carrie isn’t here and I’m starting to wonder if maybe it would be better for her to stay in Florida.

I’d miss her, but she would be safe.

## Carrie

This past week has been Hell on Earth. I just wish I could close my eyes and never wake up. I wish I could go back in time and never meet the three guys who own my soul. The car stops at a large shopping mall, and I groan softly. Opening the door, I follow my family inside the building.

My aunt decided to take me and my cousin shopping. She thought it might cheer us up, but I still feel like a hollow shell inside. Not only did I lose my best friends, I lost my grandma. She was the one person I could talk to about anything.

She never judged me for liking to wear dark clothes and hide my face behind my bangs. My own mother is still trying to change me, wishing I could be more like Tilly, my cousin who is currently fighting with her mom about buying some three-hundred dollar shoes. We haven't even been inside the store for more than five minutes.

"Tilly, for the last time, you already have those shoes in baby pink. I am not buying another pair," Aunt Sarah growls, then turns to me.

"What about you, Carrie? Is there anything special that you need or want?" she asks me, and I try not to be sarcastic. I want to say a brain transplant, but that would be rude. I know she's just trying to help.

Aunt Sarah's second husband passed away a few years ago, leaving her a widow with two young children, a spoiled seventeen year old, and she is now the CEO of his company. She has more money than she knows what to do with, but she's still humble and kind.

The total opposite of her daughter, Tilly.

"No, thank you," I say, and she sighs, then starts to grab some random things in my size. Tilly scowls and gives me a glare, but I don't have any energy to fight with her today.

I don't know when the last time I ate anything was and I feel lightheaded.

I wander the stores with Sarah and Tilly, wishing they would hurry up and be done already. I must have zoned out because Tilly clapping her hands in front of my face, barely missing hitting me, snaps me back to the present.

"God, you're such a freak," she mutters, then flips her perfect blonde curls over her shoulder.

"Would you like to grab a snack at the food court?" Aunt Sarah asks me, and I nod.

"Yes, please," I mumble, and she smiles.

"They have the best smoothies, or if you want something fried, I would go for their cheese curds," she continues to babble as we walk down the halls until we reach the food court. The smell of grease turns my stomach, and I opt for a banana smoothie with blueberries. Tilly comments on how many calories are in it and I ignore her.

I don't know why the girls at school even faze me at this point. My cousin is just as cruel to me as them, and I have known her my whole life. Granted, she never used to be this bitchy in the past.

I think becoming an heiress did it. "How are you holding up, Carrie? Your dad mentioned that you were having some troubles before everything happened with Grandma." I know she isn't prying, but I really don't want to open up to my aunt about everything, especially with Tilly here.

"It's just normal high school drama. I'll be okay," I mutter, and Tilly snorts.

"High school is amazing for people who actually try and don't look like some emo, homeless freak," she says, and my aunt gasps.

"Matilda Marie, that was uncalled for! Apologize to your cousin right now!" she snaps, and I hold up my hand.

"It's okay, Aunt Sarah, but thank you." I grab my smoothie and stand. "If it's okay, I think I'm going to wander."

“Yes, honey, take your time.” She hands me a wad of cash, and I sigh, taking it. I don’t bother trying to argue with her about it. I leave the food court and I can hear her scolding Tilly as I walk away.

I just need a few minutes of peace. Losing the guys, then my grandmother, and the stress of everything has been a lot. It’s crazy to think about how happy I was just last week. Things feel upside down now.

There’s a kid my age talking to a group of older guys, and they shove him. The guy has curly, red hair, he’s tall and thin. He’s wearing black ripped jeans, a long-sleeved, tight, gray shirt, and black boots. He honestly looks like someone I’d be friends with.

Throwing out my empty cup, my feet start moving before I can help it. I fucking hate bullies, especially now.

“Yo! Stop!” I yell, my eyes steely and angry.

“Keep going, little girl. Unless you’re the gay boy’s girlfriend,” one of the guys snickers. Ugh, why are people like this? “Do you have a girlfriend, Kiernan?”

“I’m fine,” Kiernan huffs, rolling his eyes. “Thanks, though.”

“It’s not fine. Seriously, get the fuck out and leave him alone,” I insist, kicking one of the bullies in the back of the leg hard. Meyers and the guys taught me ways to protect myself since I’m pixie sized.

The older kid crumbles like the little asshole that he is.

“Walk with me,” I tell Kiernan, grabbing his hand. The guys shout in protest, but we ignore them.

“I might be running,” he mutters, looking at the guy on the ground with wide eyes.

“You’re so lucky you’re a girl,” the guy on the ground groans.

“I’m short, not defenseless,” I scoff.

“Come on, tiny warrior,” Kiernan snorts. “So, what am I calling my protector?”

Giggling, I shake my head. “I wouldn’t go that far. I’m Carrie.”

“I was about to get my ass kicked,” he says. “Not everyone acts as if I’m a scourge, but X and his friends act as if I’m going to turn them gay. A part of me wonders if they’re afraid they may be attracted to me. I’m tired of getting beaten up for something I can’t control, though.”

“That’s awful,” I mutter. “I’m about ready to fast forward a few years, pack my shit up, and disappear. People suck.”

“Not all of them,” Kiernan chuckles, throwing his arm around my shoulder. He smells citrusy and sweet, and while I’d usually be pushing away someone I don’t know, I lean into him. Who knows if this is the last scrap of kindness I’ll get for a while? “Your view on life is awfully negative. Name one thing that would make you happy.”

I think hard, but shake my head. I don’t think anything can make that happen right now.

“Alright, let’s start small,” he murmurs, maneuvering me to an ice cream shop. “Are you lactose intolerant?”

“No.” I grin, seeing where he’s going with this.

“Do you mysteriously hate ice cream?” he presses.

“No.” I giggle. “I don’t.”

“Have some ice cream with me, hang out, and let me buy it. I want to properly thank my hero.” I accept, simply because Kiernan is being nice, and I miss having nice people to hang out with.

It’s going to suck to go back to school. Should I just stay in Florida and never go back? Maybe that’s better.

“Penny for your thoughts,” Kiernan says as we sit down with our ice cream. I watch him lick around his cone in a way that makes my eyes widen and makes me cross my legs. Damn, he’s going to make a guy very happy one day.



“I’m thinking of running from my problems,” I confess, scooping some of my treat onto my spoon.

“Eh, I think it’s overrated. They just come find you,” he responds, shrugging. “You’re stronger than you think. I can already tell. Tiny, but scrappy. Use it to your advantage. No one will ever see you coming.”

I don’t know about all that, but I silently suck my ice cream off my spoon as I think.

Maybe I’ll focus on doing my own thing, get involved in town projects, and stay busy. There’s a ton of volunteer organizations in town that need help. Then I won’t have time to wallow outside of when I ignore the guys at school.

“It’s worth a shot,” I mutter finally.

“Good,” he says, taking my cup to throw it out. “Let’s exchange numbers. You never know when you’ll need a friend, okay?”

I grin at him, nodding happily. “Alright, let’s get you back to whoever you’re with so they don’t send a search party out.”

Snickering, I give him my number. “My phone is turned off right now, I’ll get any messages when I feel brave enough to turn it back on.”

“Whatever you’re running from, I hope a bag of dicks hits them in the face,” Kiernan says sagely. The visual makes me smirk. I can only imagine what that would look like.

“Eh, they’re good guys. They’re just being dumb.” I sigh.

“Mmhmm. You wouldn’t look like someone ran over your cat if that were true,” Kiernan reminds me.

“Carrie!” Tilly stomps over to me, looking annoyed. “Mom is ready to leave. I don’t know why I bother. I should have known like attracts like. You had to find another emo person, didn’t you?”

“Oh, you’re just lovely. Bless your heart,” Kiernan drawls, dragging his hand through his hair. He gives me a look, and I shrug. “Text me later, Carrie. I need to make sure the Barbie didn’t kill you and hack you up into pieces.”

“Oh, my God,” Tilly hisses. “She’s my cousin! Why would I kill her?”

“Thanks for the ice cream,” I tell him, scrunching my nose at him.

“Anything for my hero!”

“Did you have to find another wounded puppy?” Tilly complains as she hustles me to my aunt.

Sometimes broken people have a tendency to attract others. It’s the only way to fill the holes. My heart is shattered, but it was nice to be able to help someone else. I’m going to ask my mom and Ms. Kay about finding volunteer work when I get home. It may be the only way to survive high school.

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## Chapter 8

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## Carrie

I am so ready to go back to Texas. Tilly is insufferable, and her friends are even worse. I know Aunt Sarah is trying to make me comfortable here, but every time she leaves the room or turns her back, Tilly is there to say another mean comment.

I think I'd rather return to the bitches of Reutman High. Kiernan has been a godsend, and I'm glad to have met him. He reminds me of my guys, and I know they would all get along—if they were still talking to me, that is.

I don't even have one text message from them, but I do have an odd friend request from some girl named Margo. I don't know her, but her profile photo is of one of my favorite bands, so maybe I'll accept it.

The reading of the will is today, and then we are driving back to Texas tonight. I'd rather fly, but my mom is terrified of heights and had to be practically sedated on our trip out here.

I finish packing my suitcase and the extra bag I now have thanks to my aunt's shopping spree. I have to admit that she bought me things I'll actually wear. Unlike my mom, who shops in a J. Crew magazine.

“Are you ready?” my dad asks, and I nod, fastening up the zipper and grabbing the blazer that's laid out on the bed. I was told to dress modestly and appropriately today for the lawyer. I think I did an okay job.

My dad gives me a quick once over, then takes my hand and leads me out into the hall. “I'm sorry that we didn't get to celebrate your birthday. We will have to do something when we get back. I'll have Kay make you a cake and I'll grill. You can invite the boys,” he says, and I try not to wince.

“It's okay. I liked the dinner Aunt Sarah took us to,” I mutter, and he squeezes my hand. I take a deep breath and try not to think about the fact that I'm now fifteen, and I didn't even get a happy birthday text.

When we reach the living room, I notice a man in a suit with a briefcase. He's sitting at the dining room table. Tilly is sitting on one side of the table playing on her phone, and my mom is dabbing her eyes with a tissue.

I move to sit beside her and give her a quick hug. We didn't know that my grandma had been diagnosed with cancer. She never told anyone, and suffered silently as she tried to make the most out of her last few months.

My grandpa had died a few years ago and she struggled, but the Christmas we shared together just last month was something to keep in my memories. I wish she was still here or tried to get a second opinion, but I understand. Her soulmate had died, and she didn't want to be apart from him anymore.

I hope one day someone loves me as much as they loved each other.

"Thank you all for being here. I'll make this quick, Eleanor recorded her will so she could talk to you all. I had met with her frequently over the last four months. She was of sound mind, and everything she has decided to present is in good standing."

My father nods, reaching over to squeeze my mom's hand. We're all filled with emotions, mostly sad, but my grandmother had such a full life. I would be lucky to have the same at the end of my journey.

Mr. Timbers, the lawyer, looks back at his paper with a heavy sigh. "Alright, let's get started. Here is the video Eleanor recorded for you all."

Turning the laptop around, he hits play on the video. My grandmother's wizened face fills the screen, and it's as if she's in the room. Swallowing hard, I try to hold back the tears, but it's futile.

"Hello, everyone," she says softly, staring out at us. "I know I may have made some decisions that may have hurt you, and for that I'm sorry. I wanted to live my last days fully, without being in and out of hospitals. I know what my Reginald went through. I didn't want to do it. Now, I have

some things to say about my last will and testament. I have an old family home in Hillston, Texas. It's been long abandoned, but I could never bring myself to let it go. Sarah, Jax, do you remember it?"

They nod as if she's in the room with us. "Yes, ma'am," my father murmurs softly.

"Carrie and I love quirky things. She would watch shows about haunted houses with me for hours, in fact," Grandma remembers. I smile softly through my tears because I have fond memories of those summers. "I'm giving the house in Texas to my granddaughter, Carrie Campbell. She is free to sell it, tear it down, rebuild it. It's none of my concern."

Tilly gasps, but you could knock me over with how surprised I am. Mom squeezes my hand as Grandma continues, but I tune her out as she gives mementos to Dad and paintings to Sarah. I didn't expect her to give me anything. I'm here to support Mom and Dad.

"Sarah will get my house in Florida. You're welcome to sell it or rent it out. It's got good bones," Grandma says with a small smile. There's a lot of amazing memories in the house, and I smile along with her. "All the money I have in savings, bonds, and stocks have been evenly distributed into trusts for Tilly, Carrie, Timothy, and Tasha. They can use it for college, and it can't be touched until they turn eighteen. Please don't cry for me. I'm with Reginald now. I promise I'm thoroughly enjoying my afterlife." She gives a saucy wink at the camera, making me laugh, though it's filled with tears. I'm happy she's with Grandpa now. I know she missed him. The laptop goes dark, and I wipe away the tears that have fallen.

"Today has been long and filled with tough emotions. Thank you, Mr. Timbers, for allowing us to see Mom one last time," Aunt Sarah says, wiping away her own tears.

"Of course," he nods. "The world feels different now that she's gone. She was so well loved."

Packing up his things, he says his goodbyes as he leaves.

“Who wants coffee?” Mom asks, slowly standing. She looks as if she’s trying to shore up her reserves after this.

“I’ll help,” Dad murmurs, following. Aunt Sarah slips out of the room as well, and like clockwork, Tilly snarls.

“You have always been such a damn suck up!” she hisses, walking forward to dig her nails into my arm.

“Ow,” I complain, trying to step away.

“No, you listen. It’s not fair! Grandma loved you more than me because you did all the weird things no one else would do with her,” Tilly continues her voice rising. “If you weren’t such a damn emo loser—”

“That is quite enough!” Aunt Sarah roars, walking back into the room with a bottle of wine. I don’t think coffee was going to cut it for her after today. “Today has been a lot, but there’s no one better suited for that old house than Carrie. It was the right call. Mom was always wonderful at finding what people enjoy and fostering it. I’ve always ignored your comments and arrogant attitude, but I’m done. Let go of Carrie and go to your room.”

Dad is standing just inside the room now, eyes on Tilly’s hand. He looks like he wants to take his belt to her. Releasing my arm, she steps back.

“It’s just not fair!” she screams, stomping out of the room.

“Damn, Sarah,” Dad growls, reaching out to look at my arm. “She broke the skin. I’ll disinfect it, but Tilly’s a brat.”

“I know,” Aunt Sarah says sadly, shaking her head. “She’s completely out of control.”

“I’ll take a glass of wine if you’re sharing,” Mom says with a sigh. “Coffee isn’t going to cut it today.”

Dad tugs me out of the room to the bathroom to rummage through the cabinet.

“Ms. Kay called me earlier today,” he says, swiping my arm with an antiseptic wipe. “Apparently, a girl committed suicide in the freshman class.”

“Oh, my God,” I whisper. “Did I know her?”

“Her name was Taylor Ames,” Dad says, making me scour my memory for her name.

“I’m a terrible person,” I groan. His eyes fly up to mine, and I shrug. “I have no idea who she is. We live in this tiny town. How do I not know her?”

“Carrie,” he admonishes, hugging me to him. “You can’t save everyone, baby. We still live in a town with hundreds of people. It’s not your responsibility to befriend them all.”

“I know.” I sigh. “Since I don’t have friends anymore, I was thinking...”

“Carrie, isn’t that a little dramatic?” Dad asks.

“My best friends ditched me to date the meanest girls in school. I am most certainly not being dramatic, thank you very much,” I growl, stepping away from him, not wanting to be touched. It was bad enough seeing those posts on social media.

“My arm is fine. I think I’m going to go to my room.”

I’m staying in one of the guest rooms, and I think I’ve had it with everyone.

“Wait,” Dad barks, stopping my retreat. “You said you were staying off social media. Maybe you’re not being dramatic, but how do you know who they’re dating?”

“I need to know what I’m walking into next week, Dad. I don’t want to be blindsided,” I explain. “I shut everything down after a brief scroll.”

“Fine. So, what have you been thinking about? You never said,” he says, looking mollified.

“I want to volunteer in some of the town’s committees. They’re always big on holidays and festivals, but I think most of those have passed. Mom has been volunteering running rummy games and bake sales. I need to find something to do with my time,” I grumble.

“Should I pay some neighborhood kids to beat the shit out of them?” Dad asks seriously. “I saw them that day. They said



they were going to protect you, but I think their efforts went sideways. I hate that you're hurting."

"The emo loser was never going to end up with the football player, much less three of them," I scoff, rolling my eyes. They itch, filling with tears. Wiping them back, I blink furiously.

"Don't talk about yourself like that," Dad demands. "Those three dress just like you do, the only difference is Reutman doesn't give two shits because they can throw a pigskin. I despise the double standard."

"Me, too. You said Taylor killed herself... Does Reutman have a suicide hotline?" I ask. I have to do something positive. I'm literally crawling out of my skin with the need.

"No," he murmurs, staring at me with narrowed eyes. "Carrie, that's a tough job with a lot of training needed. Are you sure you're up for it?"

"Ms. Kay can help with the specifics and getting other volunteers, but yeah. This is what I want to do with my free time, Dad," I tell him.

He's moving before I can take a breath, crushing me to him. I squeeze him back, unbothered by the fact that I can't breathe. "You make me so damn proud," he says, kissing my forehead. "I'll talk to Kay. I'm sure she'll be able to point you in the right direction. Still want to go upstairs?"

"Yeah. I think I need to lay down for a while," I explain. I feel really sleepy all of a sudden.

Nodding, he lets me escape the bathroom to head up the stairs. Ignoring Tilly's closed door, I roll my eyes at the music blaring out from behind it. She really needs better taste. Slipping inside the room I'm staying in, I shut the door behind me. Throwing myself back on the bed, I pick up my phone. I blocked the guys on social media after I saw the flood of photos of them dating the mean queens of the freshman class.

Powering on my phone, I log into Facebook to see what I've missed. I also blocked the girls in my class and locked down my profile so I don't see much in my newsfeed. There

are messages in my inbox, but when I open the first one, I blink in surprise.

**YOU SHOULD HAVE DIED INSTEAD *of that girl. Just kill yourself and do the world a favor.***

WOW, very original. Forcing myself to breathe, I block the person and close out my social media messenger. I don't think I'm in the right frame of mind to deal with dickbags today. There's also the friend request from Margo Krueger still waiting, making me frown. It's a new account, and I'm always careful about accepting those. Lips twisting to the side, I close the app and turn my phone off again. I'll let her sit in my requests until I can decide what to do.

Rolling onto my side, my eyes start to close even as I yawn. The world fades as my breaths even out, taking me to a place where my life isn't such a mess.



I'M BACK IN TEXAS, staring at Reutman High, and I really don't want to go inside.

“Would it be easier if we moved?” Dad asks. “We can live anywhere with my job. It doesn't matter to me.”

He's right. Dad usually travels out of town for his undercover jobs. He shaved his head and grew out his beard, making him look even scarier than usual. The thought gives me a weird sense of comfort. My father will do anything for me.

“It would be easier, but it's not necessarily the right thing to do.” I sigh. “Ms. Kay is going to help me with the suicide hotline project, and I think Reutman is starting to grow on me. Even if the next three and a half years at school are going to suck.”

“I know I shouldn’t want to beat the fuck out of them, but I still do,” Dad growls. “I don’t understand what the deal is, why this is happening. Can I at least make them want to piss themselves if they even look over at our house?”

“Yes,” I giggle. “It’s one of the perks of having a really scary dad.”

Grinning, his white teeth gleam. “Thank you for indulging me in my crazy.”

“Anytime. Bye, Daddy,” I say, grinning back as I get out of the car.

I refuse to look at him, forcing my feet to continue moving. If I do, he’ll see how much my heart is breaking, how scared I am to walk into school today.

“Hey, emo skank, did you have a good vacation?” Victoria asks, sneering as I walk past. My dad revs the engine of the truck he recently bought, reminding me he’s still there. Victoria wraps her arms around Meyers’ waist, snuggling into him. Smirking, he kisses her forehead, and I look away.

This looks like something he’s choosing. Maybe Ms. Kay is wrong.

Taking a deep breath, I pass them, refusing to look at the boys Nicky and Laurel are clinging to. I don’t need to see their knowing looks or the cruel sneers as they agree with the girls.

I manage to ignore Tilly’s words easily whenever I’m around her, but the words of my peers hit so much harder.

Alone, I walk quickly through the halls, getting to my locker to grab my books. As I stand there, I close my eyes to try to remember the combination. The guys always open and close it for me. Fuck, I really am a pathetic loser. I depend on them way too much.

“Twenty, forty-four, twelve,” Chuck grits out under his breath as he walks past. My eyes widen, and I quickly turn the numbers, refusing to look at him. Magically, the lock opens and I quickly write it down in my notebook. It’s probably a fluke. It sounded as if he couldn’t help himself. Old habits die hard, after all.

Pushing away his kindness, I repack my backpack for my next few classes. I'm walking home after school today, so I plan to take the least amount of books home possible. I'll do homework on one of the benches outside during lunch. There's no way I'm sitting in the lunchroom alone.

The warning bell rings, making me huff in annoyance. "I'm coming," I mutter, pushing my arms through my straps.

"You're not yet, but I bet I could make you," a boy with blond hair says, leaning against the locker next to me. His hair is artfully swept back over his forehead, making me want to reach out and fuck it up.

I guess the guys stopped peeing on me, and now it's a free for all. So this is what that feels like. I have to admit, high school guys are kind of gross.

"Pass," I mutter, slamming my locker closed and clicking the lock so it's shut. "I need to get to class."

Pulling away, I step into the hallway, trying to keep from getting run over. I'm shorter than a lot of people. It was never an issue before, because the guys' broad shoulders and commanding nature always forced a bubble around me.

"Move," an upperclassman grunts, shoving me over. Gasping, I catch myself on someone's backpack, immediately apologizing when they turn.

"I was pushed, I'm really sorry," I explain, righting myself.

"You're Carrie, right?" a junior asks, looking over me. She's pretty with jet black hair and sparkly earrings.

"I am," I say, smiling tightly, waiting for the vitriol to begin to spew.

"Girl, whose Cheerios did you piss in?" the guy asks, turning with a chuckle. "The entire school is talking about you."

"Stupid high school bullshit," I groan. "I didn't do anything except trust the wrong people."

I don't care if they're supposedly ignoring me to protect me. I'm hurt, angry, and steadily getting pissed off.

“Hmm. You’re gonna have a rough time, girl.” She sighs. “Look, I’m Dana. I hate mean girl drama. If I see shit brewing, I’ll do what I can.”

“That’s really nice,” I mumble. “Thank you.”

“I play football with the assholes who the girls are hanging all over. My name is David,” the guy next to her says. “For what it’s worth, they look miserable. I have no idea what they have hanging over them, but it must be something awful.”

I can’t imagine what blackmail Victoria, Nicky, and Laurel have on them. The guys go to practice, school, and hang out with me. That’s it.

“I have no idea. All I know is I lost my best friends last week.” I shrug. “My dad offered to pull me out of school, but I’m just going to be alone either way, so what does it matter?”

“That’s some dark logic,” David snorts. “It’ll get better, kid. Promise.”

I don’t really think it will, but I wave goodbye anyway, moving quickly because now I actually may be late. Weaving in and out of the throngs of high school students walking or holding up others by talking, I huff out a breath of relief as I slide through the door.

My homeroom class is at the end of the school, and I’m realizing not having large best friends to clear the way is going to be a problem.

“Don’t just stand there,” my teacher snarks at me. “Find a seat.”

“Sorry,” I murmur. “Having short legs is a curse.”

Finding a seat by the window, I get ready to listen to announcements before switching classes.

*“GOOD MORNING, Reutman High students. This is your mental health reminder that the counselors are all available in case anyone needs to talk,”* Principal Landers says. *“I don’t know if any of you knew the young woman who passed away, but their doors are open.”*

I'M glad they're at least offering the help, even if I don't know if anyone will accept it.

"She was a depressed little waste of space," hisses the girl next to me. "I'm glad she's dead. Maybe the other emo kids will follow."

Fuck me. I stare at her, horrified, before looking out the window. I can still see her evil smile in the reflection of the glass, making me want to punch her. I'm rarely violent, but I'm annoyed.

"Hush, Bailey," a girl spits on a chuckle beside her. "There's an emo girl next to you. Do you want to be responsible for her going to the second floor and jumping out the window?"

*Oh my god.* It's not funny, and I'm not depressed. I start launching my plan in my head for having a suicide hotline in town. If so many of the kids in school act like this, I can only imagine how hard life is for others.

Just because I'm wearing black eyeliner, a black off the shoulder sweater dress, and dark purple tights doesn't make me suicidal by any stretch of the imagination. When did this even become a thing?

By the time the bell rings, I may as well have smoke coming out of my ears. I'm absolutely fuming. Picking up my backpack as I stand, I wait for everyone around me to begin walking. I don't feel like being pushed today.

People stay away from me as a black cloud of anger seems to push everyone away. I'm pissed off that being a little different seems to immediately create a target on your back. If you're pretty and weird, you become something to play with until they're bored.

I'm no one's plaything.

The next few hours fly by, but my mood doesn't get any better. I study and work on homework outside, wrapped in a hoodie. It's getting colder the later in the day we get. I don't

even know if it snows in this part of Texas, that's how much of a newbie I still am.

"Why are you outside?" barks a voice I know too well, startling me.

"Go away, Meyers. You're not my daddy or even my best friend, so I will go wherever I want, thank you," I snarl, pushing the hood off my head to glance over at him.

He looks too perfect. His black hair is tousled by the wind, his stupid muscles hidden by a tight, long-sleeved, black shirt under his band tee.

"What's your problem?" he asks mildly.

Rolling my eyes, I start packing up my shit. Maybe I don't actually need to stay the rest of the day. Dad won't care if I skip as long as I text my mom. Closing my bag up, I look over at where he was standing, hoping I'd imagined him. It would mean I was insane, but maybe it's better that way.

Unfortunately, I'm reminded that Santa isn't real, and miracles don't happen to people like me. The ass is still standing there, looking mildly amused.

"Go back to your girlfriend," I tell him, suddenly tired as I sling my bag onto my back. "I'm going home. Maybe I will take my dad up on moving if you all won't stop popping up."

"What?" he asks, panicked. "You can't leave. That's not part of the deal. You have to stay."

"I'm not part of any of this, outside of ripping my damn heart out every day!" I scream, walking up to push him hard. He doesn't budge. Dick. "You threw me away. You're not around anymore to protect me. I've been told four times today to kill myself like the girl in our freshman class did. Four, Meyers!"

"They're supposed to leave you alone," he breathes. There's some kind of deal he got roped into, but clearly it's not going the way he planned.

"I had two jocks lean over and offer to relieve me of my virginity just in my last class." I sigh. Bates sat in a back

corner and ignored me the entire period. “You’re all idiots, and I hate you. I don’t care why you decided to do this, but you’ve managed to break my heart.”

“Carrie,” he whispers as I push past him to leave.

“Where’s she going?” Bates asks behind me as I walk quickly away.

“She hates us,” Meyers grunts.

“Then we’ve done exactly what we were supposed to do,” he says. Tears flow quickly down my cheeks and I let them. Things are complicated, but I let my anger protect me from how much everything hurts right now. Maybe it would be better to just be numb.



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## Chapter 9

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# Carrie

## *Five months later*

Rummaging through my grandmother's old house, I bite my lip. We have our work cut out for us. Pulling my hair up into a ponytail, I sigh.

"It's so hot," I complain to Kiernan. He flew over from Florida to help me clean out the house my grandmother gave me, and I'm thankful that he did. It's in a serious state of disrepair.

"Carrie, I think I saw a roach," he squeals, making me giggle.

"Oh my God," I gasp. "I don't know if it's better to burn the whole place down or gut it."

"Burn the motherfucker down!" Kiernan screams, making me cackle.

"Everything okay in here?" Dad asks, poking his head into the house. "Honey, this place is foul."

"I know, I know," I agree. "This may be a bigger project than I thought."

"Look, most of the things in this house are garbage. Toss everything, and then look at the bones of the place. My mom used to talk about the parties her parents used to have when they lived here, but it's been years since all of that. She met my dad at one of those parties." Dad chuckles. "I know why she left you this place. Mom thought you'd see how special it is and do something amazing with it."

"The outside is beautiful," I tell him. It's an old family mansion, with a honeysuckle trellis growing wild up the fences and sides of the home. It's like nothing I've ever seen

before. “It needs a little love is all. I think you’re right, though. Let’s clear it all out first. I’m going to need a really big dumpster...”

“I’ll call a guy,” Dad grunts, walking back out.

“Your dad is really scary,” Kiernan whispers, eyes wide.

“As long as you don’t fuck me over, he’s fine.” I grin.

“So does that mean the guys who aren’t your friends anymore are buried six feet under?” Kiernan asks, opening a garbage bag to begin.

“Nope,” I mutter. “They aren’t talking to me, at least. That’s better than staring at me while they let those awful girls climb all over them. I’d rather they ignore me.”

“And the rest of the school?” he asks.

“Definitely not ignoring me,” I groan. “If I could just disappear, it would be great. I’ll do my homework, go to classes, and leave. On the last day of school, I had three girls I don’t know tackle me and shove my head in the toilet. I’m debating on whether or not I want to go back or just do online school.”

“I broke my arm two years ago and had to do virtual school,” Kiernan confides. “Well, two idiots in the ninth grade broke it. It blew. I don’t recommend it, boo. You’ll be crawling out of your skin.”

Kiernan is two years older than me, it turns out. I thought he was younger because he has a baby face. This is his senior year, and then he’ll be out. I’m really jealous.

“I have to figure out something. I can’t keep skipping school or I’ll be the one buried six feet under,” I tell him.

“The dumpster will be here in half an hour,” Dad says, peeking his head in. “I also hired three neighborhood kids to help you.”

For a moment, my blood chills, but I have to remind myself that we’re four towns over and about forty-five minutes away from home. There’s no way he’s talking about my guys.

*They're not yours anymore. They never were.*

“Great.” I smile tightly. “You’re the best. Are you headed out to work?” Dad said he would drive us because he had some work to do near here.

“Yes, but I’ll be back in five hours. If you need me, text nine-one-one to me if it’s an emergency,” he instructs.

“We won’t have an emergency,” Kiernan promises, eyes wide.

“I know.” Dad shrugs, walking out.

“He’s really not that scary,” I giggle, shaking my head.

The guys that dad hired are seniors in high school looking for extra cash and take instructions easily from me. They insist on doing all the heavy lifting, simply saying they’d rather do it.

“We’re here so you don’t need to pick things up,” Tray says with a grin. “Tell us what to do and what you need.”

The next few hours fly by. The guys turn on some music on one of their phones, and it echos in the big house. No one teases Kiernan when he squeals at a rat, and instead, Michael’s nose wrinkles in disgust at the vermin.

“Dude’s right. We’re going to have to get someone in after this to get rid of everything that’s made its home here,” he says.

“We?” I tease him with a smile.

Shrugging, Michael nods. “You. We. Whatever. I have a cousin who may be able to help if you want his number?”

“Yes, please. I’d love a quote. I have no idea how much it’ll cost to fix this place up,” I tell him.

“This place has been vacant for years. It’ll be nice to have it fixed up. You may find the locals are eager to help,” Brian says with a nod. The three of them have been really helpful.

It’ll take days to clean this place up, but I can actually see the floor now. It’s like they threw a bunch of stuff in here and then left. I wonder why.

“Do you know why this place was abandoned?” I ask, starting to clean up some glass. I’m wearing a pair of leggings, a sports bra, and a cropped T-shirt. I started getting boobs a couple of months ago, and it’s so odd to find them in the way now. It’s changed how I dress, makes me rethink an outfit because of how much cleavage I’m showing.

Boobs suck.

“Honestly? There’s a really old story the older generation tells here in town. Apparently, during the last party that was thrown here, there was an accident and one of the guests was drowned in the pool out back,” Tray explains, sobering. “It was the mayor’s daughter, and no one could figure out what happened. The parties stopped, and Mr. and Mrs. Travers moved away with their daughter.”

“That’s so sad,” I murmur. “They don’t know if she fell in or if it was murder?”

“Nope,” Brian grunts. “People want to see it restored or put to good use, so you’ll have a lot of interest as you work on the place.”

“Small town life.” I sigh. “I’m still not used to everyone being in everyone’s business yet.”

“Alright, city girl,” Tray teases me.

Grinning, I keep working. By the time Dad comes to pick Kiernan and me up, we’ve managed to throw out most of the debris and trash on the first floor. I’m kind of scared to see how bad the upstairs is, and there’s a broken window in the back which makes me wonder if someone has been squatting here.

“Dad, do I need to worry about the broken window in the back?” I ask, chewing on my lip.

“Maybe. Why don’t I board it up, and we can replace the glass next time we’re out here,” he suggests.

“I’ll go with you if you want,” Michael suggests, grabbing a roll of tape.

“Thanks.” Dad nods.

“Give us a shout the next time you’re out here?” Brian asks. “We’re going to college after senior year. It won’t be a burden to help, and I honestly want to see how it turns out.”

“Same.” Tray nods. “I’m kind of invested now. I don’t even need to be paid if this becomes a regular thing. Just feed me and I’m happy.”

“Michael may kill me for saying it, but same,” Brian chuckles.

“This is dirty, gross work,” I tell them, shaking my head. “I have cobwebs in my hair, and I feel as if I have to pay you something.”

“Nah, we’re always hungry,” Michael says, coming out the front door. “Feed us, and we’re straight.”

“I’m paying you for today,” Dad insists, locking the front door behind him. “Thanks for being good to my girl. I was kind of worried something would fall on her.”

“Carrie and I would both be screaming,” Kiernan snickers. “You made a good call.”

Dad’s lips twitch, but he doesn’t comment as he hands money over to the guys.

“Let’s get home so you two can shower. We’re driving the truck home with the windows open,” he snickers. “If I could get away with throwing you both in the bed of the truck, I would.”

“It’s Texas.” Tray grins, shrugging. “You honestly could.”

Dad grins evilly, making me roll my eyes. I know we have to smell awful.

“Come on, Kiernan. We’re riding in the bed of the truck,” I tell him. He just shakes his head and helps me into the back.

“Pizza, guys?” Dad yells as he starts to get in the truck.

“That sounds good,” I groan. “I’m so hungry.”

Kiernan lays his head back as Dad slams the door closed. “Me, too. I sweat so much, I’m wasting away,” he complains.

Handing him a cold bottle of water from the ice chest Dad keeps in here, I nod. “The house was so hot. I’m looking forward to a cold shower and food.”

As Dad gets the truck moving, Kiernan raises his brow. “I know I’m gay, but you didn’t always have these huge tits, right?”

I drop my head back with a peal of laughter. “No, apparently I’m a really late bloomer. Half the time I don’t know what to do with them, and gym class has become my least favorite. The girls moo at me because they say that I have udders. They’re perky, dammit,” I complain.

“They are.” He nods emphatically, staring at them. “Damn. They’re impressive. I wanted to make sure I didn’t miss those before.”

Shaking my head, I smile at his antics. “They’re just boobs,” I remind him. Pulling out my phone, I scoot over. “Smile.”

Cheesing hard, he smiles for the photo. “We’re such a mess,” he reminds me.

“Eh, we’re adorable. I did a huge social media purge a few months ago,” I tell him as I make the post. The wind feels really good as we go down the road, but I’m distracted as I see the still pending friend request from Margo. “I got a friend request from a girl I don’t know, and I’m a little afraid to accept it. What do you think I should do?”

“Accept it. If it’s a scam profile, they’ll make themselves known pretty quickly,” he says. “What’s the worst that can happen on social media?”

My lips twist as I hit confirm. “Fuck it,” I agree. “Now that you’ve helped me with that issue, what are we getting on our pizza?”

Kiernan grins at me, and we chat and enjoy each other’s company. This is easy. It’s what I need.

## Chuck

It's killing me to see Carrie and ignore her. School was one thing, but living so close to her, watching her, it hurts. After she screamed at Meyers to leave her alone that day after lunch, he insisted that we not speak to, look at, or acknowledge her. It was too hard for Carrie.

Summer means long days of football practices, parties, and being pawed at by meaningless bitches. Victoria, Laurel, and Nicky pass the three of us around as their own personal buffet. I may hit their hands if one of them touches my dick through my pants again.

It's six in the afternoon when Jax pulls into his driveway. Carrie is giggling with a guy I've been seeing stay at their house, and for the millionth time, I wonder who he is. While I'm glad she has a friend, I'm insanely jealous.

"Come on, sweet ass, get your tush out of this truck and get in the shower," he drawls, hopping out of the bed of the truck.

My hand fists as I watch them. I want to beat the shit out of him for talking to my girl like that.

"Gladly," she groans. "I'm so damn hot. Getting out of this bra is going to be like wrestling a wet alligator."

When Carrie jumps from the truck, her tits bounce, making me bite my fist. Goddamn, I swear they're still growing. One day she came to school, and Meyers', Bates', and my eyes snapped to stare at her breasts.

Meyers forced us to walk it off, but I'm weak when it comes to her. My obsession with Carrie is becoming stronger, wilder, and more out of control.

"If you need help, give me a shout," the guy laughs, pushing her into the house as Carrie rolls her eyes.



Help? Fuck no. She's mine. Carrie may not be able to physically be with me, but dammit, I can't handle her being with anyone else.

As they disappear into the house, I stomp over to Meyers' house.

"Meyers!" I yell, knowing his mom's car isn't in the driveway.

"Yeah?" he calls out from the back yard. Stalking through the house, I find him lying shirtless on a lawn chair. Football means we've all filled out, and we're damn brick houses now.

Swallowing, I lean against the door as I think about Carrie. "Did you see there's a guy staying at Carrie's house?" I ask.

"A guy? Nah. Jax would never allow that," Meyers scoffs.

"He's been there for the past three days," I insist. Meyers has been training hard lately, so I'm not surprised that he hasn't noticed. "Jax just drove them home from somewhere. They were both really sweaty and dirty. Bro, I think her tits grew even more. She was complaining about trying to get her bra off, and the guy offered to help—"

"In front of Jax?" Meyers roars, sitting up. "She's only fifteen. What the fuck is going on?"

"I have no idea," I say truthfully. "We don't know what she does at all anymore. It's one thing to remove our presence to keep her safe, but I hate not knowing anything."

"Are you suggesting we stalk her?" Meyers asks.

The thought of it makes me so hard I groan and adjust my dick. "Why do I want to?" I whine. "I want to know everything about her. Not knowing is killing me."

"Cameras in her room won't fly," Meyers muses.

"Cameras for who?" Bates asks, stepping outside. He's also shirtless and wearing sunglasses. The beanie is gone today because it's so fucking hot, his blond hair on full display, it's always lighter in the summer.

"Carrie's bedroom," I answer.

“Do you think she masturbates?” Bates asks idly. “I wouldn’t mind adding that to my spank bank.”

“Stop!” Meyers cries out. “You’re both going to make me crazy. No cameras, even if I really want to watch her play with her tight pussy. She already hates us, I don’t want to give her any more ammunition. Though, stalking her sexy ass sounds fun.”

“Chuck, your creepy is showing,” Bates teases me.

“How do you know it was my idea?” I complain.

“Your eyes are always on her driveway, dude.” He chuckles. “Will you tell us what you find out? I miss her so much sometimes I can’t breathe.”

“Same.” I sigh. “Yeah, I’ll tell you. She’s holed up in her house with some guy, and I’m dying of jealousy right now.”

“I noticed that,” Bates growls. “I really hope the only reason Jax would let a guy stay in his home is if he’s gay. I can’t discount the fact that he may be her boyfriend, though.”

“Fuck, fuck, fuck,” I mutter. “We can’t lose her.”

“Look, we don’t know anything,” Meyers reminds me. “He’s not staying in her room, or I would have noticed. I can see into it from my room. I may be absent because of training, but there’s no way I’d miss that.”

Nodding, I agree. “I’ll see what I can find out,” I promise.

I stay over a little longer before I head home. I need to be alone with my thoughts. The guys kept glancing at me, worried, but I can’t tell them what I’m thinking. It’s too dark and depressing.

I’m spiraling. Every time Victoria talks dirty to me, or Nicky climbs into my lap at a party, or Laurel forces me to kiss her, I die a little inside. We’ve all told the girls we plan to stay virgins till after high school, but they’re still gagging for our dicks. Bates found Victoria naked in his bed just last week.

They’re insatiable.

I’m so tired of all of this.

Forcing myself to go to bed early, I hope tomorrow is better.



THE NEXT DAY, Carrie leaves the house early by herself. I long for the cold weather so I can hide in a hoodie. Damned Texas summers.

Pulling a hat over my short hair, I walk slowly down my porch stairs to follow her. Carrie never once looks over her shoulder, checks her surroundings, or sees me. She's lost in her thoughts as she walks through the streets of Reutman.

I want to shake her. Just because this town is usually safe doesn't mean that there aren't people in it who don't want to hurt her. I overheard Victoria talk about how some girls jumped Carrie on the last day of school because she dared them to. What the fuck?

Grumbling in my head, I follow her. Carrie greets a few of the older ladies in town, and I know her mom joined some of the Reutman community activities so Ms. Kay could still see her. Just because we're being punished, doesn't mean Meyers' mom has to be.

"Oh, honey," Mrs. Lightner calls out to Carrie as she starts to move on. "Are you headed to The Light Project?"

The what?

"I am." Carrie smiles. "It's our launch day. It was announced on the radio, as well. I may not get a single call today, but I'm not worried. I have some summer reading with me. The point is to be on the other line if someone needs me."

"I think this is such a great idea," Mrs. Lightner tells her with a nod. "We don't know what others are going through. Having an anonymous voice on the other line might help."

"I hope it will," Carrie says. "I'm off. I'll come by in a few days to help plan the summer festival."

Carrie has been really busy. I didn't know she was joining town committees. I heard she quit Chorus for Independent Studies, and I was disappointed to hear that. The jocks were probably a big reason for it, unfortunately. The poor girl can't find a moment of peace.

A wave of shame and guilt rides me, making me flush. We did this. We were trying to help, but are we?

People are ruining her life anyway. Is it worth it?

Pushing my feet into motion, I stumble as I follow her through the square. Carrie stops at *No More Sleepies* coffee shop for a drink and treat, and then continues. I wish I could listen to her moan as she takes a bite of her food, or watch her lashes flutter as she sips her coffee. There's so much I've lost.

And for what?

As Carrie opens a side door to the Rec Center, my brows draw down. What is the Light Project anyway? Following her carefully, I feel like the stalker the guys teased me of being.

Waving at the front desk, she disappears into a room.

"Can I help you?" the front desk volunteer asks, eyes narrowing on me.

"Uh, yes. What is the Light Project, and how can I find out more about it?" I ask, winging it. Carrie is safely tucked away in the room. There's no way she'll know I'm here.

"The Light Project is launching today, and it's a suicide hotline," she says with a smile. "We have five volunteers working the phone lines, and someone will be available at all times from now on. Ever since that freshman girl killed herself, an outcry for more resources for people rose. Carrie Campbell and Ms. Kay are the powerhouses organizing it. Are you sure you want more information?"

The woman looks unsure, as if I'm going to run away screaming at the thought of working a phone line for people who are struggling. I think it's an incredible idea.

"Is there anything you all need help with?" I ask before I can stop myself.

“How are you on the phone? We need someone to do the one a.m. to five a.m. shift twice a month on the weekends, but there’s training you need to do first,” she begins tentatively.

“Alright,” I agree immediately. I don’t usually sleep on the weekends when I’m at a party. I’ll just stay up. “Since it’s a night shift, am I coming here or...?”

“You can do your shift at home. Any calls to the hotline will forward to your phone. You’ll be able to keep anonymity,” she confirms. “The other thing we need help with is artwork for some flyers. Know anyone who can do that?”

Chewing on my lip, I reveal something I’ve never told anyone. I usually draw the skyline or Carrie, but I can probably manage this.

“Yeah, I can draw. What are you thinking, though?” I ask.

The woman beams at me, motioning for me to follow her. I’m quickly drawn into planning with her on these flyers, even drafting an idea for her on the spot.

“I wasn’t sure about you, but you have a gift, Chuck,” Mrs. Kayla Peters whispers, shaking her head. “I really should know better than to judge a book by its cover, but wow. You are talented, and your voice is very soothing. I think you’ll do really well as an asset to this project.”

Panic hits me for a second, forcing me to take a breath. Carrie can’t know I’m helping. “Can we keep this just between us?” I rasp. “I know Ms. Kay really well. She’s my neighbor. I don’t want any kind of recognition for this or anything...”

“Of course.” She smiles. Mrs. Peters doesn’t ask questions, and I’m glad. I’m worried I’ll tell her my entire fucked up life if she presses. She’s very sweet, and way more understanding than I deserve. “It’ll stay between us. I’ll say the artist wants to donate his work to the cause. Has anyone else ever seen your work?”

“Never,” I admit. “This is the first time I’ve ever let anyone see my work.”

“You sweet boy,” she murmurs. “Thank you so much for sharing a piece of yourself with the community. Even if no one

else knows, I will.”

Swallowing hard, I nod. “Is there anything else I need to know before I go?”

“Here’s the paperwork for the training. For what it’s worth, this is a really important shift. People feel more alone during those hours,” Mrs. Peters expresses.

I know full well when I lay in bed unable to sleep how horrible it is. I have Meyers and Bates, but every word of what my father used to say to me comes back in those late hours. If I can help even one person, it’ll be enough.

“Thank you for walking me through everything and giving me a chance,” I grunt, giving her a small smile. “I know I look like a big jock...”

“I can already see you’re so much more than just someone who plays football,” Mrs. Peters says. “I was wrong for not accepting you at face value.”

Saying my goodbyes, I realize she wasn’t completely wrong. I walked in initially to stalk my ex-best friend, but I got so much more than I was expecting. As I pass unseeingly through town, I realize how much I’ve been missing of Carrie’s life. Logging into Margo’s fake account, my lips quirk as I see she accepted our friend request finally.

MARGO: *Hey, thanks for accepting my request. I know this was out of the blue. I saw you live close by me, and I’m trying to step out of my comfort zone.*

POCKETING MY PHONE, I hope I didn’t sound too awkward. I make a really bad fucking girl. I want to be part of her life though, hear what she’s doing every day. Ms. Kay is very tight lipped when she goes over to Carrie’s house to play rummy or bake treats for fundraisers. But in a way, I know we don’t deserve even the crumbs we are lucky enough to have.

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## Chapter 10

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## Meyers

It's October of sophomore year, and football is in full swing. I don't know how much longer I can carry on fake dating these girls. Nicky, Laurel, and Victoria are tired of us telling them that we won't have sex with them. They are constantly making sexual innuendos, pushing us into supply closets to make out, shoving their hands down our pants.

I don't think they appreciate that our cocks won't so much as twitch for them.

After playing a rough game tonight, I found Nicky in my bed naked while masturbating. I screamed at her to get out, and my mother frog-marched her out of our home. I am so happy she was there. Mom didn't even let her get dressed, she just threw her out.

"How is she going to get home when she's naked?" I ask, lips twitching. I want to laugh, but I'm afraid she'll beat me.

"Are you kidding me right now? She somehow snuck in here and was in your bed. God, she was naked! I need to wash your sheets," Mom grumbles, pushing away from the door to walk upstairs.

"Mom? I'm a big boy, I can wash my own sheets," I remind her. Mom has been off lately. Dad is taking more overnight trips or not coming home at all, while she overcompensates by making sure everything is perfect here.

"Clearly, your life choices need some work," she snarks. Nose wrinkling as she walks into the room, Mom starts pulling off the sheets. "Are you sleeping with any of them?"

The girls loiter in front of the house a lot, or we meet here before walking to a party.

"I'd rather chop off my cock," I growl, cupping myself.

"Ew, language," Mom scoffs, throwing a pillow at me. "As long as my son doesn't follow in his father's footsteps of being



a whore, I'm good."

My eyes widen as I squeeze the pillow. "Mom, what's going on?" I ask. My blood chills as she realizes what she said. "You've been really weird for at least the last week. What's going on?"

"I shouldn't have said that, I'm sorry," she whispers. "He's your dad—"

"Who is never around," I finish. "I thought it was just his job keeping him busy—but it's not, is it? Mom, will you stop stripping the bed, please?"

"I'll cry if I stop," she rasps. "I don't want to give the man any more of my tears."

Fuck, fuck. "He's cheating, isn't he?" I ask. I feel as if my world is breaking apart. The bastard.

"Yep," Mom says, tears coloring her voice. "Apparently he has a two year old with some woman in Pottersville, where the other bank is that he's been at. I had this feeling something was wrong so I drove over there. I felt like such a stalker following my own damn husband..."

My mother rarely curses, and as a tear trails down her cheek, I want to punch my father. My mom is an incredible woman and wife. Why the hell would he go anywhere else?

"Sometimes stalking is the only way you get answers," I grunt, dropping the pillow in my hands to hug my mom.

"I should be worried about you and the guys with that statement," she mutters. "The woman I found him with is in her twenties. How the hell do I compete with that?"

Mom is thirty-six but looks younger. I know it's insecurity talking, and I sigh.

"You don't," I tell her. "You go to Uncle Kyle, file for a divorce, and kick Dad the fuck out. Sorry, I know, but you don't need that shit. Dad can jump off a bridge for all I care. You're my mom."

"I don't want you to have to choose," Mom says, shaking her head. "This is adult crap, and you shouldn't be getting in

the middle. My head is a mess, I didn't even realize the word vomit was coming out of my mouth until it was too late."

"You've been holding onto all of it for how long now?" I ask.

"Tuesday," she whispers.

"Mom, you've been banging around the house, and you burned dinner on Wednesday. I knew there was something wrong," I tell her. "You're not slick. We don't keep secrets like that from each other."

"I keep other things from you though," she cries. My shirt is getting wet, but I don't care.

"You mean about Carrie? Mom, that's different. I'm a dickhead, and you don't think I deserve to know," I tease her.

Mom's palm hits my chest, and I let out an "oof" just for her. The truth is, I probably hurt her hand with how much she's shaking it out.

"So, what now? The team won the football game, you've thrown the first ever girl out of my bed, and Dad is cheating. Can we donate all of his shit to the shelter and burn the rest?" I ask.

Mom lets out a giggle, swiping at her cheeks. "Oh, my God, you're insane."

"Can we though?" I beg. "Please?"

"Yeah, let me call Uncle Kyle first," she sighs, pulling out her phone.

I finish stripping the bed and walk downstairs to the laundry room. I prefer my mom angry and laughing to crying about what she's lost. I'm so pissed at my dad, I would probably punch him if he was here.

After loading and starting the washer, I check Margo's Facebook account. There's a message from Carrie. They've been getting closer, and all I want to do is tell her about Dad.

Carrie: Hey, we haven't talked at all today. Everything okay?

Margo: I found out today my dad has been living a double life. I'm helping my mom burn his shit.

There's bubbles immediately on her end, and I wish I was in my room right now to open my window. I try to keep the blinds closed now because seeing her hurts, but damn, I would give anything to see her teeth pull that plump bottom lip of hers as she types. My cock swells immediately at the thought, forcing me to adjust myself.

Carrie: Asshole! I'm so incredibly sorry. Burn it all!

My girl is bloodthirsty, and a damn good best friend. I wish she knew it was me on the other end of the phone, but it means giving up this last link to her. I'm not strong enough to do that.

"Meyers?" Mom calls out, and I stuff my phone in my pocket, my long legs eating up the distance between my mom and I as I jog upstairs.

"Yeah?" I ask, my eyes worried. "What did Uncle Kyle say?"

"He says there's a good chance for me to get almost everything in the divorce," she says. "You're not eighteen yet, and while adultery isn't illegal in Texas, the courts will consider marital misconduct while dividing community assets."

"How much proof do we need to provide?" I ask. It only makes sense to me that it would be needed.

"I asked Kyle to help me nail down the paper trail. Your dad isn't smart enough to have hidden everything. I don't care if he does work at a bank," Mom scoffs.

"Good." I nod. "Do you want a glass of wine while we start pulling all of his good suits from the closet? He can have whatever he was smart enough to take to his slut's house."

Mom's lips twitch in amusement. "You're going to enjoy this, huh? Are you upset at all?"

“I was never close to Dad.” I sigh. “He doesn’t go to my games. I think he’s only proud of me because I give him status in my achievements. That’s not being a parent. You’re my mom and you do everything. Including being a mom to my best friends, too.”

“Bates and Chuck need it.” She shrugs. “Tracy and Nancy work a lot, and the boys need someone to be disappointed in them when they’re jerks or to be proud of them when they ace a test.”

“Best mom ever,” I insist. “Wine or chocolate?”

Giving me a look, she rolls her eyes. “Both, please. All of his stuff is going to the town thrift shop unless you want any of it. The bastard has some nice suits.”

“Nope. I have a suit I really like, and I’m a lot more built than Dad. It can all go,” I tell her, giving her a hug.

Walking back down the stairs to get her chocolate and red wine, I sober. Damn. Life is going to change a lot. Dad made a lot of money, more than Mom’s teacher salary. I hope she takes him for all he’s worth.

This sucks, and she doesn’t deserve any of it. If life could stop shitting on us, that would be great.

## Bates

Leaning against the lockers, I watch as Carrie pushes through the hallway. I swear, it's like they're all in her way on purpose. She's wearing a black lace sweater tucked into a pair of ripped black jeans, and combat boots. Her honey-blonde hair is pulled back from her face in a complex braid, just begging me to fuck with it. She's wearing dark eye makeup and dark lipstick that I'm unused to seeing. Carrie Campbell is changing so much before my eyes.

Why is my dick rock hard as I watch her duck under Neumann's arm, continuing to walk as if she's unbothered? Only the tightening of her jaw tells me otherwise. They're all starting to get to her.

"Hey, Halloween isn't for a few more weeks, freakshow!" Johnson yells at her. "I wouldn't be against watching you cry as you gag on my cock, though. Come find me later, I'll take you for a spin."

They promised they'd leave her alone, yet I have to watch the abuse get worse and worse the older we all get. I don't even know why I'm still doing this shit, except the guys stick to their filthy bullshit cat calls without following through on any of it.

Nicky showed me some date rape pills she is holding onto in case any of us step out of line. "The girl drinks water like crazy. It wouldn't be hard to drop it in her bottle," she giggled. "Carrie doesn't even have to come to a party for me to get a train run on her."

I gagged in front of her, I couldn't help it. The idea of any part of my girl being intentionally violated like that makes me sick. Turning away as Carrie shoves another person out of her way, I close my eyes. I can't step in. I just have to let them get it out of their system.

Blowing out a breath, I open my eyes as she passes by me. Her eyes meet mine, her gaze filled with disappointment.

Yeah, you and me both, baby girl.

“Yo, Bates,” Johnson says, clapping my shoulder. “Which of the girls are you going with to the Homecoming dance?”

Ugh, that bullshit. I don’t even want to go, but I know there’s no way they’ll let us weasel out of it. Chuck told me that Carrie took shifts at the Light Project all that week, insisting that everyone else should enjoy Homecoming week since she won’t be attending. I hate that we’re ruining her entire high school experience.

“I don’t know.” I shrug. “I figured one of them would announce to us what’s expected.”

“The three of you are so pussy whipped,” Johnson snickers as we start walking to class. “Is Carrie really worth all of this?”

“Don’t say her name,” I growl. “And yes, she’s absolutely worth it. I wouldn’t be doing this otherwise.”

“Good man.” Johnson grins. “Here comes one of your actual girlfriends. You’re living the dream of dating three gorgeous girls with your friends, and you still aren’t happy. I just don’t get it.”

Hell, he’ll never understand, because he doesn’t know how amazing Carrie is. With any luck, he never will.

Meyers passes by me with a nod, his gaze slightly unfocused. I know he’s worried about his mom and what he found out last weekend. His dad not only was living a double life, the girl he’s cheating with is pregnant again. Ms. Kay always wanted more kids, but it didn’t happen. The three of us are all only children.

Honestly, I think it’s why we bonded together so hard. I hope Ms. Kay bankrupts the dick. I don’t even feel bad for the girl he’s fucking because she knew he was married. She’s a receptionist at the sister bank he’s been working longer hours at.

“Bates,” Laurel says, trailing her fingers over my chest before linking them in mine. I know she’s trying to sound sultry and sexy, but she sounds as if she’s whining and it hurts my ears.

Holding back a wince, I nod. “Good morning, Laurel.”

“You’re so sweet and such a gentleman,” she swoons. God, I’m barely being polite. I can’t fucking win. “You’re the nicest one out of the three. Will you take me to Homecoming?”

“Of course, it’ll be my pleasure,” I bite out, knowing I’m being tested. Everything is a test with these three.

“Yay! I want to go to dinner before the dance. Nicky and Victoria are asking their dates now,” Laurel preens. Poor bastards. “There’s a cute little Italian restaurant in town now. Can we go there?”

“Anything you want,” I agree. My words taste like sawdust even as I say them. My parents work so much I don’t have to worry about money, and I don’t need a job. Meyers is being sponsored as of Tuesday by a car wash business, the owner insisting on it so he can focus on school.

Word of his parents’ divorce is spreading quickly, and Meyers’ uncle Kyle just got his dad served yesterday. Today is Thursday, and I’m ready for the weekend already. Give me a football, and another team to tackle to help my school get to victory. I need the distraction.

“I’m so happy,” Laurel says. “Walk me to class?”

I hate walking her to class. She makes a spectacle of it, shoving it in Carrie’s face whenever possible. I can’t even get out of it, so I simply agree.

The rest of the day flies by, and I’m so ready to go home. Walking through the halls, I hear laughter as I get closer to Carrie’s bank of lockers. Anxiety shoots through my veins, but I force myself to appear unbothered. Something smells as I continue walking, and my nose twitches in annoyance.

“Are you kidding me?” Carrie screams.

*Just keep walking.*

Breathing fucking hurts as I glance over at her locker. Someone covered it in shit and then threw feathers at it. It's a damn mess. It's not even funny, it's disgusting.

Carrie looks lost as she stares at her locker, knowing she won't be able to get into it. Everything is going to smell inside of it too, and God only knows what else they did.

"Ms. Campbell, what seems to be— Oh, my God," Principal Landers gasps, looking horrified. "Did you do this?"

No dumbass, of course she didn't. I swear, the teachers here can be so ridiculous.

"Yes, this is clearly a cry for help. I covered my own locker in some kind of excrement," Carrie sasses. "Please write me up for this, and watch how quickly my father comes down here to reign down Hell upon the school."

"Carrie, there's no reason to involve your parents in this quite yet," he tries to appease her, paling. There's every reason, and he must be an idiot if he's going to try to get away with not calling them. "Why don't we start with who could have done this..."

His voice fades the farther my legs take me away from them. Nicky and Prince snicker behind a wall, making me roll my eyes.

"Oh, my God, did you see her face?" Prince hisses. "I thought her head was going to explode!"

Carrie will be alright. She's stronger than they think. A little prank won't break her. I force myself to repeat this to myself as I walk out of the school. The cool air relieves me of the stench currently permeating the walls of this fine institution. My beanie is firmly back where it belongs on my head, even though the girls always beg me to take it off.

There's not a chance in Hell. I don't want anyone to run their fingers through my hair. Carrie is the only one I'd even let do that. Curling up on the couch with my head in her lap was one of my guilty pleasures in life. Chuck also would practically purr when he'd get his turn. We had it so damn good.



And then we had to go and become martyrs. It's worth it as long as it keeps our girl safe, though. A few stupid pranks aren't something that'll make me break my promise to Nicky, Victoria, and Laurel.

Chuck is fuming as he falls into step with me as we walk to the football field. We have practice today, as we do every day after school during the season.

"They keep pushing," he growls. "Carrie didn't cry, but fuck... I hate that she's getting thicker skin."

"I don't," I tell him honestly. "I don't want her to break. I want our girl to tell them to go fuck themselves."

"That's all well and good," Meyers mutters, slightly out of breath from running to catch up to us. "However, the principal is giving Carrie detention and making her wash off the mess herself."

"What?!" I yell. I'm hot, a side effect of getting angry. There are waves of heat running over my body.

Meyers wraps his hand around the back of my neck and squeezes hard. I don't know why, but it makes me start to relax. I'll ignore my cock and how hard it is right now. I'm calling it a side effect of how much *red-blooded male* blood is coursing through me.

"Look, there's nothing we can do about it right now. I don't know why Principal Landers can't get his head out of his ass, but we get to beat the shit out of people on the field," he growls. Shivering, I nod. "Are we ready for this?"

"Ready," Chuck and I grunt.

"She'll survive this. It's just a little shit," Meyers reassures us. "Want to help me mete out some payback? It's spooky season, and anything fucking goes. Flaming bags of shit, toilet papering houses, painting windows black so they won't wake up for school or practice on time."

"I'm in," I agree. "I thought she was going to cry, and it was so hard for me to remain unaffected."

“Yeah, I may have punched Prince on my way out of the school.” Chuck sighs. “I don’t regret it at all. Nicky called me an oaf. It hurt my feelings.”

I bark out a laugh, knowing he’s lying. “To winning this season, and getting the ball across the field.”

Chuck and Meyers cheer, and we disappear into the locker room to change. We ignore our teammates, most of them are assholes. It’s hard to play with people who are openly spiteful toward our girl. Senior year, one of us will lead our team, and I have a feeling it’ll be Meyers. He’s a natural leader and a great football player.

Day by day, we’re closer to graduation and freedom. I can’t fucking wait. All I wanted to do earlier was to wrap my hand in Carrie’s braid and pull her head back to claim her bratty mouth. My hand fists as I think about how fucked I am, but I can’t bring myself to care.

## Carrie

I'm trying to keep busy in the height of Homecoming week. I used to love October, fall, the excitement of football and Halloween, but now I'm just trying to survive it. I turn toward the janitor and Principal Landers, and I bite the inside of my cheek to keep from crying.

I'm pissed, and unfortunately I tend to cry due to anger. "I promise you, I didn't do this," I say for the fifth time and he sighs, scoffing.

"I'm already late for a meeting, Miss Campbell. Just get this mess cleaned up and go home." With those parting words, he turns and leaves me. The janitor gives me a look of pity as he hands me a bucket of water filled with soap and some rags.

"Thanks," I whisper, and hold my breath as I clean up just another mean prank from the pathetic assholes in this school. My mind drifts as I finish the task and walk to the girls bathroom to wash my hands.

I just want this day to be over. I have a shift at the Light Project tonight, and I wanted to eat and take a quick nap before going. I'd hate to fall asleep and miss a call if someone needed me.

As I'm leaving the school, the sky is turning dark, and I zip up my hoodie and stick my hands in the pockets, trying to keep warm. Texas is hot during the days, but the moment the sun starts to set, the temperature drops.

I walk down the main streets and take in all the Halloween decorations. Some people really go all out. I have no ambition to do anything festive. Not to mention that damn dance from Hell is this weekend, and even though Kiernan tried to convince me to go and offered to be my date, I am thankful for having a shift for the hotline.

I reach my street and avoid looking at the houses surrounding mine. I don't think the guys are even home. I

overheard some of the girls gossiping about them going to pick out their dresses for the dance.

Ugh, just the thought of my ex-best friends going with the bitches who torture me makes me nauseated. I know I shouldn't even care anymore, but it's hard when three parts of your soul just dump you for absolutely no reason.

The lights are off when I reach the porch and the driveway is empty. I sigh as I dig in my bag for my keys and unlock the door. I know my dad has an important job, but some days I just wish he had a normal nine-to-five. I miss him.

Opening the door, I immediately flick on the hall light. I never cared for the dark, but lately I feel like someone is always watching me, waiting in the shadows. I drop my bag at the bottom of the stairs and walk into the kitchen, flicking more lights on as I go.

There is a plate of sugar cookies on the island wrapped in saran wrap and I smile. Ms. Kay spoils me. I shuffle over to the cupboard and grab a cup, then to the fridge for a glass of milk. I sigh after my first bite and try to relax.

The days are getting longer and harder to get through, but I know it's only temporary. Two more years, then I can graduate and leave this place. Though, if I'm honest, the thought of leaving some people behind hurts more than the betrayal they put me through.

Groaning, I finish my snack, then wrap the cookies back up and rinse my glass out before grabbing my bag and heading upstairs. I need a shower. I know I'm not dirty, but the smell of shit still lingers in my nostrils.

I still don't understand what I ever did to the people who love to torment me, besides existing in their world. I keep praying one day they will just move on and forget me, but then I also would never wish their torture on someone else.

I'm strong enough to handle them.

Walking into the bathroom, I grab my phone and check to see if Kiernan or Margo has replied to me. I made a group chat earlier and sent them a photo of my locker.

Kiernan: Maybe I should transfer schools for senior year, Carrie. I fucking hate this bullshit.

Margo: I'm so sorry. What bitches.

My lips quirk at their supportive comments, and I hit the voice memo button as I start to pull off my clothes.

“Thanks, guys. You’d think they’d know a little shit isn’t going to bother me after cleaning up Grandma’s house all summer. That place was a lot worse. I’m just tired of all of this. I don’t want you to transfer just for me, Kiernan. This town is intolerant of anyone who is even slightly different. I don’t think you’d get beaten up for being gay, though.” I sigh.

The message bubbles start to come up again, and I turn on the shower, pulling my intricate braid apart. The group message is new, and I was initially worried about mixing my friends together, but it hasn’t been an issue yet. Margo seems like good people so far.

“What do I know though?” I huff out while washing my hair. I thought Meyers, Bates, and Chuck were good people, too. Look what that got me. Tears start to drop at the thought, and I just want one person by my side. Someone to tell me it’ll be fine, who knows what this town is like.

Don’t get me wrong, there are some wonderful people here. A lot of the adults are great. I just wish the high school students were nicer. Finishing up my shower, I dry off after stepping out. Wrapping the towel around me, I check my phone, which is blowing up.

Kiernan: Where did you go? You can’t just disappear after a voice memo like that. Get your sweet ass over here!

Margo: Oh my God. Did you really just say that?

Kiernan: Hush, you don’t know this, but she’s got a great ass. I insist on proof of life, Carrie!

I'm giggling at Margo's surprise and Kiernan's antics. He's so much trouble. Feeling silly, I make sure my tits and bits are well covered by the towel before taking a photo to send it to the chat. Thankfully, my eyes aren't red from my small breakdown earlier.

Me: Proof enough? I was in the shower. It's been a rough day.

Kiernan: I think you should go on a date. They say the best way to get over someone is to get under someone new.

Rolling my eyes, I give it a second thought as I walk into my room. Glancing at my bedroom window, I bite my lip as I see Chuck, Meyers, and Bates in Meyers' room. I must have taken a lot longer than I thought if football practice is now over. Chuck glances up, his dark eyes widening when he sees me. Huffing out a sigh, I wish I was bold enough to drop my towel in front of the window.

Unfortunately, I'm not. Snapping the blinds shut, I flick on the lamp to get some light in here so I can dress. I'm still not really comfortable with my body. The changes and curves happened so quickly it feels as if it doesn't belong to me.

Staring at my body in the mirror, I drop the towel. I'm alone in the house. Mom said she was working on a fall festival committee meeting tonight, but I still shut the door to my room just in case.

Large hazel eyes stare back at me, my honey-blond hair hidden under a towel I wrapped around my head. Feeling silly, I pull it off, starting to rub and scrunch it dry. I don't feel like blow drying it straight right now. My breasts bounce slightly as I move, and I take in my rounded hips and ass. Kiernan is right. I do have a great ass.

Sighing, I pull on a long-sleeved shirt without a bra and a pair of yoga pants. I don't practice yoga, but damn are they comfortable. I need to have dinner, get some homework done, and then take the long walk to the Rec Center for my shift with the Light Project.

Picking up my phone, my lips twitch as Kiernan howls and even has a voice memo waiting for me. Margo is curiously quiet, but I figure she must be having dinner with her family. That's what normal people do, right?

*"Girl, I see you!"* Kiernan crows, making me giggle. *"I miss you so much. I'm applying to schools in Texas, I'm tired of not being able to jump in the car to see you. I have an aunt who lives near you. I am going to see about visiting her for Thanksgiving."*

"Really? Please, please come to visit," I beg. "I am helping at one of the soup kitchens in town, but other than that I'm free."

*"I should do something nice for the world,"* he muses. *"I'll do it with you. Sign me up! Gotta go get some homework done. Chin up, sweet girl. I love you bunches."*

I will not cry. Sniffling, I type out *I love you* and close out the app. Damn, I love being able to talk to him regularly, but it also reminds me of how alone I am here. The Homecoming game is tomorrow, and the dance is Saturday. I am so tired of hearing everyone's excitement over it.

I'm only fifteen, but I feel so much older.

Throwing dinner in the microwave, I write my parents a note thanking them for setting this aside for me. I also remind them of where I'll be tonight, so they won't worry. My shift is from ten at night until two in the morning. I adjusted the time a little, letting Mrs. Peters know I'm more comfortable doing my shift in town. I have no idea when my parents will be home, and I'm worried I'll fall asleep if I'm lying in bed.

Eating quickly, I start my homework, forcing myself to get lost in it. I set an alarm to start walking over at nine-thirty so I won't be late. When it finally goes off at a few minutes til, I set my books aside. Everything is done. Thank God.

Getting up, I set the coffee machine to start brewing a cup for the walk over, then run upstairs to get my backpack and phone charger. Biting my lip, I glance down, rolling my eyes

when I see my nipples are rock hard. I can't walk through town like that.

Opening my closet, I start searching for a sweatshirt. I want to be comfortable, I don't really care if I look homeless. My hair dried in pretty, though crazy ringlets. I rarely wear it like this because I feel like a poodle.

My fingers close on a sweatshirt, and I sigh in relief as I pull it out. It's huge, and my brows draw down as I look at it. Last fall, I borrowed Chuck's hoodie when I forgot mine before everything blew up. I guess I never gave it back.

Drawing it close to my face, I inhale, wishing it still smelled of him. Chuck always smells like musk and clean sweat. It sounds odd, but I've always loved his hugs. Deciding to wallow in this moment, I pull the sweatshirt up and over my head. It's too big, but it'll help me disappear. I'm tired of being privy to so much attention. I want to be left alone.

Grabbing my backpack, I make sure it has everything I need. It may be a quiet night, so I throw my Kindle into my bag too. I want to live in someone else's life right now. Mine kind of sucks.

Drifting down the stairs, I fix my coffee in a travel cup in the kitchen to make sure I'll be awake during my shift. Walking out the front door, I lock up the house.

"You're out late," calls out a voice across the street, making me gasp. Chuck's mom is getting out of the car, and must just be getting home from work.

"I'm working a new job," I tell her as my heartbeat roars in my ears from the fright she gave me. I don't tell her where I'm going. Anonymity is important in this job, and I want people to know their secrets are safe with the Light Project.

"That's nice, dear. It's Homecoming week, though. You're not missing any of the fun activities going on?" she asks. It really shows how much she works that she doesn't know Chuck and I aren't friends anymore and that I have no interest in these things.

"Not really." I smile. "Have a good night."



Walking away, I pull the hood over my wild hair. Homecoming week is when the town comes alive even at night. It's Thursday night, but I know most of the school will be at the bonfire in town.

I can see them all as I get closer to the square, and I spot Chuck grinning down at Nicky as she talks to him. For people who are supposedly fake dating, they sure look good together.

It's cold right now, and I'm glad I'm wearing my combat boots and warm clothes. The heat from the bonfire is also welcome as I hustle down the sidewalk.

"Who the fuck is that?" someone asks, and I keep my eyes straight ahead just in case they're talking about me.

"No idea. Everyone that's important is here," Neumann scoffs. I'll always recognize his voice because he gives me so much shit. God, I hope he'll just leave me alone. "Hey!"

A meaty hand grabs my backpack, pulling me back hard. Gasping, my hands pinwheel as I fall on my ass. The hood falls back, my curls spilling out as I scowl.

"Why don't you wear your hair like this, little depressed girl?" Neumann asks, smirking as he reaches out to touch one of my curls. Slapping his hand, I shake my head.

"Don't touch me," I growl. "You really don't want to test me tonight."

Dad mentioned that I should carry a knife with me, but I refused. I told him I would be too afraid that I would use it and kill someone. Every day I find myself vacillating between anger and frustration. It's a very volatile feeling. I don't want my parents to have to visit me in prison because I fucking snapped.

Dad's brows furrowed when I told him all of that, and Mom asked me if therapy may help. I told her graduating early would be the only thing helpful at this point. I know they worry about me. The truth is, I'm starting to worry too.

"What the hell is going on?" Meyers snarls, pushing his way through the crowd. I swear, sometimes it hurts the worst to see him.

Pushing myself to my feet, I yelp when I'm shoved forward by Johnson, who I hadn't seen behind me. My knees hit the pavement, making me hiss. There goes these pants. I'm pretty sure I just ripped them.

"We're playing with the pretty little emo slut," Johnson jeers. "You're done with her, aren't you?"

Victoria is hot on Meyers' heels, and I can feel the disdain and anger coming from here.

"You have Nicky, Laurel, and I to suck your dick," Victoria coos, cupping Meyers through his pants.

My lips part in surprise. I didn't think he was actually sleeping with them. Are they all having one big fuck session between themselves? Oh my God, I can't breathe. I may throw up.

"Hey, Carrie, I got something you can suck right here," Johnson teases me, groping himself.

"I'd rather die. I would rather die!" I snarl, getting up again. Starting to walk, I see Chuck move forward to block my way.

"You're wearing my sweatshirt," he says softly, his dark eyes filled with confusion.

"I didn't realize I still had it when I pulled it out of my closet." I sigh. Dropping my backpack on the ground, I pull it off my body. It's dark enough that I probably won't give him a show, and everyone else is behind me. Throwing it at him, Chuck fumbles, barely catching it because he's staring at my chest.

"You're supposed to be the star catcher," I mutter. "Get it together. They're just breasts."

"I can see your nipples," he hisses. "How the hell are you walking around like that? Why aren't you wearing a bra?"

"You're not my daddy, and I don't have to answer any of your questions," I remind him, picking up my bag. "I was covered until you got in my way, drawing attention to my

sweater. Those girls wouldn't have let me walk out of here with it on, anyway."

Every word brings me closer to him as I walk, and I realize I'm weak. Breathing deeply, I fill my lungs with a scent that's unique to Chuck.

"Now I've got to go."

"Carrie," he whispers, his voice full of emotion.

"Too late, I don't want to hear it."

I ignore the tears that drop from my traitorous eyes as I walk the rest of the way to the Rec Center. Dammit, I'm so damn tired of crying. It would be nice to catch a damn break.

My shift is exactly as quiet as I thought it would be, and I spend the time getting lost in my book. Fiction is way better than my life right now.

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## Chapter 11

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## Chuck

It's an important game even though it's Homecoming. We have a fierce rivalry with the Falcons in Pottersville, and everyone is on edge. My mind isn't here though. All I can see is the large, hazel eyes of my girl wrapped in a towel. Fuck, it's the reason I fucked with her at the bonfire, forcing her to talk to me.

I don't care about her wearing my sweatshirts. I want to sneak into her house and give it back to her after I've worn it all day, but that's weird, right?

"You missed that last pass, Chuck," my captain growls, grabbing my helmet and pulling me close. "Is your head in the game?"

"Yes!" I yell, forcing the vixen who is my every thought away. I wish she was taking her shifts at home, but she goes into the Rec Center for every one. I really want to air tag her backpack, but that would be going too far, right? She takes it everywhere with her.

"Let's get it! I'm back in the game," I promise my captain. I have to get this girl out of my head.

Rader stares at me a moment before nodding and smacking my helmet. "Don't fuck this up," he growls.

"I'm gonna ignore the language," Coach draws. "There are kids in the stands. Let's go play good ball and win!"

Out I go onto the field, replaying the mantra I always do as I play. *Get the ball down the field in as few plays as possible.*



THE GAME FEELS as if it's never ending, but we do win in the end. Somehow, it feels empty, even as I force myself to

celebrate with my teammates. Whooping and hollering, we make our way to the locker room to change.

I'm really tired of faking things. I've been masking my emotions most of my life, and I wish I could stop. Pulling off my sweaty gear, I wrinkle my nose at the stink of overripe males surrounding me in the locker room. I've been around it for so long, you'd think I would stop noticing it, but no such luck.

"Nicky wants us to hit up a party on the way home," Meyers tells me as he pulls his clothes off. Lately, it's been harder for me to be around him when he's naked. I don't know what's going on with me, but I need to get it under control. Most guys walk around half-tented or fully hard in the locker room, so no one will say anything about my rock hard cock.

Shoving my pants and underwear down my thick legs, I sigh. "I am really fucking tired," I tell him, ready to beg off. "We had the bonfire yesterday and tomorrow is the dance. I'm ready for bed."

Meyers is sitting on the bench to get his shoes off, his eyes wide as he's face to face with my cock. God, it's so awkward these days. I have no idea what's going on.

"Get that monster away from me." He smirks. "You're a big fucker everywhere, I swear."

His words make me bark out a laugh, shaking my head as I grab a towel and make my way to the showers. They're well-stocked with everything we need at least, so I never have to bring anything else with me. There's always dick measuring that happens in a locker room, so Meyers' comment wouldn't be surprising.

It just feels like there's something going on, and neither of us is willing to talk about it. He's my best friend, that's all it can be. This town is too damn small, even our football status wouldn't keep tongues from wagging.

Tipping my head back in the large stall, I wash my body of the game and filth. We all played damn hard tonight.

“Are you going to the party Johnson is throwing tonight?” Neumann asks as he showers under the spray next to me. It’s communal showers, and I wish this fucker wasn’t so close to me. I already feel on edge.

“I’m considering it,” I lie. “This game was rough, and I’m honestly not feeling it. I’d rather go to bed and rest up.”

“Better talk to your girl, Nicky,” he says, shrugging. “She’s decided to ramp up the relationship. You may end up in a massive orgy with your best friends. You’re so fucking lucky.”

A chant starts up in the locker room, and I curse the fact that Coach isn’t around. This shit wouldn’t fly with him.

“Orgy, orgy, orgy!” they all roar.

I swear, I’m in some fucked-up kind of twilight zone.

“Hold on,” Meyers yells, soaping his body with body wash. “I need my damn dick sucked before a whole damn orgy, don’t you think? If they’re putting out, they shouldn’t talk so much shit.”

Oohs and ahhs fill the room, and as much as I hate the high school bullshit, my lips still quirk in amusement. He just called the three of them out. As much as the girls have groped us, and Nicky snuck into Meyers’ house, nothing else has happened.

Finishing up, I turn off the water as I begin to dry off. I’m tired of the way Nicky, Victoria, and Laurel have claimed us. They pass us between themselves, parading us around. I’m very close to telling them to fuck off.

Pulling my clothes from my locker, I drag on my jeans without boxers. They’re nice enough for me to wear out to a party if needed, but honestly, I really want to crawl into my clean sheets and talk to Carrie as Margo on Facebook.

I forgot to throw more underwear in my locker, so I’m just going to suck it up today. It’ll be one of the many ways I pay penance to the girl I only seem to hurt.

“Fuck, Victoria is blowing me up,” Bates groans, towel around his waist. “I really fucking hate them.”

“Same,” I grunt, making sure the zipper on my jeans is up. Pulling out a long-sleeved black shirt, I put it on, sighing as I look at my hair. I need a damn haircut. It already feels too long. I wonder if Ms. Kay will do it for me.

“Your hair is starting to bug you?” Bates asks as he gets dressed.

“Yeah, I’ve been too busy to think about it, and now it’s starting to get in my eyes,” I complain, pushing it back. My eyes are my father’s, and I hate looking at them. They remind me of his cruelty. If he could do everything he has to family, I have to have that same anger and depravity inside of me too, right?”

“Snap out of it, big man,” Meyers grunts, sitting on the bench next to me. “The world is dark enough without borrowing trouble.”

He’s not wrong. Nodding, I pull on my socks and boots, having a feeling we’re going to be going to Johnson’s damn party.

“We’re going to need to make an appearance,” Bates tells us, leaning against the lockers now that he’s ready to go.

“I don’t want to stay long,” I warn them, finishing up.

Meyers groans as he gets dressed in record time. His damn hair looks like a supermodel in a way mine never can. I want to reach out and fuck with it.

“Keep your hands to yourself,” Meyers chuckles, as if he can read my mind. He probably can.

“It’s so damn perfect,” I complain. “Seriously, though. An hour tops, okay?”

“Yeah,” Bates agrees as Meyers closes up his locker. Each of us grab our bags, which will be thrown on our front porches on our way to the party. We’ll do laundry in the morning.

In sync, we weave through the men getting dressed, ignoring the laughter and chatter.

“Yo!” Johnson yells, and my head turns immediately, knowing he’s talking to us. “I’ll see you later? Nicky asked me



to check since neither of you assholes are answering her.”

“We figured we’d see her there,” I respond with a shrug.

“Cool,” he grunts, jutting out his chin. God, the thought that he was flirting with Carrie not so long ago makes my skin crawl. He has no business being anywhere near her. Meyers wraps his large hand around the back of my neck, forcing me to turn and keep walking.

“I fucking hate him,” I mutter.

“Same,” Meyers and Bates grunt.

“Look, we won’t stay long. It’ll be fine,” Meyers promises. I really hope he’s right, because there’s this odd feeling in the pit of my stomach.



THIS HOUSE IS PACKED with people. I don’t know why I thought it would be a small party. It’s a Friday night and people want to let loose.

“Fuck me.” I sigh as I stare at the lawn filled with people drinking from solo cups. Half the crowd is already drunk or on their way there. I turn to Meyers and Bates quickly before the girls figure out that we have arrived.

“One hour, or I may start slashing some of these assholes,” I mutter, and they nod.

Pushing through the front door, I walk straight to the kitchen for a drink. I’m going to need one.

“Hey, you really pulled it out of your ass at the end, Chuck,” an upperclassman says with a grin as he slowly takes a sip of his drink.

“Uh, thanks?” I grunt, upending the vodka bottle into my cup then adding a splash of juice. I don’t overdo it at these things, I don’t like to be out of control or sloppy. Plus, I remember the black out drunk fury my dad would have, and I don’t want to be like him. I’ll stick to my one drink, even if it is strong as fuck.

Taking a sip, I grimace.

“It just looked rough to start.” He shrugs, walking away.

He’s right, my head and my heart weren’t in this. Pulling out my phone, I open up Margo’s Facebook account. The three of us are on this account more than our own at this point. We’ve all become proficient liars.

Carrie appears active, and I wonder if I should message the group chat or not. I was very surprised when I found out Kiernan is gay. My jealousy settled with the knowledge he’s not into her, but I wanted to swat her beautiful ass for sending photos of herself in a towel over Facebook messenger.

Feeling weak, I open the group message, carefully scrolling up to look at the photo she sent again. I don’t want anyone else to see how beautiful she is. Taking a breath, I swallow hard.

Margo: I agreed to go to a party, but all I want to do is leave. That can’t be normal, right?

Kiernan: Oh, love, it’s very normal. In my experience, most high school parties suck.

Carrie: I wouldn’t know, I’ve never been to any.

It’s true, everything blew up, and we were never able to convince her to come to a party. Taking a sip of my drink, I message back.

Margo: You’re really not missing anything, Carrie. Promise.

Tucking my phone away, I head to the backyard, where I know the guys will be. The girls don’t like to be inside unless they’re dancing. The music is loud, and the living room is a throbbing mass of bodies. I don’t want to be touched unless it’s by Carrie.

Meyers raises his chin when he sees me, his own drink in hand. I wonder where he got his, but the girls typically cater to

us when we're with them. There's always a drink in our hand, and they're always asking if we need anything.

"Chuck." Nicky grins, waving. She's currently in Bates' lap, so I don't know what she wants with me.

Nodding at her, I sit down on one of the logs surrounding the small fire they have set up. It's cold tonight, but I didn't have any of my hoodies with me. Thinking of them just reminds me of last night and taking my sweatshirt away from Carrie.

She never mentioned anything about it in the group chat or to Margo, making me wonder how much she's bottling up inside of her.

Carrie Campbell is a fucking martyr, and I hate it so much.

I don't realize I've been staring off into space until Victoria pushes at my shoulder, forcing me to sit up from where I was bracing my forearms on my legs. Sitting on my leg as if I gave her an engraved invitation, she smiles smugly.

"I like your hair longer," she coos, running her fingers through it. I can't help it, my body shudders with revulsion. "Ooh, you like that, don't you?"

Fucking kill me.

Just take the virgin, slice my throat and make it quick. I'm so over this.

"Yeah," I rasp, swallowing a sip of my vodka drink to combat my suddenly dry throat.

"I've missed you. I was so sad you weren't coming!" Victoria squeals and prattles on while I continue to drink. The world is beginning to look a bit softer, the sharp edges beginning to blur. "Did Neumann tell you about how we want to take our relationship to the next level, baby?"

I blink slowly, trying to focus my eyesight. Her hand is squeezing my dick, and it's actually rock hard. That's not right. Meyers is making out with Laurel, and Nicky is straddling Bates' lap.

"What next level?" I slur, wrinkling my nose.

“We are going to rock your world, baby. Up you go, come with me,” Victoria murmurs, standing to pull on my hand. I’m so confused. I drop my cup, planting my feet to stand.

The girls look over at us, smirking and whispering in the guys’ ears. They walk over to us together and tug us into the house. Johnson is inside getting a drink and just smirks. I’m so confused, feeling as if I’m the butt of a joke.

Up the stairs we go, and I stop in front of a bedroom door.

“I’m not sleeping with you,” I slur, weaving a bit on my feet.

“We know,” Victoria soothes. “Come hang out with us. It’s so loud downstairs. We never get any time together. You’re so damn busy.”

“It’s football season,” Meyers mumbles, trying to come to my rescue. “I’m not sure what else we’d be doing.”

“Of course, we know it’s football season. You played such a good game.”

Laurel holds onto Meyers’ hand, while also slipping her small hand into mine. It feels funny. I shouldn’t be holding her hand. Why am I?

“Come inside the room. We have a movie set up,” she coos.

“I may fall asleep,” I yawn. “I’m really fucking tired.”

Laurel exchanges a weighted glance with Victoria, who shrugs.

“We’ll take care of you if you pass out. Don’t worry, big guy,” she says. It feels wrong for her to call me that.

Meyers’ hand lands on my back, his head heavily laying on my neck. “You’re comfortable to lay on,” he whispers in my ear. “Let’s just do what they want. It’s their own fault if we fall asleep. They can’t get pissed at us. I’m tired, too.”

Nodding, I start moving because I trust Meyers and have no reason not to. I’d trust him with my life.

The room is dark, and Laurel jumps on the bed, the soft hue of a computer turning on as she searches for something. Moans begin to sound and Bates grunts in surprise as Nicky closes the door behind us.

“Who doesn’t like a little porn,” she giggles. “Go lay on the bed for us?”

Again, there’s no reason for me to say no, and I feel as if I’m going to fall down soon.

“Do you want some water? You sound a little parched,” Laurel says, turning toward me.

“Water sounds really good,” I murmur.

“I’ve never had alcohol make me so thirsty before,” Meyers mutters. The low computer light allows me to see him, and his long eyelashes brush along his cheeks as he blinks. Why am I noticing these things?

“Here’s the water,” Nicky says. Struggling to sit up, we all take gulps of it from the offered bottles. The water tastes a little weird, like it has a metallic taste to it. Wrinkling my nose, I collapse back on the pillows.

“Much better, kiss me,” Laurel says, straddling my lap. It’s as if they don’t care which one of us they get, we’re all interchangeable. Her hair brushes against my face as she leans over, cutting off anything I can see, her lips firm as she kisses me.

Meyers groans at something one of them does, and I can hear the sound of a zipper being pulled down. I feel sluggish, my arms feel heavy, and Laurel smiles at me.

“It’s working,” she coos. “I hear what they say about you in the locker room, you know.”

“What’s that?” I grunt, my hips inadvertently jerking upward as she rolls hers over my dick.

“Damn, you feel so big,” she moans. Laurel lifts her long-sleeved dress over her head, her tits bouncing out. I’m not at all impressed by what I can see. The mere outline of Carrie’s tits in her shirt yesterday was so much better.

Scooting down, she unsnaps my pants, making my eyes widen. *I don't want this, right?*

Bates gives a pained moan, and Victoria giggles as she opens her mouth to suck him down. "Oh, fuck," he grunts.

A small lamp is turned on, barely enough to illuminate the bed. I can see heads bobbing, mouths slurping cock, and people moaning. Laurel fists my dick, her hand barely able to get around it. She licks up the thick vein on the underside, and my eyes roll.

Goddamn. This is not how our first time should be.

That's the last coherent thought that I have for a long time after.

## Meyers

*Why does my head hurt so much?*

Groaning, I roll over, trying to quiet the pounding in my head. I knock into a solid body, frowning as I realize I'm not in my bed.

"What the fuck?" Bates complains, his hand rubbing his head in an effort to probably quiet his own headache. "How much did we drink, and where the fuck are we?"

"Why is my dick out?" Chuck grunts, a note of panic in his voice.

Looking down, I see my pants are open, but my dick is tucked away.

"What the fuck did we do?" I breathe.

Our phones buzz at the same time, and I pick mine up. It's a group message with Nicky, Laurel, and Victoria. Our fake girlfriends have a lot to answer for, it seems.

"Jesus," Chuck groans, pushing himself to sit up. Gagging, he swallows hard. "Check your phones."

I haven't opened it yet, I'm a chicken shit. Bates gives a strangled sound, and that forces me to hit open the message.

Victoria: Thanks for an amazing night. We all took turns sucking you off. I like Meyers' cum, it tastes the best. Enjoy the show!

I hit play on the video, my stomach heaving as I see the three of us laying on the bed, eyelids at half-mast as the girls gagged on our cocks. The video appears to be three hours long.

"We were drugged," I mutter.

"I knew my water tasted funky." Chuck sighs. "Motherfuck. Did we fuck them? Please tell me we didn't. I

don't see any condoms..."

Lurching up to kneel, I tell my stomach to shut up. I'm definitely going to puke, but not yet. Burping uncomfortably, I groan as I look for a trash can. Moving to the one I see, I stick my hand in to look for condoms.

"No protection in here," I confirm.

"Oh, God. Gonna be sick," Bates mewls, struggling to stand. His legs almost collapse on him, but he manages to stumble out of the room to the bathroom in the hallway.

"I figured I'd let you sleep it off," Johnson says, peeking his head into the room. "You're finally men now! There were some pretty great noises coming from the room for a while. I'm glad my parents didn't plan on coming home last night. Dude, Chuck, your dick is still out."

Standing, Chuck tucks himself into his pants. I can see he's gone commando, and it makes me wonder why. It's a stupid thing to think about in the grand scheme of things, and I shove the thought away.

"We don't remember much," I tell Johnson. "Care to share with the class?"

I can hear Bates puking across the hall, and I press my hand against my stomach, forcing myself to stand from my kneeling position.

"The girls wanted you to be relaxed, enjoy your blow jobs, and said sometimes you can't get it up when you drink too much. Personally, I think you're a little young to have that issue, but whatever." Johnson chuckles. "No one would believe them either way. You're football fucking legends. So, Nicky pulled out some of her daddy's narcotics and made you a cocktail of Viagra and mollies."

Holy shit. There are small pieces where I remember rubbing against everything, rutting into someone's mouth. I was desperate to get off. I can't believe this shit happened.

"Thanks for letting us crash," I say, my mind struggling to process everything. It's moving too fast, trying to remember as much as possible, but things are so hazy.



“Yeah...Thanks,” Chuck echos, following me as I walk out.

“Can you walk, Bates?” I ask, knocking on the door. Dammit, I don’t want to take a trip to the hospital, but I’ll take him if necessary.

“Yeah, let me wash my mouth out,” he says. The toilet flushes and the water runs in the sink as he rinses his mouth and splashes water over his face.

“The girls wanted to plan a wild orgy,” Johnson chuckles, not knowing when to stop. He’s an excitable puppy, following us around. I’m waiting for him to piddle on the floor. I don’t care how much of an asshole that makes me sound like. He knew this was all going down in his house and didn’t care.

“What made them change their mind?” Chuck asks, squinting at him. If my head is barking at me, Chuck’s has to be as well.

“They remembered they hadn’t even given you a proper blow job. Your girls wanted to woo you,” Johnson says, shrugging. “I think three hours of draining your cocks is sufficient to do that, don’t you?”

He disappears into his room at the end of the hall, whistling, while I look on in disbelief.

“I’m convinced this is a really bad acid trip,” Chuck mutters.

“I second that,” Bates wheezes as he opens the door to the bathroom. He looks like absolute death. Jesus, my mom is going to kill me.

I usually text her when I’m going to be out late, but my phone is curiously silent. Scrolling through, I find a text to my mom telling her I’m staying with Bates. Mom just says she loves me and she’ll be at a bake sale all day today.

I may not be murdered by my mom, but I definitely didn’t text her. They thought of everything. Footsteps heavy, we walk down the stairs to get the hell out of this house.

“Think we can get out of Homecoming?” Bates asks. He looks better now that he’s getting fresh air. Puking must have helped clean his body of the drugs.

“No way in Hell.” Chuck sighs. “I wish, bro. I don’t want to go and have my rapists all over me.”

“God, I can’t believe they drugged us,” I rasp, feeling how wrong it is to hear those words out loud. My cock was hard. Is it really nonconsensual at that point?

“Do either of you remember saying no?” Bates asks.

“I don’t, but that doesn’t mean it’s not on the video. It’s proof of whatever happened last night, but if they’re sending us a video, it means they plan to hold the sex tape over our heads.”

“We’re underage, it’s considered pedophilia,” Chuck grunts. “Not that it matters right now, because a sex tape could still hurt our chances of getting into college or get us kicked off of the team.”

“They thought this through,” I rumble.

“They wanted to do this to Carrie,” Chuck says sadly. “Drug her, rape her by running a train on her... Is it bad that I’m glad it was us instead? I never want their crazy to rub off on Carrie. She needs to be protected, no matter what.”

Nodding, I chew on my bottom lip as we walk. A thumb pulls my teeth away from it, and I look over, surprised. Bates shakes his head, telling me to stop biting my lip. Fuck, I wasn’t expecting that.

Chuck just smiles a bit at us. “They may fuck with her at school, but they’ll be even more ruthless if they drug her. I’ll gladly continue to placate them until high school is over and we can part ways from the psychos.”

“Agreed,” Chuck and Bates say together.

“My skin crawls when they touch me,” Chuck says, blowing out a breath. “I hate people touching me... I’ll deal with it to keep Carrie safe, though.”

“We tell no one,” I intone, pulling the guys to a stop. “Not a soul, not ever. As long as the girls stay silent about it, so will we.”

Chuck and Bates nod, and my stomach decides to lose it. Turning quickly, I run into the trees, leaning over as my body purges itself. It hurts, even going out my nose. Choking, I wipe my face as I struggle to breath.

“Whatever they did was nasty shit,” Bates mutters. “I think Chuck isn’t as bad because he’s so damn big.”

“It took me longer to fall under the drugs,” Chuck muses. “I wonder if that’s why they offered us water laced with more drugs for that reason. I really wanted to fight it, but then I felt really heavy and couldn’t.”

“We don’t accept anything from anyone anymore,” I say, swallowing hard. “We won’t drink at parties anymore either. I’d love to say we just won’t go to them, but they won’t let that happen.”

We’re all lost in our thoughts as we walk home, and all I want to do is shower in scalding hot water. I feel fucking dirty. Waving at the guys as I head up the stairs of the porch, I notice my football bag isn’t there anymore. Mom must have brought it inside.

There’s no one in the house when I walk inside, and I’m grateful for it. I need to be alone. As I stand under the water once I’m in the bathroom, I allow myself to shatter as I process the absence of my innocence, and how easily it could have been Carrie instead.

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## Chapter 12

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## Carrie

I have to get out of the house. Mom is helping with Homecoming at the school because Ms. Kay was roped into it. If I have to see one more pitying look, I swear I'm going to scream.

"Where are you going? Do you want to help decorate?" Mom asks hopefully.

"No, thanks. After the locker incident, I don't really feel like spending any extra time at the school than I need to," I explain. "The principal actually thought I did it myself."

Mom's gray eyes turn stormy, and I realize I never actually got around to telling her.

"Carrie Marie, what the hell is happening at that school?" she growls.

"I expect way more than she's telling us," Ms. Kay says with knowing eyes. "Your dad called me and asked me how much trouble you'd get for carrying a knife to school."

"He asked me about it, but I told him orange wasn't a good color for me," I snark, picking at imaginary lint on my oversized sweater.

Mom snorts, shrugging. "It's not a good color for anyone, honey. What did the guys say?"

"I figure they were in on it with whoever did it," I say unkindly. "I'm not going to Homecoming because I have no one to go with, and because I'm half afraid they'd do something to me. I don't need to have a 'Carrie' moment."

"There's too many pig farms around here. It's why the Mafia likes this area." Mom shrugs. This conversation is getting more and more ridiculous. Body disposal shouldn't be a nonchalant conversation with your parents.

“Anyway.” I giggle. “Since everyone should be busy getting ready for the dance, I’m going to go get my basic bitch on and buy a pumpkin spice latte and apple cider whoopie pie.”

“Has anything else happened?” Ms. Kay asks, looking worried. “Have my boys been doing anything?”

“I... It’s typical high school bullshit,” I mutter, still protecting the guys. “I walked to the Rec Center Thursday night, and had to pass the bonfire. The jocks stopped me, Chuck took my sweatshirt, and I got pushed around a little.”

The words come out of my mouth so quickly, I’m out of breath by the time I’m done.

“Chuck what?” Ms. Kay asks, her voice dangerously soft.

“Murder is only a crime if you’re caught,” Mom says absently, patting her arm. “It’s cold. Why the fuck is he even touching you?”

“The sweatshirt was his, I didn’t realize it initially. And... I miss them. That’s stupid, right? Kiernan is threatening to transfer schools for the rest of his senior year.”

“We have an extra room,” Mom says immediately. “I really hate that you’re going through this. If Dad was home...”

“He offered to pull me out of school.” I sigh. “I’m alone either way, one just gives me a little more peace. I’m starting to think about it. Maybe I’ll do online school or something?”

“Carrie,” Ms. Kay begins.

“Does anyone want a coffee? Or will you be gone by the time I’m back?” I ask, forcing a smile.

“We’ll be gone, but thank you. Carrie, this has to get better. They’ll forget...” Mom says.

“This is too small of a town for that, Mabel,” Ms. Kay reminds her.

“I have things to keep me busy. It’s fine.” I shrug. “I’ll see you all later. Have fun.”

I open the door, enjoying the burst of fresh air that greets me as I step out.

“You’re working tonight, right?” Mom asks, poking her head out as her and Ms. Kay follow me out onto the porch.

“Yes, till like three in the morning. I’ll be at the Rec Center, but I have the keys and will make sure the doors are all locked,” I promise. I’m sure it’ll be quiet all night, but I still volunteered.

“Keep your phone on you, and please send me an hourly text,” Mom insists. She usually isn’t this overprotective, but I know now that she has an inkling of how bad things are, that’ll change.

“I will, I will. Bye, guys!” I call out, walking down the stairs.

The guys are sitting on the porch steps across the street at Meyers’ house, looking rough. I’m sure they were partying too hard last night. I roll my eyes. Their eyes follow me as I walk by in my oversized black sweater dress with Ghostface on it and purple tights. My boots make a dull sound on the sidewalk as I move.

“Chuck, get your hungover ass over here right this second,” Ms. Kay yells, moving quickly across the street.

“Who, me?” he calls out tiredly. It would be funny if he didn’t sound so dejected and awful.

Whatever, it’s not my problem. Maybe he shouldn’t have been such an asshole. My trip into the town square is uneventful, though there are girls going in and out of salons as they get ready for the dance. I ignore it all as I step into the coffee shop, *No More Sleepies*.

“Hey, Carrie!” The barista grins as she sees me. I’m here way too often. It’s one of my favorite places. What can I say?

Ordering, I hum under my breath as I wait. I kind of miss Chorus, or rather the idea of it. It was more important to me to start volunteering, but damn was I excited for it. My order is ready, and I inhale the smell deeply as I bring it under my nose.

“You look as if you’re having a religious experience,” a voice teases me.

Flinching, I put my drink on the counter before I drop it. This damn town has made me jumpy as hell. Twisting around to see who is speaking, I smile genuinely as I see it’s Ian.

“I really need caffeine,” I tell him as I turn back to pick up my cup and treat.

“You’re fully embracing the spooky season,” he observes as he points out my sweater once I’m facing him again.

Glancing down, I giggle. “Halloween and October have always been my favorite,” I explain. “It looks a little different this year, but that’s fine.”

“I’m pissed for you with everything you’ve got going on.” Ian sighs as I take a sip of my coffee.

Biting back an inappropriate moan, my lashes flutter in pleasure. “Damn, that’s good. I don’t think anything can ruin my coffee moment. It really is a religious experience,” I giggle.

“I’m glad you’re still in good spirits.” He sighs as we move toward the door.

“It’ll take more than a few jerks to bring me down. I have a purpose in this town, things to fill my time, I’ll be fine until graduation,” I tell him, trying to convince myself as well.

“I heard you humming, do you sing too?” he asks with a smile as we walk.

“I sing for myself these days. I dropped out of Chorus when the teacher resigned last year, and then got too busy to think about it again,” I lie. I dropped because of the jocks and bullies in the class.

“Hmm,” he murmurs. Ian nods as he spots someone on the street, and I see the sidewalks are starting to get busier. Guys are picking up flowers from the florists and checking on dinner reservations. It must be nice. “Are you going to Homecoming?”



I blink, realizing he's asking me. "Oh, no," I tell him, shaking my head. "I avoid all school activities possible. I have a date with my coffee and a book. I may even FaceTime my best friend later. Big plans."

"Sounds like it." Ian smirks. "I'll see you around. Don't let things bring you down."

He crosses the street, continuing about his day, and I walk home. Everyone has things to do, and the excitement is catching. It almost makes me wish I was going. Almost.

You couldn't pay me to attend this dance though.

## Bates

Ms. Kay continues to light into the three of us. Not just Chuck for stopping Carrie on Thursday night and taking back his sweatshirt, all of us. I think it's hard for her to see Carrie not attending normal high school activities. But it's not exactly a walk in the park for us either.

We already all feel like shit after the girls drugged us, forced themselves on us, and then sent us proof. It wasn't supposed to be like this. We were going to fake date them and lose our firsts to Carrie. As many of them as we could give her, that is.

"I don't know what you got into last night, but you look like shit. Catch a nap, shave, and then get dressed. If you have to continue this farce, you may as well look the part. I don't even know who you are anymore," Ms. Kay says, eyes fierce.

"Ms. Kay," I whisper, flinching.

"I love you guys, but I adore Carrie. She's having a really shitty year," she growls. "Shit on her locker, getting bullied, and then you lot are everywhere. She can't catch a damn breath. I'm going to talk to Jax about home school."

"Mom, I'll never see her then," Meyers groans.

"Stalking her isn't seeing her either!" she yells. We're standing on the front porch as she reads us the riot act. We deserve it. She'd probably start hitting us with her wooden spoon if she found out what happened last night.

We've always been warned to watch our drinks. "*Just because you're six feet tall doesn't mean date rape doesn't happen to men,*" she's always saying. She was right.

"Yes, ma'am," Chuck rasps. "It doesn't mean I'm going to stop doing it though."

Fuck, I think he's still drugged. I knew he followed her here and there, but not that he was being 'horror show' creepy.

Ms. Kay barks out a laugh, shaking her head. “I don’t even know how to respond to that. I saw the artwork going up on fliers for a community board, do you know anything about that?”

I don’t know what she’s talking about, but a flush grows up Chuck’s neck. Hmm, more secrets. Great.

“No, ma’am,” he says, his voice breaking.

“Whatever, please don’t let her see you, and don’t go to jail. It’s my dream to get you three through high school without a trip to the police station. Let an old woman get through this, okay?” she snarks.

“You’re not old,” I protest.

“We gotta go, Kay!” Mabel calls out, loading the SUV. “Do I need to bring you one of Jax’s shotguns?”

The three of us pale, because Jax is scary and so is his collection of weapons.

“Not necessary,” Ms. Kay calls over her shoulder. “They asked Mabel and I at the last minute to chaperone this dance. Please don’t make me have to bleach my eyes due to your behavior?”

“Yes, Mom,” Meyers mumbles, rubbing his face. “I’m really sorry about all of this. I promise I had the best of intentions, and now it’s all kind of... messed up.”

I know he almost said “fucked,” and winced.

“The road to Hell was also paved with the best of intentions,” Ms. Kay says, then sighs. “Please stay out of trouble. Did something happen? You three look really rough.”

We shake our heads too quickly and her eyes narrow. “We aren’t done here, is that understood? Something weird is going on.”

Hurrying across the street to where Mabel is beeping the horn, she gets in. Meyers sags against the porch steps as he watches her go.

“I can’t tell her,” he rasps, broken. “She’ll be so disappointed in me, and really fucking mad. How many times has she told us to watch our drinks?”

“Too damn many.” I sigh. “Let’s do what she said and catch some sleep. The least we can do is look presentable so she can take some photos with us.”

Waving goodbye, I head home to take a nap. My phone buzzes, and I pull it out. My account is always logged into my fake Margo profile, as I know are Chuck and Meyers’. I should feel bad about this, right?

Carrie: Is it giving up if I tell my dad to pull me out of school so I can do virtual?

I almost stumble on the sidewalk as I re-read her words over and over. My girl is a damn fighter. She doesn’t fold.

Margo: Is that what you really want?

I bite my lip as I force myself to keep moving. She messaged Margo separately, not bothering with the group chat. I know exactly what Kiernan would tell her. The fucker has been pushing for her to let him transfer schools.

Carrie: I don’t even know anymore. Everyone is so busy doing their own thing, I feel really fucking lonely. If I disappeared would anyone even care?

*I would care.* I want to find her and shake her. Meyers is right. Everything is so upside down. He wants to install cameras in her room, and now I’m thinking it may be a good idea. She doesn’t seem like she’d hurt herself, maybe a little sad, but I’m not in her head anymore. I can’t say with a hundred percent certainty that she wouldn’t.

Margo: Kiernan and I would care, sweetie. Chin up. It has to get better.

Blinking, I wonder who wrote that. We’re all usually logged in at the same time, yet all of our voices sound similar enough to the fake Margo profile that she never noticed.

Carrie: Maybe. I have to work later today. It'll probably be slow with everyone partying.

There's a lot that she doesn't tell Margo. The Light Project is something she's vaguely talked about, but Margo lives close enough that I doubt she wants her to know for purposes of anonymity.

An idea pops into my head, and I slowly climb the porch stairs.

Margo: I can keep you company here if you want? We can send each other memes and silly posts.

"Please say yes," I mutter as I let myself into the house.

Carrie sends a GIF that she's in and a smile lights up my face. I don't care if it'll piss off our dates if we're on our phones all damn night. After their stunt, they're lucky I'm even attending Homecoming. I'll go, but I'll talk to my girl all night.

## Chuck

I'm so damn tired, but I got myself ready even though I just want to sleep. Bates' parents hired a driver for the night, and it feels like a lot for a high school dance. I don't make the rules, though.

As long as the girls are happy.

"You look good, big guy," Meyers teases me with a grin as he makes a pot of coffee. We all agreed we'd need it to do this damn song and dance. We're going to have dinner with them beforehand, but after that the gloves are off. I won't dance with them or anything.

"Thanks, this bow tie won't sit right though," I growl.

"Let me fix it," Meyers says, rolling his eyes.

Grabbing the back of my neck, he pulls me down a bit. I'm just a little taller than him. He sticks his tongue out the side of his mouth as he ties it, and I watch him closely as he finishes.

"Was that so hard?" he asks, winking at me. Damn, I'm sure that wasn't, but I am. Fuck, I think I'm definitely attracted to my best friend. If that's not awkward, I don't know what is.

"Not at all," I grunt. "You planning to share some of that coffee? Or is it all for you?"

"I share just fine, big guy," Meyers chuckles.

"I need some love, too," Bates whines, walking in looking dashing in his suit.

"Oh, God," I laugh.

I love these guys.

Hanging out, we make our coffee and chat as we wait for the car to show up and the girls to get here.

“Carrie may Facebook message Margo tonight,” Bates says tentatively.

“I saw that when I jumped in to message Carrie as Margo.” Meyers sighs. “Do you think she’ll leave the school?”

“I understand why she would, but I hope not.” I sigh, taking the mugs to wash them in the sink. I don’t need Ms. Kay to come for me about this, too.

There’s a knock at the door, and I roll my eyes as I dry my hands. Show time.

The girls are waiting on the porch along with the driver, and after taking a million photos, we head to dinner. My stomach is in knots and I can barely eat.

“What’s wrong, baby?” Victoria asks, rubbing my arm. “Not hungry?”

“Nah, my stomach is still upset,” I mumble. It’s not completely a lie, I have felt off all day. Probably mixing alcohol along with being drugged.

I bite my tongue, not wanting to start a fight. I doubt she’ll release the video and photos, mostly because we are barely sixteen. Meyers turns sixteen in a few weeks, in fact. What they did was really fucking risky.

They get up to go to the bathroom, and I open my Facebook to check in on Carrie. She’s sent a few TikTok links. Looking around, I open them to find they’re thirst trap links. Is that what gets her hot?

“What are you watching?” Meyers teases me, leaning in to watch the video. “Dude, how did you even...?!”

“A girl sent it to me,” I grunt, widening my eyes so I don’t have to say who.

“Oh,” he murmurs. “Is that really what she likes?”

“Thirst traps are fantasy, guys,” Bates chuckles. “Let the girl live.”

I smirk, scrolling through TikTok to send her a silly video. Carrie sends me laughing emojis and a voice message. She’s

been sending more of these lately, and I hope she doesn't expect any back. I won't be able to send her one.

Looking around, I see the girls are walking down the long hallway back toward our table. I have time to play her message. Adjusting the volume, I click the button.

*"Oh my God, Margo! I almost peed myself watching this!"* Carrie squeals, making me huff out a laugh.

I'm not lucky enough to make my girl laugh unless I'm pretending to be a chick, effectively catfishing her. Jesus, my life is so fucked up.

"I miss her, too." Meyers sighs.

The girls get back to the table, and I force a smile. "All ready to go?"

We already settled the bill, so there's no reason to stay. Standing, we walk out together to go to the school. They decorated the gymnasium for the dance.

I barely pay attention to things as I walk in. Ms. Kay has a bright smile, insisting on photos, which of course we give her. I would say yes to almost anything for Meyers' mom.

"Let's go find a table," Bates says, clearly over the dance as well.

"Aren't you going to dance with us?" Laurel whines, and my eye starts to twitch.

"Don't drug your dates if you want to dance with them," I tell her with a wide, sarcastic smile. "You're lucky I haven't puked on any of you yet."

"Oh," Nicky says, eyes wide. "You really don't feel well?"

"You could have put Bates in the hospital." Meyers sighs. "He doesn't weigh as much as we do, and if you were dosing for us, you definitely gave him too much."

Victoria's lips tremble as if she didn't think about this, but I don't have time for her antics. We've already said too much about this in public. It just takes a second for someone to



overhear us, and then all of this secrecy would have been for nothing.

Finding a table, we pull up chairs and take turns sending Carrie funny memes and photos. At around eight-thirty, she stops responding, and I put my phone away, disappointed. I really miss her. My eyes pan the room, bored.

Another half an hour passes, and I'm ready to go.

"When do you think it's possible to bounce?" I ask, leaning in to talk to Meyers.

"No fucking way," he whispers, staring at something.

"What?" Bates asks, turning to look.

"You look as if you've seen a ghost," I laugh, flopping in my chair to follow their gazes.

"No, but almost," Meyers says.

It's... her.

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## Chapter 13

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## Carrie

I was right about my shift tonight being quiet. Not that we get too many calls to begin with, but I haven't had one in five hours. Margo has thankfully kept me occupied since my dumb ass only brought one book with me, and my Kindle died.

I am completely and utterly bored right now and I hate to admit it... I'm having a case of FOMO. Like, this is so fucking dumb. I shouldn't want to be at some crappy school dance right now, but it makes me wonder what it would be like.

I send Margo one more TikTok, then put my phone in my bag. I know she offered to keep me company, but it's Saturday night. I'm sure she has better things to do.

I'm just about to play solitaire on the computer in front of me when someone bangs on the door. I grab my phone just in case it's someone in need of serious help, and shuffle out to the main lobby.

It's dark outside and all I see is a tall shadow. I'm hesitant to open the door, but my name being shouted in Kiernan's voice has me walking faster. I unlock the main door and throw it open.

"What are you doing here?" I gasp with a big smile on my face. He pulls me into a tight hug and I melt. I miss human touch. He lets me hold him for longer than is probably polite.

"I've missed you, girl," he mumbles, and I sigh. Moving away, I startle as Mrs. Peters pops her head inside.

"So, I hear you have a dance to go to tonight. Why wouldn't you just tell me that, missy?" she scolds, and I laugh.

"Because I would never go to a hormone-infested rave," I grumble, and Kiernan gently smacks my arm.

"Shut your mouth. I just flew all the way here with a designer gown sitting beside me in first class because I refused

for it to have any wrinkles.”

I gape at him, and he closes my mouth with his pointer finger under my chin. “Don’t argue with me, Carrie. I know you want to go to Homecoming deep, deep down. So let me be your Fairy Gaymother. Let’s get changed and dance the night away.”

Tears fill my eyes and I find myself nodding. “Thank you,” I mumble, and he waves his hand.

We spend the next hour priming and primping me until I don’t recognize myself in the mirror. “This dress is amazing,” I tell Kiernan as I run my hands down the short ,purple tulle skirt and over the beaded top.

“I knew it was perfect for you when I saw it last weekend.” He finishes pinning my honey-blond hair up and I gently touch the braids he wove so delicately.

“I look like my cousin Tilly,” I mumble, and he snorts.

“Tilly wishes she had your sweet ass, now give me a kiss and let me change,” he says before turning his cheek and tapping it. With a roll of my eyes, I do as he says, then leave the room.

“Oh, Carrie, you look beautiful, sweetie,” Mrs. Peters gushes before handing me my bag. “Now, don’t worry about your shift. We have it covered,” she says with a wink, and opens the main door for me to exit.

Kiernan joins me, and I groan at the black car that’s been waiting here for us. I know Kiernan comes from money, but I would have been fine with walking.

A driver climbs out and runs around to the back to hold open the door for us. I thank him and slide in. The cool leather gives me goosebumps, but the heat blasting makes me sigh.

“Thank you for this, but I should warn you... I’m not sure tonight is going to go very well. Nicky and Laurel are going to throw a hissy fit when they see me.”

“I’d like to see them try. I’ve been biting my tongue, but I’d love to put them in their place,” he growls, and I laugh.

The drive to the dance is fast, and I try not to think about the guys and bitches as we walk down the hall toward the gymnasium. The scents of Victoria's Secret Love Spell and despair cloud the entrance, and I cough.

I instantly spot the guys sitting at a table in the back corner and I curse my eyes for wandering. Even when they hurt me time and time again, I still miss them and want them.

I need to move on, but it's so goddamn hard. "So, this is what a public school is?" Kiernan comments, and I snort.

"Yes, not as glamorous as your boarding school by any means." He takes my hand and leads me over to the dance floor, spinning me. "I am not a good dancer," I remind him, and he guides me to the music.

"Well, lucky for you, I have been through countless hours of cotillion dances and lessons." I let him move me for two songs before I've had enough. People are starting to whisper loudly around me, and I know my few moments of peace are about to end.

"Let's go say hi to my mom and Ms. Kay." He nods, and I grab his hand to pull him over to the punch bowl. My mom is laughing at something, and when she sees me her eyes light up, but she doesn't look surprised.

"You owe me twenty bucks," she says to Kay, and I roll my eyes. Glancing back at Kiernan, he shrugs.

"I couldn't just show up unannounced and expect to stay at your house," he says exaggeratedly as if I should have already known that.

"Regardless of how it came to be, I am so happy to see you here, Carrie," my mom says before pulling me into a hug. "You look beautiful, honey." Ms. Kay pulls me away from her and scolds my mom.

"Mabel, you are ruining her hair," she says, and I laugh. "But she is right, sweetie. You look like a picture. So much better than those harlots the boys are with." I try not to wince at the reminder of Nicky, Laurel, and Victoria, but it's a moot point.

I can feel their presence behind me and I curse my body for it. “Carrie?” Chuck says, and I bite my lip, turning around to face them. They look amazing in their suits and bow ties. Meyers moves closer as if to hug me, then stops, frowning.

“Oh my, what do we have here?” Nicky says with a concealed sneer as she stomps over to Bates and wraps her arm around his back. I notice him flinch at her touch and, once again, it pisses me off.

What is it about them that has the guys so pussy whipped?

“You look nice,” Laurel says next with an almost convincing smile. If it wasn’t for the glare she was shooting me, I’d almost think she was capable of a compliment. Kiernan moves closer to me and pulls me tight to his chest, resting his chin on my shoulder.

I relax in his hold and almost smirk when I notice Chuck glaring at him. “Thanks,” I mumble, and Ms. Kay walks in front of us with her camera.

“I really must insist. Girls, please step away from my boys for a moment,” she says, and pulls her son closer to me as Kiernan backs away. I try not to show any emotion on my face as they swarm me and Kay takes a bunch of pictures. “Carrie, please smile,” she says, and I do for a few more photos.

“How about I take one of you with them and Mabel,” Kiernan says, and Kay pats him lovingly on the cheek, nodding. He takes her camera and I smile one last time. The girls move in immediately as I back away.

“Oh, you’re not going to take one of all of us too?” Nicky whines, and I can’t hold back my flinch at her disgustingly high pitched voice. Kay takes the camera back and makes a fake gasp.

“Oh no, dear. It looks like my battery is about dead.”

My mom laughs into her hand, covering it with a cough, and Kiernan gives me a wink. Chuck accidentally touches my lower back as I leave, and I clench my fists. How is it he gives me butterflies with just a brush of his skin?

“I’m about over this dance,” Bates groans and rubs his stomach.

“Are you still feeling sick?” Victoria asks, and he nods. She pouts and Ms. Kay moves over to him.

“I have some Tums in my bag. Let me get them for you. This is what happens when you party,” she scolds, and I don’t miss the nasty glare Chuck and Meyers give to Laurel and Nicky.

“Well, I’m going to take my date for another spin on the dance floor. We will see you ladies later,” Kiernan says to my mom and she giggles, then waves at us.

When we are back into the crowd, I finally relax and take a breath. “Have they always been that intense?” Kiernan asks, and I shake my head.

“No, that’s new,” I mumble, and try to get lost in the music for a little while.

“I’ve never been to a school dance,” Kiernan admits a few minutes later, and I look up into his eyes. “The bullying was too bad, and I never had a date,” he says with a shrug, and my heart breaks a little bit.

“I know what that’s like, but now you have me, and if I need to fly out to Florida and be your date, I will. That’s what friends are for, right?” He pulls me into a tight hug and kisses the top of my head.

“I’m so glad I met you, sweetcheeks,” he mumbles, and I laugh.

“We really need to find you a better term of endearment for me,” I say as he continues to sway us. The music has now changed to something upbeat, and I look around me at all my classmates bumping and grinding.

I wonder what that’s like, but I would never ask Kiernan to do that. I respect that he only likes guys.

I can feel eyes on me. When I look up, Chuck’s dark eyes meet mine and I get lost in the past for a moment. All the

nights we would study together and play video games. The hours of laughter and just feeling like I wasn't alone.

Tears fill my eyes and I quickly wipe them away. "Sweetheart, what's wrong?" Kiernan asks as I turn my head away and look at the floor.

I'm about to ask to leave when someone starts talking into a microphone, getting my attention. I spin around to Principal Landers smiling at us all.

"I know you all want to get back to dancing, so I will make this brief. Can I please have the Homecoming court up on the stage?" We wait as Nicky, Chuck, Bates, Laurel, Meyers, and Victoria climb up the short steps to the stage. I shouldn't be surprised that they are the ones everyone voted for.

Neumann and Johnson cheer for the guys, and the girls all smile. They look perfect, happy, and not at all the way I feel. Do they even miss me? Do they ever wish things could be the way they once were?

Two students hand Principal Landers an envelope, and another stands there with a pillow presenting the crown and tiara. Maybe in another life I would wish to be up there beside them, but that's not me.

I have never been one of those girls. I'd much prefer wearing sweater dresses with Halloween characters on them and leggings over this dress and heels. "So, your Homecoming King and Queen are..." He takes an exaggerated pause, and I roll my eyes.

"Way to keep us in suspense, huh?" Kiernan mutters, making me smirk.

"Meyers and Victoria!" Principal Landers says grandly as everyone cheers.

Everyone but Nicky, who makes a disgusted face before forcing herself to clap politely and give Victoria a hug.

"Yeah, I think I'm about ready to blow this popsicle stand," I sigh.



“Your wish is my command, but I have to piss like a racehorse,” Kiernan confesses, wrinkling his nose.

Giggling, I wrap my hand around his bicep, eager to get my shoes off once we get home. I’m glad I experienced this just so I can tell my future children that I went. I’m also happy I came with my ride or die best friend.

“Are you leaving, Short Stuff?” Bates asks, smoothly stepping in front of us.

“Yeah, I’m ready to go,” I tell him with a small smile. “I don’t care how gorgeous the shoes are, heels always start to hurt during the night.”

“Girl, you are preaching the truth,” Kiernan chuckles.

“You’ve worn heels?” Bates asks, lips twitching. I know he’s pushing Kiernan, but he doesn’t realize who he’s speaking to.

“I have, actually,” he shrugs. “They’ve taught me how to have great posture and have sympathy for others, because they are a bitch on your feet.”

“Huh,” Bates grunts. “You’re nothing like what I thought.”

“You don’t know me, snookums,” Kiernan reminds him. “I was going to surprise you either way. Now, I have to pee, and if you don’t move, you’re going to be treated to a golden shower.”

It takes a second before his eyes widen and he mutters, “Yeah, man, that is not my kink at all.”

“Good to know,” I giggle, my hips swaying as I walk beside Kiernan.

“Carrie?” Bates asks, making me twist my body to see him. “I’m really glad you came. You look breathtaking.”

“Thank you,” I tell him. “I’m glad I did too.”

I follow Kiernan to the boys’ bathroom where he looks at me sternly.

“Do not leave without me. There are vipers in the grass, and I don’t trust these people. Is that understood?” he asks.

“I promise. I don’t want to go anywhere without you, anyway. I don’t have to pee, so I will plant myself against this wall to wait,” I tell him, leaning against it.

“Good girl,” he mutters. “You’re such a damn brat sometimes.”

Kiernan disappears into the bathroom as I giggle. “I can’t be a good girl and a brat!” I call out.

Still smirking as he snorts, I sigh happily. Today doesn’t suck...

“Look who’s unprotected and all dressed up,” a male voice growls.

I open my mouth to scream, but his hand wraps around it. I don’t know who it is as he pulls me tightly to his chest, but Johnson and Neumann step in front of me as I twist and scream.

“Damn, you clean up nice,” Neumann chuckles, even as I stomp hard on the feet of who I now assume is Prince.

“Fucking whore,” he swears. “Someone get her feet.”

“Is it really that hard to capture a tiny, squealing pig?” Laurel asks, heels clicking as she nears us.

“She’s feisty,” Johnson snickers, pulling my feet up into the air. This is awkward, and I struggle to twist out of their grasp.

“If it was up to me, I’d just drop you,” Prince rasps in my ear as they start walking. “Victoria and Nicky are waiting at the drop point, right?”

“Yeah, they are. Don’t get your panties in a twist,” Laurel smirks. “Walk faster, we don’t want the little bitch’s mom to come out.”

*My mom...* I fight harder, hoping someone on my side will hear me. I don’t want to go anywhere they’re taking me. They’re just so much bigger than I am.

“Mmmph!!” I scream, bucking my body so hard Prince almost drops me on my head.

“Fucking bitch,” he growls, fingers digging into my skin. I’m definitely going to have bruises tomorrow, and my muscles are already straining as I try to get them to let me go.

“Hurry, the janitor is around here somewhere,” Laurel hisses. “He’s looking for whoever put shit on her locker earlier this week. I don’t know why he cares. He should be happy he didn’t have to clean it up. Honestly, just mind your business.”

Laurel prattles on as I remember his kind, pitying eyes. At least someone cares.

Victoria and Nicky cheer as they see me fighting.

“Drop her heavy ass here,” Prince grunts, as he and Johnson toss me at the girls’ feet. Gasping, my body bounces as they drop me like a sack of potatoes.

“Damn, emo girl. Let’s see what she’s hiding under the pretty clothes,” Neumann chuckles as Johnson yanks me off the ground. Meaty hands grab hold of the top of my dress, ripping it open.

“Oh, my God!” I scream, trying to pull it up to cover myself.

“Shh, we’re busy,” Johnson chuckles as Prince pulls my arms behind my back roughly. My hair is starting to fall from my struggles, and Neumann touches my hair with a cruel smile.

Ripping the rest of the bodice, Johnson tears off my strapless bra as well. Tears of embarrassment and pain prick my eyes as he gropes them, twisting my nipple harshly.

“No wonder those guys couldn’t keep their eyes off you all night,” he sneers. “Sorry, girls, you don’t have anything on these tits.”

“Whatever, they’re nice enough,” Nicky mutters. “They’re fucking huge, though. Mine aren’t big enough to fuck.”

“You’re prettier, though,” Laurel says, rubbing her back as if I’m the mean one.

“You’re all insane. I just wanted to come to Homecoming with my best friend. Meyers, Bates, and Chuck couldn’t keep

their eyes off you,” I lie. I could feel their eyes on me as I danced with Kiernan. I’m not responsible for those boys anymore. “Any man who has to pin a girl down to grope her is fucking disgusting.”

“I’ve had about enough of your damn mouth,” Prince mutters, yanking my head back by my hair. I only have a moment to gasp before Nicky backhands me.

“I’m better than you in so many ways, big tits or not,” she screams. God, they’re not only petty, they’re also off their rockers. How could anyone want to date these girls, let alone wet their dicks inside of them?

“Ooh, that looks fun,” Victoria chuckles. She punches me in the face, making my ears ring as I whimper in pain. I’ve never done anything to these people, yet here I am being beaten and humiliated at a school dance.

“Oh, fuck,” Neumann groans. “I think she’s bleeding. You two hit her too hard.”

“I think I hear the janitor, shit! Stick her in here,” Laurel hisses.

Prince picks me up as if I weigh nothing, throwing me into a supply closet so hard I slam into the back wall before dropping to the floor.

“Stupid bitch,” he mutters. “Maybe you should just stay small, drop out of school, and kill yourself. It’ll be easier for everyone.”

Johnson sneers cruelly as he pushes Prince out of the way to close the door. The room is completely dark, and I begin to sob as I hear a chair get shoved under the knob.

“No,” I whimper, forcing myself to move. The world tilts as I stand, my ears still ringing. Fucking Victoria. I’m not usually violent, but I really want to beat the shit out of her. Banging on the door, I scream for help while pulling the scraps of my bodice up to cover myself. My bra is out in the hallway... maybe someone will see it and come to investigate.

“Help me!” I scream, my voice already feeling raw from emotion. “Please! Please, someone!”

“Carrie?” a voice I can’t recognize through the door asks.

“Yes! Let me out, please!” I beg, tears streaming down my face as I turn the knob and push. It’s useless and I’m just tiring myself out, but I can’t stop fighting.

“Hold on, just wait,” he says, and I can hear footsteps running away.

“Wait?” I mewl, pounding on the door one handed. “What the fuck do you mean hold on?!”

Huffing, I lean against the door, annoyed and still really scared.

There’s a screech after what feels like forever because I zoned out in my own thoughts, and I stand back. The last thing I need is to fall forward.

“Carrie?” Kiernan shouts as the door is flung open and the bright fluorescent lights have me squinting. “Oh, God. What happened?” he gasps, and I let the tears fall. There is some scuffling behind him and I look over his shoulder.

Bates, Meyers, and Chuck look pissed, and Ms. Kay and my mom are crying. I cover my breasts with my arms and wish there was something in this closet to cover me. Bates steps forward, removing his jacket and handing it to me. I don’t take it, so he gives it to Kiernan.

“Carrie, who did this?” my mom gasps as she shoves the guys out of the way to gently wrap me into her arms; she’s shaking so hard I worry she may collapse.

“Take Carrie home, Mabel. I will deal with the culprits,” Kay hisses, and I wince as I turn to put the blazer on. Kiernan helps me. There is a crowd waiting for us with their phones out and cameras on when we reach the parking lot. I duck my head and try to ignore all the comments and laughs.

I can guess how I look right now. Beaten, bloody, and half-naked. My mom walks us over to the car Kiernan rented and opens the door. “I rode with Kay, so we will have to take this vehicle home,” she says softly, and I nod.

Kiernan holds my hand as we ride to my house, and I close my eyes, trying to just zone out. I can hear him and my mom talking, but I don't have any energy to listen or comment.

When we reach the house, I'm surprised to see my dad's truck in the driveway, and I huddle deeper into the jacket. I guess I should be thankful in some way that Bates is twice the size of me and the material shields my ass.

I walk through the door and go straight to my room. Kiernan follows me and gently pushes me aside so he can run me a bath. He drops in some lavender bubble bath and turns to face me.

His blue eyes are red-rimmed and he has dried tear tracks on his cheeks. He opens his arms and waits for me to move closer to him. I know he is giving me the choice, and I appreciate how understanding he always is.

"I'm so sorry, Carrie. I never thought someone would be this cruel. I just wanted you to experience some part of high school. I should have never pushed..." he trails off, his voice shocked with emotion. I give him a tighter squeeze, and he sighs.

"When will the torture end, Kier?" I mumble. "I never did anything to them." I move away from him and start to strip. I don't even care that he's still in the room. It's not like it matters. I'm not his type, and he has never made me feel uncomfortable.

"Take your bath, sweetheart. I'll grab you some PJs," he says, then leaves. I avoid looking in the mirror and step into the scalding water. I wash away their touches from my skin, but I can still feel them like a phantom's caress.

Kiernan drops my clothes on the vanity and leaves once more. I can hear some shouting from downstairs, but I'm too tired to go investigate. I leave my hair as it is and soak for a minute before climbing out, drying off, and getting dressed.

The moment I reach my bed, I collapse on top of it and cry myself to sleep, hoping that maybe in my dreams I can have an escape from this Hell.

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## Chapter 14

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## Meyers

“I have never seen your mom so mad before,” Bates comments as we watch her rip into the girls and the assholes who helped them hurt Carrie. Nicky is fake crying and Principal Landers is trying to scold my mother.

“I know, but I’m glad she’s stepping up for this. It’s not like we could have done anything,” I mutter, and Chuck laughs. He’s removed his tie and unbuttoned his shirt, giving a peek of his collarbone and the tattoo he has. We all tried to get one, but Chuck was the only one who passed while pretending to be eighteen.

“I’m over their shit. We have kept our end of the deal, they haven’t. They keep pushing and pushing, and I’m fucking done,” he growls, and I gasp as my dick twitches and starts to harden at his tone.

That’s new.

Laurel snorts, overhearing what he said and I turn to her, glaring. “Maybe your perfect little emo bitch would have survived the night if you hadn’t all taken photos with her,” she scoffs, and I’m *this close* to snapping her neck and burying her in my backyard.

“I will be contacting all of your parents and encouraging Carrie to press charges,” my mom snaps, and now Nicky’s tears aren’t for show.

“You can’t do that,” she wails, dropping to her knees and burying her face into my mom’s stomach. “I won’t let that emo skank ruin my future,” she cries, and Principal Landers removes her from my mother.

“Ms. Kay, certainly that’s a little dramatic for a harmless prank gone wrong. The police do not need to be brought into this. I will take full responsibility and give them all detention and chores as a punishment,” he rambles, continuing to dig his hole deeper, and I know I’m going to have to step in and



convince my mom to agree to this or shit is really going to hit the fan.

“Mom, drop it. Let Principal Landers and their parents handle it. Can we just leave? I have a migraine,” I murmur, and she gives me a look of disappointment that almost hurts worse than finding Carrie naked and assaulted in the janitor’s closet.

She nods, then stomps over to the car. Victoria grabs my arm and tries to kiss me, but I’m done. “Do not touch me. In fact, if you ever fucking touch one of us again, I will be the one to shred your clothes and lock you in a room. The only difference is no one will find your corpse,” I growl.

She gasps and lets me go. Bates laughs, and Chuck makes a motion against his throat like he’s slitting it to the girls.

When we reach the car, I climb in and no one speaks except my mother. “I don’t know what has happened to the men I’ve raised better, but I am beyond disappointed in you.” She ends it at that and doesn’t say another word.

Pulling into the driveway, I glance over at Carrie’s house. All the lights are on and when I open the door, I can hear people fighting from inside. My mom sighs and shakes her head before wiping under her eyes.

She spins to look at the three of us. “You don’t deserve that girl,” she mutters, then leaves us on the front lawn with our jaws dropped.

“Doesn’t she know Carrie is the entire reason we’ve been doing this?” Chuck rasps, looking as if someone kicked his puppy.

Scrubbing my hair, I wish I could be swallowed up by the group. “I don’t think she cares at this point.” I sigh. “Things are out of control. Mom knows there’s a lot we aren’t telling her. She just has this look.”

Saying goodnight, I slowly climb the stairs to crawl into my bed. This night is fucked. I wish for so many things. Most of all, I wish for a time machine.



THERE'S SOMEONE TOUCHING ME. *Blinking blearily, I see a girl with blonde hair bobbing up and down on my dick.*

*“God, this was such a good idea,” Nicky moans. Victoria, Nicky, and Laurel are in various stages of undress, and they’re all sucking cock and masturbating. “Maybe next time we can get them to fuck us. We may have overdone it with the dosage. They’re just so damn big.”*

*“How long do we need to worry if their erections don’t go down?” Victoria giggles, dragging her tongue along the thick head of my cock.*

*Grunting, my hips involuntarily lift at the feeling. Grinning, she pushes her mouth down the length of my cock, her nose against my pelvis. Fuck. I don’t want to feel her mouth, her hands...*

*God, if she keeps doing that, I’m going to come. Nicky crawls up the bed, and it looks like Bates passed out. There’s traces of cum on her lips, and she forces me to kiss her.*

*“You’re being such a good boy for us. Now let go, and give Victoria what she’s working so hard for,” she croons. The sound of sucking gets louder, making me groan.*

*“No, I can’t,” I gasp. Smiling cruelly, Nicky pulls off her panties.*

*“Come for us or I’ll sit on your face. Can you hear how wet I am for you?”*

Screaming, I sit up in my bed, covered in a cold sweat. It figures I’d have a damn nightmare tonight.

“Meyers!” Mom yells, running in and turning on the lights. Staring at my mom, seeing the panic on her face, makes me break.

“Mom,” I say, my voice cracking. Dammit, my voice hasn’t done this since I was thirteen. “I have to tell you something.”

“You can tell me anything,” she promises. “Is this about Carrie? I know I was upset before...”

“No,” I rasp, blinking away tears as they begin to fall. I can’t believe I’m about to tell my mom this. “This is about Friday night when I went to that party. The girls were pissed that we wouldn’t have sex with them, so they decided to take matters into their own hands.”

“You haven’t had sex with them?” Mom asks, surprised, and I swear that hurts the most.

“No, Mom. We’re virgins. Bates, Chuck, and I are waiting. Well, we were. The girls took that decision away from us. They... somehow put something in our drinks. It was like a combination of a date rape drug and Viagra or something. Sorry, but my cock has no interest in them.”

Wrinkling her nose, Mom nods. “How did they manage to get that in your drinks?”

“I don’t know. They’re always touching us, distracting us. It would have been really easy. I also think they got Neumann, Johnson, or Prince to help them. They’re our teammates, we’re comfortable around them.” I sigh.

“What else happened?” Mom asks softly. I look up at her from my wet eyelashes, shuddering.

“They led us to a room, and we didn’t really feel right. Bates was weaving on his feet. The girls said we could hang out and watch a movie, which sounded good at the time,” I explain. “I guess whatever they gave us wasn’t working fast enough, because they had a bottle of water. We were thirsty, our mouths were dry, so we drank it. Things are hazy after that, but they took advantage of us while taping it. They gave us blow jobs, and based on my nightmare, Bates wasn’t even awake for some of it. Mom...”

“No,” she says sharply, climbing on the bed to hug me. “You didn’t do anything wrong outside of trusting the wrong people. They took advantage of you and that is called rape. Do you want to go to the police? This is your call, son.”

My body shudders as she calls a spade a spade. Swallowing hard, I shake my head. “I feel dirty, ashamed,” I rasp. “There’s a fucking video of it, Mom. They said they’d release it if we didn’t continue pretending to be their boyfriends. This stunt tonight at Homecoming was because we agreed to take photos. They’re insane.”

“You don’t have to go to the police, but please tell Jax,” Mom pleads. “He needs to know, that’s his little girl. He is already pissed about tonight. He’s threatening to go to the school board. Jax needs to know what he’s dealing with. And... if they release the video, they’re going to jail. Bates, Chuck, and you are minors. Releasing that video would be stupid on their part.”

Nodding, I realize what she’s saying. “So, they’re bluffing even though they took the video,” I mutter, huffing out a laugh. I’m anything but amused right now.

“If they aren’t, they’re going to find themselves in a lot of trouble.” Mom sighs. “Dating them isn’t working. I know you had this ill-fated idea that you were going to protect Carrie, but she’s isolated and alone. Dump them.”

“We’re done,” I agree. “I thought they’d leave her alone and we’d only have to date them until high school was over. Sure, it would suck, but this isn’t working.”

“You’re an idiot,” Mom mutters. “I love you, but really? Victoria, Nicky, and Laurel are terrible humans. I try to think the best of people, but I don’t think there’s a single redeeming factor. Try to get some sleep. I love you.”

“I love you, too,” I tell her, swiping the back of my hand along my cheeks. “I’ll go see Jax tomorrow, take the guys. Hopefully he doesn’t shoot us on sight.”

Standing, Mom smirks, even though I can see a slight trembling in her hands. “I’m sure it’ll only be to maim. He knows you’re football royalty. He’ll make sure you heal well,” she says before saying goodnight.

Shaking my head at her antics, I go to the bathroom to splash water on my face. It’s three in the morning, so there’s a

few more hours to try to sleep. Returning to my room, I look out my window, but everything is dark at Carrie's house.

"I hope sleep is treating you better than it is me," I grunt. Turning, I sit in the armchair by my bed, hoping I won't get comfortable enough to dream.

The next thing I know, light streaming through the blinds wakes me up. Rubbing my eyes, I groan and stand. Time to face the music.

Me: Get up. I want to go see Carrie. We need to tell Jax about the girls. They both deserve to know.

Chuck: Fuck. I'll meet you on your porch.

Bates: Why? I... don't want anyone to know.

Me: What if Carrie's next?

He doesn't respond as I take a piss and brush my teeth. Pulling on jeans and a sweatshirt, I shove my feet into a pair of sneakers. I pass my mom on my way downstairs.

"I'll be back in a little bit," I tell her, not stopping as her mouth opens to talk to me. I don't know if she's warning me or not. I don't have time for whatever it is.

Stepping outside, Chuck and Bates are waiting for me. "Ready for this?" I ask, walking down the steps.

"Nope," Bates mutters. "Jax is on the porch, but I'm not sure what he's doing."

As we cross the street and get closer, I realize that Carrie's dad is surrounded by firearms that he's cleaning. We may be meeting our maker after all.

"Sir?" I call out, stopping at the bottom of the stairs. "Can we talk?"

"Why?" he grunts, beginning to load a shotgun.

I may shit myself. Please, please... Fuck, don't let this backfire on me.

“Do you remember when you gave us your blessing to do whatever it took to keep Carrie safe?” I ask, swallowing hard as his dark blue eyes settle on me.

“Yeah?” he grunts, raising his brow.

“The day we went to see Laurel, she was planning to drug Carrie’s water bottle and have the jocks run a train on her,” Chuck rasps, interrupting me. “Carrie was fourteen. No one deserves that, but...”

“The girls said we could protect her if we dated them and ignored Carrie,” Bates explains. “She was lonely, kind of sad, but safe.”

“How do you explain what happened last night then?” Jax snarls, snapping the shotgun shut.

“We took photos with Carrie,” I tell him. “We should have said no, but she looked amazing, and I didn’t think it would hurt. Nicky, Victoria, and Laurel decided to kidnap her outside of the boys’ bathroom while she was waiting for Kiernan.”

“There’s this kid, Ian, who seems to be nice enough. He found Carrie in the supply closet and came running to get us,” Chuck says. “There’s more though...”

“Spit it out,” Jax says, setting aside the shotgun to begin cleaning another.

“We went to a party on Friday night because the girls insisted. They drugged our drinks and they—” Bates tries his hardest but his voice cracks, his head hangs in shame.

“I need you to be real clear with me before I find these people and commit murder, boys. I promise they’ll never find the bodies. These girls are on thin ice with me as it is,” Jax growls.

I thought he’d hate us after everything we’ve put Carrie through, and I can feel a tear leak from my eye.

“We were saving ourselves... I mean, we’re virgins. The girls have been mad that we wouldn’t sleep with them,” I stumble. “They drugged us with something that kept our dicks hard while keeping us really out of it. Bates passed out at one

point. We almost went to the hospital because I think they overdosed us.”

“Fucking bitches. I hope you three understand that, while noble, you can’t negotiate with terrorists,” Jax yells. “Is there anything else I need to know?”

“We were forced to be a part of our first sex tape?” Chuck squeaks out. He’s a damn big guy, and the noise hurts my heart. Jax is really fucking scary.

“Fuck. I’m going to go deal with this. I’ll get the footage by scaring the shit out of them with a conversation about underage sex, and how that’s kiddie porn if they show anyone else,” he begins, blowing out a breath as he stands. “As of today, you no longer have to fake date them. You can tell them all to fuck off, in fact.”

“Why is that?” I rasp, the pool of dread beginning to spread through my body.

“Carrie no longer resides in Reutman, Texas. Kiernan talked her into going to live in Florida with her aunt. She’ll be attending his school as well. She will get a real chance to enjoy high school,” he says. Picking up a couple of guns, he nods, placing them in cases. “Kiernan will graduate soon, but I think it’s best if she stays in Florida right now. Texas isn’t good for her.”

Stepping off the porch, we move back to allow him to walk by.

“Mabel, tell the sheriff to ignore any calls from the Clifford, Holscher, and Truver residences, please,” he says, getting into his truck. Realizing those are Nicky, Victoria, and Laurel’s houses, my eyes grow wide.

“Holy fuck,” I whisper as Mabel runs out.

“I’ll let him know,” she yells. “That man is going to be the death of me.” Chuckling, she shakes her head as she walks back inside.

“So, she’s really gone,” Bates whispers, sounding as if he wishes someone would tell him otherwise.

“Maybe this is better?” I ask. “She’s too good for Reutman. Kiernan will watch after her, and we have Margo.”

Pulling out his phone, Chuck opens Facebook. There’s a message from Carrie.

Carrie: Looks like Kiernan and I are going to be living in the same town. Talk soon! Homecoming was a bust, but maybe the rest of high school won’t suck.

So, this is it. Our girl is really gone. “I hope Jax gives them Hell.” I sigh.

“Are you going to loiter on my porch all day, or come inside and have breakfast?” Mabel asks, popping her head out the screen door. “Come on. Meyers, your mom is on her way.”

“Does she know Carrie is gone?” I ask, climbing the porch steps.

“Yeah, honey. She came by to say goodbye before she went to the airport,” she says, her eyes crinkling in sympathy.

Mom knew the whole time, that’s why she looked like she wanted to say something. Carrie has her own personal angels, and I’m glad for it.

*Be safe, sweet girl. We’ll miss you.*



## Carrie

“This is crazy,” I say for the eighth time. Not only am I now moving in with Aunt Sarah and her family, but Kiernan got us first class tickets. I have my own personal stewardess, and I think she is extremely bored since I don’t want to bother her.

“Sweetheart, I slept like shit, and I was really hoping to nap on this flight. Just accept the gift and enjoy it,” Kiernan mumbles with a yawn and adjusts the sleep mask he’s wearing. I reach for a pair of headphones and play with the remote that connects to the small TV in front of me, trying to choose something to watch.

My mind is scrambled, and I think I’m still in shock. I didn’t expect to wake up to my bags packed and my dad telling me that I was leaving in a few hours. I know it’s for the best and maybe now I can have a normal school experience, but I’m fucking terrified.

I love my aunt Sarah and the kids, but Tilly is almost as mean as Nicky, Laurel, and Victoria. I hope having Kiernan around will deflect her moods. A snore from beside me has me laughing quietly as I really take in my best friend.

He’s the complete opposite to me, but somehow we just fit. The stewardess comes by again, this time with a pillow, blanket, cheese platter, and soda. “I know you keep saying that you don’t want anything...” she trails off, looking nervous.

There is an older woman watching her, and I get it. “Thank you. I’m sorry I’m not sure what the protocol is. I’ve never flown first class before,” I say quietly, and she gives me a huge smile.

“That’s quite all right, miss. Enjoy.” I take the things from her, and I have to admit it does make the flight more comfortable. Once the cheese and crackers are gone, I cuddle into one of the softest blankets I have ever felt and take my own nap.

I awake when the plane touches the ground, and Kiernan has his phone in front of my face with the camera on, taking selfies.

“Ugh, really,” I groan, and he laughs.

“You look like an angel when you’re sleeping,” he says as if it was a given.

“I look like shit, Kier. I still have last night’s makeup on my eyes and my hair is a tangled mess,” I complain, and he rolls his eyes.

“You have a few days before you have to start school. We can go shopping and to the salon,” he says with a wave of his hand. I sigh and nod. I’ve never been the type to conform, but maybe, just this once, it wouldn’t be a bad idea.



“I STILL CAN’T BELIEVE you’re here and going to my school. Such a fucking freeloader,” Tilly sneers as Aunt Sarah’s driver takes us to school. Tilly has her own car, but Sarah insisted for my first few days that she ride with me and show me around.

I’m nervous, but Kiernan has been a fucking godsend. I’m almost thankful he’s gay, since Aunt Sarah has let him stay over the past few nights.

“Don’t worry, Tilly, I have no desire to take over your school. I just want to get through classes and graduate.”

She laughs hysterically, and I cringe. “As if some backwater skank like you will fit in here. Lakeshore Academy is one of the most prestigious private academies in the world. You won’t last a week,” she says, then opens the door and leaves me there with those parting words.

As if I wasn’t already nervous about today. The driver clears his throat, and I take a deep breath, then thank him for the ride. He seems almost shocked that I’m talking to him, and I feel even more disdain for my cousin.

As I step out of the car and make my way to the front steps, my phone starts to vibrate. I'm assuming it's Kiernan or Margo, but it's actually a calendar reminder about my shift tonight. I may not be in Texas anymore, but the Light Project means a lot to me.

I'm thankful I can continue helping people, even from far away.

"Damn, who's the hot, new chick?" someone says loudly from beside me.

"She's no one. Just some charity case my mom chose to stay with us for the year," my cousin, Tilly, replies, and I can't help but to sneak a peek at her and her group of friends over by a picnic table. They are pretty, fake, and polished. The girls look like celebrity wannabes, and the guys are all buff, tanned, and prepish.

I sigh as I continue past them, ignoring their other remarks. New school, same douchebags and bitches.



"HOW DO YOU LIVE THIS WAY?" I ask Kiernan at lunch. He has a menu in front of him, and is deciding between the fish of the day or prime rib. What happened to greasy pizza or a sandwich?

"What do you mean?" he asks as a waitress takes his order and mine. I wave my hand around the dining room. It has round tables with cobalt blue cloths over them.

"This is unreal. You saw my school, though it was brief. I thought walking into my English class this morning and finding it was in an actual library was something else."

He laughs and pulls me closer to him, placing his arm over my shoulders. Leaning down, he kisses my head and I sigh. Though today has been an adjustment, it's been nice not having to look over my shoulder as I walk through the halls.

"This is just the beginning, my little grasshopper," he mumbles, and I smile.

“Well, look at this boys. It seems Kiernan isn’t as gay as we thought,” a boy I recognize from earlier shouts as he strides over to our table. Kiernan tenses, and I’m instantly on alert.

“Fredrick, I’ve told you before that I am not interested in your three-inch pogo stick,” Kiernan states, and a few people around us laugh. Fredrick’s face turns red and he looks like he’s about to attack.

“Leave the losers,” Tilly says, from out of nowhere, grabbing his arm and pulling him to a center table.

“So... What was that about?” I ask when we are alone once again, and Kiernan moves away from me, staring at the door.

“We hooked up one night last year. It was one of the only parties I attended, and he had been drinking. It was fun, and oddly enough, he was sweet. The next day he accused me of getting him drunk and turning him bi. It doesn’t matter anymore, I’m over it,” he grumbles, and our food arrives.

I know there is more to that story, but I won’t push him until he’s ready. “Just another jerk to add to the list,” I mutter, and he snorts, his mood perking up again.

“I love you, Carrie Campbell. I am so glad I met you that day at the mall.” I shoot him a wink then dig into the shrimp pasta with a moan.

“Okay, now I see what the fuss is about. This is amazing.” I devour my food and ignore the people watching me eat.

“Did you want dessert?” Kiernan asks, and I shake my head. He grabs our bags and offers me his hand as he stands, then leads me out of the dining room and to my next class.

I take my seat and look around at my new surroundings. The kids might be dicks like my school in Texas, but I have my best friend with me here. I think maybe this year is looking up.

## *Eight months later*

The past few months haven't been great, and I'm almost missing Texas. It started out okay until my aunt Sarah decided to move and leave Tilly and me in the dorms where Kiernan stays.

I know it was due to the company having some issues, but Tilly wholeheartedly believes it's my fault. You would think she'd enjoy staying on campus and partying. I mean, having me as a roommate isn't too horrible.

I mostly stay with Kiernan anyways since she has a revolving door of guys coming by. I think she's just a miserable person.

"Fucking finally," Kier groans as he takes off his cap and gown. I hand him a bouquet of black roses, and his eyes go wide and he gives me a huge grin. "You spoil me, sweetcheeks," he coos, taking the flowers.

"I'm so proud of you, Kiernan. I know the last month was rough, but you did it. Finally graduated, and now you can go off to college. Away from this place," I say with a fake smile, and he sighs.

"About that... I think I'm going to take a year off and get a place close to Reutman High. I talked to your dad, and he agreed you could move in with me if you want. Tilly is a wicked witch, and there is no way in hell I am leaving you here alone."

Tears fill my eyes and I'm on the verge of breaking down. I thought Reutman High was bad. It has nothing on these rich girls. Not only are they wicked, they have the money to pay people to torment me.

"What about school? Your dream of opening up a Community Center?" He pulls me into a tight hug and laughs.

“It will still be there in a year or two, Carrie. Now, let’s go get these photos over with and then make a quick appearance at Fredrick’s party so my parents will get off my back. Then I want us to have a horror movie marathon and eat all the junk food.”

I roll my eyes and nod. Yeah, I’m not looking forward to the party either, but leaving the dorm and living with Kiernan sounds like a dream come true right now. I was tempted to call my dad and ask to move back home anyway.



I CAN’T WAIT to get away from these people for a few weeks. Kiernan’s parents surprised him and I with two tickets to Italy for his graduation present. I have always wanted to travel, and I’m excited to go to Italy, Greece, and France.

Tilly threw a hissy fit when she learned that I was moving back to Texas and into my own place. She thinks it’s unfair because she’s going to be a senior this upcoming year and she’s older. I wouldn’t be surprised if Aunt Sarah bought her a condo in the near future.

“Are you ready for this?” Kiernan asks me, and I nod with a wince. We are still sitting in the car in front of Fredrick’s house.

“I’m not excited at all, but let’s do it. The sooner we go in, the sooner we get to go home?” I say hopefully.

Snorting, Kiernan nods. “That’s the spirit, Carrie.”

“That’s the best you’re getting,” I mumble as we get out of the car. I’m wearing too preppy of a dress, but I’ve noticed it helps a bit with the sneers and cruel jokes. I miss all my dark clothes and hoodies. These pretty cream colors and pinks just aren’t me.

Walking arm and arm into the house, I look around. This place is huge. There’s a band, a bar in the corner, and the parents don’t seem to care that high schoolers are drinking while they laugh and chat.

“Do you want to come with me to say hi to Fredrick and his parents, or do you want to grab something to eat? You may as well. One thing this family does well is throw a party.” Kier smirks.

My stomach growls and I bite my lip. “I think I need to eat,” I say with a giggle.

“Go get some grub,” he grins. Tugging his suit into place, Kiernan stretches his neck. “Don’t go too far, sweetcheeks.”

I swear, the man looks as if he’s going off to war.

I’m thankful I’ve become a pro at wearing heels as I amble through the house in search of food. My hips roll as if they were born to walk in them, but my ankles already ache.

Grabbing a plate, I fill it with all of my favorites: prime rib, lobster, tiny potatoes, and miniature cheesecake.

“There’s a girl with a healthy appetite,” someone chuckles behind me as I move away. I refuse to listen to another fat joke. I’m hungry and I’m going to eat. Fuck everyone else.

I can’t hear them anymore as I find a table and sit down. Taking a bite of my food, my eyes close without meaning to. I just barely swallow back an orgasmic moan. Damn, rich people know how to put out a spread.

My phone buzzes, and I pull it out of my crossbody purse. It’s cute, dainty, and pink. I swear I’ve been replaced by a pod person while I’ve been living in Florida.

Margo: How are you holding up? Is the graduation party a bore?

Grinning, I shake my head at her antics. It’s been nice staying connected with Margo while I’ve been here. She doesn’t know much about me so she can’t pity me for having to leave the guys. It’s nice having a clean slate.

Me: I found the food and it’s delicious. Kiernan is chatting with people. I’m ready to strip this dress off and flop into bed naked for a nap.

Margo sends me a gasp emoji, and I know she’s kidding.

Margo: To good food and naked naps!

Giggling, I put my phone away, blushing as I realize a few people are staring at me. Let this be a lesson that you can't hide your weirdness forever, it'll bleed through at some point. Oh, well.

As Kiernan finishes up chatting, I pop my dessert into my mouth. Damn, this chocolate cheesecake is amazing.

"What are you eating?" a girl asks, turning to me. Swallowing, I lift my hand in surprise. "I'm sorry, I didn't mean to startle you. I'm Francis, and I went by the food table, but I need something sweet now. The moan you just made makes me think you're the answer to my problem."

Taking a quick sip of water, I nod. "It's one of the little chocolate cheesecakes. It's amazing, and Heaven in a dessert."

"Oh, you found the other fatty at the party, Carrie." Tilly sighs, collapsing into the chair across from me.

"Excuse me, Tilly, I wasn't speaking to you," Francis says icily. "I'm so glad my cousin doesn't only get on my nerves. "I enjoy my sweets, but I'm in no way, shape, or form 'fat'. Grow up."

Standing, Francis extends her hand to me. "I'm so sorry you're related to that thing," she says with a smirk. "If you ever need to have her killed, I know a guy."

Shaking her hand, I nod with a grin.

"Francis! You can't just threaten people like that," Tilly hisses, looking around.

"I just did," she mutters with a shrug. "Daddy is right over there. It just takes one little word."

"I'm sorry, okay? I'm tired of you holding your Mafia ties over everyone, Francis!" It sounds as if Tilly is scared of someone after all, and I'm quite enjoying it.

"I'm leaving Florida to go back to Texas," I tell Francis, letting a touch of a drawl creep in. I don't typically have it, but



I can fake it well. “Keep an eye on my dear, sweet cousin, won’t you?”

Tilly looks horrified, but I can only smirk in amusement.

“Someone has to keep her in line,” Francis says, tossing her gorgeous chestnut hair over her shoulder.

It looks like not everyone around here sucks. I wish I had met her sooner, but it’s worth it to me that Tilly just may get what she deserves. I don’t necessarily wish her dead... but maimed isn’t as bad, right?

“You ready to go? Oh, you met the resident Mafia princess,” Kiernan says. “And it looks like she actually likes you? Be still, my heart. My girl is making friends in the most interesting of places.”

“It’s a graduation party, not a cesspool,” Francis snarks. “I like Carrie, and you know I have a hard time tolerating most people. We bonded over cheesecake. Speaking of, when are you leaving for Texas?”

“We’re going on holiday over the summer first. We fly out to Rome tomorrow. Then, I’m going to take a year or two off and make sure Carrie survives high school.” Kier sighs. I wince, because that’s not too far off the mark.

Tilly flounced off when I wasn’t paying attention, and I’m honestly not sorry to see her go. She’s just so... nasty.

“If Texas is an issue, why leave Florida?” Francis asks, confused.

“Florida isn’t me.” I sigh. “The clothes, the preppy school, I feel as if an alien has taken over my body. I kind of miss my parents, too. I’m practically living with Kier as it is, so why not just go home?”

“You need a bodyguard for high school,” she growls. “That’s not normal. Look, I understand wanting familiar people and things. If things get too intense, shoot me a message on Facebook. I hear there’s lots of pig farms in Texas.”

Waving, she waltzes off to the dessert bar.

“Damn, you are constantly surprising me,” Kiernan mutters, grabbing my bicep to encourage me to stand. “I leave you for a few minutes and you befriend the damn daughter of a known mob leader. There’s just something about you that calls to us outcasts.”

I’m in a little bit of shock as we walk out of the house. Won’t my dad be surprised if she ever comes to visit.

When I left, he was throwing things and yelling about how he trusted the guys. I wonder if I’m returning home to a turf war? At least my dad is scarier.

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## Chapter 15

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## Bates

### Three Months Later

Practice has been grueling. I get it, we're juniors now and this is the year for college scouts to start paying attention, but I have been playing since I was fourteen. I'm tired. Just because we are naturals at something doesn't mean we need to do it.

I used to love the game, the smell of fresh cut grass and the feel of the pigskin in my hand, but now it's becoming a chore. A job. And I've about had it. Maybe if we hadn't played so well our first year, the girls in this school wouldn't have shown us so much attention and we wouldn't have lost the only girl we loved.

"I think Coach is pissed at us for some reason," Meyers comments, and I grunt. I'm too tired to speak.

"Who knows? Last week the lady at the grocery store wouldn't take my money because I was a cruel, manipulative guy with a little dick syndrome," Chuck mumbles, and I snort.

"It's been over a year since Carrie left and Nicky, Laurel, and Victoria are still trying to ruin our lives," Meyers growls, and I know he's frustrated. We all are.

Jax helped us for a little while, but then he left for some undercover assignment and the girls just picked right back up with their bullshit.

Prince and Johnson walk in laughing about something, and I'm just over today and it's not even nine AM., thanks to our early morning summer practices. I grab my bag and head for the door.

"I'm showering at home. Let's get the fuck out of here," I say, looking over my shoulder at Meyers and Chuck. They nod

and follow me out to my truck. I unlock the doors and we all climb in and take a breath.

“Two more years and then we can go off to college and get away from all these small town hicks,” Chuck mutters, and I laugh, shaking my head.

“That’s the dream, man.”

When we pull up to my house, I’m surprised to see Jax’s truck in the driveway as well as a small moving U-haul. “What the fuck?! Are they moving?” Meyers shouts before unbuckling and throwing the back door open. Chuck and I follow suit and chase him across the road toward the Campbell’s house.

The front door opens and we all freeze. “Carrie?” Chuck mumbles, and she gives us a smile. It’s not like the ones she used to freely give us when we were all friends. It’s hesitant, and I know we deserve it, but I miss the old days.

“Hey,” she says with a sigh as a man comes up behind her and wraps his arms tight around her stomach. He whispers something into her ear and presses a kiss to her temple before walking back inside.

He looks familiar, but I can’t place him. My eyes are glued to the honey-blonde haired bombshell in front of us wearing some type of sundress and sandals. Carrie has grown up, and it makes my chest hurt at the fact we weren’t there to see it happen.

Chuck moves closer to her and drops to his knees, grunting. “We never got to say goodbye or apologize for Homecoming, but I hope you know that we didn’t have anything to do with what they planned, and we’re idiots. There is a lot we need to tell you, but just know that we’re so, so sorry, Carrie.”

Meyers leaves Chuck groveling at the bottom of the stairs and starts to actually move closer to Carrie. She holds up her hand, and he stops. “What are you doing here?” I ask, and she looks at me.

“Florida didn’t really work out, so I’m back for the next two years. Kier and I are, that is,” she says before dropping her eyes to my bare chest and shorts. I never bothered changing after the weight room, and it reminds me that I am disgusting and need to shower.

“So you’re back for good?” Chuck shouts and jumps to his feet. “I have missed you, Carebear.” My eyes widen at that new nickname, and I watch as Carrie closes those beautiful hazel eyes and takes a deep breath.

“I am,” she finally replies, then takes a few steps down from the porch. “Kiernan found us a place near the school. I’m moving in with him.” The guy comes outside again, and I now realize it’s her gay friend.

He crosses his arms and gives us a stern look. “Why aren’t you just moving back here?” I ask, pointing toward her house. She runs her fingers through her hair and shakes her head.

“It’s better to be closer to town. I have a job, and honestly, I don’t think I can handle watching the girls who tormented me mercilessly coming in and out of your homes. It’s bad enough I’m going to be in the same classes again.”

Meyers cuts her off and reaches for her hand. “It’s done. We only dated them to keep you safe, but they are lying, manipulative, little rapist bitches, and we are done playing their games.”

Carrie gasps, and even Kiernan’s jaw drops. “What do you mean rapists?” he mumbles, and I shake my head. I don’t want to talk about that night anymore. People don’t realize how easy it is to be drugged at a party, even for guys. It’s not a night I like to think about, but it’s led to nightmares and needing weekly therapy.

“Carrie, honey, we need to get that truck loaded and over to the apartment before your dad leaves,” Mabel says, walking out onto the porch and interrupting us all, and for once I’m happy about it.

She glances back at her mom, then Meyers, and sighs. “We are not done talking about this, but I have to go,” she says,

then walks past us and over to the U-haul truck. Kiernan looks at Meyers deeply, then shakes his head.

“I don’t know what game you’re playing, but I will say this once. If you hurt her again, I will kill you. It won’t be something dull and boring either, like shooting or stabbing you. No, I will make you crawl through Hell and beg for me to end your suffering.” He walks off, and I have chills from his threat.

“That guy is fucking weird,” Chuck murmurs, but I don’t turn to face him, I’m still staring at the truck that has a part of my soul inside it.

“He won’t have to kill us, because if we hurt her again there would be no reason to live,” Meyers mumbles, and I have to agree with him.

Carrie Campbell is under our skin, and there’s no way to get her out. Hell, I don’t even want to at this point. I just want to be a part of her life in a way that’s more meaningful than as Margo, her fake friend.

## Chuck

It didn't take me long to find out where Carrie moved to. After we all parted ways and went back to our houses and showered, I immediately called Ronnie's Realty and found out. One of the perks of living in a small town—everyone knows everything, or is willing to gossip about it.

I really want to spend time with her, and I'm not above stalking. Walking through the square, I move past the townhouses to the quiet neighborhood she moved into. They're single homes, cute, and good for small families... or young people who are single.

What does it say about me that I'm jealous of Kiernan?

Stepping behind a gate, I watch as he walks out of the house yelling goodbye over his shoulder. I should have thought of bringing a housewarming gift or some shit. God, Ms. Kay has always been so much better at this stuff.

Swallowing hard, I walk up to the house and knock on the door. There's a cute swing on the porch, and it makes me smile. I can see her hanging out here. It's a good house. I just wish she was living with me instead.

As the door opens, I know there's a goofy smile on my face, but I can't help it. Carrie is wearing fuzzy socks, blue shorts with ghosts that remind me of boxer material, and a black tank top.

"Hey," she says softly, letting herself stare for a moment. "How did you find me?"

"Carebear, you're in Reutman now. Everyone knows everything, remember?" I tease her.

"Yeah, I'm going to have to get used to that again." She sighs. "I just missed my dad, you know?"

"You miss him, but you moved out of his house. I'm a little confused. Want to invite me in and explain it to me?" I



ask, hands open at my sides. I'm a big fucker and I know it. I've put on a lot of muscle, and the last thing I want to do is overwhelm her.

"When did you get so smooth?" she mutters, widening the door more to let me in.

"I'm not at all," I tell her truthfully as I walk into the house. I managed to give her three days before hunting her down. Kiernan and she have done a lot to the house already. "How did you get so much unpacked so quickly?"

"Oh? Mom came by to help, and so did Ms. Kay. Dad is working, but he sent in some of his biker friends to help with the heavy things. We're pretty much all moved in." She smirks with a shrug.

"Of course your dad knows people in a biker gang," I grunt. "I don't know why I bother to ask."

Giggles greet me as she leads me through the house. "Dad knows a lot of people. It helps that he's scary."

"Carebear, I really thought he was going to shoot us when we went over to your house to apologize for everything," I tell her as we enter the kitchen. "Jax was on the porch cleaning his guns as if he didn't have a care in the world. We about pissed ourselves."

"I doubt the guns were for you," she teases. "Cleaning them helps to settle him when he's really angry. I think Dad broke a few things the night of Homecoming. It was a rough night."

"You're the one who had it rough," I remind her. "Jax went to each of the girls' houses with his guns and promised no one would find them if they fucked with his little girl again."

"Ugh, Dad." Carrie frowns. "He means well. I hope I don't have any issues. I just want to finish school, enjoy my job, and go to college. As I said, they can have you. No offense."

Growling, I can feel myself losing my temper. We played along with the girls for way too long and now it's biting us in the ass. Moving around the island to where she is, I delve my fingers into her gorgeous honey-blond hair.

“I take a lot of offense to that, baby. Huge offense,” I mutter, dropping my face to bury it in her neck. “Do you know how much we’ve missed you? We did everything for you, and we still fucked it up.”

Carrie is silent for a moment before her arms wrap around me and her fingers push into my hair. God, I’ve missed this. I can feel myself tearing up, my skin pebbling in goosebumps.

“Tell me. All I know is that my best friends left me alone. It’s one of the reasons I left. At least Kier has never abandoned me,” she says bitterly.

My knees go out from under me at her words, hitting the hard tile. Her fingers are still in my hair, which is longer than usual, making my head tilt back to look at her. Carrie appears startled, her hazel eyes wide as she looks down at me. I feel as if I’m being dramatic, but her words fucking hurt.

“We never really left,” I rasp. “The day we went to talk to Laurel, she was with Victoria and Nicky... They threatened to hurt you unless we dated them and ignored you. During Homecoming, they told us that they grabbed you because we agreed to take photos with you. They’re bat shit crazy. We won’t have anything to do with them.”

“What about the comment Meyers said about something happening? Are they behind it?” she asks. I know she wants answers, but I shake my head and bury it in her stomach.

“I can’t tell you that,” I whisper, tears starting to slide down my face. “I’m sorry, it’s just not only my story to tell. Just know to never let your guard down, and always watch your drinks. It only takes a second for something to happen.”

“Oh, Chuck, you’re killing me,” she whispers, dropping to her knees to fold me into her arms. It feels selfish to hold her without the guys here, but I’m going to indulge for a second.

“Just know that we adore you,” I murmur, the rumbling of my voice against her skin making her shiver. “More than that, we love you. I’m so sorry we lost sight of things in an effort to keep you safe.”

“Talk to me. Tell me things,” she says. “That’s how you keep me safe. Don’t leave me.”

I spend the next twenty minutes on the floor with her. Turning to lean my back against the cabinets, I hold her in my lap. Carrie is curled against me when Kiernan comes back with takeout in his arms. I can’t see him, but I can hear the paper bag and smell the Chinese food.

“Carrie?” he calls out, and she sniffles. I didn’t realize she was crying until now. I’m completely wrapped up in her.

“What’s wrong, Carebear?” I ask softly.

“I’ve missed you so much, and the whole time you were trying to protect me,” she wails.

“Carrie!” Kiernan roars, making me wince. He’s going to bury me in the cute as fuck backyard for making her cry.

“I’m in the kitchen! I’m fine,” Carrie calls out, but her voice is filled with tears.

“Why are you crying? And where are you?” he asks, coming around the island and snorting when he sees us.

“A lot of emotion is all,” Carrie sniffles. “I’m good. Hungry, too.”

“Oh, sweetcheeks, this is a lot more than hunger.” He chuckles and grabs her hand to help her up. “Chuck, stay for Chinese? It sounds like I need to get caught up. Damn, I leave to get food and come home to find my girl on the ground crying.”

“It wasn’t on purpose,” I grumble, getting off the floor.

“It wasn’t. I think I may have misunderstood some things,” Carrie says, pulling plates from the cabinets.

Reaching over, I help her because she’s on her tippie-toes to reach it. I may as well use my height to help.

“You need to do whatever you need to do,” I begin, bringing the plates to the counter. “The guys miss you. Meyers is all torn up about things. Will you see them?”

Carrie's eyes flick to Kiernan who grumbles under his breath. "If you want, that's fine, Carrie. Remember, you have friends that don't have a conscience when it comes to you. They'll never find the bodies."

"Fuck me," I mutter in shock.

"No thanks, you're not my type." He winks.

Carrie giggles, but it sounds slightly hysterical. Concerned, I stare at her as she shakes her hands out.

"I'm not promising anything, but maybe we can go to the lake? Kier doesn't like to go. He worries about creepy crawlies," she teases.

Scowling, Kiernan starts to open the boxes of food. "It's weird, okay? I can barely deal with the ocean. Lakes freak me out!"

Snickering, I shrug. "We'll take good care of her. I promise."

His blue eyes meet mine, and I can see my death if I fuck this up.

"Seriously, man. I don't want to live without Carrie in my life anymore. The guys and I are done with the girls completely. It was a fucked up agreement we were forced into," I tell him.

Nodding, he looks away, allowing me to breathe. He's really fucking intense. I'm glad he's in my girl's corner though.

## Carrie

It was nice catching up with Chuck, even if I did end up on the floor crying. I still don't know what to think or believe, but maybe things will be better now. I mean, we are older for fuck's sake.

I have to work tonight, and I spent the day cleaning and organizing. I think it's nerves, because Mom and Ms. Kay already scrubbed this house before we moved in.

"Go shower, sweetcheeks. You're going to be late. I swear the house is clean," Kiernan groans, rolling his eyes.

"I have all of this nervous energy," I grumble, climbing the stairs to my room. I love this house. Kiernan insisted on buying this place, stating that no matter where we land, it's a solid investment if we want to rent it out to someone later.

I love the way his mind works, and it is nice to have a place of our own. I know Chuck was confused as to why I moved out at sixteen, but I wanted the space too. I have a weird sleeping schedule now, and I didn't want to worry my parents.

Showering quickly, I throw on a pair of black shorts, a tank top with a purple skull that says "Not a people person," and run some product through my hair to let it dry in curls. I'm not going to fuss with it when I'm just going to the Rec Center.

Shoving my feet into cute canvas shoes, I pack my sweatshirt in my backpack as an afterthought. It's usually cold in the room I work in, and I want to be comfortable. I also pack my charger and Kindle. Kiernan splurged and bought me a new one for my birthday. Now I have more memory space than I know what to do with.

"Okay, I'm leaving," I tell Kier as I stomp down the stairs. "Don't get into trouble."

“Babe, in this backwoods town? Never,” he snorts. “I am going to watch trash TV and throw M & M’s in my popcorn.”

“Ugh, now I want to do that,” I whine, pouting as I reach for my house key.

“So sad,” he taunts me. “Go save the world, little brat.”

“I’m a cute brat at least!” I sass as I walk out of the house. Breathing in the fresh air, I smile as I start moving through the neighborhood. It’s super cute here, and I never realized this was even here. Our realtor was amazing to work with.

Very few things have changed in Reutman over the last year. In many ways, it’s as if I was never gone.

Walking past a group of giggling girls, I’m not paying attention to who they are until I hear their next words.

“It’s the emo girl,” Nicky hisses. “I thought she left town and took her skankiness with her.”

I don’t know the ins and outs of what happened the night of that party, but I’m fairly certain she was involved. Turning, I toss my hair, pulling my private school snark out.

“Nicky, it’s terrible to see you,” I coo. “I was hoping my father killed you. I’ll have to talk to him about that. It’s a real shame when you can’t get hot guys to date you and have to stoop to drugging them to fuck you, isn’t it? I guess you’re just not that pretty.”

Nicky is flanked by Victoria and Laurel, but there’s four other girls with her. The hanger s-on must not know about the trio’s deal, because their jaws drop. “I don’t know what you’re talking about,” Victoria says, her voice breaking. There’s fear in her eyes, making my smile widen.

“I’m back in town, and I’m not going anywhere. I come with better accessories now,” I murmur, reaching into one of my backpack pockets for my knife. I never remove it from there. I’m tired of never being armed. If someone attacks me, I’ll fuck them up.

Dad had a long conversation on the phone with me before I packed up my things. I realized he’s right. I can’t be

unprotected anymore. Too much shit has happened.

“What are you going to do with that?” Laurel asks nervously.

“To you? Nothing, as long as you get out of my face. I’m never without it, is that understood? No more jumping me, no more messing with my boys. They don’t want you,” I explain, enunciating my words. Maybe that’ll help.

“You’re different,” Nicky says, eyes wide.

“Private school is so very different than public,” I tell her in a bored voice, adopting Tilly’s tone. “I learned a few things. This town has grown on me though, so now I’m back. No more of this stupid nonsense.”

“You’re not fun to mess with anymore,” Nicky whines, stomping her foot.

“I took away Barbie’s toy. Poor baby.” I sigh, pocketing my knife. “I’ll see you at school, ladies.”

Walking away feels good as there’s nothing but silence.

“Miss Carrie?” Mr. Lauters questions as I pass by. He’s a sweet man who works with his daughter at the candy store. Maybe I’ll stop by there. I really want chocolate now.

“Yes, sir?” I ask with a polite smile.

“May I see your knife?” he asks, surprising me.

“Am I in trouble?” I ask, pulling it out of my pocket. It’s a butterfly knife, and I’m half afraid he’ll maim himself with it. Instead, when I hand it to him, he opens it expertly.

“There’s not usually much use for being armed in a small town like this, but everyone has heard about how awful the girls in the junior class are,” he mutters. “Keep it close, wear it under your clothes. Those girls just ain’t right.”

Closing up the knife, he hands it back to me.

“Do you need any sweets before you go on your way, Miss Carrie?” he asks slyly. There’s a reason his daughter has him hang outside to talk to people. Mr. Lauters is very good at bringing in business.

“Actually, I think I need some chocolate.” I grin.

Ten minutes later, I’m happily popping candy in my mouth as I walk to work, glad I stopped. As I walk into the Rec Center, my phone buzzes. Letting myself into the room I tend to work from, I check it.

Chuck: Come swimming with us tomorrow, Carebear? Are you working?

I’m not, and have no reason to not accept.

Me: Alright, I’m in. I want a floatie though!

Chuck: I got you. The guys and I picked up a swan from the store for you.

The smile is still on my face as the door to the room opens. I’m working my shift with someone today. Apparently, the hotline is getting busier as people in other counties start to use it.

“Hi, Ian,” I say with a smile. Mrs. Peters has been keeping me up to date on the newest developments with the Light Project, and one of them is the addition of Ian to the team. I like him, he’s always been nice to me.

“Hey, Carrie. I’m glad to be working next to you today,” he says as he sits at a desk. I follow suit, sitting down across from him to get set up. “I brought some summer reading for in between calls, just in case. Junior English is going to be rough.”

I read most of the reading last year, so I shrug with a smile. “I have my Kindle with me, too. I’m sure we’ll have slower periods today.”

There are landline phones that we use for Light Project, unless there are special circumstances like a very late shift or someone is working remotely. When it rings, I take a breath and answer. Ian’s phone rings, and he shrugs as if to say maybe there won’t be a slower period.



Unfortunately, he's right, and our four hour shift is very busy.

"See you around," Ian says with a wave as the next rotation of people comes to relieve us.

"Yeah." I grin. It was nice working with him, and he has a really calm demeanor. "See you."

Maybe junior year won't completely suck.



"BOMBS AWAY!" Chuck yells as he swings from the tree swing into the lake. Squealing, I cover my head as the water surges over me.

"Oh, my God," I sputter with a laugh. "I swear you angled your drop perfectly."

"It's a gift," he chuckles.

Bates, Chuck, Meyers, and I have been hanging out all day. I'm cautiously optimistic about them. Meyers has been a little closed off, and sometimes I see shame in his eyes.

"Are you hungry?" he asks carefully, swimming up to my floatie.

"I..." As usual, my stomach outs me, making me smirk. "Yes, I actually am."

"Mom made me bring a picnic basket." Meyers grins. "Come eat."

"Okay, reframe." Chuck chuckles, making me wonder if they really are in therapy. "You made everything except the cookies. Ms. Kay just ensured you packed it right."

"Isn't that the same thing?" Meyers snarks, swimming for the shore.

"No." I grin, shaking my head.

"I'll tow you in, Carebear," Chuck offers, grabbing the rope to pull me behind him with powerful strokes.

“These are the benefits of being part fish,” Bates murmurs as he swims next to him. “We grew up with a football in our hand, but our parents all made sure we could swim too.”

“The lake was too close to risk it,” Meyers says, shrugging as he strides across the ground to grab towels. They thought of everything.

Chuck stands, lifting me out of the floatie and making me feel as if I’m weightless.

“Let’s get you some food before you disappear on us,” he smirks, tossing me over his shoulder. The world moves super fast as he manhandles me, making me shriek.

“Chuck, oh my God! I’m going to fall out of my bathing suit like this. Gravity isn’t nice to a girl like me!” I yell as he walks to the blanket where Meyers is laying out another blanket and the food.

“What’s a girl like you?” Bates asks curiously as Chuck flips me back over. I immediately check to make sure my boobs haven’t fallen out. “Please don’t tell me the private school bitches have given you a complex. You’re perfect.”

Blushing, I relax as I find that I haven’t popped out of my top. “My breasts have a mind of their own,” I tell him as I begin to dry my body. “I didn’t want to flash anyone.”

“We’re red-blooded teenagers and you’re perfect,” Meyers says quietly. “You’re the only girl we’ve ever wanted.”

Sighing, I wrap the towel around me as I sit on the edge of the blanket. “We’ve always been friends and nothing more, Meyers. Sometimes it felt like things could be more, but it never happened. And that’s fine,” I insist, shrugging as if I don’t care.

“Don’t do that,” Bates says, dropping to his knees beside me. His chest is still wet, and water drops down his well defined muscles. Struggling not to lick my lips, I nod. “My eyes are up here, Short Stuff.”

Flushing, I grin as I gaze up at him through my lashes.

“Hey,” I murmur dumbly. These boys still manage to rob me of my words.

“We look a little different from when you left, huh?” he teases me.

“Chuck is huge, and you two are apparently really hitting the gym.” I shrug. I shift as butterflies start to fly in my stomach. The last thing I need is to rekindle my childhood crush on them.

“Coach is really pushing us lately,” Meyers explains. “He doesn’t have any leaders to push us to victory, so the captain position is between the three of us. It’s less exciting than you may think. I just don’t love football the way I used to.”

“Same,” Chuck grunts. “It was different when we could get lost in the sport, but when you lose everything, it takes the joy out of things.”

“What did you lose?” I breathe, the words flying out of my mouth before I can stop them. “You can’t possibly be talking about me, right?”

Chuck folds his body next to me. The three of them dwarf me in size, even at almost seventeen years of age.

“Of course we are, Carebear. The second we set our eyes on you at twelve years old, we were lost. The girls in this town didn’t want to play with us, they only loved the color pink, and thought Halloween thrillers were scary,” he says, rolling his eyes. “My favorite thing about seeing you at school was seeing the outfit you managed to put together.”

“I’m a fan of the suspenders with the cute little skirts.” Bates smirks. “There’s nothing about you I’d want to change. We’ve always wanted you to be ours, we just fucked up along the way.”

“Yours?” I feel as if I’m a broken record, but I think they just broke my brain.

“Let’s start with friendship and earning back your trust,” Meyers cautions, handing me a plate with a PB&J sandwich, chips, cheese cubes, and grapes. “Do you want cookies now or later?”

I've always had a hard time waiting for my sweets. What if I'm too full later? "Can I have one now?" I grin.

"Some things never change," he says with a chuckle.

And sometimes everything does, but this feels easy. I have a lot of questions, but I bite them back as I eat with them. If they are serious about making amends and being friends, there's plenty of time for answers later.

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## Chapter 16

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## Meyers

It's the first day of junior year, and we offered to drive Carrie in. Bates got a car for his birthday and carts our asses around—not that he minds. Carrie said she was going to walk to school since it's not far. Kiernan pulled the phone away, insisting that he'd go with her.

I'm actually really grateful he's around. I just want her protected. I haven't heard anything from Nicky, Victoria, or Laurel recently, and I am not looking forward to school. As Bates pulls into the parking lot, I can feel myself breaking out into a cold sweat.

“You going to be okay today, man?” Chuck asks worriedly.

“I don't know, maybe? I don't know what makes today so much worse than other days,” I mumble.

“I do,” Bates says as he parks the car and turns off the engine. Twisting in his seat, I can see the sympathy in his eyes. “We've had a really quiet summer, and now Carrie is back in our lives. You want to keep her safe,”

“Yes.” I sigh. “My nightmares have been worse lately. I can't sleep well, and I don't know what to do about it.”

“Shit,” Chuck grunts. “Have you told Dr. Kelly yet?”

The three of us are going to the same therapist in the next town over. It was important to us that we not run into her. I know therapy isn't something to be ashamed about and she's cool, it's just how we feel.

“Not yet,” I say tiredly. “I figured I'm seeing her in a couple of days, I'll just wait.”

“Let's get today over with. We don't have practice till tomorrow, so you can nap after school,” Bates says, getting out of the car. Lately, he's been trying to take care of Chuck and me more, and I'm not mad about it. I've always been the person in this role, but my mental state is a little frayed.

“Naps are good,” I grunt, feeling a lot older than I am as I sling my backpack over my shoulder and get out of the car. The weight helps center me as I start to walk toward the school with the guys.

“Let me know if you need to ditch,” Bates says seriously.

“Yes, Daddy,” I snark. Chuck spits out the water he just took a sip of, and the three of us burst into laughter.

“You’re a handful,” Bates grunts.

“I think I’m bigger than you are,” I tease, enjoying as he throws up his hands to walk away.

“I’m going to find Carrie,” Chuck says, a flush crawling up his neck as he hides a smile. Squeezing his shoulder, I nod.

“Be good,” I say casually, stepping back to head to class. I don’t miss the slight widening of his eyes, or how he adjusts his dick after either. I don’t really understand this, but I’m sure we’ll figure it out.

Swinging by the office, I sweet talk the secretary into giving me Carrie’s class schedule. “Thank you,” I say with a wide smile as I take the piece of paper.

“You be nice to that girl, you hear?” she says, brow raising.

“I adore this girl,” I confirm. “I want to make sure she gets to class safely without any issues. There will be no more kidnappings on our watch.”

“I heard about what happened at Homecoming last year,” Mrs. Y says. “Your mother was outraged and brought it to the attention of the superintendent. It’s why the new anti-bullying policy is in place now. The principal is calling an assembly this week.”

“It’s about time,” I grunt. “Thank you, again.”

Walking quickly, people move out of my damn way. Bates, Chuck, and I are used to this treatment, but the only benefit to me is that I don’t have to throw people around to get where I need to. I don’t need my mom to remind me I need patience. I just don’t have any.

Chuck leans over her, talking in Carrie's ear by her homeroom class. It makes me happy to see him making her smile. I have always known I would have to share Carrie with my best friends, it just makes sense. The three of us are always together, and it's something Victoria, Nicky, and Laurel would complain about. Carrie just fits with us.

"Hey." I grin while folding her schedule up and sticking it in my pocket.

"Did you get it?" Chuck asks, stepping back just a little.

"I did, after Mrs. Y gave me a very detailed warning to be good to our girl," I tell him.

"Are you peeing on me again?" Carrie asks, her slight whine making my dick twitch. I wonder if she'll make that sound again for me in other ways.

"Keep your weird kinks to yourself, Carrie," Neumann grunts as he walks by. Faster than he's expecting, I grab his shirt and throw him into the wall.

"Do not speak to her, look at her, or think about Carrie Campbell. Is that understood? I don't give two fucks that we're on the same team, I choose her every single time," I growl. It's busy enough no one saw me, and I casually shove my hands into my jeans pockets as I stare dispassionately at him.

"Holy shit, fine," he mutters, rubbing his face. "I suppose I deserved that after Homecoming. You never retaliated for it."

"Carrie left, so there didn't seem to be a reason for it. Now she's back. She's off limits," I grunt.

Chuck tugs Carrie into his body, throwing his arm around her small frame. His arm weighs a ton, but she doesn't even flinch, merely staring at Neumann to see what he does.

"Fine, yes. I get it, okay?" Neumann complains. "Fuck, I have a headache now."

"I suggest you take yourself and your foul language to the nurse's office then," Ms. Katz says.



Paling, he nods. "I'm so sorry, ma'am. That was inappropriate."

"It was, and you can think about it during detention tomorrow. I'll send your regrets to Coach since you won't be able to attend practice."

"Can't I go to detention today?" Neumann complains. "I can't miss practice!"

"Consequences." She shrugs. "Now kindly get out of my face before you give me a headache."

Winking at us, she moves on.

"I love her," Chuck mutters in awe as Neumann stomps away.

"Mrs. Katz is a little scary." Carrie giggles. "I should go inside. I need to text Kier later."

"Why?" I'm genuinely curious.

"I need ice cream." She shrugs. "I'm craving it, but don't want to go by myself."

"Can we go with you? The ice cream parlor in town, right? I could really go for a chocolate fudge sundae," Chuck groans. "We're on strict diets starting tomorrow. Please? Please say yes."

Carrie nods. "I can't have you starting your new food plan without one last hurrah," she teases. "Take me after school?"

"Yeah, I'll let Bates know," I agree. "Have a good day, baby." I'm pushing, but I can't help it. Her eyes light up while Chuck looks at me in surprise.

"You, too," she says, ducking under Chuck's arm to walk into class.

"What was that about?" he asks, falling into step with me as I walk.

"I have no idea, man. I'm trying really hard not to push, but it's really difficult," I confess.

“I get it. I can’t stop touching her, smelling her hair... I’m obsessed when it comes to Carrie.” He sighs.

“I don’t think she really minds.” I chuckle, waving goodbye as I duck into class.

The day goes by quickly until I have to walk outside. They’re adding to the school, so my English class is in a portable this year. My hands are pushed into my pockets as I walk slowly to class, lost in my thoughts. I’m in a concert T-shirt, jeans, and boots. The weather is actually nice.

Tipping up my head to the sky to feel the sun, I don’t hear the girls until it’s too late.

“Meyers,” Victoria croons, grabbing my arm to pull me aside. I’m so surprised, I let her. Nicky and Laurel flank me with bright, cruel smiles.

“I’m not interested in your bullshit.” I frown, batting Victoria’s hand off of me. “What do you want?”

They’re standing too close, and despite the heat, I shiver.

“We want you, and the status it gives us to date you. People are ignoring us,” Laurel complains. “Convince the other guys to date us.”

“No,” I rasp, feeling my lungs start to close. Victoria rubs against me, and all I can smell is her thick, cloying Chanel perfume. It’s nice when it’s a spritz, but I swear she bathes in the stuff. “Get away from me.”

“You have to forgive us for the little drugging,” Nicky says, rolling her eyes. “It’s not rape if you come, now is it?”

My heart is pounding. *Am I seriously hearing this?*

“I think you came four times.” Laurel giggles. “Will you come for me again if I drop to my knees? It’s not the first time I’ve sucked someone off at school.”

These girls are unreal. Pushing them away, I force my legs to move. It’s the last class of the day, but I feel nauseated. I don’t think I’m going to make it.

Moving behind a portable, I feel my stomach heave. Gagging, I bend over with just enough time to miss my shoes as I start to puke. All I can feel is their hands on me, their lips against mine as they forced me to kiss them that night. Shuddering, I make a pained face as I puke again.

“Fuck,” I wheeze. Pulling a bottle of water from my backpack, I rinse my mouth out and spit it out before taking a sip.

Leaving behind the mess I made on the ground, I traipse through the overgrown grass to the bleachers. I’m going to skip class and hope no one gives me shit for it.

Once I’m sitting, I pull out my phone and text my therapist.

Me: I had an episode. The girls cornered me and I thought I was dying. That’s not normal, right?

Dr. Kelly: It’s very normal to respond this way. In fact, there isn’t a wrong way to handle trauma. Why don’t we have a phone session tomorrow?

Me: I have football practice, and it’s wrong to ask for a later appointment. I don’t want to keep you for this.

Dr. Kelly: Football practice is over at six, I have a six forty-five opening. You’re not keeping me. This is my job. Now do you want it or not?

Barking out a laugh, I accept the appointment. Apparently I can drive even my therapist to distraction.

Me: Yes, ma’am. Thank you.

I love that she pushes me. It’s what I need.

Staring at the football field, I lean back as I zone out for a while. Those girls are a goddamned menace.

“Meyers?” a soft voice whispers, making me flinch.

Turning, I see Carrie and relax a bit. “Do you have a piece of gum by chance?” I mumble.

Nodding, she pulls a piece out from her purse. It reminds me of a Mary Poppins bag. There's everything inside of it.

"Thanks." I feel a little more like myself as the mint explodes over my tastebuds, helping with the aftertaste of bile. "I don't feel good."

"I was coming back from the restroom and saw you," Carrie explains. "Can I sit with you?"

"I'm not great company," I explain. "I'm having a pretty shitty day. Being back at school, you being back, everything makes my skin feel too tight."

"So we'll sit and just be," she promises. "I don't want you to be alone."

This girl. Jesus. She slips her hand in mine and leans into my side. She's quiet as a mouse, but the strength she has slays me.

Carrie doesn't say anything as the bell rings, just happily squeezes my hand and asks, "Up for dessert?"

My mind thinks of things other than what she means, which is so odd after the girls' words threw me for a loop. Trauma is weird, man.

"Always," I promise. This pint sized girl is my future. I just know it.



I WOKE up screaming again tonight, and now I'm standing outside of Carrie's house. I swear my feet just found themselves walking here. I'm staring at the door, unsure of what to do now. Do I knock and confess that I can't sleep? Or do I walk until I'm tired again and pray I can sleep.

Just as I'm turning away to hope I can sleep on my own, the door opens.

"Oye," Kiernan calls out. "Are you stalking or do you need something?"

“I can’t sleep,” I groan. “I went for a walk and ended up here. Now I feel like a stalker. I’m just going to go home after walking some more. Don’t tell her I was here.”

“No, wait,” Carrie says, gently pushing Kiernan so she can get by. “Come in if you can’t sleep.”

“I don’t know if I should.” I sigh, looking at her in her black sleep shirt that hits her thighs and says, “Fuck off, I’m sleeping,” and thigh high socks. Her hair is tousled and gorgeous.

“Get your ass in the house,” she demands. I wait for an adorable stomp, but am left waiting.

“You’re so cute, I can’t say no,” I mutter. Walking heavily, I head up the porch steps.

“The lot of you are obsessed with Carrie,” Kiernan snorts. “It’s kind of ridiculous.”

“Kier.” Carrie frowns, head tilting up to glare at him. The redhead shrugs with a grin, booping her on the nose as he walks back inside.

“He means well,” she says, rolling her eyes.

“Kiernan isn’t wrong. I didn’t even realize I was on my way here until I found myself at your door,” I tell her as I follow her inside.

“Maybe your subconscious knew you needed me?” she asks, locking the door behind us. Tugging on my hand, she leads me upstairs. It’s almost two in the morning, I don’t even know why she’s awake.

“Shouldn’t you be sleeping?” I ask.

“I had a late shift,” she explains. I don’t ask where because I already know. I also know there’s a lot of secrecy around who works there as it’s meant to be a safe place.

“Then come cuddle with me to sleep. Play with my hair?” I ask her as we step into her room. Toeing off my shoes, I crawl into her bed.

Staring at me for a moment, she asks, “Do you want me to leave the bathroom light on? Or would you prefer all the lights off?”

My chest does this odd tightening at her words and my heartbeat jumps. She’s the sweetest. “Bathroom light on, please. You can just crack the door,” I explain. Nodding, she does that then gets into bed with me.

Pulling her tightly to me, I wait for her to find a comfortable place on my chest. Her fingers sift through my hair, and my eyes immediately start to get heavy.

“I love you,” I whisper as I drop off into sleep. Carrie doesn’t say anything until I’m breathing deeply, but I swear I hear her murmur, “I love you, sweet boy.”

# Carrie

## *Six Months Later*

My birthday is later this week and I feel antsy for some reason. Seventeen feels like a big birthday. I'm at Meyers' house baking a strawberry shortcake for a bake sale, and they're playing video games. It feels natural, normal.

Ms. Kay comes into the kitchen looking frazzled, and my brows raise. "Are you waiting on me?" I ask. "It's almost done and then it just needs to cool."

"Huh? Oh no, honey. I can't find my keys and I've been looking everywhere." She sighs.

Looking over my shoulder, I pick up the keys I saw by the fruit bowls. "These keys?" I ask.

"Where— I swear I'm losing my damn mind," Ms. Kay says. "This divorce has me all in my head. It'll be fine."

As she forces a smile, I have a feeling it's anything but fine.

"Do you need anything?" I ask. "I know I'm sixteen, but I'm a great listener."

"No, no, thank you, though. You have a birthday coming up, don't you?" I can tell she's deflecting, and I let her.

There are things I don't like to talk about, too.

"Yes. This weekend. I don't know what I want to do, if anything. Kier has to go out of town this weekend for a family function," I explain. "He was trying to get out of it, but I told him it was fine."

"Well, you can't spend it alone," Chuck says, horrified, peeking his head inside. I smirk because he's absolutely

eavesdropping.

“I mean... I may?” I tease him, knowing they won’t let me. I can be a brat, too.

Ms. Kay hides a smile, picking up her keys. “I’ll be back for the baked goods later. I have an appointment with the lawyer,” she grimaces. Now I know why she’s all in her head.

“Good luck,” I tell her, smiling gently. It must be hard knowing someone can betray you by cheating for years. Meyers’ dad is a bastard.

Ms. Kay leaves quickly, and the timer goes off for the cake.

“Do you need help, Carebear?” Chuck asks, eyes heavy lidded as he watches me. There’s something so beautiful about this man.

Squeezing my thighs together in my leggings, I shake my head. “I got it, promise,” I murmur, grabbing the oven mitts for the cake. Soon, the cake is set out to cool, and I start making the whipped cream from scratch. It’s hard to focus with him staring.

“Chuck! Come help me, please!” Meyers laughs, having some kind of pillow fight with Bates. I giggle, and Chuck moves away to help.

I manage to assemble the cake and refrigerate it before anyone comes in to distract me again, and I sigh with relief. It’s been harder to stay just friends, especially after Meyers spent the night in my bed and told me he loved me.

My feelings are confused when it comes to what to do with these boys, but I do love them.

Entering the living room, I grin at them. They’re all sprawled out on the couches.

“Is it safe to come in?” I tease.

“Yes, come snuggle with me. Meyers and Chuck beat me up with pillows,” Bates pouts, opening his arms wide. Giggling, I go to him, happily sinking into the open spot.



“So, about your birthday,” Meyers drawls, and I nod, unsurprised they won’t let this go.

“Go on,” I say, making him snort.

“There’s a new kid at school who is throwing a party this weekend. His name is Kyle Sanders. He asked if we wanted to come. The girls won’t be there. I know because he asked who should not be invited,” he continues.

“The guy seems nice.” Bates shrugs. “We aren’t going to go anywhere you won’t be safe.”

“I asked him not to invite Prince, Neumann, or Johnson, too.” Chuck shrugs. “I want to dance with my girl, have a good time. Party on your birthday. None of us really drink anymore.”

“We don’t,” Meyers agrees. “If you want to, we’ll watch over you. We just enjoy being clear-headed.”

“I had champagne once with Kier,” I remember. “We went to a rich party, holed up in a mansion, and danced and drank a bottle together. I was so sick.”

“Oh no,” Bates groans sympathetically. “So, what do you say? Come with us?”

“Yeah.” I nod. “If none of the people we have issues with are going, then yes.”

What’s the worst thing that could happen, right?



ARM IN ARM WITH CHUCK, I walk into the party. Bates kisses my forehead before he walks away to say hello to someone, and Meyers is pulled into a conversation as soon as he’s through the door.

“You’re with me, Carebear,” Chuck smiles down at me. “I know Kiernan wasn’t very excited about you coming.”

The man got on FaceTime and point blank asked me not to go. He also threatened to tan my ass red. I blew him a kiss and

told him I missed him.

“Yeah, but one of you will be with me the entire time,” I remind him. “Even to go to the bathroom.”

“Caveman big dick energy all the way.” He smirks as we move through the house. “I don’t even care if it’s over the top. You’re going to have a really good birthday, and then we’ll crash at Meyers’ tonight. We’ll make you breakfast in the morning.”

“It’s already a really good day,” I tell him honestly. I’m wearing a very short, black, off-the-shoulder sweater dress with floral, black suspension tights. My thong is tiny and my bra is sexy, but supportive. I am dressed to kill, and my knife is tucked into one of my black boots.

“I’m so glad.” Chuck grins. We went to the arcade, had burgers and shakes for lunch, and watched horror movies the rest of the day.

My hips move as I walk, the music pulling me in.

“Let’s dance, beautiful. I’m a big fucker, they’ll find me,” he says. There’s a section of the living room cleared off, and he pushes his way through the crowd with me perfectly protected in front of him.

As he turns me into his arms, I grin up at him. “I think you’re perfect,” I yell up at him. It’s loud here, but his slow, heated smile tells me he hears me just fine.

Chuck has amazing rhythm, and soon we’re lost in the music together. Soon someone is behind me, their arms around my waist. I stiffen for a moment before Bates buries his face into my neck, kissing a place that makes me moan softly.

“Good girl,” he murmurs into the shell of my ear. “I’ve been watching you dance, and I couldn’t wait anymore. I needed to join.”

“Please do,” I beg breathlessly. I don’t know what’s wrong with me. The guys have hugged me, kissed my forehead, brushed my lips to say goodbye. All those little touches make my body needy for more.

Bates' hands squeeze my hips, making me gasp for air. "So pretty," Chuck murmurs, his fingers diving into my hair to tilt my head back so he can kiss me. Fuck, it's a damn good kiss.

Chuck swallows my whimpers, while Bates kisses my neck, grinding into my ass. His dick is hard. He's so thick, I can feel it through his jeans. A languid heaviness builds in my belly, and they're destroying my panties. I'm so wet already.

Bates drags his hands up my thighs, massaging them firmly. "If I touched you, would you be wet for me, Short Stuff?" he asks, fingers skimming the bottom of my dress.

Pulling my lips from Chuck's, I gasp, "Yes."

"Damn, I think the party is right here and I've been missing it all," Meyers says, his green eyes molten.

"I need," I whisper, biting my lip.

"Do you need to come?" Meyers asks, turning me to face him. My hair pulls away from Chuck's fingers, and a part of me misses them.

Nodding, I look up at him, unsure of what I'm asking. I've gotten myself off here and there, and Kier bought me a vibrator to keep me from making "bad decisions due to dick," but it makes me wonder what it would be like.

"Has anyone helped you come, baby?" he asks, his hands palming my ass to lift me slightly onto his thigh. Years of playing football have made this quarterback's thigh rippled with muscles. My panty clad pussy rocks against it, eyelashes fluttering. "That's it, take what you need. Rock to the music."

Ignoring the rest of the room, my thighs roll against his thigh as my fingers slide into his black hair. Leaning over me, he takes his kiss. Lips soft, yet demanding, Meyers pushes me further into the flames.

"That's it, Short Stuff, take it. You deserve it," Bates encourages, his palms covering my breasts, kneading them. I wish I was naked so his fingers could pull on my nipples. Would I like that? I tried it once and I nearly came.

I was so shocked, I stopped. I don't want to stop with them. I want more.

My pussy clamps on nothing, wet and greedy. Bates grinds against my ass, his hands on my thighs, widening my stance. More of me grinds on Meyers' leg, and I whimper, chasing my high.

"Fucking beautiful," Chuck murmurs. "No one can see, we're surrounding you. No one can hear. Fall apart for us."

It's as if he gives me permission to come, and my lips part in a wordless scream as I shatter. I say wordless, because Bates wraps his large hand around my throat and squeezes, robbing me of both sound and breath. Fuck, if it doesn't make me come harder. I don't know what's wrong with me, but it feels amazing.

"That's it," Meyers praises, kissing my shoulder. "I want to rip your panties off with your knife and lick your cream until you come on my face. I want to do so many things I've never wanted to do with anyone else but you."

"Anyone? What does that mean?" I ask, gasping as Meyers pushes me hard onto his leg, getting me hot and bothered yet again.

"It means we've never been with anyone else," Bates explains. "Outside of a mishap, we're virgins."

I can read between the lines of his words and nod.

"We always wanted you to be our first in all ways," Meyers says.

"I want that," I tell him, only it's said on a moan. Rocking on his thigh once was incredible, but now I need more.

"Baby girl," Chuck groans, dragging his nose up my throat. They're all crowded around me, and I don't know whose hands are where. "I want to take you upstairs, strip you, and eat your pussy until you scream my name. I have no willpower when it comes to you. Tell me no. Now."

"Yes," I say cheekily, grinning. "Please."

“Our girl is such a pretty little brat,” Bates says, kissing my temple. “I want to give her whatever she wants.”

“Same,” Meyers says, easing his leg out from under me and fixing my dress. “Let’s go. I want to see how many times you can come before you pass out.”

“Is that possible?” I gape, linking my fingers in his as we walk.

“I think it is?” He blushes adorably.

“I hope it is,” Chuck grunts, adjusting his dick as he walks. “Please, walk faster.”

The guys lead me through the house and up the stairs to find an empty bedroom. I’m through the door and climbing on the bed with a grin as I twist to look at them.

“Hey.” I grin, blushing as they stare at me. Bates shoves the guys through the door as he kicks it closed and locks it.

“No one gets to see you like this but us,” he growls, surprising me.

“No one else,” I promise as he stalks toward me, pulling me toward him. Squeaking, my back hits the mattress as he leans over to kiss me.

His lips taste a little like cherries, but I can’t figure out why as I get lost in his kisses. “You taste so good,” I gasp as I come up for air.

Bates’ hands massage up my legs, slowly pushing up my dress. Leaning back, his eyes widen as he realizes my tights only go up mid thigh, providing open access to my pussy.

“I like these,” he rasps. “These thighs look like a present, and I’m spoiled because I don’t have to unwrap you to eat my treat.”

Dirty boy. Biting my lip, I pull off my dress. My bra and panties match and are a deep purple and black.

Chuck bites his fist as he stares at me from behind Bates, the weight of their gazes making my nipples harden and my thighs clench.

“Best way to take your panties off would be? They’re so pretty I almost don’t want to rip them off with my teeth,” Bates rumbles. There’s a knife in my combat boot, and I open the secret zipper to pull it out.

“That’s such Girl Scout behavior,” Meyers teases me as I hand the knife to Bates.

“Psychotic father,” I correct. “Kiernan is also very overprotective and will bury anyone who hurts me.”

“If that’s a warning, you don’t have to worry about that,” Bates promises. “We won’t hurt you. Not even a knick.”

Knife open, he pulls the strap of my panties on either side, slicing them off me. Bates hands the knife and panties to Meyers as he drags his nose up my thigh.

“You have the most perfect pussy. This pink is my new favorite color,” he confesses, dropping a kiss on my mound.

Embarrassed, I flush and Chuck groans, getting on the bed to tug my bra cups down. “This berry color is mine,” he grunts. Then in the fashion of two best friends, they dip their heads at the same time to indulge, lick, and suck.

Whimpering, my head drops back, and I enjoy the sensation of Bates sucking on my clit and Chuck nipping and pulling on my nipples.

“Oh, my God,” I gasp, writhing between them.

“Someone tell me how she tastes,” Meyers says, his voice strangled. Twisting to look at him, I see his pants are undone and he’s stroking his cock.

“She tastes like lemons and sweetness,” Bates groans, pushing a thick finger inside of me. I’m tight, and my back bows as I try to relax around him. “That’s it, baby. We have to stretch you. You’re so goddamned tight. I don’t want to hurt you.”

“I just want you,” I whine, spreading my legs open farther for him, feeling powerful as a feral sound releases from his throat.

“You’re testing my strength, Short Stuff,” he rumbles, dragging his tongue over me as he pushes a second finger inside of me.

It hurts and I wince at the pinch of pain.

“I got you, baby,” Chuck promises, kissing me. “Focus on me and everything that feels good, okay?”

“I know it’s going to hurt either way,” I confess, panting. “The three of you are so big. It’s okay though, I know it won’t hurt for long.”

Meyers gets on the bed, his head propped up by his hand as he lazily strokes himself.

“You’re so perfect for us,” Meyers says softly. “It was always supposed to be us. Kiss her for me, big guy. I want to watch.”

Fuck me. Chuck blushes, grabbing the back of his shirt and pulling it off in a way only guys can. The flush goes down his neck, and it makes me wonder if these three are more than best friends. I wouldn’t mind at all.

Bates twists his fingers inside of me, making me mewl. “Good girl. Now I want to see all of you,” he grunts, spreading me wide to rub my clit. It feels amazing and overwhelming, the earlier pain gone.

“You’re taking his fingers so good,” Meyers grunts. He’s fucking his fist, and I lick my lips. I want to taste him so badly.

Chuck kisses up my neck before capturing my lips. “Do you want his cock, baby? It’s weeping just for you. Fuck, I want to watch you wrap your lips around it.”

“Will you help me?” pops out of my lips before I can help it.

“Oh fuck,” Meyers groans. “I wouldn’t mind if you did, big guy.”

“Seriously?” Chuck asks, looking poleaxed.

Sitting back, Bates slowly pulls his fingers out of my pussy. “Who wants to taste our girl?”

Meyers sits up immediately, grabbing Bates hand to suck and lick my arousal off his fingers. “Definitely tastes like a sweet dessert,” he moans.

“Flip onto your hands and knees and help Chuck suck off Meyers. He looks as if that’s starting to get painful,” Bates says knowingly.

I don’t want him in pain, and I really want to lick him like a lollipop. I just... I don’t know what to do.

Meyers moves to kneel in front of me and strip off his clothes as I turn over. I’m still partially dressed, but Bates unsnaps my bra, helping me take it off.

“These are incredible,” Bates admires, cupping my breasts as he pinches and pulls my nipples. God, it feels so good, and I struggle to get up onto my knees. “Yes, please, present that pretty pussy to me. I’m going to make you come so hard.”

Kissing down my back, he swats my ass, making me squeal and giggle. Meyers’ cock bobs in front of me, and I stare at it wide eyed.

“I don’t know what to do,” I tell Meyers, looking up at him through my lashes.

“Anything you do is good,” he assures me. “You on your knees staring up at me has me ready to blow, baby. Want to help her?”

My head whips to Chuck who is staring at his cock and licking his lips.

“Do it, Chuck. Tell me how he tastes,” Bates says, grabbing my ass cheeks to spread me wide. “You won’t be able to function soon, so get started, baby.”

Chuck picks up my hand, wrapping it around Meyers’ cock before engulfing it with his own.

“Lick up his cock as I suck on the tip, sweet girl. Let’s get him nice and wet for us,” Chuck growls, making me shudder. Fuck, I might come just like this.

Watching his juicy lips wrap around Meyers’ cock makes me want to rub my thighs together, but I can’t because Bates is



holding them open. Meyers sinks his fingers into my hair, his head dropping back with a groan.

“I have the best view right here. Now get me wet like Chuck asked you to. I want to slide down your throat when it’s your turn,” he tells me.

Holy fuck. Collecting saliva in my mouth, I suck on the base of his cock, letting it dribble down it slowly. Dragging my tongue up the angry vein on his dick, I do whatever makes him moan.

“Bates,” I whimper as he drags his teeth along my clit. His fingers push back inside of me, and my walls are already fluttering. There’s a heaviness back in my stomach, and I can hear how wet I am as Bates drags his fingers in and out of my channel.

“That’s my name, Short Stuff,” he growls. “Feel free to scream it often.”

My breasts feel heavy, my pussy is clamping on Bates’ fingers like the greedy hoe she is, and my legs and toes are beginning to tingle.

Chuck slurps and sucks on the head of Meyers’ cock while I pay attention to his balls and lick and suck up his length. Together, we drive him wild, even as I get closer to my own release.

“Fuck, you’re so damn good to me. It feels so good. More... please,” Meyers begs, thrusting into Chuck’s mouth.

“Greedy fucker,” Chuck teases, popping off his cock. “Come on, Carebear. Play with me.”

Opening my mouth wide, I struggle to fit Meyers inside. Slowly, I relax more as I slide him down my throat, swirling my tongue around him.

“Holy fuck, ohhh!” Meyers yells, his hips pushing forward. My gag reflex triggers, but I force myself to swallow around it.

“You’re doing so good. Those tears are so beautiful,” Chuck whispers into my ear, squeezing Meyers’ balls gently.

“You’re both going to kill me,” he gasps, turning red.

“You’ll die a happy man,” Bates snarks, coming up for air. We’re all trouble together.

Chuck and I fist the base of Meyers’ cock together as I rock up and down it with my mouth. The sweetness of his precum bursts along my tastebuds, and it’s becoming my new addiction. I need him to lose control and come for us.

Bates is doing his best to make me wild, and my hips fuck his fingers as he rubs and sucks on my clit. “That’s it, Short Stuff. I need you to cover my mouth in your cum. I want to still be able to taste you on my tongue tomorrow.”

Crying out, I start to come while going down on Meyers. Eyes rolling, he pulls on my hair as he starts to fuck my face. I’m sure he can feel the vibration of my cries, and the added sting on my scalp makes me hotter.

“I think he’s going to come, baby. I want some, too,” Chuck whispers, sucking on my neck.

I’m shuddering, barely able to keep myself upright, and I can feel Meyers’ dick twitching. Pulling off his cock, I follow Chuck’s lead as we jerk him off. Meyers grunts, one of his hands reaching out to grab Chuck by the throat, pushing his head back.

“I’m going to come all over your faces. Stick your tongues out for me. Fuck, such pretty little cum whores I have,” he pants.

*Why is this so hot? Where did he learn to talk like this?*

Bates moves away from me and I can hear him taking off his clothes. Meyers’ eyes roll as he begins to find his release, and his hand tightens on my hair, forcing me up onto my knees for him. His cum jets out in streams, hitting my tongue and breasts before he ensures Chuck gets some too.

“Fuck, this is going to be my new favorite thing to jerk off to first thing in the morning,” Bates says, his voice disappearing for a second. “How does he taste, Short Stuff?”

There's cum in my eyelashes, making me close my eyes. "Sweet," I respond, tongue still sticking out.

"For a brat, you listen so well," Meyers chuckles, sounding out of breath. "Swallow, both of you. Fuck yes, you look so good all messy for me."

A part of me preens, and my fingers link with Chuck's. A damp cloth slowly cleans off my eyes so I can open them.

"Don't wipe off her breasts," Chuck says, taking the damp washcloth from Bates to clean his own face off. "I want to lick them clean while you have sex with her."

"You good with me being your first?" Bates asks, leaning down to kiss me.

Nodding, I turn, pulling him over me.

"Fuck. The condom. I'm an idiot." He sighs.

"I'm on birth control," I respond immediately. "I take it every day. We're good."

"I'm so happy right now, and yet I want to know why you're on birth control," Bates grunts.

"I've had weird periods. Please, I'll recount the whole awkward gynecological experience later for you. Just fuck me now," I beg.

Fisting his cock as he pushes to his knees, he shakes his head. "I'm not fucking you," Bates says.

"No?" I ask, disappointed.

"You're the love of my life. So that's what we're doing tonight. I'm making love to you. Hold on tight, Short Stuff," he says as he presses the head of his cock against my core.

Wincing as he pushes inside of me, my back bows. There's a little bit of resistance before my body begins to accept him.

Wow, I guess I'm no longer a virgin.

"That's it, baby," Chuck murmurs, laying next to me to rub my clit and run his tongue along my breasts. The pain slowly turns to pleasure, my pussy sucking Bates' cock inside of me.

“So good for me,” Bates praises, looking pained. “You feel so tight, warm, and wet. Fuck, it’s so much better than I could have imagined.”

“More,” I beg, wrapping my legs around his waist. Bates grabs my ass, raising me slightly as he slowly fucks me, pushing deeper with each thrust.

“I’m harder than steel again,” Meyers pants, smirking as I look over at him. His cock is proudly saluting me, making me smile.

The smile turns into a cry as Chuck decides he wants my attention. Together, Bates and he work me together until I explode when Chuck pinches my clit.

“She’s strangling my cock. Oh fuck, this is how I die,” Bates gasps, fucking me through my orgasm. I shudder as I feel him coat the walls of my pussy with his cum, triggering another mini release.

Breathing hard, he collapses over me, catching himself on his forearms. Chuck manages to retract his hand before it gets squished, making me huff out a laugh.

“I’m sorry I hurt you,” Bates murmurs, kissing my lips. He tastes like me, making me clench around his still hard dick. “Fuck, do you still feel needy?”

Blushing, I shrug. I don’t want to seem too eager. That’s wrong, right?

“Don’t do that.” Chuck smirks. “Whatever you need, we’re here for. If you’re not too sore, I want you to ride me, sweetness. Are you feeling up to it?”

“My boobs will bounce funny,” I tell him, wide-eyed. It’s dumb. I should feel comfortable in my body, but I’m still not. Bates wiggles down my body, and we both hiss as it makes him slide out of me. “What are you doing?”

It’s half squeal, part gasp, because his dick is sliding down my walls. It makes me squirm, wishing he’d come back to fuck me. Instead he stares at my breasts, pulling my nipple into his mouth to suck on.

“They’re perfect,” Meyers growls. He’s been stretched out on the bed watching happily the entire time. He’s so quiet and content, I almost didn’t notice him until now.

“Definitely perfect,” Bates says, sitting up. Chuck pulls me on top of him once my legs release Bates, as if I’m weightless.

“I feel lighter than air around you three,” I murmur.

“It’s because you are.” Chuck grins, sitting us up to kiss me. “You’re the most beautiful woman in the world to us, and so fucking kind.”

I’m lost in his words and kisses as he grabs my ass to lift me.

“Such a gorgeous pussy about to be filled again,” Bates groans, laying back next to Meyers. “You may be a little sore tomorrow, Short Stuff.”

“Worth it,” I gasp as Chuck’s cock starts to fill me. His mushroom head is thicker than the other guys, robbing me of breath.

“That’s it, nice and easy. You can do it,” Chuck praises me. Slowly, he works his cock inside of me until I’m firmly seated on it. “Your turn. Fuck me.”

My hands wind into his hair, rocking my hips tentatively. It all feels so good as his cock rubs and fills me, and in this position his pelvic bone grinds on my clit. Swirling my hips, I rock and bounce on his cock, listening to his sounds.

“Perfect, yes. Just like that. You are meant to ride my cock forever.”

Meyers gets up, moving to grind against my back. “One day soon, you’re going to take us both at the same time. Would you like that?” he asks, kissing my neck.

“I... Yes. Can I do that?” I gasp. Sex is so new to me, but I want it all. Meyers cock is hard and heavy as it rocks against my back, his sounds making me clench hard around Chuck.

“Fuck,” Chuck shouts. “Baby, fuck, I’m going to come soon. Please make yourself come. I want to finish together.”

Riding and grinding on him, pulling his hair that he's been wearing longer, I shatter on his cock. Meyers wraps his hand around my neck, pulling my head back to kiss him over my shoulder, effectively swallowing my cries.

Chuck buries his head in my neck, holding me tightly as he fucks up into me, roaring as he comes. I don't even care if anyone can hear us. I can't believe I made this man come like this.

"I think I'm broken," I whimper, my eyes fluttering open as I look up at Meyers.

"Good. Then it's time to get dressed. Your panties are going to be saved for later before I go to bed, but my phone has been blowing up for the past hour. I've just been ignoring it." He smirks.

"Oh shit," I giggle.

I'm shaky as I slowly get up, rushing to the bathroom to clean myself. The guys do that manly chuckle as they get dressed, knowing I have their cum starting to leak out of me. After cleaning up and peeing, because I heard somewhere you should after sex, I reappear slowly. I'm still naked and need my clothes.

"Still beautiful," Meyers confirms, gesturing for me to walk to him. Helping me dress, his lips meet the shell of my ear. "I plan to take my time with you. Don't think I don't want to sink my cock inside you, I just don't want to rush this."

Blushing, I nod, staring up at him. I'm still wearing my boots, which makes me smile inside. Nothing about me is normal, and I'm starting to accept that.

"Don't forget this," Bates smirks, reaching for my knife. "I'm going to have fond memories of this thing, Short Stuff."

Pulling out my shredded panties from his pocket, Meyers chuckles as he shows them to me before returning them.

"I don't even want to know," I say honestly, my cheeks hurting from smiling so much. Lifting my leg, I put the knife back inside of my boot, intentionally flashing the boys.

“Killing me,” Chuck groans. “We’ll only stay a little while longer before leaving. Happy birthday, Carebear.”

“Best birthday ever,” I tell them honestly as we leave the room. I fluff out my hair, certain it’s currently wild. Oh well, I’m just going to go with it. I can’t believe this is my life now.

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## Chapter 17

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*This chapter has triggering content and a detailed rape scene. Please read with caution.*



## Carrie

It's still loud, and the party's raging when we head downstairs. People share secret smiles as they see us, but no one really cares what we may have been doing.

People are chatting, and a girl from English class pulls me into a conversation as the guys surround me, talking to the new guy at school. He seems nice enough, but I can only listen to "guy talk" for so long.

Alice is called away, and I smile and say goodbye. It's nice to know not everyone thinks I'm an "emo freak".

"Hey, Carrie." Ian grins, holding up two bottles of water. "I was grabbing a drink and saw you. Need some?"

"Thank you," I tell him, taking it from him. My dad has always told me not to take bottles that look tampered with, but when I open it the seal is intact. Should be safe enough. "I'm actually having fun, and I haven't seen Victoria, Nicky, or Laurel tonight. Best birthday ever!"

"Happy birthday," he chuckles, taking a sip of his own water. "There's a whole list of people who aren't allowed in. This is a low key, drama free party, and honestly, it's been really nice."

We chat for a bit more before he says goodbye, but when I turn, the room tilts. Ugh, what's wrong with me?

"Hey, you okay?" Chuck asks, his hand on my back. He looks concerned, and I just want them to keep having fun.

"Yeah, I just need to go to the bathroom. The one by the stairs. I'll be fast," I promise. I'll text them that I'm leaving once I'm through the door and walking home. I always feel as if I'm a downer.

"Five minutes," he insists, frowning.

Nodding, I force myself to put one foot in front of the other. I don't even bother with the bathroom, knowing the crowd means he can't see me anymore. Walking out the door, I put the bottle against my neck. It's cold and feels good.

Once I get to the sidewalk, I stumble, whimpering because I'm worried I may be sick. Maybe I should text the guys...

"Carrie?" Ian is in his car next to me, eyes wide. "Are you okay?"

"I don't feel well," I murmur. "I was going to try walking home, but that's not happening."

"I'll take you if you want? I can text the guys and let them know you're with me so they don't tear apart the town looking for you."

Smirking weakly because they would, I walk around to the passenger side to get into the car. Ian always has a way of saving my ass when things go pear shaped.

Pulling out his phone, he shoots off a text before putting it away. "Alright, tell me where I'm going, unless you need something before you go home?"

"I think I need to lie down," I confess, putting on my seatbelt. "I live in town behind the townhouses on Woodard Road."

"I've never been there, but I can find it," he promises.

After a small period of silence that's not uncomfortable, he glances at me as he stops at a stop sign.

"Are you dating any of them? They all look happier now that you're back. Meyers was broodier than normal, Chuck scarier, and Bates was really off his game when you left," Ian tells me.

"I... Some things happened," I say, crossing my arms as I try to explain our relationship. "I've known them since I was twelve, and they want to date me, I believe."

"They didn't say?" Ian asks, surprised.

I close my eyes as a wave of dizziness hits me as he turns the wheel to go around a corner.

“I... We were at a party, so we didn’t have a conversation about it,” I explain, trying to get my thoughts together. “It was always supposed to be me and them.”

Ian turns the wheel again, and my eyes snap open, even as my stomach churns. This doesn’t look like the right way.

“Where are we going? Ian?” I ask, my fingers curling into my skin.

“You’re wrong!” he snarls, shoving his fingers through his hair. “Why would you be theirs when they’ve treated you so badly?”

“Well, we’ve talked. It was a misunderstanding,” I explain, chewing on my lip. Something isn’t right. My head is fuzzy and I’m having a hard time concentrating, but I can feel how wrong this is.

“I’ve been nicer to you, though!” he yells at me.

“This isn’t a competition,” I argue. I should try to get out of the car, except it’s fucking moving. Dammit.

“You shouldn’t give yourself to people who don’t deserve you. Come to think of it, your hair looks different than earlier. Did you let them fuck you?” Ian asks, speeding into his next turn.

“Agh!” I cry out as I slam into the door, wincing at the pain in my shoulder.

“You should be mine!” Ian yells, pulling into an empty lot. It’s behind a restaurant, and there’s no one around.

“I don’t belong to anyone,” I hiss. Ian pulls off his seatbelt, throwing it in a tantrum as he slams the car into park.

“I’m going to walk home,” I tell him, taking off my seatbelt.

“No,” he denies, locking the doors. I unlock it and try to open it, but can’t. Shoving my shoulder into it, tears start to prick my eyes.

“Why are you doing this?” I ask in panic. “Let me out!”

“My sister tends to ride with me, so we have child locks on the passenger side too,” he says, shoving his seat back and starting to climb over the console.

“Stay away!” I tell him, turning and kicking him with both feet. I am well aware of my pantyless state, and am more than willing to fight.

Crouching awkwardly, he grabs my hair and slams my head into the door twice. I gasp, the world goes in and out of darkness, and I force myself to stay conscious.

“You need to pay better attention,” Ian says, shoving my feet down to the floorboard. He finishes invading my space, his knee between my legs, pushing them open. “I got a job at Light Project to be closer to you. I’m always there when you need me. What the fuck else did you think was happening?”

His hand wraps around my wrists, grinding the bones together as he holds them over my head.

“Now, let’s see what’s under this dress,” he mutters.

I lift my body, trying to create more space. I try to kick him, the dashboard. I’m fucking panicking trying to do something.

“Stop!” Ian screams, startling me. Chest heaving, I stare at him for a moment as he rips my dress up to my chest. “You’re a whore! The only thing good about this is you’ll take my cock better. Maybe I should fuck your ass instead. Did they fuck that too?”

“They have all my firsts,” I lie. His hand loosens a little as he moves his other to pull his cock out, and I continue to fight. I need one hand to get to my knife. If he dies, he dies.

“Liar,” he jeers, fisting his cock as he holds me down. “Are you going to be a good girl for me or do I need to do this the hard way?”

The phrasing doesn’t turn me on the way it did with the guys, and angry tears begin to slide down my cheeks. “I’d prefer neither. Let me go!”

“I did warn you.” He sighs, hauling me up and throwing me over the console. His hand pushes down on my back, not letting me up even as I buck. His hand slaps my ass hard, making me cry out. It’s not sexy the way it was with the guys. His fingers drag across my folds making me flinch. No matter how well I tried to clean up, I’m still wet from the combination of mine and the guys’ releases.

“Just look at you begging for it, fucking wet for my cock,” Ian says in awe even as I try to close my legs tightly. “I can still fuck you, even like that.”

“You don’t have to do this,” I cry, freezing as his cock pushes against me. This isn’t happening. No, no, no.

“Yeah, I’m afraid I do, Carrie. This pussy is mine,” Ian growls, thrusting inside of me. I’m sore, and I feel swollen. What he’s doing hurts.

“No, please,” I scream, grabbing the seat in front of me to try to pull away.

Ian grunts, his fingers digging into my hips and ass. My mouth fills with bile, knowing I’ll be carrying the evidence of this inside and out. “Your pussy is so damn tight. You’re such a whore taking those three jokers, but you’re still strangling my cock,” he says.

Ian pulls me up, his hand tangled in my wild hair, yanking it back as he fucks up into me. Crying, I scratch and hit him, but he just groans in pleasure. My fingers touch the zipper on my boot, and I just manage to pull it down, my other hand’s fingers digging into his eye. Just as I pull out the blade, he throws me forward. My forehead hits the steering wheel, dazing me.

“That’s better,” he mutters as he continues to fuck me.

Touching my head, I feel the beginning of a bump. Fuck. Opening the knife, I reach back and stab him in the leg. His pants are still on, but this blade slides through like butter.

“You bitch,” he snarls, shuddering. I thought it was because I stabbed him, but the asshole is coming. The freak show is getting off on the pain.

I stab him again, screaming, bucking and twisting. Finally, he shoves me, and I scramble toward the driver side door to get out.

“Don’t go! We really have something here. You’re mine now!” Ian screams, his face red as he tries to shove his cock back into his pants.

Knowing he can’t follow, I push my dress down, opening the car door and taking off. The passenger door rattles and thumps before he realizes he can’t get out. My legs pump as I run hard, and by the time he jumps over the console, I’ve cut through several backyards, getting myself onto my property.

I was only two blocks away from home when Ian Matthers raped me.

Nearly collapsing as I go up the stairs, I realize my crossbody purse is still in Ian’s car after the struggle, and so is my phone. Thankfully, my house key is in my boot and didn’t fall out, and I let myself in and lock the door. I barely make it to the downstairs bathroom before I vomit.

How is this my life? Today was supposed to be the best day ever. I lost my virginity to my best friends, turned seventeen, and had mind blowing sex. Laying on the cold floor, I drift off to sleep while praying for a do-over.

## Bates

### *Six Weeks Later*

I try Carrie's phone again, but it goes right to voicemail. I wanted to check in with her because she seemed off at school today. Honestly, she's been acting weird the last six weeks. Did we do something wrong?

"Hey, Short Stuff, it's just me. Call me back," I say to her voicemail, then hang up. Meyers and Chuck are over at his house playing video games, but I'm not in the mood. There is something nagging me in the back of my mind, and I can't figure it out.

I toss my phone on my bed and walk over to the closet, pulling out my acoustic. Music has always calmed me, and one of the things my therapist suggested was to learn how to play an instrument.

I immediately grabbed a guitar and started taking lessons virtually. I'm actually pretty good, not that anything would ever advance in that aspect. Football is my life... unfortunately. It's the one thing my dad and I bond over and he's proud of me for.

I know my parents try. They work day and night to give me the kind of life they never had, but sometimes I wish I could just give all the money, cars, and credit cards back if it would keep them home more.

It's lonely only hearing your own footsteps against the polished marble floors. I'm thankful to the guys for always being around, but it's not the same.

Moving over to the desk chair, I sit and place my guitar on my lap before closing my eyes and strumming a few chords.

The vibrations of the strings is a welcome sensation, and I lose myself to a song I have been creating.

The doorbell ringing pulls me out of my one moment of tranquility, and I groan. Placing the guitar back in the closet, I make sure it's on its stand in the corner before closing the door and leaving my room.

I don't know why I'm hiding the fact I play from people. Especially my best friends and girlfriend, but it's nice to have something just for me for a change. I head down the stairs and over to the door, glancing at the small monitor to show me who is outside.

I instantly open the door when I spot the hazel eyes looking up at the camera. "What are you doing here?" I ask Carrie as I move aside so she can enter. She's wearing one of Chuck's hoodies and is twisting her hands in front of her.

"I've been calling you," I start, and she cuts me off.

"Yeah, my battery died," she mumbles and looks around, sighing. "I haven't been here in years," she says, and I laugh.

"Yeah we always hung out at Meyers' house. Did you want to go there now? Chuck and him are playing video games."

She shakes her head and finally looks at me. She has dark circles under her eyes and she looks pale. "No, can we just stay here? Maybe watch a movie?" she mumbles, and I nod.

I reach over and take her hand, ignoring how she hesitated, and lead her into the family room. It has a huge L-shaped sofa and a big TV. "What did you want to watch?" I ask her as I grab the remote and hand it to her.

Releasing her hand, I move over to the corner where we have a cupboard full of snacks. We barely ever spend time in here, but I know my mom wanted the room to always be stocked just in case.

"Maybe a comedy?" she suggests, and I pause.

"You don't want to watch a scary movie?" Carrie flinches and shakes her head. I move back to her and sit beside her.



“Carrie, what’s going on with you?”

Taking a deep breath, she gives me a smile, but it’s weak. “Nothing, I’m fine. Sorry, just some school stuff.” She leans over and kisses me, and I know I shouldn’t let her distract me with her amazing lips, but I’m only human.

Forgetting the movie, Carrie straddles me and kisses me harder. I groan into her mouth as my dick starts to wake up and she shifts her hips, grinding on top of me. She whimpers and I immediately pull away.

I check that she’s okay. Her eyes are blazing and her cheeks are flushed. “Do you want me to stop?” I ask, and she shakes her head before gripping my hair tight and pulling my lips to hers once more.

“Fuck me,” I moan as she keeps grinding against my cock. If she keeps this up I’m going to come in my jeans. “Carrie,” I say with a sigh, gently pushing her back so I can take a moment to calm down.

“Please, Bates,” she whispers, and I can’t say no to her. Lifting one hand, I wrap it around the back of her neck and continue to kiss her as my other hand reaches down and grabs her lower back, holding her tight to my lap.

Thrusting up, I fuck her through our clothes until she’s moaning and whimpering and exploding on top of me. I can feel her soaking my jeans and I’m close, but I refuse to come in my pants.

I release her, and she drops her face to my neck as I feel her panting breaths against my skin. Reaching down, I unbutton my jeans and pull the zipper down. She wiggles back to allow me to pull my dick out and give it a few tugs.

I grab her hand and place it on my cock, thinking she might want to help me out, but she freaks out and scrambles away from me, breathing hard. “Carrie? Are you okay?” Her hazel eyes are wide and she nods her head.

“Yeah, I just need to go. I have a shift at work. I can’t believe I almost forgot.” Before I can shove my dick back in my jeans and stand up, she’s rushed out of the house and left

my front door wide open, leaving me confused and with a bad case of blue balls.

## Chuck

“Do you boys want a snack before I go get drinks with Mabel?” Ms. Kay asks us as we start a new round of football on the PS3.

“We’re good, Mom. I’ll order us a pizza in an hour or so,” Meyers mutters as he picks his team. We have been playing these games for years, and he always spends twenty minutes searching for a team, just to pick the same one.

“Okay, you boys have fun. No Bates or Carrie tonight?” she asks, noticing we are missing two people from our group. I think she was more excited than us when Carrie started to come around here again.

“Bates is at his house. He might stop in later. I’m not sure about Carrie. She was quiet at lunch today. Maybe she has to work tonight,” I mumble and Meyers grunts, still picking his damn team.

“Okay, love you boys. I’ll be home before bed,” she says, then grabs her purse and leaves.

“I find it funny that your mom has date nights with Carrie’s mom,” I say with a laugh.

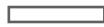
“Jax is always gone, and I doubt my mom will ever remarry after my asshole POS father,” he mutters, then sighs and chooses the Cowboys just like I knew he would.

“How is the divorce going? It’s been over a year since she filed.” I lean back against the couch and get comfortable. We can sometimes spend hours playing this game.

“He’s having another baby and is trying to take my mom to court for spousal support. He blames her for being fired from the bank.” My fists clench as my anger grows. Ms. Kay does not deserve all the stress and tears that man continues to cause her.

“He shouldn’t have been sleeping with one of the bank employees,” I scoff, and Meyers grunts. “Sorry, man,” I mumble, and he shrugs as if it’s not a big deal, but I know it hurts him to see his mom in pain.

“It is what it is. Hopefully, one day I can make millions and just take care of her and her financial burdens,” he says, then starts the game, ending our talk.



“WE NEED TO TALK,” Bates shouts as he slams Meyers’ front door open and walks into the living room. I’m in the middle of an intense play on MADDEN, but one look at his face has me pausing the game and standing up.

“What’s wrong?” Meyers grunts as he tosses his controller to the side of him on the couch. Bates’ hair is a mess and he looks like he was just fucked.

“There is something going on with Carrie. Haven’t you noticed how odd she’s been the last few weeks? She just came over and I thought things were going okay... but she freaked out when my dick came out and took off.”

“That doesn’t sound like her at all,” Meyers murmurs, frowning. “What the hell spooked her?”

“I’ve noticed she hasn’t been eating much at lunch. Do you think maybe she’s just not feeling well?” I ask and look over at Meyers, but he’s staring at the wall in thought. Bates takes the seat in between us.

“Maybe we came on too strong? I mean we had sex on her birthday and she’s never run from my dick before,” Bates grumbles and adjusts himself. “My balls ache so bad,” he groans, and Meyers hits him on the back of his head.

“Seriously? I could care less about your bruised balls right now, Bates. I’m worried about our girl,” he growls.

“Did we come on too strong?” I ask before continuing when they give me confused looks. “No, listen, when she came back, we pounced on her. Maybe we need to slow down.

We can be a little too much at times. I don't want to overwhelm her."

Bates grumbles and rubs the back of his head while Meyers looks over at the door like he's about to storm out and chase after Carrie.

"Yeah, I think you're right. We will just pull back and wait for her to come to us, but that doesn't mean I'm not going to still text her and sit with her at lunch," Meyers says and we all agree.

Sorry baby, I promise to make it right. Whatever you need is yours. I just hope we don't lose you again.

# Carrie

## *Three Months Later*

It's official, and though I have been in denial for months, I can no longer fight it. I'm pregnant, and I don't know who the baby daddy is. How the fuck did my life get so complicated and out of control? Can I ever just catch a break?

I'm not sleeping, can't stomach food at the moment, and I have been a complete and total bitch to all the people I love. I know it's just my hormones, but I feel bad. The guilt and shame of what I did that night haunts me.

I don't know what's real and what's just a nightmare. Ian has always been so sweet to me, and even though I can't remember much of that night, I don't think he's capable of hurting me. Right?

No, I remember stabbing him! Everything is so mixed up, but I remember the feeling of the blade in my hand. There was blood on my clothes. Did I stab an innocent man?

Maybe I'm just an evil and disgusting person who cheated on the men that love her. Or did Ian rape me? I want to storm up to him and confront him, but he's been smiling at me and acting like nothing happened. But anytime he walks by, my skin crawls.

I woke up the next morning confused, hungover, and my purse was sitting on the front step.

I leave the bathroom and sit on my bed, staring at the positive test in my hand. I know I need to talk to someone, but what do I say? *"I think that I only slept with my guys, but I might have cheated on them an hour later, so I don't know who my baby daddy is."*

Someone needs to put me on Jerry Springer or lock me up in a mental institution. I am losing my fucking mind.

I drop the test on the mattress beside me and place my head between my knees. My chest is tight and it hurts to breathe. What am I going to do?

A knock on the door has me wiping my eyes and quickly hiding the evidence. “Hey, sweetheart, I’m going to the store. Do you want anything?” Kiernan asks me through the wood and I bite my lip to hold in my sob.

Taking a breath, I clear my throat, then croak, “No, I’m still not feeling great. I’m just going to nap.”

“Okay, I have my phone if you change your mind,” he says, then I listen for his footsteps to leave.

I know he’s worried about me. Everyone is, but I don’t know what to do or say, and when I do talk to someone, I just snap at them.

It was sweet that they wanted to take me on a trip. I know Kiernan was excited about returning to Italy, but I just can’t.

I don’t deserve it.

Going on that trip with my mom was a disaster, and I had to make up some bullshit excuses about the guys to get her off my back.

I just need space.

I know my guys are scared they’re losing me, and if I’m honest with myself, they are.

I’m losing myself to the guilt and wariness and uncertainties. I lay down on my bed, curl up into a ball, and let myself grieve for the person I used to be. I haven’t had an easy life, but things were getting better.

I thought maybe I was finally having my happily ever after, but that’s stupid. I was just a foolish girl. I’m never going to catch a break, and now I not only need to survive, but I have to find a way to take care of the little one inside of me.

“I’m sorry,” I whisper, looking down at my stomach. “I wish I was so much stronger. I will promise that while I may stumble, I want to be a good mommy to you.”

Now I just need to figure out if I should tell the guys and take that chance, or just run and hide. They don’t need unnecessary drama. They are finally free from the girls and living the life they should have always had.



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## Chapter 18

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## Meyers

Things have gone from bad to worse. Bates was right to worry. Something is really going on with our girl. Giving her space didn't help. It's made her pull away more. She's withdrawn and I hardly see her anymore. I stopped over at her house and Kiernan said she was sick, but that was three weeks ago.

If we did something to upset her, she needs to just tell us. Whatever it is, we will fix it. Bates and Chuck look just as glum as I do lately. Carrie is our sun, and without her all we have is gray skies.

I miss her. I miss her laughs in the kitchen as she bakes with my mom. I miss her running her fingers through my hair as I sit on the floor and play video games. I miss the smell of her shampoo on my pillow after a super hot makeout session.

The sex was incredible and I would love to do it again, but if that is what has her so freaked out, I would go buy one of those male chastity belts and wear it with honor. She's more to me— to us— than sex.

I leave the locker room with my head down, not looking where I'm going. I'm a mess and I know I'm starting to piss off Coach and my team.

Summer was a total bust. Chuck, Bates, and I wanted to surprise Carrie and take her back to Italy.

She said it was one of the best trips of her life, and we thought maybe it would cheer her up.

Even Kiernan was on board to come with us, but Carrie said no. She left with her mom to go see some schools far away from here.

I hope she doesn't think she's running away again, because fuck school, football, everything. Me and the guys will follow this time, and there is nothing anyone can do to stop us.

I bump into someone and glance up, “Sorry, man, I wasn’t looking,” I grunt, and Kyle Sanders gives me a smile.

“I was saying your name but you seemed in a daze. Everything okay?” he asks, and I sigh.

“Yeah, yeah, just wiped from practice. This year is going to be rough.”

“I hear that, but hopefully we get some scouts at our games and find a full ride to some Division One school. That’d be the dream,” he says with such glee and hope and I find myself envious of him.

He doesn’t have any shit weighing on him. His parents are still happily married and he’s dating Braylee, one of the nice girls in our grade.

Giving him a nod, I raise my fist for him to bump, then leave.

Walking out to the parking lot, I’m surprised to see Jax’s truck. I immediately think that Carrie is here and borrowed her dad’s vehicle, but then I remember her refusal to get her learner’s permit.

She said she liked being a passenger seat princess.

I smile at the memory and shake my head. That was only a few months ago. She was so happy. We spent almost every day together. Bates, Chuck, and I practically moved into her home.

She made the nightmares disappear, and now it’s like she’s a ghost. Ignoring my calls and texts, never home when I stop by. I don’t even know if she’s planning to graduate anymore.

She’s different now and I don’t know what to do to help her.

I fear we’re losing her.

“Meyers,” Jax shouts, pulling me from my thoughts. Right, I forgot his truck was here.

“You okay, kid?” he asks and I feel tears well. Jax may not be around often, but he’s become like a father figure to me.

“No, everything is fucked up,” I say with a snuffle, then look over to him.

He’s leaning on the side of his truck and grunts, “Get in.”

I don’t bother arguing and climb into the passenger side as he walks around to the driver’s side.

He starts the engine, and we don’t speak until stopping at the coffee place Carrie loves. He parks, but leaves the truck on.

“Okay, give it to me straight. You look on the verge of having a meltdown and Carrie won’t answer her mother’s or my phone calls and texts. Did you guys fight? Break up? Were you even dating?”

I laugh at that and shake my head. “It’s not just you she’s avoiding. The guys and I haven’t seen her in two weeks. Kiernan said she was sick, but he was acting strange.”

Jax drums his fingers on the steering wheel as he thinks. “Carrie told her mother while they were in Tennessee looking at schools that she loved you guys, but was worried that someday you may make her choose.”

My jaw drops and I’m immediately shaking my head. “No, never. We love Carrie equally. We always have. I know it’s not conventional, Sir, but we would never make her choose.”

Jax grumbles before sighing. “I do not want to get involved in my only child’s love life. She’s still my baby girl, Meyers, but I will swing by her place and check on her. I have an assignment coming up. It’s a big one, so I planned to say goodbye anyway.”

He turns the truck off and climbs out, slamming his door. I follow his lead and head to the coffee shop.

Grabbing my phone, I text the group chat I have with just the guys.

Me: Talked to Jax. He said Carrie is afraid she will have to choose. If that’s really the issue then we need to go talk to our girl.

Bates: I tried this morning. Kiernan said she's still sick and doesn't want us to catch it. Let's try tomorrow? I don't want to piss her off.

Chuck: Tomorrow is the last fucking day. I miss our girl. I'm over this bullshit.

I send a thumbs up, agreeing, then walk over to the counter and order a drink. Jax is on his phone, talking quietly to someone, but for the first time in months I have hope that maybe we can fix things and it'll get better.

THIS CHAPTER HAS TRIGGERING CONTENT. *If miscarriage or suicide will affect you, please skip this. Your mental health is more important.*

## Carrie

I'm leaving the Light Project, walking home and trying not to jump at every noise. A twig breaking beside me has me running down the street.

It's still daylight, but I'm on edge. I think I've made a decision, and after talking to Kiernan and confessing everything that's been going on, I think we have a plan.

When I reach my house, there is a bag sitting on the bottom step with a note. I peek inside and smile for the first time in a while.

Cheese Danish and coffee. I take them inside and place them on the counter for later. I haven't had much appetite, and according to the internet that's normal for the next nineteen weeks.

Kiernan shouts from his room that we need to talk, and I groan.

I'm done talking. I know he's pissed at me for hiding things for so long, but I needed time to process.

I still don't know what happened that night and I'm not sure I ever will, but it's time to move past that.

"Bitch! You went to get coffee and forgot me?" Kier whines as he walks into the kitchen.

"No, someone left it for me," I say, then read the note and smile. Tears fill my eyes and I curse these damn hormones. "Meyers thought it would make me feel better, and he and the guys want to talk to me," I whisper and wipe my eyes.

Strong arms wrap around me and hold me tight.

"Everything is going to be okay, Carrie. Those guys love and adore you. No matter what happened the night of your birthday, they will forgive you and then you all will get married and have more little demons to chase after."

I snort and laugh as he rubs my belly. He likes to call the baby a little demon, and I find it accurate.

“I doubt that. But maybe they will help me through all this. I think I might want to talk to Dr. Kelly, too,” I mumble and he nods, then gives me a quick kiss on the head and pulls out his phone.

“I will make an appointment as soon as possible. I’m proud of you, sweetheart,” he says before leaving the room.

Sighing, I open the bag and pull out the danish. “Are you going to let mommy eat this, peanut?” I mumble then pick at it. I know I should text Meyers and thank him, but I don’t want to be on the phone for hours.

I’m exhausted and I’ve found that napping during the day doesn’t give me nightmares. Moving over to the couch, I drop my pastry on the side table and lay down. I just need a short rest, then I’ll shower and maybe...



“CARRIE, WAKE UP,” Kiernan croaks, shaking me. I open my eyes to my best friend in tears, holding his phone.

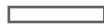
“Kiernan? What’s wrong? What happened?” I sit up and look around. It’s dark now and my mom is here, crying too. I wrap the blanket tighter to me, thankful I’m wearing one of Chuck’s hoodies and that it hides my small baby bump.

I haven’t told anyone except Kiernan and the doctor he made me go see. That was four towns over. I wanted the guys to know before announcing it to other people. “Mom, what’s wrong?” I whisper, and she shuffles closer to me before collapsing onto her knees and dropping her head in my lap.

“Your father,” she croaks. Her shoulders are shaking so hard that I can hardly hear the words. “Your father had a new job. There was a mole in the operation and he got shot.” She looks up at me. “They don’t think he’s going to make it. The ambulance is on its way to the hospital, but I can’t go alone, Carrie.”

Tears run down my face and I feel sick. Covering my mouth, I shove my mom away and rush to the bathroom almost missing the toilet. Kiernan follows me and rubs my back while I cry and vomit.

When my stomach settles, I lay on the tile and let the emotions wash over me. I can't lose my dad. He may have never been home, but he's still one of my lifelines. I need him.



WE RETURN from the hospital and I'm done. I leave Kiernan outside to pay the Uber and head straight to my closet, pulling out my suitcases. I need to get away from here. I don't want to be here anymore.

"Carrie, what are you doing? You need to rest and eat something," Kier mumbles as he enters my room. I ignore him and start dumping the clothes that were folded neatly in my drawers into the bags.

"Where are you going? You are not leaving me." Kiernan grabs my arm gently and stops me. I avoid his eyes, and he sighs. "You are not alone. You will always have me," he mutters, and I break.

I collapse into his arms. He holds me up and whispers assurances to me, but I can't hear them right now. I'm too weak. "I need to leave, Kier," I mumble, and he sighs.

"I'm coming with you, Carrie. Just let me grab some things." He leaves me and I sit on the bed. There is a photo of the guys and me when we were younger on the bedside table and I grab it, throwing it into my bag.

My phone is buzzing and blowing up with calls and texts, but I ignore them. I know everyone has probably heard by now what happened to my dad, but I don't have the mental energy to face it.

I just need to run. I grab my phone from the hoodie pocket with every intention of turning it off, but a message from my dad stops me.



Dad: Hey baby girl. I miss you and I want to see you. I have to leave town, but after this things should calm down and I will be around more. I was planning to swing by, but I don't have time. I love you, Carrie.

My phone drops to the floor and I follow it on my hands and knees. I can't breathe. He texted me when I was taking a stupid nap. I could have called him and maybe heard his voice one last time, but I was asleep.

Kiernan helps me stand and I don't even know how long I was on the floor curled into a ball, crying. He grabs my bag and leads me numbly over to his car. I don't know what we're doing or where we are going, but when I see the sign saying thank you for visiting, I take my first full breath.



FOR THE PAST two weeks I have laid in bed and cried. I hate closing my eyes because my nightmares are increasing. I find myself staring at the wall and numb inside. Kiernan contacted Francis and we met her at an airfield in New Mexico, then she flew us to Pittsburgh.

She has a vacation home here and thought it would be a good place for me to just cope with everything that has happened this year. I told her about the guys, baby, and Ian. She said she has plans for that little dicked prick and I almost cracked a smile.

I feel broken and I worry that I won't be able to do this. I can feel the baby moving, and I'm constantly talking to them. The only self care I'm able to do is take my prenatal vitamins and force down some food every few hours. It's so bad that I have to set an alarm so I'll do it.

I know this isn't healthy, but I don't know what else to do. I refused to start going to a new school, so I'm distracting myself with online school. Maybe if I'm able to survive through the next few months I'll be able to plan our future.

Kiernan is out of town when I start to have what feels like piercing period cramps. I was laying down watching a movie, and now I'm curled up in a ball.

"Francis?" I call out, unsure if she's home tonight. It's about eleven at night, and I had said I wanted a quiet night in. "Ouch, little one. What is going on today?"

Sitting up, I feel liquid start to trickle down my leg, and I freeze. "No... Why... Ow," I whimper while standing.

Wrapping my arms around my stomach, I hobble into the bathroom. I'm so scared to look and see how badly I'm bleeding. Pulling down my sleep pants, I gasp as I look down.

"No," I whisper. It looks as if I started a really intense period, but that's impossible. Feeling numb, I take off my clothes while trying to pull breath into my lungs. I can't breathe.

I need a plan. A shower. Yeah, that sounds good. Then I need to Google whatever the fuck is happening. Turning on the water, I step inside, letting the warm stream flow over me.

Pouring some body wash into my hand, I try not to look at the tile floor as the water washes me off. I can't help it though as I soap my body and gag. There's so much blood.

"Oh, my God," I rasp. I don't wash my hair, as I don't have the patience and it's up in a messy bun. I need to get clean and get to my phone to figure out if I need to go to the emergency room.

Turning off the shower, I dry myself and get dressed. I also put a pad on just in case there's more. There's a pool of dread in my stomach and I feel nauseated. Grabbing my phone, I search "**bleeding during pregnancy**".

My heart is pounding and I can hear a roaring in my ears as I scroll through the possible outcomes. "Miscarriage" is a word that makes me sob. I may not know who the father is, but I do love my baby.

"I haven't gotten to meet you," I cry, bending over as another cramp hits. "I can't do anything right!"

Nothing matters. I've been holding onto this life for months because of this tiny, little life growing inside me, and if I'm losing it, then nothing matters anymore. I need to walk. I need to get the fuck out of this house.

Shoving my feet into canvas shoes, I cram my phone into the pocket of my sweatshirt. It's Chuck's, and not one I remember packing when I left. I wish it still smelled like him. I miss him, I'm just not any good for them. I literally breed chaos and sadness. I can't even keep my baby inside of me. I don't deserve them.

It's better this way.

It's cool enough to need pants, but I don't bother. This sweatshirt hits my knees. Walking out of the house, I barely remember to lock it before I start walking aimlessly.

The words bouncing in my head make me flinch.

*Worthless.*

*Terrible mother.*

*I may as well die.*

*What else do I have to live for?*

I RECOGNIZE the signs of crisis and pull out my phone to call a number I know well. Forcing myself to take a breath, I call the Light Project's hotline number.

*"Hello, this is the Light Project. Are you in crisis?"* a man with a deep voice asks kindly. His voice is smooth, and I drop my head back as I walk aimlessly.

"Yes," I rasp. "I don't know what I'm doing. I feel so hopeless."

*"Can you tell me what's going on? Let's start with your name and go from there. It may not be as bad as you think,"* he says.

"I guarantee it's worse," I tell him, my voice cracking. "My name is Carrie, and my life is a shit show. There's only

one thing that's holding me together, and I'm pretty sure I'm losing it."

*"Deep breaths for me, Carrie, okay? What are you losing?"*

"My baby!" I scream, tears streaming down my face. My feet keep walking, headed toward a destination my brain hasn't shared with me yet. "They were moving yesterday, and now I'm bleeding. I'm a burden to everyone. I know it. I don't deserve to be here if my baby isn't."

Seeing a bridge to my right that's empty at this time of night, I head toward it. During rush hour, everyone is crossing it to get to work, but it's dark and silent with the odd pair of headlights crossing over now.

I'm nothing. No one will stop if they see me there.

*"Baby,"* the guy on the line grunts softly. *"Wait, are you sure you're losing the baby? Why don't you go to the hospital? Where are you?"*

"The bridge is really pretty today." I sniffle, walking down the road as I look at the twinkling lights of people's houses. I wonder if they're happy? It would be nice to be happy again...

I guess I'm quiet for too long as I lean over the side of the barrier, because the man on the other side of the phone clears his throat. I wonder how hard it would be to climb? It doesn't look that high, right?

I want a closer look.

*"Carrie, are you with me?"* he asks. There's something kind of familiar about his voice...

"Yeah?" I ask dreamily, raising my leg to climb the barrier. "The lights are pretty here. I want to see if I can climb the barrier."

*"No, no. The barrier is there for a reason, Carrie. Why don't you talk to me for a little bit?"*

I'm giggling, the sound is unhinged and a little crazy. "I want to see how far the water is. I wonder if it'll hurt to jump."

I don't think you can help me, nice man. I don't deserve it," I mutter.

*"Wait, wait, wait! Carrie... Carebear... Baby. It's Chuck. Please take a second. We can figure this out. No matter what happens with this baby, we love you. This baby is ours. We'll love you both. If you're losing it, we can mourn together. Please? Where are you? Can you tell me?!"*

"Chuck? Great, I'm delusional and short. That's just fucking perfect," I growl, struggling to get over the damn barrier. My legs need to grow just a little bit.

*"You're not delusional, just short. Come on, Carrie,"* Chuck begs.

"Argh!" I shriek as I finally get my ass over the barrier. Carefully, I stand between the barrier and the railing as the wind whips through my hair. It tugs strands out of my messy bun, and they play in the wind.

*"Carrie,"* Chuck barks.

"I got over the barrier," I tell him, leaning over the rail. "It's not as simple as you think. I don't know if this baby is yours. I didn't want it. I don't care what he says."

*"Baby, who hurt you?"* he asks. *"I'll kill him. Please. I'll do anything you want me to."*

"You're calling the police, aren't you?" I murmur, knowing I've been on the phone for too long. The sounds of a siren begin to scream through the night, and I swallow thickly. I can't see through my tears.

Everything is just so fucked up now.

*"Carrie, please. I can't get to you. I need to know you'll be alive for me to make this better,"* Chuck begs. *"Please. Be brave for a little longer."*

"I'm done being brave," I whisper, my voice breaking. "I can't anymore. I'm sorry. It's too hard."

Chuck screams at me to wait as I disconnect the call. Pulling up a group chat with the boys, I send them a simple goodbye.

Me: I love you. Till we meet again. Maybe in another life things would have been different.

I place my hand over my stomach and cry. “I’m so sorry, baby, but I’ll see you soon.”

The water calls to me. It looks so peaceful and reminds me of the lake back home. Of better days. Maybe it can wash away my worries and take this pain from me...

**PART TWO**



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## Chapter 19

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# Chuck

## Three years later

I leave my Intro to Economics class and walk over to the fraternity house. It's Halloween weekend and the brothers want to throw a huge party. I'm not one for parties, but I could use a break. This week is always one of the hardest for me and the guys.

Our best friend loved Halloween, and the grief of losing her hits harder when the campus is full of decorations and people planning events. She would have loved attending Angelica College. The people here don't give a shit about who we are.

Plus the bitches from Reutman High aren't around. Nicky still tries to message me on social media every now and then, but no matter how many times I block her, she always makes a new profile.

I don't understand her obsession. It's been years since we spoke.

"Hey, Chuck, wait up," Bates shouts as he runs across the courtyard. He has a duffle bag hanging over his shoulder and looks pissed, which isn't a surprise these days. He's always mad about something or drunk on his bedroom floor.

"What's up?" I grunt and keep moving. I just want to get home and away from all these people.

"Did you hear from Meyers? Is he coming to the party this weekend?" I shrug and pull out my phone, texting him.

"He may have to work. You know money is tight for him," I mutter, and wait for a reply.

Meyers never left Reutman. After Carrie chose to leave us, he had a mental break and dropped out of football. His dad is still in court with his mom, and he decided to stay home and work to help her out.

We hardly see him anymore, and things have never been the same since the night of Carrie's seventeenth birthday.

I tried to save her and the baby, but I was too late and unprepared.

The guilt eats at me, and I know Bates and Meyers blame me for letting her go. It didn't matter that we were miles apart and I contacted the police station about a jumper.

We were all too late. We let her down.

"I wish he would just let me help him. Ms. Kay is like a mother to me. I would give her my whole inheritance if she would just accept it," Bates grumbles, and I sigh.

Bates lost his mom in a car accident right before our high school graduation. His dad decided to leave the house and everything in it to Bates, then left Texas, retired, and moved to California for a fresh start.

His mom left him a lot of money in her will, but he's never touched it.

"He will never accept it. He's too proud," I grunt and look at my phone as it dings in my hand. "He will be here."

When we reach the house, I almost want to turn around and leave again. All the brothers are standing outside and our president, Pike—yeah that's his real name—is giving everyone an assignment.

"Oh, Chuck, Bates, perfect timing. You guys are in charge of the drinks. Here is a list and some cash." He hands me some stuff and I grunt in affirmation.

"We can take my car," Bates mutters, and I nod.

I don't speak much these days and that's fine with me. You don't need to carry a conversation when you're out on the field tackling someone, or knocking someone out cold during the Underground fights.

Everyone thinks I'm just a dumb jock, and I'm okay with that.

"Let me drop this off in my room and we can go get it over with." I leave him outside to talk with some of the guys and walk inside.

My room is on the bottom floor, so it doesn't take me long to throw my shit on my bed and leave.

Bates is waiting for me, and I follow him to the student parking lot. A few people acknowledge him as we walk and one of his flings stops him before we reach his car.

"Hey, baby, I haven't seen you in a few weeks. I've missed you," she coos, reaching for his arm.

Laura is a nice girl, but she will never get what she wants from Bates. He's turned into a manwhore. Doesn't matter if you're a guy or girl, he refuses commitment.

"Yeah, been busy," he grunts. "You going to the party tomorrow?"

She nods and he shoots her a wink. "You know where my room is." She giggles as we leave her and keep walking.

"Don't give me that look," he grumbles at me, and I cross my arms. "Just because you choose to be celibate doesn't mean I have to."

"I didn't say anything," I mutter, and he rolls his eyes, unlocking the car with his keyfob.

"You never do, but it's been three years, Chuck. Carrie is gone. It's time to move on."

I know he's right, but it doesn't make things any easier. He wasn't there on the phone. He couldn't hear how broken and despondent she was. He doesn't have nightmares and wish he had followed her off that bridge that night.

My chest aches at the memory and I rub it as he drives us to the local liquor store. We don't talk, and he blasts some music to hide the silence.



"IT'S SO good to see you, Chuck," Meyers says as he pulls me into a tight hug. He's changed since I last saw him, now sporting an eyebrow piercing and lip ring.

He's always been hot, and I've been attracted to him for years, but his new look has my dick hardening, and I curse my body for betraying Carrie.

"Yeah, glad you could come," I grunt, then move away from him so Bates can hug him.

He looks around campus and whistles. "Damn, I forgot how big this place is," he mutters, and Bates laughs.

"After a while it feels small. Just overcrowded at times. At least there aren't any psycho bitches around."

I actually laugh at that, and Meyers winces. "Laurel has been harassing me at work the last few nights. She comes into the bar and sits for hours. She's affecting my fucking tips. Anytime a woman tries to order from me she glares at them and makes them fucking uncomfortable. I don't get it. I'm not even playing football anymore," he groans and runs his hand over his face.

He looks tired. "Well, she's not here this weekend. Let's have some fun and maybe get you laid. Chuck wants to stay a monk, but I know I could find you someone to warm your bed."

He winks at Meyers, and my eyes widen.

He's not suggesting... I notice Meyers' cheeks blush, and I'll admit I'm kinda pissed right now.

"We'll see, man. How about a drink first?" Meyers replies, and I take a deep breath.

As we walk back to the house, Bates and Meyers gossip like teenage girls, and I roll my eyes at their flirting.

How long has this shit been going on?

The party is in full swing when we arrive, and I grab Meyers' arm, pulling him toward my room, and open the door.

We lost Bates in the crowd, but I'm not upset.

"You can stay with me," I grunt, and he drops his bag on my bed, glancing at the photo I keep next to the bed.

"Thanks. How are you? I feel like we never talk anymore. I've missed you," he says, and I find myself calming down.

"Same old shit. School, football, fights. Rinse and repeat," I mutter, and he sighs.

"Yeah, I never thought we'd be apart, though," he laughs, but it's filled with sadness. "I stopped by the cemetery before coming. I left some flowers on her grave. I know she's not there, but sometimes I'll stop by after work and talk to her. It's been three years, but it still feels like yesterday."

He covers his mouth with his hand and coughs, but I know it's to hold back a sob.

I sit on my bed and drop my head into my hands, letting the sadness overcome me for a moment.

"She would have hated us being so sad. Even when we were complete dickheads, she still wanted us to be happy," I grumble, and Meyers laughs.

"Fuck, okay. None of that. We need to go out there, get drunk, maybe laid, and start living again."

And that's exactly what we do.

## Bates

Seeing Meyers again is fucking with my head. I mean, I love the guy, don't get me wrong, but having him here on campus with Chuck and me? It's like time hasn't passed, bringing up all the pain and guilt I've been trying to move on from.

I throw back my fifth shot and groan as the alcohol warms my stomach. Meyers winces, and I laugh, smacking him hard on the back as he coughs.

"You work in a damn bar and still can't hide how much you hate vodka." He shakes his head and bites his bottom lip.

"Fuck, no. I drink Jack or Bacardi. But honestly, I don't drink much. I save all my tips for my mom."

I wish he would just let me fucking help them. I have millions in the bank that I refuse to touch.

Maybe I just need to donate it anonymously or something. But those are thoughts for another day.

Right now, I want to drink and forget my shitty life. I grab a bottle of beer and head toward the back yard. People are out here dancing or swimming. I used to love swimming at the lake by our houses back home, but since Carrie, we never returned.

"I didn't mean to piss you off, Bates. I know you want to help us, but I don't ever want to be that type of person. Mom and I are figuring things out. Someone offered us a lot of money to buy the house. I think my mom is ready to sell."

My heart breaks at the thought of the house I basically grew up in being gone. It's bad enough Mabel sold their house and left Texas.

"Would you really want to sell it though?" I ask, and he shrugs.

“No, but we can’t keep up with the mortgage since my mom lost her teaching position.” Yeah, that was a load of fucking bullshit.

Some kid’s parents came forward and said that Ms. Kay was yelling and verbally abusing her students. They investigated her, and we found out that the ‘parent’ was a good friend of her ex-husband.

She decided to retire early to save her reputation, but that’s like gossip gold in a small town. Now she’s a cashier at the local Walmart.

Chuck walks over to us and gives me a weird look. He’s almost become clingy toward Meyers for some reason. I clink my bottle against his and point toward the house.

“Have to piss, I’ll be back.”

I leave them to talk about whatever and go toward my room. There is a hot chick leaning against the wall. She looks familiar, but I can’t place her.

Long black hair, tattoos, and piercing gray eyes. She has some facepaint on to look like a skeleton, and she gives me a chilling smile.

“Rooms are off limits,” I grunt, and she laughs.

“Sorry, but that bathroom line was just crazy. Maybe I can use yours. I’ll be super fast, or maybe you’ll want me to stay,” she says softly and moves closer to me.

Fuck, she’s like some kind of spooky seductress and my cock is fully on board.

Reaching into my pocket, I grab my keys and unlock my door. I turn the knob and swing it open, letting her pass me before slamming it and grabbing her wrist.

I spin her around and press her back against the wall.

She looks up at me with a smirk, and once again I can’t get over how much she reminds me of someone.

“I haven’t seen you before, have I?” I ask, fishing for a reason as to why she looks familiar.

“No, I don’t think so. I’m here visiting some friends,” she says with a shrug. Her arms wrap around my neck, and her hands begin playing in my hair. I shudder. I can’t stand anyone doing this since Carrie.

Grabbing her wrists, I gently lift them over her head as I drag my nose up her throat and suck on her pulse. The girl moans, her gorgeous body writhing under me. I suddenly have to have her.

“What’s your name, beautiful? I want to know who I’m going to make see God tonight,” I rasp. Damn, okay, that was cheesy.

“I’m Blakely.” she smirks. “Does that really work on girls?”

“I don’t know, you’ll have to tell me,” I growl, my hands moving to her hips as I press my erection against her. Turning, I lift and launch her onto my bed, enjoying her inhaled breath of surprise as she sails through the air.

I think about Carrie’s squeals when I would throw her through the air and force myself to push the thought away. I fucking miss her. It’s why I chase tail and fuck someone new at every party.

For a few minutes while I’m lost in someone, I manage to forget. At least... until the ecstasy of my release is spent and I just feel empty again.

I wish Carrie and our baby hadn’t died. No matter what she told Chuck, I would have accepted and loved that baby as our own. Fuck, I need to stop thinking about her before I break down and cry in front of this girl.

Grabbing the back of my shirt, I pull it off as I stalk toward her.

“I’ll be sure to give a full report,” she sasses, but sounds breathless as her eyes drink in my body.

“See something you like?” I tease her, crawling onto the bed. I’m still wearing most of my clothes, but that doesn’t matter. I need to make her scream my name, bury my cock



into her wet pussy. Chase away all the damn demons for just a little while. It never works for long.

“Less talking, more of these things you keep promising,” she snarls, tossing her black hair over her shoulder. It shines even in this shitty light. The facepaint only enhances her beauty, even if it is nightmarish.

“I always,” I tell her, grabbing her thighs and pulling her forward so that her back hits the pillows behind her, “deliver on my promises of orgasms.” I wish I could say that I did on all promises, but I don’t feel like lying to the gorgeous, dangerous looking girl lying beneath me.

Pushing the black dress up her creamy thighs, I smirk as I see her thong-clad pussy has a wet spot already. Fuck, that’s sexy.

“So beautiful,” I grunt, kissing up her thighs. Blakely opens her mouth, but I tug her panties to the side, dragging my tongue up her core. Her gasp is more than perfect.

Cupping her ass, I turn with her so that she’s now upright and sitting on my face. At first Blakely freezes, but I wrap my arms around her waist and pull her firmly to my mouth as I lick and suck on her clit.

“Oh... Oh, fuck. Yes, yes, oh,” she pants, her hips rocking as I push my tongue into her channel to tongue fuck her. Belatedly, I realize that I never told her my name. Oh, well.

“Come for me,” I demand, my words garbled by her sweet pussy. She tastes fucking incredible.

Fingers searching, she tugs on my hair as she rides my face, making my dick twitch. Sex gets monotonous when you have a revolving door of women, so I’ve found I like pain during the act.

“I... Yes. Oh, God,” Blakely squeals as she starts to come when I scrape my teeth along her clit. Spanking her ass, I lap at her release. Fucking delicious.

Lifting her over my head easily so she’s kneeling in front of me as she struggles to catch her breath, I sit to pull a

condom out of my jeans pocket. I'll never go without one. Carrie was on birth control and she still got pregnant.

Birth control fails.

Moving to face her back, I unbutton my pants, releasing my cock. I don't need to get fully undressed for this, and neither does she. I do want to watch her tits bounce as I fuck her, though.

Putting my hand on her back, I push her face down onto the bed. "I want to admire my handiwork before I sink my cock into that sweet pussy. Show me," I command, ripping open the packaging of the condom with my teeth.

"So bossy," she mutters, her ass rising for me as she spreads her knees for better balance. Fuck yes, I'm dominant and know what I like. I like to admire my work.

Her pink, wet pussy is puffy from release and me sucking on the sensitive flesh. The thong looks a bit uncomfortable, so I relieve her of it with a smirk. Tossing it to the side, I stare at her as I stroke my cock. I may actually remember her name after this.

Possibly.

Removing the rubber, I ease it down my cock, hissing at the tightness. My dick is begging for me to get on with it already, the throb of my erection almost painful.

Moving closer to her on my knees, I rub my cock along her core, purposely hitting her clit over and over. Moaning, her back bows in need, her fingers knotting in my blankets.

"Feeling needy yet, baby?" I ask, wanting to hear her beg.

"Please, fuck me," she moans, reaching back to dig her fingers into my jean-clad thighs. My legs are heavily muscled so she can't hurt me, but it does urge me to palm her ass as I line my dick up with her tight hole and push my way in.

"You're so tight," I praise as her pussy pulls me in. "Fuck, your pussy is a damn masterpiece. Take it all, baby."

Thrusting hard, my eyes roll in pleasure as my dick drags along her walls. Always one to make sure the girl I'm with

comes more than I do, I lean over her, my hand reaching underneath her to rub her clit.

“Argh,” she whimpers, her pussy clenching around me as I insistently rub her bundle of nerves.

“Relax, you have a few more orgasms for me and I want them all. Come on, give me one and then I’ll let you bounce on my cock,” I tell her.

My hand tightly holds her hip as I fuck her, the sound of skin slapping filling the room as Blakely gasps at my insistent ministrations.

“I don’t know if—” Her words are cut off as I pinch her clit hard as I lose my patience. I always get what I want. What other men haven’t done in the past for this girl isn’t my problem. I have a three orgasm rule when I fuck.

Her wordless scream makes my lip curl as I fuck her through her release.

“I get the feeling you’re used to being a brat, teasing men until they fall at your feet,” I tell her, smacking her ass hard just so I can enjoy watching it bounce. She’s got a great ass.

Wrapping my arm around her chest, I pull her up so that she’s sitting on my lap. We both gasp at the change in position. I’m deeper inside of her, pushing against her cervix. I wonder how much she enjoys pain...

Pulling down the top of her dress, I trap her arms in the sleeves before shoving down the cups of her bra. Squeezing her tits, I grunt as Blakely shifts her hips, her back bowing to beg for me.

“You feel so damn good,” I murmur, kissing her neck as I draw my thumb and index finger across her skin as I pull her nipple. Her needy cry and pussy clamping around my dick makes me grunt, but I refuse to lose control. I need her mewling, begging for my dick before I’ll give in.

I won’t accept anything else. I tug and pinch, my head dropping back as she writhes. My cock is soaked in her arousal, her chest heaving makes me want to punish this girl more.

“Please, I need you to move. How am I so close to coming just with you playing with my breasts?” she asks in outrage.

“Baby girl, I think someone hasn’t been taking care of you,” I chuckle. “I take fucking very seriously. It’s one of my favorite things to do. I plan to make you lose consciousness. I’m going to ruin your goddamn pussy for anyone else.”

I’m a ‘fuck them and leave them’ kind of asshole. I never get attached. Tell me why I want to make her pussy remember me, to break her irreparably?

“I need you to fuck me!” Blakely screams in frustration, reaching back to pull hard on my hair.

“That’s it,” I grunt, finally letting my hips move to fuck up into her. She’s anchoring herself to me, which means I don’t have to release my hold on her glorious tits. They almost overflow my large hands, and they’re perfect.

Torturing both of us as I fuck her, there’s the added benefit of a mirror on my bedroom wall. Blakely’s face is flushed even through the makeup, her nipples rosy and pebbled. Her head is thrown back as she rides my dick as if it was made for her.

I don’t know who this stranger is, but I definitely needed the distraction.

Her walls are fluttering around my cock, slowly strangling it, and my eyesight starts to darken. I promised her she’d pass out, I can’t make myself a liar.

Adjusting my hands, I wrap one around her neck and move the other between her creamy thighs. My cock is stuffing her pussy so well, and I know she’ll be feeling me tomorrow too. There’s an absurd feeling of satisfaction, knowing my existence will be remembered every time she moves.

“I’m so close,” she rasps, and I realize that won’t do at all.

“You come when I tell you to,” I snarl, tightening my hand around her neck, robbing her of breath. For good measure, I slap her pussy hard with my palm, cursing as she tightens around me. “That’s it, baby. You’re not in control. I am.

Everything revolves around me and when I allow you to have it. Take my cock like a good girl now.”

Her wheezing breaths make me even harder as I fuck her, her eyes rolling in the mirror. Goddamn, this might be a mistake, because I don't do repeats unless the girl knows it's just about sex. Even then, they tend to get clingy, like Laura.

My balls start to tighten, my back tingling, warning me I won't be able to hold back for long.

“Your pussy is taking me so good, such a beautiful place for my dick to destroy. Come for me. Cream all over my cock,” I growl, my thumb rubbing her clit insistently.

She pants so beautifully for my cock as I fuck her. Blakely helps me forget the girl I lost. Shuddering, she squirts all over my dick, and I pull her head back, kissing her pouty skeletal lips. Her tongue tangles with mine, teeth gnashing as I continue to steal her breath as I groan, my cock jerking as I begin to come.

Ropes of cum fill the condom, and for the first time in years, I wish I had broken my own rule. Releasing her throat, I grin ferally, gently lifting her as I grab the base of the condom.

“Thank you,” I tell her, feeling as if I just cheapened what happened as she struggles to get her breath back.

Crawling forward, she wiggles to get her breasts back into her bra and pulls down her dress.

“You weren't half bad for a frat boy,” she says over her shoulder as she smooths her hands over her hair. Blakely looks freshly fucked, and her hair is a mess. Even her voice is throaty and sexy from me choking her.

“Thanks,” I say drolly as I pull off the condom, tying off the end as I tuck my cock back into my pants.

Tossing the rubber, I follow her to the door as she walks out. I ignore the stares as she weaves through the crowd, not saying another word to me.

Who the fuck is this chick? And why do I want to know more?

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## Chapter 20

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## Meyers

“It’s really good to be here with you guys, but I don’t think I could have handled the fraternity life,” I say with a laugh as Chuck and I find a seat by the huge bonfire someone set up in the yard.

Some people get up and leave and I relax. I was starting to get overwhelmed inside. I never used to be so paranoid about people. Not until Nicky, Laurel, and Victoria assaulted us, that is.

“It’s not always this crazy. Usually we just have game nights,” Chuck grumbles, and I nod.

“I wonder where Bates went,” I comment, looking around the yard for him. He said he had to use the bathroom, but that was more than thirty minutes ago.

Chuck scoffs.

“Probably hooking up. His bed is never empty.” Sighing, I lean back and look up at the sky.

The music from the house is still playing, but it’s not so loud all the way out here.

“Yeah, I’m the total opposite. My bed stays empty these days,” I grumble, and Chuck laughs.

“Same... Well, except for tonight... Maybe?” He shifts closer to me and licks his lips. My eyes widen and I finish my beer, nodding. I know my cheeks are pink and I’m thankful he can’t tell in the firelight.

His eyes widen, but he smiles as he stands up. I take in what he’s wearing and my dick perks up. Chuck has always been hot, but there is just something about him wearing a backward ballcap with his dark jeans and a tight T-shirt. I follow him back to the house and ignore the girls who are trying to get my attention. He stops at his bedroom door and gives me a look.

“You sure?” he checks, and I lean forward, grabbing his throat and pulling his lips to mine with a groan.

We’ve been drinking a lot, but if he’s serious, I am one-hundred percent on board. I haven’t been with anyone since Carrie’s seventeenth birthday. Not that women haven’t tried, but there is only one girl that would ever have my heart or cock, and she’s gone.

Reaching around Chuck, I grab his doorknob and twist it. The door swings open and I gently push him back until we have both entered the dark room. I kick the door shut behind me and lock it.

I don’t know if his fraternity brothers will just walk right in, and I don’t want any interruptions right now.

“I’ve missed you,” I rasp, kissing up his neck. I enjoy the deep rumble in his chest as his dick hardens against me as he enjoys my attention. “These last few years have sucked.”

“They have,” Chuck moans as I suck on his neck and his pulse goes wild. “Meyers...”

Ignoring him, I force myself to meet his eyes and get this out before I lose my nerve. “I didn’t just lose my soulmate the night Carrie went over the bridge and left us. I lost my best friends, too.”

“I’ve missed you, too,” Chuck whispers, and my lips brush across his. Growling ferally, his fingers delve into my hair, pulling me closer. My arm wraps around his waist and I grind my hips against his. It’s desperate, eager, and rough.

Chuck and I have always been sweet and hard, though we were sweeter when we were with Carrie. The sting of pain on my scalp is welcome as we duel for dominance and reminds me I’m alive.

“I want to fuck your tight ass,” Chuck grunts as he begins to lead me backwards toward the bed. “One of my regrets at that party is that we all didn’t get enough time together. I would have loved to fuck you while you fucked Carrie’s pussy.”



Groaning, I imagine Chuck telling us what to do. The night of the party, they let me be in charge, and it was a heady experience. It's one of the many reasons I haven't had sex with anyone else. I knew I wanted to lose my virginity to someone I loved.

"I have to tell you something," I gasp as he pushes me onto the bed, and pull myself back.

"Yeah?" my big man grunts with a half grin, grabbing the back of his shirt to pull it off. "So, tell me."

"Remember how I didn't have sex with Carrie the night of her birthday?" I ask carefully as he toes off his shoes. His movements slow as his dark eyes take me in.

"Uh huh," he murmurs as he drops his pants, kicking them off. Fuck me. Chuck's huge everywhere, and as usual, he's gone commando. The asshole must not be wearing them so he'll save on the amount of laundry. His cock is heavy, already beginning to weep precum, and making my mouth water.

Please have lube. Damn, his dick is going to destroy my ass in the best of ways.

"I'm still a virgin," I blurt out, heat bursting over my skin. I feel overheated, yet my cock is swelling with pressure as Chuck stares at me.

"Oh, really?" he says, eyes twinkling. "I'm honored to pop your cherry. Strip, pretty boy, and get on your knees. You have to get my dick real wet before I fuck you, so make sure you bring your A-plus sucking game for me."

Goddamn, he has a dirty mouth. Swallowing hard, I strip my clothes off in record time, enjoying Chuck's laughter at my speed. Crawling to him, I lap at his slit, enjoying the unsteadiness of his breaths.

"Come here, my good boy. Let's see how far you can suck me down," Chuck mumbles, his fingers pulling my hair until I'm on my knees for him. I played football with him for years. He knows how to get under my skin, and exactly how competitive I can get. Even if it's just against myself.

“Open wide, let me see a pool of saliva. It’ll help me slide down better,” he tells me. I don’t have to work on pooling saliva in my mouth, I’m fucking gagging for him to fuck my face.

Opening wide, saliva begins to dribble out of the side of my mouth.

“Good boy. Now come put it to good use,” Chuck croons, pushing my head toward his cock. Honestly, he doesn’t have to push much, because I dive for it. The sting of him pulling on my hair makes me gasp. “Spit on my cock.”

I’m shocked, but my cock twitches in its excitement. Holy shit. Spitting, I watch as it slides down his cock.

“More,” he growls, making me moan. “Show me how well you can follow directions. You’ve always called the plays, now you’re mine.”

The way Chuck talks makes me hotter, and I lick my lips as I watch my spit slide down his cock. “I want to suck your cock,” I tell him needily. “Please. Fuck, I need to taste it.”

“Do it, baby,” he says gruffly, his hips thrusting forward almost before he finishes speaking. My mouth fills with Chuck’s cock, and I suck greedily, my tongue swiping to catch all of his sweet saltiness.

Moaning, I surge forward eagerly, and I’ll be damned if he doesn’t slide right down.

“Fuck, you’re such a good little cock slut, aren’t you? Remember, get as much down as possible. If it’s not wet enough, I’ll tear your ass up,” Chuck growls.

Whimpering, I bob on his cock, and his head drops back in pleasure. I’m worried I’m screwing this up as spit overflows my mouth, dripping down his long shaft. Chuck is a tank of a human, and only sweet to a small amount of people lately.

None of us have been in the mood to be kind to people. Pushing away the memories, I silently fist pump myself as I work his cock down my throat. My nose butts against his pelvic bone, and my cock begs for assistance as Chuck’s hips

rock gently. He's holding himself back despite his words, and I won't have that.

Beginning to massage his balls, I thank God I don't have a gag reflex. Who would have thought this would be a good thing?

"Meyers, Jesus, fuck. Your mouth is perfect. I can see the indentation of my cock down your throat. Such a perfect little cock slut. Your ass is going to look so good filled with my cum. Fuck, I don't think I can wait anymore."

Chuck pulls me off his dick, and I already miss how full it made me. It's sad. I've been alone for a long ass time... a self-imposed isolation because we couldn't save our girl.

Chuck's hand encircles my throat, pushing me onto my back. "Stay with me," he growls. "Nothing else matters right now but us."

Nodding, my eyes grow wide as my attention narrows to the god of a man in front of me. I can't breathe unless he allows me to. His light brown hair is longer than I'm used to, flipping across his forehead. It looks good on him. Football has always been kind to him, his chest rippled with muscles.

"See something you like?" he teases as he leans over me, kissing me hard. Chuck grunts as he thrusts his hips over my washboard stomach, using me as he rubs his cock over me. It's warm, hard, and weeps precum over my body. A part of me is sad I won't be able to lick it up.

Chuck kisses down my body, lapping up his own arousal. Whimpering, my hips thrust up unconsciously, desperate for his mouth or cock. I want more of him.

"Patience, sweet boy," he murmurs, his eyes staying on mine as he eases down my body. "I want to taste you."

Chuck's tongue drags from my root to tip, and my eyes roll back. It's been a long time since I've been touched outside of myself.

"Oh my God, Chuck," I groan. He laps at my slit, moaning appreciatively.

“Is this all for me?” he teases, swallowing me whole.

“Fuck!” I scream, my legs splayed wide to accommodate this bear of a man that is wrecking me right now.

Chuck gives this stupid sexy chuckle with his mouth full of, well... me, and continues to take me deeper. His spit begins to pool at my balls, and he rolls them gently, as if rubbing himself in. I don't know why that's so sexy, and my head drops back on a moan.

I'm lost in the sensations as my balls begin to draw up. God, I'm so damn close. Something probes my ass, making me freeze. Chuck growls, making a garbled sound like “uh-uh,” but my cock is getting in the way of proper words.

Forcing myself to relax, I feel him slide in. The sly bastard was coating himself in something to allow himself to be well lubricated. I can't tell if it's spit or if he had lube stashed somewhere...

All other thoughts leave me as Chuck sucks me down deep again, pushing a second digit into my tight hole. It feels odd, but not, nerve endings I didn't know I had bursting into a measure of both pain and pleasure.

“Oh, God. Chuck, I'm going to come. If you don't—”

I was trying to tell him to pull off my cock if he didn't want to swallow, but I think I just died. I can't think. I feel full as he pushes a third finger into my ass and sucks me down with a feral growl. Crying out, I come, ropes of release eagerly swallowed down by this incredible beast.

Chuck smacks his lips as he pops off as if he didn't just rock my world. My chest is heaving, my blood roaring in my ears, and I couldn't tell you my goddamn name if you asked.

“Fuck, you taste good. You took my fingers like a good boy, and came like a faucet. Ready for my cock?” Chuck asks, sitting back as he strokes his cock.

My brain is fuzzy after he blew my mind, but his cock is shiny with something. Maybe he does have lube hiding somewhere. The thought floats away as Chuck pushes my legs wide up to my chest.

“Hold them up for me, I want to watch as you take every inch of my cock into your tight little hole,” he growls. My dick starts to perk up as if it didn’t just blow its load down Chuck’s throat. I may have a permanent hard-on.

I can see a lot of fucking in my future with him, and I can’t say that I mind. Holding my legs open wide, I watch as Chuck spits on my cock, groaning as he strokes it.

“You’re going to be a good little cum king and wait for me to tell you to come, aren’t you?” Chuck asks, moving his hand to his thick cock and directing it to my asshole.

Wait... Is that a thing?

I can’t answer him before he’s stretching me, my eyes rolling as he pushes himself in.

“Oh yeah, you’re taking my cock so well,” he praises, my head starting to leak precum in abundance. My dick is a praise slut, apparently.

I struggle to breathe as he spreads me wide. Chuck doesn’t do anything small.

“Mmm, I can’t wait to fill your ass like a cream pie with my cum. You’re fucking strangling my cock,” he grunts.

Reaching for my cock as I keep my legs tight to my chest, Chuck startles me as he slaps it. “Mine,” he growls. “You can’t come until I tell you to. I will control your orgasms from now on. Is that understood?”

My eyes widen as I rasp, “Yes, Sir.”

It’s such a power play change from how we used to flirt. I’ve heard of the term “switch,” but never understood it until now. I’m in unfamiliar territory, and am more than willing to let Chuck take the lead here.

“That’s it. It’s weird to be on the other side of things, isn’t it? But damn, does it feel good,” he grunts. Thrusting deeper, he grabs my thick, muscled thigh and pushes up so my ass lifts for him.

“Oh, my God!” I cry out as he slides even deeper inside me. Soon his balls are hitting mine, and the only sound in the

room is that of my gasps and moans and Chuck's grunts as his skin slaps against mine.

My cock hits my stomach from the force of his thrusts, and I whimper at the neglect. It's not fair. I want to come again.

"Poor, sweet boy," Chuck murmurs, leaning over me to kiss my lips as he fucks me. I can't breathe with how full I feel. I didn't even think he'd fit inside of me.

Chuck is a very determined man though, and my asshole was no match for him. Leaving me breathless, his hand finally encircles my cock, and tears begin to leak out at how grateful I am.

My balls are heavy, the tip of my cock red and swollen, as if I hadn't just come.

"Please," I wheeze, and his answering smile is cruel as his eyes sparkle with mischief.

"Begging looks so good on you," Chuck murmurs as he strokes my hard cock. His rhythm is as brutal as his thrusts as we both hurtle toward oblivion.

My eyesight darkens as I feel him begin to paint my insides with ropes of cum, and all I can hear is Chuck growl, "Come for me, now."

Shuddering, I explode for him, coming all over my chest. Afterward, Chuck showers with me, kissing me and telling me how amazing I was. I can't think of a better way to have lost my virginity, if not with Carrie.



I WAKE up in Chuck's bed with him wrapped around me. I feel safe and loved. I've been struggling a lot lately, and getting away this weekend is just what I needed. I know I scared my mom the other day when she found me sitting on the couch in the dark with a bottle of pills and a gun on the table.

I don't think I was really going to do anything, but who knows anymore. I don't feel like I'm in control of my life, and things have just been spiraling lately. I wonder if that's how Carrie felt that night.

Broken, useless, lost. I wish I would have seen the signs. I wish she would have talked to me.

Sighing, I shift to roll onto my back and startle as Chuck's eyes meet mine. "Morning," I grunt, and he smirks.

"You're naked in my bed. Any regrets?" he asks, looking nervous and biting his bottom lip. I shake my head and reach for the back of his neck, pulling his mouth to mine. I don't know what it is about him, but he makes my blood boil.

When we part, I rest my forehead against his. "I have spent a long time fighting my feelings and I'm done. I have liked you since I was sixteen. That one night with you and... her," I croak, trying not to get emotional, "was one of my best nights. After what Nicky, Laurel, and Victoria did to us, I wasn't sure I would ever want someone to touch me again. But with you, it's different. It feels as if we were always supposed to get to this part, and I don't want to lose you or Bates."

I groan and roll so I can bury my face into his chest and hide. Fuck, I didn't mean to lay everything on the table so quickly.

"Things have been fucked up for a long time now, and I'm done. I want to be happy again. I don't want to just go day by day surviving and being miserable," I mumble against his skin, and he wraps his arms tighter around me.

"You have me, Meyers, and you're never losing me. As for Bates, he's another subject altogether. Since Carrie, we haven't been the same. He drinks a lot and fights. His grades have slipped, but he doesn't care." I look up into his dark eyes. He looks sad.

"I know things will never be the same, but we need to try and move on. To live. Otherwise, mine might be the next funeral you attend. Things have been so fucking dark, and the will to live is getting harder every day."

I close my eyes and choke out the words I need to say. “I need help, Chuck, and I’m scared.”

“Last year I was walking along the interstate in the middle of the night. I had a bottle of Jack and I was stumbling. If one of my teammates hadn’t pulled over and brought me home, I may have walked into oncoming traffic. I understand having dark thoughts, Meyers. You’re not alone.”

Tears fill my eyes and my heart breaks. We are all fucked up, and instead of holding each other close, we pushed one another away. But never again. I’m going to find a way to save my mom’s house, then maybe look into moving closer to here.



“SO, do I want to know why you ditched us last night?” I ask Bates as we sit down at a cute little diner close to campus and grab our menus. I’m fucking starved. He gives us a big grin and bites his lip.

“I never thought I would connect to someone after Carrie, but fuck, the chick last night blew me out of the water. I wouldn’t mind a repeat.”

Chuck rolls his eyes, and a waitress arriving stops me from replying. We all order stacks of pancakes and sides of bacon and eggs with coffee. Chuck slides his hand under the table and grips my thigh.

My dick jerks and I bite the inside of my cheek to keep from grinning like a fool. I don’t remember the last time I felt even a hint of happiness.

“What about you guys?” Bates asks, and gives us a knowing look. My cheeks pinken, and I look down at the formica table, picking at a napkin. “For what it’s worth, I’m glad. Chuck needed to break his abstinence streak. He looks more relaxed already,” Bates jokes and grunts as Chuck smacks him.

I laugh, and we talk about everything and nothing. It’s like no time has passed, but there is still a cloud over us when



Carrie is brought up. We never knew she was pregnant, and if she had told us, we would have been ecstatic.

Yeah, we were all young and dumb, but I knew from the first moment I met her that I would marry her someday and give her babies. But shit happens, and dreams change. I just wish she would have talked to us.

I know Chuck blames himself. He was the last person to talk to her. I glance at him, and even though he's smiling and laughing, there are still shadows in his eyes. I don't think they will ever leave, and that's okay.

Carrie was a part of us all, and she may not physically be on this Earth anymore, but she will always live inside us. She's a part of our souls.

"Here is your coffee, hon," the waitress says, dropping off my refill and a paper.

"What's this?" I ask, and she shrugs.

"Boss said to hand them out. It's a contest or something for Halloween. Has a great cash prize, but haunted houses give me the creeps. Your food should be up soon."

She leaves, and I read the flier. It's bright red with black writing, adding to the creepy factor. When my eyes meet the prize amount, my heart races and I have to take in some deep breaths. "This has to be a scam, right?" I ask Bates, showing him and Chuck.

He laughs and pulls out his phone, searching online. "Nope, it's legit. They need a group of fifteen volunteers to test out their new haunted house, and if you make it to the end, you get a cash prize. They want groups of three or four people, and the first two groups to meet all guidelines will win up to one million dollars." He continues reading, but my mind is stuck on the money.

"That would pay for my house, get rid of some of our debt, and take so much stress off of my mom," I mumble, and Chuck grabs my hand, giving it a squeeze.

"We have never been scared of haunted houses or horror movies. I say we do it. It's next weekend. What's the worst

thing that could happen?” I nod, and Bates gives us a smile, agreeing.

“Fuck yeah, this is going to be fun,” he says, and I smile.

## Anonymous

I watch as they discuss the contest, biting my bottom lip to hide my maniacal grin. It was like giving candy to a baby. They took the bait without a problem. I guess learning about Meyers' mom's house being up for auction helped, but I think they love the thrill just as much as the money.

It's time for revenge and for people to play my dark and twisted games. I just hope they can handle it.

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## Chapter 21

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## Chuck

I haven't been excited about anything in a long time, but as I stare up at the house with vines crawling up the walls, my pulse begins to race. The gates are tall and black, but when you look closely, there are screaming skulls. I already have goosebumps starting to appear, and I love it.

"Damn," Bates chuckles. "Someone really loves Halloween. Did you see the graveyard next to the house? It seems a little cheesy. How bad can this really be?"

Glancing over, I see the headstones and grin. "We won't know till we go in. I'm more concerned about the creepy, nine foot clown wearing the creepy kid in a cage on his back," I snicker.

My jaw dropped when it started heralding children into the front yard. Damn, it looks so lifelike. "Carrie would have loved this shit." I sigh, my excitement now tinged with sadness.

"She loved Halloween," Meyers says sadly. "Let's go inside before we're late for orientation."

There're a few other people who surround us as we walk up the porch stairs. There are creepy dolls by the doors, and what I hope is fake cobwebs as we walk in, forcing me to duck my head as I open the door. Meyers doesn't follow my lead unfortunately, shrieking as he scrubs his face free of webbing.

"Fuck, I hate spiders. Is it in my hair?" he asks.

Snorting, I shake my head. "Other scary shit doesn't bother you, but spiders do," I tease, bumping into him.

"It's because spiders are real and the rest is fake." Meyers shrugs. "Creepy crawlers are disgusting."

"Man up," Bates grunts. "A lot of people came out."

We had to call the number on the flier to reserve our spot, so there are exactly twenty-five people milling around on the bottom floor. The inside of the house is very gothic: a black chandelier hangs above our head, and the windows are stained glass, but the images are of creepy bats and tortured souls. Someone is either religious or has a twisted sense of humor.

The flooring is a gray slate, but someone jumps as he steps on what appears to be a zombie woman coming out to get him. Whoever created this house is a genius. I'm excited to win this.

There's no other outcome where we don't get that money for Meyers.

"Attention, please, if you would follow me into the great room. We have people here to run some tests on you. You agreed to have a physical before entering the contest. We need to make sure there are no heart issues. You will also need to sign an NDA," a man, or maybe it's a woman, in a creepy steampunk mask, hoodie, and black jeans says, pointing toward a room with sliding wooden doors.

"Are we ready for this?" I ask the guys, and they give me wicked grins.

As we follow people into the room that's laid out like an impromptu clinic, I start to notice some familiar faces. "What the fuck are they doing here?" I growl, and Bates looks over to the far corner, then growls under his breath.

"I thought those douchenozzles went to school in Tennessee and California," he grumbles, and I watch as Prince and Neumann flirt with one of the nurses taking their blood.

"They did," Meyers comments. "Laurel has mentioned them a few times in one of her rambles. This doesn't make any sense."

"Well then, let's find out," I grumble, stomping over to them. Prince notices me first and gives me a smirk.

"Well, I've never," he says in a false Southern woman's voice and places his hand over his heart, batting his eyes at

me. “What are you assholes doing here?” he asks, and I snort. I clench my fists and try not to lose my cool.

We can’t afford to get kicked out.

“Was about to ask you the same question,” Meyers interjects, and I take a few deep breaths.

“Well, we were in Reutman for a break and heard about this contest. Seemed like an easy way to make some cash,” he says with a shrug, and I laugh.

“That seems like more than a coincidence. Who told you about it?” I have a sneaking suspicion that I know, and I’m hoping that I’m wrong.

“Well, Nicky heard it from someone in your fraternity and told Johnson. He’s running late, but he should be here soon. But don’t worry, the girls aren’t coming. They hate spooky shit,” he says as if that’s reassuring.

“Well, baby, you know where I’ll be this weekend,” Neumann says as the nurse giggles. Walking over to us, he attempts to pull Meyers into a hug, and I growl.

“Damn, Chuck, have you gotten even bigger? You need to stop eating your Wheaties,” he jokes, and I’m *this close* to bashing his face in. We may have needed to play nice with him for football, but the gloves are off, so to speak, and if these pricks think they are going to interfere with Meyers getting the funds to save his house, I’ll kill them and bury them in the cemetery next door.

“Attention, please. We need to get this show on the road, so to speak. Gentleman, if you could move to your assigned stations, please,” the person in the mask shouts, breaking up a potential blood bath.

Bates grabs my arm and pulls me over to a bed, but I never take my eyes off of Prince and Neumann, giving them a chilling smile. This weekend just got a lot better.

## Bates

After I'm poked and prodded and given a tracking wristlet, the nurses dismiss us, and we move over to another room that looks like some type of creepy ass conference space. There are men in suits with briefcases, and they have papers and pens all around them.

"Names," one of the men says, not even looking up at us. I walk closer and hold out my hand.

"Bates," I say, and he gives me a paper, ignoring my handshake, and another woman hands me a pen.

"Please be completely honest with your paperwork. The NDA works both ways. We will not disclose anything," she says, and I take a seat, quickly filling in the basic information as Chuck and Meyers copy and sit next to me.

I've noticed that Meyers and Chuck have gotten closer, but I'm not upset. It's about fucking time. When I reach the third page, I pause. "Why do you need to know about past trauma and triggers?" I blurt out, and one of the lawyers looks up.

"This haunted house isn't like your normal experience. There may be things that could trigger you, and if that's the case, we will point you away from certain rooms," he says, and I nod. Okay, I guess that makes sense, but do I really need to admit to what happened to me when I was younger?

Meyers sighs next to me, and I can tell he's also having second thoughts. "For Mom," he mumbles, and I quickly finish the papers and sign my name. When we are done, we are led into another space with food and drinks. There are waitresses in creepy steampunk outfits, and even I can admit this is pretty cool.

The decor is still gothic, and I notice a hallway full of checkered illusion patterns, and I know this weekend is definitely going to be something to remember.



I take a seat on a black velvet couch and accept a drink. Meyers plops down next to me with a groan. This is nothing like I thought it would be.

A man in a steampunk gas mask walks into the room, staring out at us. He's wearing a black corset top over a cream colored long sleeved button up and black pants. His arms are folded behind his back in a commanding posture.

"Excuse me, ladies and gentleman," he says, his voice mechanical sounding. Damn, I guess he has a voice changer. The cloak and dagger routine continues, I guess. Leaning forward, I wait to see what he wants.

"You have all been handpicked for what will be a grueling contest. Trust no one. Nothing is as it seems. Everything and everyone is, in fact, out to get you. Tonight, enjoy the festivities, be merry, and feel free to use the condoms and toys laid out across the room. You all have your rooms and keys. Tomorrow will dawn a new day," he coos, bowing. "I look forward to the screams. It's been too long since this house has enjoyed true terror."

My jaw drops in surprise as he nods and walks out. Damn, it looks like we're going to have to be on our toes here. I'm sure it's nothing we can't handle, though.

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## Chapter 22

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## Anonymous

“They look like they are all having fun,” one of my minions coos, and I laugh but don’t reply. My eyes are glued to the TV screens surrounding me. All the little rodents are eating my food and drinking my wine.

Let them have their fun tonight, because tomorrow they are going to be introduced to *The Doctor*.

## Meyers

“I’m over this,” I grumble as I watch Prince shove his tongue down one of the contestant’s throats. She’s wearing a short, black, leather skirt with a purple and green skull tank top. It reminds me of something Carrie would have worn in high school.

Bates hands me another glass of whatever punch they have been serving, and I take a sip. It has a cherry aftertaste and I’ve already had three cups. Chuck is glaring at the corner where Johnson and Neumann are playing beer pong.

“This weekend isn’t going to be just one big frat party, right? Horror doesn’t bother me, but having to deal with drunk idiots may have me leaving early,” Chuck grunts, and I have to agree with him.

“I still don’t understand why they are even here. Out of all the people to apply for this, why is it our enemies from high school?” I muse, and roll my eyes as Johnson strips his shirt off and starts dancing to some music.

“Can we just get out of this damn room?” I ask and stand up, heading for the door.

“It’s locked until Master says we can leave,” one of the waitresses says as she holds up a tray of snacks for me.

“I’m okay,” I wave my hand and point at the door. “When does he open the doors?” I ask, and she looks over her shoulder to a camera drilled into the corner.

“I’m not sure. I don’t even know what time it is. All of our phones were confiscated after signing the NDAs,” she says, and I sigh.

Chuck comes up behind me and wraps his arms around my waist. I ignore the laugh from the other side of the room and lean back against him. “I want to take you to my bed and not let you leave until your cum is dripping out of my ass and I

have the taste of you on my tongue,” he growls into my ear, and I tremble.

Sighing, I turn my head so he can kiss and nip at my neck. My eyes land on Bates, and he gives me a wink, licking his bottom lip. We haven't talked about it, but I don't think he would be opposed to joining Chuck and me.

My cock hardens at the thought, and I groan as Chuck begins to bite me harder. What the fuck is in the air here? I feel like spinning him around and taking him over the pool table without a care for who might be watching.

I notice Bates move closer and block us from the assholes in the room. He has always been protective of us. We all are. We are more than just friends. We're family. “Damn, watching the two of you has my cock dripping,” he mumbles, and I whimper as I feel Chuck pressing against the back of my jeans.

“The door is unlocked now. Here are your room assignments. Have a nice night,” the waitress says, handing me a large envelope that says “**The Watchers**” in big, bold, black block lettering.

Bates takes it as the doors open for us. I don't seem to notice or care that other people don't follow us as Bates reads off where we need to go. I also haven't a clue what the “Watchers” are, and I can't begin to care. That can wait till tomorrow. My mind is stuck on the large erection showing through Chuck's pants and the heat in his eyes as he looks at me.

I follow Bates as he reads from a map and opens up a large steel door. There is a huge bed inside, piled full of black pillows, and a dim light on the nightstand, giving off an eerie red glow.

“Clothes off, now,” I growl, stripping my shirt up and over my head and kicking my shoes off.

“Are we really doing this?” Bates asks, but he doesn't seem to be protesting right now. I don't know if it's the atmosphere or the drinks, but I feel like I'm going to explode

if I don't fuck someone right now. I'm painfully hard and my blood is boiling. I feel so damn hot.

"Yeah, I think we are," I say as I move closer to him and grab him by the throat, pulling his lips to mine.

"Mmm. I want Bates to swallow your big, fat cock," I groan, moving away from him to collapse into a chair and releasing my cock from my jeans. If I'm going to be a "watcher," I'm going to enjoy the hell out of it.

"On your knees for me, baby. I want to watch your eyes run with tears as I fuck your throat. Meyers doesn't have a gag reflex." Chuck smirks as Bates' lips part in surprise.

"Well, isn't that a fun party trick," he murmurs as he drops to his knees.

"Get his cock out," I command, watching as Chuck keeps his hands behind his back to keep from helping him.

"Oh, we're being the asshole today, are we, baby?" I ask, smirking.

"Yes, Daddy." He grins as Bates reaches for his belt. Fuck, my dick twitches in my hand as Bates opens Chuck's pants up and his cock springs out. He quit wearing boxers outside of games when he realized he found it more comfortable. I thought he was just being lazy.

Bates' lips part as he stares at Chuck's cock, and I can see his fingers itch to sink them into his hair and face fuck him. I wonder for a moment if he will. I loved it when he did it with me, but we are still feeling out Bates.

Tentatively, Bates opens his lips wider, wrapping them around the weeping head of Chuck's cock. My eyes struggle to fall closed, but I force them to open so I can watch every moment.

"Suck it like you mean it," I command, making Chuck groan as Bates tests the limits of his mouth, taking him down further. Bates' tongue slides down the underside of Chuck's cock, his cheeks hollowing as he sucks.

“Goddamn. I think he’s got the art of sucking my cock down,” Chuck grunts, his hips unconsciously thrusting himself even deeper. Bates gags, and fuck if it isn’t sexy as his blue eyes start to overflow with tears. “That’s it. When you start to choke on my thick cock, lean into it and swallow around it.”

As I’ve mentioned before, we’re competitive assholes, and Bates loves to push himself. Shouting in surprise, Chuck gasps as he swallows him down until his nose meets Chuck’s pelvis. Spit overflows his mouth, his tears hit Chuck’s stomach, and fuck me if he isn’t absolutely perfect.

“Such a perfect cum slut,” Chuck praises. Whimpering, he bobs his head up slightly before swallowing deep again. I can tell as Chuck drops back that his control is about to snap.

“Enough,” Chuck groans, finally weaving his fingers in Bates’ blond-streaked hair to pull him off his cock.

“Shall we run a train on Bates’ virgin ass?” I tease, lazily fisting my cock.

Bates looks up at Chuck, tears streaming from his eyes, and he bends over to capture his lips. “I want to fuck both of you. Let’s start with Meyers fucking your ass while I fuck him. I don’t think you’re ready for my cock yet,” Chuck says around a chuckle.

“I want it,” he whines, making us both smirk as Chuck slaps his dick across his face.

“Be a good boy and get on your hands and knees on the bed, ass up in the air. If you can take the plug I shove into your tight hole, then I’ll let Chuck reconsider,” I smirk.

“Game. Fucking. On,” Bates growls, scrambling to get up.

Fuck, now I have to go see if there are any sealed toys in here. Walking over to a cabinet, I pull it open, whistling under my breath. It’s like my wildest dreams just came true.

Pulling out cuffs, a sealed large butt plug, and lube, I stalk back over to where Bates is on the bed, ass up high. Dropping my goodies, I slap his ass hard.

His shiver and weeping cock tell me all I need to know. He's ready for whatever we throw at him. Showing him the cuffs, my cock twitches as he eagerly holds up his wrists for me to bind to the headboard. There's divots and hooks for all kinds of things. I'm both overwhelmed and amazed.

Stripping down to my boxers, I kneel behind Bates.

"Suck his cock, but don't let him come," I command Chuck, not looking at him. I'm intently biting Bates' juicy ass. The answering gasp makes Chuck grin evilly, and he maneuvers underneath Bates, swallowing him down like his favorite treat.

Almost collapsing on him, Bates struggles to stay upright on all fours. I have the best view as I work the lubed plug into Bates' ass as I watch Chuck suck his cock. Chuck couldn't have done it better himself. Chuck thinks lube is very important, and he told me he has a tube just for masturbating. He just happened to have it lost in his blankets when he fucked me.

The big man has his sneaky moments.

"Good boy," I mutter, smacking my palm across Bates' ass as I watch the plug get swallowed by it. He was born to take this plug. It's on the larger side because Chuck is thick and long, and I want to make sure he's ready.

I may like a little pain, but not everyone does.

"Fucker!" Bates screams, making me glance down to see Chuck chuckling around a mouthful of his cock. The big man has a stranglehold on Bates' balls, which means he was about to come.

"It looks like Chuck is being a little shit, isn't he?" I murmur, coming around to squeeze myself between the headboard and Bates' mouth.

"You were such a good boy, you get Chuck's dick as a reward in your ass. I got the fucking plug in, so my reward is your mouth," I tell him smugly, pushing down my boxers to release my cock.



“Fuck, I don’t know why, but Asshole Daddy is a good look on you,” Bates mutters, licking my cock from root to tip.

“Mmm, that’s right. You’re going to lick Daddy like a good boy, aren’t you?” I tease, my fingers unable to help fisting in his hair. “I need to fuck your face while Chuck checks out my handiwork.”

Chuck slips out from underneath Bates, moving around to push and drag the plug inside of Bates’ ass.

“Yes,” Bates grunts to me, opening his mouth wider to suck on my cock.

My hips thrust forward, enjoying how tight his throat is as Chuck fucks his ass with the plug. Head dropping back, my breath gets thready as I dive deeper inside of him. Bates’ mouth is wet, and hot, and fucking perfect.

I praise him repeatedly as he swallows me down. “Fuck, Chuck is right. Such a good little cum slut,” I groan. “How does his ass look?”

“About ready to fuck it,” Chuck grunts, working the plug slowly out of Bates’ ass. “Such a good boy. Pretty little gaping hole.”

Chuck’s words make me thrust harder down Bates’ throat, the sounds of his gagging making me even harder. “Damn, that dirty mouth makes it hard not to come.”

“Your cum should be reserved for my ass, Daddy,” Chuck sasses with a wink as he rubs lube on his cock. “Let the little cum slut speak. I need to know if I need a condom or not. I want you to fuck me bare, but our little toy needs to tell me what he wants.”

Pulling my cock out with a pop, I release Bates’ hair so he can turn to look at Chuck. “Bare,” he wheezes, his chest heaving. “Fuck. I want to feel you fill me up with your cum.”

“That’s what I want to hear,” Chuck nods. “Meyers and I are going to use you as our toy until I’m all the way in, and then he’s going to exercise that control he’s so good at and fuck me into you. Sound good?”

Bates is still handcuffed to the bed frame, but I can see how heavy his cock is as he nods.

“Words, little cocktease,” I encourage with a grunt, pulling on his hair to look back at me. I really am an asshole.

“Yes, I want it, Daddy dick,” Bates bites out.

“Good boy,” I praise, loving his shiver as Chuck begins to push his way inside his ass. “Open wide as he stretches your ass.”

Chuck and I use Bates together, the sounds we make are lewd and loud. My head drops back as I thrust down his throat with abandon, and Chuck’s face turns red as he attempts to hold his control. He’s too damn big to lose it on Bates.

As it is, I’m sure Bates will find himself sore and littered with bruises as Chuck grips his hips tightly.

“Fuck, I’m going to blow. Come fuck me,” Chuck groans, his eyes rolling. Moving away from Bates, I ignore his whine for my cock.

Smoothing my hand down Chuck’s back, I grab the lube, liberally coating his hole and my cock.

“Don’t be gentle,” he grunts. “I don’t have the patience for it, Meyers. I’m too damn close.”

“Same, man. We fucked around too long, but damn if it hasn’t been fun.” I chuckle before groaning as I line up my cock with his ass and begin to push forward.

Chuck’s ass is so damn tight, his body hot with desire. With my arms tightly wound around him, I fuck hard, and Chuck catches himself over Bates’ body. It’s a thing of beauty to be in charge, responsible for each gasp and cry.

My balls are so damn tight I can’t breathe, and I grit my teeth as I reach around to massage Chuck’s balls.

“Oh, fuck. Is this code for hurry the fuck up?” he whimpers, and I watch as he wraps his hand around Bates’ cock.

“Please, let me cum,” he keens. “Oh God, oh God. I’m a good boy. Please!”

“The best,” Chuck groans. “I’m so fucking close. You come when you start to feel my cum coat the insides of your walls, and not a second sooner.”

Bates cries in frustration, and fuck if it doesn’t make me start to come. Eyesight blackening in the corners, I squeeze Chuck’s balls. “Come on you big fucker, give Bates your cum.”

Shuddering, Chuck mutters, “Yes, Daddy,” and Bates thanks him as he begins to come.

Damn, I never thought this would be as hot as it is. Carrie may be gone, but I have my best friends back.

## Chuck

Something wakes me, and I groan when I realize it's still dark outside. "Go back to sleep," Bates mumbles from behind me, and I cuddle closer to Meyers. Last night was awesome, but I know today is going to be full of games and horror.

We need to focus and keep our eyes on the prize. The sex and possible relationships can wait until we win that money and leave this place. But I hope this does continue. For the first time since Carrie, I feel happy.

I close my eyes once more and picture what Carrie would say if she found out about all of us being together. I think she would be happy for us, but then again, towards the end there, she was unpredictable.

A noise wakes me again, and I grumble. "Is this a part of the horror show? Sleep deprivation?" I ask, and Meyers laughs, leaning over and giving me a quick kiss. I wouldn't mind taking it further, but screamo music starts to blare through the walls and Bates jumps out of the bed.

"What the fuck?" he roars, but it's almost hard to hear him through the noise. I cover my ears and attempt to wiggle off the mattress to get dressed. Meyers is on his knees, covering his own ears.

I'd laugh if my head didn't feel like it was about to explode. Bates throws me some clothes from the floor, and I hurry to put them on. The shirt is too tight so I rip it off and toss it to Meyers.

After I'm fully dressed and stomping toward the door with the guys following me, the music stops.

"What the fuck was that?" Meyers shouts, wincing. When we reach the hall, there is an envelope taped to our door.

"I don't know, but if it's a hint of what to expect for the next two days, I'm not looking forward to it."

I open the envelope, and there is a letter with another map. “Go grab the envelope from last night. We may need it,” I tell Bates, and he rushes back into the room to get it.

THE WATCHERS,

*Welcome to Hell! We hope you had a nice sleep.*

*Now, it's time to see if you have what it takes.*

*Pay attention, nothing is as it seems. Follow the map, and let the games begin!*

“LET’S GET THIS OVER WITH,” Meyers grumbles, and I can’t help but notice how adorable he is when he’s grumpy. We follow the map. There are so many hallways and locked rooms along the way.

When we reach the black and white room, there are ten people waiting. They all look like they didn’t have time to get ready either. Prince is bitching about being interrupted while balls-deep inside one of the contestants, and she’s scowling at his play by play to his friends.

She should have known he was a dick before fucking him.

The man in the mask and corset starts to speak, and I can’t help but notice even with the voice changer how excited he is. He must love his job.

“Ladies and gentleman, the games are about to begin. You’re probably noticing that most of the contestants are not here... Well, that’s because they were hired actors. Look around you, these are your real competitors for now. There may be some surprises still to come.”

He steps back and someone wheels in a TV. There is someone on the screen in another steampunk mask. I notice the other host and assistant leave as the man begins to speak.

“Life isn’t fair, and neither are these games,” their voice is also altered, so I don’t know if it’s a man or woman, “In this theme, we have a challenge. Upon my say, poisoned gas will

be pumped into all of the vents where the participants will be. There is beauty in the broken, but still you judged. Well, I am the judge and jury now, and I have deemed you all guilty. You have ten minutes to find your masks or suffer your fate. Follow your maps. There are twelve of you and nine masks. I am not responsible and have washed my hands of this. I, The Doctor, bid you good luck.”

The person smiles, and it’s chilling how the mask moved to imitate. The screen goes black, and all hell breaks loose.

“What the fuck do they mean poisoned gas?” one girl screams. Johnson and Neumann snort, and speak loudly.

“It’s all a fucking joke. They won’t seriously hurt us.”

I look at Bates and he’s studying the map. “Something isn’t adding up here. I have a bad feeling. Let’s just play along and see what happens,” Meyers says, and I have to agree. We leave the room and move along the halls, ignoring the screams of the other people.

It sounds like a battle is going on, and I’m glad we left in time. I don’t know what’s real or fake, but I’m going to follow what The Doctor says to do just in case.

The hallways fill with maniacal cackles and screams, making me shudder. Lights begin to turn off behind us, and everything is getting dark.

“Fuck,” I gasp, looking behind me.

“Move faster,” Meyers insists, and the three of us break into a run. “Don’t lose each other!”

Thankfully, the three of us are athletes and don’t break a sweat as we run around a corner. Even Meyers has continued to take care of his body, working out to manage stress.

“Here,” Meyers grunts, opening the door to room 112, which is the number circled on our map. “This is where we’re supposed to be...”

There’s two doors, and Neumann and Johnson walk in just as we do. On the table, there are three gas masks with dual respirators. Fuck me. Eyes wide, we stare at the table.

“If it’s you or us, we’ll choose us after everything you did to Carrie,” Meyers spits out, walking forward. As if his words galvanize us, Bates and I move forward with him.

“For Carrie,” I growl, wrestling the gas mask from Johnson. Looking to either side, I see Meyers and Bates pulling on their masks as I hear a hissing begin through the vents. Putting on my own mask, the three of us step away from Neumann and Johnson. It’s all fun and games until you face people who hate you enough to be willing to watch you die.

The room goes hazy as the gas fills the space, and the three of us breathe deeply from our masks, a hazard as our chests heave from the adrenaline. Neumann and Johnson run for the door, banging and screaming for help.

“This isn’t fucking funny!” Neumann screams. “Please, please. I want to go home!”

My stomach pitches for a moment, and I swallow thickly, seemingly safe beneath my gas mask. Bates and Meyers grab my hands, and I squeeze hard as Neumann starts to cough.

Johnson scratches at his throat, beginning to turn pale before puking at Neumann’s feet. Neumann doesn’t seem to notice, falling onto his back and gasping for air before beginning to convulse. Within minutes—albeit some of the longest minutes of my life—both are dead, the blood vessels in their eyes blown, foam leaking from their mouths, and spots now showing on their skin.

“We’re safe—” I begin to say just as Bates falls to his knees. “No, no, no!” I scream, watching as Meyers’ eyes also roll into the back of his head and their hands fall away. They don’t have the same symptoms, but my heart is jackhammering in my chest.

“You lied!” I scream at the walls. Unfortunately, I breathe in deeper. Whatever they’re pumping into my mask has increased, and I fall to my knees too.

My eyes begin to water and I sob as I see my friends pass out next to me. *I just got them back.*

Breathing is getting hard, and my eyes roll as I crash to the floor. My muscles lock up, and suddenly I really want to touch Meyers, who is lying next to me. I can't tell if he's alive or dead, and tears begin to fall slowly from my eyes. We should never have done this.

I was gung-ho when I first heard about this contest to help Meyers' mom. But none of us can help anyone if we're dead.

As my eyes slide closed, I wish that we're able to get it right in our next lives.

*I'm sorry.*



BLINKING HARD, I struggle to open my eyes. My head is throbbing, my arms ache, and I feel nauseated.

Clearing my throat, I look up to see my arms are tied over my head and I'm hanging from a wall. Twisting, I can't get enough leverage to pull at the rope because I'm high enough that only dipping my shoes down to balance on my tip-toes allows for any kind of give in my bindings.

"Chuck," Meyers groans, and my eyes squint in the dark room.

"Where are you?" I rasp, trying to find him. "Bates?"

"Far side of the room," Bates answers, and I twist, realizing I'm in the middle. Monkey in the middle is getting really tiring. "Are you tied up?"

"Yeah," I grunt. "It was all a damn trap. I watched Neumann and Johnson die, though. I'd swear it."

"You did," says a creepy mechanical voice, and light shines from behind me to light up a blank white wall in front of me. Glancing, I can see Bates hanging from the far wall on my left, and Meyers on my right. Blowing out a breath, I settle in to see whatever this crazy person wants now that I know we're alive and okay, for now.



“Those two scum of the earth are currently being incinerated in the basement below you. The three of you are The Watchers. You didn’t do enough for a young girl when she was struggling, so I am taking up the mantle of her revenge now that she’s dead and gone,” the voice says. It must be another one of those voice changers. It seems the same as the one that spoke to us earlier about the gas masks, but my head hurts too much to focus well.

“The Choice Games are meant to punish the wicked. I am purging the world of their evil, and teaching you three to be more observant,” the voice intones.

“I tried to save Carrie,” I whisper, sure that’s who they’re speaking about.

“Don’t say her name!” they scream, making me flinch. My toes lose their footing, and I hang from the ropes, my breath hissing as my arms hold onto the full weight of my body. I’m not a small person, and I scramble to get my toes underneath me again.

“She and her baby are angels, their names should not be spoken by the likes of you.”

“It wasn’t our fault,” I whisper. “I wish she had opened up to us.”

“Wishes and should haves get you shit in this world, Watcher. Watch the screen and see who is appearing from the past. Perhaps, when you leave here, you can do something positive,” they rasp.

The white wall transforms into a live stream of a girl who is indeed from my past. She’s in a room that’s painted in black and white checkers, and appears to be moving. However, it’s an optical illusion, and due to the way the squares are designed, it’s kind of a mind fuck.

There are two other girls in the room with her that I don’t recognize because their faces are painted. The Doctor said there were nine masks and twelve people. We only watched two die. Fuck.

Victoria stumbles through the room while the other girls run for the two gas masks hanging on hooks on the wall. They beat at each other as they struggle to reach them, but the masks keep rising and dropping.

“Oh, shit,” Bates breathes. “Do you see what I’m seeing?”

“A bitch from the past,” Meyers grunts. “Shit.”

Finally, one of the girls with the painted face punches Victoria, and she grunts as she sprawls out on the floor as the other two girls pull on their masks just as the telltale sound of gas begins.

It’s a sound that makes me flinch, wincing as I remember it’s not happening to me. Victoria screams as the gas travels through the room. The camera zeros in on her face as she claws at her throat, her blood vessels explode and she gags as puke projects from her.

“Some die more dignified than others,” the voice chuckles. “I am The Doctor, and this is just the beginning of the purge. I have stood as judge and jury. These people do not deserve to enjoy their lives while they have hurt so many others. Some are here to win the money, others have been invited to die under the pretense of a contest,” The Doctor murmurs as we watch Victoria sag in death, her eyes clouded over.

The two women in gas masks each grab a leg, leaning over to where they seem to know there’s a camera, waving and throwing up a peace sign with a jaunty tilt of their heads. They drag the body away, making sure to hit Victoria’s head on the doorway as they leave.

“Still, others hate bullies and are employed by me to make sure things go off as expected,” The Doctor murmurs as the doors to the room we’re in open, and four men walk in. “I wanted to explain a few things before we really get started. I have now, so it’s time to say bye-bye. You’re all alive. For now...”

My blood chills as I yell. The men pull Meyers and Bates off their hooks, dragging them away.

“Please. Please don’t hurt them!” I scream, yanking on the ropes that bind me, pulling in an attempt to get free.

“I’m so glad you take better care of your toys now, Chuck,” the voice bites out before the doors slam closed and the projector turns off, pitching me into darkness. “Wish you had done a better job with others.”

“I was a kid!” I scream. “I did the best I could! Why didn’t she talk to me? Why didn’t she tell me about the person who hurt her?”

*I would have killed the scum bag.*

“You’ll get your chance to watch him die. He’s in the building,” the disjointed voice says before going silent.

I wish I wasn’t alone in this room. I hate being alone with my thoughts. No good can come from this...

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## Chapter 23

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*This chapter has disturbing occurrences. I would avoid eating at this time.*

## The Doctor

“Well, that was entertaining,” my minion says with a smile on his face as he enters our secret room. I huff and continue watching the screens. Three down, six to go. He plops down at the table next to my chair and takes his mask off, tossing it aside.

“Fuck, that mask gets hot,” he grumbles, running his fingers through his messy red hair. “The bodies are in the incinerator. Carrie is finally getting her revenge. The halls will run red with their blood before we’re done.”

I grunt and turn to face him. He always has been a little on the dramatic side. “They need to pay for what they did to her,” I say, then turn back to the screen.

Chuck is still screaming for us to return his friends. Kiernan moves behind me and leans over my shoulder. “Do you think she would be mad at us for including them in this?” I ask with a shrug.

“No, I think they need to witness what their inattention did. They’ll watch every moment of her vengeance,” he says before sitting back down and pulling out his notebook, crossing off Johnson, Neumann, and Victoria’s names.



I CONTINUE WATCHING my prey as they try to figure out what is going on. We have been quiet since the last game, and it’s time for another one to begin, but this time only a certain few are chosen.

I play with the control panel until my face is showing inside The Butcher’s room. It was pitch black until I adjusted the lights and all my little mice screamed. “Please, please. I just want to go home! How did we even get here?” a woman yells, and I smirk behind my mask.

The door in the corner opens and two men enter. They look worse for wear. “Laurel, Nicky,” Prince shouts before limping over to them and trying to remove their bindings, but it’s pointless.

The only way they will get free is with a push of a button, the very one sitting beside me. “Prince, get us out of here,” Nicky screams, and I laugh as they struggle. The other man in the room just stands in the corner, watching.

He’s older than Prince, his dark eyes shrewd, and he doesn’t seem scared. That just won’t do. I note the location he is at and press a button. The wall gives off an electric shock, and he jolts away, closer to where the girls are strapped down half-naked on their tables.

Scared, defenseless, hopeless, all the emotions they caused Carrie Campbell to feel as they tortured her and made her life a living hell. We have something special planned for them.

“You can pull and fight, but the only way you will be free is if you play the game,” I say with a sigh, and they freeze, looking back over to the wall where I am displayed.

“I’m not playing your sick fucking twisted games. Now let us go. My daddy will destroy you for this,” Nicky shouts, and I laugh, startling Kiernan.

“Your father has no rule here. I am the judge and the jury. You are in my playhouse, little girl, and you will pay for all of your sins,” I growl. “Step away from the girls, Prince,” I order, and he listens, apologizing to them.

“Now, where was I? Oh, yes, your next game is quite simple. You all enjoy raping the innocent, so for this, I will give you a choice.” I press a button and the wall shifts, revealing the secret compartment filled with all sorts of toys.

“To leave this room, you can either A: Fuck Laurel and Nicky or B: Kill them. There is only one correct choice, so I will give you thirty seconds to choose.” I press the button for the timer, and it starts to count down.

“No, no, please, Prince, don’t do this,” Nicky and Laurel beg, totally ignoring the man stalking closer to them with an

erection and glee in his eyes. Mr. Roberts always was a sick pervert.

I press a button, releasing the girls, and they jump from the table and run to the other side of the room. I yawn and press another button, electrifying the wall.

“You can run, but you can’t hide,” I tease while giggling. The voice changer makes my voice sound demonic, and the girls’ eyes are blown wide with terror. “Play the game. We’re just getting started!”

“Can’t we fuck them as we kill them?” Mr. Roberts grunts, picking up a knife from a tray. I’m surprised the girls didn’t try to arm themselves. I swear, some people are too dumb to live, a problem I plan to fix immediately.

“I actually really like that idea,” Prince mutters, changing before my eyes. I wait to see if he’s going to attempt to kill Mr. Roberts. Wouldn’t that be fun? “It’s a shame you left town, Mr. Roberts. You were always a great teacher.”

“Some little assholes got me fired,” he snarls. “Which one do you want? Any ideas on which one has a tighter pussy?”

“Laurel’s ass is fun to fuck.” Prince smirks, picking up an ax.

“Prince, we had some good times, what are you doing?” Laurel squeals, pressed against the wall and holding Nicky’s hand.

Pressing a button, I push electricity into their bodies, my lips twitching as they scream.

“Nicky a shitty lay?” Mr. Roberts chuckles. He doesn’t seem in the least bit concerned as the girls drop to the ground. I didn’t give them much, just enough to make them move.

Standing even as they twitch, the two of them attempt to get past the men.

“You’re already both rapists, so I’m not surprised you would become fast friends,” I say with a scowl.

“Shut up, you asshole,” Laurel screams, stomping over to the screen. She still doesn’t have anything to protect herself,

and I roll my eyes.

Kiernan is muttering behind me, but they can't hear him, only what is said through my microphone. "I'm not the one at fault here, little girl. You ruined an innocent, just like those men beside you have."

Laurel screams and turns right into Mr. Roberts' blade. He grabs her by the hair and pulls her back over to the table, leaving the blade lodged in her gut. "No, no, please. I was your daughter's best friend," she wails, and he laughs with glee as he starts to unbutton his pants.

Prince continues to stalk Nicky around the room, swinging his ax around like a true psychopath.

"Please, Prince. I loved you once. Don't do this," she wails as he slows his pace. He actually hesitates, and I wonder if maybe, somewhere deep down, he does feel remorse. But it doesn't matter now. It's too late.

"Time's up! Make a choice or suffer the consequences," I shout, and he charges her, swinging his ax. The sharpened blade slides through her like butter. I take very good care of my weapons. They're like my babies.

Blood spatters as the men stab them and begin to attempt to pull off the girls' clothing.

"Oh no," I coo as the men pull their dicks out to fuck the bleeding and nearly unconscious girls. "Guess who chose wrong."

Opening the doors to the room, two of my minions stalk inside wearing black gloves and holding wickedly sharp knives.

"I don't think you're going to need those tiny dicks ever again," I murmur as my men kick Mr. Roberts and Prince onto their backs away from the girls. "Minions, off with their cocks," I shout with glee and laugh maniacally.

Sometimes it's fun playing these games. My minions look at each other, then swing their blades in unison, chopping off the rapists' dicks in one fell swoop. I ignore the screaming and watch the girls as they bleed out, too.



My minions grab Mr. Roberts and Prince's feet, slowly dragging them from the room, leaving a gory, bloody trail as they continue to yell, scream, and cry. Nicky and Laurel's eyes stare unseeingly after them, dead as doornails.

"It looks like we need a clean up on aisle six." I shrug, turning to face Kier.

Smirking, he radios in for the crew to come pick up the bodies to incinerate them. I need to see how the boys are doing now.

"I'll be back. I want to see how the Watchers are doing. I'll be in the control room," I tell him as I walk away.

Bates is hanging from his chains, and I'm starting to wonder if maybe I should move them to chairs. His skin is flushed and he has vomit down his chest. He continues to get sick, and I sigh, revealing myself.

"This is the correct response. Human life is precious and should be treated as such. If you can't protect it, then you don't deserve to live."

"You are sick. How could you witness that? Why are you making me watch? I didn't know about what happened to Carrie! I didn't know about the baby until she called Chuck. Is this about her? I loved her!" he roars.

"Patience. All shall be revealed. Now watch the Butchers be butchered."

## Chuck

I watch as Laurel and Nicky are being attacked like prey. I keep trying to close my eyes, but every time I do a jolt of electricity surges through my body, causing me to cry out. I don't understand.

The Doctor said I'm a Watcher, but why? I don't want to see this. Do I think these people deserve to be slaughtered? Maybe once, but now... things have changed. I've moved on... Well, maybe not moved on, but I have tried to put the past where it belongs—behind me.

“Please, whoever you are, stop this! Carrie wouldn't want this,” I beg, but it falls on deaf ears.

“Carrie was weak. She let these people hurt her over and over again. She should have stopped it. Instead, she allowed them to beat her down until she was so depressed that she was willing to end her life,” The Doctor says through the speakers. “Do you wish to know what their other crimes are? This isn't just about a sad little girl without a backbone.”

My heart clenches as I listen to *this person* talk about Carrie like this. I remember her sass, how she pushed back with us. Carrie Campbell wasn't a pushover. It kills me to hear her spoken about so badly.

“We clearly knew her differently,” I say dully. I'm tired of being blasted with electricity.

“Mr. Roberts is a predator. You got him fired from Reutman High School, didn't you? The sheriff intervened when Carrie's father sent bikers to beat the shit out of him, keeping them from killing him. He left with his family, and he got a new job. During that time, he had been stalking and raping women all over this college campus.”

My blood fills with fire and I growl. “Motherfucking bastard,” I snarl.

“Prince had been date raping girls he partied with, and inviting his fraternity brothers to fuck them after he was done with them,” the voice says with a sigh. “Daddy Dearest gets him out of any allegations. Still think that I’m the monster? I have eyes everywhere. I have been The Watcher for years, and now it’s your time to watch.”

The projector behind my head begins to whine and I blow out a breath. My duties as The Watcher are about to begin.

“Prince has so many videos on his home computer,” The Doctor muses. “He thought it would be fun to film his sexcapes. Would you care to watch?”

“Watch rape? No I don’t want to fucking watch it—” Prince’s white ass begins pumping into a half-conscious woman, and I shake my head. “I don’t want to see this!”

I turn my head, closing my eyes even though I know the consequences. Electricity slams through my body, and I grit my teeth. “No!” I yell, shaking my head.

“Do your job. I’ve watched for so long, and now you have to, Chuck. Watch,” the Doctor insists.

Shuddering, I turn to watch Prince come, pulling out after to flip her onto her stomach and slap her ass. “Good little whore,” he sneers, making bile rise into my mouth. Swallowing hard, tears begin to fill my eyes as he gets up and gives the camera a seven. Holy fuck, he’s rating her.

Miserable bastard.

Pulling up his pants, he leaves them unbuttoned as he unlocks the door.

“Anyone want her for the next round? Fuck her awake. I may have been a little rough,” Prince snarks.

The screen goes black, and I would rather be in this darkened room than have to watch another second. My chest is heaving and my heartbeat is racing. I actually want to come off the wall and help kill Prince after witnessing that.

“The world was always too good for you, Chuck. This is necessary. You need to learn to pay attention. Ask the hard

questions. Push. Maybe Carrie would still be here if you'd gone after her," The Doctor says before they leave me alone with my thoughts.

Am I really to blame for Carrie's death?

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## Chapter 24

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## Meyers

I continue to hang here, my limbs so numb that they hurt with pinpricks as the blood tries to circulate. I don't know what I'm seeing. It seems so unreal, as if this is all a nightmare or some horror film.

This just can't be real. Who would do something like this? And how is Carrie involved in all of this? She's gone, and the people who loved her aren't this bloodthirsty. The only one I can think of to organize and orchestrate all of this is in a coma. At least, he was the last time I heard. Fuck, I've been so bad about checking on Jax.

I'm also really fucking confused as to why some people I haven't seen in years are appearing. Like Gabby, Mr. Roberts' daughter—one of my friends from middle school until she began to bully Carrie—is here. I haven't seen her since freshman year, and her dad... I shudder as the flashback of what I just saw happen to him plays in my head.

“Watcher, are you ready? There is more to witness. More crimes, more depravity. It never ends,” The Doctor states over the speakers. “The sweet little town you grew up in has many secrets.”

Swallowing hard, I know they're right. Reutman wasn't filled with innocent and good people. I watched my mom become sadder and sadder as she realized how cruel people were in our town. An old man spit in her direction when she filed for divorce, she lost her job over a girl's petty words, and the list goes on.

Growing up in a small town didn't make us special. It made us blind to its secrets, because we grew up surrounded by them so we didn't notice the difference.

The now familiar sound of the projector above my head whirs, and I struggle to understand what I'm seeing. Gabby, Mr. Roberts' daughter is tied to a chair screaming obscenities

as Terri cries silently in the seat next to her. Terri pushed Carrie in Ms. Katz's class, enraging Chuck.

A man in a steampunk gas mask, ripped jeans, and long-sleeved black shirt leans against the wall in front of them with a cattle prod in his hand. Moving forward, he jabs Gabby with the prod and she jerks in her seat. Huh. So it was electrified. Nifty. I think I may be losing my mind.

"Let's try that again, cupcake. Shall we?" The man appears amused, and I would swear he looks slightly familiar.

"We're sorry," Terri whispers.

"Do you know why your father was fired from his job at the high school?" the minion asks.

Gasping for breath, Gabby nods. Her forehead is drenched in sweat and she's twitching uncontrollably.

"My dad has a problem," Gabby begins. "He likes to fantasize about young girls. I didn't figure it out until we had to move. I found a shoebox of photos that he took while hiding in the girls' locker room. They were his trophies for his 'alone time.' It got worse, and he started stalking girls at the college. I looked the other way because he's my dad."

"It's wrong to say nothing when we see bad things," the minion against the wall says. "You are just as guilty."

"Why am I here?" Terri asks, crying harder. "I'm a good person!"

"Do you think Carrie Campbell would think you're a good person? I didn't think so. Shut the fuck up before I throw you in a kill room," the minion snarls. It appears he has buttons that can be pushed. "I have a file here that is composed of every vile, disgusting thing anyone in the town of Reutman has ever done. Terri, did you know that your father likes to force himself on his secretaries? If they don't fuck him, he'll report them to Human Resources for improper conduct."

Terri shakes her head, but the minion pulls out a sheet of paper and hands it to her.

"Oh, my God," she whispers.

“Do you want to do one good thing in your godforsaken lives? Even if it’s to save your own skin,” the minion snarks. I can imagine the eye rolling happening.

Terri and Gabby are true mean girls, and nobleness doesn’t exist in their bodies.

“Yes,” they whisper.

“Minnie Vines is a news reporter that specializes in small town horror stories. You’re going to call her and tell her you have a story for her,” the minion muses. “The Sheriff is working with the Mafia and is responsible for Carrie’s father being in a coma, several people in your town are embezzling funds, and the list goes on. She’ll love this. After you deliver this file, I suggest you both disappear because the majority of Reutman will be burned by this leaked information.”

“This is crazy,” Gabby whispers. “It seems like such a nice town. I really was sad when we had to leave.”

“Nothing is as it seemed in that town. If you agree, you’ll take this file and walk out and call Minnie. You will not attempt to do anything else. The NDA is ironclad, so if she asks where you got the file, you’ll say that a concerned citizen dropped it in your mailbox. Is that understood?”

“Yes,” Gabby and Terri say, eyes wide.

“We’ll go. I’m sure you’ll have us watched,” Terri rasps, sniffing.

“You’d be correct. Now take this and get out of my face. You’ll be escorted out,” the minion states, and the bindings drop away from Terri and Gabby’s bodies.

Standing, Gabby reaches out for the file with trembling hands.

“Let’s go,” Terri says softly, and they scurry out of the room where someone in a horned mask escorts them out.

“We’ll be watching. Always,” the minion says to the empty room before the feed goes dark.

Just who are these people?



## Bates

“Okay, seriously. Enough is enough!” I shout at the wall, but no one seems to be there right now. “Can I at least have a fucking chair? Maybe a drink and a snack if you are going to make me continue to watch all these disturbing and depraved things!”

I know I should probably fear for my own life, but I think I’m starting to understand everything. I have no fucking clue who The Doctor is, but I think I know them. Why else would Chuck, Meyers, and I be told to watch instead of playing their sick games?

My stomach aches and I groan at the scent surrounding me. “Can I at least change my shirt,” I grumble and sigh. I guess I should be glad that they aren’t commanding my attention right now. I mean, I love my cock and want it to stay attached to me. It’s probably best not to piss them off, but if I continue to hang here, I might lose my hands.

Maybe if I figure out who is behind the wall, they will let me and the guys go. Like some fucked up version of Rumplestiltskin. I don’t think it’s Carrie’s mom. I know for a fact she couldn’t stomach this. The sight of blood makes her faint.

I remember the summer Chuck stepped on a nail. She was the one who needed an ambulance to come after she fainted and smacked her head into the counter. All Chuck needed was a tetanus shot.

So yeah, can’t be Carrie’s mom, but I do think it’s someone who was close to my girl. I’d say it was her dad, but that’s impossible. The last I heard of him, he was still in a coma. Then again, that was two years ago, and whoever is behind all of this has been plotting and planning for a long time.

I thought that the cemetery next door was just a ruse, a part of the haunted house, but now I'm not so sure... Then again, they did mention an incinerator in the basement. Fuck, who the hell are these people?

Shit, if this is Carrie's dad, I'm going to go after him with an ax. Like, what the absolute fuck?! We never hurt Carrie. We loved her more than anything.

"Jax, if this is you, what the fuck happened? You're better than this. Carrie wouldn't want this. She was a good person. She had a good heart," I yell at the wall.

The screen flickers and The Doctor's face appears. I grumble at how disturbing their mask is. At first, I thought this haunted house was cool, but now I'm never going to be able to look at anything steampunk related the same way again.

"I'm not Jax Campbell. He died in a gunfight with the mafia he was investigating. He was in a coma for many years until his wife pulled the plug. It was too hard on her seeing him lying there day after day. She lost her daughter and her husband," The Doctor says. "I am a concerned citizen. I met Carrie once, and I know she didn't deserve to die by drowning. Imagine how alone she was in her final moments, how frightened."

Shuddering, I scream. I'm so tired of crying, of feeling too much. This is why I use women like human cum dumpsters. They're fun and they keep me from feeling. I'm free of emotions that destroy my soul until the cycle starts again. I'm pretty fucked up.

"Don't cry for the people on the screens, their lives are forfeit. Cry for the innocents whose lives they've destroyed. No one is without sin within these walls, everyone is guilty in some form. Some more than others. Revenge will be found." The Doctor disappears, leaving me to my thoughts.

If it's not Jax, then who the fuck is it? Why are they doing this? And why now? Carrie died three years ago. I close my eyes and breath with relief as I'm not shocked. I hope the guys are holding up through all of this.

I'm not worried about Chuck; he has always been the strongest out of the three of us. Meyers, on the other hand, is probably breaking inside. "You show me all these scenes and games. Can I please see my friends? Are they even still breathing?" I ask, my voice cracking at the end. I know the Doctor is always watching and can hear me. "Why did you separate us if all we are here for is to watch and be witnesses?"

There's no answers to my questions, but scenes of the facility pop up all around me. The Doctor has been very busy while I've been hanging uselessly from the wall. The morgue is burning the bodies of those killed since the games started, and I gag. My stomach has been so weak since I've been here. I'm embarrassed for myself.

I can't help it, though. It's all too much.

On the far wall, minions are butchering the Butchers, and I can hear as they catcall and torture them mercilessly. Faster and faster, the scenes begin to change on the walls, and I catch flashes of dead bodies, people screaming, and hallways filled with blood.

My brain gets overwhelmed, and I scream for mercy that finally comes in the form of my body passing out. Unfortunately, the electric probes on the wall electrocute me, and The Doctor shows me even more horrifying scenes.

"You are the Watcher," The Doctor intones. "Witness the games."

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## Chapter 25

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## Chuck

I'm hanging from my wall, but the minions have brought Bates and Meyers back to me. A part of me feels better now, if only because they're in the same room as me now.

"What do you think is next?" Bates asks softly, struggling to get comfortable. My arms have been numb for hours, it's a useless venture.

"I don't know, but it can't be good," I grunt.

"The Hunted is the most vile of all of our contestants," the Doctor says as the projector shows an empty hallway. "No always means no, doesn't it, boys?"

"Yes," Meyers, Bates, and I reply in unison, staring raptly at the wall.

A man with light-brown hair runs around the corner, almost crashing into the wall as he flies around it. The camera switches to one where we can see his face, and I snarl. It's Ian.

Carrie fucking trusted him.

Getting to his feet, he begins to run again, an ax just missing him and getting embedded into the wall.

"You've been judged!" a disjointed voice yells as they run around the corner with a knife.

"You've been found wanting!" another voice joins in.

"And your punishment is to be hunted. If you live, you get to leave with your life."

"No!" I scream at the wall. "He can't live!"

Meyers is watching intently, shaking his head. "It's part of the game. They want him to think he has a chance. This guy is leaving chopped up into little fucking pieces," he says.

"So bloodthirsty," the Doctor says over the speaker. I have a feeling they're watching in their own little command center,

waiting for this dickcheese to be murdered.

There are four men stalking Ian through the halls, yelling things at him, startling him as he runs.

“Can’t get his dick sucked unless he’s drugging girls, eh?” one of the men says, lazily throwing a knife at Ian with precision.

*Who the fuck are these guys?*

Crying out with pain, Ian leaves the knife in, pushing open doors to find an exit. The door we all came in is locked, and he rattles it and screams.

“No! That’s not true,” Ian huffs, his face bright red, tears of frustration leaking from his eyes as he scrambles away from the hunters. “I loved Carrie. I would have loved that baby.”

“Get her name out of your mouth!” I roar. How dare he talk about her. He didn’t love her.

“Such lies flow out of the rapist’s mouth,” The Doctor coos.

I jolt my head back, smacking it against the wall. “What are you talking about?” I gasp, and the person in the mask laughs. The sound is chilling, and I feel wrecked. How much longer will we have to stay here and watch.

There are only two contestants left besides us. Bates starts to cry and mutter under his breath, and Meyers is gasping for breath. “Please stop fucking playing with us! Just tell us what we need to know. What we didn’t see.”

“I think it’s better if you see for yourself,” The Doctor says, then the screen changes to someone’s bedroom.

Laurel is riding Ian and he’s kissing her neck. What the fuck? “Tell me again what you did to that whore,” she whimpers, and he pulls away to give her a smirk.

“Little bitch would never give me attention. Always up those pricks’ asses. They should have never left her alone that night. Especially on her birthday,” he groans as Laurel swirls her hips.

“More, baby, tell me,” she keens, and it sounds like she’s close to coming.

“I gave her a bottle of water drugged with a little something. It wasn’t going to hurt her, just make her a little... Well, loose. The little bitch tested me and fought back, so I had to shove her over the center console of my car and really give it to her. Little slut wasn’t even wearing panties. Then she stabbed me and got away before I could have a second taste,” he says with a scowl, and Laurel explodes loudly all over his cock.

I can’t watch any more. “Turn it off,” I croak. My heart is shattered, and I want to kill him. “Let us free, and we will bring you that prick’s head,” I plead, and wait for The Doctor to make a decision.

There is a buzz in the room and our shackles are opened. I don’t even wait to check if Bates and Meyers are with me, the moment our door is opened, I am out and racing down the halls.

“Turn left, right, then left again, and you will find your prey in the foyer,” The Doctor says over the speakers.

When we reach Ian, the other men step aside and let us at him. I don’t have any weapons, but I don’t need them. I have always feared that I would turn into my father, but this piece of scum doesn’t deserve to live.

“Chuck! Fuck, they got you too.” He looks hopeful at the sight of me, and I shake out my arms, praying the feeling comes back.

Meyers steps closer to me and grabs Ian by the back of the neck, shoving his fist into his nose. A crack sounds and blood spurts. “How could you?” he snarls before biting down on Ian’s neck and ripping his flesh.

Fuck, why is that hot?

“Stop, please. What are you doing?” Ian wails as Bates shuffles over and starts to unbuckle Ian’s pants, lowering the zipper and tugging his jeans down. “What? What are you doing?”

“You raped one of the most amazing people in the world. You destroyed her light. You took her from us all because you wanted to get your measly dick wet,” he says, before waving his hand in front of one of The Doctor’s minions.

He hands him the bloody blade, and Bates turns back to Ian. “Hold him,” he says, and I grab Ian’s shoulders, pushing him against the wall. “I never thought I would do this to someone. Especially after seeing it happen to Prince, but for you... You fucking deserve this and worse. You deserve to be entirely emasculated so you never hurt anyone with it ever again.”

With those words, he slashes Ian’s inner thighs and cock. I wince, but not at the thought of another dick being cut, but from the high pitched squeal that escapes Ian’s lips.

“Give me the cattle prod,” Meyers says to one of the other guys, and they hand it over. The smell of burning flesh turns my stomach as Meyers shoves the prod deep into Ian’s wounds, stopping his bleeding and causing him even more pain.

“Stop. Please. She was mine, but she never even looked at me. You were so mean to her and still she would return to you,” he cries and begs, snot and blood running down his face from his obviously broken nose.

One of the minions steps forward and gives us a nod. “Run,” he tells Ian with a maniacal laugh. “It’s hunting time, boys,” he shouts, and the other guys whoop. I know this is psychotic, and maybe I have lost my mind, but my blood heats and I’m actually excited to let Ian go and continue to hunt and hurt him.

He limps away and I look at Bates. He’s still clutching the blade and seems to be in a state of shock. I move closer and take the knife. He jolts, but doesn’t lash out at me. I lean over and kiss him hard.

I don’t care that we are in the middle of a psycho’s games. Meyers chuckles and starts to prowl after Ian as he grips onto the wall for support. One of the masked men stops and waits for us.



He's in a corset, and I'm shocked when he raises his hand and removes his mask. "What the fuck!" I roar as Kieran is revealed. "You? You have been behind all this?" I want to punch him, but I have a feeling I won't get within inches of him.

"She would have been proud of you boys," he murmurs with a smile, and I shake my head.

"I'm losing my goddamn mind!" I grumble and keep moving. Bates and Meyers ignore Kier and follow me. "Let's end this and give our girl some peace," I say, and the guys nod, agreeing.

"You boys have made me proud, but don't rush the hunt. Your prey is wounded, scared, hopeless. Just the way Carrie felt when he took her soul the night of her seventeenth birthday. When he made her feel weak and full of shame. Ruin him."

Snarling like an animal, I track Ian through the halls. Bates, Meyers, and I kick him as he stumbles along so he'll sprawl on his face, telling him how inept he is.

"Why are you doing this? Fuck, you cut off my cock," Ian snuffles, cupping himself as he starts to run.

"You won't need it in Hell," I growl. It's like I've lost my self control, and it feels really fucking good. For so many years, I've been going through the motions, but I'm done. There's a reason I lost the love of my life.

His name is Ian Matthers, and he's a dead man walking.

"Carrie tried to crawl away, even stabbed you," Kier yells after Ian, stalking him with us. "In what world is that considered consent, asshole? Her knife said no twice, didn't it?"

"Do you have scars?" Meyers asks, eyes narrowing as we walk. "How does it feel that the girl who you thought of as yours stabbed you to get your cock out of her!"

My footsteps grow faster, almost done playing with my food. Ian squeals like a little bitch, and Kiernan snickers.

“I bet he pisses himself,” he says, amused.

The men who were stalking Ian earlier are back, making sure we each have an ax.

“Go for the legs, then keep chopping. Make it hurt,” one of them growls. “Justice for Carrie!”

Together, we scream, and Ian races away from us. There’s no way out. It’s clear they’ve done a lot of preparation for the games. Thank fuck, because I finally understand what we’re fighting for. The girl with the hazel eyes who looked at me as if I hung the moon.

Ian opens the doors to another room, and I frown as I see it’s outside.

“It’s closed off,” a big, masked man grunts. He looks familiar, but I can’t place him.

I have someone to hunt, so I push the thought away. I don’t even care who is pulling the strings right now. I want this fucker dead, and I’ll kiss the feet of the person who brought me here to do it.

We’re in some kind of greenhouse, and Ian is trying to open all the doors. Unfortunately for him, they’re all chained shut.

“It sucks to suck!” I yell at him, smirking. Ian turns, his face twisted into a grimace.

“I would have given her everything!” he screams at me, and I shake my head.

“You took from her. Carrie’s innocence, her sanity, and her confidence,” I tell him sadly, each step bringing me closer to him. “Carrie is at the bottom of a lake because you took her from the people who loved her.”

Swinging the ax without hesitation, I take out both legs easily. Ian’s screams mean nothing to me as he struggles to pull himself away. Stepping aside, I let the guys hack away at him until he’s a bloody mass.

“I can think of no better end for my daughter’s rapist,” one of the men growls, pulling off his mask. There stands Jax

Campbell with a feral grin.

“Jax,” Meyers breathes. It hit us all hard when he went into a coma, and I stumble in shock. I never thought I would see his terrifying face again.

“Yes,” he grunts, spitting on what’s left of Ian’s body. “When I heard this was taking place, I wanted a part of it. And before you start asking, I’m not in charge either. Let’s get cleaned up a bit. It’s almost over.”

Nodding, we slowly walk together, and Meyers, Bates, and I are led to the room we originally stayed in. I’m numb as I take a shower, not because I’m upset about what happened to Ian, but because nothing I thought was real.

It’s a mind fuck.

Carrie didn’t leave us to be selfish. Life happened to her. We should have tried harder, paid better attention at the party, followed her out. There’s so many things I wish I had done differently. Life happened to our beautiful girl. We’ve been so broken without her.

“I wish we had done better by you, baby,” I whisper, my head dropping back on the tile wall. “I love you.”

## The Doctor

I feel like a voyeur as I watch Jax, Kier, and the guys kill Ian. They make it hurt, and I cheer from my control room. Everything happens upon my command, even the deaths. All of these people joined me to avenge Carrie. She shouldn't have had to have her innocence ripped away from her on her birthday. She is so missed.

“Fly high, Carrie. Rest easy. We are changing the world for you to come back to,” I whisper.

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## Chapter 26

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## The Doctor

I let the boys shower and rest for a few hours, but I'm on edge. We are so close to the finish line, and I'm getting antsy. "Will you just sit down and eat?" Kieran grumbles as he watches me pace.

"I will eat when the world is rid of the filth that hurt Carrie," I mutter, and he sighs.

"They surprised me. Maybe we shouldn't have made them Watchers. They would have been decent minions," he continues to babble, but I'm not listening anymore.

I have one person left that needs to pay for her sins. She may have never done anything physically to Carrie, but she is at fault. "Where did you put the bitch?" I ask, and Kiernan snorts.

"She's hanging out in the checkered room. Last I knew she was singing religious songs at the top of her lungs and praying," he says with a snort, and I smile.

"Good. It's time for me to pay her a visit." I smirk. "Bring the Watchers in, too. I want them to see this. It's time for them to know the truth."

The hallways are silent as I walk through them to see the last person who needs to pay their penance. I can't kill her because family was everything to Carrie, but I can scare the shit out of her.

When I step into the darkened room, Tilly is crying and praying, just like Kier said. Rolling my eyes in my mask, I step into the spotlight in the middle of the room.

"Hello, Tilly," I drawl, the voice changer protecting my identity. "Are you having fun yet?"

"I'm not having fun, you psycho! You've been showing me videos of all the people you've killed. I swear... I won't

tell anyone. No one, you hear me? Please, let me go,” Tilly screams.

The door behind me opens, and the guys step into the room before they’re swallowed up by the darkness. They were asked not to step into the spotlight, so they wait in the shadows for my call.

Such good Watchers.

“Tilly, I don’t know if you’ve realized this yet, but every single person who has died during the Choice Games has been because they were terrible to Carrie Campbell in one way or another,” I begin, taking a deep breath for what I’m about to do. “You weren’t very nice to your cousin, were you?”

Kiernan came in with the Watchers as well, and he steps into the spotlight with me.

“Your crimes against my best friend were many,” he intones, taking off his mask. Tilly’s jaw drops, and if she could get any more pasty, she would. “Tilly, you belittled Carrie for her weight, her clothes, and told her she was a waste of space. You were even meaner than the women we just found wanting and brutally killed. I really think you should die.”

“Carrie always worried about her weight,” Chuck growls. His voice rumbles through the room, giving me goosebumps. My Watcher is pissed. If this was going to go any other way, I’d give her to him to punish. “You’d been putting that thought in her head for years, you bitch. Can we throw her to the Butcher Boys?”

My lips twitch as I realize he means the men who helped them kill Ian. I’m so glad he’s dead. *Off with his cock* is definitely my new mantra. Biting my lip, I realize it’s time. Turning so I can see the entire room, I pull off my mask.

“I wish we could,” I tell them, the voice changer still on. I can’t give it up yet. They’ll know. “Carrie should have had a family to turn to when she was pregnant and depressed. She thought she was pregnant by her rapist, Tilly.”

“Carrie was pregnant?” Tilly breathes. I edited a lot of the videos I streamed into the room, so she had no idea. “I’m glad

she stabbed him. I... Everyone loved her more than me. I just wanted something for myself. When my own mom moved away because she couldn't stand to be near me... I snapped."

I hear a gasp, and turn to face Bates. His eyes are wide as he stares at me. "Miss me, Bates?"

"Blakely..." he whispers.

I'm wearing the face paint I wore the day I met him.

"Bates and I hooked up at a party. I'm honestly surprised you even remember who I am." I shrug. "I think you disgrace Carrie's memory the most. I understand having pain, but burying yourself in some new girl's pussy every night isn't the best way to handle that. The three of you have been lost."

"I told you so," Chuck grumbles under his breath.

"Tilly, you're a terrible fucking person," I tell her, turning back to her. A spotlight drops on her, and I see Kier hide the master remote in his pocket guiltily. So dramatic. Oh, well. "The only way you'll survive this is if you promise to turn a new leaf. You will join a nunnery, volunteer, and disappear. I have eyes and ears everywhere. Will you do that?"

Tilly cries, and I know some of them are from frustration. "But she's already dead, I can't fix it!"

"You can't, which is the point of all of this. If you didn't purposely hurt her, then you wouldn't have anything to fix," I explain to her. The guys are staring intently, and I know it's almost time. "Carrie suffered. She didn't deserve any of this. I've been watching, collecting evidence, and waiting."

"You can agree to what we want or die," Kier shouts, grinning evilly. "I really would feel better if we were to just kill you and call it a day. You didn't make my life very easy either."

"Wait," Tilly gasps. "What about school?"

"I already sent in evidence that you've been cheating on your exams." I shrug. I didn't even have to fake it. Tilly has been a very bad girl. "You've been expelled for plagiarizing your papers."



“What?!” she wails, and I shrug. “Fine... Shit.”

Kier raises an eyebrow, making Tilly shudder.

“I have nothing better to do now, and my mom is going to fucking kill me,” Tilly says, sniffing.

No, she won't. Sarah adores Tilly, even though she's an asshole to her siblings and mother.

Kiernan pulls out a pack of makeup wipes, questions in his eyes. I guess that's my cue.

Taking them, I pull one out. “It's important to me to ensure Carrie gets her revenge, since she wasn't strong enough to do it herself.”

Swiping the wipe across my face, I take a breath. Why is this so hard to do? “Facing the people who hurt her, who broke her soul, wasn't easy.”

As the wipe turns black with makeup, I drop it into the waiting wastebasket. I'm nothing if not prepared these days.

“Carrie sat with strangers during her long nights, talking to people as they faced their depression and struggles. Yet, when she picked up the phone, Chuck was on the other end,” I continue. I'm not blaming him, I'm simply stating facts.

Ignoring his flinch, I wipe off more makeup. My hair is black; I started coloring it years ago, and I have tattoos now. “I don't think she expected that, and in the face of losing her baby, she broke.”

“I started working at the hotline when I followed her there one day. I couldn't be near her because of the deal I made with the girls, but I had to see what she was doing from day to day,” he rasps. “So I stalked her. I watched her. I couldn't help myself. And yet, when it really mattered, we didn't catch her leaving the party.”

“She didn't want to bother you,” I murmur, wiping away the painted ghoulish teeth along my chin and the bottom half of my face. “So she slipped out, and right into Ian's hands. I really want to blame you for that.”

“We were right there,” Meyers whispers. “We had just had the most perfect night with her, and we missed her talking to Ian.”

Tilly is quiet as she hears that. This is where Carrie was ruined. Ian planned to make her his, but it didn't go at all as he thought it would. Carrie was someone else's soulmate.

Throwing away the last makeup wipe, I take a deep breath, then let them look at me.

# PART THREE



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## Chapter 27

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## Chuck

They say some ghosts should stay dead and buried, but this is one I'm happy has returned. "Carrie?" I croak, and she flinches back as if I just hit her, shaking her head.

"Carrie is dead. I'm Blakely. Please don't ever call me that name again," she mumbles and bites her bottom lip. My head feels like it's about to explode, and Bates looks like he might be sick.

"You came to me during the party, and we... I thought you were familiar," he starts to babble, and Meyers moves closer to her.

She shuffles away, and he stops.

"I needed to check in on you all in person. I didn't plan to end up in your bed that night, Bates," she says on a sigh, wrapping her arms around herself. Tilly's eyes look as if they're about to burst. "Kier, make sure Tilly gets out of here, and give her the name of a nunnery. We're going to continue this in private."

Kiernan pulls out his phone where he leans against the wall, and it looks like he wishes he had some popcorn. One thing I've realized is that he's extremely efficient.

Following her out, my heart is beating faster than it ever has, and I waver on my feet. Meyers and Bates lean into me to help me, but I can tell they're also shaken. Carrie, I mean... Fuck, what do I mean?

She's quiet until she walks into an office with us and leans back on the desk.

"Carrie died that night in the river. She's gone. I don't know how to be that person anymore. Too much has happened, and it's too late to go backwards. I brought you here this weekend so you could witness Carrie's truth and understand everything that she went through."

Meyers shakes his head and groans. “You’re not making any sense,” he mumbles, looking just as lost and confused as Bates and I.

Carrie... I mean Blakely, turns to him and gives him a small smile. “I wanted to help you and your mom. I’ve been watching Reutman for years, and have learned a great deal. When I saw your mom was going to lose her house, we decided to move up our timeline for the games. Kiernan already transferred the prize money to your mom. It hit her account the moment you signed the NDA.”

Tears fill Meyers’ eyes, and I know it’s not because he’s sad. He’s relieved. “I don’t know what to say,” he whispers and drops to his knees in front of Blakely. She hesitates, but slowly reaches out to run her fingers through his hair, just like she used to do when we were kids.

It must have been too much for her because she quickly stands and moves over toward the door. Meyers falls on his ass, reaching out for her.

“I’m sorry that I brought you into all of this madness, but it was important to me for you all to learn the truth.” With those words, she turns the doorknob and swings the door open.

My feet are moving before I can even think, and Kiernan reaches out, stopping me. The man is a fucking ninja, always there for our girl.

Bates hasn’t even shifted from his place, and I’m worried that he may actually be in shock.

“Blakely, wait. There is so much we need to talk about!” I shout, but she never looks back and continues to walk down the hallway. A woman stops to talk to her for a moment, then nods and moves closer to me.

I don’t know who she is, but Kiernan sighs. “It’s over now. Maybe she can finally get some rest,” he says, and the woman nods. She has tears in her eyes and quickly blinks them away.

“You boys have to understand that Blakely has been through a lot. This weekend was about purging her demons,

but it still wasn't easy. Seeing you three again in person... She needs time."

"Who are you?" Bates croaks, and the woman smiles.

"I'm Francis, of course," she says, and I nod.

"We never met, but Carrie... er, I mean Blakely, talked about you sometimes. I guess it makes sense that she would have a Mafia princess helping her orchestrate her house of revenge," I mumble, and Kier snorts.

"Oh, you have no idea, Chuck," he says, then leans over and smacks a kiss onto my cheek. "Now, if you would excuse me, I have a harem of men waiting for me at home and a little princess to cuddle."

He leaves the room, and Francis turns toward Bates and Meyers. "Just give her some time to cope with everything. I have a feeling I will be seeing you guys again soon."

She leaves us, too and I collapse onto the floor and rest my head on my knees. I just need a second to wrap my mind around everything, and then I am getting out of this house of horrors.

## Blakely

I leave the house and go for a walk. I need to clear my head. Things this weekend went off without a hitch, but I never thought seeing Chuck, Meyers, and Bates again would hit me this hard.

I know that they needed to be there. There was never any question about making them The Watchers, but I didn't expect them to become so bloodthirsty and take Ian down. Maybe I should have talked to them in the past.

My phone rings, and I groan while answering the call. "I am only going for a walk," I grumble, and Kier sighs.

*"Just let me come get you, and we will go for a walk together."* I agree and then hang up. I know I scared him the night he found me at the bottom of the embankment, half-drowned and looking like some creature from a horror movie.

He saved my life, and for a while there I didn't know if that was a good thing or if it was pointless. I was in such a dark place.

A car pulls up beside me, and I give Brian a wave, then open up the back door and climb in. "I bet you never guessed when we became friends that I would make you hunt rapists," I mutter, and he laughs, shaking his head.

He and his friends helped Carrie and Kiernan clean out Carrie's house when her grandmother died and left it to her. They were a huge help in getting my haunted house set up. Plus, I guess the fact that they all fell madly in love with Kiernan worked in our favor as well.



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## Chapter 28

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## Bates

### *Two weeks later*

It's been two weeks since we left the haunted house. Meyers is staying with us here at the frat house, but we haven't left. No classes or practices. We have been in a state of shock and confusion since the moment Blakely removed her makeup.

I still can't believe that Carrie has been alive all this time, and that I slept with her that night. There was something so familiar about her, I should have known.

"Bates!" Chuck yells, and I walk quickly to the living room where we've set up camp. The guys have been watching trash television all day.

"What?" I ask, beginning to sip my beer when I choke. Reutman is on the television right now. On the news.

"Holy fuck," I sputter, struggling to breathe around the beer I'm choking down.

"It's an exposé," Meyers mutters. "People are getting arrested. It's everything Blakely talked about. Money laundering, skimming, even kidnapping and aggravated assault."

I fall into the space between Meyers and Chuck, stunned. Every dirty secret is coming out right now.

"I would never have guessed the principal was selling photos of the girls in the locker rooms," Chuck grunts, his face filled with disgust.

"REUTMAN IS *a mess as people are being arrested, committing suicide, and packing up to leave entirely. They may*

*never be able to sell their homes and are calling it a loss, and I expect this will quickly become a ghost town,” the reporter explains as she stands in the town square. “The FBI are taking people away, boxing up evidence, and the ambulances have their hands full.”*

“OH, MY GOD,” I whisper. “I hate to say it, but she’s done everything she said she would. I’m both impressed and terrified.”

The phone rings, and we look around confused. We haven’t spoken to anyone in ages.

“It’s mine,” Meyers grunts, picking up his phone. “Damn, it’s Mom.”

“Hey, Mom,” he murmurs before his eyes widen. “Mom, wait, wait. Yes, the guys are here.”

Hitting the speaker button, Ms. Kay comes through the phone.

*“I don’t know what’s happening, but the town has lost its damn mind,” she says, frustration clear in her voice. “Part of the news cast happening right now is a statement that I never should have been fired, and that it was a mistake. This means I can teach again...”*

“Ms. Kay, please tell me you’re moving?” I ask her, muting the television. “It looks like people are leaving, and there won’t be any jobs there.”

*“That’s the oddest thing,” she muses. “A ton of money was deposited into my account. I made sure it was real, and was planning on paying off the house, but then this all happened. I think I’m going to leave, too. Will I cramp your style if I move closer to you three?”*

“Ha! What style?” Chuck grunts with a wince. He’s right, we’ve become slobs and shut-ins lately. Maybe we need the threat of Ms. Kay to get our asses in gear.

*“Even more reason for me to move then,” she says firmly. “I have my teaching certification back. I’m renting a U-Haul*

*and packing up. I'll be there within the week, and I'm going to apply for new jobs."*

"Do you need help packing?" I yelp. Damn, everything is moving so fast.

*"Nope. There are some nice young men who just showed up at my house and offered to help. It seems fine,"* Ms. Kay chuckles. *"See you soon!"*

The phone disconnects, and I shake my head. I wonder if Blakley is helping Ms. Kay with this, too. It's all so insane to me.

"We better start cleaning up," Meyers mumbles, standing quickly. "It'll take us at least a week to get this anywhere near Mom approved."

Nothing like the threat of Hurricane Kay to get us moving.

"What if we also looked into moving off campus and into a place of our own?" I ask what I've been thinking about lately, and Chuck stops in his tracks, turns, and grabs my face, kissing me hard.

"Umm," I mumble when he backs away, and Meyers laughs. "I'll take that as a yes, then?"

He nods, and I smile. This is good. Maybe things are finally looking up now.

## Blakely

I wait for Trey and Brian to leave Ms. Kay's house with her first load of belongings, then I reveal myself. I use the back door and almost give the poor woman a heart attack. Her hand covers her mouth as she tries to speak.

Opening the door, I step inside. "Car—" I cut her off.

"Please, call me Blakely," I rush, and she stops speaking. "I'm sorry to just show up here, but I wanted to talk to you, if that's okay." She moves forward and pulls me into a tight hug.

"I never thought you were really gone. I mean, they never found a body, and your mother... Oh, your poor mother. Does she know you're back?" I nod and sigh, hugging her back. She still smells the same, and it comforts me.

When we pull apart, she moves over to the living room and sits on the couch. "Okay, you wanted to talk. Let's talk." I pace for a minute.

"That night on the bridge, Carrie did die. She chose to end her life, but I was reborn in her sorrow. She was too weak. She never could have accomplished everything that I did."

"Wait, I'm confused... Blakely, was it?" Ms. Kay says, then stands and grabs my hand to get me to still. "Why did Carrie decide to die?"

Ms. Kay is trying to meet me where I'm at, as always. God, I've missed her so much. Taking a deep breath, I force myself to stand still.

"Everything was so painful," I explain. "The pregnancy, not knowing who the father was, and then just as she was figuring her way through the pregnancy, the miscarriage. Carrie was spiraling, so she jumped into the water that day and died. I swam up, crawled out of the water onto the embankment, and was born. I chose to take over so Carrie could have peace."

“Have you found it? Is Carrie ready to come back?” Ms. Kay asks gently, and tears prick my eyes.

“I don’t know,” I whisper. “Maybe? I’ve almost done everything I need to. When I’m ready to let go, Carrie will be able to come back. I may always linger in the darkness of her mind though, ready to give her my strength.”

Ms. Kay bites her lip, making me wonder if I overwhelmed her with the information I’m giving her.

“Can I give you another hug?” she asks softly, looking unsure.

As I nod, she gives me the biggest smile and hugs me tightly.

“I’m so glad you’re alive, sweet girl,” Ms. Kay says. “What does that mean for my boys?”

Pulling back, I shrug. “I don’t know if they want to talk to me now. I put them through their paces, did some fu—messed up things. Will they even accept me the way I am? You know how ruthless my father is, and I think we’re cut from the same cloth.”

“Your father was an amazing man...” Ms. Kay begins, but I shake my head. “Ca—Blakely, what are you not telling me?”

“There’s a lot.” I sigh. “Dad’s alive. He woke up from the coma, and I immediately found him. He wanted to help me, so who was I to say no? His help always ends up pretty bloody, but it was exactly what I was going for at the time.”

“Holy shit,” Ms. Kay whispers, making me snicker at her language. “You’re responsible for the money, aren’t you? What pots haven’t you dipped your fingers into?”

“Very few at this point,” I admit. “I’ve had a lot of help, though. My mom is one of the reasons I was able to get so much dirt on the town. These people have hurt too many, and it was time for it to all come out. The consequences...”

“Are not your problem,” she says firmly. “However people choose to process this is up to them. It’s time to move, though. This place will end up a ghost town...”

“No, it won’t,” I smile. “I have land developers coming in to buy all the land, and they’re building a university on it. It’ll specialize in different forms of therapy, theater, and music, as well as all of the core curriculum. I want a place that will feel safe for people to come to. So Reutman will also be renamed as well. To a new start. I’ll also be paying everyone who isn’t currently in jail for the sale of their homes.”

As I wince at the last part, Ms. Kay laughs. “You’re very sneaky,” she says. “Is Mabel going to be living near the college with your father now?”

“Mom is finally finishing up her work, so she’ll be coming home to live closer to Dad and I. I know they’ve missed each other. They gave up everything for me,” I murmur.

“You’re their only daughter,” Ms. Kay reminds me. “Your parents adore you. Of course they tossed everything else aside. It’s what good parents do.”

Smiling, I say my goodbyes, because she’s right.

“Wait!” she gasps, running for the kitchen. “I made these for the road, but I made way too many. Take some with you?”

Ms. Kay made apple pie bites, and my stomach gurgles excitedly. “I missed lunch.” I giggle. “This will hit just the spot. I’ll see you soon?”

I’m already popping a treat into my mouth and moaning happily as I leave. Brian is waiting for me in the car at the end of the driveway. I look around at the houses, and the memories overwhelm me.

This neighborhood was so good to me once... until it wasn’t.

Whispering a goodbye, I get into the car, sharing my treats with Brian as he drives me to my final destination before I go to see the boys.

Pulling up to a beautiful house, I smile as I thank Brian for the ride. Sliding out, I swallow hard. I come to see them when I can, but it’s so hard. Walking slowly up the driveway, I take in how peaceful the ranch is. There’s a barn to my right, a lane toward the back of the property, and the house is idyllic.

Francis opens the front door with a lopsided smile, and opens her arms. “Hey, gorgeous,” she says, her voice easily sliding into her old Florida drawl. “It’s about damn time you got here. Someone has been asking for you.”

Forcing a smile, I hug her tightly. “It’s been a busy day, but I wanted to make sure I came by,” I murmur, following her through the house.

A little girl is playing with her toys in the living room and my chest tightens.

“Tiffany, look who is here to see you?” Francis asks excitedly, shoving me forward. She’s lucky I love her.

“Hey, beautiful, I made it,” I tell her softly.

Tiffany’s brilliant blue eyes look up at me and her lips curve into a wide smile. “Auntie!” she squeals, standing and throwing herself into my arms.

God, this child is beautiful.



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## Chapter 29

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## Blakely

Francis starts to leave the room, and I freeze. “Where are you going?” I hiss, and she rolls her eyes.

“I need to take a shower. You can play with the baby for thirty minutes, can’t you?” she huffs, and I nod. Moving over to the playroom, I set Tiffany down and she runs over to her wall of stuffed animals, then brings them back to me.

“Auntie, Moo-Moo,” she says, handing me a cow, and I smile. She has the bluest eyes I have ever seen and dark curls. She’s adorable, and so blessed to have an amazing mom.

“Yes, princess, this is a cow,” I say with a grin, and she giggles then hands me a unicorn plushie.

“His name is Moo-Moo,” she says again, and I nod.

“Oh, okay,” I mumble. I’m really not very good with children, but I try to be the best aunt that I can be to Tiffany. “Which one is your favorite?” I ask, looking around at the countless toys she has.

Yes, even at the age of two, she’s spoiled rotten. Kiernan doesn’t know when to stop buying her things. He adores her almost as much as I do.

She giggles and runs over, digging into the pile and grabbing a ratty looking elephant. “This one,” she mumbles, and my heart races.

A HOSPITAL ROOM *so plain and smelling like antiseptic.*

*A baby crying, laying inside of a bassinet next to the bed.*

*A stuffed elephant in my hand as I give it to Francis.*

*“You have to take her. I can’t.”*

*Watching as my best friend leaves with the baby and Kiernan.*

TIFFANY PLOPPING onto my lap and playing with my hair pulls me from my thoughts, and I give her a quick squeeze, breathing in her baby scent. “You know I love you, right?” I mumble, and she wiggles to be free.

I let her go and continue to watch her play until Francis comes back.

“We need to get a paternity test done. Tiffany deserves to have a dad,” I mumble, and Francis laughs, walking into the room, and running her fingers through her daughter’s curls.

“Are you sure you’re ready for that?” she asks, and I nod.

“Yes, it’s time.”

“Okay, I’ll call Kiernan,” she says, then leaves us alone again.



I LEAVE FRANCIS’ house and wait for Tray and Kiernan to pull the car around. It’s late afternoon and should be a perfect time to get in and out of the frat house without being seen. I know I could probably be upfront with the guys.

Kiernan has mentioned them calling him and hoping to reach me, but I’m not ready yet. I’m still processing everything. When we arrive, Kiernan exits the car with me and walks up the front steps and knocks.

My eyes widen and I spin to turn around. He grabs my arm, stopping me. “What are you doing?” I hiss, and he winks at me. Someone answers, but I don’t recognize him.

“Are Bates and Chuck here?” Kier asks, and the guy tells us no. I breathe a little easier until he keeps talking.

“They moved out. Got a place about ten minutes from here,” the guy says before fist bumping Kiernan, winking my way, and shutting the door.

“Great. What do we do now?” I grumble and walk back to the car.

“We go to their place,” Kier replies as if the answer was so simple.

“Can Brian find out where they moved, please?” I ask Tray and he grunts, pulling out his phone to text our mutual friend. He’s our tech wizard.

“Why did you knock?” I ask Kier, and he just laughs.

“Because, B, it’s time for you to come out from the shadows and into the light now. The demons have been slayed.” I roll my eyes at him and cross my arms. He can be such an asshole sometimes.

“You’re lucky I love you. If I didn’t, I might have just had to play a game with you as well.”

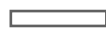
Tray laughs and Kier grumbles at him, then shifts in his seat. “I am your best friend. Your platonic soulmate. You would be lost and miserable without me, B,” he says, and I pout my lips before tapping my finger on my chin in thought.

“Blakely,” he squeals, and I smirk.

“Fine, I’ll keep you around I guess,” I snark, and he rolls his eyes.

“Brian said that they moved into the Hutton Condos on the other side of campus,” Tray says, bringing us back onto topic.

Kier clicks his turn signal on and does a U-turn. “Let’s go steal some DNA and get some answers,” I mumble and close my eyes.



“IT’S BEEN OVER A MONTH. What is taking so long for these test results?” I complain to Francis as she cuts the crust off of a PB&J for Tiffany. She’s such a good mom, so much better than I could have ever been.

Putting the knife in the sink, she brings the food over to the high chair and hands it to her daughter.

“Yum, thank you,” Tiffany says with a big smile before shoving the sandwich into her mouth. I flinch at the sticky mess, and Francis laughs at my expression.

“You can handle blood, guts, and so many other bodily fluids, but peanut butter with strawberry jelly has you looking ill?”

I shrug and walk over to the sink to wet a paper towel, then move over to the baby and try to clean her. She fights me and cries out, trying to finish her lunch. “Blakely, it’s pointless to clean her before she’s done,” Francis says right as my phone rings.

I step away, toss the damp paper into the garbage, and answer my call.

“Hello,” I grumble, then perk up when it’s the test result facility.

*“Hello, Miss, your results are in. Can you come pick them up today? We can’t give them over the phone, but they’re in a sealed envelope for you,”* a woman says.

I shiver in anticipation, knowing I need to get them immediately. I’ve avoided this for too damn long.

“I’m on my way now. Thank you,” I tell her, already waving at Francis and the baby as I walk out of the kitchen.

“Where are we going, B?” Kier asks, brows raised. I swear he’s like a ninja. Part of me feels bad that they’re always anticipating my next move, but they would tell me that’s dumb. They’re my family, and that’s what family does.

“Test results are in,” I explain, my top teeth worrying my bottom lip. “Will you take me to get them?”

“Yes,” he says with a soft smile. No jokes, no teasing. He knows this is a really big deal.

We drive to the facility, and I run in to pick up the envelope.

*I should rip the bandaid off and just look, right?*

I can't, though, I need Kiernan to look with me. There's so many things I can do, but this scares the snot out of me. What if one of the guys isn't Tiffany's father?

She has blue eyes... There's hope she is.

"Okay," I huff as I get in the car, staring at the envelope in my hands as if it's going to bite me. "Let's do it."

Kier squeezes my shoulder and I nod, tearing open the envelope. My eyes skim over the paperwork, my breath whooshing out.

"B?" Kier whispers, worried as I start to cry.

"Tiffany is Bates' baby," I sniffle. "She isn't Ian's. So many years..."

"You didn't know and you weren't ready to deal with it, sweetheart," he reminds me firmly. "B, you can't rush this. There aren't any rules for this. Figure it out as you go, and we'll all follow your lead."

"I can feel her, you know," I say absently, laying my head back on the headrest. "Carrie. I always knew this was short term, but I feel like time is running out. I need to tell them."

"I'll drive you. I can pick you up whenever," he reassures me. "Can you do me a favor, though?"

"Maybe..." I tell him, because my best friend is sneaky.

"Tiffany deserves to have you in her life as well as her dads. Think about that, okay? And I mean as more than her semi-terrified aunt." He chuckles, making me flush. Babies scare me. I'm afraid I'm going to break her.

"I'll think about it," I promise as I start the car. That's all I can handle for now.

## Meyers

A knock at the door interrupts me from working on applying to school for next year. I want to be near the guys, and now that I know Blakley is alive, I feel as if I should be doing something with my life.

Just in case she ever decides to give us another chance, I want to make sure I bring something to the table.

Putting aside the computer, I call out, “I got the door!”

Chuck is studying for a math exam, and Bates is working on a paper. The three of us agreed that we wouldn’t be apart again, and with Mom moving to be closer to us, there’s no reason for me to live anywhere else.

Opening the door, my jaw drops. Blakely looks nervous as she stands in front of me. Her eyes are a little puffy, and that makes my eyes narrow. She always seems so put together, untouchable. I want to kill whoever hurt her.

“So, who am I killing?” I ask nonchalantly, leaning against the wall as I stare at her, my anger banked.

“Excuse me?” she asks, her lips twitching. “Why would you assume someone needs to die?”

“Excusing the fact that you are a badass, I can tell you’ve been crying, which clearly means someone needs to die.” I shrug.

A giggle surprises me as she shakes her head, her dark hair swishing around her. Blakley almost looks surprised at herself, too.

“I have some news, and need to talk to the three of you,” she explains. “My tears earlier were more relief than anything else. It’s good news. At least I think it is, and I hope—”

“Come in, Blakely,” I tell her gently, moving to let her step inside. “I’ll grab the guys.”

Leading her into the living room, I leave her to knock on doors. Bates looks tired as he opens his door.

“Yeah? Who was at the door?” I smirk as I see he’s wearing low slung gray sweatpants and little else. Even his feet are sexy. Blakely is in so much trouble.

“Blakely. Go say hi while I grab Chuck,” I say, not bothering to remind him to wear more clothes than he is.

Nodding, he pads out to the living room, making me snicker.

*Make her sweat, Bates.*

Continuing on down the hall, I listen to Chuck’s music. It’s angsty alternative, and the only kind he can listen to when he studies. Knocking hard, I step back. He’s a bear when I interrupt him and he’s in a groove. This is worth it, though.

I don’t let him take a breath before I rush out, “Blakely is in our living room waiting to speak to us. Don’t eat me.”

Chuck barks out a laugh, standing in the doorway naked. I force myself not to lick my lips, because even flaccid, he’s fucking big. “I guess I should throw on some pants at least, huh?”

“I think sweatpants will work,” I assure him, swallowing back a smirk. I want our girl back. I want to meet her where she’s at, no matter who she is now.

“Okay, I feel like I smell,” he mutters as he walks back into his room. It’s true that he’s been studying nonstop, but he definitely doesn’t smell. When Chuck gets single-minded, Bates and I are used to reminding him to eat and shower.

He may not remember, but he definitely showered this morning.

Waiting as Chuck throws on a pair of sweatpants, I take in the state of his room. It’s not as bad as it could be. Thank God Mom is still traveling and unpacking her new house. Blakely helped her find the perfect cottage, since she doesn’t need much.



Walking together once he's done, I wonder how Bates and Blakely are doing. I hide a smile as I see her wide eyes drinking him in.

"You had something to tell us?" I tease her, startling her out of her trance.

"Yes," she says, swallowing hard. I'm the only one who bothered to keep my shirt earlier, but we're all well built. "It's... I just found out today—"

Deciding to stop teasing her, I sit down on the edge of the coffee table. "Take a breath," I suggest. "What's in the envelope?"

"Let me back track," she volleys back. "Carrie didn't have a miscarriage that night on the bridge, even though it appeared to be one. Kier made me see a private doctor, and it was normal bleeding. It didn't feel normal, though."

Blakely grumbles this, and I admire how beautiful and brave she is.

"So the baby is alive?" Bates asks softly.

"Yes, and she's perfect and almost three years old. Her name is Tiffany," Blakely explains. "I've... I couldn't take care of myself much less a baby when she was born, so my friend Francis became her mommy in every way."

Pulling out her phone, she hands me it. It's open to her lock screen. A beautiful girl with blue eyes and dark, curly hair stares back at me, taking away my breath. Her smile is angelic, but the twinkle in her eyes tells me she has her mischievous moments, just like her real mommy.

I share the photo with Chuck and Bates, and while we're filled with questions, we wait for Blakely to tell us more.

"I've been going to therapy, working on some things, and I decided to find out who Tiffany's dad is. I was terrified it would be..."

"But it's not, right?" Chuck presses, and Blakely shakes her head.

“You’re the father, Bates,” she says softly. “Truthfully, that makes the three of you her dads, because if we ever had kids together, we all know that Carrie was never going to choose.”

Bates looks like he can’t breathe, and I start to worry that he may fuck this up. Standing unsteadily, he walks over to Blakley, dropping to his knees between us.

“She has my eyes,” he whispers, blinking hard, and Blakley nods.

“She does,” she rasps. Now I can see why she was crying earlier. I can feel tears starting to pool in my eyes as well, and swallow hard. “Tiffany is beautiful, smart, and loves to run. She drives Francis crazy, but I know she loves it. I’m pretending to be her aunt because I don’t know if I can be her mom. I’m not good with her, I’m terrified I’m going to fuck her up.”

“You’re one of the best people I know,” Bates says, shaking his head. “We can help you now. Find your way.”

It’s an olive branch, and Blakely takes a deep breath. “Maybe,” she whispers. “Do you want to see the paperwork?”

Bates takes the envelope and tosses it onto the table. “Nope. I want to know about you,” he insists.

“I... don’t know where I fit. Carrie wants to come back, and I can feel the broken pieces starting to rearrange themselves. My revenge is over. Everyone who hurt us is gone.” She sighs. “I don’t know what’s left.”

“I think,” Bates says, leaning forward as Chuck stands to walk closer to us, “that you’ll fit wherever you want to. Do you want us?”

Blakely reaches out to let her fingertips trace down Bates’ chest, and a part of the tightness in my chest loosens.

“Yes,” she says, looking up at him with wide eyes. “I really, really do.”

“Good,” Chuck grunts, his fingers gently tugging her head back. “We want you. Bloody, beautiful, capable, vulnerable... We want every side of you, beautiful. Do you believe us?”

“Yeah,” she says in awe just before Chuck’s lips capture hers.

Bates and I watch hungrily as he claims her, watching her melt into him.

“You taste so good,” he rumbles. “Need to be anywhere?”

Blakely is arched, her nipples pebbled, and I’m hoping she doesn’t need to go anywhere.

“No,” she breathes out. “Kier said to let him know when to come get me, and Francis and the guys have Tiffany.”

“What guys?” I growl.

Chuck releases her hair so she can turn back toward me. “Kier has a harem,” she shrugs. “You met them on the hunt to kill Ian. They’re all mad for each other. They’re annoying brothers to me at this point.”

“Good,” I murmur. “I want to bury my face between your thighs and not come up for air until I’m covered in your cream...”

“I want to see if you can still swallow like a good girl,” Bates murmurs.

“And I want you to pull my hair when I sink my cock into your tight pussy,” Chuck says.

“Any problems with any of that?” I ask, my lips twitching. We have so much more to talk about, but I may die if I don’t get to touch her.

“None. If I have to stare at all of this eye candy without someone touching me, I may combust. Who the hell came up with the idea of sweatpants?” she rants.

Grinning, I grab her around the waist, lifting her smoothly over my shoulder.

“They should be illegal!” she squeals as I chuckle. Blakely shivers, and I know she can feel my voice rumble through her body.

“Have you been looking at our cocks, beautiful?” Bates asks smugly. I meet his eye over my shoulder and wink,

enjoying as he gives a bark of laughter.

I don't mind being caught being naughty in the slightest.

"You didn't remind either of us to grab a shirt," Chuck smirks. "No wonder the poor girl looks like she's about to combust."

"No big deal, I just told three hot guys they're my baby daddy," Blakely snarks. I swat her bratty ass, relatively confident she won't stab me for it.

"She admits we're hot," I tease her, pushing open the door to my room. Chuck's is a mess, and I have no idea what the state of Bates' room is right now.

The curse of busy lives.

"I did," she says, amused. And then Blakely gasps as I make her airborne, throwing her at my bed. Thankfully, my aim is still perfect, and she sails through the air before bouncing twice on the mattress, eyes wide as I pull off my shirt.

"You're wearing too much," I remind her, pushing my joggers down.

Getting onto her knees, she meets my dare, lifting her cropped black top up and over her head. Blakely is wearing a pink and black lacy bra that I can see her nipples through, and I begin to salivate.

"See something you like, Daddy?" she teases me.

I may have just swallowed my tongue.

"Take that tiny excuse of a skirt off for me, brat," I finally force out, releasing my cock from my boxers and stepping out of them once they hit the floor. "I need to taste you, and I believe you have a giant cock to choke on, baby girl."

The brat takes her time unzipping her skirt as Chuck pushes his sweatpants off his hips. Lazily stroking his cock, he watches her as Bates strips as well.

Getting up on the bed in front of her, Chuck grabs her hair roughly. "Open wide, I'm all out of patience, baby. I need to

watch you fall apart as you suck my cock,” he growls.

Whimpering in need, she lowers herself down to lap at his weeping slit. Her ass is half exposed from where she started to pull her skirt down. Smirking, I roughly unzip her skirt and pull it off her. Spanking her cheek, I admire how it reddens for me. Her panties are a tiny thong, wet spots already staining it.

“So wet already, aren’t you?” I murmur as she sucks on the tip of Chuck’s dick like it’s her favorite treat. I know exactly how good he tastes, how soft and sensitive the skin is, and how close to the edge he’s getting.

Chuck’s fingers dive into her hair as I suck on the tiny scrap of material between my tongue and her sweet pussy.

“You’re both teasing too much, and I can’t wait any more,” he groans, pushing her head down his cock. She goes willingly, moaning and rocking her hips to ask for more.

Swatting her other cheek, I click my tongue. “You don’t run the show here, baby girl. Take your medicine, and let me see your pretty pink pussy. I can’t wait to fuck it for the first time.”

As if Blakely is remembering that we haven’t had sex yet, she whines before Chuck cuts off her air supply. Sliding aside her thong, I smirk as I listen to the sweet sounds of her gagging on his dick.

Her pussy gets even wetter, and I slide my finger along her core, admiring how gorgeous she looks.

“I think she likes sucking Chuck’s cock,” Bates remarks from his new spot on the bed as he watches and strokes his shaft.

Nodding, I lick up her center, pushing my fingers into her tight channel. Damn, she’s so tight. Sucking on her clit, I listen to her noises. She’s so keyed up from being spanked and teased, I know she won’t last long.

“Are you going to come on Daddy’s face like a good girl?” Chuck asks, slowly thrusting his hips, his teeth grinding as he struggles to not fuck her face.

Her little gasps as he occasionally allows her to breathe make my balls ache. Moving, Bates slides under me to suck my cock. Groaning, my hips thrust unconsciously, desperate for more of his wet mouth.

The sounds of the four of us sucking, licking, and groaning fill the room until Blakely's thighs start to tremble.

"So close, so damn needy," I murmur between her thighs. Using my teeth a bit, I suck on her bundle of tight nerves, pushing a third finger inside of her and twisting them as I fuck her.

"Whatever you're doing, she likes that," Chuck pants, eyes rolling. "Fuck, I think I'm going to come. I'm too close. It's been too long since I've had you, baby girl. You're so perfect."

Chanting under his breath, he begins to thrust out further and fuck her face. Blakely moans around his cock, her pussy squirting a little. She's strangling my fingers, but hasn't come for me yet.

"Gonna come all over your tongue and tits," he grunts. "Fuck, fuck, fuck."

Bates' mouth feels so good, but I can't pull away. So instead, I fuck it in thanks. Moaning, I eat Blakely's pussy like the perfect treat it is. She's perfectly stuffed, and I can tell she's ready as she screams around Chuck's cock, coming hard.

Breathing hard, Chuck pulls himself from her warm, wet mouth, and Blakely sticks her tongue out as ropes of cum begin to hit it. Pulling her hair, I force her to rise onto her knees as Chuck fists himself, painting her tits too.

Breathing hard, I chuckle as Bates pulls away from me.

"I guess I'll let you pump your cum deep into Blakely's pussy while I fuck your ass," he says modestly.

"Holy shit," she says breathlessly, chest heaving as Chuck rubs his cum into her skin. Bates licks up her face, cleaning her up like a gentleman before kissing her hard.

"Do you like it when we talk dirty, baby girl?" he asks.

“Yeah, I do,” she confesses, squeaking as I flip her onto her back.

“I want to look into your eyes when I fuck you for the first time, Blakely,” I growl, leaning over her.

“Yes, please, Sir,” she says saucily, eyes twinkling with mischief. I love the light and darkness inside of her. This is who she is.

“Whatever my girl wants, she gets... even when she’s being a brat,” I tease her, rubbing the head of my cock through her arousal. “Do you want me to wear a condom?”

“No,” she says, shaking her head. “I want to feel all of you, Meyers. Please. I’m clean and on birth control, though that’s not completely effective.”

“I want to have a baby with you,” I tell her as I kiss her. “I want to be there for all of it, and I’ll be stuffing my cum back inside of you after, hoping it makes a baby.”

Pushing inside of her, Blakely’s eyes roll as I stretch her.

“Such a beautiful, stuffed, swollen pussy,” Chuck groans, tossing the lube to Bates.

“I want to keep her stuffed with cum all the time,” Bates laments as he squeezes lube on his cock. “Can’t we tie you to the bed and make that happen?”

“I’m pretty sure a lot of people would come looking, you psycho,” she huffs, moaning as I lift her leg over my shoulder and thrust deeper inside her.

“You’re taking my cock like the perfect cum queen,” I praise.

“What is with you guys and cum, and why do I want all of that?” she asks in shock.

“You’re just as fucked as us,” Bates says, hissing as he takes my ass. His cock stretches my tight hole, and I freeze, arms straining as I hover over Blakely.

“Who’s the good boy now?” she croons, tugging my head down to kiss her. She distracts me from the sting, allowing me

to be overcome by pleasure as he fills me. Bates isn't small by any means, and there's always that teasing edge between pain and ecstasy when he fucks me.

"Fuck, you're so tight," Bates groans. "I never get to be in control, this will be fun."

Huffing out a laugh, I lift my head. "Don't get too used to it. Fuck us, brat."

My eyes roll as Bates' hands grip my hips, fucking me into Blakely. It's a brutal pace, which is exactly what we need after the edging and teasing.

"Yes, I want to be fucked like this always," she moans. Lifting her other leg, I push them to her chest, my hips pistoning as Bates directs.

Always a team player, Chuck grins as he rubs Blakely's clit. "Chuck," she gasps, shuddering as she squirts all over my dick a moment later. It would figure she'd scream his name over mine when my dick is inside of her.

I don't even care, because I know I'm rubbing against her G-spot. Her thighs are trembling, and I can feel myself fucking toward another orgasm.

"I want to hear my name when you come next," I growl, winking at Chuck as he chuckles. "The next time you clamp down on a dick, it's mine."

"I'm going to milk your cock so good," she moans, and I shudder. The mouth on her. Fuck, I love it.

I can feel my balls starting to tingle, and Bates' cock is hitting every pleasure sensor that I have. "Damn, I'm close. Come with us, baby girl."

"Please," Bates says with gritted teeth. "It feels too good. Baby, come on Daddy's cock like the pretty little cum slut that you are."

"Shit," she whimpers, shuddering. Blakely comes so hard, I can tell when she blacks out. Kissing her neck, I whisper undistinguishable sweet words as I come.



Bates paints my insides with his cum next, and I come again as I feel his cock twitch inside of me. Holy fuck. My eyesight blackens around the edges, and I only hold onto consciousness by sheer force of will because I don't want to crush Blakley.

As soon as Bates pulls out of me with a hiss, I flop onto my side, dragging Blakely onto my chest.

Gently massaging her scalp, I kiss her and whisper to bring her back to me.

“She passed out?” Bates asks in surprise.

“She did.” I smirk. “It appears she never grew out of that.”

Chuck gets up to clean up and bring a cloth back, and Bates leaves to jump into the shower quickly. A few minutes later, Blakely's lashes flutter, and she looks up at me in surprise.

“Hey, baby girl. How you doing?” I ask her with a gentle smile.

Chuck kisses her forehead before he starts to clean her up, and then me.

“I passed out from an amazing orgasm,” she giggles. “Thank you, Chuck.”

“Of course. Stay with us tonight? At least snuggle and nap?” he pleads, tossing the cloth to the side.

Bates comes out with a towel around his waist, a stray water droplet sliding down his chest. Eyes wide, she nods.

“I'll let Kier know,” she says absently. “Will nap time lead to more sex?”

“It will if you keep staring at me like that, baby,” Bates says with the deep chuckle of a man who is deeply sated and knows exactly how gorgeous he is.

Rolling her eyes, she shrugs. “You three know how gorgeous you all are. How are you not disgusted by me? Knowing what I've done, and you all thought I was dead...”

Reaching for a blanket, she covers herself up, biting on her lip. Emotions are always high after sex, and we had some pretty epic sex. Not worried, I don't allow her to pull fully away from me.

“I think you're incredibly sexy,” I tell her. “You can take care of yourself, you killed the people who offended and tortured you, and you found us again. I'm not disgusted because you are the love of our lives. We were broken without you.”

“You make us whole,” Bates agrees, dropping his towel to climb into bed and kiss her forehead. “Whatever you need from us, we'll give you.”

Snuggling next to Bates, Chuck nods. “Always and forever.”

Blakely smiles, relaxing because she recognizes the vow we're giving her.

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## Chapter 30

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# Chuck

## Three months later

It took me a little while to stop calling Blakely “Carrie” in my head. She’s been working hard in therapy, and told us that while she’s starting to find herself merging with Carrie, she decided that she likes being Blakely. The sensitive and sweet parts are coming out more, but I don’t have to worry about her at all.

My girl has definitely found her voice and her stabbyness. I find it really sexy. I don’t care what she wants to be called, as long as it’s ours.

We’ve been on several dates, and have started to reconnect. I even took her away to a cabin in Colorado with the guys around her birthday for a few days. It was amazing how relaxed she became.

Our girl has the weight of the world on her shoulders. I wish she’d let us help.

My phone rings, and I grin when I see it’s Blakely.

“Hey baby,” I greet her warmly.

“*Hi*,” she says, and I can hear her relaxing.

“Everything okay? Need me to kidnap you so you can sit on my face?” I tease her. Anytime she sounds stressed, I make it a point to find her and make her come.

One time it happened while she was in meetings working with Kiernan on his new nonprofit. He is doing an accelerated program at the university so he can work as he goes to school. Blakely told him she believed in him, and encouraged him to get backers.

*“I may take a raincheck,”* she says with laughter in her voice. *“I have somewhere important to be today. Want to come?”*

“Absolutely,” I tell her. I don’t care where it is as long as she’s there.

*“Don’t you want to know where I want to take you?”* she asks.

“Will you be there?”

*“Yes, of course.”* She chuckles. *“Why wouldn’t I be?”*

“Exactly, then I don’t need to know anything else. But since you want to tell me, go for it. Where are you taking us?” I ask.

*“Tiffany is turning three today,”* Blakely explains. *“She’s having a party, and I was wondering if her daddies would like to come and wish her a happy birthday.”*

“Guys!” I yell, turning away at the last second so I’m not yelling in her ear. Bates comes running into the room, and Meyers yells from the kitchen. He was making us a snack.

I put Blakely on speaker and wait for Meyers to join us. Bates plops on the couch beside me and throws his arm over my shoulder, holding me close. “Hey, Short Stuff, what’s going on?” Bates says, and she sighs.

*“Tiffany’s birthday party is this afternoon, and I think it’s time for you all to meet her. If you want that, I mean?”* She sounds hesitant, and I get it. The moment we learned that we were dads was a lot to take in, but I’m excited to meet our daughter.

The pictures are nice, but I want to hold her, hug her. “I can’t speak for us all, but I would love to,” I say, then glance at the others. Bates is smiling, and Meyers is nodding.

“Can my mom come too?” he asks, and Blakely laughs.

*“Yes, I know she’s been dying to meet her granddaughter.”*

“What time is the party? Should we bring her something? I mean duh we have to get her something. What do three-year-

olds like?” Bates is starting to panic and ramble, and I laugh.

“*How about I meet you at the toy store down on Baker Street?*” Blakely suggests, and I nod.

“Yes, let’s do that. Give us about a half hour,” I say, then we end the call.

“I can’t believe I’m going to finally meet our little princess,” Meyers says, and there are tears in his eyes. “I have to call Mom. Fuck, did Blakely say the time or where her party is? Nevermind I’ll text her. Chuck, turn off the oven and put the chicken in the fridge. I have to get dressed.”

Bates hops up and follows him into his room, and I shake my head, moving to the kitchen.

There is a photo on the fridge, and I smile. Blakely gave it to us a few weeks ago. I hope soon to have this space covered in pictures of Tiffany and us, or maybe she can draw us something.

Fuck, I’m about to meet our daughter. I hope she likes us and isn’t scared of me. With football and working out, I know I’m huge.

I turn the oven off and pop the marinated meat into the fridge, then get myself ready while searching for toys three-year-old girls like. I know we are meeting at a store, but I don’t want to seem completely clueless.

## Bates

“Sorry we’re late,” I tell Blakely as soon as we walk inside the largest toy store I have ever seen. She gives me a smile and my heart races. It’s nice to see her becoming more like the girl I used to know. Chuck pulls her into a hug.

“So what does Tiffany like?” Meyers asks her as she moves over to him, then me for a quick squeeze. Blakely laughs and shrugs.

“Between Francis and Kiernan she’s a really spoiled little girl. She has way too many stuffed animals. She loves to color and draw. She has a whole room filled with her pictures hanging.”

“What if we just looked around for a few minutes?” I suggest, and Chuck nods.

As we move through the store, I stop at a cool little projector. I’ve seen it on social media before, and it turns a bedroom into different universes. I grab it and show Meyers. “Oh, that’s neat. I have been seeing that on TikTok.”

Blakely and Chuck move down another aisle, but I grab Meyers’ arm and hold him back for a minute. “Are you as nervous as me?” I ask him, and he sighs, running his hand over his hair.

He’s removed his eyebrow piercing, but still looks hot as fuck. “My mom is having kittens over this party, but I keep thinking Tiffany isn’t going to like us. I mean, she’s turning three. We have missed so much time. I get it. I do. Blakely said we shouldn’t rush into anything, but...”

Leaning over, I give him a quick kiss, cutting him off. “It’s going to be okay. Like you said, she’s three. We have time to get to know her. I also think maybe we should bring up the idea of moving in together,” I mumble, and his eyes widen.

“I don’t think Blakely is ready for that yet, but soon. Let’s just get through this afternoon and meet our little girl.”



WE PULL up at a cute ranch, and Blakely takes a deep breath. “Francis and Kiernan are here, too,” she says, then opens her door and climbs out. I shake my hands out and follow. I am so fucking nervous.

I know Blakely has told us that Tiffany doesn’t know about us yet and we can just act like a friend or an uncle if we want more time, but I don’t. After learning about Carrie’s suicide and her being pregnant, I had always wondered what could have been, and now I’m about to find out.

“Are you okay?” Kier asks as we climb up the steps to a large wraparound porch. He’s standing there with two men. I grunt, and Chuck takes my hand, giving it a little squeeze. “Just wait until you meet her. She’s the sweetest little princess ever.”

A car pulls into the driveway and I laugh when I notice Ms. Kay is trying to climb out the driver’s side door with an arm full of presents, tupperware, and balloons. “Mom,” Meyers yells, then rushes over to help her.

“What is all this?” Blakely asks with a giggle and pulls Ms. Kay into a quick hug once her arms are free.

“I’m meeting my granddaughter for the first time. I was not going to show up empty handed. Ever since you guys told me about Tiffany, I have been shopping. I’m rich now don’tcha know,” she sasses us with a huge smile, and I laugh.

I have been nervous as fuck, but I’m glad Ms. Kay is here now. She has always been a mother to me, but I do wish my own mom was here today. I haven’t even bothered trying to contact my dad and tell him. He was never really a father to begin with, I wouldn’t want him to disappoint Tiffany.

Kiernan smacks me on the back, then leaves the porch. I can hear kids playing and laughing. I know it’s a birthday



party, but I was hoping that maybe it would be just us. I don't know. Maybe it will be better this way.

Blakely comes over to me and takes my hand. I'm sweating, and she gives me a quick kiss. I can tell she's nervous, too, and it makes me breathe a little easier.

I'm not alone in this.

"Are you ready to meet your daughter?" she asks us as Chuck and Meyers come closer, and I nod.

Walking into the house, she leads us to the back door and to the yard. There is a bouncy house in the corner and a guy with a pony giving rides. Blakely's eyes are huge, and she laughs, biting her bottom lip.

"Francis and Kiernan together can get a little crazy," she mutters as a clown walks by with a large balloon animal in his hand. I shudder, and Meyers laughs.

"I forgot you hate clowns. Don't worry baby, I'll keep you safe," he jokes, and I roll my eyes.

"After surviving the house of horrors, I think I can handle a clown," I croak, then clear my throat, ignoring Chuck and Meyers laughing at me.

Blakely leads us over to a food table, and I notice Francis for the first time; she's holding the most gorgeous little girl in her arms. She has a piece of watermelon in her hand and her face is sticky.

"Hi," I say, and Tiffany looks over at us with eyes just like mine. I never doubted Blakely when she said the baby was mine, but there is no doubt this is my child.

Francis hands her to Blakely, and Chuck moves closer, slowly so as not to startle her, and holds out his hand.

"Happy birthday, darling girl," he says, and she gives him a big smile.

"I'm three now. I'm sooo big," she says with a giggle, and I melt. Meyers laughs, too.

“She’s beautiful, Blakely,” I mumble, and her little blue eyes meet mine again. She hands her watermelon to Meyers and tugs on one of Blakely’s pieces of hair.

“You have the same eyes as me,” Tiffany whispers as if in awe. I nod, and can’t get over how smart she is and her command of vocabulary. I know Blakely told us she could talk, but I never imagined this.

“I do,” I mutter, and a snuffle has me looking over at my girl. Blakely’s crying, and a sob behind me has me assuming that one is Ms. Kay. I know she is waiting for her turn, giving me and the guys a minute.

“Tiffany, these are your daddies,” Blakely mumbles, adjusting Tiffany onto her hip.

“I have...” she starts to count, then smiles. “Three daddies,” she says with a squeal, and I nod, reaching out to run my fingers through her curls.

Turning her head, she looks at Blakely. “If I have three daddies, do I only have one mommy?” Blakely gasps, and looks at me. She has panic in her eyes, but I smile at her.

“Are you going to tell her, or am I?” I ask gently, and she closes her eyes for a moment, taking a deep breath, but when she opens them, I know that she’s finally ready.

“I’m your mommy, Tiffany, and I’m sorry that it took me so long.”

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## Epilogue

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## Carrie

### Three and a half years later

“When is everyone supposed to be here?” I ask Chuck as he finishes feeding Freddy. For a two-year-old, he is extremely messy. I hand Chuck a paper towel, and he laughs, shaking his head.

The guys still pick on me for my disgust at sticky fingers, drool, and snot. “Ms. Kay and your parents will be here in an hour, and the rest will be here in three hours. We still have some time if you want me to calm you down once I get the kids ready for their nap,” Bates says, moving behind me and pressing a kiss to my throat.

He rubs my stomach and I sigh. “I know you guys want a huge family, but I think after this little one arrives, I am done for a few years,” I groan as he lifts my stomach, relieving me of the weight for a few moments.

Usually Meyers does this to me in the pool. “I want at least one more, and we still need to name this little angel,” he whispers into my ear, and I shiver. I can never get enough of my guys.

“We have an hour. I need to shower and get ready. How about you join me, then we can keep looking through that name book?” I suggest, and he nods, pressing his hard cock closer to my ass and making me moan softly.

Chuck grunts, reminding me that we are not alone, and I open my eyes. When did I even close them? He winks at me, and I smirk as Bates steps away and takes my hand, pulling me to the bedroom.

After Tiffany’s third birthday when we revealed who we were to her, Francis thought it was time for me to start being

her mom. She decided to go back to school, and I fully supported it. I could never repay her for everything she did for us.

The guys and I bought a big house on a lot of land. It was a fixer-upper, but we had fun doing the renovations and making it our home. I found out I was pregnant with Freddy three weeks before the house was completely done.

It wasn't a huge shock since the guys have an obsession with breeding me.

My mom and dad bought a house twenty miles from us, but they have decided since my dad retired to do some traveling and to see the world. They love their grandchildren, but I can understand, after everything we have all been through, that it's nice to escape every now and then.

They are supposed to be returning today, and we have a surprise Welcome Home/ Happy Twenty-Fifth Anniversary party planned. The guys and Kiernan have been planning everything since I've had to work all week.

Meyers is home this weekend too, and I'm so excited to have everyone I love all in one place. I'm proud of him for going back to school and playing football. He swears he hated the sport, but after everything calmed down, he admitted one night to missing it.

Now he's in the NFL, and when we can, we try to attend all his games. It's getting a little harder now that I'm in my third trimester, though.

"What has you thinking so hard?" Bates asks as he tugs down the spaghetti straps of my dress and kneels so he can help me remove my panties.

I usually don't wear them, but this morning I felt like I was leaking... Well I was full of Chuck's cream, but that's beside the point.

"Just life. How much things have changed in the last three and a half years. I never thought I would see the day when we would all be together again, owning a house, a dog, chasing kids around, or that I would be calling myself Carrie again," I

mumble, and he sighs, licking up my inner leg and to my slit, then kissing my swollen bud.

I hiss, and he groans. “I want to bend you over the counter and fuck you until you are dripping with my cum, but we don’t have time so the taste of you and Chuck will just have to do for now,” he mumbles before attacking my pussy like he didn’t just have lunch.

“Fuck, Bates. Ummm,” I whimper, and he laughs, gripping my ass and pulling me closer to him. It doesn’t take me long to get off these days, and within seconds I’m showering him with my juices.

He pulls away and winks at me while licking his lips. “Delicious,” he says, standing and stripping his clothes off, then pulling me into the shower.

I reach down and tug on his cock the way he likes it, taking his lips with mine and kissing him until my fist is covered in his cum.

“Fuck, I love you,” he mumbles against my lips, and I smile.

“I love you, too. Always and always,” I say as he turns the water on and we quickly shower.

Once I’m dressed and back in our room, I open up that baby book of names and Bates and Chuck sit beside me. “Should we wait for Meyers?” I ask, and they laugh.

“Meyers chose Freddy’s name. He will be fine if we do this without him,” Chuck says, leaning over and kissing my stomach. He is such a big softie, and an amazing dad. All of my guys are.

I flip to the page we ended on and scroll through the M’s. One name stands out to me and I laugh, pointing to it.

“I had a social media friend named Margo. I wonder how she is. After the night on the bridge, I never tried to reconnect with her,” I mumble in thought, and Chuck starts to cough, looking over my head at Bates.

“Um, Short Stuff. I can’t believe we never told you, but Margo wasn’t real,” he mumbles, and I turn to face him. He’s biting his bottom lip, looking worried.

“Explain,” I hiss, and he sighs.

“After Nicky, Laurel, and Victoria threatened us, we knew we couldn’t just walk away and let you go, so Meyers decided to create a fake social media profile and... Margo was born. After months of you not accepting, we kinda lost hope,” he mutters, and Chuck nods, taking my hand.

“When you accepted, we were so happy. We had missed you each and every day, and though you didn’t know it was us...”

I think about all the secrets and lies that we have kept from each other over the years, and yes, I should probably be upset, but I’m not. Margo was a real friend in a time that I needed her. She would make me laugh on days I felt like crying, and knowing it was the guys—that they never truly abandoned me—has me feeling loved, and I smile.

“Don’t lie to me again,” I grumble, and Bates releases the breath he was holding.

“Oh, thank God,” he mumbles, and I laugh.

I think it over for a few minutes and giggle. “I think Margo is perfect,” I say, rubbing my stomach.

The guys cuddle closer to me, and I know that we need to finish getting the house ready. I can hear Tiffany watching a movie in the living room, her giggles carrying through the house, as I listen to Freddy’s soft breathing through the speakers of the baby monitor.

I close my eyes and sigh.

Who would have thought moving to Reutman, Texas and meeting your soulmates, only to lose them and your sanity, then turning into a psychotic revenge monster, then finding love once more would lead to this...

Yeah, it sounds like some crazy horror story to me too.

But I wouldn't change a thing. Sometimes you need to break so the doctor can make you whole again.

And sometimes you need to be that doctor and break things.

People may call us crazy, but I think the games we play in life allow us the freedom to be ourselves.

Whatever the case, be yourselves and don't let some bitches try to fuck with you, and if they do... Well, there are always haunted houses around. I hear The Doctor may still be around too... somewhere.



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## Did you survive the game?

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Okay... So, how are we all doing? That wasn't too bad was it? I mean we did give you an HEA. It just took a little while to get there.

Thank you so much for reading and as always if you wouldn't mind leaving a review it would be so appreciated.

Now we're off to write some more books.

Want to yell at us or discuss the book? Join our spoiler group:

[https://www.facebook.com/groups/795817792071406/?ref=share\\_group\\_link](https://www.facebook.com/groups/795817792071406/?ref=share_group_link)

# Acknowledgments

**There are many people we need to thank first up:**

**Our alpha and beta teams. You guys are incredible and I wouldn't be able to do this author thing without y'all.**

**Secondly, Jessica, thank you so much for jumping in at the last minute and polishing up our book baby. You really saved us and I will be bugging you again in the future. You rock!**

**Thank you to November Sweets for once again formatting our book baby. We're so blessed to have you in our lives!**

**Thank you to our ARC teams! You guys are the real rockstars! We wouldn't be anywhere without y'all! Thank you for reviewing and continuing to read our books.**

**Rosa, thank you again so much for this gorgeous cover.**

# About Author Amber Nicole

Before accompanying her military husband across the United States, Amber Nicole was born and raised in upstate NY. An avid reader and baker, she always has something cooking, whether in the kitchen or in her mind. She is well known for her international best selling duet *Forever Changed*, and she has a wide range of tropes to choose from. Whether it be why choose, MF, MM, FF, paranormal, or contemporary.

She also has two incredible children who help inspire her every day and a husband that pushes her to follow her dreams. She's an animal lover and has many of her own.

Stay tuned for more from this incredible author.

If you want to come hang out with me and talk about books, come—join my author's group!

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## About Author Jenn Bullard

**Jenn Bullard is a tiny pixie author that loves to read. She has three daughters and is married to her cinnamon roll— her Griffin. She is a stay at home mom with a healthy appreciation for things that vibrate. Most of the time, Jenn is ruled by her characters: they drive, she just tells their story. If Jenn could tell her readers anything: it's to follow your dreams. She wouldn't be writing if she hadn't.**

# More from Jen

Living Words, The Unwritten Truths Duet Book One

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