




A SYNDICATES
NOVELLA

Oh Holy
NIGHT



CALA RILEY

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A SYNDICATES CHRISTMAS NOVELLA

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DEDICATION

We only wrote this because we randomly bought the cover. It was on sale. Then we realized we had to write a story to go with the cover. We contemplated offing one of your favorite characters and then thought, hmm better not...

IRISH DICTIONARY

a stór- My treasure

a leanbh- My Child

CHAPTER
ONE

Cleo

I smile as I look down at my list. It's finally complete. Now all that's left is to get Kai to say yes.

That shouldn't be too hard.

The tea kettle whistles, and I walk over to the stove and fill my cup. Once my tea is ready, I carry it back over to the island. Before I can even take a sip, I hear Kai murmuring as he approaches. Hurrying, I set the cup down and get into position.

I rest my elbow and forearm on the counter and rest my chin in my hand. I fight back a giggle as I arch my back, sticking my butt out. My legs are on display, and my short black silk robe slips down my shoulder. When I found this robe, I knew I had to have it because he would love how it barely covered me.

Kai steps into the room and comes to a stop. "I'll call you back," he says before hanging up on whoever he was on the phone with.

"That was rude, you know." I can't help but point out.

Silently, Kai approaches, and when he reaches me, he runs a finger over my bare shoulder.

“Tell me, princess, what is it that you want?”

“Who says I want anything?”

Kai raises an eyebrow as his hand wanders down my body, and I fight to keep still.

My body comes to life under his touch.

Licking my lips, I turn toward him and run my hands down the lapels of his jacket.

“So, I was thinking...” I pause, batting my eyelashes. “That we should have a Christmas party.”

“No.” Kai shakes his head.

“Please, hear me out.”

The corner of his eye twitches, but he nods.

“It would just be us, my brother and his family, Kenji and Miya, Declan, and Kado. Just small and sweet.”

Kai’s eyes lock on mine. I stare him down, unwilling to be the one to look away first. After a few moments, my eyes start to burn.

Don’t blink.

Don’t fucking blink.

The corner of Kai’s lips quirk up, and I break.

“Dang it,” I mumble.

Kai chuckles as he pulls me into him.

“Why do you want to do this?”

“Because we’re all family.”

“Warring families,” he points out. “You know we shouldn’t associate as much as we do.”

I fight the urge to roll my eyes. “We aren’t warring. You and Callum have a lifelong truce, as long as neither of you piss me off. Please, this is really important to me.”

Kai runs his thumb down the side of my face. “Is it?”

“Yes, I’d do anything?”

His eyebrow quirks. “Anything?”

I suck in a breath as he pulls my hair, tipping my head back.

“You don’t have time.”

“I’ll decide if I have time or not. Now tell me, princess, are you willing to get on your knees to get what you want?”

Instead of verbally responding, I stare him in the eye as I drop down to my knees.

“Good girl,” he hums as I undo his belt.

I can’t help but squirm, squeezing my legs together as I free him, taking his cock into my hand.

“Drop the robe, but don’t stop.”

With my free hand, I undo my robe. With one arm free, I switch hands as I pump him, letting the robe completely fall. Leaning forward, I lick him from root to tip, making him moan.

Then I take him into my mouth slowly.

Kai’s hands find my hair, and he sets the pace, moving only slightly faster but still taking his time.

I was so innocent when I met him, but he’s made me his naughty girl. He’s taught me each and every way to pleasure him, so while he pulls on my hair, gently fucking my face, I hum against him. His breaths come heavier as I let my teeth lightly glide against his skin, making him shiver.

“Fuck. Princess, you suck the best cock,” he murmurs.

I smile around him, feeling him hit the back of my throat. I swallow him deeper, making him groan. When I moan against him, he finally loses control, his hands coming to frame my face as he thrusts his hips up against me brutally.

I’m gagging on him, but I don’t move. I let him use me as if I’m his own personal toy. I love every minute of it. Glancing up at him, I see his eyes on mine, his fingers moving to swipe against the tears leaking from my eyes. I can feel how messy my face is becoming. His eyes only grow more lustful.

When he finally comes, it's an explosion of liquid straight down my throat, blocking my airway for several seconds. I keep swallowing until my eyesight grows dark.

That's when he pulls out, my lungs gasping for air.

Panting, Kai picks me up and sets me on the counter. My hands move to his hips as I hold him close and kiss him senseless.

Much too soon, Kai pulls away and rests his forehead against mine. "Fine, you can have your little party."

I open my mouth, but he cuts me off. "But you cannot invite anyone else. Just us and nothing too crazy."

I can't help but bounce on the counter, unable to hide my excitement. "Thank you."

Kai's phone rings.

"You're in trouble."

He ignores my teasing and starts to get dressed. "What are your plans for the day?"

"I'm meeting Autumn and Emily for lunch."

Once he's ready, he steps back into me and kisses me hard. "Be good today and tell Autumn hello."

"Always and will do. I love you."

"I love you more."



Kai

"YOU'RE LATE," Kenji says as I get out of the car.

I ignore him and make my way into the building.

“Everything okay?” he asks as he falls into step behind me.

“Everything’s fine. I just lost track of time this morning with Cleo.”

Kenji chuckles as we step into the men’s club.

I scan the room and see familiar faces. When my eyes land on Callum, I fight back a smile.

If only he knew what his baby sister was just doing to me.

Shaking my head, I remove the dirty thoughts from my mind as I approach the chief of police.

“You requested my presence?”

As he drrolls on about how we are making his life difficult, I look around the room and make a note of who’s talking to whom.

Rocky, who runs an underground fight ring, looks like he’s about to fall asleep in the chair that he’s in. Then again, I guess I can’t blame him, considering he and his woman just had a baby.

It seems like everyone is having babies. It’s like something is in the air, and I can only hope that it’s not contagious. While I would love to have a baby with Cleo someday, that day is not now.

Not until we put a stop to the trafficking.

The thought of something happening to Cleo makes my skin crawl, and I know that if we had a child, it would be ten times worse.

“Excuse me,” I say rudely as I step away from the police chief and pull out my phone.

I see a text from Cleo and open it. It’s a picture of her, baby Emily, and Autumn. I can clearly see two of Cleo’s guards in the background and know that others are close as well, and it eases my worry.

“You ran away from the chief like you couldn’t get away from him fast enough.” Callum chuckles as he approaches.

“I can only take so much mumbling before I snap. You and I both know we do his job for him and that he’s just a placeholder.”

“He knows it too,” Callum points out before changing the subject. “Everything okay?”

“Of course,” I say as I adjust my glasses.

“Sorry, I had to ask. I saw you pull out your phone, and I know the girls are together.”

“Ah.” I look down at my phone and pull the photo back up before turning it toward him.

Callum smiles as he looks at the screen. “They look like they are having a good time.”

“They do,” I say as I slip my phone back into my pocket.

“I got you a drink,” Kenji says as he approaches.

I take the glass of soda water from him and take a sip. It tastes like shit, but I have to keep a clear head while in a room full of my enemies.

“Sorry about that, Tristano called,” Declan says as he walks up to us.

“Anything important?” Callum asks.

“Nothing related to the joint case.” He shakes his head. “Tristano was just asking what I was doing for the holidays and asked if I wanted to spend it with him and Serena.” Declan makes a face. “Why I would want to spend it with them when they are in their love bubble is beyond me.”

I clear my throat. “Actually, Cleo was talking about the holidays this morning. She would like the three of you and your families to come.”

Kenji raises a brow, and Declan visibly jerks back.

“Really?” Declan asks, full of skepticism.

“And you said yes?” Kenji finishes.

“I did.” I nod.

“As long as Autumn’s okay with it, we will be there,” Callum says, as if spending the holidays together isn’t abnormal. “Hell, I’m sure the girls are making plans right now.”

“I don’t know what she has planned, but I’m sure she will be reaching out to all of you.”

Declan puts his hands in his pockets, looking uncomfortable. “If Callum and the girls are there, I will be.”

“Kenji?” I say, looking at my right-hand man.

He shrugs. “I’m sure Miya will be game. I’ll run it by her.”

“Good. Now that that’s done, I think it’s time to get out of here. What do you guys think?”

Before anyone can respond, a sound has us looking behind us.

Rocky’s head is tilted back, and he’s snoring away.

“That poor fool.” I shake my head.

“Give him a break.” Callum chuckles as he breaks away. “I’m going to wake his ass up so he doesn’t embarrass himself any further.”

“Later.”

Kenji and I make our way toward the door. He slips outside in front of me and gives me the all clear to follow. Once we’re in the car, he turns toward me and smirks.

“So...I take it you were late because Cleo was busy convincing you that spending the holidays together was a good idea?”

I ignore his prodding and change the subject. “How are the new recruits handling initiation?”

“They have Kado and I ready to rip out our hair.” He shakes his head. “Some of them are so eager to hit boots to the ground that it’s causing issues. They don’t care about who Kado and I are and think what we say doesn’t matter.”

“Any of them have any promise?”

“There are a few I think will be good.” He nods after a moment of silence. “Not as many as I like, though.”

“Should we stop by training?”

“Do you have time? I know you have another meeting this afternoon.”

I smile over at my oldest friend. “The meeting can wait. I think it’s time I show these men why I’m the king of the city.”

He chuckles as he shakes his head. “They have it coming.”

“How are the new girls doing under Miya?”

“You would have to ask her, but from what I’ve heard, they are adapting.”

“Good. I’ll reach out and get with her this week to have a formal sit down.”

“Sounds good.”

The car slows down and comes to a stop in front of one of our warehouses.

“Are you sure about this?”

I pull out my phone and send off a text, canceling my meeting.

“Let’s go,” I tell him as I get out of the car.

Together, we approach the building, and when we step inside, the sounds of skin on skin greets us, along with the smell of copper in the air.

As we walk toward the ring, men stop and stare, giving us their full attention until we are standing in the middle of the room.

“I heard that some of you need to be reminded of where you fall in the ranks,” I say as I take off my suit jacket.

I hand it over to Kenji and start to roll up my sleeves.

“So I thought I would remind you of who I am.” I smile wickedly as several men take a step back. “Who wants to be my first victim?”

Someone pushes some poor kid forward, and he almost falls to the ground.

“Wonderful. Let’s get started.”

CHAPTER
TWO

Autumn

“Hey, sorry I’m late!” I say as I rush up to the table. Cleo looks up and smiles. “Right on time! How’s my girl today?”

Emily tries to lunge out of my arms toward her aunt, making me grunt as I barely catch her.

“Careful,” I gently scold.

“Hand her over,” Cleo says as she holds out her arms.

I pass her Emily, and she starts loving on her as I sit down. As Cleo baby talks to her, I look around the café. I’ve never been here before, but I’ve heard good things. Instantly, I see Cleo’s bodyguards scattered around the room and Connor, my personal guard, watching over us. I know there are at least two or three other guards around for me as well, but they often hide in plain sight. I prefer it that way. It makes me feel more normal.

I can’t help but shake my head. I never thought I would be one who couldn’t go anywhere alone, but now that I have Emily, I get it. It’s one thing to put myself at risk, but I could never do that to my daughter. There’s safety in numbers.

“So how are you?” Cleo asks, pulling me out of my head.

“I’m good. How have you been?”

“I’m great.” She smiles brightly. “In fact, I have some news.”

I gasp, my hand covering my chest. “You’re pregnant!”

“No.” She shakes her head. “I’ve told you we’re just enjoying our time with each other right now. I actually got Kai to agree to let me host a Christmas party at our place.”

I raise my eyebrows, impressed with my sister-in-law. Her husband hates letting others into their home, and I get it. It’s their sanctuary.

“Do I want to know what you had to do to get him to agree to that?”

I watch as a blush covers her cheeks and she fights back a smile.

“You don’t want to know,” she mumbles. “But I got my way, which is all that matters.”

I laugh. “Do you want help planning? I don’t know how you guys do things, but I’ll try to help you.”

I watch as her shoulders drop, and she smiles softly down at Emily before looking back at me. “I would love that, and I would like to invite you guys too.”

“I’m sure Callum will say yes. Who else are you thinking?”

“Well, that’s the thing. It took some convincing, but I got Kai to agree to it being us, you guys, Kenji and Miya, Declan, and Kado.”

“Talk about an interesting dinner party.”

Cleo shrugs. “At the end of the day, I belong to both, and this way, for the most part, it’s balanced between both families. So no one should feel pressured or anything.”

“I like it. We’re family, no matter where our loyalties lie.”

“Exactly.”

The server comes up and takes our order. When she walks away, we pick back up our conversation.

“So, what do you have in mind?”

“I want something casual. Lots of food and a night where we don’t have to worry about business.”

“That’s a tall order.”

“I know, but you and I both know they all deserve a night off.”

“There’s no sleep for the wicked,” I say, repeating something Callum has said to me a million times.

“True, but I’d like to pretend.” Cleo shrugs.

“Well, I’m all for it. Just tell me what you need.”

“Do you have any plans after this?”

I shake my head. “My afternoon is free.”

“Do you maybe want to go shopping with me and pick some things out?”

“Sounds good to me.” I nod as the server brings us our food.

As we eat, we chit chat. I tell her how I’m already done Christmas shopping and plan to start decorating our place this weekend. She tells me she hasn’t even started buying gifts yet.

I cringe. “Add that to the list of things to do today.”

Cleo laughs. “Hey, not all of us can be on top of everything all of the time.”

“Do you even know what you want to get whoever you’re buying for?”

Cleo nods. “Of course, I know I want to get Emily a pony.”

I roll my eyes. “You’re not getting her a pony.”

“Why not? I think she would love it.”

“She’s one,” I deadpan.

Cleo waves her hand through the air. “Small details. Other than her, though, no idea.”

“You don’t know what you want to get Kai?”

“What do you even get a man who has everything, and if he doesn’t, he buys it for himself?” she asks as she hands Emily another fry off her plate.

I hum. I can only imagine how difficult it would be to buy for someone like Kai.

“He likes blades. Is there one he wants but doesn’t have yet?”

She tilts her head to the side and thinks about it. “I’d have to ask Kado or Kenji for help on that one. They all look the same to me. What did you get Callum?”

“Callum was adamant that he didn’t want me to get him anything. Said he already had everything he wanted, but that didn’t sit well with me. So instead of buying him something, I booked us a trip.”

Cleo’s eyes light up. “Oh, that’s a good idea! Where are you going?”

“We’re going to Ireland. I’ve never been, and he keeps saying he wants to take me someday, so I figured why not?” I shrug.

“Oh, you’ll love it.”

“I hope so.”

“Will you be taking Emily with you?”

I nod. “Of course, and our guards, too. I figured if we want a kid-free night, we trust one of them to watch her for us.”

“That’s a great idea. Maybe I should book us a trip. Make Kai take some time off.”

“Do it. If you want, I can hook you up with the travel agent I used. She’s awesome.”

“I’d love that. Thanks.”

The server comes by and drops off our bill.

“Come on, let’s pay and then go spend some money,” Cleo says as she slides out of the booth while holding Emily.

I snatch the bill off the table before she can. “I’m buying.”



Callum

“*A STÓR*, I’M HOME,” I call out as I put my keys on the hook next to the garage door.

Leaving the mud room, I walk further into the house.

“Hey, how was your day?” Autumn asks as she comes down the stairs.

“Long, how was yours? Did you have a good time with Cleo?”

I meet my wife in the middle of the room and pull her into me.

“I did,” she says before standing up on her tiptoes, kissing me. “I missed you, though,” she says when she pulls away.

“I missed you more.” I sigh, running a hand over my face.

Autumn frowns as she looks me up and down. “That bad?”

“It was just a long one,” I say vaguely.

Even though we’re married and I trust her completely, I don’t want to burden Autumn with work-related things. We skirt around the subject and keep things vague. I only tell her what I have to. If it involves her or Emily.

“Come on, I put your food in the warming drawer.”

She grabs my hand and pulls me back into the kitchen.

“Sit.”

I do as she says and take a seat on one of the barstools.

“Emily asleep already?” I ask as I watch her flutter around the kitchen.

“Yeah, she missed her nap time today, so she was exceptionally tired. I tried to hold off until you got home, but...” She trails off.

“It’s okay. I’ll just make sure to beat you out of bed if she wakes up in the middle of the night.”

Autumn fights off a smile. “You sleep like the dead.”

“Hey, I can wake up with her when I need to,” I defend myself, even though she’s right.

Autumn is the definition of a light sleeper, whereas I could sleep through the worst storm. When we brought Emily home, there was one night that I fell asleep in the chair in her room while she slept in her crib. When she woke up crying, I didn’t hear a thing, and she was only a couple of inches away from me. Autumn actually got out of bed and made sure I was still alive.

“Sure you can.” She teases as she slides my plate across the counter toward me.

“Tell me about your day.”

As I eat, she tells me about everything Cleo, Emily, and she did. The more she talks, the more relaxed I get. It’s like the weight of the organization falls off my shoulders when it’s just us, and I don’t have a care in the world about anything that happens outside of these four walls.

She mentions Christmas shopping, and it reminds me that I need to check in with my lawyer and see how the acquisition of her favorite apothecary is going. I want to be able to hand her the deed on Christmas morning.

“Are you ready for bed?” she asks as I place my plate in the dishwasher after rinsing it off.

“For sleep? No.” I shake my head. “But do I want to crawl into bed with you? Very much so.”

I watch as her breath catches and her eyes dilate.

“What do you think?”

“I would like that.”

I pull her into me and pick her up. Instantly, she wraps her legs around my waist.

“I can walk, you know,” she teases as I carry her toward our room.

I dip my chin down and gently bite her neck, making her gasp.

“I know you can, but why should you when I can carry you?”

She smiles, shaking her head.

I don't waste any time. I walk her straight to our room, sending a quick text to Connor asking him to monitor our daughter. He responds immediately.

He was the right choice to watch our girl. He takes his job seriously and often has the stream of her room up, even when he is sleeping.

Pushing him from my thoughts, I focus on my beautiful wife before me.

How did I get so lucky?

“Stop staring and get your face between my legs,” she demands cheekily.

I snort, but work on removing her clothes. She's glistening with her wetness, making me harder than I already was. I love how ready she always is for me.

I don't bother with my own clothes, dropping to my knees in front of her.

The first swipe of my tongue has her back coming off the bed. I hold her tighter, loving the way it makes her moan. She loves when I leave my fingerprints on her hips. She once told me that she likes to press on them when I'm not home to bring back the sensation of me pleasuring her.

Fuck if that isn't a fantasy of mine now.

I work her slowly, not wanting to let her give in too easily, but my girl is primed and ready to go. It doesn't take long for her to come on my tongue. I lap up all the juices and go for round two, but she pushes against me.

“Cal, I need you. I need you inside me.”

I can't help my proud smirk. I love hearing her beg for me. Usually I give in, but tonight I'm not done with my feast.

So I stand and undress. She looks at me hungrily. As if she wants to gobble me right up. I would let her too.

I want to laugh when I see her frown as I move to lie on the bed next to her.

"Inside me, Callum," she tries to demand again, but I'm done giving into her whims.

"On top, *a stór*."

I let her move to straddle me, but instead I take her body and guide her until she's in reverse cowgirl position. She reaches for my dick but squeals when I grab her hips, hauling her up to sit on my face.

"Callum, I want to feel you fill me up."

I chuckle. "Then swallow my cock, Autumn. You said you wanted me inside you. I want your mouth."

She shivers at my comment, wetness seeping out of her. She loves when I dirty talk her.

I don't pay any mind to what she plans to do next. I've got my very favorite meal in front of me, and I plan to enjoy it to my heart's content.

Sucking her clit into my mouth, I work my fingers into her opening until I'm filling her like she wants. I can hear her moaning, living in the moment.

My dick twitches, but I ignore him. I don't care if all she does is lie there while I enjoy her. This is about her.

She doesn't leave me hanging, though. I feel the heat of her mouth surround me as she begins to blow me enthusiastically.

The faster I piston my fingers inside of her, the faster she sucks on me. When I nibble and suck at her clit, her legs clench, her throat swallowing me.

Every single action I take creates a reaction in her, bringing us both pleasure beyond comprehension.

Sliding one of my fingers from her, I move it to her ass, rimming her hole. She freezes, her body shuddering. Then I slip it in, only a little. My girl doesn't just come then.

She has an out-of-body experience. Her entire body shakes as she squirts all over my face and chest.

I'm still lodged in her mouth, feeling her swallow me over and over as she screams against me. It's enough to set me off, coming straight down her throat.

She grows weak, falling on me, the tip of my dick still in her mouth.

Slowly, I pull out of her and turn her to lie on my wet chest.

She groans. "We need to clean up."

"We will when you can walk again. Then we will go for round two."

She mumbles something else, but I don't hear it.

Instead, I lie here, content to have my soul mate in my arms.

Damn, life is good.

CHAPTER
THREE

Miya

“**A**re you sure you’re okay?” I ask again for the third time.

“I’m fine, I promise.”

“And he didn’t hurt you?” I press.

Gabby rolls her eyes. “No, honestly, it was all my fault. Check the cameras. I was sitting on the arm of the chair, and when he laughed and slapped his leg at what the other man said, it startled me so bad that when I jumped, I fell backward. Talk about embarrassing.”

I take a deep breath as I push some hair out of my face as I think about what she said. It makes sense. Mr. Colson has one of those deep laughs that catches you off guard when you aren’t expecting it. The man projects his laugh so loudly that it sounds like it’s coming out of a bullhorn, and this was Gabby’s first time with him.

Still, I’d rather be safe than sorry.

“Okay, give me a few minutes. I’m going to go get Mr. Colson’s side of things.”

Gabby shakes her head. “That’s really not necessary. Really, just let me get back to work. It won’t happen again.”

I raise my brow. “Last time I checked, I’m the one who decides that. Hold tight.”

I leave the girls’ lounge and head to my office. As soon as I step inside, I see Kado, standing guard.

Mr. Colson turns toward me as the door clicks shut. “Is she okay?”

Ignoring him, I walk around my desk and take a seat.

As I wait him out, he squirms.

“She’s fine, please sit,” I say, finally putting him out of his misery.

I watch him carefully as he does what I asked. He genuinely looks like he feels bad and like he cares.

“Can you tell me what happened?”

He runs a hand through his hair as he takes a deep breath. “I don’t know. One minute she was sitting there, pretty as a peach, and the next she was falling backward.”

“What happened leading up to that?”

His brows furrow as he thinks. “I was wrapping up a discussion with another man. He said something funny, and I laughed. It should be all on camera since it happened on the floor.”

“It is, and I’ve watched it. It looked like everything was fine one minute, and then the next, one of my girls went down.”

“Is she okay? If she’s hurt, I’d like to pay for it,” he says earnestly.

“She’s fine and already ready to get back to work, but I take my girls’ well-being seriously, and I needed to talk to both of you.”

“Am I in trouble?”

I start shaking my head before he even finishes asking. “No, you aren’t in trouble. I just ask that you tone it down so this doesn’t happen again.”

He blushes as I continue. “You’ve never been a problem before, so your membership here is still in good standing. I just ask that you be aware of your surroundings.”

“Of course.”

I tip my head toward Kado. “He will see you out. If you want, Gabby can meet you back on the floor for you two to make plans.”

“Would it be okay if I paid her for the night without doing anything? This kind of killed the mood.”

“I’m sorry you feel that way, but yes. You can pay her for her time.”

“Thank you.”

I stand as he does and shake his hand. “I’ll be seeing you.”

“Goodbye.”

I watch as he walks out with Kado trailing behind him. When the door clicks shut, I relax into my chair and shut my eyes.

If it’s not one thing, it’s another.

It doesn’t help that it’s the holidays, and it’s like everyone has gone mad.

At least I’m not working retail. Imagine how bad that would be.

I cringe at the thought. Speaking of the holidays, I haven’t even started shopping. Every time I plan to slip out to do some shopping, something comes up.

I wonder if I could hire a personal shopper...

A knock at my door has me sitting up.

I can’t even get five fucking minutes of peace.

“Come in,” I yell as I rub my forehead, feeling a headache coming on.

Kenji slips into the room with a coffee cup in hand.

“Is that for me?”

Kenji looks down at the cup and then back at me. “I don’t know if you’re more excited to see me or the coffee.”

“You, of course, but the coffee is a close second,” I say as I stand.

Kenji rounds my desk and sets the coffee down before pulling me into him. He leans down and kisses me. When he goes to pull away, I pull him back and keep kissing him.

I don’t know what it is about him, but I can’t get enough of him.

Kenji chuckles. “Long day?”

“The longest,” I grumble.

He sits down in my chair and pulls me into his lap. I grab the coffee and make myself comfortable.

“Is it time to leave yet?” I ask as I take a sip.

Kenji hums. “We could probably sneak out if you really want to.”

“As tempting as it is, I have too much to do. I need to make adjustments to next week’s schedule and then plan the rest of the month out.”

“That sounds boring.”

“It is, but if I don’t do it, no one will.” I sigh. “How has your day been?”

“Fine. I watched Kai remind people why he’s the dark prince.”

“Sounds like a blast,” I deadpan.

I’ll never understand how these guys are so comfortable with bloodshed.

“What else?”

“Oh, Cleo has invited us over to celebrate Christmas.”

“That sounds...” I trail off, trying to find the words. “Interesting, but I’m game.”

Kenji chuckles. “Apparently it won’t be just us as she’s invited the Westies.”

“Well, their leader is her brother, so it makes sense,” I point out.

“True.” Kenji starts to rub my thigh.

“Is it weird working so closely with the other families?” I ask, referring to the four families that are trying to end the human trafficking ring that’s been plaguing all of our cities.

“Sometimes it doesn’t feel right. We all operate differently. Other times though, it makes sense.”

“Keep your friends close, but keep your enemies closer,” I murmur under my breath.

“Very true.” He falls silent as I finish my coffee. “You didn’t sleep well last night.”

I shake my head. “I didn’t, and before you ask, I don’t know why.”

“You’ve been working too much.”

“Are you feeling neglected?” I tease.

He shakes his head.

“How long will it take you to do the schedule?” he asks, changing the subject.

“About an hour. Why?”

He pats my thigh, and I stand.

“Because I’m going to let you get to it, and then in an hour, I’m going to pull you out of here. Then you and I are going to go do something.”

“What are we going to do?”

Kenji smirks down at me. “You’ll just have to wait and see.”

He leans down and kisses me, but all too soon, he pulls away. As he slips by me, he slaps my ass, making me yelp.

“Hey!” I lightly scold.

Kenji laughs as he opens the door. “I’ll be back soon, little one. You better be ready, or I’ll pull you out of here, kicking and screaming.”

“Is that a threat or a promise?” I yell as he starts to close the door.

He opens the door just a little and sticks his head inside.

“Both.” He winks before shutting the door.

I sit down in my chair and sigh.

That man.



Kenji

WHEN I LEFT MIYA EARLIER, I knew I needed to do something for her. She’s been working so hard she’s worn down.

You know it’s bad when she isn’t even trying to be a brat.

I lock up my office and head off to get her. As I walk through the casino, several people try to get my attention, but I ignore them. I’m off the clock unless Haruaki says otherwise.

I find my girl on the floor, talking to several of her girls. I hang back and watch her do her thing. One of the girls points at me, and Miya looks over her shoulder. As soon as she sees me, she smiles before turning back to the girls.

I start making my way toward her as she wraps up the conversation.

“I’ll see you tomorrow,” she tells them.

“You two have a good night,” one of the girls teases as the other drags her away.

“Are you ready?”

“I just need to grab my purse from my office, and then we are good to go.”

She turns and heads off, and I follow behind her. Ten minutes later, we're in the car and on our way.

“Where are we going?”

“We're going home.”

Miya hums as she sinks further into the seat. “I could totally go for a quiet night in.”

Little does she know it's not just a quiet night in, but I keep that to myself for now.

The drive home goes by in the blink of an eye, and we make our way up to our apartment. As soon as she steps through the front door, she kicks off her shoes.

Miya groans. “I didn't realize how bad my feet were hurting. I'm going to go put on sweats.”

“Stop,” I demand.

I smile as I watch her body freeze.

“Give me your phone.”

Her eyes are full of questions as she reluctantly reaches into her bag. When she hands it over, I don't break eye contact as I power her phone down and then do the same to mine.

“Kenji...what if someone calls?”

“Did I tell you that you could speak?”

Her little nose flares, but she doesn't mouth back as I put our phones down on the table in the entryway.

“Strip.”

Her breath catches as her eyes dilate.

Now she gets it.

“Why should I strip when you're fully dressed?” she sasses back, finally finding her voice.

“I'm the one in charge here, little girl. Now strip,” I remind her.

Miya takes her sweet time as she takes off her clothes. She turns, facing away from me, and ever so slowly pulls her thong down as she bends at the waist. Putting herself on display.

Fuck yes.

I step forward and push her farther down as I grind my cock against her. I bite back the chuckle when I find her wet and ready.

“You’re already so wet for me.”

She looks over her shoulder and raises a brow. “Are you sure it’s for you?”

I bring my hand down and slap her ass, hard.

Miya jumps, almost falling forward. “Ow!”

“Watch that mouth,” I warn her as I let her go, stepping back. “Now head into the living room and get on the table.”

Confusion fills her face, but she does as I ask. I follow her and smile when I hear her suck in a breath when she sees the massage table.

“What’s this?”

“Get on, I want you face down. Don’t make me ask again.”

She does as I ask, but I don’t miss the way she wiggles her ass as she does it. She’s trying to tease me, but only one of us is going to win this fight. It’s not going to be her.

I wait for her to settle before grabbing the oil, warming it in my hands before I start her massage.

I keep it mostly professional at first, only swiping against her sideboob twice as I massage her shoulders and sides. I make sure to get my fingers in deep, finding each knot to release the tension.

She moans and hums as I work, making me smile. I enjoy making her feel good, even if it’s not sexual. Still, this isn’t going to stay the calming massage she thinks it is. I’m only luring her into a sense of security before I take it away.

I massage down each of her arms, making sure to even do her hands. I want her pliant. None of that bratty energy for her tonight. As much as I love when she defies me, tonight I want her begging.

When I finally move to her ass, I feel the way she arches up into my touch. I don't move away from her cheeks, though. I actually speed through that area, leaving her sighing.

She spreads her legs as I move onto them, but other than an occasional brush against her center, I leave her alone, focusing on the massage.

"Kenji," she groans as I make another pass on her inner thigh.

"Shh. Enjoy your massage."

She grumbles a little but doesn't speak again.

So I get back to work. I massage each foot, making sure to dig my fingers into the arch. She moans, her body shaking as I work her. I wait until her body is completely relaxed, then I step back, stopping all movement.

"Kenji, what are you doing?" she whispers, not wanting to disturb the quiet of the room.

"Stay still. I'll be back. If you obey, I might reward you."

Then I walk away. I walk into our bathroom, washing my hands for several minutes. Then I sit and wait another three minutes before I move to the bedroom.

There, I grab what I need.

When I finally make it back to the living room, I find my girl in the exact position I left her in.

Good. She's being agreeable tonight.

"Kenji?" she murmurs, her tone sleepy.

"Shhh." is my only response.

Then I'm at the table. I set the items I grabbed between her feet on the table. Then I grab the rope and begin tying her to

each leg of the table. She doesn't fight me. Instead, her breathing grows faster.

It's turning her on. My girl always loves being tied up. She likes having no choice but to give in to me.

Once I have her secure, I lean over, kissing the nape of her neck. She shivers. I smile against her skin before I grab the second item I brought with me.

As I open the bottle, I coo at my girl, "Such a good girl. Not even trying to get free. I'm going to make you feel so good. I'm so proud of you."

Then I put the lube on my fingers, not bothering to warm it this time. I want her to jump when she feels the sensation on her skin.

Pressing my fingers between her asscheeks, she hisses at the cool sensation, her body attempting to arch away, but she can't move.

"How's that feel, little one?"

"Cold," she breathes.

I continue to move my fingers between her cheeks, barely pressing over her hole with each move. When her body finally calms down, I press into her slightly, making her breath catch.

"Relax. Let me in," I demand.

She tries her best, but her body is too on edge. She needs a distraction. So with my other hand, I find her clit and begin drawing circles over it. It has her moaning as her body withers against me.

I keep my fingers at her rear steady as she begins to thrust her hips, my fingers sliding into her as she does so.

That only drives her wilder. Between the slight pain she's come to love and the pleasure, she's teetering on the edge of coming.

I can't allow that yet, though. I need this orgasm to release her tension, meaning I need her to feel like a tightrope ready to snap.

So, moving my fingers from her clit, I continue to work her ass.

“Kenji, don’t torture me. I can’t handle it.”

Leaning over her back, I press a kiss to her shoulder as I continue to work her ass.

“You can handle it. Unless you need to use your safe word?” I ask.

She hesitates, making me stop my movements. Then she groans, “No. No safe word.”

“Okay then. Take it.”

I continue my ministrations, adding fingers until she’s taking three fingers deep inside of her.

“Are you ready for more?” I ask her.

“Yes. Please.” She cries out as I scissor my fingers.

“I’m going to put something bigger than my fingers here. You’re going to take all of it, aren’t you?”

“Yes. I’ll take whatever you give me,” She admits.

I already know she will. She always does. She was made for me.

Picking up the final item, I smile at it. A vibrating butt plug. It’s bigger than the last one I used on her, but I have faith she can take it. We’ve been training her ass for a long time now, building up to this.

I want her to know what it feels like to be filled so fully on both ends. Not that I could ever share her, so a toy is what she gets.

Lubing up the toy, I begin to slowly push it in, pulling it back out before repeating it. It takes several minutes, but once it’s finally inside of her, I caress her back.

“You are doing so well. Your ass looks amazing filled to the brim. How does it feel?”

She’s panting at this point. “Good. Full. God, I need more.”

“Not God, my love,” I remind her. “I’ll be right back. You better not come while I’m gone.”

“No. Please don’t leave me like this,” she cries out.

I ignore her, turning on the plug to its lowest setting as I walk back to the bathroom.

After another hand wash, I stand at the entrance to the living room, watching my wife struggle to hold her composure with the vibrating plug in her ass. She’s moving in her restraints, her body unable to handle the pleasure being given to it.

Moving to the front of her, I grab her chin, lifting her head to look at me. She’s drooling, her eyes glazed from the pleasure.

“Did you come?” I ask her.

“No, sir. I want to. Please.” She is a mindless mess.

Just how I want her. I don’t want her thinking about anything but the pleasure I can give her.

Stripping quickly, I step back in front of her. “Suck my dick good, and I’ll give you the orgasm I’ve been denying you.”

She opens easily, greedily swallowing my cock as it slides into her mouth. I wait until I’m lodged in the back of her throat before I hit the remote to up her vibration in her ass.

The way she moans against my dick should be a crime. I swear I’m about to come from that alone.

Grabbing the side of her face, I pump into her mouth, refusing to think about how sexy she looks right now. Instead, I’m thinking about anything to ward off my release too soon. When I feel her start to shake, I let her go, pulling back.

She pants against the table, her face falling back into the hole meant for it as her body shivers in pent-up tension.

Now it’s time for the big finish. To give her the release she is desperate for.

Moving back to the end of the table, I release the rope on her ankles before pulling her to her knees. Then I climb on behind her, mounting her from behind. She's so wet that I slip right in. I can feel the vibrations from the butt plug as I start to thrust into her. Each time I bottom out, I make sure to press against the plug, making her gasp.

I keep up a steady pace, increasing the speed with each thrust. As I work into a rhythm, I turn up the butt plug to its highest setting. Then I drop the remote and go to town on my woman. It only takes seconds for her to be clenching around me, her voice screaming out her pleasure.

I continue the punishing pace, knocking her from one orgasm into another until I'm the only thing holding her up. She grows so limp in my arms I'm afraid she's blacked out. I pump twice more, pulling out to spill my release on her back. Quickly, I lay her on the table, jumping down to turn off the toy. When I move back to the head of the table, I brush her hair from her face.

Her eyes are closed.

“Miya? You okay, little one?”

Her eyes flutter open, glazed and confused. “Sleep.”

That's all she can manage.

I chuckle, undoing her restraints as I rub her limbs. Then I move to the end of the table, taking out the toy and cleaning her up with a towel.

Then I carry my wife to bed and tuck her in.

She doesn't stir a single time.

Good. Maybe she will finally get the rest she needs.

CHAPTER
FOUR

Cleo

I hum as I tape down the last corner of the Christmas gift. Then I reach for the already-filled-out name tag and place it on the corner of the box.

“Perfect,” I murmur to myself.

The other day, when Autumn and I had lunch and went shopping, I completed most of my shopping. I got gifts for my younger brother, Sean, and Kieran, my godfather Killian’s son. Oh, how I wish I could spend the holidays with them, but where they live in New York City, it just doesn’t make sense.

Maybe someday.

For now, though, I’m stuck sending gifts and watching them grow up through photos.

I guess I shouldn’t complain too much. Rosa, Sean’s mother, recently visited for a week. It was awkward at first because my father put her through hell. Even though he’s dead, the memories haunt her, especially when in this city.

Honestly, I don’t blame her for packing up and leaving town. If I experienced such a horrific trauma, I would want to start fresh somewhere new. I’m thankful she even lets me stay

part of their lives at all. I wouldn't blame her for not wanting anyone who shares blood with that monster in her child's life.

Quickly, I shake off the thoughts and grab my phone. Unlocking the screen, I pull up my latest list and check off everything I have done. Next, I switch apps and open up my favorite online retailer. From there, I order what I can and smile when I see that everything will be delivered within the next two days.

As I close out of the app and go to set my phone down, it vibrates, and I see a text come across the screen.

Kai 夫: Why are you sitting on the floor, princess?

I smile as I read the text.

Me: Watching me through the cameras again?

Kai 夫: Can't blame a man for wanting to see what's his.

I roll my eyes as I shoot him off another text.

Me: If you spent more time working than watching me, the sooner you could come home. But since I have your attention, I need some packages shipped to Killian's.

Kai 夫: I'll have someone pick them up and take care of it for you. Are we decorating the tree tonight?

Me: Thank you, and yes. I love you.

Kai 夫: I love you more. I'll be home soon.

I set down my phone on the end table and groan as I stand. I didn't realize how long I had been sitting on the hard tile, and now my butt is numb.

I pick up the gifts and stack them in the corner. Then I grab the ones for Sean and Kieran and place them in a box to be shipped in. Taping the box shut, I set it next to the front door.

Turning, I place my hands on my hips and look around the living room, cringing at the sight. Totes of Christmas décor are scattered around, and a naked tree is standing in the corner, waiting for us to dress it.

Kai's going to lose his shit when he realizes I bought another tree this year to place in the front entry.

He doesn't understand my love of Christmas and going all out, but he entertains me. He might grumble while we decorate, but if I try to start without him, the corner of his eye twitches, which tells me he secretly likes it. Either that, or he just likes spending time with me uninterrupted.

My phone vibrates again, and I pick it up off the end table and see an email. Opening it, I see that our trip is completely booked.

“Yes!” I fist pump to myself.

Kai is going to lose his mind when he sees what I got him. I truly think he will love it. Or I hope he does. When Autumn told me what she got Callum, I was completely jealous. I haven't traveled as much as I'd like. I know if I ask Kai, he would make it happen, but still, I know he's busy.

Even I know the man has control issues and would be twitching to get back to make sure his empire doesn't fall without him.

Autumn's travel lady hooked me up with a dream trip to Japan. We won't be staying in one place but hopping around, staying in both cities and small villages. The part I think he will like most though is I managed to convince a Katana-Kaji, a Japanese sword maker, to make Kai a custom sword of his choosing, and he gets to watch. It took a lot of convincing because the man likes to keep to himself, but I pulled it off.

I hope he loves it.

It's Kai, the man gets hard anytime he holds a blade. I remind myself.

“Mrs. Takahashi?”

I turn and see one of the guards who's always around standing at attention.

“Yes, Daiki?”

“Mr. Takahashi messaged us and told us you had something that needs shipped?”

“Oh, yes, please.” I point at the box. “If you wouldn't mind, I would prefer it to go out today.”

Daiki nods. “I'm assuming you would like it shipped next day?”

“If you can.”

I watch as he walks over and picks up the box.

He turns back toward me and bows. “I will get this done for you.”

“Thank you.”

He pauses on the edge of the room, “Oh, Mrs. Takahashi, I forgot I was supposed to tell you. Mr. Takahashi asked me to pass along that he ordered dinner and he will be here in an hour.”

“Thank you, Daiki.” I shake my head as he leaves the room.

That man.

How he manages to know what I want before I do, I'll never know.

Ever since our first Christmas together, we have ordered Chinese food to enjoy while we decorate. I don't know why, but it's become our tradition.

The clock chimes, and I see the time.

I have about an hour before he comes home. An idea starts to form in my mind, and I smile.

It's time to get ready and surprise him with a little outfit I picked up the other day.



Kai

THE SOUND of Christmas music greets me as I walk into the house. After the day I've had, I'd love nothing more than to turn it off and sit down with a stiff drink and spend time with my woman, with the only sound happening throughout the house being her moans.

But somehow, my self-proclaimed Grinch self married one of Santa's helpers. For Cleo, though, I'll paste on a smile because it makes her happy.

After dropping my keys in the bowl by the door, I continue through the house searching for the reason my heart beats after dropping the food off in the kitchen. As I walk into the living room, I come to a stop and lean against the doorway with my hands in my pockets.

She's wearing a navy-blue silk dress that would take me two seconds to tear off her, with her hands in the air, spinning in a circle.

Cleo is fucking breathtaking. Just looking at her makes all of the bullshit from today slip away. None of it matters.

She's the only thing that ever matters.

"Ah!" Cleo screeches when she sees me, her hand flying to her chest. "Haruaki Takahashi, you fucking scared me!"

"Language," I chastise with a smirk on my face.

Cleo scoffs. "I should put a bell on you. What are you doing standing over there watching me like a creeper?"

Pushing off the wall, I walk toward her. As soon as she's within reach, I pull her into me, and her hands come up to my chest, resting on the lapels of my jacket.

“Last I checked, I’m your husband, not a creeper, and I didn’t know it was a crime to watch what’s mine.”

“Tomato, tomahto.” She smiles as she stands up on her tiptoes.

I meet her halfway and place my lips on hers. The kiss is nice and slow, and full of promise of what’s to come.

“This is new,” I say as I finger the flimsy strap that would take me two seconds to rip off her.

“Do you like it? I picked it up the other day when I was out.”

“I’ll like it more once it’s on the floor.”

I smile as a beautiful blush covers Cleo’s cheeks.

I’ve spent the last several years corrupting the fuck out of my wife, but I don’t think she will ever stop blushing when I tease her, and I fucking love it.

“I’m sure I could be convinced to take it off...later once we’re done decorating.”

I grunt as I pull away. “Tell me where you want me.”

A tiny smile plays on her lips. “You know, if you’re good, I might let you take me next to the Christmas tree.”

I adjust my glasses as I think it over.

I wonder if she would let me tie her up with a string of lights. Or maybe garland, although that might rub her wrists raw.

“You like the sound of that, don’t you?” She laughs.

Ignoring her, I take off my jacket and unbutton my shirt. Once my chest is bare, I look back at her and find her eyes on me.

And she looks fucking starved.

“Do you want food first or to start decorating?”

I feel the corner of my mouth twitch when she blinks.

“What?” she asks, completely dazed.

“Food or decorating?”

“Food.”

“I’ll be back.” I head back into the kitchen and grab the food and utensils.

Everything in hand, I head back into the living room. Cleo tells me about her day as we sit and eat around the coffee table. Once the food is cleaned up, we start decorating the house, and as much as I hate to admit it, I find myself enjoying it. I don’t even comment on the new tree that she bought for the front entry.

Only for Cleo.

Watching the way her face lights up with each new item she forgot we owned is a special kind of heaven. If I died right now, I would die happy because I have her in my life. I know I’m not destined for the good place after death, but as long as she is with me, that doesn’t matter. I would fight my way out of the depths of hell to stay by her side, ever her faithful servant.

She doesn’t even know how much she truly owns me.

After the tree is lit and covered with ornaments, and the mantle is covered with garland, we’re done.

I sit down in my chair and pull Cleo into my lap.

“Happy?” I ask as we stare at the room together.

She leans down and kisses me.

All too soon, she pulls away. “I am, thank you.”

“Good.”

Once again, my hand finds the flimsy strap of her dress, and I lightly run my finger over it. Almost instantly, her breathing changes, and her heartbeat speeds up.

“Now that we are done, I believe you owe me, my darling wife,” I murmur against her neck, my tongue slipping out to taste her skin.

Her breath catches, but she doesn't stop me. She never would stop me. She's an addict, and I'm her drug. Not that it's not the same for me. I would do anything for another hit of her.

Turning her on my lap, she adjusts until she's straddling me. Then her hands find my pants, unbuckling them before she has my cock out and ready.

"You're always so hard," she whispers.

Those words always get me. She says them often, but it doesn't make them any less dirty hearing them pour from her mouth.

"Only for you, princess. What are you going to do now that you've gotten me so hard?" Reaching out, I untie her dress.

"I don't know." She reaches up, pulling her dress open. Then she pulls a foil packet from her bra. "I was thinking of playing with it for a while."

Ripping the packet with her teeth, she pulls the condom out. Then she rolls it over my dick.

"Yeah? You wanna play?" I growl, the feeling of her hand on me turning me on even more.

"I always want to play with you."

I watch as she strips her dress off, leaving her in nothing but a bra. She's not even wearing panties.

"You've been bare this whole time?" I hiss.

"I figured my panties would be ruined anyway, so why wear them?"

Looking at her spread thighs over my lap, I can see the wetness on her inner thighs. My girl is gushing for me.

"You're so wet, princess. Is that all for me?" I ask.

"Of course it is. It's always for you."

Then she does the most beautiful thing. She kneels until she's hovering over me before sinking down onto me in one

move.

“Fuck,” I hiss at the sudden feel of her warm body engulfing mine.

She moans, her head falling forward on my shoulder.

“So full,” she murmurs.

I let her have a moment before I grip her hips and begin to move her on top of me. She gasps but takes the instruction well. She begins to swivel her hips, her moans becoming louder.

“Kai, I need more,” she manages to say.

Reaching down, I begin to circle her clit with one hand while the other paws at her breast. When I pinch her nipple while applying pressure to her clit, I feel her clench against me. I stare at her face, loving the blissful look that passes her face as she screams out my name in pleasure.

I’ll never get tired of this.

I languidly stroke her clit as she twitches with aftershocks from the orgasm. When she’s finally coherent again, I stand, walking over to the newly decorated tree. Then I lay her on the tree skirt. Nestling between her legs, I enter her again.

“Oh, Kai.”

I can see the colorful Christmas lights twinkling in her eyes as I fuck her. It’s almost as if her eyes are sparkling just for me.

I thrust faster, harder until she’s moaning my name once again.

“Give me one more, princess, then we can cuddle in bed,” I hiss at her through my teeth.

“I can’t. Please,” she cries out.

I don’t let her deny me, though. I own every single one of her orgasms, and I want one right now. I want one before I finally let myself let go.

Angling her hips up, I push myself to give her more. I know the moment I find the spot. Her moans become more high-pitched, her body coiled tight.

Then she clenches me harder than I think she ever has as she arches up into me. Then she's screaming her pleasure. My own finds me as I continue to pump into her.

When we both finally come down, she looks up at me with nothing but love and adoration in her eyes.

"You look so peaceful with the lights behind you," she admits.

I lean down, kissing her softly before I pull out to lie next to her.

Then I look up at the tree from below.

I see what she means. Something about the lights in the branches brings this peaceful feeling.

Pulling her into my side, I press a kiss to the top of her head.

Maybe this Christmas stuff isn't as bad as I think it is.

CHAPTER
FIVE

Autumn

“**W**e got so much accomplished today. I couldn’t have done it without you,” Cleo tells me.

“Of course. It was nice getting out of the house for a while.”

“And child-free,” Cleo teases as she bumps her shoulder into mine.

“I love my daughter, but it’s healthy to spend some time away from each other. Spending time with adults and having actual conversations is good for the soul.”

We step into the elevator, and I hit the button for the floor we need.

“I never thought of that,” Cleo says as she leans against the railing. “Why are we coming here again?”

I smile and roll my eyes. “When Tristano was in town, he took it as his personal mission to turn Declan’s apartment into a home. He bought him bedding, made sure he had a full set of dishes, and bought him plants.”

“I’ve never met Tristano, but I’ve heard he’s a character.” Cleo laughs.

“You have no idea. Anyway, when he was talking to Callum about business, he asked him if I could stop by and water the plant. He’s worried that Declan will kill it.”

“Why didn’t he just buy a fake one then?”

The elevator comes to a stop, and the doors open.

As we step out, I tell her, “Callum asked the same thing. Tristano told him that a plastic plant wouldn’t fit the aesthetic he was going for.”

We come to a stop in front of the door, and I open my purse, instantly finding the key and letting us both in.

“Man, no wonder Tristano helped him out. This place is sparse,” Cleo says as she looks around. “Surely my brother pays him enough to fully furnish this place.”

“It’s not our place to judge,” I say over my shoulder as I head into the kitchen.

There is an empty glass drying on a rack.

Perfect.

I grab the glass and fill it with water.

“Although I will admit it is a little sparse.”

Cleo taps her finger against her chin. “Maybe after the craziness of the holidays, we should come in here and put some photos on the walls or something. I wonder if Kado’s place looks like this too.”

“I’m sure you could ask him, and he would tell you, but I’m not invading anyone’s home and forcing something onto them that they don’t want.”

Cleo sighs. “You’re right.”

It only takes me a few moments to water the plant and put the glass back.

“Is that it?” Cleo asks as I walk back toward her.

“Yep. Now we can head home.”

“Awesome, I want to be there before they start delivering everything.”

As we step out of the apartment, the door across the hall opens, and a woman steps out. She pauses when she sees us,

and a frown covers her face as she looks between us and Declan's place.

"Who are you?" she demands.

I feel Cleo tense next to me, and I place my hand on her arm. I can tell from her aura she doesn't mean us any harm. She's just looking out for her neighbor.

"We're friends of Declan's."

"Declan doesn't have friends." She purses her lips. "Except for that flirty guy."

Cleo and I share a look and smile before I look back at the woman. "Declan works for my husband. I have a key." I raise it so she can see it. "I promise nothing shady is happening."

She shifts from one foot to the other. "If you say so."

I hold out my hand and step forward. "I'm Autumn, and this is my sister-in-law, Cleo."

"I'm Nikita." She reluctantly shakes my hand.

"So are you new to the city?" Cleo asks.

I watch as the woman's guard once again goes up. "Why do you ask?"

Cleo raises her hands. "Hey, just trying to make friendly conversation..."

I cut Cleo off before she can say anything else. "What Cleo was poorly asking was if you wanted to get together sometime. Maybe get a drink or lunch. Something easy."

Nikita frowns. "I don't know..."

"Come on, you can never have too many friends," I push.

"Sure, but I have things I'm supposed to do today."

"That's fine."

"You could join us for Christmas dinner," I offer.

She starts shaking her head. "No, that's time for family time."

"No, it's a great idea, and Cleo won't mind. Right, Cleo?"

Cleo looks at me as if I've lost my mind but smiles back at Nikita. "I insist."

"I..."

"Declan is coming, and you can come with him."

"He and I don't exactly get along."

"It will be fine, I promise. I'll tell him to pick you up. Just give me your number, and I'll give you the information," I say as I pull out my phone.

Hesitantly, she recites her number, and I punch it in.

"There. I sent you a text so you have mine as well."

"Cool." She points over her shoulder toward the elevator. "I'm going to bounce."

"Bye," Cleo and I say in unison.

We watch her walk away, and as soon as she steps into the elevator, Cleo turns on me.

"What the hell, Autumn? You just invited some random woman to my house for Christmas," she hisses.

I raise my hands. "Hear me out, please."

Cleo huffs, crossing her arms, but nods.

"This building is owned by us. That means all of the tenants have had extensive background checks. If she lives here, then she's harmless, especially if she lives next to the second in command of the Chicago Westies."

Cleo bites the corner of her lip. "True."

"She needs us."

"Why do you say that?"

"Her aura." Instantly, confusion fills Cleo's face. "Never mind, that doesn't matter. It wouldn't make sense to you anyway. Just trust me when I say that she needs us."

"Okay, but if my husband asks, I'm blaming you." She points at me.

"I'll handle it. Haruaki doesn't scare me."

Much.

“Now let’s head home. I want to see my baby.”

And warn Callum about what I just did.



Callum

EMILY’S PUDGY hands slap my cheeks, and she giggles.

“No hitting,” I warn her. “That’s not nice.”

I’m sitting on the floor in her nursery, and she’s on my lap.

“Really?” I run my hand over the back of her head as she babbles.

When Autumn told me she was pregnant, I didn’t falter. I wanted her and Emily, but at the same time, I was worried. I had just become head of the Westies a year before, and I was still having to remind people of why I was in charge.

Would I end up like my father and neglect my children?

Instead of doing what he did, I did the exact opposite. I’ve made sure to be home most nights for dinner, even if I have to leave after. I try my hardest to be the one to put her to bed at night. I want to be present.

And seeing her big brown eyes stare up at me right before she closes them each night is worth it.

My watch vibrates, and I see a text come across the screen.

Wife: On my way home. I love you two.

Gently, I scoot Emily down and pull my phone out of my pocket.

“Come here, *a leanbh*. Let’s send Mommy a picture.”

I grab her and pull her into my arms. She presses her cheek against my rough one. As soon as the camera opens, she

smiles, and I can't help but follow suit. After snapping the photo, Emily pulls away, and I let her go.

I can't help but stare at the photo. She's got drool on her chin, and her hair is wild despite the fact that I tried to tame it by putting one of those tiny ass hair ties in it.

Just looking at it makes me rub my chest.

I don't want her to grow up. Or hell, maybe it's time to give her a sibling...

I shake away the thought and text Autumn back.

Me: We love you more. See you soon.

After attaching the photo, I hit send. I go to set down my phone, but before I can, it rings.

Killian's name flashes across the screen.

Shit.

"Hey," I say as soon as I answer.

"Happy holidays. How are you?"

"I'm alright. You?"

"Tired," he says, making us both laugh.

"I remember those days," I tease.

"How is Emily?"

"She's good," I say as I watch her toddle around the room. "How's Kieran?"

"I'd say he's good. All he does is sleep, eat, and cockblock his old man."

"You'll live." I chuckle.

"I don't want to keep you long, but I just wanted to say thank you for the gifts you and Autumn sent." He pauses. "I don't understand some of it, but I know Greer appreciates it, and gifts for Emily are on the way."

When Greer had Kieran, Autumn sent her some customized tea to help recover, along with some bath salts and

who knows what else. Greer loved them so much that when we sent Christmas gifts, Autumn sent her some more.

“Of course and thank you. You didn’t have to send anything.”

“Do you really think you could send my kid something and I wouldn’t send yours something back?” Killian says, his voice full of laughter.

“Touché.”

Crying fills the background, and Killian sighs. “Looks like I’m needed. I’ll talk to you later this week.”

“Sounds good. Bye.”

I hang up as I hear a door opening.

“Sounds like Mommy’s home. Should we go find her?” I ask Emily as I push myself off the floor.

She meets me halfway, and I pick her up.

I bounce her on my arm, making her giggle. “Let’s go!”

We head downstairs and find Autumn in the living room.

“Hey there, *a stór*. How was your day?”

She turns, and her entire face lights up as she sees us. “It was good. How are my two favorite people?”

As soon as we’re close enough, she leans in and kisses Emily’s cheek, making her laugh. When she pulls away, I lean down and kiss her. When she hums, I can’t help but deepen the kiss. That is, until Emily slaps my cheek.

Autumn lightly scolds. “No hitting, that’s not nice.”

“I’m pretty sure at this point she thinks it’s a game.”

“Maybe.”

Autumn leans into my side, and I wrap my arm around her waist. I close my eyes as I hold the two most important people in my life in my arms.

This is what it’s all about.

“So...I need to tell you something,” she says after a few moments of silence.

I kiss the top of her head and then let her pull away.

“What’s up?”

“You know how you asked me to stop by Declan’s?”

“Yeah...”

My mind starts to run wild. What the fuck did he have in his apartment that concerned her?

Is the place trashed? Did she find a woman chained to his bed?

“Well, when I was leaving, I met his neighbor, Nikita.”

I take a deep breath and let what she said roll over me.

Please don’t let this go where I think it’s going.

“And, well...I might have invited her to Christmas dinner.” Autumn cringes.

Slowly, I bend down and put Emily down. Standing, I rub my jaw.

Surely, I misheard her.

“I’m sorry, you did what?”

“I invited her to Cleo and Haruaki’s for dinner.”

“*A stór...*”

“Look, I know it wasn’t smart, okay? Truly, I do, but Callum, she’s a good person. I know it.”

“My love, I know you are in tune with yourself and the world around us, but it’s more complicated than that.”

“What do you mean?” she asks.

“Nikita isn’t a guest at the apartments. She’s a prisoner of sorts. She’s the consequence of the Russian Bratva betraying Kai and Cleo.”

She frowns. “Nikita betrayed them?”

“Not necessarily. Listen, you know I don’t like to talk business with you. I prefer to keep you out of it.”

“Usually I’d allow that, but if you don’t want me to hang out with this woman, then you better give me more than ‘it’s complicated.’” She folds her arms over her chest.

I sigh. “Her father was part of the Popov Bratva that fucked with Cleo. When they fled, he stayed and made a deal with Kai. Kai would allow him sanctuary in the city, but he would need to give something as collateral. So he gave his daughter. Kai didn’t want her anywhere near Cleo, so he in turn made a deal with me to keep an eye on her on his behalf. So while it appears she has freedom, she’s never actually alone. Someone is always watching her. In fact, I could tell you where she is right at this moment if I chose to.”

Autumn’s eyes fill with tears. “She’s being punished for her father’s mistakes. How is that right?”

I shake my head. “I never said it was right. It’s the way of the world, though. He could have given anything as collateral. He chose her. The deal has been made. So now you see why it would be a bad idea for her to show up at Kai’s home, right?”

She shakes her head. “Is she even allowed to be with her family on Christmas?”

I shake my head slowly.

“I’m not okay with this, Callum. Not at all. That poor girl can’t be any more than twenty years old, and she’s been isolated from her family. She’s being treated like a criminal when her only sin is being born into the wrong family. I won’t rescind her invitation, and if Kai decides he has a problem with that, then I will deal with him myself.”

I look to the ceiling, closing my eyes.

This is a bad idea. I’m likely to get into a physical fight with my brother-in-law at his own party, but I can’t tell Autumn no. She doesn’t ask for much, but when she finds a hill she’s willing to die on, fuck if she won’t die on it.

I refuse to let that happen.

“It’s fine, *a stór*. If Kai does anything, I will deal with it. Cleo was with you when you extended the invitation. Am I correct?”

“Yes.”

“Then she will have your back as well. We will make it through this.”

Autumn steps forward and grabs onto the sides of my shirt as she presses her chest into mine.

“I know you don’t understand it, but when I saw her, I just knew that she needed us. I can’t walk away.”

“I don’t like it,” I say after a few moments of silence.

“I know.” She nods.

I run my hand over the back of her head, letting it tangle with her hair. “Tell me what you need from me.”

“I told her she could ride with Declan since they’re neighbors. I know Kai doesn’t like strangers in his home, but I thought maybe you could convince him to let Declan bring her as a date. I mean, you tell him what to do all the time.”

“That’s not the same.”

Autumn shrugs.

“I’ll see what I can do.”

She smiles and bounces up on her toes, kissing me lightly. “Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.”

“Of course.”

I mean, hell, how hard can it be to convince Declan to take his neighbor on a fake date.

Hard.

The answer is hard.

CHAPTER
SIX

Miya

“**Y**ou know you didn’t have to come with me today. You could be off doing whatever it is that you usually do.”

I look over to Kado as he looks at the antique china sets on display.

I was going to bring my normal guard, Haruto, but Kado was insistent that he be the one bringing me.

“Are you even listening to me? I know your hearing isn’t impaired.” I wait until he looks at me.

He shrugs before pointing at the sets.

“Cleo is the definition of a housewife. She is content being the perfect wife for Kai. What better than to buy her some antique china? I’m looking for something that maybe feels Japanese so it fits with their culture. What do you think?”

He nods once, then sets off looking. I roll my eyes. I have no clue why he’s here today, but I know he’s been acting differently lately.

I stroll around looking until I feel a tap on my shoulder. Kado smiles, nodding his head for me to follow.

So I do. I follow him down a few aisles until we reach a section of tea sets. There are many there, but he points to this

dark blue set with gold scenery painted on it. As I look closer, I realize it's a mountain with cherry blossoms. It's beautiful.

Kado holds up the card, showing that it's a set that was made in the 1800s in Nippon. The price is a little excessive, but for Cleo, it's worth it. She's been nothing but kind to me.

Even after everything that happened, she's welcomed me with open arms. I feel like she's much closer to a sister to me than the boss's wife. It helps that Kenji is more like a brother to Kai as well, even though he is also his second in command.

This is the family I've missed since my teens. I'll never get my parents back, but having these people in my life helps ease the pain.

I'm no longer alone.

Kado grips my shoulder, pulling me from my depressing thoughts. I always get them this time of year.

"I'm okay. Thank you. Let's get this for Cleo."

I turn, heading toward the front with the tag, but Kado pulls me to a stop. He points at an antique vanity.

"You think I should get that instead?"

He shakes his head no and points to himself. I smile to myself a little, trying to not let him see it.

"You want to get that for Cleo?"

He looks unsure but gives a small nod.

"You want to know if I think she will like it?"

He nods his head several times.

"She will love it. You should get it."

He grabs the card.

We head up to the counter together, making our purchases. We each pay extra to have the items delivered before moving onto the next store.

"Autumn is a little harder to shop for. I don't know her really well. All I really know is she likes herbs and crystals and stuff. What do you think?" I glance at Kado.

He shrugs.

“No help, bro. No help.” I shake my head and make my way down the street to the apothecary I know she loves. It’s the reason I chose that antique store specifically. I knew I’d get several gifts taken care of at once.

Kenji and I made a deal. He’d take care of the guys while I handled the girls. He doesn’t know, but I bought Kado something special already. Nothing big, but it’s a painting of all of us. I had it commissioned so that he could hang it wherever he lives. A little token of the family he has. I think he’s starting to learn what that word means.

When we finally enter the apothecary, the woman behind the counter is already with another customer. I start to walk around, finding the herbs I’ve heard Autumn mention before. Kado sniffs a jar before sneezing. It makes me laugh.

“You okay there, big guy?” I quirk a brow.

He frowns, looking at the jar like it’s offensive. I snort, taking it from him and putting it back.

“Maybe don’t touch anything. You might end up cursed or something.”

He nods and moves away from me.

“I’m so sorry about that. Is there something I can help you find?” the woman from the counter asks, coming closer to me.

“I’m picking out a gift for a friend. I don’t know about all of this, but she loves it. You might actually know her. Autumn Brennan.”

“Oh yes. Autumn is a faithful customer of mine. Are you looking for something to symbolize your friendship? Something useful for her? Or something else?”

I give her a tight smile. “All of the above?”

She chuckles as she leads me to a wall of jars with different items inside. Each one has a card in front of them saying what they are for.

Confidence.

Love.

Friendship.

Peace.

The list is endless.

“These are special herbal blends to help aid your aura to develop in a way that you feel you need. You could get a friendship set in which you would keep one and she would take the other, and by drinking it, you would be strengthening your friendship bond. Or you could go with a more generic one where it’s just meant to offer some sort of feeling, like peace. I’ll give you a moment to look at them.”

I nod as I hear her go talk to Kado. I cringe, ready to save him, but somehow, the woman knows he doesn’t speak. She talks to him with such care that I wonder for a moment what it would be like if he were to ask her out.

That’s dispelled when he comes up to me looking uncomfortable.

“I think she likes you,” I whisper.

He shakes his head before pointing to the love jar.

“You want a love potion? I think she’s into you enough.”

He frowns, shaking his head more vehemently.

I hold up my hands. “Okay, I get it. She’s not your type. Do you even have a type?”

He’s hesitant, but slowly he nods his head.

“Is there a specific person?”

Before he answers, the woman is back. Kado points at the jar again.

“Ah. You crave love. I can feel that. That’s not going to do what you think. Love potions aren’t real. You can’t make someone fall in love with you if they aren’t. This herbal blend is to encourage love to grow within yourself. It’s to open your eyes to the world around you to find the love you seek. It helps

break down walls that have long been formed. It only enhances you. It doesn't change."

Kado looks to the ground, thinking about her words.

I smile, grabbing the friendship blend.

"I'll take this one."

After I pay, I find Kado staring at the same jar.

"You ready to go?"

He holds up a finger before grabbing the love jar and taking it up front.

My heart hurts for him.

He's never had love in his life. He's desperate for it. I can only hope he finds it soon. I hate knowing the man who has become such a dear friend of mine is suffering from a lack of companionship.



Kenji

"YOU'RE STILL COMING to this Christmas celebration, right?" Kai asks me, sounding like he'd rather carve his own organs out of his chest.

"Of course."

"Do you ever wonder where we would be had we never met our women?" Kai asks suddenly.

I swallow hard. "Never. I would never trade a single minute of my time with Miya. Even when she annoys the fuck out of me."

He chuckles. "Same. Sometimes I'm sitting here working, and it crosses my mind that at one time I was such a miserable prick."

“You’re still a miserable prick,” I tease.

“True, but I actually enjoy being home now. It’s weird, I guess. I wouldn’t trade it either. Even when she makes me host parties when I’d rather be left alone.”

“She still insisting on this being the best Christmas ever?”

“You know it. My house looks like Christmas threw up in it. I thought we were just decorating the living room like last year, but when I got home yesterday, the bathroom had these themed towels, and the soap was changed out to some holiday-smelling ones. She went all out this year.”

“Do you think maybe she’s starting to nest? Wanting to start a family?” I muse.

He looks over at me in this pensive way of his. After a moment, he shakes his head.

“She’s not ready for children. I’m not sure what made her want to do the whole family thing this year. Maybe with Miya and Autumn, she now feels like we have a family?”

“Who knows. Better not to think about a woman’s mind too much. You’ll get lost in it.”

He laughs. “True. Very true. Anyway, don’t be late. I like Callum well enough, but she insisted he bring Declan too, and I do not want to have to make small talk with him. He’s too flirty for my liking. I may end up stabbing him by the end of the night.”

I growled my agreement. “Last time he saw Miya, he kissed her hand. I wanted to rip his lips off his face.”

“Here’s to hoping he’s on his best behavior then.”

“One can only hope.”

Kai is quiet for several moments. “Kado just got back from assignment. He seems different.”

I think back to the way he demanded to be Miya’s guard today. He’s been spending more time with her. If I didn’t trust the man, I might assume he was making a move. He doesn’t give off that vibe though.

“I think he’s been hanging with Miya too much. The more he sees her, the more he becomes...”

“Human?” Kai asks.

“Human,” I agree.

“Do you think this is going to affect his work? He’s been as effective as he has been because he has no emotions. Now that he’s beginning to show them, he may be more hesitant to complete the tasks we assign him.”

I consider his words. “I don’t think it will be an issue. He’s still checking off his list without any issues. I think we only see a difference because before, we would only see him when we called for him. He didn’t willingly come by. Now he is showing his face more.”

“That could be it. He’s been spending more time with Cleo as well. A week ago, I came home to find him helping her make cookies. Have you ever seen a man that you know has a kill count in the triple digits donning a yellow apron and rolling out dough?”

I snort. “No way. Seriously?”

Kai picks up his phone, finding what he’s looking for. Sure as hell, it’s a photo of Kado concentrating on rolling out some sort of dough on the counter in a yellow apron. He even has flour on his face. He looks so domesticated.

“Do you think he volunteered or Cleo roped him into it?” I ask.

“He showed up at the house. I have no pity for him, not that he needs it. Fucker looks like he actually was enjoying himself.”

“He deserves it.”

“Maybe he does,” Kai murmurs. “I’m worried we are going to lose our biggest weapon if this keeps on.”

“What do you mean?”

He looks me dead in the eye. “What happens if he finds a woman?”

I swallow hard. I get what he's asking.

Kado doesn't lead a clean lifestyle. I don't see any woman being okay with the way he lives his life. Or the things he does for us.

"We will cross that bridge if we come to it."

Kai nods. "For our sake, I hope that bridge never comes."

I can't agree with him, though.

Kado is one of my best friends. I want to see him happy.

So when the day comes, I'll have his back.

Even against my other best friend.

It's going to be a shitshow, but Kado is worth it.

Not only for being the best soldier for the Yakuza. Nor is it for the friendship we have forged over the years.

No, the main reason he deserves it is because of the way he is with Miya.

His loyalty to her is what will make me back him no matter the cost.

CHAPTER
SEVEN

Cleo

Humming Christmas carols to myself, I continue to adjust the garland around the fireplace. I have no clue why we even have one. We never use it. If we want a fire, that's what the rooftop garden is for. It's outfitted with a beautiful patio area equipped with a firepit, grill, greenhouse, and even trees. Don't ask me how Kai got them there. He just does anything that will make me smile, which includes hiring staff to solely take care of that part of the house. They even remove the snow during the winter.

Warm arms surround me, making me smile.

"It's not too late to cancel. Celebrate all by ourselves," he growls into my ear.

Turning in his arms, I look up at my gorgeous husband.

Haruaki Takahashi is the sexiest man I've ever met. Some days, I still feel like I need to pinch myself to make sure this isn't a dream.

"We're not canceling."

"Why are you fretting?"

"I want everything to be just perfect."

He leans down, kissing my lips softly.

“Why did you insist on having these people come to our home again?”

“You mean my brother and his wife? And his right-hand man? Or are you talking about your men?” I ask sarcastically.

He narrows his eyes at me. “You know I don’t mind your brother, but that doesn’t mean that I want him in my home. They are still another entity. You realize that, right?”

I pat his shoulders before smoothing down his t-shirt. “I know. I also know that this is unprecedented. To have two factions working so closely together.”

“Four, really,” he mumbles.

I take a deep breath, ignoring his interruption. “Callum would never make a move against you, Kai. He loves me, and I love you. I’m your protection.”

He wrinkles his nose. “I don’t need protection. I would take on the entire Irish mob with only my bare fists.”

I roll my eyes, pulling from his arms. “I know. You’re the big bad dragon here to breathe fire on the townspeople without a second thought. I remember, my dark prince.”

He grabs my arm, pulling me back into him. “I’m your king now, my queen. Why are we arguing right now?”

I huff, pulling from him again as I turn and walk toward the window to look over the city.

“I had a wonderful family for a short while. Then I lost it. Now I have a piece of that family back. I don’t want to lose it. I want to embrace it and cherish it.”

I hear him sigh as he moves behind me to wrap his arms around me. He settles his head on my shoulder as we both stare out the window.

“It makes me uncomfortable to have them here on a day when all I want to do is let my guard down and be with you. I can’t be off when they are here.”

I nod, understanding what he is saying. Even though we are allies, you never know when that could change. You never want them to see your soft spots.

I look at him in the reflection.

“You’ll try? For me?” I ask.

I feel his breath against the skin of my neck as he speaks, “Of course I will. I’d do anything for you, you know that.”

“I would never ask you to do something that you didn’t want to do if it wasn’t important to me, Kai. I know you don’t like this, but it will be good for us. It will strengthen that bond,” I plead for him to understand.

He kisses my neck once. “It will. I’m sorry. I didn’t mean to make you feel like I didn’t want to do this. I do. I promise.”

I give him a small smile. “You know...it is Christmas...we could exchange our gifts now instead of waiting until everyone leaves tonight.”

Kai hums. “Let me go grab your gift from my office.”

He pulls away. As soon as he’s out of the room, I walk over to the tree. Kneeling, I reach for the gift box in the very back and set it on my lap.

“Why are you on the floor?” he asks when he walks back into the room with a gift bag and a large box.

“Because I can.” I shrug. “Come sit.” I pat the floor next to me.

Kai does as I ask and slides the gift bag and box over to me.

“Open it,” he demands.

Somehow I manage to stop myself from rolling my eyes.

Men.

He’s always so growly and demanding. I might act like I hate it, but I really do love it.

Slowly, I remove the tissue paper from the top of the gift bag before reaching in. I feel several different sized boxes on

the inside.

One by one, I pull them out and see they are all individually wrapped. I start with the smallest box first. Inside is a pair of gorgeous black diamond studs. Something I would never buy myself.

“I love these,” I say as I lightly touch them.

“I’m glad you approve.”

Setting the earrings down, I unwrap the other gifts. He got me the latest upgrade to my phone, an Irish family crest to hang, and the new kitchen mixer I’d been eyeing but hadn’t brought myself to buy. It’s industrial sized and heavier than I can lift, but it’s perfect for the goodies I enjoy baking for the guys.

Pushing the mixer aside, I get onto my knees and lean forward. Kai grabs me by the back of the neck and kisses me.

“Thank you. I love all of them,” I tell him when he pulls away.

“You’re welcome.”

I move back and hand him his present. “Open it.”

Kai raises a brow. “You seem eager.”

“I am.”

As he opens the gift, I clasp my hands and hold them under my chin.

I hope he loves it.

The first thing he sees when he moves the tissue paper to the side are the plane tickets to Japan and a brief outline of what we’re going to do.

“We’re going to Japan?”

“Yes. You keep talking about taking me, so I thought I’d schedule it. If you don’t like something we can change it,” I ramble.

He reaches out and sets his hand on my thigh. “No, it’s a fantastic idea.”

“There’s more.”

When Kai moves his hand, I feel the loss of his touch, and I hate it.

He moves the piece of paper and sees the next gift. I watch as my stoic husband freezes and shock covers his face.

After a few moments of silence I break. “Do you love it?”

“You’re having a custom sword done,” he says slowly. “By one of the best, for me.”

“You get to watch it happen too.”

Kai sets the papers back in the box and sets it off to the side.

“Do you like it?”

He doesn’t verbally respond but reaches out and grabs me. Pulling me into his lap.

I wrap my arms around his neck as his hands run along my body.

“Do I like it?” he scoffs. “No, I fucking love it, and I’m pissed that people will be showing up any time for Christmas when all I want to do is lay you down and make love to you.”

I lean in and kiss him. When I start to pull away, I make sure I bite his lip, making him growl.

“Later,” I whisper.

Kai opens his mouth to say something but is cut off by the doorbell.

“Horrible timing,” he murmurs, making me laugh.

I roll off his lap and stand. “Go let our friends in while I clean this up.”

“Yes, wife.”

Right as he’s about to leave the room, I call out, “Kai.”

He pauses and looks over his shoulder at me. “Be nice today, and I might have another surprise for you.”

“Tease.” He shakes his head. “I’ll show you nice.”

I can't help but chuckle as he walks away. Today's going to be a great day. I just know it.



Kai

PULLING on my pants to adjust my dick, I head toward the door.

Before I answer it, I take a deep breath.

This is gonna be a shitshow. Guess we better get it over with.

Opening the door, the first thing I see is Callum holding Emily with Autumn in front of her.

Autumn has a couple of gifts in her hands.

“Here, let me take those,” I tell her, taking the items. “Follow me.”

I walk them into the living room where the tree is set up. Setting the gifts down, I turn, then freeze.

Behind Callum is his second in command, Declan, but that's not what has my blood boiling. It's the woman on his arm.

Nikita Smirnova.

“What is she doing here?” I glare at Declan.

He holds his hands up. “I was asked to bring her as my date, so here she is. Take it up with bossman.”

I swing my glare at Callum, but before I can say anything, Cleo walks into the room.

“Nikita. It's so great to see you.”

I watch, stunned, as my wife walks over and engulfs the woman in a hug.

My fists curl with the urge to pull Cleo from her grasp, but the woman's eyes meet mine.

She's trying to appear strong, but she's terrified. I don't think she wants to be here anymore than I want her here.

So why is she here then?

"Cleo, care to explain?"

She turns to me and winces when she sees the look on my face.

I love my wife, and I would never hurt her, but fuck if I'm not angry enough for murder right now.

"You guys mingle. Autumn, the hors d'oeuvres are on the counter in the kitchen. Mind getting them? Callum, you're on door duty." Cleo hands out orders before coming to my side and pulling me from the room.

She waits until the bedroom door is shut before she starts talking.

"I know what you're probably thinking, but I met her when I went with Autumn to Declan's, and the girl is so lonely. I couldn't let her spend the holidays alone."

"Cleo, do you know who she is? Why she is alone?" I say through gritted teeth.

Her eyes widen. I rarely take such a tone with her, but I'm so fucking angry that I can't help it.

"No. I don't."

I swallow hard. "She is the daughter of Vladimir Smirnov. He was a soldier for Ivan. He requested sanctuary within the city after turning on his leader and giving us all the information we needed to chase them from our city. I granted him asylum, but only if he provided collateral. He gave me Nikita. We cannot trust her, and now you have invited her into our home."

Cleo moves closer to me, setting her hand on my chest.

“I didn’t know, but even if I did, I’m not sure I would have done anything differently. You say her father helped you. He’s already better than mine. If I were held for the crimes committed because of my father, I would already be dead. You looked past that, as does most of the city. Why is she not given the same courtesy?”

“Sometimes I forget how innocent you were when we met. Princess,” I caress her face, letting some of the anger seep from me. “Her father had the choice to offer me anything as collateral. I did not offer any suggestions. He offered his daughter up. Either he really doesn’t give a fuck about her, or she’s a plant here to spy on us. I would never take that risk with you or our family.”

She swallows hard. “I get what you are saying, but I could have been her, Kai. I hate that we aren’t even willing to give her the chance to prove she’s not what you say she is.”

I kiss her forehead. “Our life doesn’t allow that. You know that.”

She sighs, resting her head against me. “I’m sorry. I should’ve asked you first.”

“You should’ve. Now do you want your punishment now or later?” I ask, my dick twitching at the thought.

She kisses my chest once. “If you can make it quick, now.”

I smirk at her. “Bend over the bed.”

She does as I ask. I move behind her, flipping her dress up to show her ass. Goddamn, the woman is a fantasy come true.

Pulling her underwear down to her thighs. I smack her ass twice, making her jump. Then I do it over and over until her ass is rosy red, and I know it’s going to be uncomfortable to sit down.

She’s glistening from it. So much so that I know every time she moves tonight, I know she will be getting turned on all over again.

That’s not enough to sate the anger though. No, I need more.

So I move in closer as I undo my pants. I let them fall to the ground as I line myself up against her. Then I thrust in without warning.

She squeals, but I wrap my hand around her mouth so no one can hear her.

I take her hard and fast, reveling in the way she squeezes around me. Usually I worship my wife, but she's being punished, so I make myself finish quickly, leaving her on edge. I fill her with my cum, pausing against her as she protests against my hand.

When she bites me, I smack her ass once more before pulling out. I pull her panties up and smooth her dress down.

"Kai, what the fuck?" She whirls on me.

I lean in, pressing a kiss to her lips. "Punishment, my dear wife."

She frowns at me, but her eyes light up. She likes this little game we play.

"You didn't use a condom," she pouts.

"And? I want you to feel my cum slipping out of you all night. Driving you crazy with lust. That is your punishment for springing this on me and disobeying my order to not invite anyone outside of our agreed upon guest list."

"What if you got me pregnant? I'm not ready for a child yet."

I pull her into my chest. "You're on birth control, and you're not ovulating. You'll be fine. If by chance my calculations are wrong, then we will survive."

"How the hell do you know I'm not ovulating?"

I pull back, leaning down to grab my pants. Once I have them on, I pull out my phone and show her my calendar.

There's a shark marked for four days from now and an egg marked for about two weeks after that.

"Is that what I think it is?" She looks embarrassed.

“Of course it is. I track your cycle, princess. I take all precautions to give you what you want, or in this case, don’t want. Now our guests are out there, so make yourself presentable, or hell, don’t for all I care and get back out there.”

I turn from her, smiling to myself as she grumbles behind me.

Tonight just got a hell of a lot more complicated, but it will all work out.

It has to.

CHAPTER
EIGHT

Autumn

I frown as Cleo pulls Kai from the room. This is all my fault, but I can't be sorry for it.

Even now, I can feel the sadness coming from Nikita. The girl is lonely. No one deserves to feel that way. Especially not on Christmas.

Walking over to her, I hand her Emily. "Here, can you hold her while I go get food? Thanks."

Callum shoots me a concerned look, but Declan stays by her side. I know she's a good person. I can feel it in my gut.

Even looking back at her as I leave the room, I can see the way she is worried about holding Emily. She doesn't want to do anything to hurt her or upset us. If she was so evil, why would she care about strangers?

Besides, with Declan there, Emily is perfectly safe. My husband can get over himself.

I leave them in the living room as I make my way to the kitchen. I hear the doorbell ring as I grab one of the trays with finger foods on it.

Cleo and I planned this whole night out. We would start with finger foods and drinks in the living room while we open gifts. Then we move on to dinner. After dinner, we will send the men outside with cigars while us women get to catch up.

Before it gets too late, we will all head out to our own homes and spend the evening with each other.

I just hope Kai isn't too mad at her. I'd hate to have ruined her Christmas.

I take the tray back to the living room to see that Kenji, Miya, and Kado have joined us.

All three are looking at Nikita warily as she holds Emily. Emily is none the wiser. She's laughing up at Nikita as she softly baby talks her.

That only makes me smile.

Setting down the tray of food on the coffee table, I move to Miya and pull her into a hug.

"Hey girl. How are you?"

"Good." she says loudly before whispering in my ear, "Why is she here? Kai is going to flip. Kenji is already pissed."

I pull back, pasting a bright smile on my face. "Have you met Nikita? She's a friend of Cleo and mine."

Kenji snorts. "Does Kai know that?"

"He does," Kai announces as both he and Cleo come back into the room.

Cleo's face is red, but she doesn't look like she's been crying. From the aura coming off her, I'd venture to say she eased her husband's worries the way only his woman can.

Kenji and Kai exchange a look before Kenji relaxes. Whatever he saw in his boss's eyes changed the vibe of the whole room.

"Nikita, welcome to our home," Kai offers graciously.

It's a Christmas miracle. The man is scary as hell, but he's offering an olive branch. It's for his wife, but still, Nikita looks up at him like a deer caught in headlights as she quietly thanks him.

She focuses back on the baby, breaking everyone from the sudden silence.

“Drinks. Everyone needs drinks,” I announce and move back toward the kitchen.

Cleo follows me.

“What the hell happened? Are you okay?” I hiss at her.

“Of course I am. Kai was a little angry, but he’s okay now.”

I snort. “Oh, I bet he is. You’re practically seeping out sexual vibes, girl.”

She blushes. “Shhh. Let’s just get them their drinks and start the gifts.”

I laugh but do as she asks, bringing everyone eggnog. Declan scrunches his nose up at it, but reluctantly thanks me as I hand him his.

“Let’s open gifts!” Cleo exclaims.

Everyone settles as gift after gift is handed out.

Some of them are practical, like the new set of kitchen bowls Miya bought Cleo. In turn, Cleo bought her several puzzles. The guys all sat back and watched as if they knew what their wives bought the other people in the room.

My heart warms at the familiarity of it.

Our Christmases were never bountiful, but they were always filled with love and happiness. That’s what I’m feeling now.

It makes me miss my mom.

Nikita holds Emily the whole time, helping her open gifts. Callum keeps shooting me looks like he wants to save our daughter, but Nikita needs this.

Emily gives her something to focus on so the rest of the room doesn’t make her feel unwelcome.

I’m happy our daughter can do this for her.

“Nikita.” I hand over a gift.

She looks surprised, but takes it from me. She unwraps the box and blinks a couple of times before pulling out the bath salts and candle.

“It’s a happiness blend of bath salts. All natural ingredients and dried herbs. Then the candle also promotes happiness. Once it melts down some, you will find strawberry quartz, red coral, and yellow agate stones for you to keep.”

She tears up a little bit. “Thank you. This means a lot.”

I nod once before handing the next gift to Kai.

“I made this for you, especially,” I tell him. “It may not be perfect, but I’m getting better.”

He pulls the jar out of the bag before opening and smelling it.

“Is this whiskey?” He quirks an eyebrow at me.

“Plum whiskey. Those are plums in the jar.”

He takes a sip, licking his lips immediately afterward.

“It’s delicious.” He bows his head slightly, a sign of respect. “Thank you.”

“You’re welcome.”

Several gifts later, and the living room looks like a disaster. Emily is now crawling around in the wrapping paper, happier to play with it and the empty bags than any of the toys given to her.

I start cleaning up as Cleo goes to check on dinner.

“You did good,” Callum whispers to me as he bends to pick up more paper.

“What do you mean?” I ask him.

“Nikita. Kai is unsure of her intentions, but giving her that gift touched her. If she was here for nefarious reasons, I’m not sure she would follow through with it now. Look at her.”

I glance over and find Nikita watching Emily play with a warm smile on her face. I don’t miss the fact that Declan still has not left her side.

“Everyone deserves kindness, Cal. Maybe she is working for her father or maybe not, but that still doesn’t mean that it will hurt us to show a small bit of kindness.”

“I know. Sometimes I get caught up in what we need to be to run our businesses, and I forget that we are all just human. That’s why I have you. You balance me out.”

Leaning in, I press a quick kiss to his lips.

“I love you.”

“I love you too, *a stór*.”



Callum

CLEANING up the living room doesn’t take us long.

I’m about to pick up Emily, but Nikita does it before I can, cooing at the girl.

I don’t miss the way Declan watches her. He looks angry, but there’s this look in his eye that makes me think he might not be as indifferent to the girl as he claims.

Hell, I hear him bitch about her all the time. He claims she’s the worst neighbor and curses me on a daily basis for making him share a building with her.

I know he watches her himself, along with the guard I have on her. He doesn’t trust her, and neither do I.

Yet, seeing her with my child, I think he’s seeing something different in her. Something that makes a man look past the hate and see the woman beneath it.

Fuck, I hope this doesn’t bite me in the ass.

Instead of taking my child from the girl, I decide to trust that Declan has this situation under control.

Miya and Cleo have fled to the kitchen to finish up dinner. Kai, Kado, and Kenji are talking quietly in the corner.

Autumn just disappeared down the hall to the bathroom.

I smile to myself.

No one will notice me missing for five minutes.

I slip down the same hall, waiting outside the door. When Autumn opens it, I push her back inside before turning and pressing her against the door, flipping the lock.

“Callum, what are you doing?” she hisses at me.

“I want to have another baby,” I proclaim.

I wasn't planning to tell her like this, but the thought has been plaguing me.

“What?” she whispers.

“You heard me. I want to see your body swell with my child. I want to be there for the entire thing. Every single appointment. Then I want to raise our new little one with Emily being the best big sister ever. I lost out on a relationship with my sister. You never had any siblings either. Let's give Emily something we both yearned for.”

Her eyes are glistening now. “Okay.”

“Okay? Yes? That's a yes?” I push in closer.

She nods. “Yes. Let's make a baby.”

I press my lips to hers, kissing her hard.

Then my hands are moving. She pushes against me, but I don't move. Instead, I pull her dress up. Then I hike her up into my arms against the door.

“Callum, your sister is on the other side of this door, not to mention her scary as hell husband. We can't fuck in his bathroom,” she says as soon as I let her lips go to kiss her neck.

“I think you forget my power, *a stór*. I'm not afraid of Haruaki Takahashi. I'm going to fuck a baby into you before you change your mind.”

I unbuckle my pants, pulling myself out quickly before pushing aside her panties and thrusting home.

Her breath hitches, but she doesn't tell me to stop again.

Instead, she begins to grind on me.

"Tell me again how powerful you are," she pants.

"I control hundreds of men who would kill at my command. They would take a bullet for not only me, but you and our children."

She clenches around me. We've never played like this before, but it seems my girl likes hearing about what I can do.

"You think Haruaki is scary? You should see the way men move out of my way. The way they show me respect. They do my bidding with a single flick of the wrist."

"Fuck, Cal. I don't know why, but that's so hot." She moans.

I push myself harder, faster. If anyone walks down the hall, there would be no doubt as to what we are doing. The door makes noises as I continue to take her hard and fast.

"I'm going to fill you so full of my cum that your body will have no choice but to accept my offering. Your belly is going to swell so beautifully. Fuck, the intense pregnancy sex we are going to have is going to be out of this world."

"Cal, please. I need more."

I adjust her in my hold until her clit is rubbing against me with each thrust. That's the push she needed.

I slam my lips to hers as she begins to cry out, swallowing the noise. Then I empty my balls inside of her.

It's so intense. More intense than normal for us.

When I finally stop twitching, I move her to the counter of the sink. She tries to pull off me, but I keep her pressed against me.

"Cal, I need to clean up, and we need to get back out there."

"I don't want my cum to leave you yet. Just sit still and let it marinate."

She smacks my chest. “I’m not a chicken breast. You can’t marinate me.”

I laugh, kissing her cheek. “That’s not what I meant, my love.”

She huffs but hugs herself to me, nuzzling her nose into my neck.

“You’re really ready for another one?” she whispers.

“Yes. I have been. I’ve just been afraid you might not be.”

She kisses my skin softly. “I hadn’t really thought about it, but now that you mention it, I do want another one. I want our daughter to have what we didn’t have.”

“Exactly my thoughts.”

“You really think you got me pregnant?” she whispers.

I laugh. “I’m not sure. I wasn’t trying the first time, so I’m hoping my super sperm finds its way to your egg, but if not, then I will have a lot of fun trying again and again until you are.”

She laughs. “You’re so crude.”

“But you love me.”

“I do. I love you.”

“And I love you, *a stór*.”

CHAPTER
NINE

Miya

“**Y**ou know, I’m pretty sure Callum just went to fuck Autumn in the bathroom,” Kenji whispers into my ear as he wraps his arm around me.

“What?” I look over at him as I finish the dish I was washing.

“I think we need to find a quiet place to have a little fun too.”

I can feel myself blush as I look away. “No way.”

“I wasn’t asking. Dry your hands off and meet me on the roof. You have five minutes.”

“What? No. They will all know,” I hiss.

“Not if you make an excuse.”

“What if I don’t do it? What are you going to do?” His eyes narrow at the snark in my tone.

He gives me a smirk, looking over at Cleo who is oblivious to the whole thing as she mixes something in a bowl.

“If you’re not up there, I’ll come back down and throw you over my shoulder and take you out there myself. Trust me, they will all know what’s going on then.”

I shiver at his words. I will never admit it to him, but I love when he goes all caveman on me. The employees at work have definitely been privy to some of those antics before. Part of me wants to be embarrassed, but the other part relishes in the way the girls avoid him knowing he is mine. It's the way I like it.

"Fine. Just go." I roll my eyes at him.

Of course, he is going to get his way. He always does one way or another. Now to make an excuse to Cleo.

"Um, Cleo. I need to go check something."

She glances up at me. "I'm not clueless."

"What?"

I really didn't think she'd been paying attention. She glances at the door before moving closer.

"Just don't do it in our bedroom. Anywhere else is fair game."

"You're telling me to go have sex in your house? You're not mad?"

She giggles. "Girl, go enjoy your husband. Seriously, dinner is all finished. I'll hold them off for ten minutes for you, though. Live your best life."

She pulls me in for a hug.

"You're an amazing friend," I admit.

"I know. I'll distract them."

We both head into the living room, but Cleo does as she promised, distracting everyone with some story that she has to tell right this second. I don't see Autumn or Callum, so maybe Kenji is right.

I use the opportunity to sneak out the front door. It doesn't even take me the full five minutes to find him huddling in the corner of the roof. There are some outdoor heaters on, but they are also in the light, where I know there are cameras.

"It's fucking cold, Kenji."

“I’ll warm you up.” He pulls me to him, spinning until I’m against the cold wall.

Then he drops to his knees, pulling my dress up to my hips. Then he kisses my center, right over my lace panties.

“You are a dream,” he whispers.

Then he pulls the fabric aside and dives in. He eats me like he’s a starving man, and I’m the last meal he will ever consume.

He doesn’t ease me into it. Instead, he uses his fingers to thrust into me as he sucks my clit until I’m seeing stars.

It must be a new record. I come in a matter of minutes, his name falling from my lips.

“Kenji, oh god.”

Then I feel something against me. I don’t know what it is, but he puts my panties back in place, something hard and cool on my clit.

“On your knees.”

His demand heats me up even more. I fall to my knees, the cold of the ground settling in, but I don’t care. All I care about is the man standing in front of me undoing his belt.

“Hands behind your back. Don’t you dare move them.”

I lick my lips, doing as he asks.

He grabs my hair, guiding my head to his waiting and ready cock. I lick the tip before taking the whole thing in my mouth.

“Fuck, it feels so good. The cool air is only making the warmth of your mouth better.”

I hum against him, setting a slow pace as I bob on his dick. He doesn’t like that, though. Instead, he takes charge.

“Sorry, little one. We don’t have much time. We will be missed. This is going to be hard and fast.”

That’s the only warning I get before he holds my head steady and thrusts into my mouth. I gag, but he doesn’t stop.

He keeps going. I can feel the tears begin to fill my eyes, but I love this.

He may seem like he's in control, and in a sense, he is. However, the way his face is blissed out is all me. He wouldn't feel like this if it wasn't my mouth on him.

Taking one hand from my head, he pulls out a remote of some sort. When he clicks the button, the hard, cool item in my panties begins to vibrate, causing me to swallow on him as I moan.

“That's right. We are going to come together, so get there. Quickly.”

He turns up the speed. I keep my hands clasped together behind my back as he uses my mouth for his pleasure. My nails dig into my skin as my hips start moving against the vibrating toy. I start to moan out my release, causing Kenji to spill into my mouth. I swallow every drop, my body still riding out my own orgasm as the toy continues to vibrate against me.

After a moment, he pulls out, turning off the toy. He pulls me from the ground, holding me against him. Then he kisses me. It's not a quick kiss. It's a kiss promising me forever. Showing me how much he cares for me.

When he finally pulls back, he wipes my eyes until he's happy with my appearance. Then he brushes his hands into my hair.

“You ready to go back in?” he whispers.

“Yes.” I reach into my panties to grab the toy, but his hand grips my wrist.

“It stays.”

I shiver at the look in his eyes.

This is going to be a long ass dinner.



Kenji

AS SOON AS we walk through the door, Cleo gives Miya a knowing look. Seems like the boss's wife may have a clue what we were getting up to. She doesn't say anything, though.

Instead, Cleo claps her hands, getting everyone's attention. "Dinner's ready. If you'll follow me into the dining room."

We all do as she asks and crowd into the dining room.

"Sit wherever." She waves toward the table.

Kai takes the head of the table, and Cleo sits to his left. I move to stand behind the chair to Kai's right, across from Cleo, and pull out a chair for Miya to the right of mine. Once she's seated, I follow suit. Kado sits to Cleo's left and across from Miya, situating himself between Cleo and Nikita. At the other end of the table, Callum takes up the head of the table. Autumn sits to his left, with baby Emily between them and next to Miya. Declan sits to Callum's right, with Nikita between him and Kado.

The divide between both families is evident. While we might like each other, this is only possible because of Cleo. If it weren't for her love of her brother, the Irish wouldn't be here right now. Hell, Kai wouldn't have even invited us over, and we are his closest friends.

The table is filled with food to the point it looks like Cleo went overboard.

"I didn't know what everyone likes, so I opened both red and white wine. I hope that's okay." Cleo fusses as she sets her napkin in her lap.

"It looks and smells great, Cleo." Miya smiles.

"Thank you. I couldn't have done it without Autumn's help."

Autumn waves away the comment. "Nonsense. You had it all under control."

Cleo turns toward her husband and stares at him.

Kai raises a brow. "Would you like me to say something?"

"Thank you for offering! I would love it if you would." She smiles brightly.

The corner of Kai's mouth twitches as he faces down the table.

"Cleo and I would like to thank you all for joining us. The holidays are meant for family, and we consider each of you just that. Some of us by blood." He looks toward Callum. "And some of us chosen." He looks between Kado and me. "This year our families have grown, and I couldn't be more thrilled to welcome each and every one of you." He eyes the rest of the table. "So let's eat and be merry." He raises his glass. "Cheers."

We all reach for our glasses and say, "Cheers."

No one misses that he never even looked at Nikita. He's pretending as if she doesn't exist. Honestly, it's for the best. Kai in a bad mood tends to get bloody. He might shy away from harming women normally, but Nikita isn't a woman to him. She's a threat to his family. His wife. For her, he would murder every single person on this Earth, women and children be damned.

Can't say I blame him, I'd do the same for my wife.

The food is passed around, plates are filled, and wine glasses are filled. After eating my fill, I lean back in my chair and put my arm over the back of Miya's. Slowly, I reach into my pocket and pull out the remote to the little toy I put in her. As she talks to Autumn, I turn toward Kai.

"This better than you thought it would be?" I ask him.

"The night is young." His eyes glance toward Nikita.

He doesn't trust her. He's right to be cautious, but so far, the girl has done nothing wrong. Still, he's waiting for the other shoe to drop.

"Oh hush." Cleo rolls her eyes at him as she smacks his arm.

He grabs her hand. “Never, princess.”

I chuckle at their antics and turn on the remote. Out of the corner of my eye, I see Miya flinch, dropping her fork on her plate. It takes everything in me not to chuckle.

Autumn frowns. “Are you okay?”

“Of course.” Miya turns to Cleo and apologizes. “I’m sorry, my fork must have slipped.”

Cleo shakes her head with a smile. “You’re fine. Accidents happen.”

Kai raises a brow at me, and I shrug, a shit-eating grin on my face.

“Are you fucking kidding me? Turn it off,” Miya hisses under her breath into my ear as she squeezes my thigh.

To everyone else, it probably looks like she’s whispering sweet nothings to me. Little do they know...

“I don’t know what you’re talking about,” I whisper, shutting the toy off.

Instantly, Miya’s shoulders relax, and she takes a deep breath.

“Callum, have you talked to Killian?” Cleo asks her brother.

Callum wipes his mouth. “I did. We talked the other day for a moment. He had to cut the call short because Kieran was crying.”

“I can’t wait to go see them.” Cleo sighs. “I tried to call this morning, but they didn’t answer. I assume today is crazy for them.”

Autumn nods. “Baby snuggles are the best.”

“Baby snuggles and shopping.” Cleo wiggles her eyebrows, making the girls laugh.

“Our call with the Westies and Catalini’s is after the beginning of the year, yes?” Kai asks Callum, even though we both know the answer.

“It is.” Callum nods.

“Boys, no talking about work at the dinner table,” Cleo says sweetly.

“I apologize.” Kai nods.

“Sorry, Cleo,” Callum says.

The conversation moves onto safer topics. The girls all talk about shopping. Well, all except Nikita who picks at her food, keeping her head down. The only one at the table who seems to catch her attention is Emily. Us men focus on more mundane topics. Stock market, casino life, and stories from our pasts that have no bearing on our future. It’s all so normal. It’s actually kind of nice not worrying about work shit. Maybe Cleo has a point about taking some time off.

I wait a little while and turn the toy on again when she raises her wine glass to take a drink. She jerks again, the wine sloshing in the glass.

Declan makes a noise, and I look down the table at him. He’s got his hand up to his mouth, biting his knuckle to stop from laughing.

“You good?” Callum asks, his lips twitching.

“Yes, thank you,” Miya says through gritted teeth.

I pull my eyes away and see Kado staring at Miya with his head tilted to the side, trying to study her.

Poor guy has no idea what’s happening right in front of him.

Miya leans into me and whispers, “I’m going to fucking kill you.”

She’s squirming, her face turning red. The way her hand is now clutching my thigh, I know she’s feeling good.

I turn my head and brush my lips against hers. “If you kill me, who will pleasure you?”

She rolls her eyes and sits back in her seat. Trying to remain still.

“You look a little flushed, Miya. Do you need some water or something?” Cleo asks, looking concerned.

Seems little Cleo isn't clued in either.

Miya shakes her head, biting her lip. Her breathing is growing a little heavier. I look around and note that the men have all focused their attention elsewhere. Cleo and Kado are the other ones paying attention.

I'm not about to let Kado see my girl come, though.

“It's the wine, I bet. Kado, will you go get her some water?”

He nods, getting up promptly. Thankfully, Cleo follows behind him.

“I'll show you where the glasses are.”

With everyone else otherwise occupied, I lean in, sucking her earlobe into my mouth. She hisses, her head turning to me.

“That's it, good girl. Come for me right here in front of all of these people.”

She bites into my shoulder as my words push her over the edge, her body shaking with her release.

I quickly turn off the device as Kado makes his way back into the room. Poor guy looks so concerned as he hands her not only a glass of ice water but a wet paper towel that he mimes for her to put on her head.

She does as he asks, thanking him quietly as she sips on her water.

“Who has room for dessert?” Cleo claps from behind Kai's chair.

“Sounds fantastic.”

“Sounds delicious.”

“There's dessert?”

People say all at once.

Cleo stands. “I'll be right back!”

Autumn laughs and pushes back her chair, and stands. “Let me help you.”

Miya gets up, stopping behind Nikita. “How about we join them?”

Nikita looks nervous, but she stands and follows my girl out of the room. Miya shoots me a warning look over her shoulder before she disappears.

“You good?” I ask Kado.

He tips his chin but otherwise doesn’t move.

He’s something else.

The girls come back, hands full of treats, and set them down on the table.

“Okay, we have some options,” Cleo says.

“Some?” Callum asks with laughter in his voice.

Cleo rolls her eyes. “Okay, so I might have gone a little overboard, sue me.”

There’s several types of pie, a cake, something with a crumbly top, and cookies.

“It looks great, princess,” Kai praises her.

She shoots him a thankful smile. “Everyone grab what you want.”

“What is that?” I murmur to Miya.

“A crumble, maybe? I don’t know. It looks good, though,” she says softly.

I get a slice of the cake and dig in.

“Oh dear.” Autumn laughs.

Turning, I see her trying to wipe off a frosting-covered Emily.

“I think it’s safe to say she likes the cake,” Kai says.

“Our girls got good taste.” Callum smiles down at his daughter.

Once dessert is finished, Kai clears his throat. “Would you gentlemen like to join me upstairs on the roof for a nightcap?”

“Sure.” Callum nods.

I lean down and kiss the top of Miya’s head. “Let me know if you need me.”

“I’ll be fine. I love you.”

“I love you too.”

I slip out of the dining room with the guys.

“Should we leave the girls alone with her?” Callum asks quietly, referring to Nikita.

“She won’t hurt them,” Declan says with a little heat.

“They will be fine. I have cameras,” Kai tells him. As they walk down the hall, I linger and turn the toy on again.

I hear something hit the table, and Miya groans.

“Seriously, are you good?” Nikita asks, making me chuckle.

She’s going to be so pissed when we get home tonight, and I can’t fucking wait.

CHAPTER
TEN

Cleo

Miya mumbles something under her breath.
“Come again?” I laugh.

She raises her head off the table and looks at Nikita. “I’m usually not this weird, promise.”

Nikita shrugs. “I’ve seen worse.”

That’s the most I’ve heard her say all night. Seems like with the guys gone, she’s a bit more willing to be social.

“I don’t know about you, Cleo, but tonight’s gone better than I thought it would,” Autumn tells her.

I slide from my chair into the one that Kado was in and sit next to Nikita.

I bring my wine glass to my mouth and take a drink. “As my husband would say, the night is young.”

Miya laughs. “He would.”

Autumn rolls her eyes before looking at Nikita. “How are you doing? Are you comfortable?”

Nikita shifts in her seat and takes a drink before responding. “I’m good. Thank you for inviting me,” she

replies softly.

“Of course,” I say. “I’m glad you came.”

“It’s not like Declan gave me much of a choice,” Nikita muses. “I was going to try and bail, but he wouldn’t let me.”

“We’re not that bad,” Autumn teases.

“Most of the time.” I wink at her sister-in-law.

“I didn’t meet you when the other girls did. where are you from?” Miya asks, slightly digging.

I bite my tongue. In some ways, I want to scold Miya for pushing, but at the same time, with what little Kai told me, I’m curious as well.

I can feel Nikita stiffen next to me. She’s quiet as she swirls her glass, choosing her words carefully. “I was born in Moscow, but I’ve lived here for several years.”

Autumn leans forward and rests her chin in her hand. “I’ve never been to Moscow, what’s it like?”

“Cold,” Nikita says bluntly.

My nose crinkles. “That sounds miserable.”

“It’s cold here too,” Miya points out.

I shrug. “Cold is different all over.”

“True,” Autumn says.

“How old are you?” Miya pushes.

“Miya,” Autumn scolds.

Miya raises her hands. “What? I’m just curious.”

Nikita clears her throat. “It’s fine. I’m twenty-four.”

“I’m twenty-two,” I tell her.

“I’m twenty-five,” Autumn says.

“Twenty-four,” Miya adds.

“And you are all married to your men?” she asks.

“Yes,” I tell her.

Nikita frowns. “Was it your choice?”

I smile and reassure her. “One hundred percent. When I met Kai, I knew he was it for me.”

Miya hums. “It took Kenji a minute to convince me to marry him, only because I like making him work for it.”

Nikita’s eyes move to Autumn.

Autumn has a dreamy look on her face. “I was never supposed to meet Callum, and then I did. We agreed to spend a couple days with each other. When I left, I was devastated, but then fate stepped in and blessed us.” She looks over at her daughter before looking back at Nikita. “So yes, marrying Callum was my choice.”

A look I can’t comprehend crosses Nikita’s face. “That sounds nice.”

I can tell the others didn’t miss the look either. Now I see what Autumn meant.

I might not be able to read auras or whatever it is that she does, but I can sense the sadness in Nikita. With what little I know of the Russians, she probably hasn’t had many choices in her life. Hell, even being here tonight wasn’t her choice.

That in itself is sad.

Autumn looks over at me, conveying that she feels the same way I do. Nikita isn’t a bad person. She’s been dealt a bad hand.

Autumn changes the subject, giving Nikita a break.

“So how did Kai like his present? Callum loved his.” She looks at the other girls and tells them that she booked them a trip to Ireland and that I booked one for Japan, but doesn’t mention when.

“Kai loved it.” I smile, thinking about his face when he opened it. “Thank you for the idea.”

“Of course.” She nods.

“What did you get Kenji?” I ask Miya.

Miya blushes as she holds her glass in front of her face. “The man is terrible to buy for. He has everything he needs. So I went the sexual route and got some toys from the store.”

I snort. “Seriously? Like what?”

“Come on, Cleo. Do not make me corrupt you. You’re still far too innocent for the shit me and Kenji get up to in bed.”

“Hey,” I protest. “I’m not that innocent.”

She quirks her brow before looking at Nikita. “I’m sorry for this, but a point has to be made.” When she turns back to me, she smirks. “I bought a cock ring for his dick, but it has an extension so that while he fucks me, he also fucks my ass. Then I also bought the ball gag he’s been practically begging me to let him buy because he wants to dive deeper into tying me up and leaving me completely helpless.”

My eyes widen at her admission. I mean, me and Kai play a bit, and he can get a bit rough, but a ball gag? That seems a bit intimidating.

“You broke her.” Autumn chuckles.

“Look how red her face is. She didn’t expect that,” Miya admits.

“Shit, I didn’t expect that. Get it, girl.” Autumn high fives her.

I look at Nikita, but she looks as shocked as I am. When she notices me looking, she looks away, the expression melting from her face.

“Stop picking on me. That all sounds lovely. Can we move on now?”

Miya snorts. “Sure thing, boss lady.”

“Kado’s gift to you was amazing,” Autumn tells me, changing the subject as I asked.

“He was so excited when he found it,” Miya muses.

I shake my head. “He chose well. I know where I’m going to put it already. I want it on display.”

“You all care for each other. Despite that you come from different families.” Nikita frowns. “It’s strange. I’ve never seen that before.”

“Just because something has been done one way for generations doesn’t mean that it’s right,” Autumn tells her.

“True.” I raise my glass.

The girls do the same thing, and we all take a drink.

“You know, when Kenji told me that you were hosting Christmas, I was surprised.” Miya laughs. “I don’t want to know how you convinced Kai to let you open the doors.”

I wink. “I have my ways.”

“He’s crazy for you.” Autumn laughs.

“As he should be,” Miya adds.

“You are strange.” Nikita shakes her head.

“I would rather be strange than boring,” Autumn singsongs.

“Girlfriend, if you think she’s strange now, you should see her on a normal day,” I tease.

Miya chimes in. “Today, she’s definitely toned down.”

“Hey, not everyone can handle my brand of crazy. I thought I’d be nice and tone it down some today for Kai’s sake,” she quips, making us laugh.

Miya leans on the table and looks at Nikita. “So I have to ask, you live across the hall from Declan, right?”

“I do,” Nikita says hesitantly.

“How is that going for you?”

“The place is lovely. Everything works as it’s supposed to. Having a gym in the building and a doorman is nice.”

“I’m sure my husband will love to know you find his building sufficient,” Autumn says with laughter in her voice.

Miya rolls her eyes. “That’s great and all, but you misunderstood me. What’s it like living next to Declan? Does

he throw wild parties, have women coming in and out of his place? Are you friends? He is something of an enigma. He acts all flirty and shit, but then is serious the next second.”

Nikita’s brows furrow. “No. He’s quiet. I never know when he’s home or gone. We don’t exactly get along either. We’re like...” She trails off.

“Oil and water?” I offer.

“Yes.” She nods.

“I don’t know, you two seem to be getting along just fine tonight,” Autumn says lightly.

A blush starts to creep up Nikita’s neck. “He’s just being nice. He feels responsible because you invited me as his date. He made sure to tell me to be on my best behavior. I also do not believe he felt comfortable with you giving me your child.”

Interesting. She has no idea. All night, I’ve watched Declan watch Nikita. Hell, he hasn’t left her side until now. Don’t get me wrong, I’m sure he’s a dick because of who she is but still.

Autumn hums. “Keep telling yourself that.”

Nikita shakes her head. “I don’t understand...”

“You will,” Autumn says confidently.

Almost like she knows something we don’t.

Hell, she probably does.



Kai

THE GUYS FOLLOW me onto the rooftop deck. Reaching into my pocket, I pull out my phone and hit a button, turning on the lights.

“Nice,” Declan mutters.

“You should see it in the summer,” Kenji tells him.

I look around, trying to see it from his perspective. All around, there are lights strung up that Cleo and I can operate from our phones. There’s an outdoor fireplace with more seating than we need surrounding it. Although I guess it’s coming in handy right now.

The gardens are dead and covered for the winter, and the trees are leafless. Honestly, right now it’s nothing to write home about.

“Make yourselves comfortable.” I wave toward the seating as I approach the fireplace.

While they sit, I start the fireplace and get a fire going. It’s fucking cold this time of year, but between the fire and the whiskey, we’ll be fine.

“I hope you don’t mind, but I brought cigars for all of us,” Callum says.

I move to a chair and sit down. “That sounds great.”

Declan fills the whiskey glasses that Kenji and he carried up and passes them around.

“Thank you,” I mutter to Kenji.

“Of course,” he says quietly.

Callum passes out the cigars, and we light them.

Callum removes the cigar from his mouth and raises his glass. “To another bloody year.”

“To another bloody year,” we murmur back before we all fall silent.

Without the girls, we aren’t forced to chitchat. We can just be.

“Be honest, on a scale of one to ten, how awkward was that dinner for everyone?” Callum asks.

“I’ve been to worse.” Declan shrugs.

“Better than I thought it would be,” Kenji admits.

Callum raises a brow. “Kai?”

“I would have preferred to spend the evening alone with my wife, but overall, I can’t complain too much.”

Declan smirks. “Hey boss, it sounds like the Yakuza are starting to like us.”

Callum rolls his eyes as Kenji hits Declan in the stomach, making him grunt.

Callum looks over at me. “I need to apologize. I know how you feel about Nikita, but I couldn’t tell my wife no. Especially where Cleo knew.”

I feel the corner of my eye twitch at the mention of that woman. She’s been living in a Westie-owned building for a year and under constant surveillance. So far her family hasn’t reached out, and she seems to have no ties to the Bratva outside of her father, who threw her to the wolves. While she’s been quiet tonight and doesn’t seem like a threat, I don’t like that she’s in my home.

“When Cleo sets her mind to something, she doesn’t stop. She’s like a dog with a bone. As she reminded me, a child shouldn’t have to pay for the sins of their father, even when the father throws them off the bridge.”

“She doesn’t seem too bad,” Kenji admits.

“She’s a fucking gremlin and a pain in my ass,” Declan grumbles before taking a deep drink.

“What, did you fuck her and leave her?” Kenji teases.

I watch as Declan grows tense. “Fuck off. She’s not my type.”

Interesting. I didn’t anticipate any of the men taking to Nikita when I brokered the deal for Callum to keep an eye on

her for me. I figured she'd be miserable, but it seems like they've slacked in that department.

Callum meets my eye and smirks.

He knows what I'm thinking. He was adamant that if he allowed her to live in his building, he would also take control of her treatment. He knew how unhinged I was after everything that went down. She should be grateful to him. He saved her a lot of suffering.

It seems like he might have found her extra protection too. I'll need to keep my eye on Declan.

Kenji keeps antagonizing him. "Oh, come on."

Declan takes a drink. "Want to share what you were doing to Miya under the table? Or has she developed a twitch?"

Kenji smirks around his cigar. "Wouldn't you like to know?"

"Don't think I didn't notice how both of you"—I point at Callum and Kenji—"snuck off and fucked in my home. I expect money for the cleaning bill."

"You can afford the cleaning bill without me chipping in, but if you want it that bad, give me a number." Callum smirks.

"You looked a little too smug when you came back from the bathroom," Declan tells his boss.

Callum shrugs. "Autumn agreed to have another baby."

"Planning ahead this time?" I deadpan.

An animalistic look crosses his face. "You'll understand the appeal when you knock my sister up someday." He cringes. "Let's pretend I didn't just say that."

Declan and Kenji laugh.

"Touché." I raise my glass toward him.

"I won't lie, the idea of Miya being pregnant makes me want to stab someone." Kenji winces.

Callum laughs. "It's hard enough keeping one safe, isn't it?"

Kenji relaxes. “Exactly. I have a hard enough time letting her leave the house every day, despite the fact we go to work in the same building. I can’t imagine her carrying our child and not being right next to me at all times.”

Declan’s phone bings once and then twice. I watch out of the corner of my eye as he sets down his glass and pulls his phone out of his pocket. Whatever’s on the screen makes him roll his eyes.

“Everything okay?” Kenji asks.

“Do we need to go rough some people up?” I ask, still feeling a little stabby from earlier when everyone showed up and I had to put sex on the backburner.

I look over and see Callum studying his right-hand man. What does he see?

Declan shakes his head. “Nah, it was just Tristano.”

“He’s interesting,” I say as I set my cigar down, not interested in it.

In all honesty, I hate cigars, but they are part of the life. I’ll hold one and take a puff or two when I need to for appearance’s sake, but that’s it.

“You have no idea,” Declan mutters.

“Killian is fond of him. Says he doesn’t give Greer much trouble and is good at what he does,” Callum adds.

I hum, not having anything to put in.

“Is his woman doing okay after everything?” Kenji asks.

Declan nods. “Yeah, Serena’s doing well. Therapy and all that shit.”

“Good,” Callum says, and I can’t help but agree.

We fall silent once again. Unsure of what to talk about. While on paper we might have things in common, it’s nothing we can actually talk about. I know Callum doesn’t want me to pry into his organization, and I don’t want him digging into mine. We operate very differently from what I can tell, and that’s okay.

While yes, we're competition, he stays on his side and I stay on mine. Just the way I like it.

CHAPTER
ELEVEN

Autumn

Cleo looks at me with a look I can't quite name.
"What?"

She shakes her head. "Sorry, I just realized you never mentioned what Callum got you for Christmas."

Even though I know she's lying, I can't help but smile.

"He totally surprised me." I take a deep breath. "He bought me my favorite apothecary."

"No way!" Miya nudges my arm with hers. "That's fucking awesome."

"That's a fantastic purchase," Cleo adds.

I think back to this morning when he handed me the envelope. Callum is always confident and sure of himself, but this morning he couldn't help but sway side to side. Hell, he slid his hands into his pockets and started rubbing the stone I gave him that he doesn't think I know that he carries.

"I couldn't have been more shocked," I tell them.

"What is an apothecary?" Nikita asks.

"It's like a pharmacy but with medicinal herbal remedies. They also sell crystals and all sorts of things. Like the candle and bath salts I got you," I tell her.

Cleo leans in close. "Autumn's our family witch."

I roll my eyes and smile. "I'm not a witch."

"Sure you aren't," Miya quips.

"You'll understand the longer you hang around her," Cleo tells Nikita.

Nikita nods. "Sure."

Miya jerks again and makes a noise.

"Okay, what in the hell is going on with you?" Cleo demands.

Miya blushes. "Just Kenji being Kenji."

We fall silent as we try to read between the lines.

Cleo gasps, her hand on her chest. "Did you have a sex toy in you at my dinner table, Miya?"

Miya scoffs. "No, never."

"I don't believe you." Cleo turns toward Nikita. "Do you believe her?"

Nikita raises her hands. "Please leave me out of this."

Emily fusses in her chair, wanting out and Miya and her sex toy are forgotten.

"Let's get you out of there." I stand and unbuckle her.

"Let me have her," Cleo demands, making grabby hands.

Very carefully, I hand Emily across the table and watch as she curls into her aunt's chest.

"I probably should have cleaned her off more. You're going to get that top dirty."

Cleo rolls her eyes. "Like I care."

"She had a growth spurt recently, right? I feel like she's grown a lot since the last time I saw her," Miya says.

I settle back into my chair. "She has. I swear it was overnight too."

"Not such a baby anymore, huh?" Cleo coos.

“Are you going to have any more?” Nikita asks as she stares at Emily.

She clearly wants to hold Emily to have something to do. Almost like she wants to use her as a shield from the rest of us.

“Actually...we are trying.”

Cleo whips her head toward me. “Wait, really? You never mentioned it the other day!”

I can feel myself blush. “We just decided.”

In your bathroom. I think to myself.

“You look happy,” Nikita says.

“I am.”

“Did you enjoy being pregnant? I’ve heard it’s miserable,” Miya asks.

“They say each pregnancy is different. My pregnancy with Emily was pretty easy, though. I loved feeling her move inside of me.” I shake my head. “I don’t even know how to describe the feeling. It’s like anything I’ve ever felt. It’s crazy growing a human inside of you and being overwhelmed with love for someone that you’ve never met.”

“I can’t imagine.” Miya shakes her head.

“You’ll experience it one day if you have a child,” I tell her.

Miya’s nose crinkles. “Maybe.” She looks over at Cleo. “Are you next?”

Cleo shakes her head before Miya even finishes asking. “I’m not ready. Kai would knock me up the moment I ask, but I love that it’s just us right now.”

I look at Nikita. “What about you? Do you want kids? You’re great with Emily.”

“I’m not sure I would be a good mother,” she says thoughtfully. “I didn’t have great examples.”

“They say kids are a great judge of character,” Cleo tells her.

Nikita shrugs, clearly uncomfortable.

“You have plenty of time to decide,” I tell her, trying to soothe her.

It would be a shame if she didn't experience motherhood in some form. Especially where I think there's a good chance she could end up with Declan. With the way he watches her and the sparks flying between the two of them when they share the same space, it's almost tangible. Even Cleo senses it. Declan is amazing with Emily, so if they do end up exploring those sparks, they will have children. Many of them, I'd venture to bet.

I wonder how they would react if they knew I had a dream about being at their wedding...

You can't do that. I remind myself. You don't want to piss off fate and change things. You have to let them find their way without pushing them.

“Would you look at that? She fell asleep,” Nikita says, pulling me out of my head.

I look over at Cleo and Emily, and sure enough, Emily is racked out on Cleo's chest.

“I love her so much,” Cleo says softly.

“She loves you too.”

“Watching Sean play with her when he was visiting made my heart happy.” Cleo looks over at Nikita. “Sean is my baby brother, who lives with his mom in New York. He's not much older than Emily.”

Nikita nods but doesn't say anything.

“Sean and Rosa with Killian and his family for the holidays?” Miya asks, filling in the silence.

“As far as I know. I invited them, but Rosa declined.” Cleo shakes her head with a sad look on her face.

“It was hard on her being here. You just need to give her time,” I remind her.

“I know.” She sighs.

Miya opens her mouth to say something, but a noise catches our attention. “What was that?”

“What was what?” Cleo asks.

Miya looks between all of us. “Did you hear it, or am I crazy?”

Before I can say anything, it happens again.

“That.” Miya points at the ceiling.

“I heard it,” I tell her as Nikita nods.

“I’m sure it’s nothing,” Cleo says hesitantly.

“No that was definitely something.” Miya moves to stand right as a guard comes into the room.

“Daiki ?” Cleo asks.

“Mrs. Takahashi, I need you ladies to come with me. There’s a situation outside.”

“Where’s my husband?” I ask, trying not to panic.

Daiki smiles at me. “Your husband is fine. The men will be in shortly, but if you will all follow me.”

Nikita helps Cleo stand as she holds Emily.

“Let’s go.” Cleo sighs as she and Nikita fall into step with Daiki.

“I don’t like this,” I whisper to Miya.

“Neither do I,” she murmurs back.

We make our way into the safe room, and the guard seals us and himself in.

“Might as well get comfortable.” Cleo sighs as she sits. “I just wanted one day of normalcy.”

“Normal is boring,” I say lightly, trying to choke down my worry.

What the hell is happening?



Callum

“YOU KNOW I heard that Ricardo is planning to present his daughter this year at the Gala?” Kai tells me as Declan and Kenji hold their own conversation. Kado is at the edge of the roof looking down.

Fuck, I hope the big guy doesn't jump. All the women are fond of him. It's hard to tell what he's thinking, though. Especially with him being mute. The only way he communicates is through his phone or writing. He doesn't even know sign language.

“I heard. Are you thinking about putting one of your men forward?” I ask.

Kai shakes his head, “Nah. As much as it would be nice having them at my back, I can't trust them. The cartels are too volatile. For all I know, they could send the girl to us only to have her slit his throat in the middle of the night. Then I'd be on the hook for the deal, and the girl would be dead.”

I nod. “I offered Declan to go in my place again. He has expressed that he never wants to marry, so naturally I have to thrust him into every situation that discusses marriage to annoy the hell out of him.”

Kai chuckles. “He hasn't caught on yet?”

I shake my head. “He still thinks I'm going to force him to marry. Those rules are archaic. I wouldn't have a problem with it if both parties agreed, but I won't force anyone to get married if they don't want to.”

“Falling in love has made you soft, Callum.” Kai snorts.

I shake my head. “I don't see you forcing your men to marry either, Haruaki.”

He gives one short nod. “My men do not have many freedoms in this life. If this is one I can give them, I happily do it. With that being said, I would force them if I had to.”

“Let’s hope you never have to.” I hold out my glass for him to clink with his.

He clinks it before taking a swig.

I’m about to change the subject when Kado comes running over. He points at the sky.

I squint, trying to see what he sees.

“Oh fuck.” Kenji jumps up, causing the rest of us to as well. We all have our weapons drawn within a second as the item grows larger.

“Is that a fucking helicopter?” I hiss.

“It is, and this is a no-fly zone. Declan, are you sure that date of yours isn’t up to no good?” Kai asks.

Declan snarls, “This isn’t her. She hasn’t even had contact with anyone outside our people since she moved in.”

“If it’s not the Russians, who could it be?” I ask Kai.

He shrugs. “You piss anyone off lately?”

“We all pissed the Ukrainians off,” I admit.

He nods.

“Take cover!” Kai yells, typing something out on his phone.

“You taking time to check your horoscope to see if death is on the table?” I ask sarcastically.

“Informing my guards to protect our women. Now let’s fuck these fuckers up.”

If I wasn’t one hundred percent sure that Kai would never put my sister in danger, I would almost believe that he set this up. There’s this sick glee on his face as he stares down the helicopter. Almost as if he believes he can shoot it down with his eyes alone.

Fuck, with the rumors about him, I wouldn't be surprised if it was true.

He might be known as the dark prince, but there are many rumors of him being a dragon shapeshifter hiding in plain sight.

That's obviously a lie, but with the anger in his eyes right now, I can see the comparison. If he could breathe fire, he would be doing so.

Looking at the other three men, I find them crouching behind the brick planters surrounding the garden.

"Are we really going to fight a helicopter with just our handguns?" I ask Kai, checking my gun to ensure it's ready.

He smirks at me. "Of course we are. We are going to win too. Watch."

He darts out of his hiding spot as the first shot rings through the air.

For half a second, there's nothing but silence.

Then all hell breaks loose.

Kai aims his gun, shooting at the helicopter. The men in the helicopter don't shy away. Instead, they shoot back, half hanging out of the open door.

I try to study them, but they are wearing all black with face masks. No way to tell if they are here for us or the Yakuza.

Rushing to Kai's side, I push him out of the way right before a shot lodges into my arm.

"Fuck," I grunt.

"You should have stayed hidden. Cleo is going to be pissed," Kai huffs, getting back to his feet to continue shooting.

Fucking suicidal prick.

I grit my teeth, ignoring the pain in my arm. I could let him die. I really could. No one would know. Not really. Kenji,

Kado, and Declan are focusing on their own fight as men start to jump from the helicopter onto the roof.

Then I think of Cleo's face the day she married Haruaki. How happy she was to be with him.

Fuck. I have to save the asshole.

Huffing out a breath, I move back to Kai's side, firing off my own shots. I only have three magazines on me, so I should be conserving my bullets.

Kai curses before throwing his gun at the man hanging out the side of the helicopter. It hits him, causing him to lose balance. Then he falls from the edge, plummeting to his death.

It's hard to stand with the air being pushed around from the helicopter, but we manage.

Kai runs at a man who has just landed on the roof. While he engaged in hand-to-hand combat with the asshole, I move until I can see the pilot. Bringing my gun up, I aim for his shoulder. I could kill him, but I don't want that helicopter landing on the roof. It could hurt the women below us.

When I fire the shot, I smile. I see the moment it hits its mark. The pilot jerks, the helicopter moving with him. Another man falls from it.

I smirk as the helicopter takes off, the wind going with him. The men on the roof look up to it quickly, realizing they are fucked.

There are only six of them left on the roof.

"You have time to die quickly," Kai tells them.

They are not happy at all. The resolve that they will die here today sets in, making them dangerous.

They have nothing left to live for.

If they did make it off this roof, whoever sent them would never believe they escaped.

This is the end of the road.

"I respect your choice for an honorable death," Kai says.

Then he moves.

Fucking psychopathic Yakuza prick.

CHAPTER
TWELVE

Miya

I t's only been minutes but I'm already going fucking crazy. I hate being confined on a good day, which makes this situation worse.

"Merry fucking Christmas," I mutter.

Autumn laughs. "Come sit down. I'm sure the guys will be in here any minute and tell us this was all just a misunderstanding."

"Yeah, maybe an animal set off a sensor," Cleo adds.

I look over my shoulder and give them both a look that says they're full of shit. My eyes drift toward Nikita, and I see she's curled up in the corner, chewing on the corner of her nail.

Does whatever is happening outside involve her? She doesn't look guilty, in fact, she looks scared.

That doesn't mean jack shit, a voice in my head reminds me.

"On the bright side, Emily is still racked out. Could you imagine how shitty it would be being in here with a screaming baby?" Autumn says.

"No kidding." Cleo looks over at Daiki. "Hey, could you pull up the cameras?"

Daiki shifts on his feet and looks at the wall behind him. “I don’t know. It might just be better to wait until someone radios us or comes and opens the door.”

“Are you really denying your queen?” I demand, crossing my arms over his chest.

He raises his hands. “I’m just trying to keep everyone calm.”

Stepping forward, I push past him and step up to the wall. “I don’t see any buttons or anything.”

Daiki sighs. “Move.”

I step to the side and watch what he does. He waves a card in front of a pinhole, and a metal wall slides open, revealing a wall of monitors. Daiki pulls out a keyboard and hits a few buttons and nothing happens.

Absolutely nothing fucking happens.

“What the fuck?” he mutters under his breath.

“Is something wrong?”

You can hear the worry in Cleo’s voice.

“I must apologize, Mrs. Takahashi. I must have done something wrong, and the system won’t open for me. You have to do things just right to make it work.”

Liar. He’s fucking lying and trying to placate Cleo so she doesn’t freak the fuck out.

Like you are right now, a little voice in my head reminds me.

I run my hands through my hair and start pacing as what he says hangs in the air.

“It’s okay, Daiki. Accidents happen,” Autumn tells him.

The tension in the room grows as I pace.

Don’t lose your shit. For fuck’s sake, don’t lose your shit.

“Nikita, sweetheart, are you okay?” Autumn soothes.

“I don’t like small spaces,” Nikita says quietly.

“Usually it isn’t bad, but with all of us in here, it’s a little tight,” Cleo says, sounding tense.

“It feels like a metal shoe box,” Nikita mutters.

“Amen,” I mumble.

“Miya, babe, how about you sit down and we play a game or something?” Autumn says.

I close my eyes and take a deep breath. I love her, I really do, but her optimism is grating on me. How can she constantly be so fucking happy? Especially with our men out there possibly fighting for their lives?

I shake my head. “I can’t.”

“Too bad, because that was an order,” she says, sounding fiercer than I’ve ever heard her. “Tension is high right now, and you’re making it worse.”

Cleo groans. “God, is this what I get for making us celebrate Christmas together? I just wanted to have a normal holiday like a normal freaking family. Is that too much to ask for?”

“Yes,” I say right as Autumn says, “No!”

“Is my house covered in bad vibes, Autumn? Is this because I don’t know how to cleanse? Hell, I don’t even clean this place. I have a freaking cleaning crew that comes in once a week!” Cleo says, her voice getting louder with each word.

A sob breaks from Cleo when baby Emily wakes up, crying.

Cleo starts freaking out more as Emily cries. Autumn is about to move toward her, but surprisingly, Nikita does, taking Emily from her arms. She hums to her softly.

Almost instantly, Emily stops crying.

“Thank you, Nikita,” she says softly before turning to me. “Okay, I’m not telling you again, Miya, sit the fuck down.”

Huffing, I come to a stop next to the wall. Turning, I face everyone as I slide down the wall, sitting on the floor. “Happy?” I ask sarcastically.

Autumn shoots me a tight smile. “Yes. Now I want everyone to close their eyes.”

Nikita, Cleo, and I share a look but do as she asks.

“Come on, just do it,” Autumn snaps.

Quickly, all three of us close our eyes.

“Perfect. Now I want you guys to picture a place in your minds. Somewhere that brings you peace and makes you feel calm.”

“What the fuck?” Nikita mutters, and I bite my tongue, stopping myself from agreeing with her.

Soon, a place comes to mind. Kenji and I are in a Jacuzzi that’s outside on a porch in the Rocky Mountains. We went there last winter for a weekend getaway. One day, we hung out in the Jacuzzi, naked in broad daylight as it snowed around us. I ended up on Kenji’s lap and rode him. It was fucking out of this world, and I don’t even know how to describe what it felt like when my nipples came out of the water and were instantly cold, only to be plunged back into the heat the next second.

“Perfect. Do you all have a place in mind?”

“Yes,” we all mutter as one.

“Lovely,” Autumn coos. “I’m picturing the time I went to Alaska. I went up there to work for the winter at a resort and saw the northern lights. The way the greens and yellows blended together.” She sighs. “I want to see them again, but with Callum and Emily.”

“That is a beautiful sight, despite the cold,” Nikita agrees.

“Nikita, you go next.”

“When I was a teenager, I ran away to Greece. I was there for two weeks before my father found me, but I loved it. The food was delicious, and the people were amazing. Every morning and night, I watched the sun rise and set on the beach.”

“A beach sounds nice right about now,” I say quietly.

“How about you go next, Miya? What are you picturing?” Autumn says, calling me out.

I absolutely cannot tell her what I was thinking of. There’s no way in hell.

Instead, I huff out a breath and lie, “We are back in Japan. The cherry blossoms are even more beautiful in person than they are in pictures. It’s...”

Before I can finish my sentence, there’s a banging on the door. Nikita moves into the corner, turning to shield the baby from whatever is about to happen. Cleo and Autumn crowd around her, so I take up the front position as the guard moves to the door.

He doesn’t say anything. He only types a message in his phone. After a moment, he lets out a breath, opening the door.

Only, I’m not expecting what’s on the other side.



Kenji

THIS HAS TURNED into such a mess. Who knew that a simple Christmas dinner could turn bloody so quickly?

From talking sports with Declan to Kado listening in to pure bedlam. Hell, we don’t even know who launched the attack.

“On your right,” I call out to Kado, keeping my back as close to him as I can as I fight off the next assailant.

They aren’t playing. I can see blood pouring from Callum already. Kai is covered nearly head to toe in blood at this point, but I never worry about him. Fucker can survive a gunshot to the head. I’m sure of it.

Me? I’m not so lucky.

“Fuck,” I grumble, feeling the knife slide against my side.

That's going to require stitches. Still, I force myself to go on a counterattack, snapping the man's arm in half. He cries out, falling to the ground. Leaning down, I grab his knife, slitting his throat.

Probably a bad idea considering I get covered in blood.

Fucking idiots.

Who are they to think that they can attack us? And on a holiday?

As my anger grows, I move more frantically, snapping the next guy's neck before he can get any closer.

My adrenaline is still pulsing, so when I stop and look around, I'm disappointed.

The helicopter is long gone, and all the men on the roof are dead.

"What the fuck was that?" Declan curses.

Leaning down, I pull the face mask off the man at my feet. He's white and looks like he has smoked for most of his life the way his skin sags. I don't see any visible tattoos, so I start looking at his arms and chest.

It's there I find it. Russian prison tats.

"This one spent time in a Russian prison," I tell Kai.

He nods. "These three as well. Seems this is a Russian problem."

He moves closer to Declan before looking him straight in the eye. "Did Nikita do this?"

Declan starts shaking his head before Kai even finishes asking. "No. There's no way she could have. I have her phone tapped, and she is watched twenty-four hours a day. I never let her out of the sight of me or my men."

"She's out of your sight now," I tell him.

He grunts. "She's with your wives. Not only that, but I took her phone before we got here. I knew you'd be

suspicious, so this was the best way to ensure she couldn't communicate, even though I know she's not."

Kai huffs, "Let's go ask her."

He starts to head down the stairs, but Declan pushes in front of him.

"No. I know how you ask people, and I won't let you hurt her just because shit went down. This could have been anything."

"Let's calm down." Callum meets them on the stairs, Kado and I holding back to see how it shakes out.

Kai's in no danger. He can take care of himself even if he was, but Callum won't hurt him, which means Declan won't.

"We will simply talk. You have my word," Kai assures him.

Declan thinks over his offer, but I don't care about it. All I care about is getting to my woman, then getting my side stitched up.

"Move the fuck out of the way, assholes." I push through them, Kado on my trail.

How the most violent of us managed to stay so clean, I'll never know, but Kado looks like he went for a Sunday stroll instead of murdering our attackers.

Lucky son of a bitch.

I make my way to the safe room, pounding on the door.

It doesn't open right away, so I text Daiki.

After a moment, the door opens, and I come face-to-face with my woman. She's standing there as she protects the others from whatever threat might be coming at them.

I wish I could fuck her right now. The fierce look in her eye has my dick twitching even with the throbbing side.

Her face falls as soon as she sees me.

"Kenji? Oh my god." She rushes forward, her hands checking me over.

I hiss when she reaches my side. She pulls her hand back, covered in blood.

I hear Callum murmur to Autumn, “It’s just a graze, I’m fine. I promise.”

“What the fuck happened?” Miya hisses.

The rest of the men step into the room to collect their woman as Kai speaks.

“We were attacked on the roof.”

I glance at Nikita. She’s holding Emily, with Declan at her side. Autumn carefully takes Emily back, thanking Nikita for protecting her daughter. Nikita looks frightened, but she doesn’t look like someone would if they were guilty.

Either she’s a damn good actress or this really had nothing to do with her.

“Who would attack you?” Cleo asks.

Kai looks over to Nikita. “Russians.”

Nikita backs up until she hits the wall. “I didn’t have anything to do with it. I swear.”

Declan moves to her side. “We have a few questions we would like to ask.”

She shakes her head. “No. No. I can’t. Please don’t. Just kill me already.”

“Hey.” Cleo moves away from Kai.

He tries to pull her back, but she shakes him off.

“Nikita, it’s okay. No one is going to hurt you. In fact, any questions they have can wait. You all need to clean up. How about we call it an early night and revisit this another day?”

“Princess, time is of the essence,” Kai tries, but Cleo gives him a dark look.

“Haruaki, now is not the time. I know you think because she is Russian, she had something to do with this, but can’t you see how scared she is right now? She put her body

between that door and Emily. Would someone who wants us dead do that?"

He goes to speak, but with another glare, he promptly shuts up. I've never seen him take orders from anyone before. Sure, Cleo pretends to order him around, but she's never spoken to him like this. I have no doubt that if anyone else was here, he would pull her away from us and ream her ass, but he lets it go. He lets this one show of weakness linger as he looks back at Nikita.

"I want you down at my offices tomorrow morning. We will not harm you, but you will speak to us. Do you understand?"

She nods slowly. "Okay."

"Get out of here," Kai barks.

Declan pulls Nikita from the room, ushering her until we hear the door click.

"Should we have checked to be sure there's no one waiting down there?" I ask Kai.

He shakes his head. "I called in reinforcements the moment we saw the helicopter. Everything is quiet down there."

"Let's get you stitched up." Miya pulls me from the room, leaving the others to discuss what just happened.

Once in the bathroom, she pulls out a first aid kit from under the sink. I'm not surprised she knows where it all is. She and Cleo stocked the place together.

After several minutes of silence as she cleans and stitches my wound, she speaks.

"I saw all the blood, and I thought the worst. I could have lost you. I can't lose you, Kenji. I won't."

Of course that would scare her. I didn't even think about how she found her family all those years ago. She probably has PTSD from it.

Cupping her chin, I pull her face up until she looks at me.

“Little one, not even the devil himself can take me from you. I’ll be with you until you take your last breath. I’m sorry you had to see me like this, but it’s the job I must do.”

“I know.” She leans in, resting her head on mine. “I know, but it scared me. Don’t scare me again.”

Then she gets back to work.

It’s not a promise I can make, but it’s one I’ll damn sure try to keep.

Almost as an afterthought, I hear her whisper, “Next year, we spend Christmas at our home alone.”

I chuckle. “Whatever you want.”

Anything to keep my wife happy.



FROM THE WESTIE and Yakuza families, Merry fucking Christmas.

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AUTHOR BIO

Cala Riley, better known as Cala and Riley, are a pair of friends with a deep-seated love of books and writing. Both Cala and Riley are happily married and each have children, Cala with the four-legged kind while Riley has a mixture of both two-legged and four. While they live apart, that does not affect their connection. They are the true definition of family. What started as an idea that quickly turned into a full-length book and a bond that will never end.

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