

A CHRISTMAS NOVELLA

Merry Christmas
from Daddy to
Little One

LOLA KING

MERRY CHRISTMAS

FROM DADDY TO LITTLE ONE

LOLA KING



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Also by Lola King

*To all my good girls who asked Santa for a Daddy
Merry Christmas*

FOREWORD

This book is a dark romance for 18+ readers only.

While there are none of the usual *extreme* trigger warnings in this book, it is still a dark romance that depicts sexual fantasies that might be triggering to some readers.

Like in all my books, the characters who are involved romantically are toxic, and my MMC manipulative. I do not approve of this in real life, and in fact, actively tell you to keep this to fiction.

This book includes kinks such as:

Bongage, gagging, impact play, DDlg, pleasure Dom.

My books are *not* guides to BDSM. There is *no* real BDSM in this book.

This book is for people who want to dive into their fantasies safely, on the page. Please, be aware that the fantasy starts on the next page, and you are entering at your own risk—there will be no further warning and no safe word.

The only safe word/gesture at your disposal is to close the book.

Always play safely and consensually.

Lots of Love,
Lola

1

Sometimes even the smell of deliciously roasted turkey, the sparkling of the fairy lights hanging from the ceiling, and the crisp scent of a freshly cut Fraser fir isn't enough to put me in the Christmas spirit.

My father stands proudly at the head of our long dining table. It's such an awkward length. It can seat about twelve people, but Gerald Baker only has two children. The four of us sit on a different side, giving away how cold and distant our family has always been.

My parents are at each end, so far away from each other they couldn't even pass the salt. My brother Luke and I face each other on the longer sides, glancing at the other every now and then. We're close. Close like two siblings who have always faced an emotionally abusive father. One who made sure we knew we were next to nothing compared to him.

We're close like two siblings who know their family has heavy secrets no one should ever discover. Secrets Luke is unsure of, but I've come to learn. Secrets I could never tell him. I can barely look at myself in the mirror. How could I look my brother in the eyes if I admitted what our insane father has been doing for years? What I've been an accomplice to.

The spine-chilling sound of a knife being sharpened brings me back to reality. My gaze flicks to my dad holding the honing rod he's gliding the blade against in grand, dramatic gestures. His eyes are sharp, his stance wide.

His presence is always threatening. The physical similarity between him and his children is uncanny. We're all eerie copies of him. The almost-white blond hair, the pale blue eyes, the porcelain skin. My worst nightmare is that all the similarities between us aren't just physical. That one day, I might end

up just like him.

He is a charming man, beautiful even. That's what's so scary. Charming people are nothing but a gateway to hell.

Every year, on the twenty-fourth, we have a Christmas Eve dinner. That way we can dine as a family before my parents escape to their private beach villa for their real Christmas.

The knife slides against the perfectly crispy turkey skin, and my stomach twists. My father drags the sound out, making a spectacle of the manly way he's cutting the Christmas dish. The table is full of side dishes, pots of gravy or cranberry sauce, and all the mouth-watering other options one would love to have for Christmas dinner. But everything tastes bitter in my house. Everything tastes like dirty money and sin.

My mother cooked the turkey. She is a wonderful mom and housewife. Everything my father desires of her, she has achieved. I have perfect memories with her. Too perfect. Like a doll of a mother, with no other feelings than the ones she's meant to have. She never screamed at us, never told us off. She never said she was too tired to cook or play or help with our homework.

We have help in our house, but they're all under the careful watch of Celine Baker, and when it comes to cooking, she's the chef. And she made sure I had plenty of vegetarian sides since my dad categorically refused to let her cook a vegan turkey.

"Celine," my father approves in a low purr. "This all looks delicious."

She smiles brightly at him, like a golden retriever that's been waiting for nothing but praise.

My mother saddens me. She's brainwashed, unaware of her unhappiness and all the great things she could do if she wasn't in my father's clutches. But that, among so many other parts of my life, is not something I have control of. So, I smile, and I approve, and I lie. What a perfect family we are.

I'm not twenty-one yet, but that doesn't stop me from drinking expensive champagne and quality wine that cost an arm and a leg to the average American citizen.

It tastes acrid to me, but there's nothing like alcohol to help spend time with my family. Nothing like a good buzz to make everything around me bearable.

I don't listen when my father discusses the family business with Luke. My brother wasn't very good at school, and neither am I. We both retook

years, probably because our father spends most of his evenings reminding us of how incapable we are. How dumb we are and that we'd have been nothing if it wasn't for the empire he built.

Bakers' Café.

A fucking chain of coffeehouses. That's the pride of his life. Not his children or the marriage he built with his beautiful, sweet wife, but his forty thousand and thirty-two shops in seventy-nine countries and his eleven subsidiary companies.

Luke didn't care about high school because he knew that as the eldest and the only son, he would go to work for Bakers' Café right after graduation. And that's what he does all year long at the Los Angeles offices. He's training in ruthless business so he can become CEO and my dad can stay a simple, powerful board member rather than being constantly hands on.

"Ninety-two percent?" I hear my father's stern voice snap. "We agreed to ninety-four. What the hell is that? I went on vacation for three weeks and that's the news you have to announce?"

"Two of the farms didn't meet the environmental criteria. We're working on it."

"Working on it? How are you working on it? It's Christmas Eve. We aimed for ninety-four percent ethically sourced coffee by the end of the year. It's the end of the year, Lucas."

I eye my brother, his face impassive although he knows he's about to have the worst Christmas Eve dinner of his life. We all are. If my father isn't happy, no one else is allowed to be.

Luke turns to our mom. "Do you understand now? Why I only came for one night."

"Oh, Lucas, please stay tomorrow." My mother pouts pitifully. "Gerald, will you please leave business at the office at least for Christmas."

"Stay out of it." His clipped voice makes me tighten my grip on my glass of champagne as he points the carving knife at my mom.

He attacks the turkey without mercy. Like the psychopath he is, I bet he imagines cutting up Luke's heart.

"I am not putting you in charge of a forty-eight-billion-dollar company for you to destroy my life's greatest work. My father grinded coffee beans for a living, Lucas. Your father made an empire out of it. What are *you* going to do with your life?"

Luke runs a hand through his pale hair, making a mess out of already

untamable strands.

Our maid serves everyone but me the perfectly sliced turkey and I slowly help myself to all the sides as my dad sits back down.

“I’m telling you I will get it fixed before the end of the year,” Luke grits. He murmurs a thank you to Samantha and she nods her head.

“Who was the OfEC agent on our case?”

The Organization for Ethical Coffee is familiar to me. We had agents over for dinner many times in the past. Otherwise, how would my dad bribe them into making us an ethically sourced coffee company?

“Matters,” Luke explains. “I’m seeing him on the twenty-sixth. Don’t worry, I know the process. You wanted ninety-one percent last year, didn’t you? I got it. You’ll get your fucking ninety-four percent ethically sourced.”

Dad takes a bite of turkey, chewing violently as he thinks. “His wife needs knee surgery. Did you know?”

Luke nods silently. His eyes dart to me. He can probably feel my accusing stare. My brother is a good person, and I hate my dad for dragging him down the slippery slope of bribery, threats, and everything else that makes a man a billionaire.

We live in Stoneview, a town in America that has the most concentration of billionaires per square meter. Every single one of them is a criminal. No one becomes that rich by keeping on the straight road. It’s impossible.

My brother’s mouth twists in a silent sorry to me, caught too quickly by my dad.

“We *are* ethical and environmentally friendly, Lucas,” he insists. When you tell a lie so often to keep everyone on your side, you probably start to believe it yourself. “OfEC simply has standards that we need a little help meeting. It’s not uncommon in our field of work.”

I can’t help the snort that escapes me as I chew on hot potatoes.

Oh no.

My father’s hard eyes land on me. “Something to add maybe?”

I swallow slowly, take a sip of wine—since I finished the champagne—to give me courage, and stare back. “Do you know what kind of Christmas tree is standing behind you?”

Cocking an eyebrow at me, he doesn’t bother even turning around, so I keep going. “It’s a Fraser fir. They’re an endangered species. That’s three stages away from extinction in case you didn’t know. Please, don’t bore us with your *ethical and environmentally friendly company* at Christmas Eve

dinner when you know your entire organization is a threat to our planet. Your coffee houses waste more plastic with their takeaway cups in an hour than the rest of America combined.”

From across the table, my brother kicks my shin, silently telling me to drop it. He doesn't care about staying quiet for an entire evening because he never has to deal with dad anymore. I see him all the time.

I might have just started my second year of college, but Silver Falls University is a forty-minute drive from Stoneview at best if there's a lot of traffic. I'm too close to my parents to truly feel independent, and that's how it works for most Stoneview families.

We go from Stoneview Prep to SFU because that keeps us in elite education, and that way we don't stray too far from our families and their expectations.

I see my dad at least one weekend a month. I don't have any patience for his bullshit like Luke does.

“The actions I take in my personal life don't reflect on the company,” my dad defends calmly.

“No?” I smile sweetly, and my mother tries to talk, but dad lifts a hand, keeping her silent. “It must be the other way around, then. The awful man you are at your company bleeds into your personal life.”

I take another sip of wine while we enter a staring contest. I've seen the worst my father can do. Nothing in this life can surprise me anymore. He truly is a monster, and I will never forgive him for the horrors he makes me take part of. We all have blood on our hands in this family. He makes sure of that so no one can ever escape. We're all guilty in our own way, so we all shut up.

“Ella.” His business tone tells me something I don't like is coming. “I'm glad you spoke up to defend your opinion.” I put my glass back on the table so he can't see it shaking and bring my hands to my lap. “It brings me to my next order of business for the night.”

“Gerald,” my mother complains. “You promised you wouldn't bring this up at dinner.”

“Bring what up?” The words slip past my numb lips. I lick the wine off them, cold sweat pearling at my lower back.

My father's cold smile tells me he doesn't care what he promised my mom. “You're changing your major.”

“What?” I gasp.

“Gerald,” she pleads. “Please, not now.”

“What do you mean I’m changing my major? You can’t just—”

“Believe me, I can.”

Dance is everything to me. Ballet and contemporary are what allow me to breathe and survive, but any sport that includes the least bit of choreography works for me.

“Dad, you can’t just take me out of the SFU Dance Division. I’ve been taking multiple basic minors like you asked. My schedule is overloaded. This is what I’m good at.”

“If you were that good, I’m sure Juilliard would have loved to have you. The Joly’s daughter got in. I don’t remember you ever receiving an acceptance letter.”

His words take the breath out of me. Emily Joly is from Stoneview too, she was a few years above me at school, and my dad would never stop comparing us. She was better than me, probably still is, and since my father is against me pursuing a career in dance, he would make sure to remind me how poor I was at it compared to her.

But I never gave up. No matter what he put in my way, I always found a way to keep dancing. And now he’s trying to take that away from me.

“I was on the waitlist,” I rasp. “You’re the one who made me give up my place to accept my spot at SFU.”

“If you wanted Juilliard so bad, you wouldn’t have given up on the waitlist. You’re going to major in political sciences.”

“I don’t understand.” My wide eyes go from my mom to Luke, and back to my dad. “Why are you doing this?”

“Because it’s the best major to prepare you for taking the LSAT.”

There’s a pause during which the grandfather clock in our wide entrance hall can be heard. That and my frantic breathing.

Somehow my hands have ended up on either side of my plate, and my father notices when they curl into tight fists.

“I don’t want to go to law school,” I whisper.

“For someone so opinionated and who always jumps to the occasion to debate with me, I’m surprised by your answer. Bakers’ Café legal team is extremely welcoming, Ella. Once you graduate law school, there will be a place for you there.”

This is my worst nightmare unfolding before my eyes.

“You’re punishing me for standing up to you. You can’t do that. I don’t

want to be a lawyer, and even less to work in your company. That's not fair."

"Look at your smart deductions. You really will be a great attorney."

"Dad, please."

"I'm trying to save your future. If you keep trying for a career in dance, you will end up crawling back to me because of your failures and dire need for money. You will end up working for my company then. Except I won't be so kind. You can work with the cleaners, like the other people who made terrible life decisions."

"The way you talk about people who are less fortunate than you is disgusting," I hiss.

"Your desire to come to their defense really tells me I've made the right choice for your studies."

My eyes narrow on him as he cuts a piece of turkey, stabs his fork into a roasted potato, and drags the mix to the cranberry sauce on his plate. He smiles at me before taking a mouthful of his fork.

"I'm not leaving the dance division." My stern voice doesn't bother him. He chews slowly, swallows, and takes a sip of his red wine.

"Ella, darling," he chuckles. "It's already done. I spoke to the dean. It'll take effect when you go back after Christmas break."

A cold hand wraps its fingers around my stomach, squeezing until I can't breathe from the pain.

I hate when I lose my strength around him. My watery eyes go to Luke. "Do something."

He pinches his lips before he answers me guiltily. "You can still dance. It just won't be your major."

He's taking our dad's side. Which only means one thing.

"Did you know?" I rasp.

His apologetic stare and unbearable silence make everything worse.

"El's—"

"Fuck you," I hiss, standing up so quickly my heavy chair falls to the floor. "I hate you," I tell my dad. "You've officially done it. You've ruined my fucking life."

"Language," my mother gasps.

I down my wine, slamming the glass on the table so hard I'm surprised it doesn't break.

"Ella, sweetheart," she calls as I exit the room.

"Leave her," is the last thing I hear from my dad. I can imagine him

waving a lazy hand in the air to show this is just some little girl's tantrum and not my life-long dream he just crushed.

I've been lying on my bed for God knows how long, still staring at the ceiling when someone knocks on my door. Luke doesn't bother waiting for me to let him in. He closes the door gently behind him and comes to sit on the edge of my bed.

"El's," he murmurs when I turn onto my side, curling on myself as I offer him my back. He puts a hand on my shoulder. "He promised he would let me announce it to you. I was waiting after dinner to not ruin it."

"Well done. Dinner was lovely."

He sighs, pulling on my shoulder so I'm on my back again. "You'll dance again. It just doesn't have to be your job. People who stay in Stoneview don't become dancers, El's. They're CEOs, attorneys, politicians. That's our lives."

There's a reason we all work in the same industries, marry each other. We have incestuous relationships to keep power within our elite group.

I know how deeply this runs. I've seen it with my own eyes. The Stoneview elite isn't just a pretty circle of rich people.

We control the world.

I think of my naivety and the organizations I volunteer at that have aims of saving the world. Of helping the less fortunate. It helps my conscience, but it won't change anything.

The world is controlled by the people I see every week. Oil, mines, dirty politicians, underground organizations. Those are the ones in power.

And above them all? Stoneview Community Foundation. A pretty organization behind which hides what only a selected few know as the Silent Circle, its members known as the *Shadows*. And that's where my dad wants

Luke and I to stay.

I feel sick only thinking about it. Knowing the things I've participated in when it comes to this secret society.

"Then maybe I shouldn't stay in Stoneview," I mutter more to myself than to Luke. Some sort of revelation that this might be the only solution I have.

"You still have cheer. How's that going?"

SFU has a strong sports community, and the cheer team competes in many U.S. cities.

"I'm the best. Of course."

He flashes me a gorgeous smile. Perfectly straight teeth that my dad paid for when he was a teen.

"I'm so fucking mad at you," I huff, even though there's no hate in my voice. I don't blame my brother. He has no real influence on the decisions my father makes.

"I'm sorry."

I look at him, giving him the tiniest hint of a smile. "Life must be so good in L.A. Surrounded by your model girlfriends and far away from dad."

"You'll join me if you go to law school. We have a legal team in L.A. and one in N.Y.C. If you want to be away from Dad, come to my side of the country."

"I don't think my skin would like the sun all year long."

He chuckles, then looks at his phone. "I'm going to meet the guys for some drinks. Probably at Chris's. Wanna join?"

That should be an easy decision. Chris Murray is studying at Yale, but he's likely back with his parents for the holiday season. He's not far. Our closest neighbor.

A deflated sigh leaves me. How I wish it would be as simple as it was in high school. Luke and his friends were older, but they'd always let me hang out with them. They were the kings of Stoneview Prep, and I felt invincible by their sides.

"I'm going to get some sleep," I tell him.

"It's barely ten. Come on." He shakes me. "It'll help you deal with the news."

I offer him a pinched smile and shake my head. Sliding out of bed, I walk to my desk and sit down, picking up a pen. "I still have a few holiday cards to fill in. Dad wants me to distribute them to his closest friends." We eye each

other for a second, knowing the *closest friends* are members of the Silent Circle.

Luke walks over to me, putting a reassuring hand on my shoulder. “Trust me, El’s, I know this is the best decision for you.”

“You don’t,” I push through gritted teeth.

“I’ve been in this fucked-up world for longer than you have, and I’ve managed to survive dad and the Circle. Being an attorney means you can be away from here. It’s better for you to work for him than end up being one of the wives. Take the opportunity at having a tiny slice of independence. It’s that or be like mom. I know that’s not what you want. You’d shrivel down and die inside if you were in her place. It’s a way to give you freedom.”

“Dad isn’t doing it for me.”

“No. It was my idea.”

“*What?*” I choke on the news.

“You are not the kind of woman who could be a Shadow’s wife. You know that as much as I do. Working for dad will protect you from that. If you have a different use than being a housewife, you’ll be safe from an arranged marriage. That’s all I care about.”

“But...I could be a dancer. That’s—”

“No use to him.”

“He just doesn’t believe I can do it.”

“You could do anything with the Circle’s influence, El’s. But are you willing to pay the debt you’ll owe?”

“I could do it on my own!” I snap.

The look of sadness kills me.

“You don’t believe in me either, do you?”

He runs a hand through his hair, pinching his lips. “I can’t take that risk. You’re my little sister. The last thing I want is for you to end up in the clutches of a Shadow, stuck in a loveless marriage with a sicko who’s never been told no in his entire life. Like Mom. I’m doing this for you.”

My eyes drop to the Christmas cards in front of me. Every year, I have to write them and go hand them out myself to every Shadow in town. It takes me forever, and I have to do a little every day. Those are the last few I’m going to deliver tomorrow.

They’re black with gold dust, stars sparkling, and gold writing saying *Merry Christmas from...to...* The background is as dark as the Shadow’s souls.

Inside, there's a cryptic message my dad had me write.

*Merry Christmas to you
Relish a new order
A new year awaits if you wish to stay.*

I know it has something to do with confirming the member of the order is welcome to be part of the Silent Circle for another year. Sometimes, people don't get to stay. If they lost value or if they don't bring anything to the Circle anymore, they're kicked out. Because my father is part of the board, he's the one who gets to send the renewal of their membership, as I like to call it. But I'm confused as to why he is talking about a new order.

I sigh. I can't even blame my brother for what he's done. What if I did end up useless but for becoming a housewife. I don't want to marry a Shadow from the Silent Circle. I want independence.

"Law sucks," I huff.

"Yeah," he chuckles. "Luckily two of my best friends are starting law school. And one of them is a genius. So, you'll have all the help you need." His pale eyes darken in the low light. "Just never *ever* ask dad to use his contacts to help you pass, Ella. The Shadows don't give anything for free, and their prices are heavy."

I gulp, nodding, then I gather my courage. "Are you—"

He cuts me off before I can formulate the question. "You have to marry to be a full member. Show you have everything in place to give an heir and continue the legacy."

"Right..." I smile at him. "And God knows you can't keep a relationship going for more than a few weeks." I try to lighten the mood.

Luke and I rarely talk about the Silent Circle, and I don't want it to ever get between us.

"Yeah," he chuckles. "Or maybe I'm doing it on purpose. No wife, no way dad can ask me to level up in ranks." He shrugs. "I'm fine being a nobody in that world."

He messes my hair and grabs the pen in my hand. "Now, come on, let's go have a few drinks with my friends. Chris will be so happy to see you."

But I shake my head. "This conversation took everything out of me." I

stand up and go back to my bed, hoping he doesn't notice I keep finding excuses.

Because I can't tell him the real reason I don't hang out with him and his friends anymore.

That Chris and I dated behind his back for months while he was a senior and I a freshman.

That he broke my heart because he didn't want to keep the secret from Luke anymore but didn't want to tell the truth either. That his friendship with my brother meant more than the supposed love he had for me.

That when I see Chris now and hear him talk about Yale, his girlfriend, and his new life without me...it feels like he personally digs his hand inside my chest, fists my heart and rips it out of my body.

No, I can't tell any of that to Luke. I'm not sure what his exact reaction would be, simply that nothing good would come out of it.

I wave him goodbye from my bed, hating him a little for reminding me of my ex even if he has no idea.

Chris and I were never meant to be a thing. The summer before my freshman year, I remember grabbing a coffee together while we were waiting for Luke to get a suit fitted. He'd been respectful, sweet, made polite conversation. He didn't even mention once that I was starting high school a year late. The typical Chris we all knew.

Then I joined the same high school as him.

Stoneview Prep has a gym that students can use whenever, and we bumped into each other there one morning. Turns out it was a habit of his to go before school started every day, and it was in my plans to do the same.

After a week or so of exercising separately, he started helping me with weights.

That's how this whole stupid thing started.

The heat of his skin at my back when he'd help me lift. The whisper of his breath against my neck when he leaned down to encourage me.

Chris is known to be the calmest and nicest of their group of crazy bastards. I love my brother, but he's been a playboy for as long as I can remember, and the other two in their friendship group were the worst at getting in trouble. They like to think of Chris as the one who lays down the law. The one they can come to for advice. The protector.

He was far from a virgin angel, but everyone in our school knew Chris as *the nice one*.

Easy to say when the three others were the literal reincarnation of sins.

What people forget about Chris Murray, is that no one can get between him and his goal. And the moment we started spending alone time together, I was his goal.

The moment he decided he wanted me, there was nothing I could do to stop it.

He wasn't forceful about it. He was unapologetically smart. Softly controlling. He was flirting in a way that seemed so natural, I didn't realize until it was too late. All I knew is that anytime he was close, I felt different. And anytime he showed he cared for me, I felt special.

I'll drive you tomorrow. There's no point using two cars when we're neighbors and come here at the same time.

He was picking up his towel and water bottle when he said that, making his way to the men's locker room before I could even think of a response. He didn't ask anyway. It wasn't a suggestion. He simply told me his plan.

Had I not been blinded by his shy smile and caramel hair sticking to his sweaty forehead, I might have realized that if he drove me to school...he'd have to drive me back too.

I didn't fight it. I just followed whatever it meant. The next morning, he picked me up from my house and told me to wait by his car after school. I did. My brother didn't even notice me, too taken by whoever his current girl was to see me when he walked to his own car. I stood there until most people had gone home and Chris came down the marble stairs of our elite school and into the parking lot.

He walked out alone that day rather than with his friends, and the satisfied glint in his eyes should have warned me that he liked being listened to. He liked when I did what I was told.

Knowing him the way I do now, I can bet he was biting his tongue that day. Forcing himself to swallow back the *good girl* he wanted to give me as a reward.

On the first evening he dropped me home, he simply smiled and told me to say hi to Luke for him. The next morning, he asked if I did, and I told the truth.

I didn't.

His knowing smile should have told me that it was a test. That he wanted to see if I was telling my older brother, his best friend, that we were spending time together.

The second evening, he got out of the car with me, using his jacket to shield me from the rain as I walked up my driveway.

On the third night, he squeezed my thigh with his big hand when he said bye, and when I turned to look at him, he put a hand on the side of my face.

Your eyes are truly mesmerizing, Ella.

His thumb caressed my cheek softly, and I remember parting my lips, hoping for something else. I didn't know what, just something...*more*.

He nodded at me, approval bright in his honey eyes, the dimple on his left cheek showing when he smiled.

He's always had that boy next door look. Too cute for the darkness he hides so well. Too handsome for the things he truly likes to do. The only element of his physique that reflects his soul is how tall and imposing he is. Larger than life, capable of protecting me from anything.

Except himself.

Every single evening that week he dropped me home except for Friday night. Because he knew his friends would be waiting for him at his house. The four of them always partied on the weekend. But that one was different. It was his eighteenth birthday.

And it turned out that I had been invited.

I didn't see him the whole night. Everyone wanted a piece of Chris. Birthday parties that included one of the kings of our school were a big deal. By the end of the evening, I'd lost all hope to even get a minute of his attention. And I hated it. I didn't know how it happened, but somehow, he'd gotten me hooked up on his brand of caring. On his firm gentleness. On his low, soft voice. I was suddenly aware that I was part of all the other girls that night who were craving Chris Murray, the *good guy* of their group.

And it was embarrassing.

Even more so that I stayed until the very end in the hope to see him, but he had gone to the basement with his closest friends. With my brother.

My friends were already waiting for me to leave, feeling sorry for me while reminding me they'd warned me not to get involved with anyone from that group. I'd had enough drinks that I needed the bathroom before leaving.

That's when he found me.

He followed me when I went all the way to an upstairs bathroom. I was a little too drunk to notice him, and it startled me when he slipped in with me, closing the door and blocking the way out with his gigantic body.

I was at loss for words, like most of the time around him. I tended to lose

myself around Chris. He would lead the conversation, so eager to know who I really was, and I answered anything he asked. Every single morning at the gym, he would get to know me better. Nothing superficial. No, he wanted to know who I was inside.

How do you feel about Luke leaving next year?

How has it been starting high school a year late?

Why were you so eager to get on the cheer team?

What do you want to do with your future?

But at that party, the questions to know who the girl Ella Baker was disappeared. He wanted to discover the woman.

I am not a quiet girl. I wasn't back then either. Like my father always likes to say, I'm opinionated. I defend the people I love and the people who can't defend themselves fiercely. I don't keep my mouth shut. I'm not rude, but I'm not shy, not problematic but not compliant.

It was different with Chris.

His energy takes your breath away. Forget about putting defenses up, he'll tear them down. Carefully, with a beautiful smile on his face.

I struggled to take a breath when he slipped his hand behind him and locked the door, keeping his eyes on me.

You weren't going to leave without wishing me a happy birthday, were you?

The beat of my heart was uncontrollable. Every *thump* reverberated through my body, ringing in my ears, warming my blood.

His caramel hair was curling just at the top of his ears, a few strands falling on his forehead. He'd drank that night, which was quite unlike him. His whiskey eyes were shining with mischief, but there was something else. Longing. Regret.

I thought you should know Jake tried to get me to partake in a threesome tonight.

My heart dropped. Ice crawling up my veins. Everyone at school knew of Jake and Chris's *sexcapades*. Jake was the worst of the four of them. Even Luke was an angel next to him. If anyone could drag Chris to hell with him, it was Jake White. And while Chris wasn't ashamed of enjoying sex with beautiful girls, he wasn't doing anything wrong. Jake was constantly cheating on his girlfriend.

I had never felt more stupid than I did at that moment in my life.

I think I should also tell you he almost succeeded. To be completely

honest with you, I'm drunk. I don't often let him make me do something I'm not really into, but I didn't really have the strength to fight it. And I put my hands on her.

Now, *that* was the time I never felt more stupid.

Oh, was the only thing that really came out of me. *Okay*. And that.

I prayed the disappointment wasn't obvious on my face, but when I saw the reflection of it in his eyes, I knew there was no point fighting it.

I think it was probably the most stupid thing I've ever done. He said it so simply. Because it was the truth. *I stopped it. I left them behind.*

It took all my strength to ask, *Why?*

Because I only make mistakes when I think they're worth it, Ella.

He was wearing blue jeans and a simple white shirt. Always elegant. Always easy on the eye.

And his voice. It was so deep, so confident.

Like what? I asked.

My entire being wanted to be that mistake, but I didn't dare believe he had chosen me. That if Chris Murray was going to break rules, it would be with me. And that it would be *worth it*.

He bit his lower lip, but it still didn't stop the smile spreading on his face. He had, and still has, a slightly chipped front tooth. A stupid fight, he had explained to me. Getting Jake out of trouble as always.

When he took a step toward me, I was frozen on the spot, a wide bathroom counter behind me.

I'm going to kiss you, he warned me. It was the first time I heard something ominous in his voice. *And I would suggest stopping me now if you don't want me to, because once I start, there's no going back.*

With some kind of magic, he managed to make me forget all about that girl who he almost partook in a threesome with. All that mattered in that moment was that he chose me over her. I didn't even think of my brother back then, only of my heart. I didn't think of the risks I was taking by letting Christopher Murray, one of the kings of Stoneview Prep, near me. As I said, he was no virgin angel. Despite his discretion and respect for the girls he slept with, the rumor mill never spared him, and I knew he wasn't celibate. Far from it.

He was close to me when I asked, *no going back? For how long? There's no future in what you're trying to start.*

He put his palms on the counter, on either side of me, caging me in.

You're mine for however long I decide, Ella. When I want something, nothing can get in my way. Not your brother. Not the age difference. Not even you. He smiled, almost politely, giving me time to register his words. *So, do you want to give in now or another time?*

He waited. It took me a minute to understand he actually wanted an answer. So, with my neck strained from looking up at him, my eyes wide from the shock, and my skin burning from the need to have him touch me, I whispered, *now*.

He voiced his approval for the first time.

That's a good girl.

And who knew those words would be my downfall?

I didn't understand I opened the gates of hell by allowing him to capture my mouth in a tender kiss that turned ravenous when I parted my lips. It was too early to know that man would consume my every thought and my entire soul. I let him grab my waist and sit me on the counter so he could kiss me more easily.

I trembled when he slid a large hand to the back of my neck, grabbing my hair and adjusting the angle of my head.

I moaned into his mouth when he did something as simple as snake his hand under my skirt and wrap it around my thigh.

To this day, I still can't say if it lasted hours or less than a second. It was long enough to change me forever, too short that I wanted so much more. He kissed my jaw afterward, my neck. I let him.

It wasn't my first kiss. It wasn't even the first time someone put their hands under my skirt.

But I did not have the experience he did. I was a virgin, and he knew that. So, when I rolled my hips to press my core against him, he stopped me with the hand on my thigh. He pulled my head back with the one in my hair, and he looked deep into my eyes.

I'm not going to take your virginity in my bathroom during a party. You should know you deserve better than that.

My eyes were heavy with lust, and I struggled to swallow, but I nodded.

He sucked the skin below my ear, licking it better when I hissed from the pain, and he talked in my ear again. *I'm very serious about loyalty. Your cunt belongs to me now, Ella. You're not going to let anyone else touch it, are you?*

Everything inside me melted. My brain not functioning was the least of

my problems when I could feel my panties getting soaked by the reaction I had to his words.

I tried to shake my head, but he tightened his grip. *Words*, he ordered low. Something feral I had never heard before was rumbling in his voice.

No. No, I won't.

You won't, he confirmed. *Those guys who run after you at school don't deserve you. I'm going to be the first man to know what it's like to have you come on his dick. And I can't fucking wait.*

He let me go and took a step back. He helped me off the counter, holding me gently by the waist until he was sure I was stable on my feet.

And you? I asked with the little reality that was left in me. *Are you going to be loyal to me?* It was a fair question knowing the shit that group usually got into.

I will never break the trust you put in me.

He tucked strands of hair behind my ears before flattening his hands on my cheeks and making me look up at him. I felt like I was on a plane, my ears buzzing, the pressure on my skull heavy.

Luke doesn't need to know anything. Not until I tell him, okay?

Okay, I repeated.

He smiled, happy with my numb agreement. I hate myself now knowing how dumb I let him make me. All I did was agree and follow. I let him take hold of my mind and make me believe he was bringing me to heaven when all he was doing was corrupting me.

Go home. I'll see you on Monday.

He dropped a kiss on the top of my head, opened the door for me like a real gentleman, and I walked back down to leave. My head was fuzzy, my steps uneven.

My friend asked me where I was, and I answered *bathroom* with numb lips. I could still taste him on my tongue, feel his powerful grip on my skin.

Chris took my virginity the week after. He drove me home after school, and I sneaked him into my room. I didn't think we were going to go all the way. But it's hard to resist someone as handsome as him when he's got his head between your legs and whispers, *I'm afraid I'll go insane if I don't make you mine, Ella.*

And like he had done with the kiss he said, *this is your only chance to stop me.*

I didn't.

And after that, I was well and truly fucked. Pun intended.

I should have known that the men in that friendship group are all messed up in the head. It doesn't matter how sweet Chris looks on the outside. It doesn't matter that his words are soft, and he acts like a gentleman when he orders me around. Those men are jealous, possessive. They're domineering in all the wrong ways. I was just too stupid to register the toxicity of our relationship.

We had to hide, but I was not allowed to be too close to other men. Or wear things he didn't want me to wear. The clothes weren't a jealous thing. We had a uniform at Stoneview Prep anyway. But on weekends, for secret dates, or for parties, he loved to tell me how to dress. Sometimes he'd come to my house before a party if no one else was there, just so we could spend time together. He'd lay clothes on the bed while I was in the shower. The first time was quite a shock.

What the hell?

I love that dress on you.

I remember mocking him. *We're not going to church. It's a Stoneview Prep party. I was going to wear my leather skirt. Don't you think I look sexy in it?*

I winked at him, gripping my towel and blowing him a kiss with my other hand. I thought we were joking around.

He kept a soft voice when he pointed at the bed. *You're going to the party wearing this dress, or you're not going.*

It's not that I didn't love the dress. It was a purple silk wrap-around dress, coming down just above my knee. It was sexy in a discreet and elegant way. It was what Chris Murray's girlfriend would wear. It was beautiful.

But it wasn't what I had chosen.

Which was the whole point for him. He wanted control.

And like the stupid girl I was. I gave it to him.

Okay. I shrugged like it was nothing. I put the dress on without fighting.

I made a big mistake.

But how was I supposed to know it was a terrible decision when in exchange for my agreement, he gripped my jaw gently, angled my head perfectly, leaned down, and murmured against my lips, *you are such a good girl, Ella.*

And he kissed me like he meant it, too.

From then on, everything I did was somehow directed by Chris.

And the little times I fought back...

I squirm under the covers, pressing my thighs together. Chris introduced me to a brand of eroticism I had never even thought of in my wildest dreams.

He wasn't ashamed of saying to my face that he was *training* me.

He wasn't the least bit worried that I was too young, too innocent, that he was ruining me for anyone else. If anything, his favorite thing was knowing I would never move on from him once he'd made me exactly the way *he* wanted.

And I know now that he succeeded. Because no one compares to him. Hell knows I've tried to find someone who could give me what he did.

No one can. It's his personal brand of torture that I need.

The first time I fought back was the day before the Stoneview Prep Halloween ball.

We were in the car on the way to the gym. My head was still heavy with sleep at six thirty in the morning.

Ella.

Mhm? My chin was resting on my hand, my elbow against the door as I watched the gated mansions on our way to Stoneview Prep.

Did you let Sylvan Morte invite you to the ball?

My heart dropped to my stomach. The calmness in his voice when he was mad was terrifying, but I stayed strong. He might have been angry at me for going to the ball with someone else, but I was fuming that we still had to keep our relationship a secret from my brother.

What was I meant to say? I can't go with you, can I? Unless you've finally grown a pair of balls and want to talk to Luke?

Ella, he said gravely. You've been so good. Do you really want to test the limits now? Push the boundaries to see how far I'll allow you to test me?

Maybe. I could have stomped my foot. It was a good thing we were in the car, and I couldn't act even more childish. *Unless you want to talk to Luke, of course. Then I can tell Sylvan to find a new date. But I'm not going to show up alone just because my boyfriend wants me to be his little secret.*

I'm going alone. His patience was wearing thin. I could feel it. I just wasn't sure what happened when it snapped.

I wanted to push back, and he knew it.

Do it. The whisper was the most threatening thing he'd ever said to me. His eyes were on the road as he turned into our school parking lot. *Test me. It's only normal in a new relationship to see how far you can push the other,*

isn't it? As long as you're willing to pay the consequences.

I'm going to the ball with Sylvan. It took all my strength to say that.

He parked his car, looked at me, and nodded.

That was it. *That's* what happened when good boy Chris Murray snapped? It was almost disappointing.

To this day, I still remember everything so clearly. My hand slides under my sheets without my control. I press it against my lower stomach, play with the band of my sleep shorts, and pull away again. There's an ache inside me. I need to press against it badly when I think of what happened that day.

The women's locker room was empty. It was often just me at that time of the day. I changed into gym shorts and a sports bra. I was tying my hair up when the door opened carefully.

I rolled my eyes at Chris. *Seriously? What are you doing here?*

He was wearing his large Stoneview Prep burgundy shorts and a dark blue training t-shirt with the school crest on it.

He sat down on a wooden bench by the lockers and manspread like the room belonged to him. *Come here*, he said calmly. He was poised, unlike in the car where I could feel the tension. He had taken the time to calm down before coming to me again.

So I walked to him, thinking he was going to apologize for our silly altercation.

He didn't.

That day, Chris showed me the limits I was testing. Proved there was no slack whatsoever on the leash he had wrapped around my neck.

That day, he introduced me to what happened when I wasn't a *good girl*.

Punishment.

He grabbed my wrist the second I was within reach, using the surprise to make me lose my balance and pull me flat on his lap. I landed with my stomach against his thighs, and the tips of my toes barely grazed the floor. He released my wrist, and I threw my arms in front of me trying to catch myself by pressing my palms on the ground. I could barely reach it on that side too.

What are you doing?! I shrieked. Have you gone insane?

The answer was yes. I knew that when he wrapped an arm around my waist and used his free hand to lower my shorts and panties.

Chris! Oh my God, stop.

I don't know if I truly didn't expect what came next, or if I was lying to myself, but when his palm connected with my left ass cheek, the gasp that

left me was nothing compared to the pain I felt.

It registered seconds later.

What the fuck. That hurt!

He did it again, harder this time.

You're hurting me! Stop!

And again.

I counted five alternative spanks before he finally spoke.

Are you ready to listen?

No! What the hell is wrong with you?

Another five and, believe me, I was ready to listen. I was ready to give him anything for it to stop.

Those are my limits, Sweets. The cute nickname he had for me took a whole new meaning in this position. *If you misbehave, you get punished. If you challenge me, you get punished. If you try to make me jealous,* he chuckled to himself, like this was all a joke to him, *baby, just don't. You're mine. Do you understand? Don't take my need for control as a joke. You'll regret it.*

He didn't wait for an answer. He rained slaps on my ass until I was openly sobbing on his lap.

Please, I begged. Chris...I can't.

Are you sorry?

Yes. I'm sorry.

But even he knew I had no idea what I was sorry for. The blood had rushed to my head, the pain had numbed my brain.

Now tell Daddy you're sorry for being a bad girl. Tell me you'll have no date for the ball.

My heart stopped. Had I heard him right?

The next spank brought me back to life.

I c-can't say that.

He massaged my burning cheeks, and that's when I realized the boner that was pressing against my stomach. Worst, when he pushed a finger between my pussy lips, the wetness brought an embarrassing red to my cheeks.

I gasped when he pressed a single digit against my soaking entrance.

I don't understand, I mumbled in shame.

That's okay, he soothed me. *I do. All you need is to put your trust in me.* Slowly, he pushed a finger inside me. *Now say, I'm sorry Daddy for being a*

bad girl.

Chris...

Just trust me. I would never make you do something you can't take.

Was that true? Did he really know if I could take it or not? There was only one way to find out.

I—I'm sorry... I gulped, I fought it, but the pleasure that came with giving in was too much to resist. *D-daddy.*

What for, Sweets?

For being a bad girl.

He hummed his approval, adding a second finger to the one pleasuring me. *And who are you going to the ball with?*

I squeezed my eyes shut, swallowing my moan when I answered, *no one.*

That's a good girl.

He didn't let me come. Because apparently that was part of the punishment too. He watched me squirm the whole time we were exercising. From the pain of my burning ass and the need for him to satiate me.

That day I not only discovered the *limits* like he called them. I also discovered I loved pushing them.

And oh, the reaction *Daddy* had when I showed up with Sylvan at the ball. I wish I'd taken a picture of it. At least I have a memory of the punishment that came that night.

I curse myself when I realize my hand got lost under my sleeping shorts again. I hate touching myself to the memories of him. I just can't help it.

After that first punishment, things went further. I came to learn being with a man that felt the need to protect and control came with perks I hadn't thought of. Chris *needed* to know I was happy and safe. That included taking care of me, taking me shopping, making sure I was fed, happy, comfortable around him. It followed us to the bedroom too, he wanted me satiated. He never had an orgasm before I did. Everything was catered to make me the center of his attention. As long as I gave him what he wanted, and as long as I was a good girl for him.

I did extensive research into Daddy kink at that point. Went through every website I could. I didn't find out why it turned him on so much to take care of me, or why it made me so wet when he would praise me, why I loved calling him *Daddy* or why he loved hearing it.

But I did find comfort in finding out it wasn't just us, and that it was more common than I thought.

I decided to ignore the link to my personal daddy issues and my relationship with my father. I simply didn't want to get into it.

We were both discovering our needs one sexual encounter at a time, and we had no shame in the things we wanted to try. He was more experienced—I wasn't the first girl he did this with—but we learned a lot together, and that's what made me love him the hardest.

The bastard made me fall in love with him. He built me exactly like he wanted, gave me the world, and all that was left was for us was to tell Luke we were in love. It wasn't going to be easy, but it was meant to be worth it.

3

Six months later Chris broke up with me.

That night he asked to see me, and I told him to come over. My parents were away as always. My dad worked from the N.Y.C. office a lot, and my mom was always with him. Luke was probably fucking his latest conquest. I was all alone.

He didn't bother taking his coat off. He did it in our foyer, the door barely closed behind him. I pushed to the tips of my toes to give him a kiss, wrapped my arms around his neck, and he turned his head to the side. He grabbed my forearms gently and pulled them away from him.

What's wrong? The panic in my voice was already clear.

We need to talk.

But there was no need to talk. It was short, told in a pragmatic way like Chris does when he separates his emotions from the situation.

Ella, I wish I'd been smarter and not let my feelings take over my brain, but this thing we've got going on...you were right. It can't last.

Don't. Every single day of my life I regret the reaction I had that night.

I should have been strong and pretended it didn't affect me. Maybe it's because I thought if I showed him my true feelings he wouldn't leave. If I told him how much he was hurting me he would stop. Maybe I really couldn't control my desperation.

You're saying this because of Luke, but I can talk to him. Or we can keep it a secret. I don't care. Please, just don't end this. I need you, Chris. I'm in love with you...please.

I tried to grab his hand, but he pulled it away, making sure not to give me

any hope.

Is it someone else? Are you doing the same thing they all do in your little group? Just fuck the girl and leave?

You know that's not it. I respect you too much to ever do that to you. My friendship with your brother means everything to me. I can't keep doing this to him. Going behind his back? He loves you, Ella. He loves you with everything he has. I've been...a horrible person. I've been taking advantage of you. I'm so sorry.

You're not taking advantage of me. I'm my own person, I know what I'm doing!

You're young. This is...wrong. I'm off to college in a few months. We don't want to hurt each other. This needs to end.

You're hurting me right now.

And you'll thank me later for it. I'm really not looking forward to seeing you find the true love of your life, Sweets. But I know it's not me, and the smartest, fairest thing to do is to let you go.

He didn't hold me when I cried. He didn't say he loved me back when I told him how my heart belonged to him and that he *was* the love of my life.

And he left when I begged him to stay.

Chris chose his friendship with Luke over his love for me. One was stronger than the other, and I didn't win.

The pain and helplessness of watching him graduate and leave Stoneview to move on with his life while I was forced to stay here and finish high school is probably the worst feeling I have ever felt. My heart broke in a way I don't think I will ever be able to fix.

It's been over for years and I know I'm still not over it. I haven't had another boyfriend, and all the sleeping around I've done never helped. Not that I'm going to stop anytime soon.

Sometimes, we see each other at Stoneview gatherings. All the families here are close, and I was bound to bump into him at some point, especially since his friendship with Luke never took a hit. As the sweet, perfect man everyone thinks he is, he's always polite with me, kind. He never mentions our past, always offers me a smile. I hate small talk with him, and I prefer running away from him than facing him.

But the worst are the calls. Because Chris Murray is just a man. A fucking stupid man who can't stand his ex might one day move on from him. So, every now and then, when he gets too drunk to control himself, he calls

me.

And he tells me all about his pain as if I don't have mine to deal with. He tells me that his biggest regret in life is letting me go. That he's a coward for not talking to Luke. Then he begs me with all he has to not find someone else. Because no one will love me the way he does.

Fucking. Bastard.

Those calls never stopped him from finding a girlfriend the first year he started at Harvard. A trust-fund baby who would fit so well with the Stoneview bitches. Someone who couldn't be more different from me. Mainly, someone who isn't his best friend's younger sister.

My heart jumps in my throat when my phone rings on my bedside table. My hands are shaking when I pick it up, my first thought going to Chris.

I chuckle to myself when I see my best friend's name on the screen.

"Hey, Peach."

"Parents have gone to bed, Santa is about to go around town...I think it's time for drinks, don't you?"

I smile into the phone. "What's with everyone wanting to have drinks on Christmas Eve? Places are closed. Go to bed and wait for your presents in the morning."

"Come on. I'm going to Wren's. Come with me."

"Hell no," I snort. "I'm not going to third wheel you and Wren. Plus, I'm already in bed."

"You're boring as hell, El's. And there's no third wheeling me and Wren. We're all friends."

"I don't want to choke on the sexual tension between you two." I yawn into the phone. "Thanks for the invite. Night, baby."

I hang up and stare at my phone. I could go on that kinky porn site I love. I could watch some of those videos that are the only things that have been satiating me for over four years.

Silently telling myself *fuck it*, I type in my favorite website. I love it for many reasons, including that it's a kinky porn site run by women.

I type DDlg in the search bar and scroll past the videos I've already watched a million times. I skip the ones that go too far into the role play for me. I don't want pigtails and pacifiers. I stop when I see the thumbnail of a girl tied to the bed on her back, a ball gag in her mouth, and with *Daddy's little slut* scribbled with a marker on her chest.

My free hand is already slipping in my shorts when I click play on *Bad*

girl gets punished by Daddy.

The title already made me wet. Or maybe it's the trip down memory lane thinking of Chris and me.

I press the pad of my index finger against my clit, delicately rubbing as I feel the first sparks lighting up my body.

The man on the screen grabs her breasts roughly, and I accelerate as she moans in pain and pleasure. He uses both hands to pinch her nipples and she screams *sorry, Daddy!*

I startle when Peach's name suddenly appears on my screen again. I press decline, but my frantic heart feels caught in the act, and the pleasure dies a sudden death.

I huff, pulling my hand away from myself and locking my phone before slamming it on my bedside table.

I hope Chris is miserable right now. And I hope the sex with his girlfriend, *Megan*, is as disappointing as my miserable attempt at masturbating.

I drag the covers over my face, hating the reality I'm living in when my phone vibrates again.

"Oh my God, Peach. *What?*" I snap at my friend.

"Merry Christmas, Sweets."

I can't breathe for a few seconds. My heart starts beating rapidly against my ribcage, pumping blood so harshly my ears are ringing.

"It's been a while." That's how all his drunken calls start. He tries to act normal, but I can hear the slight slur in his voice.

And I stay silent.

So he justifies himself.

"I just had a few drinks with Luke and the twins."

I knew that.

For him to call, it must have been way more than *a few*.

"Luke told me about your dad insisting on changing your major. I'm sorry to hear. I know dance is everything to you."

He must hear me struggling to take a breath because he chuckles to himself. *"Come on, say something. Just this once. No one will hold it against you."*

"Your girlfriend might."

I have never, ever, said anything in return. I listen to his drunken tirades, but I don't talk. And when I can't hear any more, I hang up on him.

I don't know what's with me tonight. Maybe it's because I'm having a miserable Christmas Eve, and I wish he was here to make it better. My life is being turned upside down, why don't I just keep fucking it up? Maybe I just...miss him.

"Ah, fuck," he whispers into the phone. *"I missed your voice so fucking much, Sweets."*

He pauses, and I hear him take a sip of something. *"You shouldn't have said anything."*

"What? Why?"

"Because now I want to see you."

"You can't see me."

"I can do whatever I want. You know that."

I huff into the phone, not knowing what to say to that. This is why I don't usually talk. There's no winning with him. "I don't want to see you, Chris."

He takes it in, staying silent for a few seconds.

"She's gone, Ella. I broke up with her."

I didn't even know it was possible for my heart to beat any faster. I'm near having a heart attack when he talks again. *"Luke is blacked-out drunk on my sofa. The twins have gone back to their respective fiancés."* A beat. *"And you and I are awake."*

"Not for long. I'm going back to bed—"

"I know you had a terrible Christmas Eve. Let me make it better." A desperate sigh leaves him. *"Please, Sweets. You know I need to make sure things are good for you."*

I put up my defenses, reminding myself there's a reason I'm miserable every single day. Him.

"I don't need you to make anything better. I've moved on, Chris. You should too."

I hang up on him like I always do. I thought I'd never have the strength to talk to him and still stay away.

Maybe I'm stronger than I thought. I haven't moved on, but it's good to know I'm capable of not running back to him the second he offers.

He broke up with her.

It doesn't matter. From what I know, he's been unhappy for four years. He and Megan met during their freshman year at Harvard. Chris just started law school at Yale, and she followed him there. Luke told me every single time Chris manages to get away from her for the holidays, he tries to break

up with her, but the second they get back to college she gets him back.

He's weak, and I'm not. I will stay away.

I notice a notification in my texts and open it. It's hard to ignore the disappointment that it's not Chris insisting on seeing me.

See, this is why you shouldn't have engaged in the conversation.

I eye the message of my regular SFU fuckbuddy.

Matias: You up?

“Does no one just sleep on Christmas Eve anymore?” I mumble to myself.

Matias is from Stoneview too, like most of us at Silver Falls University. He doesn't live too far from here. My thumb hovers over my screen, but I end up exiting the app and putting my phone back on my bedside table.

I never had typical Christmases. Traditionally they were. The roast turkey, the decorations, the lights. We even wear Christmas sweaters on the twenty-fifth while we silently open the expensive presents my mother carefully picked for us and paid for with my dad's dirty money. A car, diamonds, a freaking *apartment* in N.Y.C. Those are the kind of ridiculous things we get.

But the magic of Christmas, the love, the family time. We never get that.

My parents leave before lunch on the twenty-fifth every year. Off to their villa in Barbados. When Luke and I both lived here, we'd invite his friends over and watch Christmas movies in our media room. We'd spend the day eating and watching one movie after the other. When Luke graduated and moved to L.A., he started leaving on the twenty-fifth too. He didn't really think about it. He hates this house as much as I do, and he always has work to do in L.A. The pressure my father puts on him is no joke.

I'll be alone again by lunchtime tomorrow.

It's on that thought that I fall asleep.

I'm not entirely sure what wakes me up. There's no noise. The French doors leading to my balcony aren't open. But *something* feels odd, so I open my eyes. I twist under the covers, switching to lay on my other side, and bring the covers higher.

I close my eyes again, but that feeling is still there. I sit up, fluffing my pillow, and turn around, finally facing my room.

The frightened gasp that leaves me is loud, my hand automatically coming to my heart as I freeze on the spot.

It only takes a split second for the surprise to settle, and for my conscious brain to take over, telling me this is a shadow I know perfectly.

He's sitting on my desk chair, facing my bed, an ankle resting on his thigh, his hands linked on his stomach. I notice when he smiles because his white teeth flash in the dark.

"Chris!" I snap, sitting up in my bed. "What the *hell* do you think you're doing?"

His wide shoulders shake in the slightest when he laughs to himself. "I'm watching you sleep." A simple statement, as if saying, *you silly girl, isn't it obvious?*

"God, you're so drunk." I throw the covers off and stand up, rounding my bed to reach him. "Come on." I wrap my hand around his, ignoring the electricity coursing through my body. "Let's get you back home."

It's the worst mistake of my life to touch him. My heart is already begging me to never let him go. His warm skin against mine tells me he hasn't just come in from the cold. He must have been watching me for a

while.

But the biggest mistake was getting in his vicinity. The moment I try to pull him off the chair, he lets go of my hand, grabbing my waist instead.

He pulls me onto his lap without any struggle, and all sorts of resistance is useless. Chris must be over twice my weight. Our strengths don't compare. I push at his shoulders, but he easily sits me on his lap. I'm facing him, *straddling him*.

"Chris, stop this right now."

Ignoring my struggle, he slides a hand at the nape of my neck, his fingers tangling with the strands of my blonde hair. His hand at my waist turns into an arm encircling me.

And he pulls me against him. He forces my head to rest on his shoulder and buries his face in my hair.

"What—" His long inhale cuts me off.

"Fuck," he exhales, like an addict who has been clean for months and finally gives into his most dangerous addiction. "I missed you, Sweets."

I'm speechless for longer than I care to admit. Before I can stop myself, I'm relaxing in his strong hold, letting his muscles tighten around me. Before I can think straight, I inhale his cologne. Something so familiar. It's discreet, soft, reassuring, nothing in your face. Just like him.

My legs tighten around his body, keeping him close to me.

You are so weak, Ella Baker.

I don't know how long we hold each other before he speaks. "Say something."

I keep my head in the crook of his neck when I answer, "I hate you."

He chuckles against my hair. "Good. Better than nothing. I can work with hate."

I shake my head. "No." I look up, aware the only reason I can is because he lets me. "You don't understand. I *hate* you."

He licks his lips, looking at mine instead of my eyes. "I know. I deserve it."

"I've moved on."

He chuckles. "Now, Ella." His voice lowers. "Good girls don't lie."

I know he can feel my thighs tensing. I wonder if he can feel my core beating against his crotch.

His grip on my hair tightens, stopping me from moving, forbidding me from even looking away from him.

I gulp. “Don’t...”

“Don’t what? Do this?” He kisses my jaw softly, his body tensing beneath mine and making me aware that he’s battling with himself to stay gentle.

“Don’t do this?”

My eyes flutter closed when his mouth moves to my throat, his lips pressing against my pulse.

“Chris,” I gasp. “No.”

I attempt to pull away, but his forceful grip forces me to stay still.

“What’s wrong? Do you hate me, or do you hate the way your body reacts to mine? Hate that you can’t move on because there’s nothing like what we had?”

“Your words. Not mine,” I say through clenched teeth as I push at his shoulders. “If you’re miserable, that’s not my problem.”

His honey eyes spark to life. I can see it even in the dark. A flame licking the pure whiskey, setting the liquor on fire.

“That’s where you’re wrong, Sweets. You know me. When there’s a problem, I fix it. If my issue is that I’m miserable, I know exactly what the solution is.”

“Don’t even go there.”

I’m tiring myself with my failed attempts at pulling away from him. My scalp is starting to sting from trying to turn my head one way or another in his relentless grip.

“You’re the solution, Ella,” he says with a tipped smile.

With that, he releases me to grab my waist. He stands up, lifting me up with him, and only needs to take two steps before he can drop me back on the bed.

I push up on my elbows, but he presses a hand on my chest, pushing me back down.

Fighting him is exhausting. I’m using all my strength for something that doesn’t affect him in the slightest. It’s not like I’m some weak little thing. I hit the gym every day, I run, I dance, I cheer, but six-foot-four of pure muscle isn’t exactly fair, is it?

He lays on top of me, my wrists in his large hands as he presses them on either side of my head. “I know how you’re feeling about the future right now.”

He parts my legs with his knee, sliding it up until it presses against me. He’s wearing jeans, and I’m wearing my sleep shorts, and yet I feel like

we're already on fire. "Let me make you forget. Just for tonight."

Hesitation crawls up my chest. My body is thrumming, begging me to give in. His head drops, his mouth finding its way from my neck to my chest, until he wraps his lips around my hard nipple, wetting my shirt as he unleashes his tongue on me.

"Chris," I moan, my hips bucking. The feeling of his harsh jeans against my core tightens the pressure inside me.

This is bad. I'm meant to be stronger than that. I should be fighting with all my might right now, not melting under his touch.

His head is above mine again, his eyes staring at my lips. Aware of his hard gaze, and desperate for him, I lick my lips. It makes him smile.

"Stop thinking, Little one. Let Daddy make it all better."

That simple sentence melts any fight left in me.

I wish I was stronger, and I wish I was pushing him away right now. But I'm only human, and I'm fighting against someone who knows me by heart. Someone who knows what I crave and what makes me weak.

Chris built me. Every single erotic molecule in my body is a result of his own lust he imprinted on me when I was younger. I let him make me the way I am, and now I'm paying the consequences.

He owns my soul, feeds my lust, and the worst is...I want to let him.

"Shit." I can barely hold back a moan as his mouth trails down my stomach. He stops at my mound, looking up from his tempting position. He hooks his fingers on the waistband of my shorts. "Now is your moment to stop me, Sweets. You know there's no going back once I start."

My mouth parts, ready to tell him to leave. My brain tries everything to force the words out of my mouth. Instead, I lick my lips, trembling with need.

And I say nothing.

"That's my good girl." His smile is nothing like the Chris everyone knows. It's carnal, borderline perverse.

He is going to eat me alive.

He pulls down my shorts slowly, kissing my mound, then lower as his lips touch the small patch of hair I keep there, and then my slit. He takes his time pulling my legs out of my shorts, and I do nothing, lying there with my hands still on either side of my head, not bothered to fight him back in the slightest.

I want this so badly my heart hurts. A need that pulls at my chest and sets my heart on fire.

I gasp when he palms my thighs. Spreading my legs until he can have a perfect view of my pussy. The shuddered breath he takes tells me it's a chore to hold himself back.

"Oh, Sweets." He smiles, but his eyes don't leave my pussy. "You're so wet. Look at this desperate little cunt. Are you aching for me?"

He lowers himself, not touching me on purpose, and my thighs shake when he spreads me wider. A hopeless whimper leaves me. I'm burning, ready to let the flames engulf me.

"Tell me," he growls so close to my clit, his breath makes me tremble. "Tell me where you're hurting. Daddy will make it better."

I inhale, doing my best not to talk. I want to sin without engaging actively. Please, just let me pretend this pleasure is not coming straight from the devil.

"Ella." I squeeze my eyes shut at his sharp voice. "Use your words and I'll give you what you crave."

I didn't realize I was holding my breath until I exhale a desperate, "Please."

"That's it." He pinches my pussy lips together, tightening my slit so the chaste, closed-mouthed kiss he leaves on me doesn't touch my clit. So my needy nub doesn't get the pleasure it's dying for. "What do you want? Give it to me and I'll take care of you."

"Chris...please...touch me."

He chuckles, and I feel him shaking his head between my legs. "That's not what I want to hear, and you know it."

My trembling breath turns frantic. "P-please." I gulp. "Please, Daddy."

"Yes, Little one?" His wet tongue traces my slit, pressing between my lips in the slightest and making me gasp. He's rewarding me, showing me I'm heading in the right direction.

And I do exactly what he wants. I lose myself.

"Daddy," I whine. "Please, please, lick me. Fuck me with your tongue."

"What a good fucking girl," he growls. His fingers release the pressure on my lips, and instead he spreads me open.

His tongue unleashes on my clit, licking me from my entrance to the tight bundle of nerves, and I release a satisfied moan.

My hand slides to his soft hair, gripping the caramel waves.

"Yes," I pant. Sparks inflame my desire, and I relish in the dangerous burn.

I push against his tongue, and he rewards me with hard strokes and relentless open-mouthed kisses.

I'm rediscovering sex all over again. I knew no one compared to Chris, but I somehow had forgotten how good intimacy with the right person can feel. I catch myself tightening my legs around his head, harsher cries leaving me as I get closer to the edge.

He doesn't stop, doesn't tease anymore. He's feeding his lust, sucking it right out of me. I explode against him, my body lifting off the mattress as I carelessly scream into the dead of the night.

This mansion is big enough that my room is isolated. Thank God for that.

I drop back on the bed, panting as I finish riding one of the most powerful orgasms I've had in a while. Feeling overwhelmed by the sensations, I relax my legs. But he keeps going, his tongue stroking me without stopping.

"Chris," I whimper. "Too much."

When I try to pull away, he grips my thighs pushing me against his face harshly. "The first one was for you," he growls. "The second one is for me."

I cry out when I feel his tongue pushing into my pussy. "Please...." He moans against me, my despair egging him on. "Chris."

He pulls away, grabs my hips, and flips me around. "Who am I?"

He pulls at my hips, forcing my knees to rest on the bed while my chest is crushed on the mattress. He spreads my cheeks and slaps my pussy, making me hiss. "Who am I, Ella?"

He lays down on the bed, his head right under me. With hard fingers digging into the flesh of my hips, he lowers me on his head.

"Daddy!" I scream.

His approval shows itself in the way he forces me to ride his mouth. He tongue-fucks me, moving me as he wishes, and when he's sure I'm lost in the craziness of him again, he releases me.

I give him exactly what he wants as I grind against his mouth, seeking more pleasure. My next orgasm surprises me, unsure when it starts or if it'll ever end. My heart pumps infinite pleasure into my veins and drains me of all my energy.

I'm lifeless when he kneels behind me. The tell-tale of his belt unbuckling makes me shiver, but I don't have the energy to voice my fear... or my need.

"Look at you." His gravelly voice portrays his insatiable need. "You're beautiful, baby. So beautiful and so mine."

I shudder when he kneads my ass cheeks, and I spread my legs voluntarily when he makes it clear that he wants access to my pussy again.

“This tight cunt missed me, didn’t she?”

I nod into the mattress, panting when he presses the pads of his fingers against me, gathering more wetness at my entrance.

“You’re practically dripping, Ella. That’s how much your body reacts to me.”

I moan when he pushes in. Shame has left my body when I came grinding on his face. There’s nothing rational left inside of me.

“Daddy is going to fuck you until you remember why he’s the one who owns you.”

“Yes,” I moan. One finger turns into two, and he moves them relentlessly. I cry out when a third pushes inside me. “Fuck!”

“Watch your mouth. You know I have to stretch you out, baby, or it’ll hurt.”

He pushes deeper, and I feel the way my pussy accommodates his fingers. I push back, desperate for more.

“Good girl. Mm, I wish you could see the way you’re opening up for me.”

I fuck myself against his fingers, getting up to my hands and knees to get more traction. I’m panting, whimpering when he moves away. I need more. I need him to feed the animal inside me and take me back to my baser instincts.

He lines the tip of his dick with my entrance, teasing me as he rubs against my wetness. He pushes, but not inside me. Instead, he slides the ridge of his dick between my pussy lips, coating himself in my pleasure.

“My dripping slut,” he hums in agreement. “Always so wet for me.”

He repeats the process of sliding the head of his cock against me, pretending he’ll finally push inside me and denying me the pleasure.

When I whimper desperately, he gathers my long hair in one hand and slowly wraps the blonde locks around his fist. He pulls harshly, making me gasp at the violence. “If you’re such a desperate girl, why don’t you beg for exactly what you want?”

From the corner of my eyes, I see him undoing his button-down with his free hand. I’m practically drooling when he leaves it on and open.

Whoever is up there has favorites, and Christopher Murray has been on their good side. No one should be allowed to have such a delicious body.

A reserved smile tips at the corner of his lips, because as dominating as he is in bed, Chris has a shy side that makes him almost uncomfortable when someone appreciates the handsome man he is.

And holy hell am I appreciating. The valley between his abs creates a line I'm dying to drag my tongue along and every ridge is begging for my fingertips.

I hiss when he pulls at my hair again, dragging me back to reality.

"If you want my cock, you know what I expect."

"Please," I pant, rubbing myself along his shaft. "Please fuck me."

"That would be my pleasure, baby."

The moment the head of his cock pushes inside me, I see stars. A mix of everything he's made me feel before and the pleasure I'm feeling right now makes my arms weak.

"Oh, sweet girl," he chuckles when I moan. He stretches me some more, pushing in with a steady rhythm. "Did you miss this?"

"Y-yes, Daddy."

"Then why am I not hearing how grateful you are?"

His free hand slaps my ass cheeks before I feel it slither up my back, bringing goosebumps to my skin, and up my neck. Before I understand what he's doing, he pushes two fingers inside my mouth, hooking them to my cheek.

"Why am I not hearing 'thank you, Daddy, for fucking me so good.'?"

"Oh God," I moan around his fingers, my cheek stretched from the way he pulls at it.

He lowers his face to mine, his voice vibrating through me. "Don't waste your time calling for him. God doesn't answer little whores. Only I do."

He pushes harder inside me.

"Aah—" I'm cut off when I feel full of him. "Too much," I hiss. "Chris."

I forgot how big he was. I can confirm no one has come near his size over the years. I know his girth perfectly, aware that my fingertips barely touched when I would wrap my small hand around it. And his length is something I can hardly forget.

"Almost there, Little one. Just take a bit more for me."

"I c-can't," I whimper, my words muffled from his fingers.

"Slowly," he murmurs in my ear. His hips move, the tip of his dick pushing further inside me and imposing a pleasure I can barely survive.

“Take Daddy like the good girl I know you can be, and I promise I’ll reward you for it.”

Oh, fuck.

I feel myself relaxing around him, taking him in just because that’s what he wants from me. I push back against him, inviting him further and hissing when he thrusts all the way in, his pubis hitting my ass cheeks.

“Beautiful girl.” He gives me a few seconds to breathe through it, releasing my mouth to caress between my shoulder blades and all the way down my back. “How I wish you could see the way you welcome my cock, Ella.”

But the second I moan for more he loses all sense of reality and takes me down to the pits of hell with him.

He thrusts in and out of me, making me whimper when he hits my cervix, and my chest falls to the mattress. He keeps a tight grip on my hair, and pushes my lower back, forcing me to curve for him.

“No one fucks you like this.” Not a question. He knows the truth, or I wouldn’t be begging him to give it to me.

He pulls back, pushing back in with a new force that makes me whimper. “No one can make you come like I do, Ella, because I built you for me.”

A wave of emotions crashes over me despite the pleasure. “Fuck you,” I grit.

“Why?” he chuckles. “Because I ruined you for anyone else?”

Yes. Exactly for that reason.

“Just fuck me and get it over with. This means nothing.” I aim to hurt him, but I’m not sure it’s the best idea in my position.

He releases my hair only to grab the back of my neck and keeps me pinned to the mattress.

“Do you have any idea how much I missed this? I’m not getting this *over with*, Sweets. I’m going to fuck you until you can’t remember the reason you’ve been staying away from me.” I grunt when he rams inside me harder. “I’m going to push my dick inside this pretty cunt of yours so many times you’ll still feel me when you try to get over me with someone else.”

“I hate y-you.” The insult turns into a moan as he pulls out slightly, rolls his hips, and makes sure he hits the fucking jackpot. “Shit...shit...”

“Make sure you tell me how much you hate me again when you come all over my dick, baby.”

Believe me, I do.

Chris brings back a wet cloth from my ensuite bathroom and kneels between my legs. I hiss when he presses it against my throbbing pussy.

“Are you hurting, baby?”

I’m lying with an arm slumped over my eyes, trying to ignore the fact I just let Chris fuck me like our lives depended on it.

“Of course, I’m hurting,” I groan. “You clearly have never been fucked by someone with your dick size.”

He chuckles, the cloth disappears from between my legs, and he pulls my arm away from my face. “Go pee.”

I groan, but I sit up anyway. “Stop taking care of me.”

I walk to my bathroom, take care of my business, and come back to him still sitting on my bed. He’s topless now, and only in his boxers. His light brown hair is tousled from the session we just had, his eyes still shining from the pleasure.

He has a smirk plastered on his handsome, golden boy face.

And a ball gag in his hand.

My ball gag to be precise.

“Where the hell did you find that?” I stride to him, attempting to rip it out of his hand, but he pulls it away before I can.

“So, you have one of these in your bedside table now?”

I steel myself, a defense of words rushing through my mouth.

“Not for you to use. I just bought it because...” I shift on my feet, suddenly realizing how uncomfortable I am to be completely naked in front of him. “*First of all*, who do you think you are?” I snatch a silk robe from a

hanger right next to me by bed, sliding an arm inside the sleeve. “You can’t just go through my drawers.” I slide the other half on, fiddling with the belt. “And stop looking at me like that. That isn’t for...you...”

He waits, a small, expectant smile on his lips as he watches me silently while I make a fool of myself.

“Just put it back,” I huff, shoulders sagging as I give up on tying the belt around my waist. I wrap the robe around my body, crossing my arms over my chest as if to protect myself from his overwhelming presence.

Our eyes are locked together as I watch him rise to his full height. My head tilts back as he steps closer...and closer, until my neck is strained from trying to keep up with the six-foot-four immovable wall standing a hair-width away from me.

“Tell me you use it on yourself.” His voice is low now. The rasp of jealousy is barely audible in it.

Keeping the ball gag in his left hand, he brings the right to my face. His warm fingers splay on my cheeks, the tips at my hairline as his thumb caresses my lower lip.

“Ella.” The growl is lacking the control and prudence everyone knows Chris for. “Say it. Say it’s not because you use it with other men.”

I relish in the basic instincts that leave him. Jealousy, possession, *regret*. I’ve been forced to feel those things. I didn’t ask to have my heart broken and to know he was dating another woman far away from me. It was his choice. He brought it on himself. This is his punishment.

“This is not something you need to know. I don’t owe you explanations.”

He slowly pushes his thumb inside my mouth, hooking it to my lower teeth and pulling my mouth open.

“Say it,” he repeats, but I shake my head. “Tell me you’ve not given someone else that side of you.”

I haven’t, but he doesn’t need to know that the sex I’ve had with his replacements was vanilla.

For a few seconds he is as still as a statue. That’s before his hand leaves my mouth to clamp the nape of my neck.

He drags me with him to the bed, pulling me down over his lap as he sits down.

“Do you want to play? I know Daddy’s little slut likes her games.”

“I’m not playing!” I fight back, squirming on his lap, my head upside down.

He pulls the silk up, sliding his hand all the way up my thigh until it settles just below my ass cheeks.

“What a beautiful ass. Such a shame to punish it.”

“Maybe I don’t want to hurt your feelings.” I really am playing with fire. “Maybe I’m just trying to protect you from getting hurt.”

He freezes.

Swat!

It comes down hard and with the intent to hurt.

“Motherfucker!” I gasp.

“No swearing. Count.”

That’s the only words I hear through his gritted teeth. And it’s accompanied by fire raining on my ass.

“W-wait—fuck!”

“I said watch your fucking mouth and *count*.”

“One,” I gasp at the harsher slap. “Chris, stop. This isn’t funny. We don’t do this anymore.”

Swat!

And yet, the word comes out of my mouth. “Two. Can you talk like an adult?”

Swat!

“Ow—three...”

They start coming more rapidly, and I know he’s trying to stop me from talking. A dejected sigh leaves me. Not because of the pain, but because I feel myself relaxing in his hold. The familiar sensations bring a buzzing feeling to my body. My skin is warming sweetly despite the pain.

My eyes close as I count, and a sob gets stuck in my throat. It’s not from the hits. They’re not unbearable *yet*. But the sensation of being back on his lap, to have him care enough to punish me, is too great for me to control. I feel like I’m *his*. It’s terrifying and utterly satisfying at the same time.

The tenth one is more than I can take. The sob in my throat releases, and I feel tears streaming down my face. “Chris...”

“What’s the number?”

I can’t take his cold tone. I need to hear the real him.

“T-ten. Please, stop.”

His digits skim between my legs, sending a shiver up my spine “Don’t...”

I feel him relax when he slides two fingers through the wetness against my sore entrance.

“Do you feel this?” he murmurs. “That’s proof that there’s only one man you belong to.”

I don’t have the strength to contradict him. My lips part when he pushes inside me, uncaring of the ache he’s already left there. My ass cheeks are throbbing from the pain, but when he starts pushing in and pulling back, repeating the slow movement and making me tighten around him, I can’t hold back the moan that mixes with my tears.

“Now, tell me. Who do you use the ball gag with?”

I drag in a painful breath, my stomach constricted against his thighs. The trembling exhale is only more proof of the pleasure he’s mixing with the torture.

I spread my legs, trying to give him more access, and curve my back to incite him to go deeper and faster.

He doesn’t.

He draws his fingers back and pushes back in ever so slowly.

“No one,” I whimper, immediately regretting giving him exactly what he wanted.

“Do you use it on yourself?” If possible, the hard cock pressing against my stomach swells some more. “Do you put the gag on when you play with yourself, Sweets?”

Too embarrassed to talk, I nod. He doesn’t force me to say it, but he does ask, “Do you wish someone would shove it in your mouth and force you to wear it while you’re being fucked like the little whore you are?”

My yes is barely audible, mixed with the sob that leaves my body.

He keeps playing with me, barely enough to promise more pleasure with his fingers.

“Please,” I whimper. My entire body is taut, desperate. I need more, need to feel the full pleasure that comes with his wrath.

“You keep getting wetter,” he chuckles, the words a humiliation I didn’t need. “This poor little cunt needs to be fucked again.”

He pulls his hand away, slapping my ass one last time. “Get on your knees.”

I hate the way I hurry to follow his order. Now that he has me desperate enough, he knows he can make me do whatever he wants.

And I’ve learned to trust he won’t do anything I can’t cope with.

I kneel between his legs, my eyes on the hard-on under his boxers. “Take it out, Little one,” he rasps. “Show Daddy what you can do with your mouth,

and I might reward you.”

My fingers are hooking in the waistband before he even finishes his sentence. I lower the boxers with trembling hands and shift on my knees when his hard cock springs free.

I wrap my fingers around it, and I have to hold back a moan at the feeling of his hot skin against mine. He is rock hard. My thumb can't even touch my index finger.

“Take your time,” he murmurs in a low voice. “I could spend my entire life watching you on your knees with my cock in your mouth.”

I lick the swollen tip, relishing in the taste of him and the noises he makes as he throws his head back.

“That’s it.” I have to open my mouth wide to take him in, lowering my head as he slides a hand in my hair. “Good girl, keep going.”

His tip hits the back of my mouth too soon, forcing me to retreat.

“Relax your throat,” he says softly, his hand caressing the back of my head.

I lower my head again, licking the underside as I take him in.

The next time I try to come up for air, his hand is firmer. “I said relax your throat, baby. Swallow me.”

Squeezing my eyes shut, I attempt to swallow him as spit starts to gather at the corners of my mouth.

“Very good,” he hums. “Keep going. Look at you.” I feel his eyes on me as he pushes me down on his cock. “Do you have any idea how pretty you are when you’re on your knees for me?”

A choked whimper escapes me as he pulls my hair, dragging me back up his cock before pushing me down again. “My beautiful slut.”

I pick up the rhythm. I don't manage to take all of him, but I make up for it in my eagerness to please him and with my hands on him. Spit is dripping out of my wide-open mouth as I take him in, lick him, and enjoy the taste of him.

“Fuck,” he growls. “Just like that, baby.”

He thrusts his hips forward, lost in the pleasure as he holds my head still and ravages my mouth. He fucks my face relentlessly, the choking sounds resonating in the dark room.

I struggle to breathe, my hands landing on his thighs.

“Stay still.”

His voice is strained, and a few seconds later he explodes in my mouth.

I can't swallow with his cock choking me, and I feel the thickness coating my tongue.

"Keep it in."

My eyes widen, attempting to look at his face from my position.

"Keep Daddy's cum inside your mouth." He repeats his order sternly as he pulls out of my mouth. "Just stay still..." He leaves the threat hanging in the air as I keep my lips tight, struggling against the need to swallow.

My hands curl into fist, fighting against my instinct to protest.

I'm squirming, desperate for more pleasure, spreading my thighs open while I stay on my knees. There's a promise of more to come. I can see it on his face. I just have to be his good girl.

His smile softens as he caresses my hair. At the same time, he brings his other hand to my mouth, and I'm reminded of what he's been holding the whole time.

I'm about to pull away when he shakes his head. "Let me. Please, I know how much you'll love this. Let me pleasure you."

I tremble in his hold when he presses the black ball against my lips. "Open. And don't let Daddy's cum spill."

I open my mouth, wrapping my lips around it as much as I can, letting him gag me. Time becomes meaningless as I do exactly what he tells me. Rubber keeps my mouth wide open, and when it touches my tongue, it enhances the taste of his cum, and somehow, I become more desperate for him.

My heart kickstarts when I feel his cum at the corner of my lips. My wild eyes search for reassurance in his as I moan around the gag.

"You can let it go now," he murmurs. "Daddy wants to see his cum dripping from your mouth."

It takes all of me to not let my eyes roll to the back of my head as I feel myself getting wetter.

Your brother's best friend telling you such dirty words shouldn't make you feel like butterflies of pleasure are fluttering their wings in your lower stomach. It shouldn't make you feel like electricity is zapping directly from your clit. Like there's an ache inside you that needs to be pressed against.

There's a pounding need inside me. I need Chris to satiate it.

How low can I fall?

I'm on my knees in front of the man who broke my heart, his cum spilling from my lips, and a ball gag stopping me from swallowing.

Merry. Fucking. Christmas.

“My beautiful girl.” The rumble of pleasure in his voice makes me tremble. “Touch yourself where you want me to make you feel good.”

Inhaling a shaky breath through my nose, I lower my hand between my parted thighs.

My ankles are strained from kneeling. My knees will be bruised in the morning.

But the silk against my skin feels good. It’s soft, and it sticks to my sweaty body.

And the wetness against the tips of my index and middle fingers as I slip them between my pussy lips is a deliverance.

Shame is a strange thing. It’s dangerous because it makes me feel alive.

Pleasure and humiliation are two sides of the same coin for me. It’s only in rare situations that they come separately.

When I’m with Chris, I don’t even care to think about why I’m this way. I don’t care for explanations. I just want to *feel*.

I want to feel the excitement in my chest as I graze my clit with my fingers.

I want to feel the liquid bliss running through my veins as I press them against my soaking entrance, and as I push inside my pussy and feel myself contracting from the pleasure.

I would die a happy woman if the last thing I hear is Chris Murray’s pride as he says, “Look at you, baby. You are such a good girl for me.”

I moan around the gag, spit joining the cum running down my chin. My hips buck to meet my hand as I fuck myself in front of him.

My eyes flutter closed because that’s what helps deal with the shame the most. Suddenly, it’s okay that I’m humiliating myself in front of a man I know is not good for me. In front of someone who uses me behind the pretense of still loving me.

I’ll take my disgusting pleasure, and I’ll never think of his smug face right in front of me enjoying the fact I’m debasing myself to reach nirvana.

“Stop.”

I startle, hating that I have to acknowledge his presence again.

And I feel stupid when I do what he says. I look up at him with despair clear in my eyes, watching him shake his head in disappointment.

“Don’t close your eyes. Don’t try to escape me, Ella, not even in your mind. I swear to God, I will follow you everywhere you go, even when you

try to hide in the deepest part of your subconscious.”

It scares me to realize he knows me so well. I’m helpless against him if I have no weapons he doesn’t already know about.

He reaches out for me, grabbing strands of my hair and pulling me up and on his lap. I go without a complaint, but he doesn’t let me straddle him like I want to. Instead, he spreads his legs so I’m only on one thigh rather than both.

His lips are at my ear when he talks again. “You’re going to come while riding Daddy’s thigh. That way I can look into your eyes when you realize you will never move on from me.”

The sleeve of my robe is falling off my shoulder, my breasts bare for him to play with with his other hand.

“Ride my thigh, Little one.”

He flexes the muscle so he can press harder against my wet core, and I don’t need any more convincing. With a hand on my hair and one playing with my nipple, he looks right into my eyes as I start rubbing myself on his thigh.

“That’s it. Keep going.” I cry out behind the gag, ready to explode already. “Yes. Do it harder.”

I’m making a mess on his naked thigh, but I press harder, thrusting my hips with desperate need.

“You’re almost there. Keep your eyes on me.”

My moans become breathless, my legs straining. I’m so close I could cry.

My chest tightens, and a million stars explode in front of me. My eyes close automatically, my entire body tightening, and he pulls me closer, wrapping his arms around me as I reach my peak.

My sweaty body contracts against him, and I throw my head back, whimpering behind the gag just before I slack back into his chest.

When the flash of pleasure disappears, reality crashes in, and dread freezes my blood.

I shake my head against him, smacked right in the face by what I’ve just done. I pull away, my hands flying to the buckle at the back of my head.

“Calm down,” he says softly.

“No.” My word is muffled by the gag, but I struggle to undo it with trembling fingers.

“Let me.”

But I pull further away, not realizing there’s nothing behind me. I fall off

his lap and on the floor. I'm a mess of trembling limbs, shaky breaths, and sweaty skin.

I back away from him as he stands up.

"Ella." His stern voice does nothing to help, and me shaking my head desperately doesn't deter him from advancing.

He catches me before I can go further, flipping me flat on my stomach. I cry out, suddenly so cold my teeth would break if not for the gag.

"Let me help."

A sob catches in my throat, but he doesn't let me crawl away when I try to.

He manages to unbuckle the ball gag and I claw at it, desperately pulling it out of my mouth.

"Get off me," I sob.

Not questioning it this time, he lets me go. I stand up with him, wrapping my robe around my trembling form.

I wipe my disgusting mouth and chin with my sleeve, looking up at him with unshed tears. "Why? Why do you do this to me?"

He grazes my cheek with his thumb, catching the single tear now rolling down my face.

"You're coming down, Sweets. Let me take care of you."

There it is. That need he has to *care*. The desperation for him to make me feel loved, nurtured.

He breaks only so he can repair.

He shatters me to pieces so he can put me back together.

He wants to control and possess. He wants to know that he's the only one who will tend to my needs from the most basic to the most shameful ones.

"You're sick," I spit out. "I know what you're doing."

"No," he says calmly. "You think you know what I'm doing, but you're wrong."

Putting my hands to my temples, I rub harshly, the headache already coming. "Stop. Stop trying to get inside my head."

"I'm trying to give you aftercare because you gave me something we both needed. I'm trying to tend to you."

But there's a frustration in his voice. He doesn't try for me. He doesn't want to. He *needs* to.

"Ella, your body is in shock."

"Stop *manipulating me!*" I shriek.

He runs a hand through his hair before sliding it to the back of his neck, massaging the stiff muscles.

“You’re sub-dropping hard. Let me shower you. Hot water will do you good.”

“No,” I snarl.

Before anything else, Chris is someone who needs to look after people. His hero syndrome has always defined his life. He can’t find satisfaction if he’s not helping.

And I don’t want him to find satisfaction.

“I need you to leave.”

“I’m not leaving you in this state.” His hard tone matches mine.

“It wasn’t a suggestion.”

He crosses his arms over his strong chest, his square figure becoming even more imposing. “Go ahead. Kick me out.”

“I don’t need strength to kick you out, Chris. The police will do it for me.”

I could slap the smug smile off his face. “What are you going to tell them? ‘I let my ex use me like a little slut and now he doesn’t want to leave?’ My cum dripped out of two of your holes tonight. Do you want me to add a third one before they arrive?”

Burning heat creeps up from my chest, itchy and uncomfortable. It flames all the way to the tips of my ears, reddening my fair cheeks on the way.

I’ve lost this fight. I lost many fights tonight, but it scathes my throat to admit defeat on this one.

“One shower and you’re leaving.”

Finally getting the answer he wanted, he softens. His arms drop, his shoulders relaxing.

It’s his brow scrunching with painful relief that gets to me. “Thank you,” he sighs. “Thank you, Sweets.”

I hate to admit that he was right. The hot shower in my en suite bathroom does me good. He lathers my body in my rhubarb and rose shower gel. He massages my shoulders for what feels like hours. He forces me to relax as he kisses my neck.

“You were so good to me,” he murmurs in my ear as his arms wrap around my waist from behind. “You’re always too good to me.”

I know that’s the truth. I am too good to him. I let him do things I shouldn’t.

Chris is a drug that gives me the highest highs and the lowest lows. I'm going to indulge in him and leave him behind when I go back to college.

It's just for one night.

I turn around in his arms. "You don't deserve me," I say softly.

He shakes his head, water dripping from the waves in his light-brown hair. His honey eyes take me in, photographing the image of us in each other's arms, relishing in our soft moment together.

"I don't," he confirms.

His head lowers in the slightest, the only indication that he's about to capture my lips. A split second later, I'm melting in his arms like the stupid girl I am.

His hands stay at my waist, holding me close to him, my breasts against his warm skin. He doesn't seek anything sexual, only the touch of two people who used to be in love.

We're both searching for something we don't have anymore. For a life we could have had and that he threw away.

When we separate, I swallow back the tears. I feel better than before the shower. I know he was right; I was coming down from the high he gave me.

"How I survived four years without you is a mystery." His breath fans over my face, and something hits me.

It doesn't smell of alcohol.

At all.

I fall flat on my feet.

He didn't taste like someone who's been drinking. Now that I think of it, before the shower, he didn't smell of alcohol either.

"You're not drunk." I don't need to ask. It's obvious he's not.

His brow furrows slightly, like he's unsure how he should react. Honesty wins. "No, I'm not drunk."

"But when you called..."

"I wasn't drunk."

"Then why did you? You only call when you've had too many drinks."

He pauses, his eyes roaming over my face, a look of regret shadowing the gold in them. "Every time I called, you wanted to believe I'd been drinking. I went along with it. If you thought I was drunk, that I was just some desperate guy calling his ex after too many beers...if you felt sorry for me, then you'd stay on the phone."

I try to step away, but he tightens his grip on my waist. "You abused my

compassion,” I grit out.

“I was desperate, Ella. Desperation makes you do stupid things.”

“I fucking *know that*. I’m the stupid girl who begged you to stay when you broke up with her. *That’s* desperation. You...you’re just some dude who can’t put up with his mistakes.”

“Ella—”

I almost slip when I finally manage to get out of his hold—or when he lets me—but I refuse his helpful hand as I step out of the shower.

I grab my plush towel and flip around. “We agreed. A shower and you’re out. The shower is over.”

I’m in my walk-in closet when I hear the bathroom door open and close. Then it’s my bedroom door.

I walk out, wearing an oversized Christmas sweater and some new sleeping shorts. I check the bathroom, perfectly knowing he won’t be there.

Standing in the middle of my bedroom, I look at the empty space.

He’s gone.

He did what I asked. He respected my wishes.

Then why do I feel like someone just ripped my heart out and made me watch as they stomped on it?

Why does my throat tighten and eyes water?

The headache from earlier comes back tenfold. It pounds in my head to the rhythm of regret. I let him in my life again. I picked up the phone, talked to him. I let him fuck me, let him put me on my knees and use me.

I played the game and I lost.

That’s what seeing Chris feels like. He plans it all out to get what he wants, hides behind that image of perfection to trick you into trusting him. And then he goes for the kill.

I press my palm against my forehead. I need headache tablets.

I huff to myself, biting my lip as I swallow back tears. I have nothing in my bathroom cabinet, but I think some of the house personnel keep medicine in a kitchen drawer.

Padding along the long hallway that links my wing to the grand staircase, the shaking comes back. How could I let him do this to me? Why did I let him back in?

This is going to cost me.

I don’t turn on any of the reception lights. I can find my way to the kitchen in the dark, but to my surprise I don’t have to. From the stairs, I can

see that the light is on. It's pitch-black outside. I haven't checked the time since Chris showed up in my room. Maybe it's four or five a.m. and the maid is already up.

But it's not the maid I find in the kitchen, facing the counter with their back to the door.

"What the hell is going on?"

Chris looks up, twisting his head to see me while he keeps at his activity.

"Hey, Sweets."

I rub my eyes, wondering if I dreamed tonight's situation and I'm still asleep. "What are you still doing here?" There's no poison in my voice, no blame, only relief that he didn't listen and decided to stay.

"You don't think I didn't hear your stomach rumbling the whole night, do you?" A teasing smile pulls at the corner of his mouth. "Two slices of Emmental, cranberry sauce, and lettuce. That's still your favorite Christmas sandwich, isn't it? With a lot of vegan mayo, of course."

I take a minute to pick up my jaw off the floor, especially when he finally turns around holding a plate with a sandwich cut in half on it.

"Don't worry," he says softly. "It's rye bread. I know it's the only bread you eat."

I gulp the emotions down. "Chris..."

"Just take it. You know I won't be able to go home until I know you're fed, safe, and tucked in bed." He pauses, his smile widening. "I already made sure you were thoroughly fucked."

I lick my lips, searching for something to say. And I find exactly what I should say.

Chris, you need to go home right now.

I don't want you to take care of me. It'll only hurt more when you leave.

We are not together anymore. It's not your job to feed me.

I simply choose not to say them.

Because I don't want him to leave.

I take the plate, and I'm about to sit down when he grabs my hand. "Let's watch a movie."

I let him gather some candy canes, popcorn, and chocolates on a platter—moving around my kitchen like he's lived here his entire life—and we both make our way to the media room in silence.

For lack of saying anything smart, I look at the platter. "I thought you hated candy canes."

“I do. Might as well eat toothpaste. But I know a silly girl who loves them.” He winks at me as we enter the media room.

He sits down on one of the many extra-large sofas while I awkwardly stand next to him, my plate in my hand. For a second, I wonder again who this house belongs to as he lays back, his long legs resting in front of him, and puts the platter near him.

He taps the space next to him. “You might not like me, but you can’t resist Home Alone, can you?”

He doesn’t even look at me as he grabs the remote. I look around the room. My mom had it decorated because she knows I’ll be watching a movie alone in here tomorrow afternoon when they’re all gone.

There’s a tree in the corner of the back wall, some fake presents around it wrapped in golden foil with red ribbons. There are Christmas lights around the room, and I have access to any Christmas movie I want in here. Including Home Alone.

I sigh and sit down as far away from him as I can, pointing at my sandwich. “When I’m done with this, I’m going back upstairs.”

“Noted.” He doesn’t say he doesn’t believe me. His tone says it all.

I hate Chris, but I don’t hate that he remembers what my favorite weird Christmas sandwich is.

I hate him, but not that he noticed I was starving.

I don’t hate that he knows my favorite Christmas movie and that I like candy canes even though he hates them.

It’s hard to hate someone who loves taking care of you. It’s just too bad it comes with the rest of who he is. Possessive, controlling, desperate to hold my soul in the palm of his hand.

The movie starts, but he focuses on me. “Did you not have dinner tonight, Sweets?”

Shaking my head, my eyes are on the screen as I swallow my first bite. “I left dinner early.”

I sense him nodding in my peripheral. “Because of your dad’s news.”

I take another bite, taking my time to get my emotions under control. “Did you know it was Luke’s idea?”

He shifts, always uncomfortable when my brother’s name comes up.

“Yeah,” he huffs.

“He wants to make sure I have a future.”

I don’t mention the Silent Circle. I have no idea how much Chris knows,

but he lives in Stoneview and his parents are powerful. I have no doubt he's heard of it if not more. Still, he's the last person I want to talk to about the Shadows.

"You're an incredible dancer." I feel his eyes burning a hole in the side of my head.

I keep my eyes on the screen.

"But..." I mutter, expecting the same lesson Luke gave me.

It doesn't come.

"But nothing. It's a shame your dad is controlling, a shame that Luke doesn't believe in your potential. I hope you keep dancing."

I whip my head toward him so fast, the headache pounds against my skull. I blink at him, holding the sandwich in both hands, but incapable of swallowing. I almost choke when I do.

"Do you...do you really believe that?"

His eyebrows rising to his hairline tell me everything I need to know. "Of course, I believe that. I've seen you dance. I've seen you cheer. I've seen the hard work you put into your passion. Not many people have the chance to find something that drives them in life." He sighs. "I wish you could see yourself the way I see you. It's magical."

I scratch my throat, the rye bread suddenly too dry for me. "Erm...thanks, I guess."

He chuckles, shaking his head. "Look, there's nothing you can do about your dad and Luke but promise me you won't stop dancing. Even as a hobby."

I nod dumbly, repeating the gesture over and over again. "Okay."

"Promise, Sweets."

"I-I promise."

My heart somersaults in my chest when his bright smile spreads on his handsome face.

"Good girl."

And there it is.

That fucking dimple.

Please, someone save me. The devil has the face of an angel. He has a hold on my soul, and he won't let me rest in peace.

Will I ever be free of Christopher Murray?

Not if I keep melting every time I see his dimple.

Not if I let him be the only one to plant seeds of hope in my heart just so

he can watch my dreams grow.

“Chris,” I huff. “Stop calling me that.”

He’s too quick to reply, proving he knows exactly what he’s doing. “Calling you what?”

“You know what.”

He grabs a piece of popcorn, throwing it in the air and catching it in his mouth. “Enlighten me, baby.”

I narrow my eyes at him, but something hot spreads in my lower stomach.

“Stop calling me a good girl.”

He doesn’t even pretend to be confused. “Why would I? You’re being a good girl for me.”

“I’m not…” I can’t help a soft laugh. “Only because you set everything up for me to be.”

Pushing the platter away, he slides closer to me. “So what? Doesn’t it feel good?”

My throat dries up, my stomach twisting. “Don’t get any closer.”

He does. “Answer me.”

“I’m not answering you. You’re tricking me into turning you on.”

His laugh is beautiful. Soft, warm, relaxing. Especially when he throws his head back and I can see the sharpness of his jaw from another angle.

He’s a little more serious when he looks at me again. “Little one, I don’t need to trick you into turning me on. Your simple existence is enough.”

“S-stop.”

I say that, but I don’t move away when he gets close enough that I feel the warmth pouring out of his skin. I tell him to stay away, but my heart races when he looks down at me and puts a strand of hair behind my ear.

“I’m going to kiss you.”

I hate the way he always announces what he’s about to do. It makes it even worse when I do nothing to fight him.

I shake my head, but I don’t pull away when his soft lips meet mine.

I let his hand snake behind my neck. I let him angle me so he can comfortably entwine his tongue with mine. So he can make me moan into his mouth.

And when he pulls away, trails kisses along my jaw, and stops just under my ear. I stay still. “And now I’m going to fuck you.”

I should run away, but instead, I relish in the shiver crossing my body.

“Lie down on your stomach with your hands behind your back, baby.”

Then you can tell me how good it feels to be my good girl.”

I should say no, but instead, I lie down on my stomach and put my hands behind my back.

Because it feels fucking delicious to be his good girl.

“Don’t move, Little one. Daddy’s just getting something for us.”

And I don’t fucking move.

Not when I hear him walk around doing God knows what. Not until I feel something soft around my wrists.

“What are you—”

“Stay.”

I look back as much as I can, my eyes rounding when I notice the red ribbon from the fake presents.

He binds my wrists with it, ensuring I can’t move my arms while not cutting the blood flow.

“The most beautiful Christmas present,” he murmurs. I watch him tie a perfect bow before my neck gives up and I rest my cheek against the sofa.

“Did you not get enough earlier?”

“I thought I did, but then you refused to admit you love being my good girl. Now I have to show you what happens to bad girls, then you can think about your answer again.”

A flash of electricity courses through my body.

“You’re not—”

“Punishing you? Of course I am.” In one sudden gesture, he rips my shorts down, leaving them around my knees. “Spread your legs as much as you can.”

The second I do, he slaps my pussy harshly, making me gasp. “You ass —”

“Tsk, don’t make me get the gag again.”

He brings my hips up, making sure my knees are supporting me before lowering himself between my legs.

I can’t stop the moan that escapes me when his tongue probes at my entrance. He pushes in, making me melt from the pleasure. He makes sure to alternate between my clit and my entrance, spreading my wetness everywhere he can reach.

I push back against his mouth, taking the pleasure he offers while I can.

He only pulls away once I’m writhing and desperate to come.

“I think you’re ready for your punishment,” he murmurs. I expect a harsh

slap on my ass. A spanking like he loves so much.

I should have known he loves his games too much to spank me twice in a night.

I hear him grab something from the platter of treats he prepared. He bends over me, whispering in my ear, “Would you like to admit how much you love being called my good girl?”

“Under duress? It won’t mean anything,” I snarl.

He chuckles. “You’ll make a wonderful attorney, Sweets. But that was a stupid answer.”

I feel something pressing at my wet entrance, and he cuts me off when I start to moan.

“This is going to hurt.”

I freeze. “W-what?”

“Just enough to teach you a lesson. It’ll be bearable.”

“What is it?” I fight his hand on my hip while he pushes inside some more, but there’s not much I can do with my wrists tied in a pretty fucking Christmas bow.

It doesn’t feel big, just enough for me to feel it. Just enough to pleasure me.

He pulls it out, making me whimper from the lack of friction.

“Open your mouth, baby.”

When I don’t, his hand at my hip comes to my jaw, and he presses my cheeks until my mouth opens. It always shocks me how non-violent his gestures are. He doesn’t need to put strength in his acts, he just controls me with a bit of pressure and dirty words.

My eyes widen when I watch his other hand approach my mouth.

A candy cane in it.

And that’s when I feel it.

The tingling sensation, nearing a burn.

“Fuck!” I shriek in his grip. “You’re a dick!”

“Language. There’s barely any peppermint in these things. It’s mainly sugar, it won’t burn badly.”

And I know he’s right. I can feel it just enough to *learn my lesson*.

His fingers press slightly harder on my cheeks. “Say ‘ah’ for Daddy.”

He pushes the candy past my parted lips. It’s not the peppermint I taste first. It’s myself.

“Can you taste how delicious you are, baby? How drenched you are for

me?”

He pulls the candy in and out of my mouth, until the hints of my pleasure are completely gone from my mouth.

“Answer me, Little one.”

“Yes...” I moan around the candy cane.

He pulls it out only to fuck my pussy with it again. “Oh, God,” I hiss at the slight burn. “Chris...” It’s annoyingly disappearing to be replaced by pleasure.

I helplessly pull at my binds, hating myself for enjoying his brand of punishment.

“So what do you prefer? To be a good girl or a bad girl for me?”

“G-good,” I pant.

“Say it, then. Beg me to be my good girl.”

He drags the candy in and out of me, bringing me just enough pleasure to survive the ordeal, but not nearly enough to orgasm.

“I want to be your...your good girl,” I whimper. “P-please.”

“Well done,” he rasps. The candy disappears just before I hear him mumble, “These things are so much better when they taste of you.”

I look behind my shoulder, seeing the cane between his lips.

The next thing I feel is his dick at my entrance. He pushes in slowly, enhancing the burn. I wonder how it feels for him. He’s not the kind of guy that thrives on pain, but maybe the pleasure takes over like it does for me.

He fucks me slowly, one hand at my hip, one holding the bow, and a candy cane he’s supposed to hate in his mouth.

He forces me to reach my peak languidly, the room spinning when the orgasm shatters me.

And when he comes, I hear the candy cane being crushed between his gritted teeth.

We’re not in my room anymore, but he doesn’t fail to go to the downstairs bathroom so he can bring me back a warm, damp towel and clean me. He doesn’t fail to dress me in my sleeping clothes again.

When I fall asleep, in a home I hate, with a family I hate, I know I’m safe just because I’m in his arms.

I startle awake, sitting up as my bedroom door bursts open.

“Wake up, sleepyhead.” Luke’s warm voice freezes me on the spot.

My heart drops to my stomach, every single memory of yesterday smacking me in the face.

Chris.

I look next to me in bed. He’s not here. Of course, he’s not. He must have tucked me in bed before leaving.

“Hey,” I say groggily.

I feel weird seeing my brother, perfectly knowing the things that happened with his best friend right here a few hours ago.

“You look like shit,” he chuckles as he comes in. “It’s eleven a.m. I thought I’d wake you up before leaving.”

“Already?”

He huffs. “I’ve got a lot of stuff to deal with in L.A. Seems Mom and Dad skipped on the whole present opening this year. They just left two big checks on the kitchen table before leaving for the airport. Hey, why don’t you come see me before going back to college?”

I nod, numbly. “Sure. Why not.” I pinch my lips, doing my best to stop the question that’s begging to spill out of my mouth. I fail. I need to know if he’s seen Chris this morning. “How was it at Chris’s?”

You’re stupid, Ella Baker.

Luke shrugs. “I was blacked-out drunk and had to sleep over. Chris woke me up this morning when he was leaving.”

“Leaving?” My heartbeat accelerates. Something feels *wrong*.

“Yeah,” he huffs. He runs a hand through his hair, his mouth twisting with annoyance. “He’s leaving Stoneview early.” He rolls his eyes. “Megan called.”

For a few beats, my body refuses to react. My brain freezes, my life pauses.

I blink up at my brother.

Megan.

Chris’s girlfriend.

Called.

“But…” I choke on something, unable to speak.

Oh, I know what it is. *Regret.*

My heart squeezes so hard in my chest, I could swear I’m having a heart attack. “I thought they’d broken up.”

“How do you know that?”

I startle, only now realizing I said it out loud. It takes all my strength to act unperturbed.

My shrug is stiff. “It’s Stoneview, Luke.” I fake a smile, hurting my cheeks. “Gossip works fast.”

He nods. “Yeah, well, you know how it is. He breaks up and then she calls crying on the phone about something, and our hero runs back to her because he can’t stand hurting anyone.”

He can’t stand hurting anyone *but me.*

He’s everyone’s hero *but mine.*

Sweet Christopher Murray. The wise friend. The sensible boyfriend. Mr. Perfect.

The man who chooses to show his true, vile personality to only one person.

Me.

And I fall for it every time. I let him deceive me every. Single. Time.

Christopher Murray. My treacherous liar.

Luke leaves around one p.m., and that’s when I call my best friends Peach and Alex. We meet at Baker’s Café on Main Street, so I can tell them about the stupid thing I did last night.

They hug me when I cry, like they did in high school when he broke up with me. They tell me that I’m amazing and he’s an asshole who doesn’t

deserve me. And I pretend to believe them.

They come with me to the pharmacy to get the morning after pill because I acted like a stupid, reckless girl last night. We spend the day at Alex's lake house. I even laugh when Peach falls on her ass while ice-skating on Stoneview Lake.

But when I go home to an empty house, the dread is still there. My heart is still heavy. I sit down at my desk, intent on finishing the Christmas cards I have to go distribute for Dad.

I always wonder why he doesn't want them to be mailed. Why doesn't he want them to be tracked? No proof. And why do I have to be the one to deliver the cryptic messages to his friends?

I sigh, knowing there's a long evening ahead of me when my eyes catch a card that is already open, hidden under a stack of others.

There's a note on it.

*To my love from another life,
I can explain. I promise.
I love you.*

My heart drops, wondering if I'm dreaming. If maybe...it's from someone else? I know that's impossible, but why would Chris leave me such a strange note?

I fold the card, noticing he filled in the front too.

*Merry Christmas
From Daddy
To Little one.*

To be continued...

AFTERWORD

Thank you for reading *Merry Christmas from Daddy to Little One*.

I was only going to start sharing Chris and Ella with you in 2024, but they have been wanting out of my head and to officially be part of the world.

I hope you enjoyed the little sneak peek into their story. I had so much fun writing it and starting to dive into their complicated relationship.

Full story coming 2024...stay tuned.

Lots of Love,

Lola ♥

ALSO BY LOLA KING

STONEVIEW STORIES

Stoneview Trilogy (MF Bully):

Giving In

Giving Away

Giving Up

One Last Kiss (Novella - includes spoilers from Rose's Duet)

Rose's Duet (FFMM why-choose):

Queen Of Broken Hearts (Prequel novella)

King of My Heart

Ace of All Hearts

NORTH SHORE STORIES (interconnected standalones)

Beautiful Fiend (enemies to lovers)

Heartless Beloved - (good girl/bad boy)

Delightful Sins - (MFM enemies-to-lovers)

Lawless God - Coming April 2024