

*Boston Bay
Vikings*

MINOR LEAGUE

LAKE

on the Ice

NY TIMES AND USA TODAY BESTSELLING AUTHOR

LEXI BUCHANAN



*Boston Bay
Vikings*

MINOR LEAGUE

LAKE

on the Ice

NY TIMES AND USA TODAY BESTSELLING AUTHOR

LEXI BUCHANAN

LAKE

BOSTON BAY VIKINGS MINOR LEAGUE

BOOK 1

LEXI BUCHANAN

HFCA Publishing House

Ireland

www.lexibuchanan.net

First Published 2023

Copyright © 2023 by Lexi Buchanan

Proofreader: Lynne Garlick

Cover Design: Alison Higson

Lexi Buchanan asserts the moral right to be identified as the author of this work

This novel is entirely a work of fiction.

The names, characters and incidents portrayed in it are the work of the author's imagination. Any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, events or localities is entirely coincidental.

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced in any form or by any electronic or mechanical means, including information storage and retrieval systems, without written permission from the author, except for the use of brief quotations in a book review.

CONTENTS

[Chapter 1](#)

[Chapter 2](#)

[Chapter 3](#)

[Chapter 4](#)

[Chapter 5](#)

[Chapter 6](#)

[Chapter 7](#)

[Chapter 8](#)

[Chapter 9](#)

[Chapter 10](#)

[Chapter 11](#)

[Chapter 12](#)

[Chapter 13](#)

[Chapter 14](#)

[Chapter 15](#)

[Chapter 16](#)

[Epilogue](#)

[Afterword](#)

[Other books by Author](#)

[About the Author](#)

CHAPTER ONE

JUNIPER

WHEN I FIRST OPEN THE DOOR TO THE LAUNDRY ROOM, I immediately gag and make a complete about-face, ensuring that the door is shut behind me. I narrow my eyes and concentrate on my brother as I watch him yawn and walk into the kitchen. When he sees me, he stops for a moment before continuing on to the coffee machine. Oh, he is aware of the situation because I saw a fleeting look in his eyes as he turned away from me that was directed toward the door behind me.

Even though this isn't the first time he's done it, he really needs to put an end to stinking out the laundry room with his workout clothes. The fact that Lake ignores me only serves to aggravate me further. I ignore the fact that he is only wearing grey sweatpants and nothing else as I walk over to him and position myself in between him and the coffee machine, which is slowly brewing the beverage.

He retreats quickly and leans back against the counter. "What now?" He stands there with his arms crossed and waits.

I indicate the room with the closed door and say, "Go in there, and you'll figure it out rather quickly."

He feigns pain. "You had some laundry that needed to be washed." He gives a shrug. "Where else would you like me to put them, if not in there?"

“You could have kept them concealed in your bag by zipping it up, for example. This place smells awful right now.” I go to the machine, remove his coffee, and hand it to him. “You need to go in there and do something like open a window.”

The only reason I’m able to maintain my composure while Lake takes a drink from the cup is because I have trained myself not to fidget.

As he sets his cup down and ambles over to the laundry room, I raise an eyebrow and watch as he forms a smirk with his lips.

The asshole.

Lake Bradshaw is my stepbrother. When I was fourteen years old, my mother married his father, and Lake was seventeen. One year later, unfortunately, both of our parents passed away in a car accident. They had lost control of their vehicle on black ice and were killed instantly when it collided head-on with an eighteen-wheeler. Fortunately for us, both of our parents contributed financially to the household, and they owned the house jointly. Therefore, Lake and I are the ones who inherited everything.

If it weren’t for him, I wouldn’t have a place to call my own. I would have been taken in by the state as a ward. Instead, we still reside in the home that belonged to our parents, and Lake made every effort to be here for me.

We provoke each other, but that’s to be expected as sibling rivalry is a natural part of the family dynamic. The fact that he is popular with my friends only serves to aggravate me further.

As I hear grumbling in my stomach, I hastily place the bread in the toaster oven and then proceed to grab the butter

and grape jelly. I notice a carton of eggs in the refrigerator and decide to take them out, with the intention of cooking them.

“What are you making?” Lake asks, hovering.

“Toasted bread and scrambled eggs. Do you want some?”

“Thanks.”

The next ten minutes are spent with both of us contributing to the preparation of the breakfast. The other day, Lake brought home a brand-new coffee machine, and he used it to brew some coffee for me. It’s quite an elegant one. Said it was so that I could have the expensive coffee that I enjoyed drinking. It’s a shame that he hasn’t yet instructed me on how to operate the machine.

After sitting down at the breakfast bar, he serves the two of us glasses of orange juice.

“Did you cram all of your gear into the washing machine?”

He gives a crooked smile and a nod. “Didn’t think they’d be that bad.”

“Any chance I can come and watch you practice later?”

He frowns as he raises his eyes from the plate of food in front of him and looks up. “Um, alone?”

I chuckle. “Yes, alone. I’m going to meet Leah for lunch at the Hard Rock, and then I thought I’d come and watch practice for a while before hitching a ride home with you and Nik.”

He nods. “Ethan ought to be okay with that,” he says with a grin on his handsome face.

“There is to be no flirting with the other players.”

My cheeks flush a bright rose color. “I don’t flirt.”

“Yes, you do!” He has a chuckle. “I’ve seen the flicks that you do with that long curly hair of yours.”

“That is not flirting.”

He mumbles, “If you say so,” in response.

“Don’t you have anywhere else to be?”

“You’re trying to get rid of me.”

“Well, seeing as how it is abundantly clear that you don’t, you can wash the dishes.” I spring up from the chair and give him a peck on the cheek before making my way toward the stairs. I turn my head to the side and see that he is watching me. Immediately, I flick my hair back over my shoulder and run up the stairs. His mirth follows me all the way up to my bedroom.

Since the day I was born, I’ve slept in this bedroom. The previous year, Lake assisted me in redecorating it, and now I enjoy looking at the light blue walls with the white trim. I turn my attention to the desk that is situated in the farthest nook of the room, very close to the expansive window. I need to complete an assignment, despite the fact that I have zero interest in doing it.

After only a few more weeks, I will have completed all of my coursework and will be free to enjoy the summer before beginning my studies at the University of Boston. Lake told me that I was free to go wherever I pleased and that he wished for my happiness. I have no desire to move because I’m happy here.

Lake turns twenty-two soon and graduated from college early with a major in English. He’s clever and excels at academic stuff where I have to really study for the grades I

get. His ultimate goal is to play for a major league team. I haven't really figured out what it is that I want to do yet.

I take a deep breath of exasperation and then quickly strip down to my T-shirt and shorts in preparation for a jog around the neighborhood. The sky is blue, and the sun is shining, but there is a nip in the air when I open the window to my bedroom. I begin by searching for my Boston Bay Vikings cap after pulling my socks up over my ankles. In order to keep my long chestnut hair off of my neck, I pull it through the hole in the back of the cap.

As I get ready to leave my room, I take one last look at myself in the mirror and decide that I'll do. Downstairs, Lake is slouched on the couch, thumbing through the apps on his phone while he checks his social media accounts. Because the number of people who follow him continues to rise, he has asked me to assist him with posts. It must be exhausting for him to respond to his fans.

I'm pacing around the living room, trying to jog my memory about where I put my keys when I got home the night before. I should keep them by the door as Lake does. I do not do this. I look under the cushions of the armchair that is next for the window, and then I become distracted and ask, "Have you seen my keys? Ah! Never mind." I look down the side of the chair and see them there. I prop one knee up on the seat of the chair and then reach down to pick them up.

"What the hell are you doing?" Lake hisses.

As I get up from the chair, I turn around and see Lake staring angrily at me while he is seated upright with a cushion in his lap. His mouth becomes more constricted as his eyes travel over my body. "Juniper, what in the hell are you wearing?"

The frown deepens. “Shorts and a T-shirt. I’m going to go for a jog.”

His eyes bulge out of his head. “Not like that you’re not.”

“Seriously!” I position myself so that I am facing him head-on and place my hands on my hips. “It is not up to you to decide what I can and cannot wear.”

“Knee socks don’t go with that outfit.” He gestures toward me with his hand.

It dawns on me all of a sudden what is giving him so much trouble, and I grin to myself as I edge closer.

“Are you having naughty schoolgirl fantasies, Lake,” I drawl in a sarcastic tone. “Playing is absolutely not a problem for me.”

As he rises to his feet, his eyes narrow as they focus on my face. “Sis, you don’t want to tease me, do you?” After continuing his movement toward the stairs, he tosses the pillow over his shoulder and continues his ascent.

A knock can be heard coming from the front door.

Lake pauses and goes tense. “You get it.” As if I have no idea what’s preventing him from opening the door right now. If he knew how much I know about the male body, I think it would surprise him.

I make fun of him. “Alright, I’ll answer the door in my naughty schoolgirl outfit since that’s what you want.” I don’t wait for a response as I quickly scoot to the door.

“Hi, Nik, come in.” I raise my voice. “Lake will be down in a minute.”

“You’re on your way out.” He cast a quick glance over me before his eyes widen and return to examining my legs.

I give a satisfied sigh. “You think I have pretty legs, huh?”

Nik gawks and covers his embarrassed laugh with his hand. “I’m not going to answer that.”

“Men!” As I walk through the door, I mutter my complaints. “If he still doesn’t come down, yell at him once more. I’m going.” I give Nik a wave and then continue walking down the driveway.

Nik and Lake have been best friends since before I knew Lake existed.

CHAPTER TWO

LAKE

THE DYNAMIC THAT EXISTS BETWEEN JUNIPER AND I IS beginning to shift, and I'm at a loss as to how to respond to it. If anything, my patience is being tested by the girl, but there hasn't been any sexual tension between us up until this morning. I quickly wipe my face with my hand and then yell down to Nik, "I'll be down in a minute."

The instant that she entered my field of vision, my body began to entertain other possibilities. So much so, that I'd smacked myself in the face with my phone when it slipped from my hands. I'd been hard as a steel rod when she'd leaned over the chair. What the devil is she trying to pull here?

Before I check how well my lower body is behaving, I fiddle with my T-shirt and my sweatshirt. I join Nik in the kitchen. "Don't you ever go to the store and buy your own groceries?"

He appears to be enjoying the pop tart that is currently in his mouth. "I make it a point to buy stuff that's good for me. When I have a craving for something sweet, I come here. Pop Tarts and sister to the win."

I remain still and give him a pointed glare. "What did you say?"

"Let me tell you, your sister is one smokin' babe."

I'm so angry that I lunge at him and snatch the unopened package of pop tarts out of his hands, before hurling them back into the cupboard and slamming the door.

"Ah!" Nick coughs. "So, that's how it is, huh?" Nik ignores the subtle cue and sits down in one of the chairs at the breakfast bar. "She's your sister," he states.

"Believe it or not, I haven't forgotten."

"Talking about hard," he says as he reaches for his crotch.

"If you so much as touch yourself while thinking about my sister, I swear to God that we are going to have a serious disagreement." I hold his gaze and observe as the smile on his face gradually transforms into a frown.

"I was joking. Jeez man, lighten up!" Nik looks at me with a grin on his face. I don't take him on.

I have more things to think about, like why is my stepsister getting to me all of a sudden. That is even more perplexing than the fact that Nik is just sitting there watching me with a knowing look on his face.

"Juniper is going to be there to watch practice, so be on your best behavior around her. It's weird."

He laughs nervously. "You do know that you're not related, right?"

Before I grab my bag, I shove him in the direction of the exit. After I've ensured that everything is secure, I look at him. "I've looked after her since she was a kid."

"You make it sound as if she was just a young child. She was fifteen." We hop in his truck just as he is driving off, "You have been living together alone for a total of three years."

"Exactly." I sigh. "Stop talking about her so much."

As he pulled onto the road, he looked at me sideways. “So, if you’re not going to make a move, do you mind if I do?”

When I think about her dating Nik, a stifling ball of jealousy forms in the pit of my stomach. Dating anyone. I don’t understand what the hell is wrong with me.

“Yeah, I don’t give a fuck about it. Friends don’t typically date the sisters of other friends. It’s the bro code.”

“Are you seriously pulling the bro code with me over your sister?”

“Yeah. I am.” I have my arms crossed and am hoping that is the last of it.

I should have known better.

“I don’t get it.”

I’m well aware that I will come to regret asking, but I do it anyway. “Don’t get what?”

“Why am I not allowed to date your stepsister?” Again, he gives me a sidelong glance, a move that he’s gotten pretty good at thanks to the amount of time we spend together in his truck while he drives me around.

I don’t drive. I have a license. Because of how my father passed away in a car accident, the idea of me getting behind the wheel of a vehicle gives me chills. Nik’s driving record over the past three years has been spotless, and that’s the only reason I have any faith in him at this point. When I consider that I spend the majority of my life actually skating on the ice, a part of me realizes that this makes absolutely no sense.

“Are you taking what I’m saying in?”

“My head is starting to hurt.” It’s not, but he’s really starting to get on my nerves at this point. I’m also annoyed

with myself for reacting to Juniper's outfit, which consisted of knee socks and very short shorts. She better not show up to watch practice wearing them.

"Have you noticed Ethan has been observing the team practice with greater regularity? I'm curious as to why."

I have no problem with the shift in discussion. "There's this rumor going around that Jericho wants to hang up his skates."

"No way!"

"Don't you ever take the time to read the newspapers?"

"The sports page." Nik wears a frown.

"Clearly not every day, or else you would have seen the article." I can only nod my head. "He's a defenseman, and I'm a right winger with no plans to switch."

"I know you want to play in the major league, so you need to become familiar with positions other than the one you currently play. You'll move up quicker." Nik pauses. "You are undoubtedly one of the more talented players on the squad. Even I'm aware of that."

"You're still not dating my sister."

After a brief pause, he erupts in uncontrollable laughter. "Fuck you!"

"I've switched places with Bradford in the goal, if you were wondering. I've even subbed for Dario on centre."

"Then you should try the defense." I can pick up on the joking spirit that lies beneath his words. "Or do you not want to get that pretty face all messed up?" While we are waiting at the lights, he smiles and gives me a light pat on the cheek.

“We’ll see.”

As he makes the turn onto the road that will take us to the team parking lot, I can’t help but look toward the harbor, which is not far from where the Hard Rock Cafe is situated. Because Juniper frequents that location, it makes me wonder whether or not she goes there for a purpose other than to catch up with her close friend. That is something I have no business even considering, but now that I’ve given it some thought, I’m aware that it’s going to linger there until I figure out how to deal with it.

I grab my belongings as soon as Nik has finished parking. I give Rhodes a friendly nod as he walks by us. He’s a defenseman. He has a massive frame, is covered in tattoos, and carries himself with a bad attitude. It has been whispered that he has served time behind bars.

Nik encircles my neck with his arm and asks, “So, do you think Juniper will come and watch practice in that outfit?” He then continues, saying, “I mean, it might get uncomfortable behind the cup if she does.”

I come to a complete stop.

Nik shoots off ahead of me laughing his ass off while I give him the finger.

“Asshole,” I mutter while covering my mouth with a hand.

“Who’s an asshole?” Madden asks, coming up beside me.

“Who do you think?”

“What’s he done now?”

“He’s just pretending that he’s interested in my sister,” I say.

Madden smirks. “I probably shouldn’t tell you this, but I don’t believe he is faking it.”

I find myself muttering, “Way to put me in a good mood,” as we get closer to the locker room.

Madden puts his hand on my arm and jerks me to a halt while wearing a frown on his face. “Does it really get under your skin?”

“Wouldn’t that bother you?”

He feigns pain. “Point made.” My arm is released, but he continues, “Perhaps you need to make sure that he understands how serious you are. You know how Nik is.”

I sigh. Unfortunately, I do know how Nik is and he is not going to let this drop.

CHAPTER THREE

JUNIPER

LEAH IS SITTING OPPOSITE, CHECKING HER PHONE FOR NEW messages. She is currently awaiting a message from her boyfriend regarding tonight's plans. She has already convinced me to attend the party with her, along with our phony identification. If Lake ever finds out that I possess that, he will go absolutely nuts. It would be best not to bring it up.

My fingers are crossed that Leah's boyfriend David won't show up. This guy's mental state is questionable to say the least. I don't trust him. My friend Leah is extremely possessive of her boyfriend because he is the first boyfriend she has ever had. I really wish she'd latch on to somebody else instead.

When she sighs for the fifth time, I reach across the table and place my hand on top of her phone. "Stop looking. We're going to have a better time without him."

"You never stop saying that." She is drinking a Pepsi through a straw while flopping her body forward and making a noise. "We've got more chance of getting past the security guards with him than our fake ID."

"Leah," I groan. "If we put on a show for everyone, we won't get into any trouble. It's possible that David will make things difficult."

“Listen, I’m aware that you don’t care for him, but I do.”

“Why did you invite me along if you were already planning on going with him?”

She cannot sit still. “You’re a good friend and I trust you not to let me down.”

The food has been brought to us, and while I chew on a chicken strip doused in ketchup and think about what just happened. It’s possible that she’s coming to the realization that David is nothing more than a waste of space.

I have no doubt that he’s also a drug dealer on the club scene. Since Leah first made the introduction three months ago, he has seemed to be familiar to me. I’d been at a party that had been thrown for Lake’s team. It had taken place at a night club, and due to the fact that I was underage, I’d been granted special permission to be there.

After leaving the party room, I went into the main area of the club where people were dancing. That’s where I’m pretty sure I saw David handing out pills to people while others gave him money under the table. At the time, I hadn’t given it much thought at all.

After that, Leah referred to him as her boyfriend.

“Are you going to eat that?” Leah inquires with a puzzled expression on her face. “It looks like you’ve killed somebody with all that ketchup.”

“Hey, don’t be so negative about it. It’s considered to be one of the primary food groups.”

Leah grits her teeth.

“Tomatoes are good for you.”

“No, not when it’s mixed with sugar.” Leah gives a frustrated eye roll. “Now, regarding this party that we have tonight.”

I let out a groan as I lean back in my chair and push my food away because I have completely lost my appetite. “You got a promise out of me to go with you. I will.”

“Please refrain from being awful to David.” She squeezes one of my hands firmly. “It’s no secret that I like him. A lot.”

“I swear I won’t get anything started.” I hold her pleading gaze. “However, if he initiates conflict with me, you can be sure that I won’t just stand there and take it.”

Leah, who is hesitating, searches my face and sees that I’m not going to budge on that particular issue. Oh, my goodness, the lengths I go to for my friend.

“Now that’s over with,” she says, letting go of my hand as she settles back into her chair, “want to tell me why you’re dressed like a hooker?”

My eyes widen, and I subtly push her under the table. “I think I look nice.”

She lets out a loud snort. “I’m really into guys, but even I have to admit that you have some serious sex appeal. It might have something to do with the knee socks.” While she is laughing, her eyes are fixed on my face, and I feel my face turning red.

“Now that I look at it, I wish I had worn something else. It’s not you I’m trying to get to.”

“Ah!” Her grin grows wider. “And how exactly did he react to you being dressed like that?” She pokes fun at me while throwing her head back and laughing at the same time.

“He told me that I was not allowed to go out in public dressed like this. He didn’t refer to me as a hooker, so that’s a plus.” I give her the cold shoulder for a moment before bursting out in laughter. “He reacted.” My cheeks are getting hot.

“I believe that it would be beneficial for me to attend practice with you.”

I shake my head. “You can’t. I promised him I’d go alone.” I shrug. “I don’t think it goes over well with the coaches.”

“I need a complete report tonight.” Leah makes a move, so I join her.

As I put my arm through hers, the weather is clear and sunny outside; there is not a single cloud in the sky. “Why don’t we take a stroll around the harbor?”

Although she frowns, she follows my lead.

I adore the way Boston Harbor feels when there is a wind blowing in off of the water. The gulls are flapping their wings and looking for something to eat. The look on a visitors face when they see the harbor for the first time. The smell of the salty water from the ocean. The sparkling white yachts, which are bobbing in the water and moored alongside the jetty. Although I’ve tried to explain it to her, Leah just doesn’t see what all the fuss is about. It’s mine to call home. My go-to destination whenever I feel the need to get some much-needed mental space.

“You have to put your house up for sale so you can purchase one of those.” Leah directs my attention to the condos that have a view of the harbor.

“That condo probably costs a heck of a lot more than the house.” Pause. “Nevertheless, it would be nice.”

“Have you ever thought of doing that?”

“Doing what?”

“Put your home up for sale.”

The frown deepens. “Why on earth would I do that? Lake, and I call it home.”

She lets out a muffled sigh. “It won’t matter how you feel about Lake in the future because the two of you will eventually go your separate ways.”

The things that she says make me pause for a moment.

“I’m not saying you won’t stay close. You probably will. If he doesn’t already have a girlfriend, he’s going to get one soon enough; he’s twenty-two years old, after all.”

I make a quick retreat. “What do you mean by that? Does he have a girlfriend?”

“I’m sorry, I don’t know!” Exasperated, she raises both hands into the air and throws them up. “Did you happen to catch anything else that I said? I’m warning you not to get your hopes up about him because he might let you down. You’re his sister, aren’t you?”

“Stepsister,” I snap.

“Whatever.” Leah sits down on a bench that overlooks the water and takes in the view. “Ever since you were fifteen, Juniper, he’s been watching out for you. It’s possible that he can’t look at you in any other way because he finds it too strange.”

The weight of her words is like rock in my stomach.

There is no way that my emotions are one-sided. I’m not completely devoid of common sense. I’ve caught a glimpse of

the way he looks at me before he quickly diverts his attention elsewhere. This morning I most certainly did not fail to notice his response to me. What if I'm going to make a mess of everything while I'm trying to get him to respond to me? My whole being yearns for him, and I have no control over it.

Since my mother and his father got married, I've had a serious crush on him. After they passed away, I buried all of my feelings and refused to let anything out. It wasn't until one night that everything came crashing down and I lost it. Lake had been there. On the sofa, he had held me the whole night. I know he loves me, I'm just not sure in what way he loves me.

Leah embraces me and puts her arm around my shoulders as we come closer together. "I'm sorry. I ought not to have said anything at all."

"I wish you hadn't." Pause. "It's true though. Leah, I really don't want to end up without him. He's the only family I have."

"Hmm," she mutters to herself.

I'm unsure about what I'm doing, so I lean my head against her shoulder. I was confident in both the outcome I desired and the strategy I would use to achieve it. Now that Leah has brought some things to my attention, I'm not sure what to do or what I should think.

CHAPTER FOUR

LAKE

THE FORCE OF RHODES' SHOVE ON MADDEN CAUSES HIM TO lose his balance and collide with me. We both make a loud impact as we land on the ice, with my body continuing forward a few feet after I do. The jerk is acting even more obnoxious than usual today. Nik reaches out his hand to grab hold of mine and pulls me back up to my feet. I give him a very slight nod and then skate over to Madden, who is currently shaking out his left arm. "Are you okay?"

He growls, "I'll live," as his glowing eyes continue to follow Rhodes.

"What the heck is wrong with him?"

"I'd be damned if I know. Before we stepped onto the ice, he was interrupted by a phone call. His mood turned more quickly than it normally does."

Ethan and his wife, Riley, are waiting for Rhodes to approach them while they are standing to the side. Additionally, Riley is the owner's daughter. Wyatt Peters is the owner and manager of the NHL and AHL teams that are affiliated with the Boston Bay Vikings. Ethan and Van split their time as the head coaches of the NHL team. Nevertheless, Ethan and Riley co-coach the AHL team with Myles as head coach. They have never once appeared to disagree with one

another in front of us. One day, I hope to have a partnership like theirs.

Whatever it is that Ethan says, Rhodes body goes into a rigid state. I cringe in discomfort because I know it can't be good. On the ice, this man is unmatched in ability. It's important to correct his attitude first and foremost.

Dario grumbles, "Well, my blood pressure just shot up. Please tell me she's a cheerleader."

As soon as he speaks, I turn my head to the side to see who he is referring to, even though I'm already aware of who I will find. There she is in that spot. Moving her pert bottom along the bleachers in order to locate the seat from which she always watches the game.

"Oh, man!"

Dario is suddenly pushed by my outstretched hand. "If you're drooling over anyone, it should not be my sister. Quit it!"

He lets out a guffaw before skating backwards with a grin plastered across his face. "She's just asking for trouble by dressing like that." He then laughs and makes his exit.

What the devil is going on with her is beyond comprehension.

I can't remember ever seeing her dressed in anything so damn...tempting. I hear a few chuckles in the background, and I narrow my eyes to focus on my teammates. When a group of dudes are unable to focus on what they're doing because there's a sexy babe in the room, there's a problem.

I make a quick retreat.

She is not a hot babe.

She is not in any way.

Nope.

Absolutely not.

“Lake,” snaps Nik, “you need to tell her to cover herself.” He casts a glance in Ethan and Riley’s direction. While the latter is smiling and laughing, Ethan is frowning and turning his back to the rink.

“She’s one girl, Nik! What the fuck do you want me to do?”

“I’m sure Juniper has some ideas about what she wants you to do.”

I flip him the bird and skate toward one of the exits while maintaining my attention on the hottie who is standing there. Simply picturing her leaning forward over the chair first thing in the morning makes me as hard as a fucking rock. When Nik said that the cup pinches, he was absolutely correct.

She maintains eye contact with me as I make my way to the row in which she is seated. “I need to find something for you to wear.”

She rolls her eyes and stretches before placing her long legs over the chair in front of her. I swallow hard and bring my attention back to the woman in front of me. “With you looking like that, the guys can’t help but be distracted.”

“Like what, Lake?” She lowers her voice.

“Like...*like*, that.” I gesture with my hand in the direction of her body.

“I’m a woman. What I wear is completely up to me. It is none of my business if your perverted friends have nowhere else to look.”

I rip off one of my gloves and rub my forehead with my finger while simultaneously wondering what in the hell I did the day before to deserve this. I take a long, deep breath in, then slowly let it out as I hold her gaze. “You are correct, all right. I agree you should be allowed to wear what you want.” Pause. “The thing is you look really hot in those shorts and knee socks.” I scold myself for causing the heat that’s starting to creep onto my cheeks. “You’re, uh, well, um—”

“A wet dream, is what you’re looking for,” Nik says as he approaches me from behind.

I turn. “I’m going to knock your fucking head off if you continue talking to her like that.”

“You seemed to be at a loss for words. I was helping a friend out.” He chuckles and I don’t miss the way his eyes rove over Juniper’s legs.

“I’ve had enough of that.” I toss my gloves at Nik and pull my shirt over my head. I give her the evil eye and dare her to refuse to put it on. “More of your legs ought to be covered by it.”

With a loud sigh, Juniper stands and takes the shirt, which to my relief stops mid-thigh. At least her butt cheeks don’t hang out any longer. Now I’m dealing with an entirely new set of problems. The shirt she’s wearing and her knee socks. “Fuck me,” I mutter while covering my mouth with a hand.

Nik bursts out laughing and runs away before I have the opportunity to punch him in the face.

“Let’s go.”

“Where?”

“Home,” I yell as I come to the realization that the team is no longer needed.

“Lake, I’m sorry, okay. I thought it would be fun to tease you. I had no idea that other people would be looking at me at the same time.” Her voice is quiet, sad.

I frown as I watch her move down the steps leading to the rink while keeping her head bowed the entire time. It’s possible that I don’t fully comprehend what’s going on with her. I don’t like it.

When I catch up to her, I call out, “Wait for me, okay?”

She gives a small nod and then sits down once more, this time placing her feet on the chair and pulling my shirt over them to cover the rest of her body. “I’ll be here. I promise.”

“Okay.” I hesitate, before I wince and quickly make my way toward the locker room knowing I’m about to have the quickest shower in history.

Although I don’t hesitate when Madden walks in front of me, I do stop when I find him hovering near the door. “Uh, I was just wondering if it was okay if I asked Juniper out for coffee.”

My pupils dilate as I prepare to fire off a caustic retort, but I make myself pause and give it some serious consideration first. Madden isn’t like the others. In point of fact, I can’t recall ever hearing him make a single sexual remark about a woman in the past. Not like the other jerks in the group. I don’t even want to think about anyone else with Juniper. Especially another player.

Madden takes a few steps back. “Never mind,” he murmurs under his breath.

I tell him, “It’s up to her who she dates,” and leave it at that.

Madden nods and walks over to his cubby while I head in the direction of mine.

I don't know what the hell I'm going to do, I mutter a thought to myself as I throw my shoulder pads onto the ground.

CHAPTER FIVE

JUNIPER

I THINK MADDEN WANTS TO TALK TO ME BEFORE LAKE SHOWS up, judging by the way he rushes over to me. Madden is adorable. In addition to that, he is constantly looking behind him, which is a blatant giveaway.

“Is there anything you need?” I pose this question because I can’t think of anything else to say. The man’s twitching is giving me the willies and making me anxious.

“What the heck is going on with you and Lake? When I asked him if I could take you out for coffee, he looked ready to punch me in the face.”

Annoyed, I narrow my eyes at the guy. “Why on earth would you ask Lake? Who I have coffee with is none of his business, and he should stop acting like it is.”

“Um,” he says as he takes one more look around the arena in an effort to come up with something to say.

I decide for him. “I’m sorry, but I can’t. I have plans.” I quickly walk around him and head in the direction where I can see Lake coming toward me.

When he spots me, he gets in a grumpy mood and quickens his pace. “What’s going on?” He questions, looking over my shoulder.

“I believe he was attempting to ask me something.”

He appears to be amused by the situation. “You think, huh?”

“Whatever! Please just let me leave this place already.”

He gives a snort. “Before we go anywhere, I want you to put some pants on.” As he searches around, he eventually unearths a pair of black running pants. “They’re clean.”

I’ve had enough of being looked at inappropriately, so I kick off my sneakers and put on Lake’s pants instead. “Thanks.”

He gives a light head shake. “I have no idea what was going through your head when you decided to put on that get up in the first place.” He pauses. “I know you. You’ve been uncomfortable all day.”

“Not when I was sitting down.”

His expression changes to one of amusement. “Come on, I have an idea.”

After putting my shoes back on, I immediately stand up. “Something enjoyable?”

“Yes.” He has a chuckle.

My excitement begins to disappear as he pauses for a moment before gesturing for me to walk in front of him with his hand. It looked like he was going to do what he’s done so many times before and put his arm around my neck. He’s even taken my hand before now. It’s possible that the antics I pulled with my outfit choice earlier today messed up something between us.

I turn to ask him and find him frowning. He looks directly into my worried eyes and then steps forward to embrace me.

He pulls me into a bear hug and holds on tight. I bring my arms around to his middle and squeeze on for dear life. My head is gently cupped, and I can feel his lips moving as he says, “Please, don’t make things weird. You’re all I have, and I don’t want to hurt you.”

I squeeze him even tighter as I try to hold back the tears. This is the place that I want to be always, but he’s right. I shared with Leah that he is the only member of my family that I have. I dare not risk losing him.

My ears pick up on a deep, manly grunt, and Lake pulls me slightly away from him before turning to look at his teammate, who moves past us. “Ignore him,” Lake mutters under his breath.

“That’s Rhodes? What’s his problem?”

“Don’t worry about it.” While we are walking to the harbor, Lake places an arm around my neck and maintains that position the entire time. When we arrive at the harbor, we come to a stop next to one of the tourist boats.

As I turn to face Lake, my gaze travels over his features for a moment. “What are we doing?”

“Gonna take it easy for a while.” He is very happy, and his expression shows it.

I let out a high-pitched squeal as I fling myself into his arms. After exhaling a puff of air and laughing, he whirls me around before helping me to my feet and putting me down again. “So, you enjoy being surprised, do you?”

“Of course, I do.” I poke him in the stomach, noticing we’re being watched by more than one person. I ease my way closer to him.

“What just happened?”

“People are staring.”

“No, they’re not.”

He then helps me onto the boat by throwing his arm over my shoulders and guiding me in while handing me his tickets. I crease my brow in concentration. He gives a shrug. “Nothing wrong with making plans.” He tries to avoid making eye contact, which causes a blush to appear on his face.

He is aware of how much I enjoy spending time at the harbor, so he assists me in finding a seat outside and then takes the vacant seat next to me. He makes himself comfortable by spreading out and placing his bag underneath the seat in front of us. He then appears to be at ease. Because the seats aren’t very spacious, I’m not sure how he can remain calm while he’s pressed up against my side. The heat coming from his body causes areas of my body that have never been touched to tingle. It’s probably not a good idea for me to bring that up to him right now because I don’t think he’d appreciate it.

Instead, I turn my attention to the port and feel like I’m going to burst with excitement as the boat begins to move away from the harbor. Lake gives me the eye roll, but it doesn’t bother me in the least. It has been a very long time since I last went out on the water. I had the impression that it was something that only vacationers did. I can’t believe how much I’ve been missing out on.

The captain starts the conversation by informing us about the harbor, and then continues by providing a history of the monuments that we are currently passing. The lighthouse intrigues me, and I find myself staring at it intently. When we are instructed to take a look at Fenway Park, the home of the Boston Red Sox, Lake immediately sits up and takes notice.

Now that he's paying attention, I accidentally bump into Lake and start laughing.

"I thought you'd fallen asleep."

After a few minutes of silence, he says, "Not happening. I don't want to miss a single moment of all the excitement you're feeling."

My cheeks start to heat up, and Lake gives me a smirk. "Enjoy it to the fullest, Juniper." All I can think about is the person sitting next to me.

I give him a gentle smile as I drape his arm over my shoulders and nestle into his side, and I am both surprised and delighted when I hear him catch a breath.

It's a little chilly out on the water, so I huddle closer to Lake to keep warm. Goosebumps break out all over my arms as I shiver. Lake has taken note, and he begins rubbing my arms in an effort to warm me up. "Wait," he says as he moves me away from him. "Put on my sweatshirt."

I reach down and grab the bottom of the sweatshirt, then pull it back down his chest. Then, with a smirk on my face, I snuggle up close to him and put my arms inside the sweatshirt. I let out a sigh of contentment as the warmth that I discover makes me happy. Despite this, I can't help but get the impression that Lake is going through a tough time because of how tense he is. I bury my face in his neck.

"What are you doing?" is hissed at me.

"Starting to feel warmer."

He mutters something under his breath and wiggles his fingers before letting out an exasperated sigh. He moves me away from him and quickly takes off his sweatshirt, which he then hurriedly places over my head. While he is pulling it

down, I pout like a child. I finally finish putting it on and then turn my attention to Lake, who is avoiding making eye contact with me.

I give him a sharp jab in the side. Once. Twice. The third time, he successfully grabs hold of my hand. “Behave yourself before I throw you overboard.”

“You wouldn’t even consider it given that I’m not the best swimmer in the world.”

He mutters something under his breath that sounds like, “Perhaps I should jump in and cool off.”

I then shift gears and inform him, “I’m off out tonight with Leah and her boyfriend.” I tense up. “Hopefully David will stand her up.”

“You don’t like him? Because of Leah or because he’s an asshole?”

“Lake, you are not allowed to let her know that I have told you anything. Promise me?”

A serious look crosses his face. “Tell me. I won’t share it with anyone else.”

While I lick the dry patches on my lips, I have to admit, “I think he hurts her.”

Before making a frowning expression, his eyes move up to his brows. “Have you asked her?”

“Yes. She moves on to a different topic. She reveals to me how much she has a crush on him. It’s very strange. The guy makes me uncomfortable.” I don’t bring up the fact that I’ve seen him elsewhere.

“Perhaps it would be best if you stayed in tonight.”

“I’m going.”

“Juniper,” he growls as the boat begins to make its way back into its harbor after the forty-five-minute cruise, which seemed to go by very quickly.

“Look,” I say as I curl my body into his, “the way I’m thinking is that if I’m with her, then he can’t do anything to her. Does that make sense? I don’t think he’s that stupid. He knows I don’t like him.”

“Fucking hell! Why did you have to get yourself involved in something like this?” He then stands up after grabbing his bag.

“Leah’s been my friend since first grade,” I snap. “Are you telling me that if you thought Nik needed your support, you wouldn’t give it to him?”

“That’s very different!”

As we disembark, Lake takes hold of my arm and guides me away from the other tourists before continuing, “Nik isn’t likely to get involved with someone who beats him up.”

“There are men in the world who are in relationships that are abusive to them.” I squeeze my eyes shut. “But I admit that Nik is a poor example.” I let out a sigh, and Lake grins.

“Look, if there is any trouble, you call me, Juniper. Whatever the case may be. You call. If you can assure me of that, I won’t bother getting in the way.”

“Okay. I’ll call.” As soon as the words are out of my mouth, Lake wraps his arm around my neck once more and pulls me in the direction of the road.

“I’ll get us a ride.”

Lake does exactly that on his phone while I wonder what he has planned. He won't let himself be idle while I spend time with Leah. Not now that I've come clean about the situation I believe to be occurring with my friend.

CHAPTER SIX

LAKE

“WE’RE GOING OUT,” I ANNOUNCE TO NIK. “I NEED TO change first though.”

“What? Now?” While watching me move around the kitchen and placing dirty dishes in the dishwasher, Nik frowns and makes a face at me.

“Yes, right now!”

“We have a game scheduled for tomorrow night.”

I heave a sigh and try to direct my attention to Nik’s face. “Juniper is going out with Leah and the boyfriend tonight,” I pause, and then continue, “She doesn’t like Leah’s boyfriend.” I’m hunched over the countertop, clenching my fists as I do so. “It’s not looking good, all right. I have to make sure that she’s okay.”

Nik tilts his head to the side and searches mine with his eagle eyes. After that, the jackass bursts out laughing. “You want to go and make sure she doesn’t hook up.” Before it finally registers with him that I’m not laughing, he slams his hand against the countertop. After a brief moment of reflection, he gives a throat clearing and then proceeds to compose himself. “Shit!”

“I have no idea what’s going on, but I do know that I’m extremely concerned about it. Earlier, Juniper confided something to me, and I promised that I wouldn’t repeat it, so please don’t ask me about it. But it’s that aspect that’s giving me pause right now.”

“Hmm.” Standing tall with his legs slightly spread apart and his arms crossed over his broad chest, he transforms into the friend I always knew he would be to me tonight. Then the question becomes, “What are we waiting for?”

“Give me a minute.” I dash up stairs and make a hasty outfit change into slacks and a button-down shirt. My Italian ancestry shines through as I fix my gaze on the reflection in the mirror and run my hands through my jet-black hair. After putting my feet into my dress shoes, I have a change of heart and grab an extra shirt and pair of pants for Nik. We won’t get in anywhere wearing scuffed up jeans. Well, not the place I know Juniper has gone with Leah. Hopefully he’ll get a pass on the black trainers as I only have one pair of dress shoes.

Nik had just finished getting changed and it wasn’t until we were in his truck on the way to the club that I realized Juniper was using a fake ID. This is something that I ought to have been aware of, but for some reason, the thought never occurred to me until now.

“So we’re spying.” Nik grins.

“No matter what you want to call it, we are taking precautions to ensure that both of the girls are safe.” I must also confess, “I’m interested in learning more about this David guy. If Juniper is frightened of him, then there must be something not right. She isn’t easily frightened by anything.”

It is convenient to have valet parking in the city, so the truck is parked there.

Even though we're both on the team for the minor league, our names are known, and that's why we get waved through security. However, not before they shake our hands and pat us on the backs. It doesn't bother me at all. It does Nik. He despises it when people recognize him.

The moment we set foot inside the club, our ears are assaulted by the club's blaring music. It is so loud that I can literally feel it in my veins. This nightclub is one of the more recent additions to the central Boston nightlife scene. It has a lot of fans. Extremely popular, which leads me to wonder how Juniper and Leah managed to sneak their way in.

It takes my eyes a few moments to adjust to the darker room that has strobes flashing all over the large room that is designed to look like a warehouse.

My stomach turns at the thought that I have no clue how I'm going to track her down in here. It is extremely difficult to navigate through the sea of people because the place is completely packed to capacity with bodies that are swaying and dancing to the beat of the music.

I make out a few familiar faces here and there, but neither Juniper nor Leah appears to be among them. The more I consider how straightforward it would be for them to become disoriented in this frenetic environment, the more urgent it becomes for me to locate them.

Nik grabs my arm and points in the direction of an obscure nook. Because I can't make out anything, I give my friend an annoyed look. He leans in close to my ear and calls out, "She's sitting at a table in the shadows with Rhodes."

When Rhodes is brought up, I immediately feel a surge of anger and a strong urge to protect those I care about. I can't help but wonder what he's doing with her and why she would

choose to be with someone like him. To regain my composure, I take a few slow, deep breaths, and then I bring myself back to the present moment by reminding myself how critical it is to approach the predicament with composure before drawing any hasty conclusions.

After Nik gives the impression that he's going to the bar, I point in the direction of a more secluded area. He gives a nod and then vanishes. I look around until I find a table that offers a significantly better view of Juniper and Rhodes.

As I sit here with a frown on my face, I can't help but wonder where Leah is and why on earth Juniper appears to be at ease with him. Her sitting with Rhodes throws me for a loop. Did they make these plans without my knowledge? But when exactly? I've never seen her talk to him. Rhodes is a reclusive individual. This makes absolutely no sense at all. I itch to go over there and join them, but I'm curious and a little embarrassed that I followed her here first.

I'm aware of the fact that I will not leave until she does. My eyes dart over the withering bodies that are spread out on the dance floor, but I can't seem to find Leah anywhere. Because she is acting so composed and content while with Rhodes, it is clear that Juniper believes her friend is in a safe place. A twinge of resentment wells up inside of me at this moment.

Regardless of how much I care for Juniper, I will not let her be led into trouble. Because I do not believe I would be able to continue living if she were not a part of my life.

I'm not blind. I have witnessed the way in which she looks at me. It's just the way I am. My dad had cautioned me to stay away from her when I first met her, and I took his advice to heart. My attraction to her and my willingness to heed my

father's advice are in a state of constant conflict with one another.

It's better to love her from a distance and value the connection we already have rather than try to get closer to her. That's what I keep telling myself anyway. At least Juniper has no idea the depth of my passion for her. If she did, I wouldn't have a snowball's chance in hell of keeping her away from me.

Her curves make my mouth water, and the number of dreams I've had about her is something I will never discuss.

CHAPTER SEVEN

JUNIPER

THE MOST THAT RHODES EVER SAYS TO ME IS THE OCCASIONAL grunt. When I had initially sat down, he had given me a very intense scowl. I'd given him a scowl in response, and then I'd smiled. Because I notice a smile form at the corner of his mouth, I know that I'm able to make him laugh. I know that Lake would prefer that I keep my distance from the other guys on the team, and I also know that he has some reservations about Rhodes.

Nobody knows that I looked him up online because I was intrigued by the circumstances surrounding his incarceration and wanted to learn more about him. I hadn't been entirely confident that I would find anything, but I did, and it was a significant amount. But I'm not going to tell anyone else about it. The other guys on the team, including Lake, have the option of either asking him about it or looking it up on their own if they are curious.

I have a favorable opinion of the man. He has a lot of tattoos and appears to be all alone. He isn't here to hook up—not that I plan on doing that—he said he likes the noise. It's getting to the point where it's giving me a headache.

The only reason I'm still sitting here is because I spotted Nik walking around with two bottles in his hands, and since I

was looking in his direction, I followed him with my eyes until I found Lake. It has piqued my interest to know whether or not they came here after me. After I admitted that something is going on with Leah, Lake became concerned about her. When I look around the dance floor, I see her rubbing all over her boyfriend who is being a complete asshole.

“Does he not trust you?”

I am taken aback by Rhodes’s initiative to start a conversation, and my eyes dart to him. I usher closer and lean in. “I’m not sure what their purpose is in being here.”

He makes a grunting sound and looks at me in an off-angle way as if to ask, “Are you stupid?”

“Why are you here?”

“I already told you.” Another intense look. “I much prefer to be by myself.”

“Yes, well, you are the only one protecting me from all those grabbing hands that are out there.”

He mutters something after there is a brief pause. “I can’t think when the noise is so loud.”

We are seated in close proximity to one another, and I notice out of the corner of my eye that Lake is becoming agitated. He wants to keep me at a distance, so I’m going to spend time with whoever I choose.

I stare at Rhodes, much to his surprise, and I tell him, “Please don’t be angry, but I looked you up. I know. I also believe that you should not have been sentenced to time behind bars. Various emotion flickers in his gaze. I give him a supportive squeeze on the arm.

“So, does the rest of the team know?”

“I haven’t told anyone, and I won’t. Not even Lake. It piqued my interest, but given that they are your teammates, I won’t be the one to blame if they find out. I swear to it.”

He looks directly into my eyes and then nods.

“I take it that we’re friends by this point?”

“I don’t have any close friends.”

“Well, you certainly do so now.” I grin and ignore his annoyance. “Give me your number, and I’ll give you mine.” His brows furrow in concentration. I teasingly say, “Friends have each other’s numbers,” while laughing. “Also,” the grin on my face widens, “Lake is going to be pissed.”

I hand him my phone and watch as he types in ‘hot guy’ followed by his phone number. He gives a sly smile. “That should really piss him off.”

After sending him a brief message, I hurriedly put my phone away.

“What’s going on with your friend?”

As I follow his line of sight, I see that Leah has become more distant with David. I am surprised by this development. They continue to dance, but something seems to be off. I don’t even give it another thought before I start walking toward my friend. When I see Leah on the dance floor at the same time that she sees me, there are a lot of people there. She gives me the evil eye by shaking her head at me. I come to a standstill because I have no idea what to do.

Hands land on my hips and I’m turned into Rhodes arms. “Dance, and we’ll keep an eye on her.”

“Okay.”

Rhodes draws me into himself until my back is pressed up against the front of his body. My veins begin to pulsate in response to the music, and I find myself moving. Even though it's possible I shouldn't, I still do it. I put on an act as if Lake is standing behind me and cross my fingers that Rhodes does not get the wrong idea. I can't help but take pleasure in being in Rhodes embrace as we sway to the rhythm of the music. Because of the effortless way in which his hands move over my hips and stomach, I'd be lying if I said that he wasn't stimulating me sexually.

It is necessary that I divert my attention away from Rhodes touch and locate Leah, which I do. David holds her tightly in his arms while she gazes at Rhodes. I turn around in Rhodes embrace, encircle his neck with my arms, and whisper in his ear, "Move us closer to Leah."

He continues to do this until we are dancing side by side with one another. It's unclear to me why Leah is acting so frightened now that we're so close. Her gaze is fixated on Rhodes the entire time. "What?"

She gives a light head shake.

David recognizes both of us and gives me a knowing look before turning his attention elsewhere. The cretin is aware that I have no affection for him.

I barely have time to catch my breath before Lake yanks me out of Rhodes's arms. I confront him, "What are you doing?" I have to yell in order to be heard over the blaring music.

Lake is not looking at me; instead, he is concentrating on Rhodes. Seeing where this is going, I get between the two of them and plead to Nik with my eyes.

Nik just shrugs his shoulders and moves out of the way.

While I ruffle my brows, Lake and Rhodes are giving each other the cold shoulder. I give Lake a jab in the chest before turning back to look at him. “I can dance with whoever I want to.”

Lake snarls, “Not him,” in response.

When I look at Rhodes, I catch a glimpse of pain in his eyes, but he quickly covers it up with a confident grin. This is not going to help us in the least. I turn my head to look at Leah, but I don’t see her anywhere. I start to freak out as I search the crowded dance floor for her.

My gaze falls upon Rhodes. “She’s gone.” After moving his eyes as if searching for her, he takes my hand and leads me toward the back of the club with Lake and Nik behind us.

“What the fuck is going on?” As soon as the doorway we were in closes behind us and the music stops, Lake emits a hissing sound.

As we proceed down a dimly lit corridor, Rhodes firmly grasps my hand in an effort to reassure me. At the very least, I think that was the intention behind it. I really hope that I haven’t made an incorrect assumption about the man and that he doesn’t want to be more than just friends.

As we get closer to what might be an exit in case of an emergency, the corridor opens up. Rhodes bulldozes his way right through it, and now we’re standing in a dark alleyway outside. Our senses are being assaulted by the odor of rotting garbage as well as the sound of far-off sirens, which is making me feel even more uneasy. I give Rhodes a quick glance before turning my attention to the others, wondering if they have any suggestions regarding what we ought to do next.

“I can’t find her. What if it turns out that she’s still inside? We’re unable to get back in.”

“Would somebody please explain what the fuck is going on?” The tone of Lake’s voice is angry.

“Leah and David have vanished into thin air. Lake, she was shaking with fear.” After letting go of Rhodes’s hand, I move into Lake. “Because of your interruption, we were unable to get closer to her while we were dancing, and as a result, we lost sight of them.”

“And what about him?” His gaze suddenly shifts to Rhodes.

I smirk at Rhodes and tell Lake, “We’re friends.”

The man makes a groaning sound and rolls his eyes.

Lake responds with a hiss, “Since when?”

“Since earlier tonight.” I punch him in the chest with my fist. “You need to stop being a jealous asshole.”

The argument that we are having is interrupted by a scream that comes from the other end of the alleyway.

Rhodes takes off.

“Nik, you need to stay with Juniper.” Lake takes off after Rhodes.

“No way in hell.” As Nik tries to grab my wrist, I quickly evade his grasp.

When I walk in, I find Leah sobbing quietly in a corner while yelling at the others to leave. When I find out that she has been assaulted, my heart breaks into a million pieces. The black cropped pants she is wearing are still on her, but the top she is wearing is ripped and there is blood all over her face.

My eyes well up with tears as I lower myself to the ground and inch closer to her. “Leah, it’s Juniper. You’re safe now.”

My best friend is shaking, and blood and tears are running down her face, but her eyes are fixed on me the whole time. “Juniper?” She lowers her voice.

“That’s right. I’m here with Lake and Nik, and my new friend Rhodes. We all want to help you.”

Leah gives a slight shake of her head in response. “No.”

“Where did the bastard go?” Lake asks.

I frown wondering what is going on with her. She frequently moves her gaze to Rhodes. I give him a quick glance, and he is focused on her. What gets to me about Leah is the expression she has on her face.

Nik tells us that the police are on their way to the scene.

Not good.

I spring to my feet and hasten my way to Rhodes. I lower my voice. “You have to get out of here.”

He is staring right at me.

“Rhodes, you are not allowed to be here when the police show up.” I give him a hug. “Please leave. I’ll send you a text message in a little while to let you know what’s going on. I swear to it.” I give him a tight hug, and I can feel him returning the affection. “Go.” He indicates with a nod that he will continue down the alley that is closest to the road.

“What the heck was that?” Lake inquires.

I pay him no attention as I get into position next to Leah. “Was this David?”

She carefully studies my face before murmuring, “You have to lie for me.”

The frown deepens. “Regarding what?”

Her worried eyes wander off in the direction of the spot where Rhodes was last seen. “About him.”

“I don’t understand what you mean. Lie about who?”

“Rhodes,” she utters so softly that I hardly hear her as it rolls off her tongue. “Say that he attacked me.” The intensity of her sobs has increased. “I’m frightened. David said if I don’t say his name that he’ll kill me next time.”

After that, everything makes sense. “David is the one who did this, but he wants you to place the blame on Rhodes?”

She gives a slight nod before retreating into herself and sobbing uncontrollably.

The arrival of the police and emergency medical personnel is signaled by flashing lights. I say to my friend, “I’m not lying, Leah.” Before I move away from her, I say. “Don’t you dare accuse an innocent man.”

Her eyes meet mine and register astonishment. She really believed that I would lie on her behalf. This makes absolutely no sense at all.

As the emergency medical technicians begin their examination of Leah, I back away and feel Lake’s arms wrap around my waist. Even when a police officer is standing next to me and asking, “What happened here?” she never takes her eyes off of me.

“David, who is her boyfriend, is to blame for this. I don’t know his last name.”

Leah yells out, “She’s lying!” in response. “His name is Rhodes, and he is the one who did this.”

“What the fuck is she talking about, he was with you,” Lake retorts. “He was with you.” Lake shifts his position to the side and fixes a frown on his face as he looks at my friend. He tells the officer, “She’s lying,” as he makes his statement.

“She was dancing inside with her boyfriend at the time. Juniper, who was present, was seen chatting with Rhodes while sitting at a table. After that, the two of them danced together. Leah remained there with David. I interrupted Rhodes and Juniper, and when we turned around after five minutes to look for Leah, we found that she had vanished. This is how we discovered her. The club has surveillance equipment. You are going to find out that what I’ve been telling you is accurate.”

“You can’t do this.” Leah lets out a scream.

My first inclination is to be there for my friends. To back her up. However, I won’t be doing that. I will not point the finger of blame at an innocent man. I can’t help but feel nauseous because of my frustration with Leah and my inability to feel compassion for her.

When I say, “Make sure you get the video from inside before they get rid of it,” I make sure Leah hears me and that she understands what I’m saying. “Her boyfriend knows the staff here.” When the officer finally understands what I’m getting at, I give a sigh of relief and look directly into his eyes. “Rhodes was here the whole night with me. There is no way he could have done this. Leah is my best friend, I wouldn’t lie. Her boyfriend has made threats against her.”

“You wouldn’t happen to be talking about David Jenkins, would you?” The officer inquires.

“I don’t know his surname and Leah obviously isn’t talking about him.”

The officer fiddles with his phone for a moment before handing it over to me.

“You’re right, that is him.”

CHAPTER EIGHT

LAKE

THIS ENTIRE NIGHT HAS BEEN MESSED UP.

Juniper has been clinging to my hands in some way. I need to keep her close to me so I can be sure she's safe. We need to talk but haven't had the opportunity since the calvary arrived to care for Leah. Juniper's reluctance to be with her friend is palpable, and I hope she overcomes it quickly. Leah needs her friend until her parents arrive at the hospital, regardless of the lie she told. It bothers me that Juniper defended Rhodes against her best friend, but then again, Leah is lying.

Juniper moves into my arms and buries her face in my neck once Leah is loaded into the ambulance. I feel her tears on my skin as I raise my arms and clutch her tightly. My heart swells with desire for this girl.

"We need to go to the hospital," says Nik.

Cupping a hand to the back of Juniper's neck, I rest my forehead against hers. "She'll be all right." Before I can think about it, I press a brief kiss to her lips and move her out of the alleyway, wrapping an arm around her shoulders. Nik unlocks his truck, and I help Juniper into the back, and follow her inside.

Nik grins as I catch his gaze in the mirror.

“I can’t believe she would lie about who attacked her.” Juniper peers between Nik and me. “Why would she do something like that?”

“Didn’t she mention David threatening her?” Nik sighs.

“We’re the ones who told the cops the whole truth.” As Nik drives through the streets towards the hospital, I clutch Juniper in my arms. “She should stay away from the jerk.”

“Lake, I’m not entirely sure she has a choice in the matter. If the cops don’t find him, he’ll look for her.”

“Hmm,” I murmur. “As much as I didn’t like seeing you with Rhodes, I’m proud of you for not lying for Leah.”

“What she said was a serious allegation. I’m not going to let Rhodes or anyone else take the blame for the jerk she chose to date.”

I chuckle. “That’s my girl.”

We drive for a while, and I hold Juniper in my arms. She’s at ease here. I feel like a fucking idiot for even wanting what I want. But I can’t seem to let her go.

“There isn’t any parking. I’m going to leave you at the entrance and try somewhere else.” Nik slows the truck down, and we leap out.

Juniper takes my hand and weaves our fingers together. A rush of pleasure rushes through me. I’m smiling because of the shy blush on her face. “You’re cute when you blush.”

Her blush deepens.

I kiss her cheek and bring her into the hospital with me. It doesn’t take long to figure out where we’ll wait for Leah.

“Will you tell me how you ended up with Rhodes?” I try to keep my jealousy from coming through in my voice, but I’m not sure it works.

Juniper exhales a long sigh after taking a deep breath. “He was already at the bar, oblivious to everyone. So, when Leah left with David, I reasoned that I’d be safer with Rhodes than alone.” She sighs. “He’s a really nice guy.”

“He’s been inside, Juniper.”

“I’m well aware of that.” She beams. “He’s my friend now, Lake.”

“Friend?”

“Yes, friend! I’m not interested in him in that way, and I doubt he’s interested in me in that way either.”

In disbelief, I snort. “Did you forget I saw you dancing together? He had his hands all over you.”

“Are you jealous, Lake?” she asks, moving in close until our mouths are mere inches apart. “Because that’s how it sounds.”

I twitch in my seat, and Juniper’s smile broadens. “No.”

She chuckles. “Don’t lie to me, Lake.” She grabs my arm and wraps it around herself, snuggling into my side. “You should know that the only guy I’m interested in is you.”

I mutter a few explicit words to myself, and ask, “What was he prison for?”

“Who?”

“Juniper, you know who.”

“I promised him not to tell anyone. I’m keeping it.”

“I still can’t believe he told you.”

“Hmm,” she squirms, and I get the impression Rhodes didn’t say anything to her, so who did? “That’s why you told him he had to go before the cops arrived.”

“Lake, all I’ll say is that I don’t think he should have gone to prison. Others clearly saw things differently.”

I frown at the top of her head, puzzled as to why she isn’t looking at me during this conversation. My annoyance with her dancing with Rhodes has subsided, though I’m not sure I can watch her do it again. But she has piqued my interest in the man.

“Give it up, Lake. I know your mind is racing on this.”

I cup the back of her neck as she moves out of my arms, unable to let her go. A shudder runs through her, which makes me smile. “As soon as Leah’s parents get here, I’m going to take you home.”

“I’d like to see her first. She lied in order to get a man she didn’t know in trouble. She’s my best friend, but that’s not acceptable.”

I wince, my gaze drawn to the newly arrived nurse. Her gaze meets mine, and she motions us over. “Let’s go.”

The nurse guides us through a set of double doors into which she has entered a code.

“How is she?”

“I’ll let her tell you.” The nurse motions for us to enter a cubicle. “You only have a few minutes.”

Leah bursts into tears as soon as she sees Juniper. “I’m truly sorry.” Her eyes well up with tears, and I slump to the side like an idiot. I don’t do tears unless they’re Juniper’s and even then, I don’t really know how to handle them.

Moving from my touch, Juniper knows what to do. She hugs her friend as she leans over the bed guard. I take a chair and bring it over to Juniper. Her back must be hurting from leaning over. I take her arm and help her into the chair. Leah meets my gaze and bursts into tears once more.

“Why did you tell a lie?” I ask.

Juniper sniffles into a tissue as Leah is startled.

“David told me that if I didn’t say it was Rhodes, he’d hurt me worse.” Leah sighs and curls up in bed. “I figured that blaming a rapist wouldn’t hurt anyone, and I was scared.”

Juniper stands and leans against the bed, her body stiff with rage. “Leah,” she hisses, “Rhodes is not a rapist. Why on earth would you believe that jerk of a boyfriend?” She takes a breather. “Wait? Is that why you kept staring at Rhodes? Because you believed—”

“—that you were in danger, yes.”

“Shit!” Juniper sinks into the chair. “I’m getting a headache.”

“What’s the matter with you? I assumed you’d back me up.”

“Leah,” I growl.

Juniper returns to the fray. “I’m not accusing an innocent man because you made the decision. What’s the matter with you?”

“You’re awfully protective of the man.”

That’s what I’m thinking.

Juniper pulls out her phone, types a message, and presses the send button. I can’t see who it’s going to or what it says,

but she gets a response a few moments later.

“Rhodes was in prison for killing the man who raped his sister and left her for dead,” she says with a heavy sigh. “He’s not a bad person, Leah.”

Fuck! That hadn’t occurred to me.

But I suppose it should have. Juniper isn’t one to put her trust in just anyone.

“I’ve really messed up,” Leah sobs after a brief moment.

“Did you tell the cops when you got here that it was Rhodes who did this?” I ask.

Leah refuses to look at me.

“I told them to look at the security footage from the club to confirm our story,” Juniper confesses. “Everyone gave the same account. David was the one who attacked you.”

Leah lets out a deep groan. “I’m in so much trouble.”

“You’ve got that right,” Leah’s mother says. “I spoke with the cops, and they said your account does not match witness statements.” Her mother raises an eyebrow as she bends and kisses Leah on the cheek. “I want to know the truth, young lady.”

I wrap my arm around Juniper’s waist and move us back toward the curtain so we can leave. She doesn’t need to be here anymore. Neither do I.

“Leah,” I say, “no one will protect you unless you tell the truth. Don’t blame an innocent man.”

“She will do nothing of the sort,” her mother assures us. “The cops are coming back in five minutes to take another

statement. You will tell them the truth,” she says, looking at her daughter curled up in bed.

Juniper follows me from the cubicle. “I have faith in her mother.”

“Okay.”

CHAPTER NINE

JUNIPER

I KEEP A CLOSE EYE ON LAKE AS HE TALKS WITH A DETECTIVE on the phone about what happened last night.

I'm still tired from not getting enough sleep. When I walked into Lake's room and threw myself down on his bed, I didn't give him much of a chance to object. Out in the blink of an eye. However, I'd woken several times before Lake flung his arm around my waist as he spooned behind me. "I've got you, Juniper. Sleep," mumbled his sleepy voice. I'd settled, much to my surprise.

There had been no awkwardness this morning because Lake had already gotten up, showered, and started making breakfast. My bedroom is no longer appealing to me.

Lake frowns into the phone as my gaze sweeps over his strong back—bare—and down to his firm butt in a pair of grey sweats. I slowly drag my gaze up his body, meeting the heat in his blue eyes. I swallow hard but can't take my gaze away. Lake swallows and hangs up the phone.

"You need to stop looking at me like that," he says, his voice rough and almost seductive.

"Why?" I respond with an innocent expression on my face.

While standing with his hands on his hips and his face tilted up to the ceiling, he mutters under his breath. My gaze roves over his lovely and firm body once more, noticing a slight twitch at his groin that causes my eyes to widen. Embarrassed, I enter the kitchen, only to be followed by Lake's laughter.

"At least you figured out why," he smirks, leaning around me to grab the flavored creamer, his upper body pressing against mine for a brief moment.

I turn around and face him, not realizing how close he is. I notice his eyes sweep down to my lips before swallowing and forcing himself to meet my gaze.

"Cat got your tongue?" I smile, trying to hide the fact that my body is going crazy with him pressing up against me. "What did the detective have to say?"

Lake closes his eyes for a moment before placing his forehead against mine and pressing a kiss there. He curses and drags me against him the next moment. His other hand grips my bottom while a hand cups the back of my neck and holds me against him. I wrap my arms tightly around his waist, softly moaning as I feel the pulse of his arousal against me.

"You are my best friend, Juniper," he says quietly. "Since our parents died, we've looked after each other. I can't lose you."

"Lake," I try to move so that I can look him in the eyes, but he keeps me pressed up against him, "me and you will always be together. We have a unique bond that no one can ever break."

"Hmm." As he caresses back and forth along my back, his grip on me gradually loosens. "Leah told the detective the

truth about David. David has been on their radar for a while, so they finally have a reason to charge him. The detective expressed his hope that more would follow.”

“That’s good.”

The front doorknob shook.

Lake let out a sigh. “That will be Nik.”

It shook once more.

He took a step back, but not before brushing a kiss across my cheek, his gaze fixed on mine. “Nik will be looking through the windows in a minute.”

“You had better let him in.”

I like watching him saunter over to the door. Then Nik walks in, looking like he’s had too much coffee. He sprints over to me and swings me around before repositioning my feet on the floor.

“What’s wrong with you?” Lake asks as he moves around the kitchen assembling breakfast burritos.

“That flight attendant who I gave my phone number to the other week finally called me.” He rubs his fingers together. “She’s coming to the game, and then afterwards—” he wiggles his hips.

Lake throws a bread roll at him. “Behave yourself in front of Juniper.”

Nik wiggles his brows and laughs. “I noticed a lovely shade of red on your cheeks when I arrived,” Nik remarks. “Why were you blushing?”

I prefer honesty. “What do you expect when Lake is walking around half naked?”

Nik is stunned into silence for the first time.

I pull out a chair and sit, instead of taking my plate of food to the breakfast nook. Lake and Nik join me, and I notice Lake has put on a T-shirt and casts a sidelong glance at me.

Nik keeps his head down, but I don't miss his subtle glances between Lake and me. I set down my cutlery and smile at Nik. "So, Nik, I don't believe you're this excited over a date with an flight attendant. What's the deal?" I give a broad grin.

"Yes, Nik, what's up?" Lake has a scowl on his face.

It's not that Nik isn't always happy; it's just that this is unusually so. He laughs and waves his fork in front of us. "I stopped to visit my grandmother on the way here." He takes a breather.

"Get on with it," grumbles Lake.

"Willow," he groans.

I take a look at Lake. He looks at me and shrugs. We return our attention to Nik.

"She's new."

Lake rolls his eyes and begins shoveling his breakfast in once more. "He's talking about a new care assistant."

"Oh!" I gave Nik a stern look. "Don't bug the shit out of her while she's at work."

"As if I would," he grumbles. "So, why were you eyeing up Lake?"

My cheeks are warm.

Nik jumps with a hiss.

Lake looks innocent. Too innocent.

Oh, he probably kicked Nik under the table.

Regardless, I respond, “He has a nice body. Besides, I eye up Rhodes too.”

The second those words leave my mouth I wished I’d kept them buried. I don’t actually eye up Rhodes. The only man I’m interested in is sitting beside me, his handsome face cast in a dark glare.

Nik, for once, does not draw attention to my flushed cheeks.

Breakfast is quickly consumed, and the guys are gathering their belongings in preparation for their trip to Viking Arena. This evening is a home game for which I will be present. It’s convenient to have my brother on the team because I get a season family pass.

Lake tucks me against his body in a hug, hesitantly. “Don’t get into any trouble,” he says into my ear before kissing my cheek. As he pulls away, our gazes meet.

Nik pushes him aside and gives me a hug as well. “Playing with fire, little sister.” He winks and kisses my cheek. He is the first to leave the house, while Lake stands in the doorway.

“Stay away from Rhodes,” he growls, slamming the front door in my face.

I’m so irritated that I give him the middle finger and stamp my foot. It makes no difference that he didn’t notice me. It lifts my spirits.



I’M GETTING READY FOR TONIGHT’S GAME IN THE LATE afternoon. Given that I’m wearing jeans and Lake’s game

shirt, it doesn't take long. But my thoughts turn to Leah. This morning, her parents had taken her home first thing. She'd barely said anything to me. It's my fault, she claims, that David is upset with her. The man will not get the message and will abandon her. I must admit that she sounded scared on the phone. Her father had stayed at home with her, and a police officer was passing by the house every hour, at least for the time being.

Knowing that the asshole is on the loose has me on edge and jittery. Hopefully not for much longer.

The unexpected sound of glass breaking downstairs jolts me out of my reverie. I quickly grab a nearby object for protection and proceed downstairs to investigate. Any fear I have is masked by the adrenaline coursing through my veins as I brace myself for a possible confrontation with the intruder.

I come to a halt at the bottom of the stairs. Fear makes my heart race as I hear someone moving around in the kitchen. I quickly grab my phone and dial 911, giving them my address. The dispatcher speaks, but before I can respond, my phone is taken from me. I exclaim. "Help!"

"You bitch!" David snarls, making a fist of my hair and yanking me towards him. "Tell the cops it was Rhodes, or else you'll be seeing me again."

"Fuck you!"

"That is something that can be arranged." He chuckles.

My mind races with ideas of how to defend myself as I struggle to break free. The sound of sirens approaching gives me a glimmer of hope that help is on its way. Then I recall the vase in my hand, but it's useless. I can't raise my hand because of how he has me gripped.

“You’ve been warned.”

My heart pounds as I desperately try to find a way out, but David’s grip tightens. It dawns on me that I must find another way to protect myself. As the sirens approach, I gather my courage and kick him with all my might, hoping that it will be enough to free myself from his clutches.

David curses, his face contorted in evil. He slams my head against the wall, and I collapse to the floor as he flees as quickly as he appeared. I struggle to regain my senses, dazed and disoriented. The pain in my head throbs, but I know I can’t stay down for long. I push myself up and stumble towards the nearest exit.

I stumble forward, my hand on my head, toward an officer who is rushing forward. Just as I’m about to fall, he catches me and gently lowers me to the ground while calling for help. I’m relieved as I lay here, knowing that help has arrived and that I’m safe.

Others rush around us, but the officer remains with me as a paramedic examines my head. “I don’t think I’ve been cut, but he pulled my hair and slammed my head into the wall.”

The officer frowns.

“It was David Jenkins. There is an arrest warrant out for him after he attacked his girlfriend last night.”

“I won’t go very far.” As he speaks into his radio, the officer stands and moves slightly out of hearing range.

The paramedic examines my head gently, assuring me that no visible injuries exist.

“He threatened me,” I say as the officer crouches beside me once more. “He said I’d see him again if I didn’t accuse someone else of attacking Leah.” I can’t stop myself now. I’m

on a roll. “My friend, Leah, tried to tell the cops that she had been harmed by someone else. He didn’t, however, because he was with me at the time and was captured on security footage. She lied, but her mother forced her to tell the truth.”

The officer’s expression becomes more serious as he listens intently. “I’m glad you told me this,” he says. “It’s critical that we have all of the information. We’ll do everything in our power to keep you safe and bring Jenkins to justice.” He walks away to make a phone call.

“Do you need me to call someone for you?” A female officer enters the scene.

“My parents are dead.” Tears hover. Not because I can’t have Mom by my side, but because I’ve been attacked in my own house. “I live with my stepbrother, but I don’t want him called. Tonight, is a big game for him. He does not need to be distracted. I’ll be fine.”

“Hmm. There’s a big hockey game tonight. Is that the one?”

I give a soft smile. “It is. Lake Bradshaw. He’s a member of the Vikings’ minor league team. Hopefully, he’ll be promoted soon.”

“Yeah, I’ve heard a few whispers.” The paramedic writes down my personal information on a form, then takes off the thing he’d placed on my finger and winds up the cord. “You’re all set. Take Tylenol only if you have a headache.”

“Like right now.”

“Yes. Just remember to rest and look after yourself. If you become ill or your headache worsens, call the number at the bottom of this card. It’s the hospital’s medical staff.”

“I will. Thank you very much.”

I go inside and see the officer I spoke with earlier cleaning up the mess in the kitchen. “Thank you, you didn’t have to do that.”

“I know.”

“I’m going to take some headache medicine and lie down on the sofa.”

“Go right ahead. I’ll finish up here and board the window up while they dust for prints. Then I’ll lock up.” He pauses. “Are you sure you’ll be okay here by yourself?”

“I don’t think he’ll be back today.”

I hope so, at least.

CHAPTER TEN

LAKE

AS I MOVE AROUND THE ARENA, ADRENALINE RUSHES through me. Supporters applaud the raucous and thrilling noise. I cast a glance toward Juniper's seat and frown when she isn't there. What happened to her? She is always on time. My heartbeat quickens as I continue to scan the crowd for any sign of Juniper. As worry creeps into my mind, the excitement of the game begins to fade. Is something going on?

I need to concentrate on the game.

As I get into position and steady my breathing, it's about to begin. Tonight, I'm a right winger. Nik plays defense, Bradford plays goal, Dario plays center forward, Rhodes plays defense, and Madden plays left wing.

Dario is waits.

The buzzer sounds throughout the arena, signaling the beginning of the game. Dario takes control of the puck quickly and passes it to me on the right wing. I concentrate on finding an opening to make a powerful shot towards the goal as I receive the pass. I'm being blocked by an opponent, but I quickly dodge around him. I unleashed a blistering shot, aiming for the top corner, with my eyes fixed on the goal. The puck flies through the air, just missing the goalie's outstretched glove and landing in the net. My teammates rush

to congratulate me on a well-executed play, and the crowd erupts in applause.

I sigh with relief as I see Juniper, who is wearing dark sunglasses, arrive at her seat. Fuck. She has a headache. Why did she come if she wasn't feeling well? Because I would be concerned throughout the game.

She slowly lifts her glasses, our gazes meet, and she beams at me.

The moment with Juniper passes, and I'm crouched and ready for a face off. The referee blows the whistle, and I explode off the line, determined to win possession for my team.

As the puck drops, I focus all of my attention and skill on gaining control and setting up our next play. It comes quickly as Madden seizes the puck and passes it to me. I move quickly past the opposing players, adrenaline coursing through my veins. I send the puck soaring towards the net with a powerful shot, hoping to secure another goal for our team. As the puck finds its mark, the crowd erupts in cheers.

Fuck me!

I'm unstoppable tonight.

I'm drenched in sweat by the end of the game, but I still skate over to Juniper and ask her to wait for me. She gives me a small smile and returns to her seat.

I head off the ice and through the tunnel toward the locker room wondering about Juniper. This is not typical of her. She's always upbeat. On the other hand, she rarely attends games when she has a headache. She appeared pale and ill. This is why I'm rushing through my shower and rushing Nik to do the same.

“Let’s go.” Nik takes my blazer and tie.

I follow him, my shirt tails flapping behind me. “I took a shower before you. How did you get dressed so quickly?”

He chuckles. “I’ll take a shower at home.” When I cast a sidelong glance his way, he shrugs. “You needed me. Don’t worry about it.”

My heart is in my throat as I see Juniper slumped in her seat. I sprint up to her and crouch beside her seat. “Juniper?”

“Hmm.” She stretches her legs. “I think I fell asleep,” she mumbles.

“You scared the hell out of me.” I wrap my arms around her and assist her in getting to her feet. “Why did you come here tonight if you’re not feeling well?”

“You’d have freaked out if I wasn’t here.”

“You could have just called me.”

“My phone broke.”

At this point, her gaze is directed elsewhere.

What is she not telling me?

Nik gently kisses her on the cheek. “I’ll get you home, and Lake will get you to bed, okay? Just hang on.” To me he says, “I’ll bring the truck to the door. Give me five minutes.” He takes off.

Juniper repositions herself so that my arm is wrapped around her shoulders and hers is wrapped around my waist. “I can’t remember ever feeling so bad.”

“I hate that you’re suffering because of me.” I draw her in closer and lower my hand to her waist. Juniper means everything to me. I know seeing her with someone else will

hurt. Last night with Rhodes, I think I proved it to myself and Juniper.

I stayed away from him for the most part today. The stupid fact is that I like the guy, or at least I do now that I know why he was in prison. It's no surprise he prefers to keep to himself.

I slide in beside her as I assist her into the back of Nik's truck, not wanting to be separated from her. I wrap an arm around her shoulders and move her so she's resting against my side once our seatbelts are buckled. I catch Nik's attention in the front mirror before turning away.

"When you're feeling better, why don't we invite Rhodes for a barbecue?" I kiss the top of Juniper's head. "Would you like that?"

"Why have you changed your mind about him?" She inquires softly.

"Although he killed a man, he did not do so maliciously. You stated that he is a friend. As a result, we'll invite him over."

"Thank you."

Nik casts a quick glance at me, a frown on his face. I shake my head, signaling that I don't want to say anything right now.

A cop car is parked on the curb directly outside our house as we turn onto our street. "What the hell is going on?"

"What?" Juniper sits up, winces, and looks out the window. "Oh, I need to tell you about that."

"What the fuck is going on?" Nik sputters and comes to a halt.

"Juniper?" I ask, grabbing her hand as she tries to get out of the car.

“We had a break-in earlier today.” She yanks free and walks over to the cop car.

I join her on the sidewalk, cursing under my breath as I notice how close the officer is to her. He notices me approaching and his eyes widen when he recognizes me. I approach Juniper and wrap my arm around her, pulling her into my body. “My girlfriend says there was a break-in.” My voice becomes stern. “What exactly happened?”

The officer casts a sidelong glance at Juniper before sighing and saying, “I think it might be best if you ask your girlfriend.”

“It probably is, but I know she’ll miss a lot out, so I don’t worry. I want the details.”

Juniper press close and wraps her arms around my waist. I clutch her close and stare at the officer. “David Jenkins forced his way into your house and threatened your girlfriend. I arrived just as she flew out of the house. She was terrified and shaking, but the paramedics gave her the all-clear.”

I nod to the officer and move Juniper and myself toward the front door, but stop short of going inside, furious that Juniper was targeted by that asshole. “I think we’ll pack a bag and head to a hotel. If he returns, I don’t want you here.”

“Come back to my place,” says Nik. “The guest room hasn’t been used.”

“Okay,” Juniper responds.

“Please stay in the truck with Nik. I’m going to go get us some clothes. I won’t be gone long.”

“Be sure to get the headache medicine on the kitchen counter.”

I force myself to pass her to Nik after I brush a kiss to her lips.

He looks at me and nods.

He'll look after her.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

JUNIPER

MY FOOT KICKS AGAINST A BODY AS I STRETCH, HALF ASLEEP in bed. He groans and rolls toward me, his body pressing up against mine. As he burrows his face into the back of my neck, his arm slides around my middle. “Go back to sleep, Juniper,” Lake murmurs into my ear, sending shivers up my spine.

“I’m sorry I didn’t tell you.” I turn to face him, snuggling into his arms. “You had a crucial game. I didn’t want to keep you distracted.”

He rubs his nose against mine, serious, and says softly, “I don’t give a fuck about the house, but you’re everything to me.”

I search his eyes, but they blur as my own fill with unshed tears. Lake cups the back of my head and gently pulls me close. It feels wonderful to be held by him. It’s so good that I don’t want to leave this spot.

“I’m afraid, Lake.”

“He’ll never get to you again. I swear.” He squeezes me so tightly that there isn’t an inch of space between us. “Nik has been gone for a few hours. He’s left us some food.”

My lips are teasing me with a smile. “I’m not quite ready to move yet.”

“Me neither.” His fingers caress the strands of my hair, which relaxes me. “Juniper, we need to talk.”

“I don’t think we do.”

He laughs. “If we’re going to do this, then we need to talk.”

I can’t help but tremble at his words. I raise my head and look into his eyes. “Lake, there is nothing wrong with the way we feel.” I’m blushing. “I mean in the way I feel.”

His lips twitch up into a soft smile, his mouth a mere breath away. “It’s exactly what we both want, Lake.”

His lips brush up against mine. “Why do you think I don’t date, or do anything else for that matter, huh?”

My heart is overflowing with affection for this man. He is everything to me.

With Lake’s eyes roving over me, I wiggle out of my clothes and flush. I feel a slight tremble as he places his hand on my stomach. “Let me see you,” I ask.

As he quickly reveals himself to me, his heated eyes swirl with emotion. He’s stunning. I reach out a hand and press it against his chest, pushing him to his back. As I straddle his waist, I smirk. Lake shakes his head, his hands on my hips. “I don’t know what to touch first.”

“Everything,” I mutter as his hands reach for my breasts.

I arch into his touch and groan as he pinches my nipples sensually. One hand moves downward, and the touch between my legs causes goosebumps. “I’m so ready for you.”

“I’m going to come all over your ass.” Lake pants, grabs my hips, and flips me over. “You can ride me later.” I feel

fingers slip through my folds before a large digit slips inside me. "I'm ready."

I move him into position by digging my fingers into his buttocks. Lake grabs his penis and directs the tip to my entrance. My stomach flutters with delight. "Quick or slow entrance," he asks, his teeth clenched.

"Quick."

He pulls my leg up over his hip and plunges deep. I gasp at the sharp pain, and then concentrate on breathing through it.

"I'm truly sorry." Lake burrows his face into my neck and kisses it before moving his mouth to a breast.

They're extremely sensitive, and every time he sucks at one or plays with the hard nipple of the other, I feel a rush of excitement. I move my hips slightly to see if it will hurt. It doesn't.

Lake pulls me in close, our gazes locked as he moves. My eyes flutter open, but I don't close them. I don't want to miss a single second of Lake's reaction to his feelings for me. I dig my fingers into his butt, his growl of pleasure rolling through my body. As we move together, the heat overwhelms me. Our bodies begin to crave more. I need to fall over the periphery with Lake.

All it takes is for him to grind into me. As pleasure overtakes me, my eyes widen in surprise. I writhe, pant, moan, and scream, "Lake."

He has a firm grip on me, jerking and releasing while his penis is sucked hard with my release.

"Oh, Juniper, fuck. You've ended me," he says quietly, his arms slightly relaxed.

Our hearts thud loudly.

Lake breaks free and rolls us to our sides, gathering me close. “We’re together now.” He kisses me on the top of my head.

“Yes.”

CHAPTER TWELVE

LAKE

I'M NERVOUS ABOUT OPENING THE DOOR TO LET LEAH IN. I'VE witnessed her friendship with Juniper over the last few years, but I'm furious right now. I understand her fear of David, but because of her, David pursued my girl, which is unacceptable. I promised Juniper that I'd keep my mouth shut about it and let her handle it. It bothers me. But I understand.

My gaze flits over Juniper, who is dressed in one of my T-shirts and a pair of shorts. All I want to do is put her back to bed. That, however, is not going to happen. Nik will be back soon, so Leah's desire to speak with Juniper makes little sense. We'd have been interrupted regardless.

Leah is nervous as she sits next to Juniper, her eyes darting around the room. I sink into the armchair next to my girl. Before clearing her throat, her lips twitch into a soft smile. "How are you doing?" she asks Leah.

"I'm okay."

"Why are you nervous?"

Leah comes to a halt and locks her gaze on Juniper. "I really don't know what I'm doing."

Now the tears are falling.

They also appear to be real, but something tells me they're not.

I wiggle in my chair before leaping to my feet. "I'll get you some water."

Juniper snorts and gives me an amused look.

What exactly does she want me to do? When Juniper cries, I freak out, but I'm not going to handle someone else's tears especially when I believe them to be fake.

I go into the kitchen and get a bottle of water and a box of tissues. That's good right? Thoughtful.

"Here." I shove them at Leah and glare at Juniper when she bursts out laughing. "What?"

"Nothing."

"Can I talk to Juniper alone?" Leah inquires, swiping her eyes.

"No." I sink back into my chair. "I don't trust you. I'll be staying."

"Lake, I'll be fine." Juniper leans over and squeezes my knee.

Before she slowly pulls away, I cover it with mine. Leah is paying close attention to our interaction.

"Pretend I'm not there." I pull my phone from my pocket and begin scrolling through my social media.

"As if I can do that," Juniper mutters, and I smile but keep my gaze fixed on my phone.

"I've told the police the truth," Leah says.

"That it was David?" I question.

“Yeah. I know he’s a jerk and has harmed me, but when he wasn’t high, he was nice to me.”

Juniper interjects, “I’m glad they know the truth.”

“I really needed my friend last night.” Leah sighs.

I fix my gaze on the girl and observe the look of guilt on Juniper’s face. I have the words to defend her on the tip of my tongue, but I keep my trap shut.

“What you accused Rhodes of doing is a serious offense. I was furious, and I couldn’t believe you lied.”

“I’ll apologize to him as well if it means we’ll still be friends.”

“We’re still good friends, Leah.” Juniper yawns after sighing. “You should apologize to Rhodes because you want to, not because I forced you to.”

“I am sorry, but that isn’t an issue.” She shivers. “I just want it to be over with.”

The silence grows uncomfortable, so I say, “Nik should be here in a few minutes. We’ll drop you off first.”

“Oh.” Her brow furrows. “I was planning on spending the afternoon with Juniper.”

“I have a shift at the coffee shop.” When she hears Nik’s truck outside, Juniper smiles and gets to her feet. “We’ll catch up tomorrow, okay?”

Leah frowns as she looks between the two of us. “Yeah.” She exits through the front door.

I reach out and take Juniper’s hand, moving in close and kissing her neck with my free hand against her stomach. “Keeping my hands to myself has been driving me crazy.”

She shivers. “I like it, Lake. It just feels right.”

“It certainly does.” I kiss her on the shoulder. “Let’s get going before Nik comes in to see what we’re doing.”

“We’re not doing anything.”

“I beg to differ,” I say quietly, pressing my erection against her backside.

“Hmm. Let’s get naked at home.”

My dick becomes as hard as a fucking hammer.



I DROP OUR BAGS AS SOON AS THE FRONT DOOR CLOSES, GRAB Juniper in my arms, and press her up against the wall. Juniper’s legs encircle my waist as my mouth reaches for hers. I inhale as we kiss, our desperate groans filling the silence.

I grind my cock against Juniper’s sensitive nub, and shiver when she hisses and throws her head back. Her hips search for the friction she needs to get herself off.

I grip her with my hips and yank off her shirt, gasping as her naked breasts reveal themselves to me. My mouth grabs one and suckles, allowing my tongue and teeth to work the nipple into a rock-hard peak. I smirk as I move to the other, my hands slipping beneath her shorts to reveal her naked bottom. I clench her to me, on the verge of losing control.

“Get my shorts off,” Juniper grumbles. “Now, Lake.”

The taste of her lips sends a rush of desire through my body, amplifying my desire to explore every inch of her. I quickly remove her shorts, revealing her flawless curves.

Her hands begin to tug at my waist, but my pants become stuck at my hips. Juniper slips her hand down the front of them, wraps her fingers around my dick, and begins to jerk me off.

I get my pants lower, remove her hand, and thrust into pure fucking heaven .

“Lake—” Her moan echoes around the room, fueling my desire even more. I get lost in the rhythm of our bodies, each movement bringing us closer to ecstasy. My tongue catches a nipple and I suck hard. Juniper pulsates in my arms seconds later, her orgasm tumbles through her and sets off mine, our bodies trembling in unison. As we ride out the waves of pleasure, basking in the aftermath of our shared ecstasy, the room fills with the sound of heavy breathing and satisfied moans.

Juniper begins to laugh as I struggle to catch my breath. When I look into her eyes, I see both joy and heat. “Why are you still clothed and I’m naked?”

“I really like you naked.” As I move away from the heat of her body, I wince. My cock is semi-hard and will no doubt be ready to go in a few minutes.

Regardless, I assist Juniper in getting her feet under her before removing my clothes. Her gaze stirs my blood, and I’m throbbing with need in seconds. Swallowing hard, I move to the front door and double-check that it’s securely locked before pressing my palm to my dick to keep it from bobbing around.

When I turn to look at Juniper, I find her on her knees. Her mischievous expression tells me everything I need to know. I move my hand and fall into the door as her mouth swiftly takes me inside. She doesn’t let go and sucks me like a fucking

popsicle. Her tongue does things to me that send tingles up and down my spine. She hums as precum enters her mouth, sucking harder.

My hands tangle in her hair as I gaze at her through my partially closed eyes. Her hands stroke up my legs, one to my ass where she digs her fingers in, and the other between my trembling legs. As I tighten my ass and come, my hips jerk forward. Juniper sucks me dry while I grunt and hiss.

“Fuck me!” I gasp.

Juniper chuckles. “I just did.” I help her up and wrap my arms around her.

“We’ll shower when I’m able, and then I’ll take you out to eat before I go to the arena.”

“I’m glad Myles gave you a half-day off.”

“Yeah, he wasn’t thrilled until I told him what had happened to you. He’s an excellent coach.” I take Juniper in my arms and lead her to the stairs.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

JUNIPER

TODAY IS A BUSY DAY AT THE COFFEE SHOP WHERE I WORK. A swarm of tourists appeared to arrive at the same time, which made my feet and legs hurt. I'm tempted to take a five-minute break and sit down, but I'm afraid I won't be able to get back up again if I do. That's how exhausted I am. Part of this is my fault. I grin. I wouldn't trade my time with Lake for anything. In fact, I'm missing him, which makes no sense. Aside from us being together, it's just another day. I'm full of nonsense this afternoon, and I'm not sure why.

The door opens, and for some reason, I cast a glance toward it—something I rarely do. People pass through. If I kept watching the comings and goings, I'd get a crick in my neck. And then all my thoughts fade away as I watch Leah rush toward me, her cheeks flushed pink.

"I need help," she says quietly, grabbing my arm. "I'm sorry for everything, but I really do need your help right now."

My brows furrow into a frown. "I thought you were excited, but you're not," I say with a tilt of my head, "you're scared."

She takes a deep breath and looks me in the eyes. "I'll be free after I do one thing."

“Are you crazy?” My head shakes. “Don’t be a fool, Leah. Whatever that jerk says, he’ll keep his hooks in you.”

“You don’t understand.” Her face twists as if she smells something foul. “I’d do it on my own if I could.”

“Tell me.” I sigh deeply and rest my arms on the table’s surface.

“It’s more complicated than it seems, but in the end, David said he wouldn’t come back if I do just one thing for him.”

“You are avoiding telling me what that thing is.”

“He wants to talk with Rhodes.”

I recline in my chair in horror as the words burst from her mouth. “What exactly does he want with the man?”

“I honestly don’t know.” Leah refuses to make eye contact, which indicates that she is lying. Oh, I understand she’s nervous, but something doesn’t seem right.

“I’m not interfering in Rhodes life to get you out of this mess. The man has already been through a lot. David, can go fuck himself.” I cross my arms and give her a dark glare.

“You’re so obstinate. Why are you refusing to help me?” Tears well up in her eyes, but I remind myself to stay strong.

“I’ll help you. I, on the other hand, refuse to involve anyone else.” I lean against the table. “It’s involving Rhodes, or anyone else for that matter, which I won’t do.”

“David said you wouldn’t be willing to help.”

I blink a few times, not sure if I heard her correctly.

“I thought we were best friends,” she adds.

“Leah,” I hiss, “will you listen to yourself? I’m not sure what David has on you, but this isn’t you,” I say as I sit there

watching my so-called best friend sulk like a child. “What does he want Rhodes to do?”

Her eyes well up with tears. “He wants Rhodes to meet with him.”

I furrow my brows. “It doesn’t make any sense. What exactly is his beef with Rhodes?”

“I think he knows him.”

“I didn’t get the impression from Rhodes the other night that he knows David.”

Leah sighs. “Can you talk to him and ask him to meet with you?” She shivers. “He’ll come if he knows you want to meet with him.”

“Wow!” I exclaim. “No!” I leap from my chair and rush behind the counter, closing the door behind me so Leah can’t follow.

“Be reasonable.”

I gasp.

“Are you kidding me?” I snap. “I am being reasonable.”

Then a thought enters my mind. If I know where David will be, I might be able to inform the cops.

I close my eyes. “I’ll send him a message. But I’m going to be honest with him.”

“You can’t tell him the truth!” she implores.

My boss shoots me a ‘get rid of her’ look. “You need to leave. I’ll text you.” With my final words, I turn my back, and the door closes behind me.

“She’s gone,” Sammy reports. “Trouble in paradise, huh?”

“I don’t know what she’s up to these days.”

I’m unsure of what I’m doing. I send Rhodes a text message.

Please call me.

Straightforward and to the point. I know he’s with Lake at the arena. They’ll be training all afternoon and then meeting about tomorrow’s game.

My phone vibrates with a message.

In a meeting. Are you all right?

With a sigh, I lean against the counter.

Not at all. Do you know who David Jenkins is?

Asshole from last night? No

I think he knows you. He’d like to meet you.

I can’t be involved in another mess.

I know. He’s using Leah. Threatening her.

We need to talk. Not text.

I’ll be at work until 6.

Coffee Bean? I’ll be there.

Yeah.

I shove my phone away and wince. “I apologize for that. Something is going on with Leah and I need help to sort her mess out.”

“I saw her with her boyfriend. He’s a nasty piece of work.” Sammy sighs and shakes her head. “Tell her to get as far away from him as she possibly can.”

“I believe that’s what she’s attempting.”



THE REST OF THE AFTERNOON IS FILLED WITH TOURISTS, WHICH is good. It helps to be close to Faneuil Hall, one of Boston’s most popular tourist attractions.

“That’s a mighty fine-looking man with your brother.”

I panic as I follow Sammy’s gaze. I don’t want Lake to get involved in whatever Leah is up to. I don’t even want Rhodes to be involved. “He’s not my brother,” I say quietly.

Sammy laughs. “I know that.”

I cast a sidelong glance at Sammy and notice her amusement. Sammy owns coffee bean and has done so since she retired early at the age of fifty-five, seven years ago. She’s made it what it is today thanks to her sweet treats and sandwiches, along with the coffee.

“Go on with you. Julie is in the back, ready to assist with the closing.”

“Thank you.” When I meet Lake’s blue gaze, I move to the front of the shop and smile. He grabs the back of my neck and pulls me in close, his lips warm in the brief kiss he gives me. I smirk, knowing full well that he’s marking me as his. I’m half tempted to ask him about peeing on my leg too, but I refrain when my gaze lands on Rhodes.

“Let’s sit outside,” I recommend.

When we're seated, I tell them about Leah's visit and how determined she was to get Rhodes to meet with David. "I don't trust any of this. First, that asshole tried to blame what he did to Leah on you," I say, pointing to Rhodes, "and now he wants to meet with you for a chat." My head shakes. "I don't get what his beef is with you."

Rhodes runs his hand across his face. "If he knows anything about me, he must know who my brothers are." The man appears pale and concerned. "I don't have anything to do with them." He pauses. "Not anymore."

"How come I have a bad feeling about this?" I mutter, my gaze fixed on Rhodes, who appears to be debating whether or not to say anything.

Rhodes swallows and clears his throat. "Jessop and Carlisle Hallen are both older than me, and they don't exactly walk down a straight and narrow path, if you know what I mean." He looks around before locking his gaze on mine. "I have a feeling he must have somehow made the connection between me and them."

I frown.

Lake hisses. "Fuck no!" He cups my jaw and turns me to face him. "You're not going to have anything more to do with Leah and her jerk of a boyfriend. You already know she's taking advantage of you. Leah has changed."

I shake my head, but Lake maintains his gaze as he continues, "Juniper, I saw her fake tears earlier. Surely you saw right through them as well."

"Yeah," I admit quietly. "I noticed."

"I spoke to a detective last night," Rhodes says. "As a witness, not a suspect." He gives me a gentle smile. "Let me

call him and see if I can meet Jenkins while the detective is nearby to apprehend him. He's wanted for more than just attacking Leah."

"What about your brothers?"

Rhodes sighs and shakes his head. "I no longer have anything to do with them nor do I know what they are up to. I can only assume Jenkins hasn't spoken to them yet; otherwise, he wouldn't need me."

"I don't like this," Lake mumbles, his fingers soothing the ache in my neck.

To Rhodes surprise, I reach out and tightly grip his hand. "Promise me you won't go and meet that asshole without the detective with you."

"I'm not going back inside, so that's an easy promise for me to make."

"Should I give Leah your phone number?"

Rhodes gives a nod.

I send Leah a message with Rhodes phone number.

Then I type in another message.

If something bad happens to Rhodes, I will never forgive you.

I don't receive a reply.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

LAKE

JUNIPER HAS CHANGED INTO A SHORT MINI SUNDRESS, WHICH flatters her legs to perfection. I turn away from her, so she can't see how my body is reacting. She knows how much I like her in the dress. As soon as we get upstairs, I'm going to enjoy her. If we make it that far.

I've done something that I want to be a surprise. However, now that it's time to reveal 'said' surprise, I'm terrified that she'll hate it. Be angry at me. Juniper knows me better than anyone else. That's probably why she has a worried expression on her face. My emotions are being passed on to her.

Once the elevator doors close, trapping us inside, I take a deep breath and reach for her. I press the tenth-floor button and place my forehead against hers. Her hands search beneath my T-shirt, causing goosebumps among other things. My hands slide over her hips, resting on her lovely bottom. Juniper sighs, plastered against me. "I'm happy, Lake. Are you?"

I reach up and cup her face, running my thumbs over the freckles on her cheekbones, pressing her into the back of the elevator. "I love you, Juniper. So, yes, I'm happy." I hold her gaze while brushing my lips against hers. "I don't want you to be mad at me for what I've done."

Her brow furrows together. “What exactly does that mean?”

“Let me show you.” I take her hand in mine and guide her out of the elevator and down a short corridor. Dragging a keycard out of my back pocket, I open the door and usher her inside.

Juniper locks her gaze on mine before taking in our surroundings. The entryway leads to a large open living, dining, and kitchen area with a wall of full-length windows overlooking Boston Harbor. Juniper fiddles with the door before stepping out onto the balcony, gasping at the sight. As she turns to face me, the wind rustles her dark hair.

“Tell me what’s going on?”

I take her offered hand and accompany her onto the balcony. She returns her gaze to the sea, her arms resting on the balustrade. I approach her from behind and wrap my arms around her waist. “I know how much you love the harbor.” I swallow quickly, nervously. “I bought this apartment for us, Juniper.”

She bursts into tears.

Fuck!

I quickly take her in my arms and hold her, wondering why the fuck I didn’t tell her what I was thinking before doing it. I know why, but I feel like a jerk now.

Juniper raises her head, her fingers brushing against my jaw. “What about the house?”

I knew this would be a problem. “Nothing about the house needs to be decided, okay? I don’t need the proceeds from the sale of the house to purchase this apartment. We can rent out the house to a family.”

She presses her lips against mine, her arms around my neck. “I love this apartment.”

“You do?”

She laughs. “I do. I’m going to find it difficult not being at the house,” she admits, “but that has more to do with my mom than the house itself. It has more sentimental value than anything else.” She takes a deep breath. “We don’t need to decide what we’re going to do with it just yet right?”

“No. Juniper, the apartment is paid for.”

She tightens her grip and lifts herself up, wrapping her legs around my waist. “Is there a bed in our apartment?”

I quickly turn and head toward the master suite, grabbing her bottom, but I don’t make it. The tiger in my arms slips her hand between our bodies and lunges for my dick. As her fingers tease my flesh, I curse and stumble. Her pelvis presses and rubs as if she’s trying to get herself off, and it drives me crazy.

I knock her hand away as I drag her to the ground. It goes straight back as she unbuttons my jeans. My cock flies free, right into her grasp. I push her back, breaking her grip once more. When I flip her dress up, I notice she isn’t wearing panties. My head is so filled with blood that I can’t hear anything.

I grab her legs and pull them over my arms, pressing my mouth into her folds. My dick tingles with a desperate need to be touched as a result of her gasp and moans of pleasure. I suck her sensitive nub between my lips and enjoy the way she pulsates.

“Lake,” a keening moan spreads throughout the apartment as my name on her tongue drives me insane. Her fingers tangle

in my hair, and I'm not sure if she wants to hold me closer or pull me away.

Her pussy is wet, swollen, and oh-so-delicious. Her legs begin to tremble, and the next thing I know, my hips are thrusting hard, and I'm seated deeply inside her warmth. I place my arms on either side of her head and press my lips against her plump, waiting mouth. We kiss deeply, her fingernails digging into my ass as I force myself to slowly make love to her. I'm not sure how long it will last because my dick is solid, and more and more excitement slips out with each thrust.

I take a breather from the kiss before diving back in for more. It's the sexiest kiss ever, turning me inside out and causing a guttural cry as my orgasm barrels through me, Juniper falling with me. Her sweet little pussy clenches tightly around my cock as she writhes and moans.

She's perfect.

In the quiet room, our breathing is harsh, and we're a bit of a mess, which makes me smirk. "I've got you good and wet."

She laughs. "And what are you going to do about it?"

"Well," my mischievous eyes light up, "I think we should take this to the shower."

"Hmm," she says as she stretches.

The sudden clench around my dick makes me gasp. "God," I hiss, resting my forehead on her chest.

"I love you, Lake," she says quietly, brushing her fingers through my hair. "I don't care what other people say about us."

My brows furrow. "Has someone said anything?" With a wince, I slip free of her body, aware of how uncomfortable I

am on the floor.

I undress and assist Juniper, removing her sundress and bra, my lips kissing along her shoulders as I cup her neck. “Tell me.”

“There hasn’t been anything said. Yet.” I force her to look at me despite her eyes moving downwards. “You’re always in the news.” She continues, “If they find out about us—“ she trails off.

“If they find out about us then so be it. Juniper, I’m not hiding. I love you, and I couldn’t care less who knows.” I give her a hard kiss before carrying her to the shower.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

JUNIPER

LAKE SLEEPS DEEPLY BESIDE ME IN OUR NEW APARTMENT. IT was one heck of a surprise. My heart is so full that it's ready to burst wide open, which is why I'm struggling to stay asleep. I'm excited. Nervous. In love. Happy...*and* worried.

I turn my phone over so I can see the screen and notice a text message waiting me.

Meeting tonight. Midnight. Wharf Bay 12.

I frown wondering why Leah has sent me that message.

Unsure, I forward it on to Rhodes in case she's using me as a go between. She has Rhodes number though.

Rhodes replies.

She messaged me the details.

So why then is Leah sending them to me?

My heart thuds against my breastbone. I should have left this alone. If anything happens to Rhodes it will be my fault.

I cast a nervous glance toward Lake who is still sleeping and make a decision I hope I don't regret.

Sneaking out of the room, I slip Lake's shorts on, wishing I'd worn jeans last night for our date. My dress is wrinkled but

I doubt anyone will notice in the dark. I glance around and locate the sweatshirt Lake discarded the moment we'd entered the apartment.

My phone I shove into the hoodie pocket, and I quietly slip out of the apartment. Lake is going to kill me if he wakes and finds me gone. Perhaps I'll be back before he does. My eyes widen when I realize I have no idea how to get back inside the apartment. I'm not even sure the guard downstairs will let me in. I haven't planned this out very well.

In the elevator, I request an Uber. The doors open and I head toward the security desk.

"Hello, I'm from apartment," I can't remember the number, "um, it's on the tenth floor."

"You've just moved in, right? With Lake Bradshaw?"

"Yeah. I live there. I didn't pay too much attention to the number." I shrug, feeling like an idiot.

"Name?"

"Juniper Shaffer."

The guard goes through a box of envelopes and then smiles, pulling one out. "This is for you. Your card for the main entrance, which also unlocks the underground parking garage. The other key is for your apartment."

A huge sigh of relief. "Thank you so much. I should be back in an hour or so."

"Have a good night."

I nod and make my way outside.

In the envelope there is a lanyard with a plastic compartment on the end. I put the cards inside and then shove

the lanyard over my neck. The envelope I toss in a trash can just as my ride pulls up. I check the app to make sure the details match the car in front of me before I climb inside. I tuck the lanyard beneath the hoodie and sit back wondering what the hell I'm doing.



WHARF BAY 12 IS A DERELICT STRETCH OF OCEANFRONT A mile outside of town. It's creepy, which makes what I'm doing stupider than anything else I've ever done. But I feel responsible. Rhodes had avoided getting involved in anything that could land him in hot water. I don't hold it against him, which is why I'm here. The Uber driver didn't want to drop me off on the outskirts, but I'd persuaded him that I was safe. I'm hoping I don't live to regret those words.

All I can hear is the blood pumping through my ears as fear engulfs my entire being. I creep up to the building and notice that the meeting is on the other side. This does not sit well with me. What in the world am I thinking? I regret my decision and send Lake a quick message to let him know where I am.

The moon is shining brightly, which aids in my navigation of the warehouse. I move carefully through the shadows, my heart pounding with each step. A chilly breeze sends shivers down my spine as I approach the entrance. I can't shake the feeling that something is seriously wrong, but it's too late to change my mind.

A deep voice comes towards me, and I freeze in place. My arms are covered in cold gooseflesh, and I'm sure my heart is in my throat right now. That voice is not David's nor Rhodes. I see them when I peer around the edge of the building. Leah

and four other men. What the hell? When she moves, I notice the gun in her hand. My thoughts race as I try to make sense of the situation. Why is Leah with these men, and why is she carrying a gun? Fear grips me as I realize I'm witnessing something far more dangerous than I anticipated.

Leah convinced me that this meeting was between David and Rhodes. I assumed she was there, but not as a willing participant with David. Who are the other three men? The stockier of them appears to be in charge as he stands at the front of the group, facing Rhodes, who is alone.

As I watch their interactions, it becomes clear that Leah's involvement is more than just a coincidence. The way she holds the gun confidently suggests a level of familiarity with such situations, raising unsettling questions about her true motives. The air becomes thicker with tension, leaving me on edge and desperate to learn the truth behind this unexpected turn of events.

My rage, on the other hand, grows. Leah has deceived me. She made me think David was forcing her to do his bidding. This is not the case, as I am witnessing. My eyes well up with tears at the thought of losing my best friend. Nothing can explain why she appears to be willing in this situation.

Even though I know what I'm doing is stupid, I need to get closer.

Keeping an eye on the group, I move forward and crouch behind a large oil drum. With a mix of fear and determination, my heart pounds in my chest. I can't let Leah go without questioning her about the lies.

In his jeans, work boots, and shirt, Rhodes looks different. His voice travels clearer toward me now that I've moved closer. "Gettin' me here like this is not the way to get a

meetin' with my brothers.” With a thick southern accent, his voice rumbles. I’ve never heard it from him before.

“You set up the meeting. Now.” The group’s leader demands. “I’ll return your phone.”

“You don’t want to piss them off.”

“Is that a threat?”

Rhodes mutters. “No. It’s fact.”

“Put the phone on speaker.”

I can hear a ringing sound coming from the speaker, which grows louder as I assume Rhodes turns up the volume.

“This damn well better be important, lil’ brother!” The person on the other end of the phone appears to be someone you don’t want to mess with.

“It’s literally a matter of life and death,” Rhodes responds.

Silence.

“Someone wants to set up a meeting with you and Jessop.”

“You have a gun to your head, boy?”

“I’m not a fuckin’ boy!” Rhodes snaps. “And, Carlisle, yes. To be precise, five guns.”

The man sounds anything but amused as he laughs loudly over the phone. It’s a lethal laugh that makes me glad I’m not on the receiving end of it. “You touch a fuckin’ hair on my brother’s head, and your family will be findin’ pieces of you up and down the fuckin’ Mississippi. Am I makin’ myself clear to y’all?”

“He’s talkin’ to you.” Rhodes passes the phone to the leader.

“I understand. He’ll be unharmed.” With a smirk on his face, the bastard waves his gun in front of Rhodes’ face.

I’m hoping Rhodes punches the guy.

“You want to meet. I need a fuckin’ name.” Carlisle’s patience runs out—not that he had any to begin with.

“Roger Stillman.”

“Why would you want to meet, Stillman?”

“We’ll talk about it then.”

Carlisle snarls. “Tell me right now, or you won’t hear from me again.”

“We have a shipment that we need help with.”

A few seconds of silence.

“Tell the lil’ girl hidin’ behind the oil drum to join my brother.”

Oh God! How the hell does Carlisle know where I am?

All eyes are on me as I raise my hands in the air and slowly reveal myself. I swallow the lump of fear in my throat and force my trembling legs to move me beside Rhodes. I lower my arms and force my gaze to meet Rhodes. He glares, his eyes wide with concern. “She’s not a part of this.” He wraps his arm around my waist and pulls me behind him.

“Wait a minute.” Stillman and his men begin to look around. “How the fuck did Carlisle know you were hiding out there?”

I peer around Rhodes and lock my gaze on Leah. “You flat-out lied to me.”

“I’m truly sorry, Juniper.”

I gasp as rustling reaches my ears. My heartbeat quickens as I notice the armed men closing in on us. Fear grips me, and I move closer to Rhodes, seeking his protection. He wraps his arm around my waist, and I don't move. He presses his face against mine. "We're getting ready to leave. Just walk with me, please."

I nod.

I don't cry until we are in his truck and he's pulling out of the back of the warehouse. I feel a mixture of relief and overwhelming emotions as tears stream down my face. The gravity of the situation sinks in, and I realize how close we were to death.

He calls Lake via Bluetooth. I cry even harder when I hear his voice, which causes him to panic even more. He gives Rhodes the apartment address.

"Who were those men at the end?"

Rhodes strokes pats my hand. "It's best if you don't know."

"Those men had to have seen where I was hiding." I ponder what to say next before blurting out, "They work for your brother."

Rhodes lets out a sigh. "They owed him and Jessop a favor. Leave it at that."

"They're not going to kill them, are they? Leah's with them."

He gives me a sympathetic look. "Leah made her decision, Juniper. But they will not kill them."

I don't know whether to believe him or not. My heart aches for Leah.

I'm half-asleep by the time Rhodes pulls up outside the apartment building. But my tears flow once more as Lake opens the door and pulls me into his arms.

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

LAKE

“LEAH SAYS SHE DOESN’T REMEMBER MUCH ABOUT LAST night,” Juniper says, holding a cup of coffee. “What I do know is that she was a willing participant in the activities with David and the others.” She joins me on the sofa after setting her phone and cup on the side table.

I kiss the top of her head while wrapping my arms around her. “I’m just relieved that Rhodes had backup waiting.” I take a breather. “I’m surprised it wasn’t the cops.”

“I’ve been considering it. His brothers are obviously involved into something illegal.” Juniper sighs. “I honestly don’t care because it’s over.”

Juniper leaps into my arms as the front door bursts open. I turn around to see Nik striding toward us, a huge grin on his face. “Please tell me you have a spare bedroom?”

My scowl deepens, and I give him the middle finger.

He laughs, throwing himself onto the sofa across from us and wriggling his brows. “So, Juniper, I believe you had quite a lot of excitement last night.”

Nik laughs as a blush spreads across her cheekbones. “I was referring to the unexpected apartment surprise.” He laughs

once more. “I’m curious as to what you thought I meant?” His gaze shifts to me.

“The apartment is amazing.” She sits up on the sofa and clasps my hand in hers. “I can’t believe Lake purchased it.”

Nik sighs and rolls his eyes. “He’d do anything for you.”

“Why do you look so pleased with yourself?” I inquire because Nik is ecstatic about something that has nothing to do with Juniper or me.

“I’m finally moving out.”

“Really?” Juniper exhales.

“It’s about time,” I mumble.

“Yes really, Juniper. I’m two floors up.”

“Fucker!” I curse and laugh at the same time. I should have known.

“It’s only to be expected as you two are joined at the hip,” Juniper says.

Nik swallows and clears his throat. “So, I’m still curious as to what kind of excitement you thought I meant.” He wiggles his brows in anticipation of juicy details. While Juniper tells him about her snooping, I give him the finger.

His mouth is hanging open by the time she’s finished. He wipes his brow with his hand and looks at her. “They could have hurt you,” he says quietly, his brow furrowed with concern.

Juniper hesitates before approaching my friend and sitting beside him, she pulls him into a hug. “I’m all right. Rhodes shielded me.”

Nik kisses her on the cheek and takes her hand in his. “You’re like a sister to me, you know that.” His voice becomes strained. “You and Lake are family. Please don’t do anything like that again.”

“I won’t.” She kisses him on the cheek before returning to me and my embrace. I can’t stop myself from wanting to touch her in some way. I’m aware that I’m reassuring myself that she’s mine.

“All right, back to the new digs,” Nik says, taking a look around. “Are you sure you’re not going to miss the house and its back garden?”

Sighing, I fiddle with Juniper’s long hair.

“We rarely used the garden,” Juniper responds. “We’ve only had one barbecue this year, and it was just the four of us.”

Leah was there, attempting to get into Nik’s pants. She had not been successful. He didn’t trust her even back then.

“And Juniper can sit on the balcony and gaze out at the ocean for as long as she wants. In comfort too.” I take a breather. “Some furniture is being delivered this morning. There’s also some stuff for the balcony.”

“I think,” Juniper begins, “I’d like to keep the house. At least for the time being. Perhaps we could rent it out for a few years and see how it goes.” She sighs. “We might want to move back there at some point.”

“I’ll do whatever you want. You know that.”

The buzzer sounds throughout the apartment. “Delivery,” I declare.



BEFORE TONIGHT'S GAME, ETHAN AND HIS WIFE, RILEY, ARE talking with our head coach, Myles, in his office. Except for Rhodes presence, it's nothing out of the ordinary. I'm concerned. The shambles he'd gotten himself into last night were the result of his association with me and Juniper, which is why I'd back him up with management if necessary.

I seem to be the only one on the team who has noticed the meeting, so I tell myself not to worry about it.

It's not long before we're on the ice, and the excitement in the arena sends my blood rushing through my veins. As I glide across the ice, feeling the cool air against my face, the adrenaline rush is electrifying. The enthusiastic applause from the audience fuels my determination, and I can't help but feel a surge of confidence in my abilities.

I glide past Juniper, who is sitting with a big smile on her face. She blows me a kiss, so I turn and return to the plexiglass that separates us. I take off my glove and motion with my finger for her to come in closer. I place my hand against the barrier, and she follows suit. "I love you," I say quietly, knowing she wouldn't hear me anyway. She confirms this and blows me another kiss.

As I move off to get into position for the game to begin, I'm grinning like a fool. As the arena falls silent, Dario takes his position facing the opposition. Everyone is waiting for the puck to be thrown. Tonight, we play the Detroit Warrior Cubs.

The tension in the air is palpable as the crowd waits for the game to begin. I feel the adrenaline coursing through my veins as I prepare to go all out on the ice.

Dario rushes with the puck and passes it to me. I outmaneuver my opponent, smoothly gliding the puck to Nik as we race for the net. We execute a flawless play. The crowd

erupts in cheers, leaving the opposing team scrambling to catch up. Madden takes control of the puck, his eyes are locked on the goal, ready to make a game-changing shot.

Madden shoots the puck with incredible speed and precision toward the net. The goalie dives to make the save, but it's too late; the puck sails past him and into the net. As we celebrate, the crowd goes wild, roaring with joy.

The game comes to a halt when Hodge on the opposing team starts something up with Rhodes. The tension on the ice rises as players from both teams rush to join the fight, resulting in a chaotic scene. Helmets and gloves are tossed. The referee steps in quickly to restore order and separate the players involved in the skirmish.

I head for Rhodes, unconcerned about what the others are doing. I avoid a punch to the face, but a right hook sends a player flying backwards as he loses his footing. Rhodes takes the brunt of the damage and falls. I push the jerk who is attacking him away. His teammate grabs him and pulls him away.

My focus is on Rhodes, and I drop to my knees when I realize he's out cold. His face is also fairly swollen. I'm wondering if what happened last night has anything to do with this tonight. When Rhodes still doesn't come around, I quickly assess him and call for medical help. I can't help but feel guilty as I wait for help to arrive for not being able to protect him better after he protected Juniper.

Shit! Juniper!

Doc and Myles land next to Rhodes, so I take a step back, looking for Juniper among the crowds. I skate over to her and become frustrated when I'm unable to touch her. I look around and point to a gap in the plexiglass. She moves along with me

until I have her in my arms. It's awkward with all of my gear on. "He'll be okay," I assure her.

"What happened? That guy sure went for him."

"Yeah, I saw." I kiss her on the lips quickly. "I really need to get back."

She gives a nod.

EPILOGUE

JUNIPER

RHODES IS SOUND ASLEEP IN THE HOSPITAL BED, AND I'M exhausted sprawled in an armchair beside him. He came around in the ER, but he was given antibiotics and Tylenol. They can't give him stronger pain relievers just yet because he has a concussion.

But I can't abandon him. He's alone. Lake didn't want to leave me, but I insisted on at least one of us sleeping in a bed. He'd prefer that I be the one with a bed. I'm just glad Lake understands why I'm doing this.

It's reassuring to know that he supports me in this. He could easily have been a jealous jerk about the whole thing.

Rhodes begins to stir, his hand nearest to me twitching and rising to his face. I move out of the chair quickly and grab his wrist before he touches his injured face. "I'm glad to see you're awake."

He shivers.

"Don't even try to say anything." I look into his eyes. "It'll probably hurt."

His gaze sweeps across my face, and I force a smile. "You scared me to death." I move my hand to take his in mine.

“I’m not leaving you.” I take a breath. “I want you to come stay with Lake and me when you’re released. He’s agreed.”

“Are you sure?” he asks, his lips bruised.

“That he doesn’t mind, or that I want you to move in with us?”

“Both.”

I lean in close to him. “We’ve already talked about it. Rhodes, we’re friends. I sucked at it with Leah, so I’m going to do better with you. Lake and Nik have already set up the guest room for you.” I grin.

“Well now, lil’ lady,” a man with a southern drawl says as he enters the room. “I’d be disappointed not to be sharing your room.”

Rhodes twitches, his expression hardening. “Leave her alone,” he hisses.

The man extends his hand across Rhodes bed. “Jessop Hallen.”

His brother!

I extend my hand to him and introduce myself as “Juniper Shaffer.” When he lets go of my hand, I turn and pull the chair closer to the bed so I can keep holding Rhodes hand. I’m not leaving him with this man, whether he’s a brother or not.

The man stands over six feet tall, has broad shoulders, and powerful arms. His face is tanned, and he has a trimmed beard that covers his cheeks and jaw. As I hold his gaze, his green eyes light up with amusement. He knows I’m watching him. Not because I’m interested in him, but because I have the impression, he’s not someone to mess with. His dark brown hair curls at his shoulders in a messy, just-out-of-bed style.

Tattoos protrude from the top of his T-shirt, and black ink covers his arms and hands.

He clears his throat and smiles broadly. “Now that you’ve had a good look, would you mind tellin’ me why my brother is in the hospital?”

I roll my eyes and refuse to be intimidated. “Your brother was beaten during a game last night.” I sigh and maintain Jessop’s enraged stare. It’s easier now that I know he’s not angry with me. “I’m not sure, but it could have been related to the previous evening at the wharf.”

Jessop rubs his chin with a tattooed hand. “Carlisle told me about that.” He fixes his gaze on Rhodes and maintains it. “You may no longer want anythin’ to do with us, but you’re still our brother. I’ll take care of it.” His cold stare falls on me. “Can I trust you to look after him?”

“He’s a friend, so he’ll be taken care of.”

Jessop nods and walks out of the room.

I expel a puff of air. “That was really intense.”

“Fuck!”



IT’S NICE TO SHARE A LOUNGE CHAIR ON THE BALCONY WITH Lake. The heat of the day is relieved by a refreshing ocean breeze. I’m tired, but I don’t want to miss Lake’s promised sunset.

Rhodes is being released tomorrow and has requested that I leave him alone to rest. Lake concurred. I suppose I did as well. I only left because Rhodes assured me that his brother

had left Boston. He was surprised he'd shown up at all. There's a story there, which I hope he'll tell me someday.

I play with Lake's hair, enjoying the sensation of his body pressing against mine. The scent of his cologne is subtle but pleasant and enticing. He is well aware of Rhodes brother's appearance at the hospital. He is also aware that I'm concerned about what Jessop meant when he said he would handle it. I recognized a threat when I heard one.

When a much stronger gust of wind hits us, the newspaper on the side table flutters. When I see a photograph of Lake and me, my eyes widen. I exhale and grab the paper. "What's going on?" I inquire, having already located the news article.

When I read the headline, the color leeches from my face:

MORE THAN JUST A BROTHER AND A SISTER!

"WHAT THE HELL?" I SIT UP STRAIGHT, MY GAZE NARROWING ON Lake. "You knew about this and didn't tell me?"

"I didn't read it until this morning. Nik delivered it. I was planning on telling you in the morning."

I skim the article before deciding to read it from beginning to end. "At the very least, they mention our family history." The newspaper is tossed inside. "Whatever they say, Lake, I don't care." I climb onto his lap and sit atop him. "Just don't keep the reports hidden from me. I'd prefer to know, okay?"

"I won't." I lean into him as he gently cups the side of my face. "You are stunning, Juniper. You do realize that this is the beginning of our life together?"

With a smirk on my face, I move forward and wiggle down on top of his erection. “I’m aware. However,” I say with a teasing glint in my eyes, “I think right now,” my hand reaches between us and shoves his shorts out of the way, “that we need to give our neighbors something to talk about.” I drag my skirt up and sit on Lake. I tremble as every inch of him fills me.

My dress pools around us, concealing flesh from those who choose to look. He clutches my hips as he tries to catch his breath. “You are naughty.”

“Only with you.” I sit tall and move on him.

His penis touches every sensitive spot on my body, and his girth stretches me wide. Lake rearranges himself and presses even deeper. I tighten my grip on his shoulders and grind down on him, his pubic hair tickling my nub.

“God,” he grunts. “I need your tits.” His hands cups me through my dress, his fingers rubbing and pressing my nipples, creating heat below.

I smile as I put my lips to his. The kiss is passionate and sensual, turning my entire body inside out.

I lean back, rest my hands on his thighs, and begin to move while holding his gaze. He thrusts in long, slow strokes until I can’t breathe anymore. His hands become uncoordinated as they try to reach my breasts. He eventually gets beneath my dress and has my flesh in his hands. My pussy is zapped by the pinch and roll of my hard nipples. As my orgasm slams into me so hard and fast, I let out a guttural cry. Lake suckles on a nipple and jerks his release, my own going on and on.

I collapse forward, my arms around his neck, panting heavily. Lake encircles me in his arms.

“I love you,” he says quietly.

I nibble on his earlobe, and he shudders beneath me. “I love you, too, Lake.”

THE END

Rhodes will be the second book in the Boston Bay Vikings
Minor League series.

Thank you for reading *Lake*, and thank you for your reviews!
It's really appreciated.

Subscribe with your email to be alerted about new releases,
sales, and events.

<http://lexibuchanan.net>

OTHER BOOKS BY AUTHOR

Written as Atlee Soren

The Chosen: a fifth realm novel

The Prisoner: a fifth realm novel (2024)

Written as Lexi Buchanan

Single Titles

Butterfly Girl

Come Back to Me

Persephone Unchained

Stryker

The Summer We Collide

This is my Story

Twenty-Eight Days (College Girl Killer, Book 1)

The Next Victim (College Girl Killer, Book 2) (2024)

Boston Bay Vikings

Book 1: Camden: on the ice

Book 2: Bennett: on the ice

Book 3: Ethan: on the ice

Book 4: Sutton: on the ice

Book 5: Carter: on the ice

Book 6: Bryson: on the ice

Book 7: Ivan: on the ice

Book 8: Theo: on the ice

Book 9: Noah: on the ice

Book 10: Knox: on the ice

Book 11: Jericho: on the ice

Book 12: Roman: on the ice

Boston Bay Vikings Minor League

Book 13: Lake: on the ice

Blossom Creek

Book 1: Christmas at Emelia's

Book 2: A Rake in Blossom Creek

Book 3: Heatwave in Blossom Creek

Book 4: Secret Love in Blossom Creek

Book 5: Mischief in Blossom Creek

Book 6: Runaway Bride in Blossom Creek

Book 7: Naughty & Nice in Blossom Creek

Bad Boy Rockers

Book 1: My Brother's Girl

Book 2: Past Sins

Book 3: My Best Friend's Sister

Book 4: Never Let Go

Book 5: Saving Jace

Book 6: Silent Night (Novella)

Kincaid Sisters

Book 1: Meant to be Mine

Book 2: You Were Always Mine

Book 3: Will You be Mine

McKenzie Brothers

Book 1: Playing with the Boss

Book 2: A McKenzie Wedding (Novella)

Book 3: Playing with Fire

Book 4: Playing with Desire

Book 5: Playing with Trouble

Book 6: Playing with their Hearts

Book 7: A McKenzie Christmas (Novella)

De La Fuente Family (McKenzie Spinoff)

Book 1: Love in Montana

Book 2: Love in Purgatory

Book 3: Love in Bloom

Book 4: Love in Country

Book 5: Love in Flame

Book 6: Love in Game

Book 7: Love in Education

McKenzie Cousins

(McKenzie Spinoff)

Book 1: Baby Makes Three

Book 2: A Business Decision

Book 3: Secret Kisses

Book 4: Kissing Cousins

Book 5: If Only

Book 6: Princess & the Puck

Book 7: A Bakers Delight

Book 8: A Cowboy for Christmas

Book 9: A Secret Affair

Book 10: One Christmas

Book 11: The Pregnant Professor

Book 12: It Started with a Kiss

Novella's

Educate Me

Lawful

One Dance

Pure

Holiday Season

Kissing Under the Mistletoe

A Soldier's Christmas

Jingle Bells

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Alison, who was born in England, writes romance and erotic romance as Lexi Buchanan. As Atlee Soren she writes young adult/coming of age, fantasy adventure/romance. She moved to Ireland with her husband, four children, a dog in 2010.

Follow on social media:

Website: <http://lexibuchanan.net>

Email: authorlexibuchanan@gmail.com

