

LINZVONG

Kaden

ARCHER HIGH SERIES



BOOK TWO

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*For my deliciously dirty minded readers.
This is for you.*

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COMING SOON!

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FOREWORD

If you have triggers, I'd advise you to think carefully before reading this book. A list of potential triggers can be found on my website if you do wish to check ahead, but these are not exhaustive.

[Trigger list...](#)

KADEN

“**S**o much pussy here, bro. Time to move the fuck on.”

Jagger swigs from the beer bottle in his hand while he scans the room with his predatory gaze, shooting me a look of distaste when he sees I haven't moved from his side. “You're fucking weird, man.”

It's pointless arguing; I *am* pretty weird.

Ever since Michelle—

No. Don't think about her.

I swallow my beer and watch Jagger's lips pull into a wide smile as he greets more of his guests.

“Fuckers! Welcome to hell.”

Another night, another party. Not just any party, Jagger Knox's party. The boy has a rockstar name, and he carries it well. He dances over to Wolfe and Nicole, who are aptly dressed in black, but Nicole reveals way more flesh than she wears fabric. *Shit*. But Wolfe eyeballs every fucker in the room, not that he needs to. He's made it clear these past four months that Nicole *belongs* to him. They're barely apart and so obsessed with each other that it's sickening.

I wonder if Michelle is here, but then I remember she transferred schools for the rest of her senior year. Somewhere up north with her aunt, apparently, but it's for the best. It means she's not here, and that works for me.

“Alright, gorgeous?” Wolfe punches me lightly on the arm before glancing back at Nicole—Jesus, he’s infatuated.

My chest aches when I remember looking at Michelle like that—no, not *quite* like that, let’s be fucking honest, the way Wolfe looks at Nicole is like he wants to eat her, skin and all. Then again, I wouldn’t be surprised if they did shit like that; they’re both freaky.

“Yup, you? Hey, Nic.”

Nicole sends me a pretty smile before resting her head on Wolfe’s shoulder, her black nails dragging down his chest as he sucks in a breath and whispers in her ear.

See? Fucking obsessed.

“Have you fucked anyone yet?” Wolfe frowns at me, and Nicole slaps his chest. “What?!”

“Don’t!” Nicole hisses loudly, sending me a wary smile. “It’s only been a few months....”

Wolfe snorts. “Bullshit. He needs to fuck Michelle out of his system.”

“Wolfe!” Nicole arches a brow at him, and he shrugs.

“You do, Kaden. Go pick a girl and charm the panties off her, take her upstairs, and show her a good time.”

“Lovely.” Nicole rolls her eyes, and Wolfe mutters something to her, making her giggle and kiss him hard on the mouth.

I sigh, returning my attention to the room.

Jagger’s mansion is decadent, to say the least, his mom is rich as fuck, and it shows. Paintings adorn the stone walls that must be worth more than most houses I passed on the way here, with extravagant dimmed chandeliers hanging dramatically from the high vaulted ceilings, giving the room a cave-like vibe. The floor is solid wood and waxed to perfection daily, with floor-to-ceiling windows that lead out to the huge swimming pool out back, and I can’t help but wonder how his mom trusts Jagger here, knowing he parties like he does.

Jagger doesn't go to school—he doesn't value education in the slightest and doesn't respect any form of authority. Nevertheless, he's a model and probably earned more than we will in our lives already.

I'm still lost in my thoughts when I see *her* and do the classic double-take.

She makes her way through the crowd, her electric emerald eyes almost neon in the near darkness of the room. Black hair parted down the middle falls way below her waist, which shows off her figure perfectly.

Fuck. Me.

She's wearing a *red leather* bra with a netted black top over the tightest jeans I've ever seen. Her fire-engine red stilettos match her lips, and it's only then that I realize she's approaching us.

Even Wolfe and Nicole are staring at her, but then half the fucking room is. For a hot minute, I'm sure she's walking over to me, but then she reaches past me to drag a beer from the ice box beside me, barely glancing over. Her citrusy scent hits my nostrils first, sending my heart thumping in my chest, my dick springing to attention when she bends forward in those jeans.

Wolfe sniggers beside me, but I don't even look at him.

Who the fuck is she?

My tongue feels too thick for my mouth as she goes to leave, but somehow I make my mouth move in time with my brain.

Well, almost.

“Do you like beer?”

Wolfe laughs so loud I almost wince, but it works; the beauty stops in her tracks and tilts her head towards me.

Fuck.

It's like she's staring into my soul, searching through my deepest secrets, deciding if I'm good enough to speak to. Her lips part like she's going to say something, but then she steps closer, beckoning me to dip my head to hers. I'm six foot two—she must be five foot or something, so I oblige.

The thing is, I'd oblige in *any* way she wanted me to.

"I like *you*," she purrs into my ear, her breath hot on my neck as her fingers lace around my head, pulling me closer to her.

Then our mouths meet, and I'm trying to keep up, trying to put my beer on the side unsuccessfully, hearing it smash on the floor as the devil in my arms laughs into my mouth. She tastes faintly of tequila, and fuck, she's addictive.

"I'm Aph."

"Kaden," I mutter against her, my hands all over her body.

"I don't usually do this with strangers...." Aph confesses as my lips skate along her jawline, finding the soft spot that makes her body shiver.

"Me neither."

Aph giggles and glances around before biting her lip, sending my soul rocketing in all kinds of directions.

Who the *fuck* is this girl?

I've never seen her before, is she new here?

I feel dizzy as she tugs me after her towards the sweeping staircase, and Wolfe cheers as we leave.

There's *no way* this girl is single.

We're running down a hallway, her giggle the only sound aside from her heels and my feet pounding on the floor.

She stops beside a door, her chest rising and falling as she gazes up at me, her dark lashes framing her eyes perfectly.

"Can you keep a secret, Kaden?"

I'd do jail time for this girl, and I've known her all of five fucking seconds.

"Yeah," I growl, no longer caring about the law, society, or anyone here.

"Good," she says against my lips, twisting the doorknob with one hand and the other around my neck as we fall into the room. The kiss intensifies as she grinds against me, making her intentions clear.

Damn, I'm here for it.

I kiss her back so hard our teeth clash then she's biting my tongue and lower lip...

The room is so fucking dark I can barely see shit, but then she falls to her knees, tugging at my pants. Her eager hands struggle, and I help her, shoving my pants to my knees so my dick springs free. She doesn't waste a second taking me into her mouth, her tongue flickering against the tip, sweeping around the precum.

"Fuck," I mutter, allowing myself to let her own me.

But then she takes me all the way into her mouth, and she gags almost instantly.

"It's okay," I rasp, my hands moving to the back of her head as she takes me back into her mouth, the tightness of her throat expanding around my dick as she sucks and licks at my shaft.

God, she's good at this.

The sound of saliva dripping from her mouth as my dick rams into her throat sends excitement beneath my skin, caressing the beast that lies dormant deep within me. She's getting me off too quickly; the thought of that ass in those jeans, the red bra...

I grip her chin and take my dick from her. She whimpers her protest, but I lift her into my arms, my lips finding her slippery mouth as I thrust my tongue into it. It's salty and delicious, and as my shins hit the unmistakable form of a bed, I throw her onto it, barely making out her outline.

She gasps with delight as I peel her jeans from her fine body, the musky scent of her cunt hitting me before I've even got them off.

"You're ready for me," I mutter, wishing I'd brought a fucking condom. "Aph, I don't have a condom, do you?"

I shove her knees to her chest while she ponders that, and feast on her cunt. My god, it's been too long since I've tasted a woman, but a woman that tastes like this?

There's nothing like it.

“Ahhh...fuck!” Aph arches her back, but I grip her hips, holding her in place as she wriggles and moans.

“Condom, Aph,” I growl against her lips before spitting on her swollen clit with such force she nearly screams.

Kinky, then. Freaky girls *love* this shit.

I don't know what to do if she hasn't got a condom. Probably storm downstairs with my raging hard-on and scream out for one from *anyone* at this fucking party.

I almost chuckle at the thought, but Aph says, “Try the drawer.”

How would she know that? Has she been here before?

Who with?

When?

Unreasonable jealousy floods my senses, clouding my vision as I drive my tongue into her, my finger pinching her clit as she shudders and moans beneath me.

This girl...

“I'm coming!” Aph whispers, her nails digging into the back of my scalp, burning my skin. “Fuck!”

She floods my mouth, and I lap it up like a fucking animal, my tongue swirling to catch every single drop her cunt gives. It's over my nose and dripping down my chin, but I'm here to worship her pussy.

“Drawer,” Aph whispers, like the energy is leaving her rapidly.

Women always feel exhausted after orgasms, so I'm relieved I haven't lost my touch.

Michelle used to—

No. Not now.

I lift onto my knees and then slide from the bed, yanking open the drawer on the bedside table. My fingers touch countless foil packets.

“How did you know these were here?” I demand, ripping one open with

my teeth.

Aph rolls her head to the side as I roll the latex down my shaft impatiently, climbing back onto the bed, seeking her heat with my mouth. I could feast on her all day.

“My god...Kaden...”

“Sorry, baby,” I say with a smirk, rising to my knees. “I’m not religious, but I’ll worship you tonight.”

Then I thrust into her.

KADEN

The sun almost blinds me the following morning, and I throw my arm over my eyes with a groan. Sex permeates the air, and last night seeps back into my brain in slow frames, blurry at first but then crystal fucking clear.

Aph.

I roll my head to the side to see her sleeping beside me, her silky hair touching the top of her butt. I can see the swell of her breasts and swollen lips as she breathes. I'm hard already just from looking at her. I sweep my hand lightly over her ass and bite down on my lip, knowing this girl could fucking destroy my world if I let her.

I had enough of that with Michelle.

How come Jagger and Hunter can fuck whoever they want without giving a shit, and I have these intense, crazy feelings for certain women? Like this one, even though I know she was just after a good time, so was I. And damn, was it good.

Jagger will be pleased, I think, as the goddess beneath my fingers begins to stir, opening her sleepy eyes to focus on me.

“Shit,” she mutters, rising to her knees.

I can't help but check her out; I've never seen a woman so perfect. Her skin is flawless, but my eye is drawn to the word tattooed on her hip.

Dangerous.

Oh fuck me, that's ominous.

I didn't even ask if she was with someone. I run my hand through my hair before watching her jump to her feet, dragging the sheet with her and covering her beautiful body.

What a fucking *sin*.

"Do you know Jagger?" Her green eyes narrow as she tosses my clothes to me.

"What?"

I'm confused. Jagger isn't seeing anyone; I'd know.

So why is she asking about Jagger?

I let out a low chuckle and tug on my pants, leaving my belt loose as I study her. Her cheeks are flushed, and she's hopping around like she's waiting for me to leave or something.

"Yes, I know him," I say slowly, tugging my shirt over my head as she watches. "Why?"

Then I hear him.

"Aphrodite!"

Is he drunk? Why is he shouting a Greek goddess's name?

Aph's face creases with worry as she shoves me into the closet, my back colliding with clothes hangers and shit. I curse, but Aph slams the closet doors on me, and I can't help but laugh.

What the fuck is going on?

It's been a while since I've had to hide in a girl's closet, that's for damn sure. I'm too old for this shit, and Jagger is my buddy. He won't care that I've fucked some girl in his house; he does it all the damn time. Still, I can hear him getting closer as Aph yanks open her door, eyeballing him like a shit stain on her shoe.

"What?"

Jagger barges past her, scanning the room like he's part of the FBI. "Did you have someone in here?"

What? Why the fuck does he care?

The thought crosses my mind that Jagger is interested in Aph, which could cause serious problems. It wouldn't be the first time friends have liked the same girl, but fuck, it's not ideal.

Aph shakes her head, rolling her eyes. "No, Jag, I didn't."

Jag?

She's fucking him, isn't she?

He sniffs the air and glares at her. "I *told* you not to come back last night. You said you were staying at that girl's house."

I freeze, suddenly paying rapt attention to my friend. He sounds *concerned*. Jagger isn't concerned about *anything or anyone*.

Ever.

Aph rolls her shoulders and yawns her disinterest. "I did."

"So why does it smell like someone has been fucking in here?" Jagger demands, checking under the bed.

I swallow.

Why is he checking under the bed?

"Maybe someone was; I got back really late," Aph lies with ease, I note.

The fucking temptress.

Jagger stares at her before glancing around him again, his gaze falling on the closet.

Aph steps forward, ushering him out of the room as she says, "Come on, Jag, I've got to get dressed."

He's still staring at the closet, though, but she's pushing him out of the fucking door.

"I said I'd look after you; I swore to your dad," Jagger snaps, pointing at her, his eyes flashing. "Don't make it hard for me."

"I don't *need* a babysitter, Jagger," Aph huffs, going to close the door. "I'm the same age as you."

"Yeah, but you are a Dahla. You know better, Aphrodite."

Aphrodite? Dahla?

“Fuck off, Jagger,” Aph says as she glares at him. “I’m *not* a princess.”

“No, but you *are* the daughter of Leonard Dahla, and that means if *anything* happens to you while you’re with me, it will fuck with my life. Do you understand? I’m getting you security. *Today.*”

Aph slams the door in his face, leaning against it while pinching the bridge of her nose, exhaling heavily through her beautiful lips. Her shoulders tremble before she straightens up, her cool gaze moving to the closet.

“You can come out.” Her tone is clipped, and I wonder what the fuck is going on.

I push the doors apart, shoving my hair out of my eyes as I stare at the petite thing in front of me. She’s breathtakingly beautiful, but as I move forward, a scowl forms on her face.

“Don’t tell anyone about this. I need a shower; show yourself out.”

Then she turns and heads to the ensuite without looking back.

I swear I’ve never been in a situation so fucked up in my life. I chuckle as I slip out of her bedroom door, wondering if I could crash in another room. If I see Jagger now, he’ll put two and two together, and it seems that Aphrodite really didn’t want that, and I aim to please.

Aph. Aphrodite—named after a fucking goddess.

The question is, who the fuck is she to Jagger, and why is he looking after her? Who’s Leonard Dahla?

The first bedroom door I open has two girls and a guy in there—I back off when one of the girls invites me to join them.

“Jesus,” I mutter, trying another door with bated breath.

I dread to think what’s in here...

It’s empty, thank fuck.

I heave a sigh of relief and lock the door behind me, not wanting any uninvited guests. I flop onto the bed, fully dressed, my tired mind trying to make sense of everything that happened. Finally, my eyes close, my eyelids

heavy.

I'll figure this out later.

Aphro-fucking-dite.



"OPEN THE DOOR, FUCKER!"

Someone hammers on the door, bellowing their order repeatedly until I force myself to sit up, my head throbbing from their interruption.

"Fuck off!" I grumble, vowing to knock whoever it is the fuck out. I almost rip the door from its hinges as I meet Jagger's gaze, my lips twisting into a scowl. "What the fuck, man? Where's the fire?"

Jagger relaxes, poking his head into the room behind me with interest.

"Did you finally fuck someone?"

Yes.

"What?"

"Wolfe said you fucked off up here with some girl. He's too wasted to give me a description, though, the prick. So come on, who was it?" He leans against the doorway with a smirk, waiting for me to tell him who I went upstairs with.

Aphrodite.

I scratch my head and make a face. "I dunno, some random girl."

Jagger looks impressed. "Yeah?"

"Uh-huh."

I can't even look at him, but I need to. "Is the Spanish Inquisition over then?" I drawl, finally meeting his eyes before arching a brow.

Thank fuck Wolfe was too hammered to identify Aph.

"As long as you got your dick wet, I'm happy for you, bro." Jagger claps my back and pulls me from the room. "It's been too long."

"Yeah."

I follow him downstairs, stretching my arms as we go. I shudder at the state of his house, not to mention the smashed bottle I dropped when kissing Aph... It's Sunday, thank fuck, but it means I've got school tomorrow. Unlike Jagger.

"I need to ask you something," Jagger says, heading into the kitchen. He opens the fridge and gulps the orange juice from the carton, his eyes closing gratefully. His hair sticks up in tufts everywhere, and he's shirtless. He's covered in tattoos, and bright red scratch marks cover his neck, along with hickeys.

I fill a glass with water and stare at the swimming pool shimmering beneath the midday sun. The sky is a bold blue, with not a cloud in sight.

"Kaden?" Jagger coughs as a citrusy smell fills my nostrils, commanding me to turn toward it.

Aph stands in the doorway, her arms crossed. Her excessively long hair is pinned on her head loosely, and I can't help but stare at her full lips, the same ones wrapped around my dick last night. She's wearing a lilac tracksuit and earbuds in her ears.

"I'm going for a run."

She barely looks at me, and I don't like it.

I don't give a fuck that Jagger is here; she could at least...I dunno; give me *something*.

"Hold on," Jagger says, pointing at me. "I want you to meet Kaden."

Why, Jagger? Why the fuck...

I don't have to wait long to be enlightened, though.

Aph stares directly at Jagger before sighing, throwing me a bored glance.

"Hi."

I almost choke.

How can she be so indifferent?

"Kaden will look after you for the rest of the senior year. Kaden, this is

my little cousin—"

Oh, fuck.

"I'm not your *little* anything, Jagger. I'm at least a month older than you."

He rolls his eyes and makes a face at me.

"She starts at Archer High tomorrow. She's..." His voice fades as his brows knit together. "She needs looking after. I promised my uncle."

Aph rolls her eyes and stares at the floor.

"Who's your uncle, the Godfather?" I joke, my heart racing when Aph and Jagger exchange a look.

Fuck me.

"Look, just make sure no one touches her. She's not like other girls." Jagger's gaze hardens as he turns his attention to his cousin. "She's not a slut."

Aph narrows her eyes at Jagger before jutting her chin.

"*What* and *who* I do is none of your concern, nor is it my father's. For the record," she says, dragging her phone from her pocket and swiping at it. "Women who like sex aren't sluts. So fuck you."

Only then does she look at me, and for a brief second, her tongue flickers over her lips, and her gaze softens, but it's soon swept away by her cold words.

"Goodbye, Kaden."

Be still, my heart. She's just a girl.

Jagger watches her go with a look of contempt, still holding the carton of orange juice to his chest.

The door slams, and I force myself to look at Jagger instead of watching Aph leave.

"She's a fucking nightmare."

"So, who's her dad?" I ask lightly, sipping my water thoughtfully.

Jagger winks at me.

"Put it this way, bro. You're better off not knowing. I'll get her security, but they won't be allowed *in* school. I've already told the other guys, but...."

Jagger pushes his lips together with a frown. "They'll probably try to fuck her."

I swallow.

"Not like you, bro. They can't go five minutes without fucking someone, let alone *months*. I trust you with her."

Fucking marvelous.

APHRODITE

I try to steady my breathing as I round the corner of the block, refusing to look back at the house.

Keep calm; Jagger doesn't know shit.

My heart slams in my chest when I think of how Kaden looked at me with disappointment before I left.

It was just sex, bro. Insanely good sex with a man that should carry the name Zeus, but hey.

My playlist starts and heavy rock music fills my ears, blocking out my thoughts. My feet pound the sidewalk, and my body begins to release some of the tension it's gripping onto. Running always helps.

'Running away won't save you, princess.'

My breath stalls in my throat, and I grit my teeth, refusing to let that bastard's threats get the better of me.

Because he's wrong. I *did* run away, and I'm safe.

Daddy knows about him. The tightness in my chest eases at the thought of my father, and slowly the music takes over my thoughts again. Leonard Dahla doesn't make idle promises, and when I told him about the threats I'd been receiving, he sent me away to my cousin's house, promising to take care of it. Even though he's in Spain now, I trust him. The offer to join him in Spain when I finish school still stands, and I fully intend to do so. I want to

finish school despite my stalker, and so far, all he's done is leave threatening voicemails and messages. I have no idea who he is.

But Daddy will find out, and I'll feel peace again.

I can look after myself anyway; I've been taking kickboxing lessons since I was six. But it's the feeling I had when I was back in Pittsburg. Like eyes were on me all the time, watching everything I did.

Who I did.

I'm panting as I round the corner, narrowly dodging the couple I saw at the party last night, the ones dressed like Gomez and Morticia.

"Sorry," I mutter.

The guy glares at me before checking if his girl is okay.

She shoots me a reassuring smile before distracting him, but he looks like he wants to kill me.

Jeez. Possessive much?

I think they're friends of Kaden's.

Shaking my head, I pick up my pace, trying not to dwell too much on what I did last night.

You fucked up majorly, I tell myself with irritation. *You fucked Jagger's best friend.* And Jagger thinks I'm a fucking virgin.

Ha! I love sex. There's nothing wrong with that. But I'm Leonard Dahla's daughter. I'm supposed to take over his empire one day, and I won't have his respect or anyone else's if I've fucked the whole town. My cheeks flood with anger.

Why can't I run the family business if I've fucked everyone? Does it affect my ability to make decisions?

"No," I huff out, answering myself.

But you don't get to make all the decisions, do you, Aphrodite?

My stomach churns at the thought of my supposed fate, and my jaw clenches. People think being in a family where guns are on the table more often than cutlery is fun, but it's not. Sure, we love each other fiercely; we're

Sicilian. It's who we are; family is life. And yes, we're feared by everyone who knows us, but that's not always a good thing.

So who'd be stupid enough to stalk me?! The only daughter of the most feared man in America?

Whoever he is, he has a death wish.

I run for the next twenty minutes, trying to blast the cobwebs from my brain. I woke up fuzzy-headed thanks to the alcohol Molly plied me with last night, and I couldn't afford to let my health slip. Water and running will make me better, and maybe a good breakfast.

Goddamn Molly.

Molly, who insisted on coming with me, was like the sister I never had. Her parents didn't give a fuck about her, and when I told her I was leaving Pittsburg, she came with me. Luckily for her, she has family here, and they give more of a shit about her than her parents ever did.

So I'm lucky. I'm not starting Archer High alone; I've got my bestie. As much as I love her, she does get us into some sticky situations. Like last night, drinking at some seedy bar...

I shake my head, my mind drifting to the present.

Hopefully, Kaden will be gone when I get back.

I don't know why he bothers me so much; he's not the first hot guy I've slept with. But there's something about him that won't leave me...the way he seems to see into my *soul* when he looks at me, for example. He's also the only guy that makes me feel nervous, which won't do. And Jagger has asked him to look after me—of *all the people* he could've asked; he chose him.

Great.

Good thing I don't need looking after, and I'll tell Kaden as much tomorrow.

I slow to a jog, then walk back to my new home. It's huge, just like my old home. But it's empty, whereas our home wasn't. We had staff, maids, cooks, and gardeners...not to mention the men and women who frequented

our home. I've seen some of the most beautiful women in the world and some of the ugliest men by their sides. But the women are with them for their status; these men aren't low-ranking men in the mafia. They're scary and they're loaded. But Daddy is handsome, and so is his right-hand man, Carlos.

But Carlos is another story entirely.

One that we won't touch on today.

I push the door open, keeping in my earbuds in case Kaden is still around. I go to the fridge and pluck out a bottle of water, drinking it gratefully. The cold liquid soothes my aching throat, and memories of me on my knees for Kaden fill my mind, making me wince.

I'll do anything when I'm drunk.

"How was your run?" Jagger drawls from the den, munching on a bag of chips.

Since I've been here, all he's done is eat shit and drink beer. How he has an eight-pack, I'll never know.

"Good." I close the fridge door and tug at my hair. "Has your friend gone?"

Jagger nods with a frown.

"He's a good guy. He'll look after you."

I avoid his gaze as I climb the stairs.

"I don't need looking after, Jagger."

"Your security guard will be here at seven a.m."

The fucker.

"Wonderful."

I slam the bedroom door behind me and strip out of my clothes, the thought of a steamy shower calling blissfully to me. I catch sight of my reflection and frown at the bruises skimming my hips.

So Kaden was a bit rough last night. I scrutinize my body and wonder why it's still so *shapely*. I run most days and I try to keep fit when I can. My ass is so round you could balance your drink on it; it's like a ledge. I know

some women like that, but it's teamed with thick thighs and a wide waist. Add that to my tiny height; I often feel like a walking potato. My boobs are okay, though. Alright, more than okay; they're pert and round with huge brown nipples. My gaze continues to my arms, which thankfully don't match the width of my thighs.

Yet.

I purse my lips and vow to start healthy eating again. Fucking tequila messes with your appetite that much, I can tell you. As if on cue, my stomach rumbles, and I shower quickly. All I want to do is take a tub of ice cream to bed and watch Netflix.

Yup, all day.

And that's what I intend to do until school tomorrow.

KADEN

Where the fuck is Aphrodite?

Jagger told me she'd meet me at the entrance to Archer High, but I've been here fifteen minutes and I haven't seen her. I know I haven't missed her either; there's no way anyone could miss *her*. I scan the crowd of people messing around or gossiping by the entrance and exhale my frustration.

Hunter eventually strolls out of the crowd, his grin fading as he sees me.

"What are you doing? You look like a teacher." He snorts his disapproval before nudging me.

"Waiting for Jagger's cousin," I tell him, still scanning the crowd. "He's asked me to look after her."

"Her?" Hunter perks up, joining me in scanning the crowd with eager eyes. "Is she hot?"

Irritation streaks through me as I catch sight of red lips and black hair. My heart skips a beat as I narrow my eyes, trying to see my charge. Then the crowd parts like she's fucking ethereal, and fuck *me* if she isn't hotter than I remember.

Jesus fucking *Christ*.

Hunter slaps his hand against my chest as Aphrodite strides forward, her expression neutral as everyone stares at her and her friend.

"Tell me that's her." Hunter chuckles when I shake my head with

annoyance.

And what she's wearing...*fuck*. Ripped black jeans and a skin-tight cropped shirt, her waist-length hair flowing around her as she finally makes eye contact with me. A backpack dangles from her blood-red fingertips, and when she comes to a stop in front of me, she exhales her peppermint breath in my direction. She looks up at me through her thick lashes before tilting her head to the side, glancing at the girl standing beside her.

"This is *Kaden*. Molly is my best friend from back in Pittsburg."

My dick screams to be back inside of her as she studies me, her eyes trailing down my body like she doesn't know what's beneath my clothes. Her emerald green eyes are rimmed with black pencil, and the contrast to her red lips makes me want to fall to my knees and worship her.

What. The. Fuck.

"You're late," I mutter, glancing at her friend.

I do a double-take. This girl is seriously hot too. Not *Aphrodite* hot, but *fuck*. What are they putting in the water in Pittsburg?

Have I got to look after *her* too? *I fucking hope not.*

"I'm glad I showed up today," Colton murmurs from behind me, his arm resting on my shoulder. "Who the *fuck* are these two?"

Aphrodite narrows her eyes at Colton before pursing her lips.

"We *can* hear you, you know."

Colton grins, stroking his chin as he stares at the girls in turn.

"Names?" Colton asks, still smiling in a way I don't like.

Aphrodite walks up to him, drags her nails down his chest, and purrs. "Earn them."

The girl with her, Molly, laughs throatily before looking me up and down. She's got electric blue eyes and the whitest blonde hair I've ever seen.

"Bye, boys."

Colton watches her as she walks away, chewing on his lip thoughtfully.

"Earn them," he says, glancing at me. "I wonder how."

Something tells me Colton intends to earn more than their names, so I shake my head.

“The one with the long hair is Jagger's cousin.”

Colton stares after her.

“So?”

Another slice of irritation. “So she's off limits.”

Colton says nothing but smirks before walking away.

For fuck's sake.

“You sir, are truly fucked,” Hunter declares cheerfully, watching as the girls draw attention all the way down the hall. “They're dangerous.”

“Tell me about it,” I mutter, watching as random guys approach them, trying their best to introduce themselves.

It's hilarious to watch them tripping over themselves only for Aphrodite to turn and lock eyes with me. A flutter of something unfamiliar rises in my chest but I push it away, refusing to entertain my attraction to this girl.

“Hey, Kaden.” A voice yawns from beside me.

I look down to see Nicole resting her head on my arm, rubbing her eyes.

No Wolfe, unsurprisingly, he doesn't do mornings. But Nicole is a straight-A student, and she follows my gaze to see Aphrodite leaning against the locker watching us.

“Ooh, isn't that the girl that you—”

“Shut *up*,” I growl, cutting her off as she gasps.

“What? Why?”

I break eye contact with Aphrodite to glance at Nicole. Out of all of Wolfe's friends, I'm the one Nicole is closest to. Probably because her best friend, Michelle, and I had a thing, but I *do* like the girl. She tamed Wolfe, and that earns respect in my book.

“Don't tell anyone,” I tell her, staring down at her.

She's wearing a thick black scarf despite the mild weather.

My lips twitch as I tug on it.

“Cold?”

Nicole rolls her eyes and shoves me playfully.

We both know she’s not cold, and we both know Wolfe is responsible for whatever she’s hiding.

“So who is she?” Nicole nods at Aphrodite who stares back at her curiously.

I wonder if Aphrodite gets jealous. Considering how she dismissed me the other day, acting like she barely knew me after fucking me, I doubt it. But still, I tug Nicole towards me into a hug, and whisper in her ear, wanting to see what Aphrodite does.

“She’s Jagger's cousin. He’s asked me to look after her.”

I pull away from her and grimace, and she gasps, her eyes wide.

“No way!”

“Yeah...” I run a hand through my hair before Nicole groans.

“You’re *screwed*, dude.”

“Wolfe *can't* tell Jagger.”

Nicole arches a brow at me. “I hope you’re not expecting *me* to stop him.”

I study her and she turns, nodding in Aphrodite’s direction.

“Start doing your job.”

I follow her gaze to see Colton talking to Aphrodite, his palms on either side of her, pinning her to the lockers. Green envy sloshes in my stomach, rising to flow through my veins as I take in the scene.

For fucks sake.

I stride forward and clap a hand on Colton’s back, tugging him away slightly. Aphrodite’s eyes dance with amusement as she watches me mutter in his ear.

“Not her.”

My body feels like it’s alight with jealousy when Aphrodite smirks at her friend knowingly.

“Kaden, you don’t get to choose who I talk to.”

I ignore her and glare at Colton, clenching my jaw.

He frowns at me before looking back at Aphrodite.

“Fuck off, Kaden.”

Colton and I are friends, sure, but he’s got zero respect for friendship and boundaries. He’d probably fight me and Jagger if he were so inclined.

I just hope he doesn’t want her that much.

Because it’s a fight I’m willing to have, for Jagger, obviously. I close my eyes and step in front of Aphrodite, staring at Colton with a fiery anger I’m struggling to control.

“Colton. *Go.*”

My voice doesn’t sound like mine, and it’s enough to make Colton step back, watching me warily.

Huh?

It’s not like Colton to back off from anything.

“You’re taking this babysitting shit too seriously,” Aphrodite hisses in my ear, her hand wrapping around my waist as she turns me toward her. “I *want* to talk to him.”

I press myself against her, feeling her heart slamming in her chest against mine. Her breath stutters as she looks up at me, and a smile tugs at the corners of my mouth.

So I do bother her after all.

“Aphrodite,” I rasp against her ear, my hand gripping her hip. “*Don’t* cross me.”

She pants against me but squirms beneath my grip, trying to push me away.

“Get off me,” she snaps, looking up at me with those fucking eyes.

I smirk at her, moving my hand to the small of her back and holding her against me.

“Make me.”

She arches a brow at me before gripping my throat, her nails digging into my flesh as she twists from beneath me, slamming me into the locker.

“*Don’t* tell me what to do.”

Our eyes lock, and I wonder for a second if she’s going to kiss me. Her lips hover near mine, and I arch a brow, waiting to see what she does next. Even though she’s tiny, the heeled boots she’s wearing bring her a little closer to my height.

I lift my hand to hers on my throat and tighten it, watching as her eyes widen.

“If you’re going to choke me, do it properly Princess,” I tell her, staring down at her red mouth.

Her lips part like she’s going to say something, but then she moves her hands to my chest, shooting a glance around us. Colton is nowhere to be seen, yet Molly is still leaning against the locker beside us, watching with amusement.

“Chemistry,” Aphrodite says, her hands sliding down my chest, stopping above my waist. Her tongue flickers against her lips and my dick grows hard. “Can you take us there?”

I push off the locker and stare down as I circle her like a predator.

“If you ask nicely.”

Molly gazes at me with appreciation, reaching out to take my hand. I frown but then she slides my finger into her mouth, closing her eyes and moaning as Aphrodite laughs.

“Please,” she says against my finger before letting it drop to my side.

Fucking hell.

Hunter’s right—these girls *are* dangerous.

But then...so am I.

“Time to get to class!” A voice booms from behind us, and I turn to see the principal striding towards us.

His face pales when I frown at him and he stumbles on his next words.

“Apologies.”

He keeps his eyes on the floor as he hurries past us and around the corner, and I allow the corners of my mouth to lift at Aphrodite’s curious look.

Good.

Let her think.

“Chemistry,” I drawl, “is this way.”

APHRODITE

My head buzzes as I listen to the teacher drone on and on about things I couldn't care less about, and when the bell rings to signify the end of the period, I'm immediately on edge.

Why?

Because Kaden is waiting for me at the door with two guys who look like they've been designed for women around the world. The dark-haired one to Kaden's left, Colton, I think, has alarmingly gray eyes and thick eyebrows that make him even more handsome. The other is blonde and built like a football player, and I have no doubt that's what he is. His strong jaw and blue eyes rival Molly's ocean-blue beauties, but he doesn't so much as look at us when we reach the door. Kaden, however, stares at me, and my stomach twists into a thousand different positions, making my breath squeak out between my lips.

"Hello," Kaden says with amusement, his eyes not moving away from me.

Kaden is beyond beautiful, but I *cannot* go there. Jagger will flip, and not only that, he'll probably tell my dad, and I don't need that kind of drama. Kaden rubs his chin as he leans forward, his breath close to my ear.

"What's next? Gym?"

I regard him coolly as he grins, chewing gum. It's fucking sexy, and I

need to stop staring at him.

“English,” Molly declares from beside me, pouting at the sheet of paper in her hands. She doesn’t even *need* to be here, she’s a genius, but she wants a degree and everything that comes with it. She feels she has something to prove, even though I’ve told her countless times that she doesn’t.

“If you need a workout...” the blond guy says to Molly with a wink, and I scrunch my face up.

“Does that line ever work?” I ask, arching a brow.

He laughs, and a couple of girls walking by chime simultaneously, “Hi Hunter.”

Like they’re the twins from *The Shining* or something.

Hunter nods at them before turning his attention back to Molly and me. “Yes.”

Molly doesn’t look convinced.

“Come on,” Kaden says, lacing his fingers with mine.

I’m about to rip them back from him when a jolt of electricity shoots through my hand, zipping up my arm and pulling *directly* to my core.

Fuck.

Like he knows, Kaden smiles, pulling me down the hall.

I don’t usually *like* men like this. Alpha, dominant men. I know most women love that shit, but I hate it when a guy tries to dominate me.

“Can you let go?” I frown at Kaden who drops my hand like it’s on fire, shrugging his broad shoulders. Instantly I regret saying that, and I refuse to entertain the reason why. Instead, I follow his gaze and see the girl from this morning walking towards us, a shit-eating grin on her face. I peer at her, wondering if she’s another girl Kaden has nailed when I recognize her as the girl with the possessive guy at the party. The one I bumped into on my walk.

“Here she is, the hottest girl in Archer High,” Hunter booms, lifting her into the air as she squeals.

I dislike her immediately.

“Nicole, what’s up?” Colton ruffles her hair fondly as she shoots him a grin.

She’s beautiful, but I hate the way these boys are staring at her like she’s their queen or something. I glance at Molly to see if she’s thinking the same as me, but she’s gazing into the distance. I’m about to nudge her when I hear someone drawl, “Put my girl down before I break your arms.”

Molly blinks and groans quietly when the owner of the voice strides forward, ripping Nicole from Hunter's arms.

“Alright Wolfe, calm down,” Hunter mutters.

Wolfe.

“Hey baby,” Nicole breathes, slamming her lips against his.

They begin to make out, and I roll my eyes. Couples like this make me want to vomit.

Kaden watches me with interest, and when I meet his gaze I challenge him.

“What?”

Kaden says nothing but continues to stare at me. It’s fucking unnerving.

“Why are you staring at me like that?” I hiss, crossing my arms.

“Because I can.” His voice is gravely and deep, and fuck, it sets my ovaries on fire.

Why him?

There are three gorgeous-looking guys here, why does it have to be the one tasked with looking after me?

“You can’t,” I argue, lifting my chin. “I’m not a painting you can stand and admire.”

Kaden walks towards me and I step back instinctively. I can sense dangerous men, I’ve grown up around them. And these boys?

They’re dangerous.

But the one staring down at me like I’m a peach drizzled in honey looks like he wants to eat me.

“If I want to stare at you, *Aph*,” Kaden says, stepping closer so his scent envelops me. It’s woody yet minty, and it’s making my body do crazy things. Like stepping closer to him so we’re inches apart. Up close, gold dances in his eyes, making him even more alluring. His lips part as he continues. “Then I will, and you can’t stop me.”

My heart thuds in my chest, but he’s challenging me. And I don’t do well with being challenged.

“I’ll gouge your eyes out,” I say sweetly, leaning in close to whisper my threat. “You may have fucked me, Kaden, but you know nothing about me. Watch your step.”

I lick his ear and he shudders, whipping his head around to mine. His skin tastes divine, and I’m caught off guard when he reacts.

“Little girl,” Kaden rasps, his hand lost in my hair as he walks me backward. “*Don’t* fuck with me. I don’t *care* who your daddy is, you behave around me and every guy here. Because I promised to look after you, do you understand me? Don’t make me break that promise.”

He tugs on my hair until pain rips across my scalp and he smiles like he knows. I refuse to let him know it’s hurting, and as he continues to yank on it, my eyes water, and my pussy throbs.

What is wrong with me?

“Let’s go already,” Hunter says with a yawn. “I’m bored of this babysitting shit. Can’t you just leave her to it?”

The pain in my scalp is near excruciating but I can take it. Even as tears prick my eyes, I stare Kaden down. Then, I shove my hand to his pants, wrapping my hand around the shape of his dick as his eyes narrow.

“Can you take it?” I whisper, digging my nails into his balls.

Kaden throws his head back and bites on his lower lip, his nostrils flaring.

“All day long, baby.”

His dick is hard, and I can’t understand why we’re both hurting each other and yet...we’re so turned on. I yank my hand away and he releases my

hair, both of us locked in a stare-off neither wants to break.

“You think you can handle me, don’t you?” I step closer to Kaden, my eyes fleetingly meeting Molly’s, who’s watching us from beside everyone else. “I dare you to try.”

I move away as his fingers circle my wrist, tugging me so my back is flush against his chest. He dips his head to my neck, and sinks his teeth into my skin, nibbling slightly.

“Dare accepted.”

KADEN

“**D**id she just roll her eyes at you?” Hunter muses from beside me as we follow Aphrodite and her friend to their class.

My dick is as hard as a rock because of Aphrodite, and it’s taking every ounce of strength I have not to force her to her knees and remind her who’s in charge here. Because she’s not the girl I fucked the other night, she’s a bitch. A sexy, devilish bitch that needs her attitude fucked out of her.

“Mmm.”

Aphrodite flips me the middle finger before heading into her final class for the day, and I grit my teeth. There’s no way I can do this, and I’m telling Jagger as much. He can come into fucking school and look after her himself if he’s so worried. I can’t be around her for another second. Luckily she’s got security the minute she steps off school property, so I’m off the hook.

But for real—I can’t handle her smart mouth. Especially when it’s licking my ear, sending shivers down my spine, and lust skittering to my dick. I close my eyes and let out an annoyed breath as Hunter snorts.

“How is it that you’ve moved on so quickly now that this she-devil is around? She does something to you, doesn’t she?”

I refuse to answer him and he laughs.

“Oh, man. First Wolfe, now you? I mean, I’m not surprised. You’re always whipped by hot pussy—”

“Hunter, shut up,” I say with a growl, staring at the classroom door where the smart-mouthed bitch sits. I’m furious that she grabbed my balls earlier and *didn’t* finish me off, and the more I think about it, the more I decide to take action. Who does she think she is, treating me like fucking me meant nothing? Then having the audacity to grab my balls...

Nah, fuck this.

Hunter laughs when I almost rip the classroom door from its hinges, my eyes blazing as they search the room for the woman who’s able to cure me of this blinding rage.

Like she’s been expecting me, Aphrodite smirks at me, her eyes wide.

“Up,” I command, watching as she tilts her head to the side with mock confusion. She even looks around her.

“Me?” She asks, her eyes moving to the teacher behind me who pipes up.

“Kaden, we’re in class. Would you mind—”

I raise my hand to silence him without turning around and stare at Aphrodite who looks like she’s *excited*.

“Now.”

She chews on her lip before gathering her things, leaning over to whisper something to her friend. She laughs, and Aphrodite sashays towards me, looking up at me through her thick lashes as she says, “What do you need, Kaden?”

What do I need?!

I take her backpack in one hand and grip her hand with my other.

What. Do. I. Need?

We leave the classroom, which is so quiet you could hear a pin drop, and I slam her against the lockers, my mouth crushing hers, stealing her breath. She gasps at first, but that only gives me the entry I so badly desire. I kiss her so hard she yelps, but then she grabs my hair in her hands, wrapping her leg around my waist as our teeth clash. She sucks on my tongue and pulls my hair so hard my neck is exposed, and she drags her tongue along it with a

wild purr.

“Is this what you need, Kaden?”

I lift her into my arms and push through the door to our right, startling a couple of students who are private tutoring.

“Get out,” I growl, slamming Aphrodite onto the nearest desk.

There’s a sound of hurried feet and the gathering of papers, and then we’re alone.

“You want me, don’t you?” Aphrodite teases, wrapping her legs around my waist so tightly my dick presses against her pussy through our clothes.

“Well,” I say, kissing her roughly as I drag her to the edge of the desk. “It’s your mouth I’m interested in, to be honest.”

Then I tug her off the desk, and like she knows, she’s on her knees, tugging at my pants.

“I bite,” Aphrodite tells me, fisting my dick which feels like it’s ready to explode.

“If you bite me, I’ll come quicker,” I breathe, my fingers yanking up her top to expose her pert titties.

Aphrodite gasps when I squeeze her nipples hard, twisting them as she tries to pull back.

“Fuck no,” I tell her, gripping her jaw and rubbing my dick against her lips. “You’re going to take this, then you can bite whatever the fuck you want.”

Aphrodite moans as she opens her mouth, her hot, wet mouth.

I slam into her, fucking her throat with as much intensity as I can muster, all the while locking eyes with the beauty who’s been driving me insane all day. I grip her throat, loving the feeling of my dick rammed in there, stretching her out. Tears spill from her eyes but she’s not gagging, and I need her to. I hold her head and fuck her, getting harder when she panics, her palms slapping against my stomach as I tip her head back, violently thrusting into her.

“Take it,” I mutter as her teeth cut into me, and my eyes roll. “Bite it, I don’t give a fuck.”

She lets out a moan that’s audible even though she’s choking on my dick, and I realize she’s moaning in pleasure.

“You drive me crazy,” I tell her as her titties bounce with each thrust. “Take care of you, huh? I’ll fucking take care of you.”

Then I fill her throat, no longer caring that she’s actively biting me and dragging her nails down my thighs so hard I’m bleeding. I see stars as ropes of cum leave me, my dick rammed so far down her throat that I wonder if it will ever come out. I feel dizzy as my vision darkens, and I release her so I can slam my hands onto the desk behind her. Then she releases my dick, and spits my cum all over my stomach and thighs, glaring at me with blood on her lips.

Then I feel it. The pain, the ache. I stare down at my dick to see it bleeding, and the teeth marks don’t hide why. I rub the blood on my fingers, then smear it over her lips as she stares at me, stunned.

“I told you,” I pant, helping her to her feet. “If you bite, I come quicker.”

She stands shakily before me, her nipples hard and her chest rising and falling so quickly I know she’s beyond turned on. Her tongue flickers over her lips as she cleans my blood from them, and then she grabs my hand, forcing it into her panties.

“Your turn.”

APHRODITE

Kaden yanks his hand from my panties, lifting it to his lips as he inhales. His eyes darken, and for a moment fear trickles through my veins.

Damn.

What the *fuck* did I do that for? Maybe because I'm dripping for him, and I want his fingers to work me into a frenzy after everything he's just put me through. I need relief. But the *bastard* smirks at me and glances towards the door.

"I've got shit to do. By the way, I'm done being your babysitter."

What?

He allows his gaze to rake over me as he steps closer, gripping the back of my neck so I'm forced to stare up at him. His heady scent makes me dizzy, and my legs open automatically so he can slide between them.

"You need someone to protect you from me, princess," he says huskily, stroking my face with his other hand. "If you know what's good for you, you'll keep out of my way."

Then he steps back, taking the heat with him. My body chills without his touch, and I watch as he backs away, still gazing into my eyes.

"What if I don't want to?" I whisper, fully aware that I'm provoking a wild animal. But I've always been brave.

Kaden shrugs. "You'll see."

Then he leaves the room, taking my orgasm with him.

Only then do I realize I'm panting, and my pussy aches so bad I want to reach into my panties and deal with myself before I leave.

But I can't.

Jagger has security waiting for me, and I know class is due to end soon.

Fucking Kaden.

I straighten myself up, checking my reflection in my camera app before cussing. My lipstick is smeared all over my face and my mascara and liner have run into thick ugly lines that streak my cheeks. I look like I've been face fucked.

Which I have.

I do my best to sort my face out using tissue from my bag, but I need to wash my face. I reapply my lipstick, grateful I've managed to clear most of the smeared stuff off my cheeks, then head into the silent hallway.

Kaden is nowhere to be seen, and I release a breath of relief I didn't know I was holding. I knew he'd be gone, but the knot in my stomach eased somewhat when I actually saw he was not around. He's sexy and dangerous, a perfect mixture of what I crave in a man, but something tells me he wouldn't ever let me go. So I'm not going to become his.

The bell rings and I almost scream with fright when doors fly open from all sides, allowing torrents of students to flood the hall. Black nails wrap around my bicep and I'm whipped towards my best friend, her eyes wild.

"Tell me everything."

I roll my eyes but she arches a brow at me before dragging me through the crowds to the exit.

"So, how was your first day?" I drawl sarcastically as she shoots me a look of disapproval. Her light blue eyes seem to shimmer beneath the afternoon sun, and I marvel again at her beauty.

I wonder what Kaden thinks of her.

Fuck!

“Great. My best friend got yanked out of class by one of the hottest guys I’ve ever seen, then I found her dazed and covered in streaky makeup in the hall.”

I scoff. “I cleaned my face, actually.”

Molly laughs, stopping to look at me. “Are you kidding me?”

I go to tug my phone out to check my camera app again when she sighs.

“It’s still there. Maybe a man wouldn’t notice, but a woman would.”

I cross my arms and glance around the parking lot. Most kids drive by the looks of it, and my heart rate rises when I find a pair of cinnamon-brown eyes boring into mine from the bonnet of a black Audi.

Kaden. His arms crossed over his chest, and I noticed that girl, Nicole, sitting beside him, giggling at her boyfriend. Hunter and Colton stroll over to them, and before I can turn away, they all turn to stare in my direction with such intensity I squirm.

I’m Aphrodite Dahla, I *don’t* squirm. Yet here I am, squirming like a worm on a hook, my cheeks burning.

Kaden smiles but looks away, seemingly content with my awkward reaction.

“Did you fuck him?” Molly asks, following my gaze. Unlike me, she doesn’t feel at all intimidated, and I scathe silently. That bastard has me on edge.

I shoot Molly a glare. “You *know* I did.”

“No,” Molly says, clearing her throat, “I mean *today*. In *school*.”

My phone vibrates and I check it, sighing when I see it’s my security demanding to know my location, which means I don’t have to answer her.

“We need to go to the car,” I say, checking the location on the app link they’ve sent me. “It’s right outside the entrance.”

Molly jabs me with her forefinger, her brow knitting. “*They* can wait, *I* asked you a question.”

I’ve known Molly for so long, she probably already knows what went on

between Kaden and me in that classroom. But she wants me to tell her. To spell it out.

She's a deviant.

Urgh.

"No, well, not really." I sigh. "I sucked his dick."

Molly's eyes glint. "You dirty girl," she says with delight. "I love it when you're bad."

I can't help but grin back at her and we link arms, heading to the entrance where security awaits us.

"So, what's your cousin like? Total asshat?"

I spot the sleek black Mercedes as soon as we approach the gates and the driver nods at me. My phone vibrates the confirmation that I've arrived safely, and we slide into the cool leather seats with happy sighs.

"Good afternoon, ladies," the driver purrs, not even looking at us in the mirror. "You'll find water and snacks beside you, if you need anything else, just ask. My name is Ryan."

Molly stretches and mumbles her thanks, which prompts me to do the same. It's not that I don't have manners; I do. But I'm so used to being treated this way I guess I forget how grateful I should be sometimes. But I'm not always grateful; that's the problem. I'd like to drive myself home once in a while or go shopping with Molly without an entourage.

I can't even date, having to resort to secret fucks and fumbles when I can get away. I feel like a caged animal sometimes, and it's vile. Despite the cage shimmering with gold, it still locks me in. A cage is a cage.

APHRODITE

My mind flickers back to Kaden, and I realize school is the perfect opportunity for me to play with him, should I want to.

“You’re thinking about *him*, aren’t you?” Molly interrupts my thoughts with her yawned words. “Can you stop for a second and answer my question?”

I move my gaze from the window to her and frown. “What question?”

“Your cousin. I asked what he was like.” Molly raises her eyebrows and waits for me to answer, waving her hand in the air to encourage me.

“Jagger?” I shrug. “He’s fine. He’s usually super relaxed but since I’ve moved in he’s been like a bear protecting its cub. It’s annoying.”

Molly chuckles and stretches her long legs. “You can’t blame him, Aph. If anything happens to you, your dad will burn his balls off.”

I grimace, wishing I hadn’t told Molly about the whole burning balls situation. Just another story I overheard at home. “Yeah, I know. I get it, but...” I return my gaze to the window and watch the world go by. “I want to do my own thing. Maybe in Spain, it will be different.”

Molly reaches over and squeezes my hand. “I know. I’m right here with you, and when you go to Spain, I’m coming too.” She gives me a wide smile. “You’ll be safer there.”

I nod but say nothing. Molly knows about my stalker, so she is one

hundred percent supportive of all the security that surrounds me. But she doesn't understand how I feel, not truly.

No one does.

"And hey," Molly says quietly, making eye contact with me. "At least your family cares about you."

Guilt stabs in my heart at the pain in her eyes, and I squeeze her hand back.

"I know. How is it, living with your aunt?"

Molly rolls her eyes and launches into a story about how her aunt yelled at her for not wiping down the bathroom sink after she'd washed. I arch a brow as she groans.

"She even told me where the cleaning spray was, along with a sponge. She wants me to clean it daily once I've used it."

I shake my head and wince. "I could always ask Jagger if you can stay with us?" I offer, knowing he probably wouldn't mind. It's not like he hasn't got the space, and my aunt is never home.

"No," Molly says with a smile. "Other than her OCD, she's pretty nice. But her boyfriend?" She shudders and the car turns sharply to the right, making us both gasp.

My eyes search the windows for any sign of danger, but it's just the driver taking a shortcut.

"Is everything okay, Ryan?" I croak out, glancing at Molly.

"Yes, Ms. Dahla. There's an accident ahead, that's all. Sorry about that."

I relax back into my seat and nod as Molly clasps her chest.

"Fuck, I thought there was going to be some kind of gun war then."

I crack a smile, but then I think of my stalker.

He doesn't know where I am.

I refuse to live my life in fear, so if he does find me, I'll handle it. Even if it means gutting him like a fish. *Another thing I have to learn to do.* Personally, I'd rather burn him to death. It leaves less mess, which Dad did

agree with me on.

‘But gutting someone allows you to extend their pain, to watch them die slowly and at your mercy,’ Dad tells me. ‘You deserve their pain, it’s yours, so take it, breathe it in. Make it yours.’

He has a point.

The car soon arrives at Jagger's mansion, and Molly leans forward, her mouth gaping.

“Okay, forget my aunt. I could *totally* live here.”

Once the car pulls to a stop outside the door, we make our way inside, and Molly whistles.

“Nice place. More rich family members, huh? Why don’t *I* have any rich family members?” She’s muttering to herself more than me, and I smile before dropping my bag at the foot of the stairs. I can hear a football game blaring from the den, but I head into the kitchen to get us some drinks first.

I need coffee.

“Latte?” I ask Molly over my shoulder, watching as she pokes her head into the den.

She can’t help herself, can she? Little Miss Introduction, complete with a cheesy grin.

“Hi! I’m Molly.”

“Hey.” Comes the bored response from my cousin.

“What are you watching?” Molly asks, leaning against the doorway. I smile at her dumbass question.

Isn’t it obvious? Ha!

Jagger will detest Molly. Even though she’s beautiful beyond belief, she’s too full on for him. He’ll soon be annoyed with her, so I try to coax her back into the kitchen by tearing open a pack of cookies. As predicted, Molly hears the packet opening and comes scurrying in.

“He’s an asshole,” she mutters, grabbing a cookie.

I snort with laughter. “He’s probably hungover. I try to keep out of his

way.”

Molly chews thoughtfully, covering her mouth as she speaks. “Does he know you and Kaden—”

“No,” I hiss, shooting an anxious glance toward the den. “I didn’t know they were friends, did I? Remember? I told you.”

Molly frowns, polishing off the last of her cookie. “Oh yeah. Well, you’re playing with fire.”

I wink at her and reach for a cookie. The sound of the coffee machine steaming the oat milk fills the air, and we eat half the pack of cookies before it’s even finished.

Damn.

“I *like* playing with fire.” I shrug.

“Until you get burned,” Molly reminds me. “Which I hope you don’t.”

My mind moves once more to my stalker, and despite the miles I’ve put between us, I’m glad he doesn’t know where I am. Because he’s the only thing that scares me, and that’s saying something.

I make our caramel lattes and we head to my bedroom, talking about what movie we want to watch on Netflix. Anything so that I don’t think about my stalker, my golden cage, or Kaden.

Anything but those thoughts.

“You’re so lucky, Aph.” Molly rests her hands on her hips and stares out of the window of my bedroom. “This view is to die for.”

Whenever I’m with Molly I feel guilty for my wealth, so I do what I always do—I try to give her some.

“If you need anything Molly, you only have to ask.” I mean it. I’d do anything for my best friend.

She glances at me with a genuine smile. “I know you would. I love your life, that’s all.”

I drag the pizza app open and declare it’s my treat, and Molly does her usual job of protesting, trying to give me half of it.

“Girl shut up and give me your order.”

An hour later the pizza still hasn't arrived, so I head downstairs to make sure Jagger hasn't stolen it. I wouldn't put it past him.

But he's nowhere to be seen.

“Jag?” I call out, aware that downstairs is cloaked in darkness. “Jagger?”

Nothing. Pure silence. This is the problem with huge houses—when you're alone, you know it. Then the doorbell rings and I almost jump out of my skin, heading to the door with relief.

“It's about time,” I mutter, yanking the door open.

But there's no one there.

What the hell?

“Is the pizza here?” Molly calls from the top of the stairs. “I'm starving.”

I stare across the manicured lawn and sprawling driveway to see no one is there.

But the doorbell rang.

“No,” I call back, stepping away from the door with the intention of closing it. Except something catches my eye, and my stomach drops when I see it's a bouquet of dead flowers. Hundreds of them. My heart pounds in my chest as I reach for the porch light, trembling before it floods the porch with its reassuring white glow. My stomach twists at the sight of the black-brown flowers, nearly wrapped in cellophane and tied with twine. There's a card, but I know already that these flowers are for me. I don't need to tear open the envelope holding the card, and I certainly don't need to see the blood-red writing that reads ‘RIP Aphrodite Dahla’.

But I do.

My stomach churns and I screw the card up, dragging the heavy bouquet of death into my arms.

“Aph,” Molly says from behind me curiously, peering over my shoulder and almost earning herself a black eye.

“Jesus *Christ*, Molly!” I kick the door shut, sliding the deadbolt over it.

“Quit creeping up on me!”

“I didn’t!” Molly protests. “I called your name twice. What are *those*?”

“I believe they were once flowers.” I crack a grin just as the kitchen light turns on, making us both jump.

Jagger is rooting in the fridge, squinting at me through sleepy eyes.

“Am I tripping,” he says slowly, grabbing a carton of milk, “or are you holding a bouquet of dead flowers?”

Molly stares at him, forgetting entirely about the flowers in my arms. She’s more interested in Jagger, or his lack of clothes on his upper half anyway.

“Yes, I’m holding a bouquet of dead flowers.” I roll my eyes and stomp past him and into the garden, searching for the trash can. My heart stutters in time with my erratic thoughts, but each time the conclusion is the same. My stalker knows where I am.

What do I do now?

I spot the trash can and launch the dead flowers into it, hurling the card in after.

“You *fucking bastard*,” I hiss, hating the tears that spill down my cheeks. They’re hot and angry, and I want to claw the skin from my face so Jagger and Molly can’t see that I’ve been crying.

“You won’t win. I won’t let you.”

It’s time to find this fucker, without my dad’s help. I’m a Dahla; I have connections of my own.

And I’m not afraid to use them.

KADEN

I can't get her out of my head.

Aphrodite Dahla.

The memory of her on her knees, as she sucked my dick, is too much to bear, and I grit my teeth and exhale slowly through them before parking outside Jagger's house. I'm not babysitting her anymore. It's bullshit; I'll tell Jagger straight... if I need to. Fuck this. She brings out a side of me that needs to lie dormant. The side that scares women; that scared Michelle. I tried to calm it down but I couldn't, and fuck, it's probably what drove her away. Not that I care. I thought I loved that woman, but it's clear I didn't, otherwise, why would I feel so cold towards her? I'm a fool for going there anyway, she had a thing for Wolfe; that meant I'd always be second best in her eyes, and fuck that.

I'm not second best to anyone.

As usual, the door to Jagger's house is unlocked, and I stride in to find it empty.

"Jagger," I call out, closing the door behind me.

I better not see Aphrodite. I'm not in the mood for her wide eyes and red lips; I can't trust myself. Women like her destroy men like me, and I'm done being the emotional dick that everyone thinks I am. So if she crosses me again, then I pity her.

“Yo, out here.”

I twist my head to the yard where I see Jagger's outline highlighted by the moon. It's a clear night, but it's cold, so what is Jagger doing outside? I head through the house and stepped outside, my eyes falling on the bouquet of dead flowers in his arms.

“What the fuck is that? It's not Halloween.” I eye them curiously for a minute until he hands me a thick cream card.

His eyes narrow and I raise an eyebrow, twisting the card over to read it.

“RIP Aphrodite Dahla.”

What the fuck?

My stomach drops at the sight of her name, the intention behind the wording clear.

Jagger's jaw clenches as he shows me the flowers, his eyes flashing.

“Who would *dare*?” He demands, throwing the bouquet into the trash. “It's a fucking death threat, Kaden.”

Jagger trembles as he snatches the card from my hand.

“Whoever sent her this knows where she lives,” he mutters, scrunching the card into a fist.

I sigh my annoyance, wondering who she'd made her enemy after one day at school. I couldn't think of anyone ballsy enough to go up against us though. The Archer High boys have a reputation, one we didn't need to earn. It just sort of...came. You didn't cross us unless you wanted to experience our wrath, and not many people choose to do that. They want to survive.

“*You* said you'd watch her,” Jagger says, tossing the card into the trash. “So what the fuck happened?”

I stiffen at his words, not giving a fuck about this right now. I came here to tell him I'm done with his cousin and all of her problems, so that's what I'm going to do. This doesn't change anything.

“Listen, I’m done babysitting her. She’s a bitch, and I don’t have time for her.”

Jagger snorts and pushes a cigarette into his mouth, surprisingly calm. “Is this because you fucked her?”

Ah, shit.

He lights the end of his cigarette before sucking on it so hard the end burns bright orange.

I sigh and look away, wondering how he knows. I can’t deny it, but he seems eerily calm considering everything.

“Wolfe told me it was her you fucked at the party.”

Of course, he did. Wolfe doesn’t give a shit about anyone or anything unless you are Nicole.

“Yeah, well,” I say, shoving my hands in my pockets. “I didn’t know she was your cousin.”

He shrugs. “Better you than any of the others. You didn’t hurt her, did you?” He watches me as he exhales, smoke crawling through the air between us.

I shake my head. He knows my sexual tastes leave bruises.

“Nah. But I can’t watch her anymore.”

Jagger nods. “You like her.”

I scrunch my face up in response. “No. She’s a brat.”

Jagger nods his agreement, still sucking on his cigarette.

I don’t know what to make of his reaction, but he doesn’t seem angry that I’ve fucked his cousin. He also doesn’t seem to give a shit that I don’t want to help him anymore.

“I’ll ask Hunter or Colton.”

I stiffen, knowing full well what will happen with Colton. Maybe even Hunter.

“She’s fine at school. No one will bother her, she can handle herself, trust me.”

Jagger shakes his head. “Someone has sent dead flowers, Kaden, to her home. With a fucking RIP note.”

I eye the trash can and shrug. “Maybe it’s a joke.”

“A joke?” Jagger chuckles. “No, she’s the daughter of Leonard Dahla. Whoever sent them wants her dead.”

“It could be someone fucking with her from school,” I point out, but he shakes his head.

“Nah. It’s more than that.”

“I’ll call you.” A female voice says from inside the house, and we both turn our heads to see Molly leaving through the front door.

“That’s her sidekick,” I mutter, my attention drawn by the silhouette on the stairs.

It’s her.

“Molly,” Jagger hums before stubbing his cigarette out. “Decent to look at, but that’s about it.”

I scoff. Trust Jagger to see her as a pair of tits and ass as soon as he met her. I can’t say shit, judging by how I was with his cousin.

“Aph,” Jagger coughs, twisting his head to look through the window. “Come here.”

“I’m tired.” Comes the petulant response.

I lift my eyebrows at him as though to say, see? She’s a fucking brat.

“Please?” Jagger meets my eyes and smiles, almost like he knows what he’s doing. And he does because seconds later, Aphrodite appears in the doorway. In her pajamas.

At first, I think she looks cute, but then I realize her tiny shorts leave nothing to the imagination, along with a flimsy camisole that shows her stiff nipples. She crosses her arms to hide them, sending me a scowl.

“Fuck you too,” I mutter, shaking my head.

“Who sent you those flowers?” Jagger asks flatly, giving her no room to argue. “And don’t tell me you don’t know.”

I watch her carefully, and I don't miss the fear that flickers in her eyes for a second, even though she's good at disguising it.

"Some sick fuck."

She's trying to sound nonchalant, but I know better. I'm intrigued despite myself, but I'm damned if I'm telling her or Jagger that. The scent of watermelon and citrus wafts over to me as she tosses her hair, clearly wanting to leave.

"If anyone at Archer High is fucking with you, tell me right now. I'll end them."

Jagger stares at his cousin, and I follow his gaze, hating how fucking beautiful she is. She's devoid of makeup, and her full lips look even better beside her flawless skin. Her eyes draw me in like they always do, and when she stares at the ground, my dick twitches.

There's something wrong with me.

"It's fine," Aphrodite says. "I can handle myself."

What is it with this girl?

Someone is sending her dead flowers and death notes, and she's able to handle it herself?

"Is it an ex?" I ask, cursing myself the minute the words leave my lips. Now she's going to think I care, and I don't.

I really don't.

Aphrodite shakes her head without looking at me. "No."

Jagger goes to say something else but she holds her hand up, stopping him.

"I'm going to bed. School tomorrow and all that. Has Kaden told you he's no longer babysitting me? Please don't think of replacing him."

Jagger narrows his eyes at her. "Someone is sending you death threats to your *home*, Aphrodite. What makes you think they couldn't get to you in school?"

Unease ripples through my stomach at the thought of something

happening to her, but fuck that. I'm not spending my days arguing with a brat. She's not my responsibility.

"It's a school, Jagger. Just relax, will you?" Aphrodite sighs.

But Jagger looks anything but relaxed. "Fine, *I'll* come to school."

I snap my head up and laugh, sure he's joking. Jagger quit school years ago and has a modeling career which means he's already set for life financially. He has no reason to go to school, and as far as I know, no intention.

"You don't have to do that." Aphrodite stares at him with those fucking eyes, and I groan inwardly.

Jagger back at Archer High would be a fucking shit show, and as he meets my eyes, I see the triumph in his. But I'm not giving him what he wants. I'm not risking being Aphrodite's protector.

So apologies, Archer High, it looks like you may have all of the Archer Bay Boys to play with.

"I'll pick you up if you like?" I say innocently, enjoying the scowl that twists his features.

"Nope, I'll ride with Aph and Molly." Jagger sighs and punches my shoulder a little harder than I expected. "Fuck off then, Kaden. School tomorrow." He grins at me and I swallow, knowing tomorrow is going to be very interesting.

Very interesting indeed.

APHRODITE

The following day we climb out of the security car and head to the entrance of Archer High.

Jagger stops and lights a cigarette, his hair falling into his eyes. I don't miss Molly staring at him, but she's not alone. Hushed whispers and wide-eyed stares surround us, girls clutching their phones and typing away frantically at the sight of Jagger at the school gates. He gazes around us coolly before sighing his cigarette smoke out. It twists in the air into gray clouds, and Molly bites her lip.

"Can we go?" I ask, wanting to get on with my day.

"We're waiting for the others." Jagger looks around again, nodding to a sleek black Audi that's heading past us and into the parking lot. "There's Kaden."

My heart lurches at the sheer mention of that boy, but I shrug nonchalantly and walk forward.

"Hey, Jagger." A blonde girl calls out from the right, flashing her endless legs from beneath her black mini-dress. "Long time no see."

Jagger glances at her before giving her a cruel smile. "Is it?"

He doesn't wait for an answer and strolls ahead of us, sending a cautious glance my way. I resist the urge to roll my eyes and instead give him a tight smile. He's come back to school for me, and that's huge. Jagger hates school

with a passion from what I know, and his mother stopped forcing him to go when he pointed out he has already made enough money to live off of for life. It's true, he has. Not only is he the heir to all of his mother's fortunes, but his modeling career has only just begun, and already he's rich.

"Looks like everyone wants a piece of your cousin," Molly says, rolling her eyes. "All it takes is a pretty face."

"Mmm," I say, my heart stalling in my chest when Kaden climbs out of the Audi. He's wearing black cargo pants, the ones with the pockets on the sides, and a tight black t-shirt that shows his muscles and broad shoulders. His dark hair is still damp no doubt from the shower, and when he grins at Jagger, his perfect white teeth complete the Adonis look he's got going on.

"Fuck me," Kaden says with a grin as Hunter and Colton pull up.

They're a sight, that's for sure. Hunter and Colton look like they've stepped out of a teen movie, one dark and handsome, the other blonde and Prince-like with his golden curls and blue eyes.

"Which is your favorite?" Molly asks, sliding a piece of gum between her lips. She tears her gaze away from the boys to look at me before laughing. "Oh, I forgot you've already slept with one of them."

I keep walking and the boys follow us, the sound of Kaden's heavy boots filling my ears. But then again, Hunter and Colton are also wearing boots. It could be any of them, I don't know why I assumed it was Kaden's boots.

"Hold up, Aph," Jagger calls, forcing half the hallway to turn to stare at me. "You're the only reason I'm here, remember?"

I can feel eyes boring into me from the girls that assume I'm Jagger's new piece of ass, and from the guys that seem intrigued that Jagger seems to care about someone. I reach my locker and grab my books, whirling around to see Jagger glaring around us.

"Listen up, Archer High." Jagger cups his hands around his mouth as the hall falls silent. "This is my cousin, Aphrodite. If anyone fucks with her, they fuck with us."

I swallow as Molly looks around us slowly. Everyone is hanging from Jagger's every word. Some are even nodding.

"So *don't*." Jagger grins before turning back to me. "At lunch, you meet me here, by the lockers. Same after school. Don't go anywhere outside of school, alright? If you need me, call me."

His eyes flicker to Molly, who's texting on her phone, chewing her lip.

"I expect you to look after her too," he says coldly, staring at her like she's something he found on his shoe.

Molly looks up, checking he's talking to her by jabbing a finger into her chest.

"Are you talking to me?"

Jagger looks irritated.

Molly rolls her eyes and stares back at her phone. "I look after this girl regardless of what you say, hotshot. Go back to your fans." She dismisses him with a wave of her hand and Jagger's eyes narrow.

"Bitch, behave."

Molly snaps her head up, and Jagger lifts an eyebrow at her, almost daring her to retaliate.

"Who the fuck are you calling a bitch?" Molly spits, her eyes wild.

I step between them and drag Molly behind me, turning to glare at my cousin.

"Don't be a dick! She's my best friend," I snap.

Jagger looks Molly up and down before shrugging.

"It's a poor choice, but yours to make. See you at lunch."

Molly gapes after him, but I drag her away to first period before she can say another word. Jagger had to make an enemy out of Molly, of all the people.

"Ugh, I officially hate him," Molly grumbles, still shooting death looks down the hallway. "Why is he even allowed back in school? I don't get it. They should refuse him entry."

I turn to send one of my death looks down the hallway, but instead of Jagger, I see Kaden. He's leaning against the locker, one knee bent as his foot rests on the bottom half of the locker, his arms crossed over his chest. But then I make eye contact with him, and it's clear he's been staring at me this whole time. His gaze has a way of penetrating me in a way I've never experienced before. Even when we're in a crowded hallway, I feel like there's only me and him here. Everyone blurs and fades away, their chatter drifting away as my blood pumps in my ears. He continues to stare at me, but then his gaze moves south, slowly trailing over my body, leaving tiny fires in its wake.

"Just because he's good-looking doesn't mean he's allowed to speak to people like that," Molly continues, slamming her locker shut and glaring back at Jagger, who doesn't look in our direction. Instead, he's got a crowd of girls around him, all giggling and tossing their hair around in a pathetic attempt to win his attention.

"Money," I sigh. "Money and power give him the right to be at school, but nothing gives him the right to be a dick."

I fixate on a busty redhead, stroking Kaden's arm, whispering something in his ear as he continues to stare at me. Darkness broods in my stomach when she runs her fingers down his chest, following his gaze so my eyes lock with hers. I contemplate raising a brow at her, challenging her for Kaden. But what's the point? I'm only here for my senior year, and then I'm moving to Spain. Away from Jagger, his friends, and my fucking stalker.

I still can't forget about the dead flowers.

"Are you even listening to me? Ooh, it's Wolfe!"

I'm getting bored with these Archer Bay boys, but I nod when I confirm it *is* Wolfe striding down the hallway.

"He's so fucking sexy," Molly breathes, biting her lip when he passes by. "He's my favorite."

I snort. "Have you seen his girlfriend? Jeez. I could turn gay for her."

Molly groans. “Me too.”

My eyes follow Wolfe until he approaches Nicole, who’s grabbing her things from her locker. His hands wrap around her throat and waist simultaneously, and he mutters something in her ear that makes her eyes roll with delight.

“Fuck,” Molly whispers in awe. “That’s couple goals.”

I nod my agreement, wondering how I’d feel if Kaden did that to me. My cheeks flush just as his voice nears my ear, sending shivers through my body.

“You like that?”

Wolfe and Nicole disappear, and Kaden moves to my side, watching them beside us. The heat from his body makes me dizzy, but I refuse to let him know how he affects me.

Molly squeezes my arm and winks. “See you in class.”

Then she’s gone, the whore, flouncing off into the crowd.

“Do you like to watch Aphrodite?”

His voice makes me want to fall to my knees, begging him to fill my mouth with his—

What the fuck is wrong with me? I’m a strong, independent woman. I don’t need a man. Especially one like Kaden.

Right?

“I’ll watch with you if you like,” he continues, reaching forward to push my hair behind my ear. It’s basic, moving someone’s hair, but also insanely intimate. I move my head so there’s more distance between us, and he steps closer. My heart is doing laps in my chest, the thought of watching Nicole and Wolfe fuck exciting me more than I dare to admit.

Kaden studies me for a second, then takes me by the hand and pulls me after him.

“Wait!” I hiss, but he doesn’t stop until we follow Nicole and Wolfe in the direction of the classroom they disappear into.

This isn’t good. I can’t...

But before he pushes the door open, he tugs me to the side, pulling open a side door next to the classroom.

“Better view,” he mutters, stopping at a tiny window that peeks into the classroom.

There’s one opposite, and I can’t think for the life of me why they’re here, but then I realize they’re fire safety windows, and there’s a fire exit at the end of the passage we’re in. It’s dark, and the stench of bleach fills my nose.

Kaden drags me in front of him, moving my hair over one shoulder so he can rest his chin there instead. His woody spiced scent fills my nose, and I’m intoxicated, inhaling it like an addict. His hand moves to my stomach, pressing flat against it as he whispers in my ear.

“Watch.”

KADEN

Her body presses against mine, and I curse every curve my hand touches as I rest my hand on her stomach. She's tense, as she should be. Her coconut-scented shampoo dances around my nostrils as I inhale her, my cock growing hard against her ass.

I shouldn't be doing this.

I need to stay away from her, but here I am, watching my best friend fuck his girlfriend. It's the same as watching porn, except this is better.

Wolfe buries his head between Nicole's legs and she moans, throwing her head back. Aphrodite stiffens in my arms, and as Nicole rolls her hips on the desk, I feel Aphrodite's stomach contract.

Good.

"Breathe," I whisper, moving my hand further south.

Her hand covers mine as she goes to stop it from moving further, and I wait, wondering what she's going to do next.

Nicole bucks against Wolfe as she comes, her low cries of ecstasy audible through the glass.

Wolfe wastes no time in rising to his feet and twisting Nicole over so she's bent over the desk, her ass exposed.

"Her pussy must be dripping," I say against Aphrodite's ear, slowly moving my hand below the waistband of her pants. Her breath hitches, but

she doesn't stop me.

Interesting.

“Are you wet, my Goddess?”

A small sound leaves her throat as I cup her pussy with my bare hand, feeling the warmth throbbing through it. I drop my head to her shoulder and squeeze her pussy, my teeth sinking into her skin as she whimpers.

Wolfe fucks Nicole so hard that the desk slams into the one in front of it, causing the chairs to scrape and clatter noisily.

“Yes! Like that!” Nicole moans, looking over her shoulder as Wolfe gazes at her.

I stroke the slit of Aphrodite's pussy, exhaling a heavy breath when her slick juices soak my finger.

“Dirty girl. All wet from watching Nicole get owned by Wolfe.”

“So?” Aphrodite murmurs huskily, tipping her head to the side to allow me more access to her skin. “You're as hard as rock.”

I push my dick against her ass cheeks and slip a finger inside her, all while biting her shoulder.

Aphrodite yelps and Wolfe gazes in our direction, his eyes wild with lust. He mutters something to Nicole who rolls her head to the side, her eyes half-closed with desire and ecstasy.

“Oh my god,” the goddess before me squeaks, terrified of being caught in the act.

But they can't see us.

“Kaden...” Aphrodite moans.

I insert another finger, this time fucking her hard with them. Her pussy tightens around my fingers and I growl, knowing I'm going to need to fuck her again and *soon*. But this isn't about me right now. I owe her this, according to her, and why shouldn't I get to humiliate her by watching people fuck at the same time?

“This can be our little secret,” I rasp in her ear before dragging my fingers

from her. She lets out a choked sound as I tug at her pants, loosening them so I can slip my hand past her sweet ass and back into her pussy from this angle. Much better. I pull her hips back before moving her forward so she's bent over, my fingers fucking her so hard she cries out.

"Watch," I command, roughly fucking her as she stares at Nicole and Wolfe.

He's got his hand around her throat and he's licking her face, his dick ramming so hard into her I'm surprised she hasn't screamed this school down. Then Nicole stiffens, her eyes rolling as Wolfe thrusts into her faster and harder, and Aphrodite tightens around my fingers when Nicole comes for a second time, her body slumping onto the desk as Wolfe chuckles. He pulls out and comes all over her bare ass, and Aphrodite loses it.

"Kaden..."

My name on her lips destroys me. I want to take my fingers away and replace them with my dick, but I don't. I watch her unravel beneath me, her shivery moans and cries driving me crazy.

I can't do this, but here I am, doing it.

This isn't emotional. It's sex.

But when Aphrodite turns to look at me, her hair spilling over her shoulder and her eyes clouded with lust, I don't think. I yank my hand free of her pants and turn her around, slamming her against the window as she gasps. My hand tightens around her throat and her pulse quickens beneath my fingers, and I squeeze tighter.

"Why are you so fucking addictive?" I rasp as she tries to drag my hand away from her throat. "You dirty little bitch. You know exactly what you're doing."

She's gasping for breath now, and just as she lifts her knee to get me in the balls, I release her, slamming my mouth into hers, taking the breath she so desperately needs. She panics but I don't stop, my tongue fucking hers as she finally exhales from her nose, her hands clawing at my back.

Pulling me in.

I'm losing it, and she's encouraging me.

She lifts her legs around my waist, moaning into my mouth when my dick presses against her through our clothing.

Then a door booms open and I hear a voice demand, "What the fuck is this?"

Only then do we break apart.

APHRODITE

Fuck. I'm gasping for breath and my cheeks throb with heat as I look to see who's interrupted what could possibly be the best make-out session of my life.

Yeah, of my *life*.

Kaden runs a hand through his hair and sighs, directing his attention to the person in the doorway.

My heart flips when I see my cousin glaring at us.

"What the fuck is this?" Jagger repeats, crossing his arms over his chest. "I came back to school because *you* didn't want to look after her anymore, remember?"

I flinch and move back, adjusting my clothes before looking at Kaden.

A muscle above his jaw ticks and his eyes darken as he shrugs.

He's so majestic.

"So?" Kaden sounds bored, and I hate how it turns me on. His hands hang by his side and my fingers itch to touch them, to feel the burn from our attraction once more. But who am I kidding? I can feel it from where I'm standing, the electrical current between us is so high I'm surprised it's not audible.

"I'm going to class," I announce, pushing past Kaden while trying not to swoon. He drives me crazy. Even now I can smell him, taste him on my lips,

and feel his fingers inside me.

Jesus.

My body hums with pleasure and it means the smile I give Jagger is genuine, making his eyes narrow suspiciously.

“Maybe I need protection from Kaden,” I say, turning to look at the god that reduces me to a wreck every time he touches me.

Kaden lifts his fingers to his lips and strokes them softly, *slowly*, but so subtly it’s barely noticeable.

But I notice.

“This is bullshit,” Jagger mutters, glaring at me. “Don’t disappear again.”

I throw my cousin an exasperated sigh. “Or what?”

Kaden’s voice fills the hallway and I shiver, hating how my body yearns for him even when he’s being a prick. “Just do as you’re told, Aphrodite.”

My nipples harden at his tone but I push past Jagger, determined that Kaden doesn’t see the effect he has on me.

Like he doesn’t already know.

I make it to my next class early, thanks to missing the first one.

My teacher looks at me with surprise as he gathers the paperwork on his desk. He’s a handsome guy, and I wonder how many girls spend their time drooling over his chiseled good looks and salt-and-pepper hair. His blue shirt accentuates his toned body, and as bodies fill the room, I find myself staring at him. History just got more interesting, that’s for damn sure.

Molly arrives, scowling in my direction as she plops herself in the seat beside mine. “I don’t like this fucking school.”

I chuckle and drag my book open, searching for the page number the hot teacher is waiting for us to locate. “Oh, I’m quite enjoying it.”

Molly twists her head to glare at me. “Because you’re fucking Kaden,” she says with a sigh. “Whereas I sat in the most boring math class with a bunch of dicks.”

My mouth twitches when she finally looks at the teacher, her jaw-

dropping. “Well, maybe I’ll retract that statement,” she says breathlessly, fanning herself. “Older men...god. They know what they’re doing.”

I nod my agreement but my thoughts flicker back to Kaden, who isn’t older, but definitely knows what he’s doing. My core tightens at the thought of him, and my phone lights up with a text message. When I see who it’s from, my stomach twists with nerves, and I jab at it, not caring about the consequences of using my phone in class.

DAD: We know who it is. Are you safe?

He’s referring to my stalker, I just know it. My heart thunders in my chest because if Dad knows who it is, I’m safe.

APHRODITE: Yes. Who is it?

I stare at the phone intently, praying he responds quickly. Knowing my father, he won’t tell me via text. Which means I’ll have to wait until I can call him at lunch. Irritation sweeps through me as I glare at the phone.

The door opens and Jagger and Kaden stroll in, barely looking at the teacher. I turn my attention back to my phone, aware of Kaden’s eyes on me.

“Aphrodite,” Jagger says, his gaze burning into mine. “There’s a family emergency. We need to leave.”

The room is so silent you can hear a pin drop, but my chair scrapes loudly when I shove it back, jumping to my feet.

Jagger holds my gaze and nods subtly.

He knows.

The teacher sighs and pinches the bridge of his nose as I hurry past him.

Molly follows me, not even bothering to give the poor teacher an explanation. Jagger glares at her and blocks her exit, staring down at her with hatred.

Now they hate each other? When the fuck did this happen?

“Go back to your seat. It’s a *family* affair, which doesn’t concern *you*.”

Molly's eyes flash with indignation as she arches a brow. "Oh? So *Kaden* is family, is he?"

"Do you mind if I continue with my class?" Hot teacher drawls, earning a cackle from the girls in the room.

Jagger doesn't move his gaze from Molly, who juts her chin defiantly.

"I'm her sister in more ways than *you're* her cousin, so get the fuck out of my way."

Jagger stiffens and I reach over to grab Molly's hand, shooting Jagger a glare. I don't know what his problem is with her, but he needs to drop it. Molly is right; she's like my sister, and we don't keep secrets.

"She's coming," I say to Jagger, avoiding Kaden's penetrating gaze. I feel like I'm naked every time he looks at me, and he fucking smirks like I am too.

Jagger doesn't move, and Molly has to practically contort her body to get around him, which she soon loses her patience with.

"Stop being an asshole and *move*." Molly shoves him and he barely moves, a wicked smile appearing on his lips as he reaches out to grab her wrist.

"Let me help you out," he purrs, dragging her out of the classroom behind him.

My eyes widen and I scurry after them, determined to give my cousin a piece of my mind, when I find him pressing her up against a locker, his hand over her mouth as he mutters something into her ear.

"Get off her, Jagger! Right *now!*" I demand, striding over to my best friend and cousin. But when I get closer, I see something in Molly's eyes I've not seen before. It's hatred, but also desire.

She's turned on by this shit?

I reach out to grab Jagger's shoulder and Molly lifts her knee, angling it so it hits Jagger's family jewels.

He releases her to cup his precious balls, and Molly joins me, her face

flushed and her eyes wild.

“I’m *not* one of your fangirls, Jagger. *Don’t* make me your enemy.” Then she looks at me and gives me a shaky smile.

“Are you okay?” I ask her, pleased to see Jagger doubled over in pain.

“She’s fine,” Kaden says, stepping forward. “I can’t say the same for Jagger.”

“If I can’t have kids because of this, I’m going to skin you alive,” Jagger says, his eyes flashing with disbelief.

“Jagger,” I say impatiently, disregarding his narrowed eyes. “What did my dad say?”

Jagger stands upright and glares at Molly before addressing me. “He said to tell you it’s Verona.”

I still, every fiber of my body now flooding with confusion. The stalker left me voicemails, and even though the voice was tinny and mechanical, I’d assumed it was a man. I’d *stupidly* assumed it was a man. Like Verona couldn’t get a voice changer app.

Fuck!

Verona Castello, the daughter of one of the other families.

“Fuck,” Molly whispers, her brow furrowing with concern as she reaches out to grab my hand.

All along I thought it would be a man; stalkers usually are, right?

But Verona?

I should feel relief at knowing who’s been targeting me, making me feel unsafe in my own home, making me move miles away to finish my senior year.

But I don’t. I feel white-hot fury, replaced by the fear I felt first.

‘You should have never have crossed me, bitch.’

I swallow and Kaden gazes at me wordlessly, his eyes burning holes into mine. I want to tell him I’m not safe. That Verona Castello won’t stop until I’m dead, and more than anything I want to tell him I won’t be the first

person she's killed. But then I'd have to tell him how I know that.

Instead, I force a smile and squeeze Molly's arm.

"I need to leave. Now."

KADEN

Something is wrong.

Aphrodite's face has drained of color, leaving it the kind of gray you associate with death. Sullen, dark, and terrifying. Her eyes are wide, and I know without having to ask that she's lost in a memory that only she can see. My chest burns with a desire to slip into her mind to view it with her, just so she knows she's not alone.

Why the fuck do I care?

I'm fucking her, that's all. The attraction between us is purely sexual, and sooner or later it will wear off.

For me, anyway.

But the sight of her lower lip trembling has me feeling things I don't want to. The urge to protect her from whoever this Verona is. But I'm not doing this again, I'm not falling for another girl only for her to break my heart.

No.

It's easier to keep her at arm's length. She's got Jagger and her father, and god knows how many mafia men. She's a Princess, guarded at all times.

So why do I feel so protective? She doesn't need me.

Molly chews on her lip and stares at Aphrodite, and a look passes between them that makes my spine stiffen. Molly mumbles something to Aphrodite and her shoulders slump.

“Who’s Verona?” The question leaves my lips before my brain can intervene, yet Aphrodite barely acknowledges me. Molly glances at me but gives nothing away, and Jagger heaves a sigh.

“Let’s go.”

We leave school and climb into the security car that’s awaiting us at the school gates. The ride back to Jagger’s is silent, a tension weighing in the air heavily like a blanket of secrets.

But secrets always have a way of getting out.

Once we’re back at Jagger’s house and in the den, he steepled his fingers together and stares at Aphrodite.

“Tell me about Verona.”

Aphrodite doesn’t even flinch. “We had some business to take care of. It went a little sour, and we fell out.” Her voice is flat and low like she’s reading the weather aloud.

“So why is she stalking you?” Jagger twists his neck both ways, trying to relieve the tension there.

“I don’t know,” Aphrodite says, her eyes narrowing. “But I’ll deal with her myself.”

Jagger snorts, rubbing his temples before addressing her. He’s pissed.

“Your father is speaking to her father right now,” Jagger says, arching his brow. “We’ve got to stay here until he tells us otherwise.”

“We?” Aphrodite raises an eyebrow at me and Molly. “You and I, you mean?”

I know what’s coming so I sit back and enjoy the show, which is delivered with perfect execution.

Jagger shrugs. “Yup. Plus these two.”

He waves a finger between Molly and me, and Molly and Aphrodite exchange a confused look.

“The house is surrounded. No one comes in, and no one goes out.”

When Jagger told me about Aphrodite’s house arrest, I knew I had to be

here for it. I couldn't miss the opportunity of watching her squirm.

Ha.

“Are you *serious*?” Aphrodite breathes, her nostrils flaring. “My father told you this?”

Jagger nods, and this seems to infuriate Aphrodite even further.

“Why? Verona won't come here herself—she'll send someone else to deliver her stupid gifts!”

“It's not about the gifts, Aphrodite,” Jagger snaps, his eyes blazing. “Verona wants you *dead*. She knows with you gone, she'll be the one running things. Plus...” His voice falters but he knots his eyebrows and moves his gaze back to Aphrodite. “Apparently, you and she have unresolved business.”

“So?” Aphrodite bites out, her cheeks flooding with color.

Interesting.

“Who gives a shit?” Aphrodite yells.

“Verona, apparently.” Jagger glances at Molly, and irritation lines his face. “Do *you* know about any of this?”

Molly shrugs. “Some.”

“I can't protect you if I don't know everything, Aphrodite.” Jagger presses his lips together. “When someone in the mafia wants you dead, it usually happens.”

Something twists in my gut and I shake my head. “She isn't going to die.”

“*You're* not in the mafia,” Jagger points out as I stare at Aphrodite, a plan forming in my mind.

“There's only one way to deal with this, and I'm sure you know what it is.” I lock eyes with Aphrodite who nods so subtly I'm sure I imagined it.

But I know I'm right.

Whoever this girl is, she wants Aphrodite dead, and she won't stop until she is. I don't know what Aphrodite did to this girl, but I don't care. Jagger is my best friend, and I'm not going to sit by and watch his cousin get killed by some bitch. So... we either sit like ducks, waiting for her to do her worst, or

we move first.

Jagger's phone rings, and he jumps up to take it, nodding at me to wait until he comes back before discussing it further.

When he leaves, Molly turns to Aphrodite with concern written all over her face. "You should go to Spain."

Aphrodite stares at her best friend before shaking her head stubbornly.
Spain?

"I'm finishing school first."

"But Verona won't stop. It's the only place you'll be safe." Molly twists her hands in her lap.

My fingers grip the arms of the chair until I can't take it anymore, and I lean forward to get their attention.

"She's safe here, and if she's not, we'll make sure she fucking is. Wherever she has to go, she'll be safe."

Both girls stare back at me.

"What?" I huff, crossing my arms over my chest.

"Nothing," Molly says quickly, her lips curving into a smile.

Aphrodite sends me a small smile and it sends ripples of pride through me. I'm glad I've made her feel safe.

"That's sweet, Kaden, but really..." Aphrodite pushes her hair behind her ear. "You can go. Jagger will get you out."

She's dismissing me.

"I'm not going anywhere, Goddess," I say, making sure she knows I mean it. Her eyes lock on mine and she frowns, but I tilt my head and grin. "So get used to it."



IT TAKES four hours before Molly and Jagger are at each other's throats, and

even though Aphrodite begs them to stop, they don't.

Jagger is particularly cruel, pointing out any flaws he can find in Molly, including her upbringing and lack of class. He pisses the girls off majorly with that one.

"Class?" Aphrodite growls, jumping to her feet. "Molly has more class in her pinky than you have in your whole body."

Jagger laughs. "I bet she knows how to strip. I've got a pole in my bedroom. Why don't you do it now, honey? I'll give you tips."

Molly's cheeks flame, her jaw clenching as she squints at him.

"It makes sense," Molly says, tilting her head. "You're attractive on the outside because you're so fucking ugly inside."

Something flickers over Jagger's face before it's gone, slid back behind the mask of indifference he's mastered so well. But I saw it, and I know Jagger. Molly hit him hard with that one.

"So what happened with you and this girl?" Jagger asks Aphrodite, ignoring Molly, but I don't miss the smug smile pulling her lips upwards.

Aphrodite looks like she's going to stab Jagger with something very sharp, and I glance around to see if there are any weapons nearby.

"I told you. We had some business to deal with," Aphrodite says icily.

Molly shoots a warning glance at Jagger which he promptly ignores, twisting his body so he's draped over the armchair lazily.

"Elaborate."

Molly's eyes widen but this only seems to spur Jagger on, and he waves his hand in a circular motion to encourage Aphrodite to spill the beans.

Aphrodite closes her eyes and pinches the bridge of her nose before exhaling heavily. She doesn't want to do this.

Part of me wants to tell Jagger to leave it, but I want to know too. Why is this girl stalking her? What did she do?

"It's just one of those things." Aphrodite gazes at Jagger with indifference, challenging him to push her.

And he's about to, but then his phone rings.

"Uncle," Jagger answers instantly, his eyes not moving from his cousin. "She's fine. Right in front of me."

Aphrodite rolls her eyes and Molly reaches out to squeeze her hand.

I'm intrigued. Whatever it is that Aphrodite did to piss off this Verona girl, Molly knows what it is.

"Fuck. Where's this cabin?" Jagger frowns.

Aphrodite whips her head up, her eyes wide.

"There's four of us right now, but I can drop the other two home."

Molly shakes her head, gripping Aphrodite's hand. She's a loyal best friend, I'll give her that. Aphrodite is in danger, so much so that she's under house arrest with armed guards surrounding her, and Molly isn't moving. Some people have bravado, some people are brave, and others are weak. Molly strikes me as brave, and it intrigues me. Like Aphrodite, but not in the same way. Ha. I don't have the time or sex drive to manage more than Aphrodite.

"Well?" Aphrodite demands, arching a perfect brow as Jagger ends the call.

"Your dad wants you to take a trip."

It's fascinating watching Aphrodite react to the news. Her head snaps to the side, her lips pulling into a sneer as she stares at her cousin with disbelief in her eyes.

"Why? Because of Verona?"

Jagger chews on his lip, something he *never does*, and he exhales heavily. "No," he groans. "Fuck, Aphrodite, it's not Verona who's been stalking you."

We all stare at him as he drags his hands through his hair, his usually tanned skin losing its golden glow.

"What? But Daddy said it was," Aphrodite whispers, her brow creasing with confusion. She swallows thickly as Jagger nods.

"Aph," he says slowly, glancing at me. "Verona is dead, and they think

you're the one that did it."

APHRODITE

This has to be a sick joke.

My stomach twists into knots until they're wound so tightly that bile rises into my throat. I swallow repeatedly, trying to keep it at bay.

Verona is dead?

Molly slides her arm around me and guides me to my room, throwing clothes into a suitcase I'd not long unpacked.

I feel numb. Verona is one of the daughters of the Castellors—there's no way anyone has killed her. It's impossible—she's too protected. I'm still stuck in the same thought process as Molly frogmarches me downstairs to where Jagger and Kaden are waiting. I pull my coat on as the boys watch me, their stares deep and curious. I know what Kaden must think of me; a spoiled mafia princess who's good enough to fuck around with, but when there's a hit out on me, he's gone.

I don't blame him.

"I'm coming." Molly's voice comes from beside me and I relax a tiny bit before panic sets in.

"No, you're not," I say, shaking my head. She's my best friend and she's already been through so much. There's no way I'm putting her at risk.

She glares at me, ready to battle with me, but I reach out to hold her hand, lifting it to my heart.

“This is my life, not yours. You know how I feel about this.”

Molly shakes her head violently, her eyes burning with her fury. “Aph, you are not going to sit in some fucking cabin alone in the middle of nowhere when some psycho is stalking you!”

“And you’ve been framed for murder,” Jagger adds unhelpfully as I shoot him a glare.

“I may have been framed for murder,” I say, licking my dry lips. “But I didn’t do it, and I’m not stalking anyone. The truth will come out and I’ll be safe. But you don’t get to risk your life to be with me. You’re not some sidekick in a superhero movie.”

Jagger snorts and a smile plays at my lips at the image of Molly in a superhero costume. Maybe not a bad idea.

“But—”

“I’ll be fine on my own. I’ll have guards.”

I sound stronger than I feel. Because in all honesty, how am I meant to feel safe when Verona has been murdered? She’s from a big family. She’s the same as me.

I swallow down the lump of fear in my throat and force a wide smile, the one I’ve learned to wear as a Dahla. Dahla’s don’t show fear, not now, not ever. And I’m not taking my best friend along on the scariest ride of my life.

Jagger sighs before opening the door. “Come on, we’ll drop you home on the way to the airport.”

“Airport?” Kaden snaps, making me jump. He glares at Jagger who makes a face, shrugging his shoulders like he’s just a whipping boy.

“I’m just taking her where I’m told.” Jagger shrugs.

It’s humiliating to be treated like a possession rather than a human, but I refuse to show any emotion. I’m used to it after all; I’m Aphrodite Dahla. My father knows what’s best for me, and I don’t doubt that. But when Kaden’s eyes meet mine, there’s a jolt of something deep in my stomach, and it’s a yearning I’ve never felt before. And he gazes at me like he feels it too.

“Are you going with her?” Kaden demands, not breaking eye contact with me as he addresses Jagger.

“No,” Jagger admits, rubbing the back of his neck. “I’ve got a shoot in a few days...”

I shouldn’t feel sad, but I do. Jagger owes me nothing, and if anything, I’ve been a pain in his ass since I’ve been here. He’s probably glad to see me go.

Kaden stares at Jagger, his jaw clenched.

“She can’t go alone!” Molly is on the verge of stomping her feet, and I straighten my shoulders and try not to balk at the thought of hiding from the world in an icy cabin in the middle of nowhere while a killer hunts me down.

“She can’t,” Kaden agrees with Molly, his silky voice calming me. “So I’ll go with her.”

Jagger does a double take and frowns, glancing over at me before he speaks. “Are you mad? You don’t even know her.”

Kaden holds my gaze, his jaw tightening.

With one look, he sets fire to my soul, stroking my senses and reassuring me that everything will be okay. He knows a part of me, I’ll admit that.

But then he steps forward, grabbing my suitcase in one hand, and the other claps Jagger on the back.

“I’ve got fuck all to do anyway. I could do with a vacation.”

I try not to take offense, but my heart deflates at his words.

“You said you were done babysitting her,” Jagger mutters, stopping his friend from leaving.

Kaden looks back at me and shrugs. “I don’t mind being holed up in a cabin with her.”

Jagger shakes his head. “No, this is serious, bro. You could be killed.”

Kaden laughs, throwing his head back as he points at Jagger.

“I’ve hung around with you felons my whole life—if I’m not dead already I’m living on borrowed time, right?”

Jagger still looks pissed though, his brow furrowing as he nods stiffly. “Alright.”

They bro hug like guys do, and then Kaden turns back to me.

“Come on, Goddess.”

I hug Molly and Jagger promises to drop her home, and I threaten him with death if he fucks around. Molly has tears in her eyes and I feel bad—the only reason she’s in this town is to be with me. And now look at me. Hopefully, it’s not for long.

Kaden strides outside and I follow him, keeping my expression neutral as we enter the truck with blacked-out windows and steps to climb into it.

I’m not sure who decided this was a conspicuous vehicle to escort a girl with a target on her back, but they were wrong. It stands out for miles around.

“Don’t you need clothes?” I ask Kaden as he stares out of the window.

“I’ll get some at the airport.”

He’s distant, and I’m confused as to why he’s here. I daren't ask him though, he looks lost in a world that doesn’t concern me.

“What about your parents? Won’t they wonder where you are?” I press, jamming my seatbelt in before the car rolls away from my temporary home. Molly smiles and Jagger waves, but I know they’re worried.

“No,” Kaden says, dragging his phone from his pocket. He types away silently and I wonder who he’s texting.

“Kaden, you don’t have to come with me,” I say, peering at him. He spreads his legs far apart as he stares down at his phone, his delicious fingers sliding over the screen as I remember what we did earlier...

“Aphrodite, I’m here. I need a fucking vacay, okay? Not everything is about you.”

It’s like he’s slapped me, even my cheeks sting from it, more from humiliation than anything else.

“Asshole,” I mutter, dragging my phone out to see no texts or missed calls.

Why hasn't Daddy texted me? I dial his number, annoyance pulsing through me until he answers.

"Aphrodite." His voice is business and no pleasure, so I don't waste either of our time.

"What's going on? Where am I going?"

Daddy exhales. "The mountains. I need you away, Aphrodite. When you get to the airport, give your phone to security. There will be a phone waiting at the other end for you."

"But—"

"You'll be fine, sweetheart," Daddy says. "You know I won't let anything happen to you. You'll be safe there, I promise."

I chew on my lip and stare out of the window. "With the guards for company?"

Daddy is silent for a beat then he says, "Yes, there'll be guards. Dahla guards. I have to go. Love you."

"Love you," I murmur as I end the call, wondering what it's going to be like being holed up in a cabin with only Kaden for company.

Would I have been better on my own? Should I have let Molly come?

No.

I did the right thing.

Molly has been through enough in her life...a bit of normality at Archer High might be good for her. I still feel bad though, because she's on her own now until I'm back. The only person she knows is Jagger, and they hate each other. My thoughts fill the silence of the car journey until we arrive at the airport, and even then, Kaden barely speaks to me. He doesn't look at me either.

So why is he here?

I don't understand him.

KADEN

I grab some clothes at the airport while Aphrodite sits in a coffee shop surrounded by plainclothes guards. Her face is twisted with worry, and she stares into her coffee cup with a glazed look in her eyes. Something happened with that dead chick, Verona, and it's all too complicated for my liking.

I drop my bags at her feet and sink to the chair in front of her, nodding at the nearest guard. He eyeballs me like I'm suspicious before returning to scanning the crowds, his gaze hard.

These guys are *cold*.

"Have you eaten?" I ask, glancing at the bakery stand by the checkout. My stomach rumbles and I tilt my head, watching Aphrodite look over to the sweet goodness. Her eyes roam over it all before she shrugs.

"I'm not hungry."

"I didn't ask that."

She says nothing, and I grit my teeth. She's in a shit situation, and only she knows what's going on. I buy some muffins and croissants, dropping them on the table in front of her as her eyes widen.

"I said I'm not hungry." Yet she licks her lips as she drools over the sticky goodness, so I roll my eyes.

"Just fucking eat, will you?"

Aphrodite ignores me and picks up a blueberry muffin, biting into it with

a moan. Her eyes roll in her head and she devours the muffin in seconds, reaching for an apricot pastry.

I like a girl who can eat, and I take pleasure in watching her polish everything off. She pushes a cinnamon roll in my direction and arches a brow. Crumbs spill from her mouth as she says, “You eat.”

She sounds like a cavewoman.

“Me eat?” I repeat with a chuckle, picking up the roll. “Feel better now that you’ve eaten?”

Aphrodite sighs her contentment and nods. “I didn’t realize how hungry I was. Thanks.”

We sit in silence until our flight is called, and we make our way through security and to the private jet that awaits us.

Aphrodite sleeps most of the way, and I can’t help but watch her, along with the six guards. At least they have genuine reasons to be watching her; what do I have? Well, it’s probably the fucking state of her for a start. She’s in a hoodie and jeans but I know what’s beneath it. Dangerous curves and a pussy I could eat all day long.

Fuck.

Her lips part as she breathes, and I have the urge to wrap my arms around her and let her sleep on my chest, my fingers in her hair.

Damn, I’m fucked.

But I don’t move. I force myself to watch her from across the aisle while fantasizing about what I’d do if there were no guards here. My dick swells in my pants and I curse myself for getting carried away. Adjusting my pants I heave a sigh, turning to stare out of the window instead. I can’t remember the last time I went on a vacation with a girl, but I know this much for certain; I’m not going to be able to keep my hands off her. She makes me crave her in ways I’ve never felt before, and I’m pissed with myself because she’s in danger, and I’m thinking with my dick. I vow to find out what went down with this Verona girl, then I want to know everything about this fucking

stalker. My chest tightens at the thought of Aphrodite in fear of some prick who gets off on scaring her.

Who is he? Probably an ex.

My stomach twists at the thought of another man touching her, a rage growing deep within my soul that knocks me for six. Her creamy skin and curves belong to me. Her wide eyes and full mouth are mine.

Get a grip, Kaden.

I thought it was just sex, but I've fucked her and played with her enough to know better. It's why I'm here after all; if she's in danger, I'm the one she needs to protect her. Because if what I'm feeling is real, then I protect what's mine. I gaze back at her and suck in a breath to see her looking at me through half-lidded eyes, her mouth curving into a sleepy smile.

"Jace said we're landing soon." She glances at the guard in front of her and smiles, and I want to rip his fucking throat out. "It looks freezing out there."

Aphrodite peers out of the window beside her and I watch as Jace gives a small smile and says, "You'll be fine, I'll keep you warm."

I'm on my feet before I can think, grabbing him by the collar and slamming him against the seat. He grips my fist and snarls, but I'm too quick for him, gripping his throat with my free hand.

"What the fuck is that supposed to mean?" I hiss.

His eyes swirl with fury and he shoves me as hard as he can, and I barely move. The surprise that registers in his eyes almost amuses me, but I tighten my grip on his throat until someone rests their hand on my shoulder, a deep voice in my ear.

"Let him go."

But I don't. I continue to stare him down, this prick that offered to keep Aphrodite warm.

"Answer me," I say, tightening my grip until his face turns a deeper shade of red.

“You know what it meant,” Jace rasps, shoving me back again.

I release him and rise to my full height, staring down at him with disgust. He’s supposed to be Aphrodite’s protection against the mafia, and all he wants to do is fuck her? Heat scorches my skin as I lean closer to him.

“You don’t even look at her. Do you get that, dickwad?”

A meaty hand tugs me back and I turn to see one of the older guys glaring at Jace.

“He gets it,” he growls, moving past me. “Don’t you?”

Jace glares at me and plasters on a shit-eating grin. “Oh yes. I get it.”

I stare him down until he looks away, and it’s only then do I notice Aphrodite staring at me, her eyes swollen with disbelief.

“Kaden?” My name leaves her lips in a sigh, and I force myself to look away from her. She’ll wonder why I did that, why I reacted in that way. But I can’t explain it because I don’t fucking know.

“Kaden...” She tries again, but this time I ignore her completely, stomping back to my seat so I can keep an eye on Jace.

Aphrodite gazes at me for a beat, but then she shakes her head and twists to stare back out of the window.

Jace doesn’t look back, but I don’t take my eyes away from him until we land. He’s left to sort the luggage while Aphrodite and I follow the older guy to a black truck, complete with blacked-out windows. I don’t miss the cache of weapons loaded into the trunk either.

Aphrodite was right about one thing; it’s fucking freezing. But I’m still burning with rage at the thought of that slimy prick touching what’s mine.

“Are you okay?” Aphrodite asks from beside me, tilting her head to the side. She’s bundled up in a white fur coat looking every inch the princess she is.

I nod stiffly and zip my coat up. “I’m grand, princess. Just grand.”

APHRODITE

Kaden is anything *but* grand. His ocean-blue gaze looks like it could cut glass as he crosses his arms over his chest, glaring at the guards. I suck in an icy breath and hug my coat tight until Andros opens the truck's door, ushering me inside. The warm air conditioning greets me as I ease into my seat, surprised to find Kaden slipping into the seat beside me. Our thighs touch but he doesn't make an effort to move, and I take the opportunity to inhale his delicious scent. I can't deny that part of me liked him standing up to Jace like he did. Jace was out of line, and if Dad had been here...Jace would be skydiving without a parachute.

"It wasn't professional," I whisper to Kaden, who tilts his head left, the only sign he's listening to me. "What Jace said."

Kaden nods, his jaw clenching. His eyes narrow when Jace climbs into the back of the van, and I feel his eyes on me. Andros mutters something inaudible to Jace and Kaden stiffens.

"If he looks at you again, I'll take his eyes out."

The feeling of being watched leaves me at his words, and I relax in my seat.

"Anyone would think you cared," I say lightly, turning my gaze to the snowy view out the window. Wherever we are, there's nothing to see but mountains covered in snow. The airport we landed at had a small runway and

barely any staff, so I doubt this place has a high population.

Kaden glances at me, his hand moving to my thigh. I suck in a breath when he strokes it with his thumb, sliding further up as he says, “Now that would be dangerous.”

Holy shit.

I’m in a car with Kaden and four of my father's guards, and he’s talking about danger while stroking my inner thigh.

I mean, I’m down.

“Behave,” I whisper, attempting to move his hand.

But he grips my thigh so tight I yelp, and a smirk plays on his lips. “I told you.”

“You told me what?” I ask breathlessly, losing myself in his eyes once more.

“That it would be dangerous if I cared.” He tightens his grip and a rush of pleasure runs through me, making me bite my lip. Kaden drops his gaze to my mouth and heat pools in his eyes. We gaze at one another wordlessly until he breaks eye contact, dragging his hand away like he’d been burnt. Why does he do this? He’s hot and then cold, and I hate it. I’d rather just know one way or another how he feels so we could...I don’t know what we could do, but it would be better than *not knowing*.

The rest of the journey is silent until we pull into the driveway of a beautiful cabin by a lake. I frown at the ice-free driveway as we get out, wondering how on earth it’s evaded the temperature assault when Kaden grins.

“Heated driveway.”

My mouth forms an "o" shape before I laugh. “Wow. Not heard of that before.”

Kaden shrugs. “You must’ve spent most of your vacays in the sun then.”

I peer up at him and nod. “Mainly Europe in the summer,” I tell him as he stares around us. “Or the Caribbean.”

Kaden smiles as he looks at the jade-coloured lake. “My family loves the cold,” he says, inhaling a lungful of air. “I practically grew up in this environment.”

I follow his gaze as the guards haul the luggage from the trunk of the van, and I have to admit, it *is* beautiful. The icy wind nips at my bare skin and I shudder, but the lake sparkling beneath the high sun is breathtaking.

“It’s so quiet,” I murmur, turning back to see Kaden gazing at me.

My stomach flips when he extends a hand to me, his hair falling in his eyes.

“You’re cold. Let’s get you inside.”

I hesitate but reach for his hand which is warm and strong. He pulls me along after him and I sink my teeth into my lower lip, secretly excited Kaden is here. I’d have come alone, of course, but having someone here is better.

Not just someone though. *Kaden*.

The cabin stands proudly before us, made from solid wood and stone. Snow blankets the roof, lining the house perfectly like nature intended it to look so pretty. The windows provide little insight into what lies beyond them, and black iron railings surround the house, providing security without imposing on the view from the wide porch.

“Do you know where we are?” I ask Kaden as we climb the steps.

Kaden looks at me and nods: of course he knows.

“We’re near Banff National Park,” he says, twisting the doorknob only to find it locked.

“Canada?” I say, blinking with surprise.

I’ve never been to Canada before, but it didn’t come as a surprise to me. I guess the fact we bypassed border patrol threw me. But then again, Dad can buy his way around the world without playing by any rules, that much I should know by now.

“The key,” Andros says, coming up behind us. “We need to check everything out first, Miss Dahla.”

I smile at the older man before moving back, allowing him access to the door. I'm reminded that however beautiful my surroundings are, the reason for being here is anything other than a vacay.

This is my new cage.

I swallow down my sadness and Kaden squeezes my hand with a frown.

"You okay?"

The tenderness in his voice shocks me, and I cock my head at him. God, he's beautiful. I study his jawline and high cheekbones before answering, trying to commit them to memory.

"Yes."

He turns when Andros and his men appear in the doorway, filing out one by one.

"All clear. After you." Andros waves a hand into the cabin and Kaden drops my hand, moving it to the small of my back before he follows me.

I love his touch, even when it's pinching and cold. But when it's warm and caring? Damn. It leaves fires on my skin.

The cabin is just as beautiful inside as it is from the outside; upon entry, there's a stone fireplace that dominates the room. A golden mirror reflects our flushed cheeks and wide eyes; even Kaden looks impressed. A black chandelier hangs above a thick oak table with six chairs, each cushioned and wrapped in black leather. Paintings of what looks like the lake outside adorn the walls, and as I study them, I realize they're all from different angles of the lake. *The amount of time that must've taken...*

The sound of the guards moving around brings me back to the room, and I shove my hands in my pockets. Kaden strolls through an open bricked doorway, whistling when he sees the bar in the corner.

"That'll keep us warm, Goddess," he murmurs, shooting me a smirk. I shiver as he holds my gaze, his eyes traveling over my body slowly before he adds, "Amongst other things."

Holy fuck, he hasn't even touched me and I'm shaking. Imagining him

bending me over the bar and—

“Everything is secure, Miss Dahla.” Andros interrupts my dirty mind and smiles. “We’ve each got cabins of our own set further back, but we will have eyes on the house at all times and of course, you’re not to leave without a guard.” He looks sad when he says that, but I’m used to it.

“Not even to the lake?” I ask, trying to steady my voice.

Even though I’m used to it, it doesn’t make it any easier. The lake is beautiful.

“You’ll be fine to go with me,” Kaden says, his gaze moving to Andros.

“No, her father said—”

Kaden puts his hand up, stopping Andros in his tracks. My heart skips a beat when he speaks slowly like he’s addressing a child.

“Her father isn’t here. I am. Nothing will happen to her when she’s with me.”

Heat pools in my stomach at his words spoken with such authority that even Andros hesitates. But Andros won’t defy my father, and he looks to me for help, his eyes dancing with desperation.

“I’ll be okay with Kaden,” I say, aware of Andros’s shoulders deflating at my words. “I’ll take it up with Dad if he has a problem. If you don’t mind, I’d like to lie down.”

Kaden arches a brow at the guards who eyeball him back, waiting for their leader to tell them what to do.

Andros sighs but nods. “Okay. But I’ll have to tell your father.”

I wave him off with a smile, watching as the men file out of the cabin. My heart thumps in my chest until the last one leaves and the air crackles with the tension of being alone with Kaden.

He turns to me, his eyes fixed on mine with an intensity I’ve not seen before.

“If I’m looking after you, Goddess, I’m going to need you to tell me everything.”

I swallow, hoping he doesn't notice how nervous I am. I know he's right, but I can't bring myself to tell him *everything*.

It's too much.

Kaden watches me, his jaw tensing. "Start with Verona."

He always knows what I'm thinking and it's unnerving. I shift my weight and then gaze at the bar longingly. If I'm doing this, I need a drink.

"I'm tired," I say, trying one last time, hoping he lets me off the hook.

Kaden doesn't even flinch. "You'll sleep when you're dead. Which could be a lot sooner than you'd like if you don't tell me everything I need to know."

I gape at him but he holds my gaze, his eyes burning into mine.

"You think someone is going to try to kill me? *Here?*" My voice is higher than I'd like it to be, but it's only because Kaden just voiced my ultimate fear.

Verona is dead—It's not impossible that I could be next. My head spins as I whirl on my heel and head to the bar in the corner. My hand trembles as I reach for the whiskey, placing two glasses on the counter.

"Not for me," Kaden says, sliding onto the bar stool before me.

My breath catches in my throat as his scent wraps around me, his lips flattening as he stares at me. The way he stares...I don't think I've ever seen anyone look at me this way. Shit, I don't think anyone ever has looked at anyone this way. I pour three fingers worth of whiskey into the glass and sip it, trying to arrange the jumbled thoughts in my mind into some kind of order. The whiskey stings as it goes down, and I immediately knock back the rest of the contents in the glass.

"Verona and I weren't ever friends," I say, pouring more whiskey. "We were the daughters of two mob bosses who didn't see eye to eye."

Kaden says nothing, his gaze moving to the whiskey glass when I lift it to my lips. Maybe he notices my hand trembling, maybe he doesn't.

"So, we were natural born enemies."

Verona was a different mafia princess than me; she thrived on her title, using it to her advantage every time.

Me? I just did what I had to do.

I gulp at the whiskey when I think about what I *had* to do, and dizziness hits me. It doesn't matter how you feel about something the mafia tells you to do. It doesn't matter whose daughter you are; when the family gives an order, you do it.

End of story.

“What happened?” Kaden tilts his head in a way that makes me gaze longingly at his bare neck, and the silver chain glinting on it. I have an urge to run my tongue along it, but then Kaden clicks his fingers, a smirk on his lips. “Stay with me, Goddess.”

I force my eyes away, annoyed that he's caught me checking him out. I can't seem to control myself when I'm around him, and it's annoying as hell.

“Our fathers were asked to truce,” I say, clearing my throat.

“Who by?” Kaden asks, not missing a beat.

I shrug. “Another family. One with more power than any of us.”

Kaden nods and waits for me to continue, but my stomach is doing somersaults at the thought of continuing this shit.

“They had an enemy they needed us to deliver a message to,” I huff out, my cheeks throbbing beneath Kaden's gaze.

I've never told anyone this.

So why am I telling him?

Because he has to protect me. That's why.

The guards can do that too, but Kaden is *here*. Right now, he's the only person in this cabin, and I feel like I *need* to tell him.

“So they gave us a task.”

Breathe.

In, and out.

“All we had to do was scare her.” My voice tightens and I bite my lip,

tears stinging my eyes. “We broke into her house...” A sob catches in my throat but I swallow it down, pouring yet another whiskey.

Fuck, this is hard.

Just spit it out!

“We cut her hair while she slept.” My eyes feel glazed like I’m watching the memory play out in slow motion. “Shaved her eyebrows. Juvenile stuff, you know?”

Kaden watches me without moving a muscle, and somehow it gives me the strength to go on.

“I wanted to go. She got the message. But Verona...” Tears stream down my cheeks and Kaden flinches, the only sign he’s listening to me at all.

“Let’s go, Verona.”

Verona shoots me a glare as her lips curve into a wicked smile.

“No. I deliver my messages personally and thoroughly.”

“She killed her?” Kaden finally says, his voice gruff.

The knife slid across the girl's throat with ease, like a knife through butter. Her gasp ends with a gurgle as her throat opens, blood spilling onto her chest and ice-white sheets. Verona stabs her in the chest, her face hovering inches above her victim's, watching the life leave her eyes.

“Aphrodite.”

Kaden’s voice makes me jump, and I close my eyes and try to compose myself. But I’m lost in the memory, where the girl's eyes have connected with mine, a desperate plea to save her.

I can't move. My feet are rooted to the spot, and Verona is stabbing the girl in a frenzy, giggling as blood covers the both of us.

I scream, and Verona's head snaps to mine, her eyes dark and wild.

“Shut the fuck up!” She hisses, launching herself at me.

She grabs me by the throat and slams me against the window, the glass cracking beneath my head.

I moan, but she doesn't stop, lifting the window open and pushing me out.

I roll down the roof, my fingernails dragging across the slates desperately as Verona follows me. My legs hit the air first, and I'm free falling, my hands grabbing at the air...

“Breathe!” Kaden grips my chin and drags my mouth open, his eyes searching mine with the desperation of a frightened man.

I suck in air before a wail leaves my throat, and I sink to the floor in Kaden's arms.

He wraps his arms around me, kissing my head and tugging me into his lap. I can't breathe, but he seems to know, rocking me gently on his lap as his lips move through my hair.

“I've got you. Breathe.”

But the sobs have taken over, and I can't unsee the memory of that poor girl bleeding to death, her eyes locked on mine as I'm shoved from the window.

“Please, Aphrodite, breathe.” Kaden holds me tighter, his legs pulling me closer to him.

I know I should feel soothed by his presence but I'm not there; I'm locked in a memory I can't escape from.

“I didn't save her,” I whimper as Kaden tilts my chin, his lips finding mine. “I didn't,” I try to say between kisses as his tongue slides against mine, inciting a moan so feral I almost scream with desire.

His fingers grip my throat as we kiss, and he holds me tight against him.

“Shut the fuck up,” Kaden growls, shoving his fingers into my pants. “Just stop.”

My eyes roll in my head when his cool fingers stroke my throbbing heat, his tongue halfway down my throat like he's trying to devour me. I whimper again but I thrust against his fingers, moaning when he slips a finger inside of me.

“Kaden!” I'm crying and moaning as he pumps two fingers into me, his thumb pressed against my clit.

“Lose yourself,” Kaden commands, moving his lips to my throat. I throw my head back as he bites the skin beneath him, just as my orgasm takes hold, ripping through me.

“Good girl,” Kaden says, sucking hard on the wound he’s created, causing blind pain to clash with my orgasm. “God, you taste good.”

I realize he’s talking about my blood, and when he slams his lips against mine, the metallic taste makes my toes curl with delight.

If I’m fucked up for loving this, so is he.

“God,” I whimper, my tongue lapping at his mouth, my fingers digging into his cheeks. “I want you.”

Kaden smirks against me, his hand curling a fistful of my hair as he rips my head back.

“Say it again, Goddess, and you just might get me.”

KADEN

Jesus fuck, this girl corrupts my brain. Her hot breath pants onto my neck as she grips my dick through my pants, demanding I fuck her.

We're in a cabin in the middle of nowhere, and as much as I want to, I don't trust those fucking guards not to jerk off to it. So I lift her from me and rise to my feet, reaching down to tug her against me. The wound on her neck throbs, forcing blood to trickle from it as she stares up at me with heat in her eyes.

"I could suck the life from you right here, right now," I tell her, sweeping her hair away from her face as I gaze down at her.

My chest aches at the thought of Aphrodite watching Verona kill someone, and I want to kill Verona myself. Shame she's already dead. Aphrodite might be a vixen, but she's not a murderer.

She traces her finger over the bite mark on her neck and shivers, lifting her finger to my lips.

"Drink me," she says with a smirk, rubbing her finger along my lips.

"Witchcraft," I mutter before lifting her into my arms. "That's what this is."

Aphrodite laces her arms around my neck as I carry her upstairs, scanning the hallway for the main bedroom. There are six doors in total, two of which I assume are bathrooms. I move to the door in front of us and open it, pleased

to see a large bed with a floor-to-ceiling window behind it. I spot the other cabins in the yard below us and glance around to see curtains on either side of the bed.

Good. I'm not having them watching this.

Especially Jace.

"What are you doing?" Aphrodite asks when I drop her to the bed and stride towards the window.

"Giving us some privacy."

My dick throbs at the sight of Aphrodite panting on the bed, her eyes wild with lust.

"Kaden..."

I draw the curtains and turn back to her, totally unprepared for the sight of her on her knees, her hand outstretched to me.

"I know you're rough..."

Erm, fuck yes.

"But can you...be nice?" She bites her lip and looks up at me, uncertainty pooling in her eyes.

I step closer and grip her chin, lifting it so she's staring up at me. "Nice, sweetheart?"

She bobs her head and swallows, her eyes growing more fearful by the second.

"I'm not *nice*, Aphrodite. If that's what you want, it's not me." I'm not lying to her. I'm a fucking brute, even if I fall in love fast. I love to cause pain and pleasure. I'm a whole lot of weird. "I don't care about anyone."

She reaches up and pulls me down, my palms hitting either side of her on the bed.

"I know you care about me, Kaden." She studies me as her fingers cup my face, her legs lacing around my waist as I exhale through my nose.

"And if I do?"

She shivers and looks at me from beneath her lashes. I'm floored by her

beauty, and I know without a doubt that this girl means something to me.

“Then I like it,” Aphrodite whispers, her lips close to mine. “I like knowing someone like *you* cares for me.”

My lips curl into a wicked grin and she shudders beneath me.

“Goddess,” I say, dropping my full weight onto her and pinning her to the bed. “You don’t know what someone like me is.” Our lips are so close I can taste her, but there’s a second where we seem to stare at one another for eternity like she’s paused time so she can delve through my mind and soul. Like she wants to know me.

“And I don’t care,” she whispers, locking me into her gaze. “I want you.”

“Inside you?” I smirk, hating how hard my heart pounds at her words.

Aphrodite throws her head back and laughs, sending crazy thoughts through my brain. I’ll fuck her while she laughs. Until she stops. Until she begs me to stop.

“I want you inside me, Kaden, in every way.”

I chuckle and let my lips brush against hers, moving back as her tongue reaches for mine.

“I’ll corrupt you,” I warn her, moving my hands down her warm body. My fingers reach into her pants and I yank them down, the scent of her arousal doing something it shouldn’t to me. I vowed after Michelle I’d never fall for someone else. I shove her legs apart and stare down at her glistening cunt, continuing to talk. “I’ll destroy you from the inside out. I’ll own you.”

Aphrodite's eyes roll in her head as I trace my finger up her smooth thigh, enjoying how she writhes beneath my touch.

I want to mark her skin.

“You’ll wear my name like a perfume,” I rasp, remembering her request for me to be nice. “I’ll smother you until you can’t breathe.”

She whimpers beneath me and I crack a smile.

“And I’ll be the only one you fear, Goddess.”

Something flickers across her face that makes my stomach twist in rage,

and it's not because she's afraid of me. She's afraid of someone else.

“Look at *me*.”

I stroke her slit with my fingers, dipping them in and out of her wetness. She writhes and bucks beneath me when I slip them into her, stretching her hole.

“Are you afraid?”

Aphrodite gasps and shakes her head. “No.”

“Do you still want me to be nice, Goddess?” I purr, circling her clit with my thumb.

She'd look good with this pierced. Maybe I could get her nipples done too, link them all together, and make her scream my name in pain and ecstasy. Her flat stomach screams for my attention, and I run my other hand over it, enjoying her curves. Her hips jerk when I stroke them, and I realize she's fucking my fingers.

“Just fuck me, Kaden,” Aphrodite moans, dragging her hands down her body, reaching for my dick.

“Oh, I'll fuck you,” I promise her, watching as her greedy cunt coats my fingers. “But first, you've got to tell me what you're afraid of.”

She glares at me, and delight spreads through my chest.

Good.

“Now?!”

“Now.”

She's close to coming. I press harder on her clit, and she grits her teeth, her hips bucking as I drag out her pleasure. She claws at my arms as she comes, her pussy tightening around my fingers.

“Tell me!” I still, my fingers and thumb halting as she opens her mouth, a small cry leaving her lips.

“I don't want *him* to kill me,” she says with a sob, and immediately I move, allowing her orgasm to crash through her.

As she moans and whimpers, my mind switches gears. *Him*. She said she

didn't want *him* to kill her.

“There's only one way you're going to die, Goddess.” I shove my pants down, freeing my dick. I slide into her effortlessly and she moans my name, her heels digging into my ass as I thrust into her.

“How?” She clings to me as I destroy her, and for once in my fucking life, I rest my forehead against hers and say something nice.

“Old age, princess.”

“Promise?” She gasps as I kiss her mouth hard.

Our teeth clash against one another as I hold her tight, muttering into her mouth. “I swear.”

APHRODITE

I wake to darkness.

I've never had a problem with the dark, but right now it's suffocating. I can't see my hand in front of my face and it scares me. My nightmares torment me enough while I sleep, but they linger when I wake just long enough to send shivers down my spine. I slide my hand across the bed, hoping to feel Kaden's warm body, but it's not there.

Of course, he's not.

He gets me off and then leaves.

I shouldn't be doing this with Kaden; it's too dangerous. For him and me. I can't get into this with him; not when I'm leaving for Spain soon. And he can't get involved any more than he already has—who knows what lengths my stalker will go to to get to me? Fear grips my heart, icy fingers probing into the soft flesh as I bolt upright. What if that's why Kaden isn't beside me? My head spins and I clamp my hand to my mouth, trying to calm down. There's no way the stalker has him. The guards are right outside...Still, terror floods my senses and I throw the covers back, relieved it's warm in the cabin as I'm naked.

Wait, when did I get naked? I groan when I remember Kaden removing my clothes and fucking me into oblivion at least twice more after the first time. He's incredible.

I pull the door open and find even more darkness.

“Kaden?”

Silence. My body trembles at the touch of icy fear trickling over me like water.

You're a Dahla. Pull yourself together.

I walk towards the stairs, staring down into the open-plan living area which is also cloaked in darkness. I'm unfamiliar with my surroundings, so I take my time walking down the steps. They don't creak which I'm grateful for, and when I reach the bottom, I start searching for a light switch. My fingers brush against the smooth walls until they touch something soft and fleshy. I open my mouth to scream, but a hand clamps over it, and a voice whispers in my ear.

“Shh, Goddess. It's me.”

White hot fury fills my veins as I shove Kaden as hard as I can, determined to kick him in the balls for scaring me so badly.

“Kaden! What the *fuck?!*” I hiss as he chuckles.

“Go back to bed.”

He twists my body so I'm facing the stairs again, and walks me forward until my toes hit the bottom step.

“What are you doing down here?” I demand, hopping out of his grip so I can face him. I'm almost at his height when I'm one step up, so I take another and release a breath I didn't know I was holding. I can make out his outline in the dark, and his fingers move to my waist, pinching the skin softly.

“Go back to bed,” he says again, his tone flat.

“Not until you tell me what you're doing down here in the dark,” I say, sucking in a gulp of air.

His fingers twist against my skin and I wriggle, trying to get away from him. It's painful, yet for some sick reason, it's turning me on.

“Get off me!”

“If I tell you what I'm doing down here will you take your demanding ass

back to bed?”

I laugh. “Yes.”

Kaden sighs and loosens his grip on me. “I’m thinking.”

My heart thuds in my chest at his words, and I reach out to cup his face. I don’t need to see him to know he’s frowning; I can feel his annoyance radiating around us.

“About?”

“Bed. Go on.” Kaden tries to push me up the stairs but I hold onto his shoulders, meaning I stay put.

“I can’t sleep,” I admit, licking my lips. “Can you come with me?”

There’s silence before Kaden answers. “I told you. I’m thinking.”

“You can think in bed,” I point out, praying he’ll come with me. I don’t want to tell him I’m afraid of the dark tonight, but maybe I’ll have to play the damsel in distress to get him to come with me.

Something tells me he won’t buy it though.

“I can’t think when I’m with you.”

I stare into the darkness where I know he is, and I suddenly don’t feel so scared.

“Why not?” I ask, my voice husky.

“Stop asking questions and go to fucking bed.” Kaden lifts me into his arms and *carries* me to the bedroom effortlessly.

“Don’t go,” I plead as he puts me on my feet with a sigh.

“Aphrodite…” Kaden says, but I rest my head on his chest and curl against him, inhaling his scent and strength.

“Please.” I close my eyes and pray he doesn’t push me away. I want him to hold me, that’s all. Nothing more.

Kaden stiffens beneath me and I wince, wondering if this is it. He’s going to walk out. But he doesn’t. He strokes my back and shrugs.

“I guess I can think in here.”

It’s a window into Kaden when he’s not being a dick, and I revel in it.

“You can,” I whisper, taking his hand and leading him to the bed. “You can always think in the dark.”

“I’ll never understand why people are so afraid of it,” Kaden says, letting me curl against his body.

“Because they can’t see what’s in it,” I whisper, my eyes rolling with tiredness. “It’s the unknown.”

Kaden chuckles and I love the way it sounds beneath me, the sound making my head vibrate. “It’s what we *know* that we have to fear. Not the unknown.” He sounds so sure, so confident, that I allow myself to believe it. Just long enough to fall asleep in his arms.

KADEN

I'm up and dressed before Aphrodite can convince me to stay, and I refuse to look back at her in the bed otherwise I'll cave. It's bad enough that I let her fall asleep in my arms last night, but I let her stay there *all night*. I shake my head and stare out of the window that overlooks the lake. It glistens beneath the morning sun, and a longing to go outside overtakes me.

Not without Aphrodite.

I tense my jaw, weighing up my options.

Aphrodite has fucking *guards* right here—technically, she doesn't need me. It's not as if we're in the middle of a town where anyone can walk up to the door either. This place is isolated with a capital I. I pull on my coat and boots and double check the door is locked behind me. Aphrodite can get out, but no one can get in. Not even the guards. The air is shockingly cold, and when I inhale icicles line my throat, pinching my flesh. I huff and clear my throat, scanning the beautiful view to see what's hiding there. Because usually, behind something beautiful, is something deadly.

I should know.

I head down the heated driveway and almost slip on the icy ground, forgetting that I'm genuinely in a winter wonderland. The ground is coated in snow which is untouched, reassuring me that no one has been snooping overnight. If anyone had come here, I'm sure I'd have heard the engine. No

one could get here on foot unless they were a superhero or some shit. There's nowhere to land a chopper either, I think as I scan the rugged mountains. Leonard Dahla picked the right place to hide his little princess. But something feels off, and I can't put my finger on it. I walk around, keeping the house in my gaze at all times, just in case. It's getting easier to breathe now, but Jesus fuck, it's cold. I shove my hands in my pockets and head for the trees that line one side of the lake, wondering how easily I can hide here. Because that's what I'd do if I came for Aphrodite.

I'd hide, and I'd watch. And I'd take out the guards, one by one.

Whoever sent her those flowers killed her 'enemy', Verona, and framed Aphrodite for it.

But who?

The obvious choice would be the family of the girl Verona killed. But why would they frame Aphrodite? *Because they think she's involved. They think she helped to kill her.* Okay, so that makes sense. So if I'm on the right track, the family got their revenge on Verona by killing her and framing Aphrodite. Would they still come for Aphrodite? Even if they've framed her for Verona's murder?

Probably. Make it look like a suicide.

My heart freezes in line with the weather at the thought of Aphrodite dying, and I have to force myself to breathe. I've entered the trees now, and when I stare up, I can see the brilliant blue sky and dazzling sunshine amongst the tops of the trees. But the forest is too dense for anyone to see me, I'm sure of it. I tense, standing perfectly still while I listen for any sounds that aren't natural. There's the humming of birds and the flutter of wings occasionally, the sound of the lake lapping on the shore the only other sound.

It's eerily silent.

I trudge forward.

What am I doing here?

The thought comes from nowhere, and I frown, trying to ignore it. But it

persists.

“Fuck off,” I mutter to myself, spotting a decently shaped rock wide enough to sit on. It looks perfect for a seat, and I sit down facing the direction of the house with a sigh.

So what if I like Aphrodite? We have good sex, and she’s feisty. I like that in a woman. But she’s also a mafia princess and the cousin of one of my best friends. It’s just messy. Yet here I am, fucking her and staking out the house she’s in just in case someone wants to murder her. I should be alarmed by the way my fists clench and my teeth grit, but I’m not. I don’t condone violence against women unless you’re in the bedroom and they’re begging for it. Fuck yes. My cock stiffens at the thought of Aphrodite begging me to choke her and I have to pinch the bridge of my nose to stop myself from getting carried away. It’s then that I hear a door open and slam, and her sweet voice calling me like a siren calls men to their deaths.

“Kaden?”

What is it with this girl? Why does she need to know where I am all the damn time? Irritation sweeps through me as I rise to my feet, watching her through the thick of the trees. She’s hugging her coat, but she’s still wearing a thin t-shirt and boots. Is she crazy? She’ll fucking freeze. I’m about to let her too, just to teach her dumbass a lesson, when her voice takes on a panicked, scared tone.

“Kaden!”

I know she’s not in danger because I *am* the danger. There’s no one around, but oh, wait, *look who it is*.

Jace.

I watch as he jogs around to where Aphrodite is, followed by two other guards. I stop, still hidden behind the trees, when Aphrodite narrows her eyes.

I’m not sure what he’s said to her, but boy is she pissed off. I notice the two guards with Jace exchange a look, and then back away, clearly meaning

to leave Aphrodite alone. Except she's not alone. She's with Jace, and I want to know why. Apparently, so does Aphrodite. I watch as she challenges him, despite her body trembling from the cold. She's fierce, even when the elements are against her. Jace steps closer and I do too, wondering when to put the poor fucker out of his misery. He reaches out to stroke her cheek and Aphrodite freezes, her mouth falling open in surprise.

Hot envy sweeps through my body at the way her eyes widen, and I don't give a damn *why* they're widening. Surprise or fucking adoration I don't care, they only widen for *me*.

Jace chuckles and tilts his head, and I wonder if he realizes I'm about ten seconds away from tearing it from his fucking shoulders. Aphrodite came out looking for *me*. Call it sick curiosity, but I force myself to watch this absurdity play out. Like how she studies him before her eyes dart around.

What are you looking for, Goddess?

She crosses her arms, and whether it's dismissive body language Jace is oblivious to or she's cold, I take it as a positive.

"As I said," she says, the tone of her voice matching the wind whipping her hair around her. Her eyes flash as she narrows them once again, and my heart almost fucking bleeds for her. I love her when she's like this. "I was looking for Kaden."

Jace's lip curls as he reaches out and grabs her wrist, tugging her close.

"Maybe you should look for a *man*, baby. Like you had before, huh? I've heard the stories. I want some of that mafia pussy."

My mind is in overdrive. One, his hand is on what's *mine*, and I *don't* fucking like it. Two, he's offensive by referring to *me* as a boy. Three, what fucking stories? Four—fuck counting.

"Good morning," I sing, striding from the trees, the branches snapping at my coat as I do.

Jace releases Aphrodite and turns to glare at me, his fists clenched and ready.

But neither of us are prepared for Aphrodite. She grabs Jace by his hair and knees him in the balls, staring down at him as he curses. He falls to his knees, one hand cupping his dick, the other spread out on the ground.

“You’re officially dead when I tell my father about this,” she tells him, the bones of his fingers crunching beneath her boot.

Jace howls and lunges for her, but she’s too quick, slamming her elbow into his cheekbone as he screams. He still reaches for her, but this time I tug her back by the collar of her coat, pushing her behind me.

My nostrils flare as I stare down at the piece of shit that just told Aphrodite he wanted her *mafia pussy*, the man who swore to her father he’d protect her.

He opens his mouth to speak, but my boot meets his jaw, and the crack echoes around the lake as he flies back, slumping against the wall of the house.

“Go inside,” I tell Aphrodite, who’s staring past me with a strange expression on her face. “Go.”

She hesitates but soon moves into the house just as I hear footsteps running up behind me.

I turn to face the five guards, watching as they take in the scene, making sure they get a good look.

“This,” I say, waving a finger at the unconscious Jace, “is what happens when you cross Aphrodite. I’d take credit for it, but it wasn’t *all* me.”

I smile crookedly as Andros’s lips flatten, his eyes morbidly dark.

“I don’t know what stories you’ve *heard* about Aphrodite,” I continue, eyeing every man individually. “But that’s just it. They’re stories, not reality. In reality, she’s untouchable. You don’t even *look* at her unless it’s to save her fucking life. I don’t want to see *any* of you near this place unless there’s a security breach. Am I clear?”

Andros nods and then turns to the other men.

“Get him up.”

It takes three men to lift Jace, and the other watches me wordlessly, along with Andros.

“I want Jace gone. No replacements.” I snarl, staring at the two men before me. “You hired a fucking *rapist*, Andros.”

Andros stiffens and his jaw ticks, and I can see the cogs in his head turning as he absorbs the reality of what happened.

“Attempted,” I add. “Threatened, whatever. But if I hadn't been here, I'm not sure who'd have won between the two of them, but it's disgraceful that a guard would treat his charge that way.”

Andros dips his head as his cheeks flame.

Good. I hope he feels ashamed. I watch them leave and slide my phone out, sending a text to Jagger requesting Leonard Dahla's personal number. This has gone far enough, and I'm done with these shitheads.

Aphrodite may be in danger, but there's no one better than me to look after her.

No one.

APHRODITE

I pour myself a stiff drink while Kaden stomps around outside on the phone. His shoulders are stiff, and his brow furrowed. Every step he takes is pounded into the ground like it will remain there forever. In short, he's pissed. My heart knows why, but my brain is trying to override it. That jerk of a guard tried to...

Fuck. He tried to rape me.

'I want some mafia pussy.'

I shudder.

I couldn't imagine what would have happened if Kaden hadn't turned up when he did. Even if I *did* handle myself well, all Jace had to do was get *one* good shot, and I'd have been down. I'm furious at myself for letting it happen. The signs were there all along—Jace's behavior on the plane, then his comments in the car. So he knew about Carlos.

Which means they all know about Carlos.

The whiskey stings as I knock it back, wondering if my dad knows. My stomach churns at the thought.

His best friend fucking his daughter?

Yikes. I hope Dad *doesn't* know.

I chew on my lip, lost in thought when the front door slams. I whip around, unsure if it's Andros or Kaden.

Whiskey-brown eyes sweep over me as Kaden shrugs off his bulky coat, tossing it on the back of a chair before setting his jaw.

I swallow and meet his gaze, lifting my chin almost defiantly. He takes his time walking over to me, despite his long legs eating up the distance like it's nothing. I arch a brow and he twists his head in warning, reaching out to grip my chin between his thumb and forefinger.

“So,” he rasps, his voice sending shivers all over me when it leaves his full lips. “Care to tell *me* the story?”

My mouth opens and then closes, waiting for my brain to make a decision. Kaden stares at my mouth, his thumb pressing down on my lower lip as he sighs.

“Who did you fuck, Goddess?”

His fingers move to my throat, and his eyes are suddenly darker, something that is almost ethereal. *How do his fucking eyes change color?!*

“Does it matter?” I choke out as his fingers press against my windpipe.

Something in me stirs and a soft moan leaves my lips.

Kaden chuckles. “Yes, it matters.”

“Why?” I wheeze as he tightens his grip, moving me closer to him this way.

I glare at him, but his smile breaks my defenses in seconds.

“Because *someone* is trying to kill you, pretty girl.” He rolls his head to the side and dips close to my mouth, his breath fanning my lips. “And I don’t want them to succeed.”

My heart leaps at his admission, my eyes widening as he lifts his eyes to mine. His tongue wets his lips and it's like it's the most erotic act I've ever seen a man do. My body throbs with need for him, its earlier combat mode now forgotten. Typical woman. Like I care. I'll tell him just so he can fuck me again.

“He was a friend of my father’s,” I say, reaching out to wrap my hands around the one around my throat. His jaw tightens as I tell him what he wants

to know. “We fucked. That’s it. No one knew.”

Kaden stares at me, his lip curling with rage.

“What?!” I step closer, his lips centimeters from mine. “Are you *jealous*, Kaden?” Part of me wants to move away from him, far, far away from him, but the stubborn streak in me won’t allow my legs to move. Fear seeps from every cell in my body, and like he knows, he inhales it, grinning at me as he exhales.

“Yes, I’m jealous,” Kaden admits, his fingers tightening on my throat as I search his eyes. “I don’t want anyone else fucking you. I don’t like the thought of anyone else *touching* you.”

My head spins at the lack of oxygen he’s allowing me, but *fuck*, I’m so turned on right now.

“Why?” I ask, my voice coming out as a faint whine. He releases my throat and grabs the back of my neck, slamming his lips against my throat.

He sucks and bites so hard I cry out, but my knees are trembling. The effect he has on me...He lifts me onto the counter by the bar, standing between my legs as he drags his fingers up my thighs possessively, digging his fingers into my flesh through my clothes. I’m wearing my pajama bottoms but they’re so thin I may as well be naked as his fingers leave bruises in their wake. I suck in a breath and watch him, his gaze locked on my body.

“I think you know why.”

It’s as close to him admitting he feels something for me that I’m going to get, but he isn’t finished with me yet.

“Were you a virgin, when you fucked this man?”

His fingers slide into my pajama bottoms, seeking out my heat easily. I’m not wearing any panties, so I part my legs and shudder when he strokes my pussy.

“No,” I whisper, my head rolling back as he massages my core.

A finger circles my entrance and I feel his gaze on me.

“Lay back.”

I glance behind me at the bar with a frown. “But I’ll be hanging off!”

“You trust me, don’t you?” Kaden asks, his finger stilling.

I do, so I nod. To my demise.

I relax and he lifts my butt, sliding my pajama pants down my legs so I’m bare to him. I lay back, shoulders and head hanging off the edge until he drags me closer to him. His lips are close to my clit, and I writhe beneath him. His touch is second to none, and when he exhales heavily, I let out a low moan.

“I can’t protect you if I don’t know everything, Aphrodite.”

“What do you want to know?” My voice sounds strange and it’s probably due to the angle I’m at. No, it’s definitely due to the angle. My cheeks throb when he flicks his tongue against my nub.

“How many men have you fucked?”

My cheeks flame with color that has nothing to do with the angle I’m at, and I thank god he can’t see me right now. He doesn’t touch me, so I force myself to answer. “Honestly? I don’t know.”

Teeth graze my clit and I whimper, knowing my honesty is going to get me into hot water. But I can’t lie to him. And that irritates me more than anything.

“Try. Twenty? Forty?” Kaden nibbles on my clit and I roll my hips, begging him to use his tongue.

“Fuck, Kaden, I don’t know,” I cry with frustration when his hand slaps my pussy hard. When the sting subsides, waves of pleasure roll through me at his feathery light touch.

“Try.”

“Twenty?” I guess, having absolutely no clue. “I don’t know.”

Kaden rewards me with his tongue, flattening it against me until I’m breathless.

“So you slept around? No one serious?” His voice rumbles against my core, and I reach for his hair, my fingers curling into it until he groans.

“No,” I tell him as his tongue slips into my pussy, his thumb pressing on my clit.

“Why?” He says after he’s brought me to the brink of ecstasy, and I growl with frustration once more.

“Kaden!”

“Goddess,” he says, lifting me effortlessly into his arms as he holds me in midair.

I’m dizzy from my almost orgasm, and now from being lifted so quickly. I rest my forehead against his, smelling myself on his lips as my toes curl.

“I want to know if you’ve ever been in love,” he mutters, his teeth nipping my bottom lip as he drops his pants.

The thought of him fucking me sends me spiraling out of control, and before I can answer, he thrusts into me, fucking me in *mid-air*. I clutch his shoulders, terrified I’m about to fall. He smirks at me and lifts me with ease, his fingers leaving internal scars on my hips. He slams me down mercilessly and I cry out, my legs wrapping around him as my orgasm rips through me. This man only has to fuck me once and I’m undone.

“I hate that you do this to me,” I whimper against his mouth as he strokes my tongue with his, owning me.

“Nah, you don’t.” Kaden smirks against me as his thrusts turn feral, one of his hands now using the back of my neck as leverage. A second orgasm threatens to destroy me and I try to resist, but it’s impossible.

“You’re going to fall in love with me, Aphrodite Dahla,” he whispers into my ear, ramming himself into me so hard I choke.

“I’m not.”

His laugh fills the room as he bites down on my shoulder, rolling his hips against me as I lose control for the second time.

“Fuck!” I moan, riding the blissful wave that makes me feel reborn.

Kaden grips my chin and slams me against the wall, the cold against my back making me scream out. He stares down at me as he thrusts into me, his

grip tightening as he does.

“You’re mine.” Then he loses it. He throws his head back and roars, shooting his orgasm deep into me. I watch him become undone in awe, this delicious, heavenly man that I have the power to do this to.

Me.

His beautiful brown eyes focus on me as he smirks, pecking my lips repeatedly between breaths.

At this moment in time, I want to be his. I want to be his *forever*.

But there’s no way I can be, and he needs to know.

Just not yet.

I’ll be his for now. And I’ll enjoy every second.

“I’m never letting you go,” Kaden whispers in my ear, and a part of me crumbles inside.

He won’t have a choice.

APHRODITE

Why would he say that I'm going to fall in love with him? There's absolutely no way I can, even if I feel like it's possible...*stop!* What am I thinking? Of falling in love with someone who could have a life free of the bullshit I'm surrounded by day after day? Like I could ever escape it. The reality of my future weighs heavily on my chest as I stare out at the lake, wondering if I'm brave enough to try to change it. But the family comes first; it's the motto so many mafia families live by.

Fingers creep around my waist and my skin heats from his touch. He tugs me back so I'm flush against him, and I let out a sigh of contentment. Because I am content, for now at least.

"What is it?" Kaden asks, tilting his head so he can see me.

I don't take my eyes off the lake. I can't risk falling in love with him.

"Nothing," I lie as he chuckles.

I love his chuckles. They're dirty and sexy, yet somehow scary. That's Kaden all over. Dirty, sexy, and scary.

I'm doomed.

"Tell me," he commands, and my heart aches.

"You wouldn't understand."

I regret the words as soon as I say them, but Kaden doesn't flinch.

He waits.

“It’s stupid.”

Still, he waits.

My brain feels like it’s burning as I try to think of how to tell him I’m trying not to fall in love with him for his own sake. But all I can come up with is the truth, and it’s not what I want to say.

So instead, I lie. “I’m scared of whoever is trying to kill me.”

Kaden stills, and even though he wasn’t moving before, it’s like he’s seized the air in the room in his fist, and he’s holding it captive. The pressure throbs and I find it difficult to breathe, but then he exhales, and I begin to relax.

How can he affect me like this?

“No one is going to kill you.”

Little does he know that I’m more afraid of falling in love with him than someone taking my life.

What is going on?

His fingers tighten around my waist and he rests his chin on my shoulder. If I tip my head slightly to the left I’d be resting on him, and suddenly I want nothing more.

No, Aphrodite. This is just casual. Strictly sex.

“You see the lake?” Kaden says, nodding ahead of us.

I follow his gaze to the still lake, enjoying the way it glistens. Like it knows we’re admiring it.

“Yes,” I whisper.

“You’d never know it was so dangerous. That one slip into the water could mean life or death for most people.”

My blood pulses in my ears and I frown. “Not if you can swim though.”

Kaden laughs, and my spine dissolves.

I’m a mess. A pool of flesh and pointless matter at his feet.

“It doesn’t matter if you can swim. You’re not prepared for the cold. The depth.”

I can't breathe, imagining plunging into the icy water, unable to reach the surface as the lake swallows me whole.

"I'd fight," I say automatically.

"You're not the one falling into the lake, Goddess."

I twist to look at him then, and the air is scorched from my lungs from the fire in his gaze.

"You *are* the lake, Aphrodite."

He studies my lips and reaches up to stroke my cheek. "You're more powerful than you realize. People could drown in you."

I can't breathe. My brain screams for oxygen as our eyes lock, and I have to fight the urge to smash my mouth against his, to claw at his back and beg him to fuck me.

People could drown in you.

"People?" The word comes out faintly, and I clear my throat irritably.

But he heard me because he says, "I could drown in you."

The thought of Kaden drowning in me is enough to send my brain into the ether, and there's no getting it back. My heart has expired, and he holds me up like he knows. Like he *knows* he's just stolen my life from under my eyes, while I watched him the whole time.

"Best wear a life jacket," I manage to croak out, trying to shoot him a smirk that doesn't materialize. "Because the water is *cold*."

Kaden grins and I *swear* my panties melt off.

"I'm going in naked, Goddess."

I step back, needing air, or anything that I can claim as my own. Because right now, he's sucking me in, mind, body, and soul. He watches me, the man who wears my arousal like cologne. The man who makes me scream for him to never stop, to devour me for eternity. My breath hitches and I know I'm dangling off the precipice, my fingers barely holding on.

"This isn't anything," I say, waving a hand between us. "You know that, right?"

I'm not prepared for the way he snorts, or the way he throws his head back, exposing his throat. My tongue flickers over my lips as he looks back at me, still grinning.

"Okay, Goddess. If you say so."

My skin flames at his words, and I wonder where he gets the idea he has some kind of view on our relationship that I don't have.

"You're not omniscient, Kaden," I snap, crossing my arms.

Kaden holds his hands in the air, and I stare at the big, flat palms that smacked my ass when he fucked me relentlessly earlier. His dark hair curls around his forehead as he shakes his head, and when he backs away, I instantly feel colder.

I don't like him being away from me physically. In fact, I hate it, but all this is doing is proving how thin the ice we're skating on is.

Damn this fucking stalker—I don't have time for this. Being out here in the wilderness like prey being hunted isn't my style, and I'm over waiting to be caught.

I meet Kaden's gaze and he arches a brow, yet again predicting my thought process. How does he do this to me?

"Now what?" He gives me a crooked smile before crossing his arms, mirroring my own. Except his are bulky and veiny.

Great. Now I'm staring. I blink and ignore the smirk he gives me, instead pulling on my big girl pants and saying, "I'm sick of this. Being the prey."

Kaden frowns. "What are you thinking of doing about it?"

I haven't gotten that far.

"You better not be thinking of doing anything stupid," Kaden warns me, clenching his jaw.

I avoid his gaze and he rolls his eyes, exhaling my name in a gust of beautiful *air* that I want to choke on.

"Aphro-*fucking*-dite."

I hesitate as he stalks over to me, staring down at me like a god

overseeing his dominion. His whiskey brown eyes swirl with darkness, and not for the first time, I fear him.

But his voice softens as he says, “You don’t get to risk yourself. Not anymore.”

Heat rises from my core as he grips my chin, staring down at my lips with what can only be described as starvation. But if my lips are the cure, he should be more than satisfied by now. They’ve been all over his body more times than I care to count. I can either fall into this, or I can push him away, but it would be pointless. Kaden is my...

What?

What is he?

“Kaden...”

“I’m serious. Don’t even *think* about risking yourself.”

I glare at him but he glares back, and my lips flatten. We’re arguing about my safety, for god's sake.

“And I thought you didn’t care,” I say sweetly, tugging my chin from his fingers. “Who knew?”

Kaden drags his teeth over his bottom lip while studying me, shaking his head. “You fucking knew. Don’t play games.”

“Why?” I cock my head and he drops his mouth to my ear, his breath sending shudders straight to my core.

Damn this man.

“Because you’ll lose.”



I HAVE A PLAN, not that I can tell Kaden. It’s majorly risky, but I don’t *need* anyone to protect me. All my life I’ve had men try to control and protect me, and I’m over it.

I shower and dress in black, lacing my boots and tying my long hair in a high ponytail. I zip my coat up and tug on my gloves, glancing over at Kaden who's sprawled over the sofa, his breathing heavy.

This is for the best.

Andros waits at the door, his eyes flickering over at Kaden like he might jump up at any second. But he won't. I slipped enough powder into his whiskey to make him sleep for days.

People underestimate me daily. I'm used to it, but what they forget is that I am a Dahla, and I have tricks up my sleeve just like the rest of them. How will I ever take over an empire if all I do is let men care for me?

"Are you sure he'll be okay?" Andros watches Kaden warily, and I smile.

"He'll be fine. Just instruct the guards to drive him the long way to the airport when he wakes up."

Andros nods and waves for me to walk ahead.

I look back at Kaden one last time, trying to memorize everything about him. The way his hair curls at the ends, the way his chest rises and falls as he breathes. His hand rests on his flat stomach, and my heart lurches at the sight of the skin his bunched-up t-shirt reveals, and the beautiful V that leads to my favorite place.

"I'm sorry," I whisper, ignoring the ache deep in my chest. "But this isn't your fight."

Then I step into the icy air.

KADEN

My head throbs like a motherfucker, and when I try to open my eyes, I can't. I move my fingers, pleased that I haven't lost the ability to do that at least. But my eyelids are so heavy, my body at one with whatever I'm lying on. *The sofa?* I lift my fingers to my nose and pinch the skin, making my eyes water so they can open. I'm staring at the ceiling, and I feel like someone has hit me with a brick.

What the fuck?

I blink a few times, and my vision is blurry. Thoughts flood my brain.

Did we get drunk?

Then: *Where's Aphrodite?*

My heart slams in my chest at the thought of her name, and it reminds me again that I'm completely at her mercy.

For fuck's sake.

I force myself to move, my muscles slack and unresponsive until I get to a sitting position.

"Urgh."

Nausea sweeps over me and the headache intensifies, burning into my skull.

"Fuck," I mutter, trying to bunch my hands into fists, but my fingers won't comply. It's like there's a tennis ball in my hand, and it's preventing

my fingers from bending. “Aphrodite!” I try to shout, my voice hoarse. This isn’t right—we didn’t even drink. Oh wait...Aphrodite made us a nightcap, but that was one whiskey. It can’t be that. But this feeling...I’ve had it before. Wolfe made us all try Rohypnol for a laugh—hardly hilarious, but that’s *exactly* what this felt like. But I didn’t take any fucking Rohypnol. It takes a second to dawn on me, but then I get it.

I was drugged.

By who? There’s only one person who would drug me, and I can’t see her anywhere right now. Why would Aphrodite drug me?

Probably so she could do something stupid, my gut tells me.

I grit my teeth and rub the heels of my hands into my eyes, cursing the woman who’s duped me.

“Aphrodite!” I roar, stumbling to my feet. The cabin swims as I try to look around, and it’s then that I notice the outlines of the two guards sitting on the deck outside. My gut twists, and I shake my head in disbelief.

She’s gone, and I know *why*—She wants to deal with this herself. It would be laughable if it wasn’t so fucking absurd. Aphrodite thinks she can take on the world, and that she doesn’t need my help or protection. So she’s part of the mafia—I get it. She’s seen shit that would make most people’s toes curl, but not mine. Instantly my mind fills with images playing like a reel, and I brace myself for what’s coming next.

Blood all over the floor. I check left and right, the drag marks on the floor bidding me to follow them.

“Mom? Dad?”

Where are they?

I can hear someone panting and wheezing. The air is metallic with blood. My twelve-year-old self wants to run and hide because I already know whatever is in the kitchen beyond is going to scar me for the rest of my life.

“Kaden, don’t come in!” My father rasps, sounding like he’s in pain.

My heart stiffens at the sound of his voice, the man who is stronger than

anyone I know. The man who taught me how to ride a bike, how to survive in the wilderness, how to protect myself.

He's never sounded like this before.

Never.

"Dad," I croak out, staring down at my bare feet that stand in a pool of crimson. I don't know why, but I wiggle my toes and shrink back when I realize the blood is warm.

"Kaden, you heard your father!" Mom hisses from somewhere beyond, somewhere in the bloody kitchen. "Do not come in here!"

I'm frozen with fear.

There's no way I can abide. I need to see what's causing all this blood, all this mess...

So I stride forward.

I SUCK in a breath and it hurts like fuck. It's the memory. It's just a memory, and I need to bury it away.

Now.

I need to focus on finding Aphrodite. My skin feels clammy and my stomach rolls like a tsunami, causing me to stagger briefly.

Jesus, get a grip.

I grab my phone and discover it's dead—and fuck only knows where a charger is.

"Dammit," I mutter, striding to the fridge to grab a bottle of water. I need some painkillers, and then I need to charge my phone. I also need to know where my goddess is, and if she knows how much trouble she's in. Both with me and whoever is looking for her.

To kill her.

Fear sweeps over me with its icy fingers, plunging into my heart and twisting hard.

She won't die.

But then Verona did, and she's—she *was*, a mafia princess. She had all the protection in the world and she was still murdered.

I chug the water before attempting the stairs, imagining how red Aphrodite's ass is going to be when I get hold of it. The thought should calm me down, but instead, it drives me insane. The thought of her peachy ass in the air, while I slap it repeatedly, makes me hard; the thought of not knowing where said peachy ass *is* doesn't. I knew it was getting serious. I saw the signs and ignored them, but it was too late. I feel too much for her.

I'm in deep.

APHRODITE

Andros navigates the twisty turns like a professional, which I suppose he is. I grip the side and grit my teeth when he narrowly avoids snow that's now blocking half the road.

"It must've slid down from the mountain," Andros says, meeting my eyes in the rearview mirror.

I nod and straighten up, returning my gaze to the view beyond my window. I don't recognize the snow-capped mountains or the steep slopes. But then again I was on the other side of the car... god, who cares about the view? All I need to do is get back home. *My* home, not Jagger's house. Because that's where they'll least expect me to go, and that's exactly what I want. In my home, I'm in my territory. I know every nook and cranny in that house, and I'll be ready when whoever it is that wants to kill me turns up.

"You okay?" Andros asks, keeping a close eye on the road.

He's the only one I trust right now. Obviously. There's Kaden, but I can't let him fight this battle with me. We barely know each other, and feelings are getting complicated. I ignore the voice in the back of my mind telling me I shouldn't have left him behind. I feel guilty for drugging him, but I did what I needed to. Andros understood what I needed, and called my father to confirm the change of plans. I was surprised Dad agreed to me going back home, especially after he was so insistent I stay with family while he was in Spain.

But Andros is one of his oldest guards, and he knows he'd protect me with his life.

"I'm fine," I tell Andros with a smile. "How long until we get to the airport?"

Andros taps the screen in the center of the car's console and says, "Ten minutes."

I ease back into the seat and sigh. All I need to do is get home and then wait.

There's a scuffle in the trunk, and as I turn to see what the noise is, a gloved hand clamps something over my nose and lips, muffling my scream. I struggle to prise the hand from my mouth, terror thrumming through my veins as another hand clamps over the first, slamming my head into the headrest so I can't move. My seatbelt holds me fast, and before I can think of anything else, everything slows. The last thing I see before I pass out is Andros. His deep brown eyes meet mine without apology, a wicked grin on his face.

Then it's black.

KADEN

My head clears after a few hours, and I step out onto the porch, inhaling the crisp air.

The two guards have nodded off, and I shake my head in sheer disbelief. *This* is what the mafia hires for their princess? Guards that nod off when they should be protecting her? I've got half a mind to shoot them between the eyes, but it won't change anything.

So instead, I take the car keys from the table and head around the side of the house. The snow is like a blanket here, and it makes powdery crunching noises as my boots sink into it, and I wonder where the other footprints are. Then I spot them, but there are no tire marks. I stop and spin around, wondering where the truck is that Aphrodite used. I frown, trying to ignore the sinking feeling in my gut. I follow the other set of footprints into the back of the wooded area, where the guards' cabins are.

Then I see the tire tracks. They're headed in a different direction than the way we came; the way I assumed was the only way out. Then I stop, looking at the guards' cabins with renewed interest. Did one of them drive her? I doubt Aphrodite knew there was another way out of there, not without someone telling her or taking her. My stomach flips.

One of the guards.

At least it's not Jace. Andros sent that fucker packing.

I check my phone and see there's still no service. That's not surprising out here, not really. I check the keys in my hand and head over to the matching truck, pleased it's got snow chains on the tires. I start the car and it hums smoothly beneath me, and I twist it in the direction of the tracks Aphrodite must've taken. I've got a feeling it's Andros because it seems he's the one in charge of this band of cunts. Maybe she trusts him, as her father seems to.

I'm irritated that I can't call anyone, and it's pointless sending a text. It's just me, and that's fine. The truck has weapons in the trunk; I saw them when we arrived. They all do. Guns, mainly, but I did see a pretty crossbow I would *love* to use. But hopefully, I'll catch up with Aphrodite and drag her back to the cabin without the use of any weapons. Which is only if no one tries to stop me from taking her back. A grin curls at my lips imagining it. Andros is old yet wise; he wouldn't try to fight me. Yes, he may shoot me, but that's only if he's quicker than me, and I highly doubt that.

My memories come flooding back, making me inhale sharply as I turn a bend made for the tiniest of cars.

“Kaden!” Mom screams as I step into the kitchen, the blood warming the soles of my feet. “Baby, please go upstairs!”

But I don't. Because now that I've gone further into the kitchen, I can see what's happened.

My heart jolts and I gasp, staring at the woman my parents are holding in their arms. Their bloody arms.

It's Mona, my nanny. The maid, whatever you wanted to call her. The hired help.

The woman who would make the best chocolate chip cookies whenever my parents were late home, allowing me to eat them when they were still warm.

She'd laugh and dance around the kitchen as she ate hers, encouraging me to do the same.

But she'll never dance again.

She's dead.

And here I am, standing in her blood.

My mother wore a cream silk suit that day. My dad was in his usual attire; a navy suit complete with shiny black loafers. I always thought they looked so perfect.

But now?

My mother is covered in blood, but she's holding her hand to a wound on Mona's chest, frantically shouting into the phone. At some point, I fall to my knees, and my father curses. He never curses. But he does now.

"What happened?" I demand, staring at the woman I always thought of as an aunt. The woman who helped raise me.

Dad closes his eyes and twists me away, forcing me out of the room.

Mom is screaming our address to the police, begging for help.

"She's been shot," Dad whispers, his eyes filling with tears.

I stare back at him, dumbfounded.

"I didn't hear a shot."

Dad looks pained, and he nods frantically, his eyes widening.

"Well, she was."

I know she's dead. How could she survive being shot in the chest?

"Kaden, go to your room and stay there until one of us comes to get you. You shouldn't be around this."

THE ROAD SWERVES to the right and I grip the wheel.

"Jesus," I mutter, managing to keep the truck on track. The drop to my left is steep; no way would I survive that. I imagine the truck tumbling down the slope, a huge hunk of metal and gas crashing and splintering with me inside it. I hope Andros is a good driver.

If Andros is the one driving her. Aphrodite wouldn't go on her own.

Would she? Panic settles in my gut and I groan, imagining her trying to navigate these treacherous roads alone.

Can she even drive? I've never seen her drive. She's always had a driver. Why would she break that habit now? It cements the idea that she's with Andros, and although that should settle me, it doesn't. Because Aphrodite needs to be with me.

I drag my hand over my stubble and consider my options. There aren't many, but nothing can happen to her—I made her a promise.

The tire tracks begin to fade, but there is only one road and no turn-offs that I can see. The road widens and I breathe a sigh of relief; whoever was driving made it past here, otherwise I'd have seen signs of an accident.

I can't even think about that. I drive faster, my thoughts propelling me down the road until I see an intersection approaching, and it doesn't fill me with hope. There's another road here, and it looks like it's used way more than the mountain tracks I've just used. It's cemented for a start, and it's got road signs. The airport is to my right. I glance left, hoping to see a sign, anything to tell me which way she went. Of course, it makes sense that she'd be heading to the airport, and the chances of me catching her before she flies are slim. It's not like she's flying commercial and has to wait around.

Fuck.

I'm not wasting any more time, I'm going to the airport.

APHRODITE

I jolt awake.

Darkness surrounds me, as does the smell of dampness. I'm on my back, and I can't see anything. My breathing escapes my lips at an alarming rate, and I try to take deep breaths to calm myself down, but my heart feels like it's going to explode out of my chest and expire in front of me. I wriggle my fingers, but I'm unable to move my hands. Ice-cold terror washes over me when I try to pull my elbows down only to have them still in midair. Pain shoots up my forearms and I groan as something pinches the skin of my wrists. Cold metal.

Handcuffs?

My head is too fuzzy. I must be having a nightmare. I continue to stare into the darkness, wondering why this feels so real if it's a dream. Because I'm shivering, and my feet hurt. Do we feel pain in dreams? I try to move my hands again, but it's no use. I'm handcuffed. Water drips somewhere in the distance, and I inhale sharply when I hear something scuttle across the floor.

So it's not carpeted.

I close my eyes and count to ten, trying to rationalize my thoughts. I need to consider the facts, not the fucking decor. But it's how I am.

'Consider your surroundings as your friend. Look for help in every room.' My dad's words echo through my head as clearly as he is standing

beside me, and my throat thickens.

You're the one that didn't think you needed anyone to protect you. Now look.

Breathe. Think.

So I'm handcuffed, in the dark. I can hear water, and something crawling around on the floor. But my earlier thoughts were rational, I realize. Because if I can hear whatever it is crawling, then the floor must not be carpeted. Plus, there's dripping water and the strong smell of damp. It's also absolutely freezing. Which means I'm probably not in a house. Or, if I am, I'm in a basement.

Panic floods me again as I bite my lip, willing myself to think. The last thing I remember was Andros looking at me in the mirror, but then...

I gasp, almost throwing myself off whatever I'm on. Springs creak. Iron shudders.

A bed then.

Being handcuffed to a bed is *not* fucking ideal. That shit is reserved for bedroom activities between two willing participants—not like this.

You're a Dahla. You're always going to be a target. Well, at least I have Dad's voice in here with me. I can only hope he says something *useful*. Keeping calm is my objective because I'm considering breaking my bones to get out of these handcuffs.

Wait, who did this to me?

Andros was driving, so it wasn't him. Someone must've hidden in the trunk of the car, waiting for the perfect opportunity to take me.

Nausea rises in my throat as I think of Verona, probably lying dead in a morgue somewhere. And now whoever killed her has me.

Oh my god.

Tears sting my eyes but I refuse to use energy I don't have by crying.

Andros wouldn't let anything happen to me unless they hurt Andros. My gut twists. What happened? Did Andros scream? Did he lose control of the

car? I rack my memory—No, nothing like that. When the gloved hand went over my mouth, my eyes met Andros’s in the mirror, and he... He smiled.

Wait. What the fuck?

I must have it wrong. Andros would *never*. I lick my lips, which are dry and chapped. There’s a chemical taste lingering on them, and I almost vomit. All I want to do is *think*, and my body wants to react to the drugs. Why have they left me down here? If they wanted to kill me, wouldn’t they have done it by now?

Breathe.

I’m trembling so hard now my movements are sharp, and I try not to cry. My body feels weak, and I’m *not* weak. So I’m handcuffed. But my feet are free. I wiggle my toes but pain roars through them, and I cry out. I use my big toe to feel the other foot, and it’s wet and sticky. I press down to see how deep the cuts or wounds are, and I almost black out.

Jesus Christ!

What happened to my feet?!

There’s the sound of stone sliding across stone, and I whip my head to the right, my heart racing.

What is that noise?

There’s a rush of air, and I turn my face away. Footsteps sound on the ground, confirming that whoever it is is standing on stone. Stone floor.

Okay, you’ve learned something else.

I’m clinging to facts because that’s all I’ve got right now.

A throat clears, and I almost jump out of my skin. Someone is in here with me. Maybe I’m going to figure out who has done this to me.

Suddenly the room is flooded with a yellow light, and a single bulb hangs from the ceiling, swinging from the touch that brought it to life. I squint, but before I can see anything, a blindfold covers my eyes. *No!* My brain wants me to fight, but my body is exhausted. I can’t move.

“I’m going to put a straw in your mouth and you’re going to drink.”

The voice isn't familiar, and my heart drops. My lips are forced apart by a paper straw, and I suck on it, praying it's not poison. The cool water greets my parched tongue and I suck harder, wanting to get as much as I can. I drink until there's none left, and then the straw disappears.

"Sleep well, Aphrodite Dahla."

The voice is almost tinny; mechanical. It's also moving away. There's the sound of the light string being tugged, and I'm back in darkness. And blindfolded.

"Wait! Please!" I yell, only to hear the stone rolling against stone once more.

The water churns in my stomach.

I'm alone again.

KADEN

The airport is deserted.

I stare out of the thick glass overlooking the runway, sure I'm wrong. But there isn't a single airplane on that runway, and the skeleton staff here are as useful as chocolate teapots. I turn back to the desk tucked away in the corner of the airport, my legs striding over so fast it takes seconds to tower over the man manning the desk.

He looks up at me, his beady eyes narrowing. "Yes?"

I don't like his tone, and I already know he won't like mine.

"I'm going to ask you again." I slam my hands on the desk and stare down at him, speaking through gritted teeth. "Have *any* flights taken off today?"

The man swallows before shaking his head. "I told you, no flights have taken off today."

I clench my jaw. If he's telling the truth and no flights have taken off today, then where is Aphrodite? It bothers me more than if she had flown home. Because she left me, drugged me, so she could hatch a plan, and if she's still around here somewhere, that means I have no fucking clue where she is.

"Then why the fuck are you even open?" I growl, reaching out to grasp his shirt. "Tell me. Why is an airport even *open* when it has no flights?"

The man flushes and glances around.

“Well?” I cock my head, bringing him closer to me as he stammers.

“In case of an emergency?” He doesn’t sound sure, and I’m about to throw him onto the fucking runway.

Instead, I drag him over the desk, knocking off his papers and leaflets as he holds his hands up.

“Wait! Wait...” He gasps, his eyes searching mine as he tries to smile. “We have someone landing. That’s why we’re open.”

This isn’t JFK Airport. This place doesn’t have flights landing daily.

I pull him closer to me, my voice barely a whisper.

“When?”

“Tonight at eight,” he babbles, closing his eyes. “A private jet.”

My stomach twists at his words. The amount of people that have access to a private jet in the world is slim. Add to that the likeliness of them coming here, of all places. It’s practically a snowy desert. The chances of it being someone unrelated to the Dahla’s is extremely unlikely.

Fuck.

I release him and he makes a show of straightening himself up. There’s hardly any staff here, and no one comes over to ask if he’s okay.

“Where is the jet coming from?” I demand, my stomach lurching when he answers.

“Pittsburg.”

That’s where Aphrodite is from. What are the chances of that being a coincidence? Again, slim—And I don’t believe in coincidences.

I check my phone and see I have two bars of service, and an hour until this mystery plane turns up. But regardless, whoever is on that flight, they’re going to take me to my goddess.

And I’ll take them to their death.



WHEN THE JET LANDS, I'm restless. The man from earlier hasn't stopped watching me, and it crosses my mind to take him outside and make sure he can never look at me again, but then I'll probably end up arrested which will be no good to Aphrodite. I've tried calling her countless times, but it just goes to voicemail, which is no surprise. Knowing her, she's blocked my number. Keeping an eye on the jet that's taxiing on the runway, I call Jagger, who answers immediately.

"Kaden? What's wrong?"

"Jagger. Can you call Aphrodite?"

There's a brief pause before he speaks. "What? Isn't she with you?"

There's a gasp in the background, and I frown. But I don't have time to quiz Jagger on his life, I need to find Aphrodite.

"No, she's not," I huff, gritting my teeth. "I think she's blocked my calls, can you try her?"

I don't even wait for him to respond, I hang up.

The jet takes forever to come to a stop, and when it does, a sense of calm washes over me. I'm prepared for anyone to walk off that jet.

My phone rings.

"Well?" I bark into the phone, not taking my eyes off the jet.

"Voicemail. Molly tried too, but she got the same. What the fuck is going on?" Jagger rasps. "Kaden?!"

I hang up.

The jet door opens. I brace myself, my eyes aching from not blinking. A man strides out in a black suit, with a leather hold-all in one hand, the other held out to a female behind him. I suck in a breath, waiting to see her face. She's average-looking, with dark hair cut into a sharp bob. Her hand lifts to shield her eyes from the winter sun, despite wearing oversized sunglasses.

She's wearing a red duffle coat with white trim, making me think of Santa. I don't recognize either of them, but something tells me they're not here for a romantic break. The woman wears impossibly high heels and I can't help but smirk as she skates on the slippery ground. The man steadies her, and for a second, his eyes seem to meet mine. A chill runs through me, the sort you get when you look into a predator's eyes. Except I don't feel afraid. I feel excited.

I go to leave the airport, stopping briefly to remind my stupid little friend to remain quiet with my finger to my lips. He shrinks back, his eyes wide as the couple approach the airport.

"Not a fucking word," I mutter.

He nods, staring at the floor as I back away, choosing to remain in the shadows rather than leave.

I want to know who these fuckers are. It's easy to hide when no one is looking for you, so I lean against the wall, scrolling through my phone when the couple enter the airport. Icy air enters with them, and the woman complains loudly about the weather. Is she unfamiliar with this place? Then why is she here? If it's for a vacation, then why isn't she up to speed on her chosen destination?

"Is the car ready?" The woman demands, cutting her eyes at the man beside her. "It better be. I don't have all day."

"Chill out," the man mutters. "Everything will be perfect."

The woman smiles, but it's more of a devilish grin than anything beautiful. She shrugs her shoulders and sighs.

"I want to enjoy every minute."

They pass me by, not even looking in my direction. I'm hidden by shadows, but they're not expecting anyone to be here.

Why?

"Maybe I can enjoy it too," the man says, earning a look of disgust from the woman.

"You're revolting."

There's no way this conversation is about a fucking vacation.

"You're jealous," the man purrs, reaching out to push her hair behind her ear as she slaps his hand away.

"Don't ever mistake my disgust for jealousy, Ricardo."

Ricardo?

APHRODITE

I drift in and out of consciousness, my dreams twisting into nightmares featuring gaping faces and clammy hands, pawing at my skin until I jerk awake, violently tugging my hands forward until the chain of the handcuffs yanks them back. I gasp, still blinded by the fabric covering my eyes, the pain in my arms tearing through me as I try to move. Everything hurts, and I grit my teeth as sharp pain shoots from my wrists to my armpits. I'm surprised I haven't dislocated anything trying to get out of these damn handcuffs, and it's been pointless.

Still, I had to try.

The blindfold has slid down my face, covering both my eyes and nose. As if I need to feel any more claustrophobic. I'm so cold I can't feel my toes, but that's a blessing considering how painful my feet are. The dripping sound that once irritated me is now a comfort, and I listen to its rhythmic beat, each splash hitting the floor with an ear-splitting *plop*. Because it's so fucking *quiet* in here. Eerily quiet. Which confirms I'm the only person here. Even the kidnapper wasn't here; I'd have heard *something, surely*.

If *only* I could get out of these handcuffs. I don't have a single thing to help—not a hairpin, earring...nothing. It's getting harder to remain calm, especially when my senses are deprived like this. I try to breathe through my mouth to prevent my nose from sucking at the fabric that covers it, but the air

is so cold it chills my throat. How long can I survive in this temperature? How long will they leave me here? What if they've left me here to die? Fear begins to slide in like a serpent, starting in the base of my stomach and writhing around until it's coiled around my neck, tightening...

A door slams somewhere and I stiffen. Then there are voices. I strain to hear what they're saying, but there's no use. I can't even make out whether the voices are male or female.

Who am I kidding? I was taken while Andros was driving me, for god's sake. Hot tears prick the back of my eyes as I realize the man in charge of my protection brought me to this place.

Why? And who drugged me?

My head aches as the thought stirs in my mind like a cluster fuck soup, and I allow myself to cry.

But not for long.

Because the voices are getting louder; and closer. My heart rate escalates and my intuition tells me I'm in danger.

I'm powerless.

Footsteps sound in the distance and I squeeze my eyes shut, desperate to calm myself before whoever this is comes in.

Breathe.

The lock twists.

Be strong.

And for a second, as the blood rushes in my ears and I suck in a sharp breath, I almost believe I'm going to survive. That I'm strong enough. Until I hear *that* voice.

“Aphrodite Dahla, it's been a while.”

It can't be.

I'm hallucinating; I have to be. There's no way that's *her*...

“Come on, Aphrodite. I don't have all day.”

Her heels click on the stone floor, and my heart beats twice as fast when I

realize she's walking toward me. She rips the blindfold from my head, and I blink at the sight of her looming over me. Her red lips pull into a twisted smile, and her blood-red fingernails rest on her forearms as she studies me with her dark eyes.

"But..." the word rasps from my parched lips as I struggle to move, my fight or flight threatening to kick in any second. "You're dead."

Verona laughs, tilting her head to look at someone behind her, rising to her full height.

"Am I dead?" She asks the shadows, and my stomach churns.

This isn't happening. Daddy said she was dead, so she's dead. But she's fucking standing in front of me.

Verona *isn't* dead. She's very much alive, and she's staring at me with hatred so hot it burns my skin. But Daddy is never wrong.

"No, *Bella*. You're not dead."

I stiffen when I hear his voice, terror slicing through my body in electric waves as I try to focus.

"Ricardo," I whisper, tears stinging my eyes.

Ricardo is a walking nightmare. He's Verona's cousin, and he's sicker and more sadistic than anyone I've ever met.

"Greetings, my pretty."

The air feels too thick to inhale, and my lungs burn at the effort.

Ricardo and Verona.

I'm going to die.

And not just die. I'll die slowly, and painfully.

But why?

"I'm bored of formalities," Verona declares as Ricardo steps forward, flicking on the light. My stomach lurches when his scar appears above where his right eye should be, leaving only his left eye to run over my body.

"Why?" I demand, trying to prepare myself for the torture that awaits me. If they're going to kill me, I want to know *why*.

Verona sighs before reaching into the bag beside her on the floor. It's a sleek leather hold-all, and all of a sudden, I want nothing more than to break free of these handcuffs. Because that bag holds the tools of death, and my body senses it, shaking violently. Verona slips a knife from the bag and smiles, twisting it between her forefinger and opposite palm.

"Why? Because there can only be one of us, Princess."

That's it? I'm going to die because of my surname?

"Have it all," I croak out, watching as Ricardo moves to the bottom of the bed, tutting as he strokes my feet. I suck in a breath as his nails begin to scrape my wounds, tears spilling from my eyes as fresh blood runs down my feet. "I don't want it, Verona, please."

"Bullshit. It's not up for discussion." Verona waves a hand at Ricardo and he twists the skin on my feet, earning a scream from the pit of my stomach. White hot pain shoots through my body and I grit my teeth, refusing to cry.

"You're weak, Aphrodite. Like your father."

Verona steps closer, her perfume wrapping around me as she leans down, using the knife to move my hair aside.

"Fuck you," I hiss. "My father will kill you for this."

Ricardo and Verona burst out laughing, and a cold fist tightens around my heart.

"Your father won't do anything of the sort, sweetheart."

I can't breathe, but I try to inhale regardless, refusing to listen to their lies.

"We took care of him yesterday. And your mother."

No.

No.

No.

"You're lying." I grit out, panic gripping my chest. There's no way—Daddy has the best protection. No—

"See for yourself." Verona taps on her phone before twisting it around to

show me a video playing, one that I'll never be able to erase.

A gasp leaves my throat, followed by a howl of agony so deep it cuts me inside. It's daddy's car.

And it's on fire.

"That doesn't mean shit," I snarl, bucking against my restraints. "There's no fucking proof—"

Sighing her annoyance, Verona purses her lips and then taps the screen again. "There you go."

And just like that, my world implodes.

KADEN

I follow their tracks on the snow, stopping only when I see their car ahead. There's nothing here though, no houses or cabins that I can see. I leave the car, my boots crunching into the fresh snow beneath them as I study my surroundings. There's nowhere they could possibly be. Trees surround me, and I huff out a breath as I move slowly toward their car, keeping behind the cover of the trees. I can see their footprints in the snow, but they stop in the middle of nowhere. I can't see what's on the ground from here, but I notice there's no snow on a patch of ground near their footprints. I'm going to have to leave the protection of the trees so I can get closer, but first I have to make sure they're not hiding, waiting for me to leave. I remain perfectly still, examining the area inch by inch until I see what I'm looking for. Dark shapes in the trees across from me. Two, to be exact. I barely breathe as I wait for them to move, to see if they saw me coming, but they don't. So either they're watching me...or they're bored stiff.

Either way, I need to move.

I step back, avoiding branches and twigs that have fallen from the tree, hidden by the snow. When I'm sure I'm far enough back, I start to make my way around to where the dark shapes are. My pulse thuds in my ears with adrenaline, but I know I have the advantage here. They may be guarding something, but I'm no stranger to the cold, and I'm no stranger to evil either.

Not when it flows through my veins. I'm stealth-like as I move, pausing sporadically and without pattern, just to see what they do. I'm closer now, close enough that I can see the two men hunched over something, both watching intensely. So intensely that they don't pay *me* any attention.

"You're lying!" A female screams in the distance, her voice crackly and faint.

I freeze, my body is taut as the beast within me awakens.

That voice.

It's her.

My goddess.

And they're *watching* her.

They're grinning too, the fuckers. I dig around in the snow for a decent rock, and when I find it, a smile stretches across my face. It's like someone has injected me with fire, and as it burns through my nervous system, it lights me up.

I can't feel anything.

I'm indestructible.

So when I creep up on them, too quick for them to look up, I feed on their surprise, grinning as I lift my hand, cracking the rock into the nearest skull, and straight into the face of the other man. Their howls irritate me; I don't want them alerting anyone to my presence, so I make it quick.

The rock slams back into the bloody face of the second man while the first rolls around on the floor moaning. Blood splatters all over me but I don't stop until there's nothing left but an open wound for a face. I turn to the first man on the floor, watching as he cries for help that will never come. I bring the rock down onto his skull twice more, the bone splintering beneath each swing, the rock slipping from my hands like the life from his eyes. I'm panting, and when I lick my lips I taste metal. I recoil; I don't want to taste their vile blood. I feel nothing as I take their guns from the hold-all between them on the floor; not once did either of them think to reach for them.

Who hired these monkeys?

Crimson bleeds into the snow around me, but I only have time to admire it briefly before picking up the device the two beef heads were watching earlier. The screen displays my worst fucking nightmare. Aphrodite is screaming from behind a gag in her mouth while the *woman* drags a knife down her stomach. Blood pours in its wake, and I almost crush the device in my hands, incandescent with rage.

“I’ll fucking kill you,” I spit, my gaze falling to the circular grate in the middle of the clearing: the only place free of snow.

She’s down there. She has to be.

I head towards it, slipping on the blood before stomping it from my boots into the fresh snow, my eyes focused on the ground. There’s a hand-wheel lock that’s open, reminding me of the locks on ship doors, and the grate has been pushed aside. There’s no doubt in my mind that’s where Aphrodite is, and I don’t waste a second shifting the grate so I can start making my way to her. Those bastards won’t be ready for what I’m bringing to the party.

The air is chillier than outside, and I can see my breath when I look over the hole, staring down at the ladder and torches that guide the way down. I rise to my feet and take a deep breath, checking the guns are loaded and ready to go. Then, I begin to descend into the ground. The rungs of the ladder are slippery, but I grip the icy metal to steady myself, trying to make as little noise as possible. I don’t know if they know I’m coming, but I haven’t got time to waste. The hole above me gets smaller the further I go, until the sky is a small circle in the distance, reminding me I’m a long way down. But finally, my feet hit the stone floor, and then I backed up against a wall, trying to catch my breath and get my bearings. The air is dense down here, and I can’t see much with the lights by the ladder. I squint as my eyes adjust to the darkness, and I make out a tunnel that bends around a corner, but nothing else.

So there’s no other way in or out of here. Interesting—The perfect prison.

I keep my back against the wall and move closer to the corner, just as I hear feet scuffle on something from the other side. I freeze, holding my breath as I listen, my hand moving to my gun.

I don't want to kill anyone else, but whoever stands between me and my goddess is already dead.

“Casey? Paul? Is that you?” A voice demands, and I take a breath.

It's that fucker from the airport—Ricardo.

“Answer me!” He barks, still out of sight.

I don't doubt he's armed, but I don't have long to think about it before he rounds the corner, blinding me with a light so bright I have to scrunch my eyes shut. Instantly I drop to my knees and take aim, just as a bullet whistles over my head. I roll across the floor and grip his ankle, yanking him to the floor as I jam my gun beneath his mouth.

He lifts his gun but I'm too fast—I don't hesitate—it's him or me, and it's not going to be me. The shot goes straight through his head, and his gun falls to the ground with a clatter as I climb to my knees. I grab his torch and sweep it over him, my lungs screaming for air. Blood pools around his head, his eyes glassy, and staring into nothing above him. I take his gun too, emptying it of bullets and kicking it aside.

“Night, Ricardo,” I mutter, moving swiftly around the corner. There's a door at the end of this tunnel, and it's closed. I want to smash through the fucking door and save my girl, and I don't see an alternative. Who knows how many people are watching this place from afar? It could be crawling with fucking guards within minutes.

I raise my foot and bring it down on the door with such strength I wonder if the whole thing will collapse on us all, but somehow it holds together, and the door clangs as it hits the wall of the room beyond.

That's when I see her, and my heart drops.

APHRODITE

I can take pain. I like to think I have high pain tolerance, but when Verona begins to carve her initials onto my stomach, I scream. White-hot pain sears my skin, and warm liquid trickles in the wake of the knife, making me nauseous.

“Aww, not such a mafia princess now, are you?” Verona coos holding the knife in the air. Her eyes follow the blood trickling onto her hand from the knife, and she grins.

I try to get my breath back, but my stomach stings so bad I can’t help but sob, taking away any air I have. This fucking *bitch*.

“You’re a monster,” I hiss. “The only reason you can do this is because I’m handcuffed to a fucking bed!”

I yank my hands to emphasize my words, and the handcuffs clang against the metal.

Verona frowns. “You think you’d fight me, little Dahla? Hmm?” She laughs and leans down, pulling a silver key from her pocket. “Well, you probably would, but I prefer to watch you suffer. And when Ricardo gets back...” She sucks in a breath for effect, and I grit my teeth. “Let’s just say you’ll wish you were dead.”

I can’t even begin to imagine what that piece of shit would do to me. Not that it matters...my parents—

No. Don't think about them.

But the images Verona showed me on her phone are burned into my brain, and tears sting my eyes. My parents are dead, and it's all because of this fucking bitch.

"You're still a coward," I say, enjoying the annoyance flashing in her eyes. "Release me and fight me fairly."

For a minute, I'm sure she's going to release me, but then she throws her head back and laughs, holding onto her sides. I've never hated anyone more than I hate Verona. We could've worked together. The two families could've had it all—but no, Verona faked her death and murdered my parents.

Now she's going to kill me.

Verona raises the knife before slamming it into my thigh, and I gasp, letting out a scream just as the door opens, smashing into the wall. I scrunch my eyes so tight I can't see who it is, but I know it will be Ricardo, here to join his twisted cousin in torturing me.

Is this her plan? To stab me to death?

My head feels woozy, and I wonder how much blood I've lost. Three pretty deep wounds and more to come; how long will I survive?

There's a roar and the sound of a body slamming into another, and the bed shakes. I open my eyes to see a man on top of Verona, his hands around her throat as she tries to scream, clawing at his face.

I can't be sure it is Kaden, but my lips part to say his name anyway.

"Kaden?"

Kaden's here?! Tears of relief slip down my cheeks as I try to calm my racing heart, the fear of dying at Verona's hand not entirely far away. Where's Ricardo? Fear leaps into my throat, and I tug at the handcuffs, letting out a scream of frustration.

"Kaden, he's coming back..." I can't take my eyes off the door, imagining Ricardo returning to finish Verona's job. He'd kill us both.

"Kaden..."

He doesn't move.

But I *know* it's him. I'd recognize him anywhere.

"Don't, Kaden," I say, emotion clogging my throat. "Just get the key...."

Only then does he turn to look at me, his eyes filled with pain and rage. He narrows his eyes when he sees the state of me before turning back to Verona. He's going to kill her.

"Don't kill her...." I feel woozy now, and I let my head rest on the pillow, wondering if this is it. Maybe this is how it all ends for me.

I'll be with my parents, though.

My eyes close, and as my body throbs with pain, I allow myself to drift away from the pain, away from this *hell*.

"Aphrodite!" Kaden rasps, close to my ear. "Don't you fucking dare give up, do you hear me?"

There's the sound of a key twisting in a lock, and suddenly my hands are free. They fall limply to the bed and Kaden curses. Suddenly I'm in the air, and Kaden presses me close to his body, whispering to me.

"Stay with me, Goddess. Hold on to me real fucking tight."

It's like I'm underwater. Everything seems muffled. But his scent fills my nostrils, and I cling to it, relying on the memories it conjures to keep me conscious.

"Remember the first time we met?" Kaden says, gripping me with one hand as we climb upward. His breathing becomes labored, and he grunts, keeping one arm around me. I try to hold on as tight as possible, but it's hard. "You walked into that room like a fucking goddess, and you know what I thought?"

I'm slipping in and out of consciousness, but I'm desperate to hear what he thought.

"I thought; she is going to ruin me."

My heart skips a beat, and I smile, but not for long. Ice-cold air slams into my lungs, stinging my stab wounds and making me cry. Kaden rolls onto his

back and holds me, but he's soon back on his feet, cursing when I whimper with pain.

"And you did, Goddess, you ruined me."

I grit my teeth as he runs with me through the snow, and I try to stay awake just so I can hear what he's got to say next. But my vision keeps blurring, my eyes stinging so much I let them shut for a minute.

"Nearly there, Aphrodite, don't close your fucking eyes!"

But my eyelids are so heavy, and everything hurts.

"Fuck," Kaden growls, yanking open a car door. "Baby, *please*. Stay with me." His voice trembles, and fresh fear snakes into my stomach, because that's the first time I've heard Kaden sound afraid. He rolls me onto the back seat, and I sigh with relief when he covers me with a blanket.

"You know what, baby, I've never loved *anyone* like I love you. We've got so much to do together, haven't we? Tell me something you want to do. Where's our first date gonna be?"

My lips feel numb, but I wonder why he's talking about dates. I don't know where we could go on a date. Maybe the movies like normal couples? But my lips won't form to make the suggestion. The next thing I know, the engine is running, and I'm so tired I can't listen to him anymore.

Even though I want to, I can't.

KADEN

Everything hurts, but it doesn't matter. Aphrodite is asleep in the hospital bed before me, her chest rising and falling beneath my watchful eyes. She's covered in bandages, and her feet are raised. Whatever those bastards did to her, they hurt her badly enough that she won't walk for a while. Fury throbs in my veins at the thought of her struggling because of anyone, but more than anything, I want her to wake up.

"Hey."

The door opens, and I see Jagger holding out a can of soda, his eyes scanning Aphrodite warily.

"Any change?"

I shake my head and crack open the can, glugging it eagerly. "No."

"Huh." Jagger sits beside me, and we drink silently, watching the bed before us, hopefully. "What're the doctors saying?"

Jagger flew in a few hours ago and lost it when he found out what had happened to his cousin. He had to be removed from the hospital, and I was useless. I had zero energy, and no fight left in me. Jagger's temper was too much for me, and I wasn't willing to leave Aphrodite no matter what.

"Just that she'll survive."

Jagger scowls and I feel it on every level. "Survive? What does that look like for her, though?"

I shrug and continue to drink my soda gratefully. My stomach growls loudly, and Jagger frowns.

“Go and get some food. I’ll watch her.”

“I’m not leaving her,” I mutter, squashing the now-empty soda can in my hand. “I’d rather starve.”

Jagger stares at me before chuckling. “Someone has it bad.”

There’s no malice in his tone, not that I care. He can tease me all he wants.

“I nearly lost her, Jagger.” A lump forms in my throat and my tired eyes burn with emotion, but I refuse to cry. Crying wouldn’t change what happened.

Been there, done that.

Jagger gazes at me before rubbing his chin and leaning on his knees. “My uncle…”

I look at him from the corner of my eye and cringe, wishing someone else was here to have this conversation with him. He’d lost his uncle and aunt, and his cousin was in a hospital bed, unable to walk. His guilt is contagious because I feel it tenfold.

“I’m sorry, man,” I say, clearing my throat. “That bitch was one sick fuck.”

“Was?” Jagger repeats flatly, still staring dead ahead.

I shrug and don’t answer him. The less said about Verona and Ricardo, the better.

“They won’t bother her again,” is all I say, and Jagger nods respectfully, holding out his fist for me to bump.

“I’m forever in your debt,” Jagger says quietly, his voice thick with emotion. “Anything you need…”

“Jagger.” I throw my hand toward the bed where my goddess sleeps, and he laughs like he knows what I will say. “I need her to wake up.”

And like I had made a wish, her croaky voice interrupts us.

“Kaden?”

I jump to my feet, rushing over to the bed where Aphrodite’s eyes are fluttering open, her lips cracked and dry as her tongue wets them.

“Here, let me get you a drink,” I mutter, filling the cup beside the bed and lifting it to her lips. Jagger lifts the bed so she’s sitting up, and I nod at him gratefully. Aphrodite drinks eagerly, moaning with relief as she does.

Thank fuck she’s awake. I dip my head and rest it on her shoulder, inhaling her scent, which is still there, albeit mixed with a clinical smell I never want her to wear again.

“Are you okay?” I ask, sweeping her hair back from her eyes as she rests back on the pillow. Her eyes are swollen from a medically induced sleep, but their sorrow breaks me.

“No,” she says flatly, and I can’t help but be proud of her honesty. “I’m furious.”

This I hadn’t expected.

Jagger and I exchange a look, and my jaw sets.

“She killed my parents.” Aphrodite grits her teeth as she pushes her fists into the mattress, moving herself upright and into a more comfortable position. Despite the hospital gown and bruising to her face, she’s never looked more beautiful.

Her eyes flash as she looks at Jagger, her lip quivering. “Andros betrayed me. He betrayed our family.”

Jagger stares at her, his fists bunching at his sides. “I know.”

Aphrodite frowns. “You do?”

Jagger nods. “Kaden told me he figured it was him.”

Aphrodite turns to me and presses her lips together. “Someone drugged me while he drove.”

Rage seeps into my veins while I take a deep breath, trying to remain calm for her sake. But the thought of someone drugging her...

“It has to be someone he knows,” Aphrodite says, breaking into a cough

that makes her wince.

The fuckers. I'll kill them all.

"I'll find them." I stare at her, and she stares back, her eyes boring into mine like they're making sure I'm trustworthy. Like she doesn't know that by now.

"Promise me." Her voice is steely. "That when you find them, you let me deal with them."

Jagger scoffs. "No. *I'm* dealing with them. Your parents and you are *my* family."

Aphrodite chokes on her tears as he leans forward to press a kiss to her forehead.

"Kaden will stay with you. Let him look after you, Aphrodite."

I cross my arms and stare down at her with a playful smirk, even though I feel anything but.

"No more drugging me," I quip.

Aphrodite winces, but I reach for her hand and let my lips brush the tender skin softly.

"I'm sorry," she says, tears rolling down her cheeks. "I didn't want you in a life like this."

I chuckle and hold her hand in both of mine, lifting it to my chest where my heart beats hard against her hand. "I'm more than involved, Goddess, and you owe me a date."

She smiles then, and it's only faint, but I'll take it.

"I'll get the doctor," Jagger says, stepping away from the bed. "It's good to see you awake, cuz."

"Jagger!" Aphrodite calls out, her eyes swirling with worry. "Can you call Molly? Let her know I'm okay?"

Something flashes over Jagger's face briefly, but it's soon replaced by a nod. "Sure thing." But when he turns away from her, I see the expression he's been trying to hide.

Something is wrong, and that something is Molly.

EPILOGUE

APHRODITE

Wounds heal, right?

I stare at my reflection and exhale heavily, wondering how long it will be before I can put weight on my feet. Luckily the bones aren't damaged; it's the skin, and skin heals quickly. I had a skin graft while in a medically induced coma, so they're healing well, according to the nurse who changed my dressings. My eyes meet Kaden's in the mirror, and my heart skips a beat like it always does seeing him there. He's staring at me intensely, and even in this state, I have to clench my thighs together to keep my desire at bay.

Not that he'll touch me anyway, not until I'm fully healed. More is the pity.

"What?" Kaden rasps, and I realize I've been staring at him for the past few minutes.

"You know what," I say, throwing my hair over my shoulder. "Stop fishing for compliments."

He rolls his eyes, stares at his phone, and I bite my lip. He's so gorgeous. He's commanding my attention even now, scowling at the phone and swiping away.

But then a dullness fills my soul, and I feel like I can't breathe. I close my eyes, but it doesn't stop the tears from sliding down my newly made-up cheeks or the pain exploding from my heart. Just like that, my happiness is

gone. A moan escapes my lips, arms encircle me from behind, words are muttered into my ear, and thumbs brush away my tears.

“Breathe, baby.”

But how can I do something as simple as breathing when my parents can't? Their lives are no more, stolen from them by a vicious bitch with a yearning for control.

It's not fair.

The words vibrate around my mind until they're so loud they're all I can hear, and they're screaming into the void, into the air, until my lungs are going to burst.

“IT'S NOT FAIR!”

It's me. I'm screaming.

My chest is too tight like someone is sitting on it, preventing me from inhaling.

“Goddess, breathe.” Kaden's calm voice slips into my mind like ice water over a parched throat. “In and out, like me.” He breathes in and out, and I try to mirror him, but the sobs in my throat keep getting stuck, hindering any progress I'm making.

No more calls to Daddy.

“In...”

No more Daddy.

“And out.”

Breathe.

“Again, Aphrodite, again. In...”

I see the car exploding. Bright orange fireballs burn black in the air, and the car and my family disappear in a cloud of smoke.

A loud wail fills the air, and I cover my ears, desperate to block it out. But it's me. I'm wailing.

Then Kaden kisses my forehead, then both of my eyes. He rests his forehead against mine, his eyes blurring before mine. He holds my hand to

his chest, and I feel him inhaling, and I do the same. “Breathe me in.” Kaden exhales, and I inhale, the taste of his breath soothing my lungs. “You’ve got this, baby.”

Baby. Goddess.

“I love you,” he says like it’s something I should be used to hearing.

My breathing steadies as he strokes my cheek with one hand, the other still wrapped around me.

“I…” I try to talk, but he kisses me, taking whatever breath I have away, his tongue exploring my mouth like he’s hunting for air for me to breathe. I gasp, but my lungs aren’t screaming anymore.

“I love you,” Kaden says again into my mouth.

I cling to the whispered words, trying to swallow them like they’re medicine. “I love you,” I manage to say, holding his face in my hands. “So, so much.” It’s not the first time I’ve said it, but he reacts like it is, his mouth stretching into the widest smile I’ve ever seen, showing off his pearl-white teeth and dangerously sexy jawline. Even when I’m dying, he breathes life into me.

“Don’t let them win,” Kaden rasps, gripping my chin. “Never let them win.”

I meet his gaze and take a deep, shuddery breath, pleased that I’m stronger with his breath in my body. I’d drink him if I could.

“You’re strong,” I whisper, staring up at him, “I need your strength.”

Kaden laughs and shakes his head, thoroughly amused. “Nah, you don’t need me. You don’t need anyone. You never have.”

I don’t know if he’s right, but I feel anything but strong. Everything has been shattered; my family, life, body, and mind. Most of all, my mind. Because it’s cracked and fractured beyond repair. It’s been dropped too many times. But Kaden is my glue and won’t let me break again. He didn’t let them get away with breaking me, either.

“I know you killed Verona and Ricardo,” I say softly, avoiding his gaze.

“You don’t have to admit it, but I know you did.”

Kaden tilts his head and shrugs. “I’m not ashamed of what I did, Aphrodite.”

Dizziness hits me when he pulls me gently onto his lap, wrapping his arms around me and burying his face in my neck.

“I’ll do it again if anyone crosses you.”

I run my fingers through his hair and kiss his scalp, inhaling the fresh scent of his shampoo. I don’t doubt he’d kill for me again if he’s done it once. I’ll be forever grateful.

“No evidence, right?” I whisper, despite knowing the answer.

He told me a thousand times, but I’ll always ask.

“That hole in the ground is no more, baby.”

I know the hole was burnt not long after I left. I didn’t ask who or how...I just nodded like a good girl should. Or how a good girl would. Because if there’s something I’ve learned through all of this, I’m not as good as I thought.

People are going to pay.

Every. Last. One. Of. Them.

“No evidence,” I repeat, a grin on my lips.

That’s how it has to be; no evidence.

“I know that look,” Kaden says with a frown, looking up at me with my favorite expression; excitement. “What, or should I say, who?”

I laugh and stare down at my feet, remembering who I’ve got to thank for the fact I can’t walk right now. For the one person who put me in this situation, who betrayed my family and me. For what? Death?

“Andros,” I say firmly. “He has to be first.”

Kaden gazes at me as I smile.

“Goddess, are you serious about this killing spree?”

I swat his shoulder and peck his lips, sighing heavily. “It’s not a spree, darling.”

“Oh? Then what is it?” Kaden looks amused again.

“Murder. Cold-blooded murder.” I shiver at my words, and Kaden holds me closer, telling me wordlessly that he’s the Clyde to my Bonnie.

That no matter what comes at us, we’re ready.

I stare down at my bandaged feet and sigh.

Well, almost.

THE END



Thank you for reading Kaden, I hope you loved it and if you did, I’d love for you to leave me a review!

The next book is coming up soon, and you guessed it...it’s about Jagger!
This will be written on my subscription site first, and you can join that here:

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