



SHERIDAN
ANNE

PRETTY
MONSTER

A DARK STALKER
ROMANCE

PRETTY MONSTER

A DARK STALKER ROMANCE

SHERIDAN ANNE

Sheridan Anne

PRETTY MONSTER

Copyright © 2023 Sheridan Anne

All rights reserved

First Published in 2023

Anne, Sheridan

MONSTER, PRETTY

This book is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places, and incidents are products of the author's imagination. Any resemblance to actual events or persons, living or dead, is entirely coincidental.

No part of this book may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means, without prior permission in writing of the publisher, nor be otherwise circulated in any form of the binding or cover other than in which it is published, and without a similar condition, including this condition, being imposed on the subsequent purchaser.

Cover Design: Artscandare

Editing: Fox Proof Editing

Formatting: Sheridan Anne

Join me online with the rest of the
stalkers!!



www.facebook.com/SheridansBookishBabes

For more information on PRETTY MONSTER and all of my
other work, join my Facebook group - Sheridan's Bookish
Babes.

Here we talk shit, perv on sexy men, and try to forget that
sometimes, the world is a shitty place. :)

Come on, hit join! I know you want to!

See you there!



For those whose hubbies aren't willing to pull a mask over their face and chase them through the woods. Dreams don't always come true, but hopefully this will scratch that itch!

Keep trying, girl. Persistence is key. He'll cave eventually!!!

INTRODUCTION



I'm addicted to my stalker.

He watches me at night, sneaking in through my living room window and making my blood turn to ice. I feel him all around me as chills snake down my spine. Each night he becomes bolder, getting closer and welcoming himself into my bedroom, feeding his addiction.

When I feel the warmth of his skin brushing over mine, I pretend to sleep, terrified of what he plans to do with me. But when he touches me ... my whole body comes alive.

I've never seen his face, and don't even know his name, but I want to. Every part of me knows this is wrong, but I can't bring myself to lock the window, to tell him no.

He thrills me, but living life on the edge doesn't come without consequences.

He's sick in the head, addicted to this infatuation, and
obsessed with his messed-up mind games. But maybe I'm just
as sick as he is because, whether I like it or not ... *I'm*
addicted to my stalker.

CONTENT WARNING



Pretty Monster is a Dark Contemporary Stalker Romance.

It contains explicit sexual content, graphic violence, kidnapping, on-page murder, mind-games, heavy stalking, deception, blood play, dubious consent and non consenting sexual content.

Please be aware the main love interest in this story is far from a hero.

This book was created to push boundaries and is recommended for mature readers. This is not a typical HEA and readers will need to keep an open mind.

Contents

PROLOGUE

1. KYAH

2. REID

3. KYAH

4. REID

5. KYAH

6. REID

7. CREW

8. KYAH

9. KYAH

10. KYAH

11. REID

12. KYAH

13. KYAH

14. REID

15. KYAH
16. VIPER
17. KYAH
18. KYAH
19. REID
20. KYAH
21. KYAH
22. ALEX
23. KYAH
24. KYAH
25. KYAH
26. REID
27. KYAH
28. ALEX
29. KYAH
30. VIPER
31. KYAH
32. KYAH
33. KYAH
34. KYAH
35. REID
36. KYAH
37. ALEX

38. KYAH

39. KYAH

40. KYAH

41. KYAH

EPILOGUE

THANKS FOR READING!

STALK ME!

OTHER BOOKS BY SHERIDAN ANNE

PROLOGUE

REID



Raquel Stacy screams as my blade plunges through her chest, and I let out a heavy sigh, watching as her blood quickly pours from the wound, her body quivering as she chokes to death.

That was ridiculously unsatisfying.

She barely put up a fight or pushed me away. Hell, she tripped and fell three feet into the woods. I had to drag her ass deeper into the thick brush just to make it interesting. She tried to scream, hoping someone would come for her, but I chose this location wisely. I always do. Even if I killed her out in the

middle of the road, I still wouldn't be caught. I'm just that good.

As for Malibu Barbie here, what gives? Not even the blood dribbling from her mouth does it for me tonight. Though I have to admit, her sputtering is earning her a few points.

I've watched Raquel for the past few weeks, waiting for the moment she realized the person behind her had followed her around every corner, waiting for the surge of panic on her face when she noticed her bedroom window was open. I'm addicted to the rush, but the best feeling comes from watching a woman bolt upright in her bed as she feels that tingle down her spine that tells her she's not alone. But I got nothing from Raquel. She's either extremely unaware of her surroundings, or she simply doesn't give a shit whether she lives or dies.

Fucking boring. This one had to go. She wasn't even worth the chase. Not that she really gave one.

What does it matter anyway? She was considered dead the second I set my sights on her. The only problem is that this kill hasn't satisfied me. So now, I'm going to need to find someone else, but this time, I won't be so careless in my selection. This time, I'll make it count, and when I take her life, I'll feel the power pulsing through my veins, finally satisfying the ugly, cruel need within me.

God, it's so good.

I need someone who's going to put up a fight, someone who will run when they sense me coming, someone whose eyes

will widen with fear at just the mere thought of what I could do to her. Yeah ... that's exactly what I need.

Shit. I start getting hard just thinking about it.

"Sorry, Raquel," I mutter, adjusting my cock. Getting a hard-on while this woman's life is fading from her eyes hardly seems professional, though, it wouldn't be the first time. Now, sweet Jessica from Boston, she was a real go-getter. She was on her knees, and my cock was buried deep in her throat when my blade swiped across the base of her neck, but to be fair, that was an accident. I only meant to nick her enough to make her thighs shake, and I got a little carried away.

Sue me. Accidents happen, right?

Jessica was fun though. She really surprised me, and if I wasn't so eager for that rush of death, I would have dragged it out another week or so. She would have liked that. She had a dark and depraved little soul. I opened her eyes to a new world of excitement, and if it weren't for my fucked-up need to slaughter the women who walk into my life, she probably would have asked me to teach her the tricks of the trade. On second thought, perhaps getting rid of her before she could cause me any trouble was probably a smart move.

Fuck, no one ever said being a killer was easy, but as long as the feds struggle to identify me, then I'll continue to play. Hell, they've never even gotten close, but that's because they've never been able to link the deaths. They're always different ... random. Raquel was a simple stab wound through the chest, Jessica a slit throat, while Bonny out in Vegas was a

bullet straight between the eyes. And never a shred of my DNA to go with it. After all, my freedom is important to me, and I'm not careless enough to get caught.

Raquel finally takes her last gasping breath, and I let out a heavy sigh, shaking my head.

What a waste of time that was. I took a chance on Raquel. I really thought she was going to go out swinging, but that's my fault. I didn't do enough homework—a mistake I won't make again.

Don't get me wrong, it's not like I love the fact that I'm a stone-cold killer, it's just a necessary part of what I do. After all, once I'm through with a woman, I can't just walk away. It's too risky, and like I said, I'm not planning on getting caught. Ending their lives is just a necessary step I need to take in order to protect my freedom. The fact that taking their lives just happens to make me feel like a fucking God is beside the point.

Okay, so maybe I lied a little. Perhaps I do love being a stone-cold killer, but there's nothing wrong with that. I think it's important for everyone to love what they do. After all, you wouldn't want your surgeon falling asleep in the middle of your heart transplant because he was bored out of his mind. Enthusiasm in the workplace is important. Now, if Raquel had just a little bit of enthusiasm, perhaps we wouldn't have been here quite this early.

God. I really hate it when someone fucks with my schedule.

Grabbing my backpack, I open it up and pull out my gloves before finding the pack of alcohol wipes. I get busy stripping Raquel out of her clothes and cleaning her body, making sure there isn't an ounce of my DNA to be found. Not that Raquel's body will even be found out in these woods, but I'm nothing if not thorough. Hell, I never even fucked her, but I'm not taking any chances.

I hum the tune of "Killing Strangers" by Marilyn Manson like it's part of my own little personalized playlist as I scrub Raquel's nails, cleaning out beneath them. She didn't scratch me, but she did spend twenty minutes in the trunk of my car, and I've seen bastards get locked up for a lot less than a simple carpet fiber.

Like I said, I don't take any chances.

I spend an hour cleaning her off before getting started on a grave. I move the thick bushes out of the way, holding the branches back with my backpack as I dig a hole beneath them. After tossing her body in and filling it halfway back up, I throw in the remains of an animal before finally filling in the hole. After patting it down, I take my backpack, letting the thick bush fall back into place.

Then after double and triple checking that I haven't left a damn thing that could be tied back to me, I grab my shit and head out of the woods. My car is pulled off the highway, hidden behind the uneven terrain, and as I climb back in and jam the key into the ignition, I set my sights on somebody

new, my gut telling me that this time, I'm going to find exactly what I'm looking for.

KYAH



The bell chimes above the door of High Voltage Ink, and I lift my head up from my latest sketch, one hand freezing over the tablet. A big, burly guy strides through the door, turning to the right to fit his muscled arms past the frame. A wide grin stretches across my face as his gaze lifts to mine.

“Careful, Viper,” I tease, having to raise my voice over the music playing through the small shop. “Any bigger and you’re not going to fit in my station.”

Viper grins right back at me, stopping by the reception desk. “That’d be a tragedy, baby,” he coos, ever the flirt. “Perhaps Big Jim needs to pull his head out of his ass long enough to see your potential and finally give you a bigger space.”

I laugh, not even bothering to respond, knowing Big Jim isn't going to let that slide, and sure enough, his head lifts from the calf he's been working on for a good portion of the day. "Perhaps you need to quit the roids, and then you won't have issues fitting your double-wide at Kyah's station," Big Jim throws back at him, a wicked grin lingering on his lips. "Besides, if you think I haven't noticed her potential, you're dead wrong. I don't keep people on if they can't keep it real, and Kyah ... You know she's one of my best."

"Know it?" Viper scoffs. "Why do you think I have her doing my ink and not you? Watch your back, old man. If you're not careful, Kyah's gonna take this place off your hands."

Big Jim rolls his eyes, that cocky, too-sure grin settling on his lips. "I fucking hope so," he says. "This'll all be hers one day."

My brows arch, and as I meet Jim's gaze across the shop, he gives me a subtle nod, letting me know just how serious he is. My heart races, my mind momentarily falling out through my ass and splattering across the polished concrete floor. Getting to own High Voltage Ink one day is a dream of mine, but I've never allowed myself to have hope because, let's face it, Big Jim is the kind of man to hold on to something until he's lying on his deathbed, and even after he's gone, he'll continue to haunt the halls of this shop just to make sure I don't screw it up.

Big Jim built High Voltage Ink from the ground up. It's been his baby since before I was even a sparkle in my dead-beat father's eyes, and he's not about to let it slip through his hands. He's like a father to me, and when I was a struggling kid, heading down a bad road at seventeen, he took me on, taught me everything I know, and from there, it's only gotten better. Now at twenty-three, I'm one of the best tattoo artists Brooklyn has to offer, and I owe it all to Jim.

On the other hand, Viper is the Vice President of the Grim Reapers' motorcycle club and has been asking me to marry him since the moment I turned eighteen. Despite my constant rejections, he continues to visit me every month to get inked and always makes sure to tip well. Hell, he's the reason I'm able to pay my rent on time each month. That, and the fact he recommends me to all of his men, keeping my chair constantly booked out. Though, it leaves me wondering if I am booked out because Viper demands it from his club, or if I am just so good they don't want to go anywhere else.

Checking the time, I realize Viper is twenty minutes early for his appointment, but he's not exactly the type of guy to care about someone's schedule. When he wants something, he generally makes it happen, and when he can't ... that's not anywhere I want to be.

As a general rule, Viper is cold, callous, and cruel, and yet for some reason, he treats me like a queen. But today, his inability to stick to a schedule works out perfectly for me. The sooner I get started on him, the sooner I'll be out of here tonight, not that I have anywhere to be, but it's been a long

day, and I'm more than ready to get out of here and drop down onto my bed.

We're working on his chest today—a demonic skull that winds up around his throat, and considering the size of his chest, this artwork is going to be huge. It's fucked up and chills me to the bone, but it's one of my favorite pieces I've ever worked on, and the fact that Viper can sit down and shut up while I work, instead of whining like a little bitch, only makes it that much better.

Cleaning up my sketches and my tablet, I make a neat little pile on my table before getting myself set up, and as I do that, Viper talks shit with Big Jim. As I scurry around my station, making sure everything is just right, the bell over the door chimes again and I glance up, Crew strides through the door.

His gaze comes to mine first, just as it always does, and I give him a tight smile before his stare shifts toward Viper. His smile instantly falls away, and I let out a heavy sigh. The two of them have never got along, purely because they both want to claim something that neither of them will ever get—me.

Crew Ledger is one of my closest friends and works in the station just to my right, and most of the time, he's the best kind of devilish angel. Sexy as sin, tall and broad and covered in tats with the most panty-melting grin that sends a thrill through me every time he looks at me, but he's also a colleague, and I value this job too much to cross that line with him and he knows it. He respects it though ... most of the time. I'm not going to lie, there has been the occasional night

where we've maybe had a few too many drinks that have ended up with me on my knees, but come morning, I draw the line back into the sand and we're right back where we were.

Crew is the kind of man to treat me like a kid sister. He values my input and comes to me with his problems, but those few times where we've crossed that line, he treats me like a dirty little secret, and that's never sat well with me. Viper, on the other hand, treats me like a queen, and while I know the sex would be mind-blowing, he's also not the kind of guy who's looking for exclusivity. So while he may want to marry me, there's no telling just how many other women he's whispering the same promises to, and I just can't get down with that.

I'm not a prude. I love a little sharing in the bedroom, but when that sharing comes along with deceit, that's when I get pissed off, and let's face it, I can be a crazy, jealous bitch when I need to be. I'm not looking to adopt drama into my life, not now that everything is going so well for me.

Crew glares at Viper, and knowing just how much he gets under his skin, Viper smirks back at him. "Viper," Crew grunts, striding past him and toward my station. Viper doesn't bother responding as Crew steps right into me, his big, strong arm circling my waist. He pulls me against his chest before dropping a kiss to my cheek. "Hey baby," he murmurs, pulling away, respecting my space. "How are you doing? Everything good?"

“Mmm-hmm,” I murmur, my gaze narrowing on his face, not liking how withdrawn he seems. “What’s up?”

“Nothing, just didn’t realize your biggest fan was going to be here, otherwise I would have scheduled my client for tomorrow,” he tells me, moving around his station, getting his shit set up. “You working on his chest today?”

“Yeah,” I say, skimming through my sketches and finding a copy of the tattoo that’s halfway done on Viper’s chest. I hold it up for Crew, certain I haven’t shown him this. “You like it?”

Crew glances at the sketch before doing a second take, and I grin to myself. Only something worthy deserves a second glance when it comes to Crew Ledger. “Fuck me,” he mutters, crossing into my station and taking the sketch out of my hand. “This is great, but it’s a shame it’s wasted on that asshole.”

I roll my eyes and snatch it back. “Don’t you have a tramp stamp or a BFF tattoo to prepare for?”

Crew mutters under his breath, striding back to his station. He’s a ladies’ man, too fucking pretty for his own good kind of ladies’ man, and to add the cherry on top, he’s the biggest flirt I’ve ever met, even when he doesn’t mean to be. The women absolutely love it. They come flocking in here just to have a moment of his time, which generally means his schedule is jam-packed with infinity symbols and tiny little hearts placed on the inner wrist.

He’s more than bored of it, but when it pays the bills, how could he say no?

With everything ready for Viper, I glance across the shop and catch his eye before indicating the chair he's become all too familiar with.

Viper moves across the shop, not stopping until he's standing right in front of me, those jet-black eyes gazing right into mine. "Kyah," he murmurs, his deep tone making me shiver.

I tilt my chin, holding his gaze and knowing how it gets him off. He's mentioned more than once that there are not a lot of women who can bear holding his stare. It's intense, but when you're not terrified of him, it's not so hard to handle. "Viper."

His big hand falls to my waist, his fingers nearly wrapping halfway around me. "I'm growing impatient," he says. "When are you going to give up this hard-to-get act and become my old lady?"

"I'm twenty-three, Viper," I remind him. "I'm not looking at being anyone's old lady anytime soon. Besides, you and I both know that if I were to agree to this, I'd be property to you, not an equal."

Viper grins and fingers the hem of his shirt before pulling it over his head, putting that magnificent chest on display, not denying it one bit. "You'll cave soon enough," he tells me, leaning in until his lips are barely a breath from mine. "I see it in your eyes, Ky. Every time you're working on me, you're thinking about just how good it would be, and you know it will. You clench those pretty thighs every time you touch me, and you know that I can make those tight little walls shatter."

My pussy starts to throb, and I mentally remind myself just how much of a bad idea Viper would be. “Are you done trying to turn me into a slip-N-slide?”

Viper’s lips twist into a wicked grin, and it only makes me want him more. “Not even close.”

“Get your ass in my chair,” I tell him. “Otherwise, we’re going to be here all night, and while I know that sounds like a dream to you, I have shit to do.”

He scoffs, lowering his big body into my chair and lying back, propping his hand behind his head, his muscles rolling with the movement. “You’re such a liar,” he mutters, those dark eyes eating me up. “You ain’t got nowhere to be. I’ve got you as long as I need you.”

Damn it. I hate it when he’s right, and despite how he knows it, I’m not about to go and show my hand by admitting that. Instead, I pull on a pair of gloves and reach for the alcohol wipes. “In that case, I better make this quick then.”

Quickly getting lost in my work, I chat away to Viper, and as I focus on the design, I let out a small breath. Viper’s always been intense when we’re standing toe to toe and he’s making his intentions clear, but when he’s in the chair, he mellows out and allows me to concentrate, keeping the conversation light and easy. Not that there’s really anything light and easy about either of us.

Crew’s client wanders through the door, and during their consultation, he turns the music down just a bit, because even though he’s only doing a boring set of four doggy paw prints

up her ankle, he still takes it very seriously. Then the second she's in the chair and he whips his tattoo gun out, he cranks the heavy metal music right back up.

The afternoon flies by, and I feel content. I'm in my zone, my happy place, and as Viper's hand rests on my thigh, I don't even try to tell him to fuck off. As long as it's not creeping any higher, I'm good.

Glancing up at the clock, I realize it's almost seven, and I've flown straight past closing time, but so have Big Jim and Crew. It's not exactly anything out of the ordinary, but usually at five, my stomach starts to bug me for a snack. "How are you doing?" I ask Viper.

"I'm good, baby," he says, scrolling through his phone as though he were relaxing on the couch at home.

"You don't need a break or anything?" I ask. "Your call. We can call it a day now and make another appointment for a few weeks, or we can power through. I have maybe another two hours and this'll be done, but if you need to be somewhere ..."

"I've got all night," he mutters. "Finish it."

I nod. "Okay, but I'm ordering in," I say, sitting up straighter and stretching my back. I glance up at Viper. "Want anything?" I usually make it a rule not to eat in here, and I certainly don't allow my clients to eat while being inked, but sometimes basic human needs have to be put first. Hell, I've made the mistake of inking someone who'd just eaten and ended up wearing his regurgitated noodles. Since then, I've made it a habit to ask every single person who sits in my chair

if they have a weak stomach. That's not a mistake I'll make again, but I've been working with Viper long enough to know he can handle it.

"I could eat," Viper mutters, holding his phone above his head, keeping his body still. "You keep working, I'll order. What do you want?"

"You pick, I'm easy," I say.

Viper scoffs. "If you were easy, I would have had you chained to my bed years ago."

The deepness of his tone sends a shiver sailing right down my spine, and a thrill shoots through me. I'm not exactly someone who's vanilla when it comes to the bedroom. I need a man who's not afraid to throw me around, to brace his hand around my throat and squeeze, and something tells me that Viper would more than satisfy me when it came to sex, but on an emotional level, we couldn't be less suited.

The thought of Viper chaining me up should have me running for the hills, but instead, a twisted smirk settles across my lips. I don't respond, but I don't need to. He sees it all over my face. "I fucking knew it, baby," he growls, his tone low. "One of these days, I'm going to stop taking no for an answer."

"And one of these days, I might just let you."

It's a little before nine when I stand at the front door of High Voltage Ink, locking up with Viper standing behind me. Crew and Big Jim took off an hour ago, though Crew needed a little

convincing that I wasn't about to be screwed within an inch of my life right there in the middle of the shop. I couldn't tell if it was his ridiculous need to always protect me or out of pure jealousy.

“Let me take you home,” Viper says, inching toward his matte black Harley Davidson.

I scoff as I finish locking up before turning to face him. “You're kidding, right?”

He gives me a blank stare. “I didn't mean let me take you home to my place so I can fuck you all night. I meant, let me give you a ride back to your apartment so you're not walking home through these fucking streets after dark.”

I arch a brow. “You don't think I can handle myself?”

“Considering the excitement that flashed in your eyes when I said I wanted to have you chained to my bed, I know you can handle yourself, but you're young, Kyah, and I don't think you have a damn clue what you want,” he tells me. “I know the people who run these streets, and they're not anyone I want you bumping into.”

I glance away, peering down the empty street, wondering if I should take my chances. Viper isn't exactly a saint, and given the chance, he'll try his luck. “I don't know,” I murmur. “I don't think it's a good idea for you to know where I live.”

Viper scoffs, a wicked grin playing on his lips. “Baby, I've known where you've lived since the day you moved in,” he

says. “Who the fuck do you think convinced your landlord to turn a blind eye to the fact you were a teenager?”

My eyes widen, and I gape at Viper. “You’re lying.”

“Do I strike you as the type to lie?”

I swallow hard and shake my head.

“Good. Now get on.”

He doesn’t wait for an argument, simply hands me a helmet before straddling his bike and turning it on. The powerful engine rumbles through the street, and after figuring out the buckle for the helmet, I climb on the back, wrapping my inked arms low around his waist, careful not to touch his chest. He’s not exactly the type to complain about a little pain, but after the amount of work I did on him today, I know his skin has got to be more than a little tender.

Keeping his word, Viper drops me off right in front of my apartment complex, and the second my feet hit the ground, he takes off, his bike roaring down the street. I have to admit, despite how adamant I’ve been about him keeping his dick away from me, I’m a little disappointed that he didn’t even try. Hell, I didn’t even get a goodnight.

The thought confuses me, and before I allow myself to turn back and call after him for a wild night of being tossed around my small home, I enter my access code into the keypad at the main entrance of my apartment complex and get my ass inside. I hurry up three flights of stairs before finally coming to my

door, hastily unlocking it, stepping inside, and locking the door behind me.

I'm not going to be Viper's little plaything.

Good for the hole does not mean good for the soul.

REID



K yah. Kyah. Kyah.

My beautiful Kyah Renee Bailey.

Fuck, she's going to be mine.

She walks down the street, and I stick to the shadows, hidden under the cover of the surrounding buildings. My gaze sails over her body, taking in the art covering both of her arms and chest. There's a raw beauty to her, something real that I haven't seen in a woman for a long time, and I know, without a doubt, that this one is going to be a wild ride.

I'm already infatuated. One look and I needed to have her.

I can't wait to hear her scream and feel her body under my hands as I take her life, but first, I'm going to make her mine.

She's going to want me just like I want her. She's going to love me, depend on me, and crave me every moment of the day. And fuck, when I taste her? The thought alone makes my hands ball into fists at my sides. I'm ready to take her right here in the middle of the street, but I have to be careful and play my cards just right.

This woman intrigues me.

I need to wrap my hand around her blonde hair and pull her into me. I need to hear the soft exhale of breath when I push inside her. And damn it, I know she's going to be tight, like the perfect fit, made just for me.

There's a feistiness in her. It's as though she's just waiting for me to come and give her exactly what she needs, and that's exactly what I'm going to do. I see it in her. She's never been satisfied, never felt the kind of rush I could give her.

I've been doing this for a long time, carefully choosing the woman who will become my newest obsession, and Kyah is easy. She lives alone, and from what I can tell, doesn't rely on her family or friends. She walks to and from work, apart from the times Big Jim offers to drive her, though on nights like tonight, she foolishly declined, preferring to walk instead.

God, she's going to make it easy for me. I'm almost disappointed that she won't be a challenge.

I know her likes, her dislikes, her favorite meals, and where she prefers to buy them. But it's not enough; this is only the surface-level shit. I need to go deeper to work out what makes her tick.

We're in the middle of Brooklyn, and luckily for me, there's plenty of people littering the street so I'm able to keep close without raising suspicion. She stops by the convenience store and grabs a chocolate bar and a soda, and I wait out front, hidden in the shadows, taking a long drag of a cigarette. Then when she steps out of the store, she passes right by me, and her sweet scent washes over me like the sweetest summer breeze. If I didn't have the kind of control that comes from years of practice, I would have ended her life right here, but that would be a tragedy. I'm not nearly done with her yet. Hell, I haven't even started.

Kyah keeps walking, smashing the chocolate bar like there's no tomorrow, and as I fall in behind her, inconspicuously following her home, I can't help but wonder if she has any consideration for her own safety.

She doesn't exactly live in a safe area, and any other girl wouldn't feel comfortable walking the streets alone at night. Hell, she doesn't even flinch when a man passes her, and she doesn't hold on to her bag a little tighter or cross to the other side of the street when someone leers a little too long. But it's fine. She has me watching her back now. Nothing will happen to her as long as I'm with her ... at least, not yet.

A thrill shoots through me at what's to come. I always knew there was something a little wrong with me, something a little different, but it feels too good to give up now. I'm in too deep. There's nothing quite like a little childhood trauma to fuck with a grown man and turn him into a walking red flag. But

hell, every man's a little fucked up these days, I'm just a little higher on the scale.

Though, am I really that bad?

Sure, murdering women in cold blood is a little frowned upon here and there, but it's not like I'm going around breaking their hearts and making promises that I'm never going to keep. Who's the real monster here? An observant guy who just happens to like following a woman home to make sure she's safe, or a piece of shit boyfriend whose pull-out game is weak?

When a woman comes toe-to-toe with me, she knows what she's getting. I'm up-front about what I want, what I'm going to do to her, and hell, I might even give her a screaming orgasm before ending her life. But I draw the line at being a shitty boyfriend. There's nothing worse than a man who leads a woman on, promises her the world, and then the next minute, he's fucking her best friend in the bathroom at Whataburger while she's busy slurping on a shake.

Fuck. Men are real fucking bastards sometimes.

As for Kyah, I almost feel bad that I'm going to end her life, but the question is, when? I intend to enjoy her first. I'm going to open her eyes to a whole new world, and by the time her life is slipping away, it'll be because she wants it, she'll beg me to push her to the breaking point and set her world on fire. And those sweet, desperate screams, they won't be made out of fear. No, they'll be made out of pure ecstasy and pleasure.

It's gonna be fucking amazing, the sweetest rush, just like when you're ordering McDonalds and they accidentally give you an extra cheeseburger for free. Pure bliss.

Besides, I've been watching Kyah for a while. I know the men who've been trying to get between those pretty thighs, and they're no good for her. It's best I take her off their hands before they do something stupid like touching what's mine. I'm sure some won't see it this way, but honestly, I'm doing her a favor by saving her the heartbreak and regret. All men should strive to be a little more like me. They could really learn a few lessons. But I draw the line at teaching them how to make their kills. That's far too personal to be sharing. Besides, most men are fucking idiots, and soon enough, one of them will get caught and end up giving the feds my name, and then my whole game would be over, and who wants that?

Unlike moronic, messy men, Kyah is still a mystery to me. I need to know more about her, need to get closer, and that's exactly what I intend to do.

She talks on her phone and stops outside her apartment complex, and I keep walking, taking advantage of her moment of distraction. As she hashes in the front door code for her building, my gaze shifts over the keypad.

3821

I've known this code for weeks, yet every time I watch her hash it in, I can't help but watch. It's like a thrill, a dark secret between me and Kyah, something she shares with me every time she touches the keypad. If only she knew.

I keep walking, not wanting to draw her attention, and the second she disappears inside her building, I cross the road before doubling back and pausing in front of the building directly opposite of hers. I lean up against the wall, my foot propped up with my phone pressed against my ear, looking like every other asshole lingering out on the street.

My gaze lifts to Kyah's building, impatience brimming through my chest as I wait. Then finally, a light turns on in the bedroom window on the right-hand side of the third floor.

Kyah walks in front of the window, her blinds left open, and I watch as she peels off her black tank and tosses it across the room. She kicks off her shoes and then her jeans, leaving her in nothing but a bra and panties.

My mouth waters.

I need to get inside that apartment and taste her.

As she moves through her apartment, other lights turn on, but all of the other windows are concealed with blinds. It leaves me wondering if she likes putting on a show in her bedroom, or if this was nothing more than a moment of forgetfulness. Had she known there was a view right into her bedroom from the street below, would she have closed the blinds or does she assume she's too far up for anyone to see her undressing?

She's careless, and when she belongs to me, that shit isn't going to fly. But for now, I'll sit back and watch as though she were one of those ping-pong girls putting on an exotic show in Bangkok. God, the good things in life really are free. Apart

from the entry fee, of course. That shit doesn't count, but for that kind of talent, those showgirls deserve to be paid.

Sidebar. How does a woman just happen to stumble across the realization that she can do something like that?

The lights turn off inside Kyah's apartment, and I force myself to focus. It's been almost an hour since she arrived home, and I cross the road before slipping down the narrow alley beside her building. Then finding the fire escape, I make my way up like a ninja in the night.

Lingering outside the window of her apartment, I peer right into her living room like some kind of stalker, and make sure everything is quiet inside before gripping the window frame and effortlessly sliding back, a twisted smirk stretching across my lips.

Silly girl leaving her window unlocked. Doesn't she know how dangerous that could be?

Slipping inside, I move around her apartment, and the closer I get to her bedroom, the more I can smell that sweet summer breeze. She's so enticing, like forbidden fruit made just for me, teasing me, begging me to come and take a bite. And when the time is right, I will.

Her apartment is small, but that's expected for a one-bedroom in Brooklyn, but she clearly looks after it. She puts care into how she dresses the place and mostly cleans up after herself. I appreciate that in a woman.

Stepping into her bedroom, I hear the subtle sound of her even breathing, and it takes hold of me like a hand plunging right into my soul. I close my eyes, resting back against her bedroom wall, and just listen, but it quickly becomes too much. Before I know it, the soft sound of my fly being pulled down fills the room.

My heavy, straining cock falls into my hand, and as I close my fist around it, squeezing tight, I open my eyes, needing to look at that sweet face. I stride toward her, and as my fist starts working up and down my cock, I come to a stop right by her head feeling the soft brush of her breath blowing against my bare skin.

My whole body shudders, and I grip her headboard so I can lean a little closer, and with her face barely a breath away, I go to fucking town. I picture her so perfectly, the way those full, pink lips would close around me, sucking me hard. Fuck, I need her more than anything.

“My sweet, Kyah,” I whisper into the darkened room, my grip tightening on my cock before finally coming hard right into the palm of my fucking hand like a goddamn teenager. My body stiffens, paralyzed by the intensity, and my knees shake.

Good God. That was good.

Then with a palm full of hot cum, I reach down with a closed fist and gently run the back of my knuckles over her bottom lip so softly that she doesn't even stir. “Soon, Kyah. Soon,” I

tell her before tucking my cock back into my pants and finally leaving her room.

Moving into her bathroom, I go to wash the pool of cum out of my hand when I find a pair of black cotton panties lying on the ground. I recognize them as the ones I saw her wearing earlier through her bedroom window, and I can't help scooping them up and holding them to my face.

I inhale deeply, and I groan, immediately growing hard again.

So fucking sweet, just as I knew she would be. Then after wiping my hand in her worn panties, I prop them up on the bathroom vanity, waiting for her when she wakes, the sweetest gift I've ever left.

KYAH



My six a.m. alarm screeches through my bedroom, and I groan, throwing my hand out and scrambling for my phone to turn it off. The sound is like nails on a chalkboard. What the hell was I thinking when I set it this early?

On my way home from work last night, I had the brilliant idea to start working out. I was going to go for early morning runs and start a Pilates routine. I've always been in love with my body. I'm one of those *love the body you're in* kinda girls, but damn, I'd kill to look like one of those gym girls with the dump truck ass and the toned stomach, but now that the sun is streaming in through my bedroom window, I don't know how badly I actually want it.

Shit. Everything always sounds like a great idea before it actually comes time to do it.

Lying in bed, I stare up at the ceiling, willing myself to go back to sleep, but when it becomes all too clear that's never going to happen, I sigh. My bottom lip pouts out, and I throw my blanket back before clambering out of bed.

I traipse out of my room and across the hall to the bathroom to pee, and before I can talk myself out of it, I grab my laundry hamper, scoop all of my clothes up into my arms, and dump them in. My towel falls on top, and as I reach for the hand towel beside the sink, I laugh, noticing my black panties I wore yesterday lingering on the vanity.

I was so freaking tired by the time I got home last night, I was tossing my clothes everywhere. Hell, I'm pretty sure I was half naked by the time I even made it to the bathroom. My shower was quick, and I barely remember any of it. Hell, I was due to wash my hair last night and was so tired that the thought of having to go through my whole hair care routine almost had me shedding a tear, but I wouldn't dare cry over something so trivial. If Crew ever found out, he'd never let me live it down. He can be an ass like that, but I love that carefree, teasing relationship between us. If only it could be more. We'd be great together, but there's no way in hell we'd be able to make it work.

We're more like siblings, but siblings who are sexually attracted to each other ... wait. No. Scrub that. I take that back. That's definitely not what we are.

Shit. Now the thought is burned into my brain.

What the hell is wrong with me?

There's no doubt about it though, the chemistry between us is like no other. If we didn't work together, I'd probably already be his. We'd fight like there's no tomorrow, but then we'd fuck until the sun came up and everything would be good again.

Lifting my laundry hamper, I knock my panties in before trudging out into the kitchen and grabbing the few tea towels I've left discarded on the counter. Then because I'm a sucker for punishment, I strip my bed as well.

Making my way to my front door with my laundry hamper jammed under my arm, I go to walk out before glancing down and gasping, realizing I'm barely wearing anything, just a thin tank and a pair of cheeky Brazilian panties. I mean, shit. Maybe there really is something wrong with me today.

I scurry back to my bedroom and throw my clothes from one end of the room to the other until I find my favorite pair of sweatpants, and before I know it, I'm back at the front door, juggling my keys, my laundry hamper, and my fancy-ass detergent. Apparently, I'm a hoity-toity bitch who gets turned on by superior laundering. I mean, there's just something about the way I can walk down the street and look at the random dude coming the other way and know that my clothes are not only softer than his, but they definitely smell better too.

Stepping out of my door, I quickly lock it, and a noise behind me has me whipping around, my heart lurching out of

my chest. "I'VE GOT MACE," I scream, just as my eyes land on my hot neighbor, the one I've been avoiding saying hi to.

And good God, he's not wearing a shirt.

He gapes at me, pulling his door closed behind him, a laundry hamper jammed under his arm, identical to the way I hold mine. A slow grin stretches across his lips, and for just a fleeting second, my heart fumbles right out of my chest. I've only ever seen him at a distance and made a point to avoid him like the plague. I could just tell he was a heartbreaker, the kind that I would throw myself at over and over again. But now, up close and personal with that sculpted chest and abs that lead down to that deep V ... I'm screwed.

Did I mention he wears low riding-gray sweatpants, and damn it, I see the perfect outline of his thick cock.

Hot neighbor dude arches his brows, clearly seeing what's caught my attention, but he doesn't waste a perfectly good opportunity to drop his deep, inquisitive gaze down my body as though he's committing every last subtle curve to memory. "I'm curious," he murmurs, those dark eyes seeming to dance through the dimly lit hallway as my mind instantly takes me to all the ink I could decorate his body with. Hell, he's the perfect blank canvas. "That tank isn't leaving much to the imagination, so it's only natural for a man to wonder where you could possibly be hiding that can of mace?"

My cheeks flush, and I mentally slap myself across the face. I am not that girl who gets all flustered and blushes because some guy is noticing just how thin her tank is. "Ahh, so New

Neighbor Dude is a dirty perv,” I comment with a teasing grin. “Good to know.”

He laughs. “Ahh, and New Neighbor Chick likes to evade questions. Equally as good to know,” he throws back at me, that same teasing grin gracing his full lips. “But in case that mace is shoved somewhere you can’t quite reach, just know that I’m the kind of neighbor who will happily lend a hand when in need, especially when it comes to all of those hard-to-reach places.”

I adjust my hamper against my hip, narrowing my gaze on his and trying not to notice just how tall and wide he is, not in the same way that Viper is though. No, this is the kind of guy who looks as though he spent years as a professional athlete. His body is practically cut from stone, and judging by the deep summer tan, I can only assume he spends plenty of time outdoors.

My gaze slowly drags back to his face, taking in the almost jet-black hair that’s kept messy and falling into his eyes. Add that to the stubble along his sharp jaw and he looks perfectly uncaring, but something tells me that’s exactly what he was going for.

I hold my hand out to him, my gaze lingering on his. “I’m Kyah.”

“Kyah,” he says, testing out the sound of my name on his lips. “I like that. I’m Alex.”

“Well, Alex,” I say. “It’s been a pleasure meeting my new pervert neighbor, but there’s a washing machine down in the

basement calling my name.”

His gaze shifts to my full hamper. “That looks like a full load,” he says slowly. “Perhaps *two* full loads.”

“Uh-huh,” I murmur, narrowing my gaze, wondering where the hell he’s going with this.

“There’s only two washers in the basement,” he comments, gripping his hamper a little tighter. “And yet, between us, three loads.”

I inch away from my door, putting myself a step further down the hall, understanding him clearly. “Wouldn’t it be a shame if one of us was made to wait?”

He nods, his gaze narrowed to slits as he inches toward me, following me slowly, creeping down the hall. “You should know, I’m not a very patient man.”

“Then perhaps you should know that I don’t like to lose.”

He holds my stare a moment longer, the tension in his body like a coiled-up spring, ready to bounce forward at any second. But there’s no way in hell I’m about to give up now. Hell, had he not made this sound like such an intriguing competition, I would have happily put my second load in after he was done, but now I’m fighting purely out of spite. Then before he gets a chance to get out in front of me, I turn on my heel and sprint for the stairs, gripping onto my hamper like my life depends on it. “THOSE WASHERS ARE MINE, ASSHOLE!” I call over my shoulder.

“We’ll see about that,” Alex calls, bounding after me.

I squeal as he hauls ass, his long legs quickly catching up to me, and as I hit the stairs, I grip the railing and fling myself down two at a time, positive I'm about to fall. Something flashes out the corner of my eyes, and I gape, realizing Alex just launched his hamper right over the edge of the staircase. With a slack jaw, I watch as he grips the railing and launches his body right over the side. Only, unlike his hamper that fell the full three floors, Alex's big body drops down only one flight of stairs, easily putting himself in the lead.

Fucker.

Hell, he's given himself enough time to stop and glance back at me with a wicked grin. "Gonna have to be faster than that, Mace," he teases, and with that, he takes off like a bat out of hell.

A thrill shoots through me at the way he calls me Mace, but I don't get a chance to linger on it as I fly down the stairs after him. Though I don't know why I'm bothering, it's clear I can't win this one. But playing along? Shit, I don't want to miss this for the world.

Hitting the basement floor, I sail right through to the laundry room to find Alex hovering over one of the washers, in the middle of dumping his clothes in, not bothering to separate the colors, but I'm not one to talk. I've never separated the colors, and so far, I've lived to tell the tale. "Shit, where have you been?" Alex smirks, making a show of glancing at his watchless wrist. "Stop for a break along the way, did ya?"

I blow out a breath, hardly able to talk as I move in beside him to the second washer, hating how out of breath I am while Mr. Parkour beside me looks as though those acrobatics were nothing but a Sunday morning stroll to him. “I underestimated you,” I say with a grin, a giddiness creeping through my veins. “But don’t worry, it won’t happen again.”

Alex outright laughs, and the sound has something trembling inside my chest. “Fuck, I should have run into you ages ago,” he says, a boyish grin pulling at his lips as he watches me out the corner of his eye, making my cheeks flush again. “What do you do, Mace?”

“I’m a tattoo artist,” I tell him as I pull all of my clothes out of the hamper and dump them into the washer.

“No shit,” he says, reaching over the washer to adjust the cycle settings before dumping way too much detergent in. “I’ve always thought about getting a tattoo but could never figure out what to get.”

I smile. I must hear that comment at least a million times a day. My gaze drops to his chest and abs, my mind already spinning with endless designs, and damn, each and every one of them would look amazing on him. “Hmmm, all the things I could do to you.”

Alex arches a brow, and my eyes bug out of my head, realizing how that came across. “Oh. Shit. No, I didn’t mean like that,” I rush out. “I meant tattoos, as in all the ink I could give you. Crap. That sounded bad. It’s just, you’re like the

perfect blank canvas, and now I'm rambling, so please feel free to shut me up any minute now."

"No, no," he laughs. "By all means, keep going. Don't let me stop you. This is the best entertainment I've ever had."

I roll my eyes, trying to recover as I finish filling my washer, and just as Alex had done, I set my wash cycle before taking my special detergent and pouring in the perfect amount. "You need to put on a shirt," I tell him. "You're turning me into a frazzled mess, and that says a lot for a girl who spends her days hunched over half-naked people."

"You know what?" Alex murmurs. "I might just walk around like this all the time now."

Just great.

Leaving the hampers in the laundry room, Alex and I make our way back to the stairs. "So, what do you do?" I ask, recovering from my earlier rambling as we prove that we can act like adults on the stairs.

"Military," he says, not offering much more, and considering it's absolutely none of my business, I don't pry. He glances toward me as we pass the first floor and head to the second. "How come I haven't seen you around?"

I scoff. "Because when a hot guy moves into the building, I make it a general rule to avoid him like the plague."

His dark eyes dance with laughter. "Why?"

"Because I will end up sleeping with you and then it's awkward because you'll get attached and then when we run

into each other in the hallway, it's going to be that weird *oh shit*, we've seen each other naked and I know exactly how you taste things, and I don't want that, especially at home. And in case you haven't noticed, you live directly across from me."

"Ahh, so you think just because you're hot, that automatically means I'm going to fuck you."

I grin. "You're telling me if I asked you to take me right here on the stairs, you'd say no?"

"Hell no, Mace," he says, almost offended by the suggestion. "You wanna bend over right now? I'll fuck you until you cry. But you should be warned, I don't play gently."

Good God.

This man is going to get me in trouble.

We pass the second floor and hit the third, walking down our hallway toward our apartments. "I'm taking you out on Saturday night," he tells me.

"Like hell you are," I tell him. "Did you not hear my whole explanation about why I don't get involved with guys I live near, or do I need to start over?"

"Nah, I heard you, Mace. I just think it's bullshit," he says as we reach our doors. He opens his, hovering in the doorway as I shove my key into my lock and give it a firm twist, the mechanism being a little bitch as usual. "I'll pick you up at eight, and this time, make sure you're wearing a bra. If I have to look at you all night with those pretty nipples peeking through your tank, it's going to fucking kill me."

My gaze drops to my chest, and I gasp, my eyes widening in horror, realizing that my tits are on full display through this flimsy tank. Hell, it's even a little see-through, and my nipples ... well, shit. They're more than happy to see him.

My hands awkwardly come up and cup my tits as I glance back at him. "Such a gentleman, waiting until I'd gotten all the way back to my door before mentioning it."

Alex winks. "What can I say? Momma raised me right."

I laugh and shove my door open with my elbow. "You're trouble, Alex."

"Saturday night," he says, stepping into his apartment. "Don't be late."

"Never gonna happen," I call back, and with a stupid grin across my face, I close my door between us, certain that he's the kind of guy to bust down my door, dress me, and force me out of my apartment just to show me a good time.

Alex really is trouble, but for once, I think it might be the exact kind of trouble I want to get into.

REID



Mmmm, there's no denying it, out of all of the women I've had, Kyah is the most thrilling. The way she bends over her client, her ass so perfectly in the air for the taking. If only there weren't a piece of glass between us, I would have claimed it by now.

She wears a pair of tight black jeans that curve around her ass just right, and I've never wanted to sink my teeth into something more than I do now. I wonder how she'll feel about biting. Who am I kidding? Just look at her, of course she's down with biting. I've always had a sixth sense when it came to what my women want while they're being fucked, and Kyah ... goddamn, she's different.

The whole vanilla lifestyle isn't for her. No, she's a triple scoop with all the flavors and sprinkles on top.

She wants the thrill of a hand closing around her throat, wants to feel herself being thoroughly fucked, right on the brink of passing out when she comes. She wants the fear, wants to scream so loud her throat bleeds, wants to feel the way her heart thunders in her chest, not knowing if this is going to be the one that kills her. But then in the morning, she wants to get up and go to work as though she isn't a freaky little devil between the sheets.

She's a kinky little angel, and I can't wait to play.

Kyah sings along to the music as she works on her client's back—a scrawny dude who thinks his ink is somehow going to make him seem tough, but when it comes down to it, he'll always be a little bitch. Guys like him always are.

Kyah concentrates, and as I watch her, I realize just how much care she takes in her work. It's clear that she loves what she does, and fuck, she's good at it too. She posts the designs she's most proud of to all of her social media pages, and they're always exceptional. She's made a name for herself around here, one of the most sought-after tattoo artists in Brooklyn.

Taking someone's life is my addiction, just as leaving her designs deep into someone's skin is hers. But once I'm through with her, the only addiction she'll have is me. At least until I end her life and feel that passion pulsing through her veins and draining from her eyes. God, the power it gives me. It's the best kind of rush, and with Kyah, it's going to be astronomical.

Big Jim is nowhere to be seen, and with Kyah occupied, I make my way around the back of the shop and pry open the back door before inching it open just enough to peer inside. After making sure the coast is clear, I slip inside, a dark thrill pulsing through my veins like liquid ecstasy.

The back room is small, just big enough for the employees to stash their shit. There's a small lunch table and a fridge, but Kyah doesn't use it. She generally orders in, and when she doesn't, she'll go hungry until she gets home. I'll have to do

something about that because once I finally get my hands on her, she's going to need her energy.

My gaze shifts around, taking it all in until I find exactly what I'm looking for.

Kyah's bag.

It sits up on one of the shelves of a storage cabinet, and as I make my way toward it, I keep my head down, masking my face from the security cameras. Reaching up, my hand curls around the faux leather of Kyah's handbag, and I dump it out on the lunch table, fingering through the useless shit she's got crammed in here until I hear the familiar jingle of her keys.

Bingo.

Pulling them out, my gaze lingers on the oversized K keyring that dangles from the keys, and after figuring out which is her front door key, I press it into my clay mold and make the perfect impression. Don't get me wrong, I have a way into her home ... for now. But there will come a time when she senses me there and gets chills every time she looks into the dark corners of her room, and when that happens, she will make sure that every window and door of her apartment is locked. But she won't be keeping me out that easily. I'm prepared to break straight through her defenses.

My sweet little Kyah isn't going to know what hit her.

Dropping her keys back into her bag, I continue searching, glancing over the random shit in here and looking through the identification cards she has stashed in her wallet. I take a

mental photograph of her driver's license, committing it to memory, then look over her bank cards, knowing I'll soon have these numbers memorized like a childhood phone number.

After putting her wallet back in just how I found it, I go for the gold—her phone. Only it's not here, and I mentally scold myself. She must have it with her out in the shop, but that doesn't matter. I'll take it tonight, making a clone as she sleeps soundly beside me.

God, just the thought is getting me hard.

I wonder how she liked the gift I left for her the other day. She's so beautiful, she deserves another. Hell, she deserves a new one every fucking day. It's a tall order, but I'm sure I can handle it. But hell, with the way she's got me jerking off, my dick's either going to develop calluses or fall right off. Worth it though.

Excitement drums through my veins at the thought of getting to go back to her home tonight, and with that, I put her bag back up on the shelf of the storage cabinet and slip straight back out the door with the mold of her front door key safely in the palm of my hand.

KYAH



I t's a little after seven when I finish with my last client of the day, and while I clean my station, I listen to Crew trying to work his new online planner, all but beating it to get it to work. With a tattoo gun, he's incredible, but when it comes to other forms of technology, he's absolutely hopeless.

"I can hear you laughing back there," he calls over his shoulder, forcing a smile across his face as his client walks out the door, leaving us alone in the shop to finish closing up for the night.

"Me? No," I laugh. "I would never."

He groans and quickly switches the loud music off, probably just as eager to get out of here for the night as I am. It's a Friday night, and as a general rule, we usually don't get out on

a Friday or Saturday night until after ten or eleven. Hell, I don't even know what to do with myself.

Crew turns off the lights at the front of the shop, leaving just enough light from the back for me to finish up what I'm doing, and as he waits for me, he strides to my chair, perching his fine ass on the edge. He's silent for a while, watching me as I sanitize my station, and when I cut in front of him, his hand snakes out, gripping my wrist.

I pause, my gaze lifting to his as his thumb brushes along the inside of my wrist. His other hand lifts, bracing against my waist, and my knees tremble as the tension in the room becomes almost too much to bear.

His dark eyes linger on mine before slowly trailing down my body and to my arm—the arm he's been working on for the past six months. “When are we going to finish your sleeve, Ky?” he asks, his tone so deep that I know that's not really what he's asking me. Not even close. He wants to know when we're going to stop tiptoeing around each other. When we're finally going to give in and admit that we'd be great together.

“Crew,” I warn, shaking my head as I gently pull my wrist free, only his other hand tightens on my waist and holds me close. “Don't force this.”

“I'm not forcing anything,” he murmurs, his fingers grazing my shoulder and slowly trailing down, making goosebumps spread across my body. His gaze lingers on his touch as though he can't wait to devour me. “I know where you draw

the line, but fuck, Ky, sometimes I wish I could destroy it and bend you over this fucking chair.”

He pulls me in closer, and I step right in between his open legs, hunger pulsing through my body at the thought of just how well this man could fuck me. God, he would have me falling to pieces, ruining me for any other man.

I brace one knee on the chair, high between his strong thighs, and lean forward, breathing him in. God, he’s fucking delicious. His hand shifts from my waist, trailing around to my ass and firmly squeezing, not even close to easing the need pounding through me.

My gaze shifts down, taking in the tats dancing down the thick column of his neck and disappearing beneath his shirt. They appear again at his defined arms, snaking all the way down to his fingers. I put half of them there. Hell, Crew let me use his body as practice when I first started, and he’s part of the reason I’m so good at what I do. Without him, I don’t know where I’d be.

Feeling that devious stare lingering on my face, I force my gaze to trail back up to his, and the burning desire I find there only makes me want him more. “This is a bad idea,” I murmur.

Crew shakes his head, gripping both of my hips and lifting me onto his lap, lowering me down so I straddle him, feeling just how hungry he is for me. “Ain’t nothing bad about this, baby,” he rumbles, pulling me in until my lips brush over his.

I groan, wanting this so damn bad, and before I can convince myself otherwise, I close the gap and give in to my every

desire. My lips fuse with his, and I feel the second his body relaxes as though he's been waiting for this very moment for way too long. He kisses me back, his lips moving effortlessly against mine, and damn it, it feels so right.

He doesn't wait, reaching for my tank and pulling it over my head, and I let him, not willing to hold back. We've been here before, many times, and it usually ends with nothing more than his cock slamming into the back of my throat or his face between my legs, working my cunt until I come on his tongue. But something feels different about this one.

I'm not down to stop, not tonight. If we're doing this, then he's going to give me exactly what I want.

The second my shirt falls to the ground, he reaches around me, unhooking my bra and letting the straps fall down my arms. I toss it aside and Crew works his lips down my body, stopping at my neck and making me groan.

I tilt my head, needing so much more, and the way his tongue works over my sensitive skin has that need growing stronger. Desperation claws at me, and as if reading that hunger, Crew grasps my ass, lifts me off the chair, and as he walks us over to my table, his lips close over my nipple.

“Oh fuck,” I groan, tipping my head back.

He sets me on the table, and with my hands free, I bunch my fingers into his shirt, pulling it over his head and putting that delicious torso on display. He's so fucking strong, built as though he were carved from stone. I need to feel him against me.

My heart races, and my body shakes with nerves that shouldn't be there, but it's Crew. This means something. We've both wanted this for so long, I just hope we can figure out where to go from here because I can't afford to ruin this relationship between us. Apart from being the guy I've fantasized about every night when I slide my hand under my blankets, he's also one of my closest friends.

"Stop thinking so much," he growls, his hands back on my waist.

Fuck. He's right.

I need to enjoy this. I need to be here in the moment, feeling every inch of him.

I shake the thoughts from my head and drop my hands down his body, quickly working his belt before popping the button on his jeans. As his tongue flicks over my nipple, I cry out. "Oh God, Crew," I groan, arching my back and pressing harder against him. "I need more."

"I got you, baby," he tells me, his deep, raspy tone making my eyes roll in the back of my head, hunger pulsing through me like never before.

Reaching inside his pants, my fingers curl around his thick, velvety cock, and his low groan sends me into a needy frenzy, but it's nothing compared to the sound that rumbles through his chest when my small fist starts pumping up and down.

"Fuck, Ky. Just like that."

My head tips back, as he releases my nipple and settles his lips against the base of my throat, slowly working up to the sensitive spot just below my ear. My other arm scoops around his neck, and I dig my fingers into his shoulder.

Fuck. I need him inside of me now.

As if sensing my desperation, his strong arm braces around my waist, and he lifts me off the table just enough to tear my jeans down my legs, leaving me completely bare. Crew lowers me back to the table, and I eagerly push his pants down past his strong thighs just as his hands grip my thighs and spread them wide.

His dark gaze sails down my body, taking in my pebbled nipples before lowering further. When his eyes finally land on my pussy, he sees exactly how ready I am, and that dark stare blazes with intense desire. “Fuck, Ky. Look how your sweet cunt glistens for me,” he growls as he presses his fingers against my clit and trails them down to my entrance, mixing with my arousal.

My grip tightens on his cock, and as his fingers brush over my clit again, my whole body jolts with need. “Crew,” I beg, but he’s already there, thrusting two thick fingers deep inside of me. I cry out again, watching the way his eyes darken as his gaze remains locked on my glistening pussy.

His fingers draw back, soaked with my arousal, and as my eyes flutter with pure satisfaction, he thrusts them back in.

My fist pumps, my thumb rolling over his bulbous tip before going straight back down to his base, already addicted to the

feel of his angry veins under my skin. Then as a bead of moisture appears at his tip, he swipes it off before bringing it to my lips. “Taste me, Ky,” he groans, his tongue slowly rolling over his bottom lip as the desire almost tips me right over the edge.

I open my mouth, and he pushes his thumb inside, placing it right on the center of my tongue, and I eagerly suck it clean, closing my mouth around it and tasting his salty hunger. I groan, wanting to take more, but that’s going to have to wait because I need him inside of me, I need to feel the way his thick cock stretches my walls and fills me to the brim.

He releases his thumb from my mouth, and I lock my legs around his waist, drawing his hips in closer, not needing to voice what I want—he just knows. He’s always known when it comes to me.

Crew’s fingers curl inside of me, and I gasp, my hips jolting forward on the table. “Fuck yes.”

“You like that, baby?” he drawls, doing it again and turning me into a writhing mess.

“Crew,” I gasp, my fingers digging into his skin. “Please. Fuck me.”

He groans, and just as he steps in closer, he reaches up behind me and knots his big hand into my hair. A subtle moan slips from my lips, and he tightens his hold before pulling down, forcing my head back as I instinctively arch my back, pushing my tits out toward him.

My pussy clenches around his fingers and he grits his teeth. “I knew you’d fucking love that,” he says, pulling his fingers free from my cunt and lifting them to his lips. He sucks them dry, and I bite my bottom lip, never so fucking turned on in my life. Crew licks his lips, savoring every last drop of my arousal before lowering his hand to mine over his cock. “Is this what you want?” he demands. “You want me to fuck you?”

“God, yes,” I whimper, my pussy throbbing without his fingers.

“How?” he questions. “Do you want me to take you slow and hard?”

“No,” I pant, shaking my head against his hold on my hair. “Fast. I want you to fuck me fast and hard. Make me scream, Crew. I need to come on your cock.”

A wicked smirk plays on his lips, and good God, it’s the hottest thing I’ve ever seen.

Crew releases his grip on his cock and takes my hip, pulling me forward until my ass is barely dancing on the edge of the table, giving him all the space in the fucking room to do with me as he pleases. Then with his hand still gripped in my hair, he leans into me, his deep growl making me tremble. “Hold on, baby.”

Fuck.

I barely get a gasp out when he lines that thick, veiny cock up with my entrance and pushes inside. My walls instantly stretch around him, taking him inch by girthy inch. Then

without warning, he slams the rest of the way in, bottoming out. “Fucking hell,” he grits through a clenched jaw as I groan, my pussy already spasming around him, getting used to his sheer size.

Crew pauses there a moment, leaning in and hovering his face right in front of mine. I feel his hungry breath on my lips as those dark eyes linger on mine, both of us panting. The moment seems to last a lifetime, the tension burning between us, and then finally, he closes the gap and crushes his lips to mine.

He kisses me deeply, but it only lasts a second before he pulls back, glancing down between us to watch the way his cock slowly draws back, glistening with my wetness. “Fucking hell,” he mutters again, and damn it, I have to agree with him.

Crew slips his arm beneath my knee before hoisting it up, and as he slams back into me, he hits me at a whole new angle. My body shudders, shattering like glass, and I hold on to him tighter as he picks up his pace and fucks me just like I’ve always needed him to.

He releases his hold on my hair, and when that same hand comes down over my clit and rubs tight circles, I cry out, my pussy ready to succumb to the intense pleasure. “Don’t you fucking come yet, baby,” he growls. “Hold on to it.”

I groan, tipping my head back as the intensity burns within me, building and building, becoming too much. “Crew,” I pant, gripping his shoulder.

“Hold on to it,” he repeats, not nearly close to letting this be over.

“Oh, God,” I pant. “I can’t. I’m going to come.”

“The fuck you are,” Crew mutters, locking his arm around my waist and scooping me off the table. He walks back over to my chair and hits the button, making it recline all the way back before putting me down so I’m facing away from him on my knees. “Bend over, Kyah. I haven’t waited years to fuck you for you to come this soon. Spread those pretty thighs and bend over.”

A thrill shoots through my body, and I quickly spread my knees as wide as my chair will allow before plastering my tits to the cushion, my ass high in the air. Crew cups my ass, squeezing hard before releasing his hold, only to come back with a sharp spank that forces a deep, guttural groan sailing from my lips. I can all but feel my arousal dripping down my legs.

“Every time I think about you, Ky, this is how I picture you,” he says, his fingers dragging through my wetness, roaming right up to my ass before heading south once again. Then without warning, he thrusts his fingers back inside of me. “You don’t know how many times I’ve fucked my own hand, picturing you just like this.”

My pussy spasms around his fingers, and I bury my face into the soft cushion of my chair.

“Touch yourself, Ky. Show me how you like it.”

I don't hesitate, slipping my arm beneath me and through my legs until finally, my fingers are pressing down over my clit, rubbing tight little circles, making everything more intense. "Please, Crew."

"So fucking pretty," he hums to himself before finally pulling his fingers free once again. I feel as he steps in behind me, his tip lingering at my entrance, and then as he takes my hips to hold me steady, he slams back into me, stretching me so fucking wide, it can't be natural. "YES," I cry as he hammers into me, taking me deep and hard, just the way I like it.

My other hand reaches up to grip the headrest of my seat, keeping me balanced, and I squeeze tight, feeling the exact moment my nails penetrate the material. My mind swirls as I feel my orgasm creeping back up on me. "Crew," I warn with a heavy pant, the intensity already blasting through my veins.

"I got you, Ky," he vows, his sweet words like music to my ears. But then he goes and presses his thumb over my ass, adding just a little pressure as I continue working my clit, and God dammit, it's too much.

I push back against him, wanting more, and he doesn't hesitate, giving me exactly what I'm craving, and as he thrusts into me one more time, that thick cock stretching me wide, I clamp down, my orgasm tearing through me.

I detonate like a fucking explosion, crying out as my body spasms, my pussy convulsing around Crew's cock and holding him hostage, but he doesn't dare stop. He keeps fucking me,

keeps working my ass as my orgasm pulses heavily through my body, and my toes curl as I clench my eyes, barely able to breathe. The intensity knocks me down, but the high keeps climbing, even more so as Crew comes with me, shooting hot spurts of cum deep inside my cunt and making me feel like a fucking goddess.

I've always wanted to know what it'd feel like to have him release inside of me, and shit, it's better than I could have imagined. But fuck, it was stupid. Careless. Neither of us even considered a condom in the heat of the moment, and yet, I'm not worried. I'm on birth control, and while Crew has been known to get around, he's not usually the type to go without wrapping his junk. He would never knowingly pass something to me.

As I come down from my high, my body crumbles against my chair, but Crew doesn't move, keeping that monster cock buried deep inside of me. His hand loosens on my hip, his other gently dropping to my lower back, rubbing back and forth. "Shit," he breathes, catching his breath.

"Yeah," I agree, needing a minute.

Crew reluctantly pulls out, and when he does, I've never felt so empty. I hear him fixing his pants, and I scramble back up to my knees, already feeling him leaking out of me. I take a breath, not trusting my shaky legs to move just yet, and as I look back to watch Crew, he catches my eye, a smirk playing on his lips as his eyes soften. He steps right into me, his big hand curling around the back of my neck as he pulls me in. He

kisses me again, only this time, it's not as deep as when he took me on the table.

This is softer, almost like a gentle caress, and I instantly become putty in his skilled hands. "Come on," he says a moment later, pulling back just enough to meet my stare. "Get dressed. I'm taking you to that bar across the street from your apartment so I can get you all shades of fucked up, and then I'm taking you home and fucking you all over again."

A wicked grin stretches across my lips as I swivel around on my chair before any of Crew's cum can leak out of me and spill all over my beloved chair. "Oh really?" I ask, getting to my feet and standing right before him, his hand circling my body and coming down to grip my ass. "Presumptuous of you to assume I'm going to let you fuck me again."

He scoffs, his eyes darkening once again. "And to think that I was going to spread those pretty thighs and eat that sweet pussy until you came on my tongue. But if you're not down, that's cool."

My eyes widen. "Woah, woah, woah," I say, pressing my hand against his wide chest. "No need to get hasty. I never said I wasn't down."

"Good," he murmurs, leaning in until his warm breath brushes over my ear. "Because after I've finished tasting every last drop of you, I'm going to watch you ride me until your neighbors are busting through the door and physically prying you off me."

Heat pulses through my core, and my eyes flutter at the thought of what the rest of my night is going to hold. “You’ve got yourself a deal,” I tell him as I find my shirt. “But just so you know, drinks are on you.”

Crew grins, and the way his eyes dance with silent laughter makes butterflies soar through the pit of my stomach. I quickly get myself cleaned up and dressed, and as I go about sanitizing my station again, Crew finishes closing up the store.

After agreeing to drive me home for a quick shower, we get on our way, and I can’t help but notice the possessiveness in his eyes every time he looks at me, and honestly, I think I kinda like it.

He pulls his truck to a stop outside my apartment complex and presses his hand to my lower back as we make our way up the stairs. “I wasn’t kidding,” he says. “We need to finish your sleeve.”

My gaze drops to my arm, scanning over the dark wolf’s eyes and intricate designs Crew created for me. He’s already completed my left arm, but the right is still a work in progress. I can’t wait though. It’s going to be incredible once it’s done. “I know,” I tell him with a heavy sigh. “But neither of us has the time right now. We’re booked solid.”

We reach the third level, and as we stride down the hall toward my apartment, my brows furrow, finding something taped to my front door. “What the fuck is that?” I mutter to myself.

Crew glances up to figure out what's caught my attention when we finally reach my door, and I find a little slip of paper, the word Mace scrawled at the top with a phone number written below.

I fight the smile that tries to force its way across my face and pull the little slip of paper off my door. "Mace?" Crew asks, a strange hint of irritation in his deep tone.

"It's nothing, don't worry," I tell him, scrunching the paper in my hand before unlocking the door and striding in with Crew heavy on my heels. "Just a new neighbor in my building. He's just a little persistent."

"Need me to say something?"

I think it over, unsure why I'm not walking over to the trash can and dumping Alex's number straight in, but honestly, the idea of Alex and Crew going toe to toe kinda turns me on. "No, it's fine. He's harmless," I say, holding the scrap of paper in my hand a little tighter.

I make my way to my kitchen, dumping my bag on the counter and scooping my phone out of it when I'm hit with a man's cologne. My back stiffens, my brows furrowing as I breathe it in. Don't get me wrong, it's hot as fuck, but it's definitely not supposed to be here, and that smell is certainly not one of Crew's. After years of working with him, I'm well acquainted with all of his colognes, but my favorite is when he doesn't wear any at all.

I follow my nose and find myself staring at the living room window before letting out a heavy sigh and realizing I must

have left it open. Striding toward it, I grip the frame and pull it closed. My upstairs neighbor considers himself one with nature, and it's not the first time I've been chilling at home only to be drowned out by the fumes that come from his place. At least tonight it actually smells good for a change. I wonder if he's got himself a hot date.

After closing the window, I make my way to my room while glancing over at Crew making himself comfortable on my couch. "Make yourself at home," I tell him. "There's beer and Chinese leftovers in the fridge, but I'll only be ten minutes."

Crew gives me a knowing stare with his brow arched, and I roll my eyes. "Okay," I say with a groan. "I'll be fifteen minutes. Twenty at most."

He smirks to himself, and with that, I stride into my room, put my phone on charge, and kick off my shoes before finally traipsing out to the bathroom, more than ready for a quick shower.

REID



The sound of the shower has an image of Kyah's naked body flashing in my head, the mental image instantly getting me hard as I stand in her bedroom. I can't help from bracing my arm against the wall and reaching into my pants, desperately fisting my cock. Furiously jerking off, I listen to the subtle hum of the shower pipes through the wall, unable to keep from picturing the way the small beads of water would skate down her toned body.

She's left the bathroom door open, and knowing that fucking gorgeous body is only a few steps away gets me off that much faster.

A soft grunt tears from the back of my throat, and I quietly move across her room, my fist moving up and down my cock,

squeezing tight as I picture the way that tight little cunt would take me, my cock glistening in her wetness.

Bracing my knee against her bed, I come hard, the intensity knocking me forward, and as I catch myself on her bed, my hips jolt, and I pour hot spurts of cum onto her bedspread.

Fuck. That was good.

I hang my head, taking a panting breath as I try to calm myself, and when I can finally control the wild need pulsing through my veins and my hard-on has faded, I get to my feet, tucking my dick back into my pants.

Kyah's phone is charging on her bedside table, and sparing a glance back toward the door, I take my chance, scooping up her phone and quickly accessing her app store. I download a cloning app and connect it to the one on my burner phone before starting the process.

She's got a lot of shit stored on her phone, and the process takes longer than I'd hoped.

Ten percent. Twenty-five. Forty-four.

Fuck. This is going to take too long, but it'll be worth it to receive all of her incoming calls and texts in real time, to be able to access her location whenever I need to find her, to see who's trying to contact what's mine.

Hearing the shower cut off, I curse under my breath before glancing down at the phone. Fifty-eight percent. Shit.

Cutting back across Kyah's bedroom, I take her phone and slip into the darkness of her closet, listening to the soft pad of

her feet as she gets out of the shower. I hear her messing around in the bathroom before finally stepping out and walking into her room. I peer through the gap in the door. She's wrapped in a white towel with water dancing across her skin.

Fuck, she's flawless. I've never seen anyone quite like her, and when she truly becomes mine, it's going to be the most satisfying kill of my long career. Just having those bright blue eyes locked on mine as I drain her of life is going to thrill me like never before, and hell, if I get to be inside her while that happens ... shit, I'll never experience anything better.

She's like a fucking bear cub, cute as a button, but lethal if you get too close.

Kyah strides over to her closet, and my heart races, a thrill pulsing through my veins. She's barely a breath away, and when she opens her closet door and reaches in, her bare arm skims past my chest, and my knees buckle.

Well, shit. I'm hard all over again.

I wonder just how fucked up it'd be to lick her arm? Just a little. I mean, not like a fucking dog slobbering and panting all over, just a quick flick of my tongue, just enough to get a taste. The idea has a subtle groan rumbling through my chest, but before my tongue can even roll over my bottom lip, her arm is gone.

She searches for an outfit, blindly selecting hangers and tearing the clothes off them before tossing them over her shoulder, covering the new gift I left for her, until she finally

finds something that I'm sure will hug her body just right. And hell, the whole time I have to resist reaching out to touch her, to grip her wrist and lean in, bringing her skin to my mouth and breathing her in like some kind of drug I'm already addicted to.

God. I need her to touch me. I need her hands on my body and to feel her warm mouth closing around my dick. I just need one fucking taste.

Kyah kicks her closet door closed, and I grin to myself, loving her sweet ignorance. But it won't last much longer. Soon enough she's going to sense me here, and things will begin to shift. She noticed her open window when she got home. I watched her move across her living room to close it, and that was my mistake. I thought I had more time. On Friday nights she usually works much later.

I was a fool not to close it behind me, but I'll know for next time. On the other hand, I like the idea of her knowing I'm in her space. I need to be patient though. I need to ease her into it, otherwise, she's going to get spooked and ruin everything.

Kyah drops her towel to the ground, and as she fishes through her underwear drawer, my gaze shifts to the phones in my hands, knowing if I look up, I won't be able to resist. This fun little game of ours will be over before it's even started.

Eighty-seven percent. We're nearly there, just a little while longer.

As I wait, I watch her. Watch as she bends down to step into her black thong, watch as she drags the flimsy material up her

legs and fixes it around her hips. She then pulls on her bra, reaching around her back to hook the little latch before turning and glancing at herself in the mirror, her tits now pushed right up and looking like a fucking treat.

She'll be dressing like this for me soon.

Ninety-three percent.

She gets dressed, and just as I knew she would, she looks phenomenal, and as she sprays a spritz of perfume, I inhale deeply, needing so much more. She crumbles onto the edge of her bed before pulling on a pair of thigh-high boots, and before I know it, she's reaching for her phone, only she's not going to find it.

Kyah pulls back, muttering something under her breath as she searches her bedside table before looking near her bed and on the floor. "Fuck," she grumbles before turning and striding out of her room. "Crew, have you seen my phone?"

There's no response, and I watch as Kyah's brows furrow. She strides over to her bedroom door, peering out. "Crew?" Still, there's no response, and a smirk settles across my lips as she steps right out of her room, striding out into her home, and as I glance down, I find her phone flashing with a hundred percent. Then taking this small moment of distraction, I open the door of her closet and creep out before dropping her phone onto her bed, concealing it beneath the pile of clothes. Then before she comes back in, I stride over to her bedroom window and slip out into the night, pulling it closed behind me.

CREW



My hand curls around Kyah’s door just as I hear her calling for me from within her apartment. “Crew?” she questions before muttering to herself. “I swear, if that big bastard bailed on me after fucking me, he’s dead.”

A smirk pulls across my lips, and I push my way into her apartment, grinning as I find her hovering around her living room, looking like a fucking snack in those thigh-high boots. “You bellowed?” I say, grinning back at her, loving just how easily I can get under her skin.

“Where the hell did you disappear?” she asks, grabbing the cushions off the couch and looking beneath them.

“Just went down for a smoke,” I tell her, striding through her small apartment, my brows furrowing as I watch her. “The

fuck are you doing?”

“My phone,” she says, continuing to look. “I’ve somehow lost it over the last ten minutes. I swear, I took it into my room and put it on charge, but it’s not there. You didn’t take it, did you?”

I shake my head. “Haven’t seen it,” I tell her, making my way toward her bedroom. “But you’re right. You did take it into your room with you. It probably just fell on the floor or something.”

“Wait,” she says, her tone shifting enough to bring me to a stop and glance back at her, my brows furrowed. “You don’t smoke.”

I grin. “Don’t I?”

Kyah narrows her gaze on me, crossing her arms over her chest, unintentionally squishing those perfect tits together. “What were you really doing?” she questions, pausing a second before finally figuring it out. “I hope you weren’t trying to stake some kind of bullshit claim on me with my new neighbor.”

My grin widens. “I don’t need to stake a claim, Kyah,” I rumble. “You’re already mine.”

Before she gets a chance to respond or even adjust her facial expression, I step over the threshold of her bedroom and a strange hunger pulses through my chest. I’ve been in this apartment a million times before, but I’ve never been welcomed into her bedroom.

It feels different now, like we crossed that imaginary line she insists needs to be kept between us. All I know is that after having her like that in the shop, after sliding my cock deep into her needy cunt and feeling the way she clamped down around me, I'm not going back. How could I?

Kyah might not know or understand it yet, but I meant what I said—she's mine. She's always been mine.

Striding deeper into her room, I inhale deeply, the smell of her favorite perfume still lingering in the air. As I make my way over to her bedside table, I glance around, certain she brought her phone in here. The crumpled slip of paper that was stuck to her door catches my attention, and I grit my teeth as irritation burns through me. I should burn it, but then, there's also a sweet satisfaction knowing she has other options and still chooses me to be the one to fuck her.

As far as I'm concerned, she can play around with this fucker as much as she wants. I hope he gets his chance to screw her because when she inevitably comes back to me, it's going to be that much sweeter. Kyah and I are endgame, and the sooner she realizes that, the better. But she's also very young, only twenty-three, and I get it. She needs her chance to make mistakes, needs those wild years to screw around and have fun. And until she's ready to see where she truly belongs, I'll be right here, waiting and watching. But fuck, if one of these little assholes she decides to have fun with ends up hurting her ... I hope they enjoyed what little time on earth they had.

Kyah's bed is covered in clothes, and I glance down at them as I pull my phone out and press her name.

Her phone rings from beneath the pile of clothes, and I roll my eyes, tossing them around until I find it. Why am I not surprised?

Scooping it up, I stride back out of her room and hold it up. "Got it," I say, finding her in the middle of tipping out the contents of her handbag, though I don't know what she expects to find in there. I've peaked in there once before and it was terrifying.

Kyah's head snaps up, relief shining in her bright blue eyes. "Thank fuck," she breathes, scurrying toward me and scooping it out of my hand. She glances down at the screen and lets out a frustrated groan. "Damn it," she mutters. "It's still almost dead."

"Does it matter?" I ask, stepping into her, my fingers at her chin, lifting until those blazing eyes meet mine. "You won't need it, not when you're with me."

Her gaze softens as her hand slips beneath the fabric of my shirt. She skims her fingers up my body until finally flattening her hand against my chest. "You're playing with fire," Kyah warns me. "You're gonna get burned."

"I know," I rumble. "But if I'm getting burned, you're coming down with me."

She narrows her eyes on me as if trying to decipher just how serious I am, but she should know by now that when it comes

to her, I'm not fucking around. She inches back, letting her hand fall from my chest. "We should go," she says.

I nod and press my hand to her lower back, leading her toward her door, but she sidesteps back toward the kitchen, grabbing her ID and keys off her counter before making her way back to the door. I follow, stepping out behind her and pulling the door closed with a soft thud, and after quickly locking up, we're finally on our way down to the bar.

It's a quick walk, only two minutes down the road from her apartment, and as we step through the main doors, I look around at all the people crammed in like sardines. I hadn't taken that into consideration. I usually don't get off work till much later, and by the time I'm hitting up dive bars, most of the drunken idiots have already stumbled out into the street and passed out in a gutter somewhere. Though something tells me Kyah doesn't care all that much. She's into the party scene. People gravitate toward her. They see her and instantly know she's going to be a good time, but tonight, she's my good time.

We weave our way toward the busy bar, and just as we approach, another couple gets up and Ky is quick to steal their seats. She looks back at me with a grin, and I can't resist smiling right back at her.

Fuck me. She's always been so damn irresistible.

I take my seat beside her, twisting my body to keep her in my sight. Meeting her gaze, I point toward the bar. "What are you drinking?" I ask over the loud eighties cover band cramped in the corner.

“That depends,” she says as the bartender reaches out with a rag, cleaning off the spilled beer the last couple left smeared across the bar. “How fucked up are you trying to get me?”

“Fucked up enough that you forget to slam those walls of yours back into place.”

“Shit. Then you’re gonna have to hit me with tequila,” she laughs. “Make it a margarita.”

“You got it,” I say, turning to the bartender and ordering our drinks, and as I glance back at Ky, my hand falls high on her pretty thigh. Her gaze falls to where I touch her, and she starts to worry her lips. “Don’t do that,” I say, reaching up and freeing her bottom lip from between her teeth. “You’ve known this was coming for years, and now that I’ve had you, I don’t intend on letting you go.”

“But—”

“No,” I say, my hand tightening on her thigh. “I know you’re not ready, Ky. I know you still want to fuck around and be free, and that’s fine. I’m not asking you to get into some kind of committed relationship with me.”

Her gaze flickers toward the bartender, probably wondering where the fuck her drink is. “Then what the hell are you trying to tell me?”

“I’m telling you that from here on out, I’m your home,” I say. “When you’re finished fucking around and doing whatever you gotta do to make yourself feel like you’re in control, come back to me. It’s always been that way. It’s just

time for you to admit it. You're mine, Ky. Since the day you walked into High Voltage, you've been mine."

Her margarita is placed down in front of her, and she hastily scoops it up. "Oh God," she mutters, taking a long drink. "You're right. I'm going to need to get fucked up for this conversation."

I nod and watch as she takes another healthy sip, her glass now half empty. She places it down on the bar, keeping her hand on the rim of the glass between us where we can each see it, something she's always done after a friend of hers was slipped a pill last summer. "You realize it was just sex, right?"

"You realize it was so much more than just sex," I throw back at her.

"How can you say that?" she questions. "We've done other stuff, all the time, and you've never given me the whole *we're destined star-crossed lovers* speech before. Why is this any different? It's not like you made love to me and vowed your undying love. We fucked, and it was great, so why the hell won't you let me set my boundaries again?"

I indicate to her drink, letting her know she's going to need some more, and she doesn't hesitate, throwing back what's left in the glass. "Because Ky, the moment I felt your tight little cunt squeezing around my cock, I wasn't about to let you go," I tell her, indicating for the bartender to get Ky a refill before I've even taken a single sip of my beer. "So get the fuck used to it. I know you're young and not interested in the whole

marriage and kids bullshit, but you can't pretend that you didn't feel how fucking good we are together."

"Crew," she murmurs, shaking her head.

"Deny it all you want, babe, but I know you feel it. Every fucking day I walk into the shop, I see it when you look at me. Hell, Big Jim fucking sees it too. Why else would he put up with our shameless flirting every fucking day? You know we're good together."

Ky braces her elbow on the bar before dropping her face into her hand and groaning. "Crew, you said we were coming here to get fucked up and then you were going to screw me all night. You didn't say shit about talking."

"How about this, baby. Every time you talk, I'll get you a new drink."

"Fuck."

Her new margarita is placed down in front of her, and she greedily scoops it up, taking another long sip before bringing it back down to the bar. She meets my stare, holding it for a second and looking at me like she would rather be anywhere but here, but Ky has never been one to ignore a free drink. Her brows crease before letting out a deep sigh and leaning into me, crushing her forehead against my chest.

My arm scoops around her back, holding her to me as I wait for whatever she wants to say. "High Voltage is all I have," she tells me. "But you're right, you and me ... we just work, but I'm twenty-three. I don't want any of this, not yet at least. I

want to fuck around and have fun, just like you said, but where the hell does that leave us? I know you, Crew. You say you can wait around for me to do what I want to do, but we both know it's going to drive you insane. Every time Viper makes some bullshit excuse to come into the shop, you can barely keep your cool. You'll fucking explode having to sit back and watch me screw around. You can't do it, and on top of that, I don't want to do that to you."

"Don't worry about what I can handle, Ky."

"I have to," she throws back at me. "I care about you too much, and I know I'm going to fuck this up, which is exactly why I've tried to force this distance between us. And when that inevitably happens, where does that leave me with High Voltage? Big Jim is just as much a father figure to you as he is to me, and I don't want to have to leave there because I fucked up and crossed a line I shouldn't have."

I shake my head, pushing her back into her chair properly to better see her face. "You really think that low of me that I would let you fuck up so bad that you couldn't show your face at High Voltage?"

"No," she says, her gaze lingering on mine. "I know you wouldn't, but I also know me, and when I feel like I'm backed into a corner, I start lashing out, and I don't want to hurt you, Crew. I love you too much."

I push her drink back toward her and she takes another sip. "I don't want you feeling like I'm backing you into a corner," I tell her. "But it's time for you to know that there's no more

drawing lines in the sand when it comes to you and me. When I walk into work every morning, I'm going to grab you, and I'm going to kiss you until you're falling to pieces, but I also know that when Viper walks in, he's going to try the same thing, and I'm okay with the fact that, for now, that's going to excite you. Hell, fuck him if you need to work him out of your system, but you should know, baby, once Viper has a taste of you, he's going to sink his claws in and never let you go."

"I know," she murmurs. "But he's never going to treat me like you would. I'd be property to him."

I nod, relieved that she understands that. "You still need to be wary of him. There'll come a time where he gets tired of asking, and then he'll just take what he wants from you."

"The same way you're taking what you want?"

"Not even close," I tell her. "The difference is, I take only what I know you're able to give, but Viper will rob you blind."

She visibly swallows before averting her gaze to her drink, watching the condensation roll down her near-empty glass. "Does it make me an idiot for wanting to see what it'd be like with him?"

"No," I say, shaking my head despite the way her words pierce straight through my chest. "It makes you human, but you know that if you do go there and he makes you uncomfortable in any way, I'll come for you, Ky. I'll always fucking come for you."

"Even if it kills you?"

“Even then.”

“Shit,” she says, blowing out a heavy breath.

“Couldn’t agree more.”

We sit and drink for the next few hours, talking shit about life and the shop until she starts swaying on her chair. Then all too aware that she still needs to function tomorrow and put art on somebody’s skin, I close out my tab and lead her out of the bar and back down the street.

Kyah chills out a lot when she’s been drinking, and I’m not surprised when she slips her hand into mine and laces our fingers together. I loop our joined hands over her shoulder and pull her into my side, feeling so fucking right when she tilts her head against my shoulder. “So, what happens now?” she asks.

“What do you mean?”

“With you,” she says, laughing to herself at some kind of silent joke that I’m not privy to. “Are you just going to mope around after me until I pull my head out of my ass and decide I’m ready for something more?”

I scoff. “Do I strike you as the type to mope around while watching you fuck your way through Brooklyn?”

“No, I guess not,” she says, sounding a little defeated. “I don’t like the idea of you sticking your dick into every available hole and then expecting me to put out too.”

“I don’t expect you to put out, but when those little boys you’ve been playing with can’t get you off, you’re gonna

come looking for me whether I've been fucking random women or not. You can't resist, Ky."

She lets out a heavy breath, and I continue. "Do you really expect me to save myself for you when you're not doing the same for me? That's not me, Ky. I like sex. Hell, I fucking need it, and when I want it, I'm going to get it. It's up to you if it's your door I'm knocking at."

"Uggghhhh," she groans. "Don't put that kind of pressure on me."

"No pressure, babe. Just telling you how it is," I say, stopping in the street outside her apartment complex and meeting her stare. "It's simple. I want you, and I know you want me too, but you're not ready. So until then, we'll fuck. We'll have fun, screw around with other people, and then one day, maybe a few years from now, you'll come and tell me that you're done with the bullshit."

"But you're already done with the bullshit," she says. "It makes me feel like I'm forcing you to wait for something you want now when there's probably some other gorgeous woman out there who's willing to give you that without all the screwing around."

"You're right. There are," I tell her, not willing to be dishonest with her. "But no matter how much they want to throw themselves at me, I don't want what they can offer me. I want you."

"Damn it, Crew," she groans. "Why can't this be easy? Why'd you have to go and blur the lines?"

“Oh, my sweet little Kyah. I think you’re underestimating just how much fun blurred lines can be,” I tell her, placing my hand on her lower back and leading her toward the door of the apartment complex and hashing in the access code.

Once we’re inside, I pull her aside, pressing her back up against the wall and leaning into her, my nose skimming along the sensitive skin beneath her ear and feeling the way she shudders under my hold. “Blurred lines means that when I’m at work and have been watching you bending over your clients all day, I don’t have to just think about taking you out back and fucking you until your tight little cunt is squeezing around my cock, I actually get to do it. I get to throw you up on the hood of my truck, part your pretty thighs, and fuck you with my tongue, bend you over your kitchen counter, or take you in the shower. Anything you want.”

“Anything I want?” she asks, panting heavily.

I nod. “Anything.”

“Right now?”

I grind my hips into her, letting her know just how fucking ready I am for her. “Right fucking now.”

“Good,” she breathes, her hand slipping up beneath the fabric of my shirt and pressing against my bare chest. “In that case, I need you to take me up to my apartment and throw me around like a fucking ragdoll. I need you to fuck me, Crew. In all the ways you just said. I want to feel your tongue working through my slit. I want you to make me sweat.”

My cock becomes painfully hard and I growl deep in my chest, her words the sweetest music to my ears. Then without even a second of hesitation, I grab her hips and haul her over my shoulder, taking her ass upstairs and hoping like fuck this new prick who lives across the hallway hears every fucking second of it.

KYAH



I swear, tequila is the devil's lifeblood. What the hell was I thinking going so hard last night? My head aches, and I'm pretty sure I'm about to see the contents of my stomach. But hell, when having to face Crew and his demands for our future together, tequila is a necessity. Even though I feel awful this morning, I can't bring myself to regret my night.

A lot was said last night, words that can't be taken back, but as long as he knows where I stand and is able to respect those boundaries, then we should be okay. I just hope these next few years waiting for me won't destroy him. It almost makes me feel guilty for not being ready for a life with him. The last thing I'd ever want to do is hurt him.

But what if he finds someone else during that time and I foolishly missed my chance? Or what if those few years pass and I find that I'm still not ready to make a life with him? So much could go wrong. People change. Their hearts change, and their wants and needs change right along with it. To be completely honest, while I know how incredible we'd be together, I just don't know if I want that ... not yet at least.

Glancing at the clock, I realize I'm going to be late for my first client if I don't get a move on, and as I roll over in bed, I let out a sigh of relief, finding Crew already long gone. My hand stretches out over his side of the bed and finds it cold, as though it hadn't even been slept in, and honestly, I really don't know if it had. As soon as he finished rocking my world in a way it's never been rocked before, I passed out.

Considering everything we talked about at the bar, I wouldn't be surprised to find he had left last night. Once a line has been drawn, he's usually good at respecting them, and he'd already pushed my boundaries enough last night. He wouldn't be stupid enough to then go and make me pull away by staying the night.

Realizing I stink like a bar and sex, I hurry through a quick shower before noticing the remnants of my night with Crew left all over my bed. Fucking gross.

Not having time to wash the sheets now, I yank them off my bed and drop them in a pile on my bedroom floor, wondering what the likelihood of running into Alex in the laundry would

be before quickly dismissing the thought. I don't have space for that kind of trouble in my life.

It's another big day. Saturdays are always my busiest, and usually I love that, but today, my pounding head is going to make this a challenge.

Grabbing my phone off my bedside table, I find my gaze shifting over Alex's number he left taped to my door last night, and before I scurry out of my room and change my mind, I grab it, shoving it deep into my bag before getting my ass out the door and locking up behind me.

God. I must be an idiot for not throwing that away.

My gaze flickers to Alex's door, still so intrigued by the one guy I adamantly told myself that I wouldn't be going out with. Hell, I feel guilty for just thinking about the possibility of going out with him after all of Crew's heavy feelings last night, which is exactly what I didn't want to happen.

How can I even consider anything with Alex after Crew fucked me into oblivion last night? Hell, I know Crew almost better than he knows himself, and I know for damn sure he put in all the extra effort to blow my mind for that very reason. He wanted to ruin me for other men so that I'd come running right back into his open arms.

Fucking asshole.

After a twenty-minute stroll through the streets of Brooklyn, I finally push through the door of High Voltage Ink and see Big Jim already working on a client. Hearing the bell chime

above the door, Jim glances up, and a fond smile spreads across his face, but as I make my way around the counter and into the back, his brows begin to furrow.

I walk right into his side and drop a kiss to his cheek.

“You look like shit,” he comments, his gaze scanning over my face.

“Why thank you,” I say, walking across to my station and dropping my bag on the table. “They’re the exact words every woman wants to hear first thing in the morning.”

“Just calling it how I see it,” Jim says, turning his gaze back to his client’s shoulder and getting back to work. Then despite how thoroughly I cleaned my station after Crew and I screwed all over it last night, I give everything another wipe down and put my bag in the back.

My first client of the day is just arriving for her consultation, and we spend the next twenty minutes going over everything she wants. She’s a virgin when it comes to ink, but she wants a whole sleeve, and I groan to myself, knowing that when she returns next week to actually start the process, it’s going to be a painful day. Today, we’re just talking design.

It’s well after lunch when Crew finally walks in, and just as usual, he comes straight to me and drops a kiss to my cheek, only this time, his hand lingers on my back a second longer than normal. “How are you feeling?” he murmurs, his hungry gaze sailing over my face, probably remembering exactly how it felt to push inside of me.

“Like someone poured a whole bottle of tequila down my throat and then fucked me until I couldn’t stand.”

He grins, his hand lowering to my ass. “You still feel me between those pretty thighs, don’t you?”

My cheeks flush, and I don’t miss the way my afternoon client lifts his head and locks his gaze onto mine, raising a brow as a smirk stretches across his face. I groan and look up at Crew. “Don’t you have something you need to be doing?”

“No, no, no,” my client rushes out, stealing my attention right back. “Please, finish your conversation. I’m dying to hear how this one turns out.”

I roll my eyes and look back at Crew, stepping into him and lifting my chin as his hand finds my waist. “I feel you with every step I take. Every time I sit down, every time I tilt my hips even an inch. I feel you everywhere,” I murmur, my tongue rolling over my bottom lip, remembering just how easily he took control of my body and made me come alive.

Crew leans in, his nose skimming along the sensitive skin below my ear. “How is it possible for me to need you so badly already?”

“Hey,” Big Jim calls out, making me all but spring away from Crew. My head whips toward Jim to see him staring between me and Crew, his brows furrowed. “Is something going on that I need to be aware of?”

“No,” I rush out, looking guilty as all hell.

His gaze narrows further, lingering on Crew with a deep suspicion that he's somehow taken advantage of me—as if I didn't hold all the power. “In that case, this ain't a fucking whore house. Both of you get to work.”

“Yes, sir,” I mutter under my breath, turning back to my client as Crew snickers to himself and strides off toward his station. I get sucked into what I'm doing, putting in extra effort to make sure it's perfect, but over the next hour, Big Jim's curious gaze never leaves me.

I hate when he does this. Every few months he starts to worry about me like I can't handle myself, and then I have to prove to him that I'm not the struggling kid he first met when I was seventeen years old. It's a vicious cycle, but he should know by now that I always come out on top, no matter how hard I have to fight to get there. I'm not the type who gives up.

Crew is busy working on a spine tattoo while busily trying to avoid his client's shameless flirting, and with my next client not due for another twenty minutes, I take my opportunity to have a quick break. “You guys want me to order you anything?” I ask, scrolling through the endless options on my phone.

“Always,” Big Jim says just as Crew mutters, “Nah, baby. I'm good.”

I get busy ordering lunch, and as I tidy up my station while I wait for my food, my gaze shifts back to my phone, and before I know it, I'm typing in the number that Alex left on my door.

Kyah - Why the hell did I come home to find your number on my door?

I hit send, and the moment I do, my gaze awkwardly shifts toward Crew. I wonder how he'd feel if he knew I was messaging Alex the night after he's screwed me into oblivion, but my wondering doesn't last long when Alex's response comes shooting right back.

Alex - Figured you need it seeing as though I'm taking you out tonight.

Kyah - I thought I told you that I don't date my neighbors.

Alex - Thought I told you I didn't care.

A wide grin stretches across my face, and suddenly, I feel like a teenage girl talking to her crush for the first time. I'm giddy and excited, and that could only mean one thing—trouble. And yet, I can't find it in myself to put my phone away.

“Yo,” Crew asks, nodding toward me, his brows furrowed as a deep suspicion flickers in his eyes. “What's got you smiling like that?”

I press my lips into a hard line and glance away, unable to meet his stare. “Nothing.”

I feel Crew's piercing stare on the side of my face, and I try to ignore it, feeling like the biggest asshole in the world, which is exactly why I didn't want to cross that line in the first place. But damn it, there's no denying that last night was incredible. I've never been fucked like that, and yet, there was still something missing. I needed more, but I'm not sure what.

Kyah - Saturdays are a no-go for me. I work till after ten, and I already have plans for a girls' night after that. Not that it matters anyway because you're not taking me out.

Alex - I can work with that.

Kyah - What the hell is that supposed to mean? Work with that?

I wait by my phone for an explanation, and after twenty minutes, I finally realize I won't be getting one. My food is delivered, and I quickly eat in the back room before my next client arrives. An hour later, as I finish up the shading on his sleeve, I hear the familiar chime above the door.

"Where's my fucking girl?" Viper's deep tone rumbles through the store.

Oh no. I fucking love Viper, but why's he always gotta come in when Crew is working?

Crew immediately mutters under his breath as my head whips up, finding Viper already making his way through the shop with one of his henchmen at his back. "Well hey, trouble," I say, my gaze flickering to the guy behind him as

they stride past Big Jim's station and toward mine. "You didn't have an appointment today, did you?" I ask, starting to panic that maybe I'd double-booked.

"Nah, don't stress, baby. You're good," he tells me before indicating toward the guy at his back. "Spider wants to book in with the best in the business. Figured while we were close by, I'd introduce you."

"Yeah, cool," I say, glancing toward Spider. "What were you thinking of getting?"

Spider pulls his shirt up, showing off the goodies. "Chest and back. I want something to represent the Grim Reapers," he mutters, referring to the motorcycle club they belong to. "Hooded reaper maybe. Something a little fucked up that sends a message."

I nod, and a design weaves through my mind already. After working on Viper's men for the past few years, I have more than enough ideas to work with. "I got you," I say. "When did you want to get started?"

"As soon as you can get me in."

I nod before pointing toward my schedule. "Could you grab that?" I ask Viper.

He doesn't hesitate, grabbing the little black book and putting it down in front of me, and I peel my gloves off before flicking through the pages. I don't exactly have time to squeeze him in, but Viper's guys have always been good to me, so I go out of my way to make sure I fit them in. "Ummm

... I could have a design concept drawn up by the end of the week, and assuming you're good with it, we could start as early as next week, but you're in for some long sessions."

Spider nods, and I scrawl his name into my schedule before closing the little book and grabbing a fresh pair of gloves. I position myself back beside my client, and as Viper and Spider turn to leave, I call out, "Hey, Viper," and watch as he turns back. "If you've got ten, could you hang around? I wanna see how your chest is healing."

He nods, his heavy gaze lingering on mine. "We'll be out front."

Perfect.

Turning back to my client, I finish up his shading before cleaning him up and making sure he's all good to go. He stands in the mirror for way too long, and as he flexes to himself, watching how his ink sits with his body, Crew glances toward me, a heavy scowl across his face. "Really?" he questions, arching a brow, his tone thick with disdain. "Viper's been inked more than anyone in this fucking room and suddenly you think he might need a little guidance with his aftercare?"

I stare back at him, suspicion deep in my gaze, not liking his tone. "If you're jealous, just say that."

Crew scoffs. "Jealous? Of Viper? Get fucked, babe. I've already got you. I don't need to be jealous of some asshole who can't catch a fucking hint."

Irritation burns through my veins. Already got me? I mean, sure. He fucked me last night, left his mark from one end of my apartment to the other, but that doesn't mean shit. We talked about my boundaries, and as far as I was concerned, he was okay with them.

“Then what's your issue?” I demand, getting frustrated with him, ignoring his comment about already having me because right now, all he's about to have is my foot shoved so far up his ass he won't walk for a week. “I've been working on Viper for years, and you know just as well as I do that he doesn't give a shit about aftercare, and I spent way too many hours on that piece to have him come back in here in a few weeks telling me it healed like shit. So yeah, I asked him to stay so I could check up on it, but you know what? I don't owe you any explanations, and I sure as hell shouldn't be standing here trying to justify myself to you. He's my client, and if I wish to check how his chest is healing, then that's none of your damn business.”

Crew stands and steps into me. “You're leading him on,” he growls, getting in my face, his hand balling into a fist at his side. “And you're only fucking doing it to get at me. To prove some fucking point that you don't belong to me, but I told you, Ky. You're mine. Whether you fucking like it or not.”

“The fuck did you just say to me?” I demand. “You might have made me scream your name all night, and we might have something worth looking into in the future, but if this is the kind of bullshit I'm going to get from you for simply looking out for one of my clients, then you can forget it. You'll never

fucking touch me again. Don't make me regret what we did, Crew."

He clenches his jaw just as the bell over the door chimes and Viper strides back into the shop. He takes one look at the standoff between me and Crew, and a cocky grin stretches across his face. "Trouble in paradise?" he laughs, already gripping the hem of his shirt and pulling it up over his head, putting that impressive torso on display.

For fuck's sake. I swear, Viper's timing is always on point.

I roll my eyes and step away from Crew as my client finally pulls his shirt on and makes his way back to the reception desk to pay, probably sensing this isn't somewhere he wants to be right now. Then despite having a girl working the desk today, I walk back around with him, needing a minute to calm down before having to face Viper.

He thanks me before finally getting his ass out of the shop, and when I turn back around, I find Viper and Crew looking as though they're about to tear each other to shreds. "Fucking hell," I mutter under my breath.

Making my way back to my station, I shove my hand against Crew's big shoulder, forcing him back a step, a deep ugliness in my tone. "Knock it off," I tell him. "Your client's waiting."

Crew looks at me as though he wants to tear the flesh right off my body. "We're not done with this conversation."

"We were fucking done with it before it even started," I hiss.

Viper steps closer into my back as though I need some kind of protection, and with that, Crew finally relents, clenching his jaw as he walks back to his station, muttering something under his breath.

“You good?” Viper asks from behind me, his hand falling to my waist.

I let out a heavy breath and turn back to face him, letting his hand fall away. “Fine,” I say. “Just trying to work out where we stand with each other.”

“What’s that supposed to mean?” he asks as I cross my station to grab a new pair of gloves and a few supplies.

“It’s nothing,” I say, indicating for him to take a seat in my chair.

Viper does as I’ve asked, and as I lean over him to peel the bandage back, I feel his heavy gaze lingering on my face. “You fucked him, didn’t you?” he murmurs, keeping our conversation private.

“I don’t see how that’s any of your business,” I say.

“Ahh shit, babe,” he mutters as though I’d just made some horrible, life-changing mistake that I’ll never be able to come back from. “You know he’s no good for you.”

My brows furrow. Why would he think that? Apart from the fact I’m not ready for a relationship or that I want to skin him alive right now, Crew and I make the perfect match. But considering everything we talked about last night, I didn’t

think a jealous Crew was something I was going to have to worry about.

“Funny,” I say, my gaze locked on Viper’s chest, suddenly very uncomfortable. “That’s exactly what he tells me about you.”

Viper laughs. “He’s right. I’m no fucking good for you. But that doesn’t mean I wouldn’t treat you like my fucking queen.” I don’t respond, and when his hand finds my waist again, my gaze lifts to his, not believing him for a second. “I’m serious.”

“About what?” I ask. “That Crew’s no good for me or that you’d treat me like a queen?”

“Both,” he says. “But I’m talking about Crew. You’ve always had blinders on when it came to him. You’ve been friends for years, but he’s only ever shown you the parts of himself he wanted you to see. You don’t know him like I do, and if you really want to get involved with him, that’s your call. I just want you to be careful.”

Unease pulses through my veins. What does he mean *know him like I do*? Outside of this shop, I wasn’t aware they knew each other at all. I mean, sure. Their lives might have crossed here and there, but Crew doesn’t involve himself with the Grim Reapers. “Care to elaborate?”

Viper shakes his head, his gaze flicking toward Crew for just a moment, the tension reaching the boiling point between them. “No. Just be careful.”

I let out a heavy breath. “Let me guess, this is one of those, *you’ll kill him if he ever does something to hurt me* scenarios.”

“That goes without saying, Ky,” he says. “I’ve told you from the start. I want you to be my old lady, but I know you’re not down for that, at least not yet. So I’ll let you play around with these little toys to keep you warm at night, and when it’s time, I’ll come and take you for myself, but if any of these little fuckers hurt you in the meantime, they’ll have me to deal with.”

“You make it sound as though I don’t even have a choice in the matter.”

“You don’t,” he says as though it’s already set in stone. “But when the time comes, you won’t need the choice. You’ll already know exactly where you belong and you won’t want anything else. I promise you that.”

I roll my eyes and focus on what I’m doing, knowing damn sure a life as his little motorcycle club wife who has to share him with a bunch of whores isn’t ever going to be a reality I’ll settle with. “You’re so damn sure of yourself.”

“You don’t get to where I am by being a little bitch,” he tells me.

I laugh because damn, he’s got one hell of a point, but in this particular case, he’s dead wrong.

Finally peeling the rest of the bandage off, I look over the massive tattoo and grin to myself. It’s fucking gorgeous. I

really outdid myself with this one, but it's still got quite a bit of healing to get through.

After quickly cleaning him up, I start applying some ointment to his chest to help the healing process, and as my hands glide over his toned chest, the little bell over the door chimes once again.

On instinct, I glance back to see who's walked through the door, and my hands pause on Viper's chest as I stare back at Alex, looking just as devilishly delicious as he did the other day.

KYAH



Alex, A.K.A. Dirty Perv Neighbor who likes to do a little parkour down the stairs of my apartment, stares at me like he's hoping for a challenge. A cocky smirk lingers on his lips as his eyes seem to dance with silent laughter, and damn it, I can't resist. He's like the perfect snack just waiting to be eaten.

Excitement drums through my veins, and my brow arches as a stupid grin tears across my face. "You must be lost," I say, my fingers pausing on Viper's chest, as my gaze sails over the way his black shirt seems to be glued to his body like a second skin. But damn it, those strong thighs. He could crush me alive with those thighs.

“Who the fuck is this guy?” I hear Crew mutter from his station, no doubt able to hear the way my tone hitched up with excitement. Hell, it’s the way I used to talk to him when I was seventeen and just starting here, when I thought the whole world revolved around him. He treated me like a little sister then, but as I got older, it shifted. I loved the new way he looked at me, but I’ve learned that my world doesn’t revolve around any man, only me, and if they can’t find a way to fit into my orbit, then they need to go.

Ignoring Crew’s question, I keep my gaze focused on Alex, loving the way his eyes seem to dance with an enticing darkness. “I told you, Mace, I’m taking you out,” he says, bracing his elbows on the front counter and peering at me across the shop. “You said you can’t go out tonight, so I’m taking you out now.”

Viper scoffs, and I press a little harder against his skin, though something tells me he’s the kind who gets off on the pain.

I narrow my gaze at Alex, all too aware of the short break in my schedule. Hell, it’s why I asked Viper to stay. If I didn’t have the time, he would have been left to fend for himself. My next client isn’t due to walk through the door for another thirty minutes.

“Is that so?”

Alex nods, not intimidated in the least by the two burly men glaring daggers at him. “A girl’s gotta eat, right?”

Crew stands and strides across the shop, putting himself right in the line between me and Alex. He crosses his arms over his wide chest, and I can't help but feel as though this is quickly turning into a pissing match, only Crew seems to be the only idiot participating. "She already ate."

The fuck?

I stand, moving around Crew, more than frustrated with him today. "*She* can speak for herself," I say, my jaw clenching as I stare up at the man who treated me like a fucking goddess last night, but all his words seem to mean nothing today, and he's treating me like his property. "And you know what? I'm suddenly starving."

Moving back to my station, I pass Viper and toss my gloves into the trash before reaching for my phone and shoving it into my back pocket. Only as I turn back, Viper sits up and catches me around the waist. "You know this guy?" he demands.

"He's my neighbor," I tell him. "No one you need to be worried about."

"Baby, I worry about every man who looks at you like that."

I roll my eyes, glancing between Crew and Viper as I step out of his hold. "Do you have any idea how overbearing you two are today? It's sickening."

"You can say that again," Big Jim grumbles from across the shop.

Crew mutters under his breath, something he's clearly become very fond of doing today, and as I walk past him, I

turn back to Viper. “Your chest is healing great. Just keep applying the ointment as you usually would.” And with that, I make my way around the front of the shop, stopping right in front of a grinning Alex. “You know, I don’t recall telling you where I worked.”

Alex scoffs, and damn it, standing this close to him, I can smell him, and it has me desperate to smell that all over me. “If you type Kyah, tattoo, and Brooklyn into a search bar, it doesn’t leave many options.”

Shit. He has a good point.

Rolling my eyes, I nod toward the door. “Come on,” I say. “We better go before someone has a coronary back there.”

Alex grins and steps back out of the door, holding it open for me, and as I walk out into the street, I don’t miss the way he glances back into the shop, his gaze lingering on both Viper and Crew. “So, what’s the deal with those two?” he asks, letting the door fall closed behind him. “You dating them both?”

“Neither,” I say with a groan, and the idea of being anywhere near either of them right now makes me grit my teeth. “Along with not dating neighbors, I also don’t date coworkers or clients. Though you should know, it was ballsy walking in there like that. You don’t know how close to death you just came.”

Alex scoffs and gently presses his hand against my lower back, leading me across the road. “They don’t scare me,

Mace,” he says, the confidence radiating out of him like a sonic blast.

“They should,” I warn. “The company I keep ... they’re not exactly law-abiding citizens if you know what I mean. They’re protective, and for some fucked-up reason, they each think they have some kind of claim over me so if they feel threatened or think that you’re someone out to screw with me, they won’t hesitate to step in. They act first and ask later.”

We walk past a narrow alley, and before I even know what’s happening, his hands are on my waist. Alex lunges down the alley, taking me with him, and suddenly, I’m pressed up against a brick wall, surrounded by the silence of the dimly lit alleyway.

Alex hovers over me, his sculpted body pressed against mine, breathing heavily as his hand lingers on my waist. “You trying to warn me away?” he questions, those dazzling eyes lingering on mine and making me squirm under his intense stare.

I can’t fucking breathe.

My whole body quivers, but not out of fear, and I shake my head. “No,” I whisper, my heart racing. “I should be, but for some reason I still can’t figure out, I’m not. I’m simply giving it to you straight. You know, considering how adamant you are about taking me out, despite my objections, then you need to know exactly what you’re getting yourself into. Crew and Viper back there, they don’t fuck around when it comes to me.

If they can't find a reason to trust you, then this is about as close as you'll ever get to me."

His gaze becomes hooded, and the way he watches me makes my knees weak. He's so intense, yet I've never felt so comfortable. "With all due respect, Mace. I'm not looking to fuck your guard dogs. I don't give a shit what kind of claim they think they have over you or what bullshit threat they want to hit me with. They can come at me however they like, but it doesn't matter to me because, at the end of the day, you're the one I'm interested in. Their opinion of me doesn't mean shit. Your opinion on the other hand ... now that's something I'm curious about."

"I ..." My brows furrow, and I tilt my chin, holding his intense stare. "Why are you pushing it this hard? You met me for two seconds in a hallway."

"I mean, if you wanna get technical, it was more like two minutes. But those two minutes were enough to know that you intrigue me," he tells me, leaning in so that his breath tickles the base of my throat. "I want to get to know you, Kyah. I want to know what gets under your skin. I want to know what makes you smile. But most of all, I can't stop wondering about the way you'd taste on my tongue."

I suck in a breath, wanting to feel more of him all over me, and as his fingers skim across my jaw, I find myself desperate to feel the way they'd close around my throat. "Plus," he continues, his thumb stretching to brush along my bottom lip.

“The second I saw these full lips, I knew I needed to see what they looked like wrapped around my cock.”

Hoooooly fuck.

This man.

He’s the best kind of dangerous, and despite knowing I shouldn’t, I can’t fucking wait to explore it with him. He’s a risk, but damn it, I know he’s going to be a good time. Though, if it turns out he’s all talk and no action, I’m going to be pissed.

My knees give out, and if it weren’t for the way his body pins mine against the brick wall of the alley, I would have surely crumbled to the ground.

My tongue pokes out, rolling over my bottom lip, and I watch the way his sharp gaze tracks the movement. “Bold of you to assume these lips are going anywhere near your cock.”

Alex smirks, his eyes blazing at the word *cock* coming out of my mouth. “Bold of you to assume they’re not,” he tells me. “But let’s face it, the sooner you quit denying that you feel this fire between us, the sooner we get to have fun.”

Hunger pounds through my veins, and I struggle to catch my breath, the feel of his body against mine making me dizzy. “Who said I was denying anything?”

“Baby, if you weren’t denying it, you would already be braced against this wall with my cock buried inside your sweet cunt.”

“Presumptuous.”

Alex shakes his head, his lips settling into the most devilish smirk that makes my thighs clench. “I call it being realistic.”

“I call it being a troublemaker.”

“You’ve got no fucking idea,” he rumbles, his lips hovering so close to mine, tempting me with the filthy little promises they hold. “What’s it gonna be, Mace? I’m not playing your little games. Despite me showing up like this while you’re working, I’m not gonna chase you. So if you want to see what this is, then say that, but I’m not dancing around your little *I don’t date my neighbors* bullshit.”

“Do you not consider this taking me out?”

“Despite how fucking good your body feels pressed against mine, I don’t consider stealing twenty minutes between clients as a win,” he says. “I want to take you out properly. I want to spend the night whispering filthy things in your ear and then I’m going to take you home and fuck you until you’re screaming my name.”

“I’m not a relationship kind of girl,” I warn him. “But I’m also not some whore who’s going to let you use me for an easy screw. If you’re taking me out, you’re going to respect me. You’re going to show me a good fucking time, wine and dine me, and then only if I say you’re welcome to my body, you can take it.”

“You’re telling me you don’t want me whispering filthy little things in your ear?”

“Not at all, I encourage the filthy little things,” I tell him. “But if you can’t respect my boundaries, then those filthy little things are nothing but empty promises. Treat me like your fucking queen, and I’ll make you my king in return.”

Alex watches me for a short moment, his gaze lingering on mine, deep in thought. “I like a woman who knows what she wants and isn’t afraid to set boundaries.”

“Good, because I like a man who isn’t afraid to push those boundaries while giving me exactly what I need ... within reason, of course.”

His fingers skim across my waist, sending a wave of goosebumps sailing across my skin. “What else do you like, Mace?” he rumbles deep in his chest.

I tilt my head, and without hesitation, his warm lips press down on the curve of my neck, sending me spiraling with pure satisfaction. “I like a man who knows how to read a woman’s body, a man who doesn’t need me to walk him through everything. I don’t want to tell him when to take me deeper or harder. I just need him to know.”

“What else?”

“A man who knows when to cross the line and when to hold back,” I breathe, my hand inching up his back and knotting into his thick, dark hair. “I like a man who knows when to back off and leave me alone, or when to ignore my bullshit and bust through my fucking door anyway. I like confidence, Alex. But the second that confidence turns into arrogance, I’m done.”

He nods, gathering my hair into one hand before ripping it back and forcing my stare up to his, a sharp gasp tearing from the back of my throat. Those dark, devilish eyes linger on mine, sending chills sweeping across my body. “Here’s what’s going to happen, Mace,” he tells me. “I’m going to walk away, and you’re going to go back to work. You’re going to have your girls’ night tonight, but you’re not going to be able to stop thinking about me, wondering how it would have felt if my fingers trailed just a little further down, or if I’d closed the gap and kissed you the way you’ve been hoping I would, and when you’re home at the end of the night and lying in your bed, knowing I’m just across the hall, you’re going to message me.”

My chest heaves with a heavy breath, and I swallow hard. “Then what?”

“Then you’re going to spread those pretty thighs and reach under the bed or into your side drawer and pull out whatever toys get you off each night, and you’re going to fuck yourself while thinking about me.”

“You’re gonna leave me hanging?” I ask. “Knowing I’m just across the hall, all needy and worked up, and you’re not going to come?”

“Oh, I’ll be coming, just not in your sweet little cunt, or your pretty mouth, or in that tight ass. Not until you’ve worked out what the fuck you want, because right now, I don’t think you have a damn clue.”

Pressing my hand against his chest, I force him back a step to give me space to breathe, and he doesn't hesitate. He's respecting my boundaries, but he doesn't dare take that intense stare off mine. "You're pretty damn sure of yourself."

Alex nods. "Do you want a man who's going to give you what you want, or give you what you need?"

"I—" I cut myself off because honestly, I have no fucking idea, and as he stares at me with that knowing sparkle in his eye, I want nothing more than to smack the cockiness off his face.

"Think about it, and when you're ready for me to really take you out, you know where to find me. Until then, I'm going to enjoy listening to the way you come through the wall while screaming my name." And with that, Alex is gone, leaving me gasping for air and having absolutely no idea what the fuck just happened.

KYAH



The mid-city bar is crowded as I weave my way through the throng of rowdy partiers, but despite the noise and the chaos of the bar, I hear my best friend's voice as clearly as though she were standing right next to me, screaming directly into my ear.

“WHERE THE FUCK HAVE YOU BEEN, SKANK?” Nat roars across the bar. “YOU’RE OVER AN HOUR LATE!”

I groan, rolling my eyes as a stupid grin tears across my face. I learned a long time ago not to get embarrassed by Nat's ability to make her voice carry across a room. She's always been loud, since the first day of our freshman year of high school when I faced off against Kelly Blake in my first-ever fistfight.

Nat was right there, and when it was clear I was about to have my ass kicked, she jumped in and whooped that bitch's

ass, despite not even knowing my name. We've been best friends since, and I'm proud to say that since then, I've more than shaped up my fistfighting skills. Hell, I'd be more than happy to go for a round or two with Kelly now and finally have my chance to put her in her place, but on the other hand, I also like to think that I'm not that messy high schooler who didn't know what was good for her anymore. I've grown. I'm a woman now, and I've worked hard to achieve this life.

At seventeen, I was a mess and had traveled down far too many dark paths. The day I stumbled upon High Voltage Ink and met Big Jim, I fully believe an angel was looking down on me. Without Big Jim, I don't know where I'd be today. Probably already dead. He saved me, gave me something to work toward, and because of that, I owe him everything. Hell, his willingness to pull me out of the darkness and set me straight also meant that through association, Nat was able to keep out of trouble too. Since then, she's had the world in the palm of her hands and has been making it her bitch.

She has always had an overwhelming need to help people, to stand at their back at the worst of times and help them through, so it was no surprise when she was offered a job as a 911 operator right out of school. She was put through all the necessary training and took her job seriously, and now at twenty-three, she's been awarded for the work she's done in helping save lives, but she doesn't do it for the recognition or the praise, all she's ever wanted was to help.

Last year, she was finally able to move out of the shitty rental she shared with her ex-boyfriend and purchased her first

home. It's modest and needs a few upgrades, but those four walls are all hers, and I've never been so proud.

Finally weaving through all the bodies, I make it to Nat's table, and she immediately tumbles out, throwing her arms around me in a tight hug, clearly already a few drinks ahead of me. "Sorry," I say, knowing damn well she's about to give me shit for being so late. "Today was a weird day, and my last client was late and grouchy. I got out of there as soon as I could."

"I ordered you a drink," she says, her gaze falling to the table where there are two empty glasses. "But it didn't last very long."

I cringe. "Tell me it wasn't tequila," I ask, knowing how she gets when she's had too much tequila, but it's her drink of choice, just as it is mine, but she guzzles that stuff like it's water.

"Of course it was tequila," she says, scooting back into her seat at the table and nodding across the bar to a guy who's watching her with a lazy smirk. "But don't worry, I found someone to occupy my time."

I narrow my gaze, making myself comfortable just as another two drinks are delivered to our table. "What is that supposed to mean?" I ask, taking in the wicked grin stretching across her lips.

"His name is Sullivan," she starts. "He was eye-fucking me from across the bar, and I didn't want to just sit here all by myself, so I invited him over and we hit it off."

“Okay,” I laugh. “Where’s the rest of the story?”

“What do you mean *the rest of the story?*” she questions, scooping up her glass and playing innocent as she takes a long sip through the straw, probably hoping that if she takes long enough, I might just forget to push her on it.

“Natalie,” I warn.

Her grin widens, and the second her eyes start to glisten, I know it’s about to fall out of her mouth like word vomit. “Okay, so like, he came over here with those bulging arms and all that sexy cologne, and I just ... I don’t know. It was like those men’s deodorant commercials when women just fall to their knees when they walk past. He smelled so good and he’s so hot, and I couldn’t help myself. One minute we were sitting right here, and the next, I was spread eagle on the bathroom vanity with his face between my legs. And fuck, Ky. This man knows how to eat pussy. My eyes were rolling in the back of my head. It was insane. My legs are still shaking.”

My eyes bug out of my head, and I gape at my best friend, not knowing whether I need to be shocked or impressed. “NAT!”

“What?” she laughs. “It was so good, and he’s so big. He’s taking me home for round two tonight.”

“Oh God!” I mutter, sipping my drink and trying to ignore the burn of tequila that pours down the back of my throat. “Let’s just hope he knows how to use it.”

“Oh, he does,” she assures me, glancing up and grinning like a devil at the mysterious Sullivan across the bar, the two of them looking at each other like they share the filthiest little secret, and I suppose they do. “After eating my pussy, he bent me over like a pretzel and fucked me into oblivion, but it wasn’t enough. That’s not the kind of dick you use once and throw away. I need a whole night with him first and then I’ll throw him out with the trash.”

I laugh and shake my head while studying the attractive stranger across the bar. He doesn’t strike me as the type to mind being thrown out in the morning. “Just remember to be safe,” I tell her. “The last thing you need is to catch some dirty STD from the guy.”

“Since when have you known me not to be careful?”

“Ummm ... literally with every single guy you’ve ever screwed,” I laugh. “Tell me, when this Sullivan guy bent you over like a pretzel, did you physically see him wrap up, or were you too busy telling him to hurry up and fuck you?”

A smirk settles across her lips, and the way her eyes sparkle tells me everything I need to know. “Soooooo,” she says, attempting to change the topic. “Less about my sexcapades and more about yours. What’s going on with Crew? Has he finally talked you into bed yet?”

I press my lips into a hard line, my cheeks instantly flushing bright red, and as she takes me in, her jaw drops, and a loud gasp sails across the table. “No fucking way,” Nat booms.

“You finally fucked him, and you’re only just telling me now?”

“It only happened last night,” I tell her.

My confirmation is enough to send her into a tailspin, and she gasps again. “Holy shit. I can’t believe it. Crew’s been trying to get between your legs for years,” she says, shaking her head, still in disbelief. “You have to tell me all about it. How was it? Fuck. I already know. It was incredible, wasn’t it? Crew is a beast in every term of the word.”

A wicked grin stretches wide across my face. “It was ... holy shit. He was like a fucking machine. The second he got my pants off, he didn’t stop until I physically couldn’t go any longer. Like, we hadn’t even made it to my door. I thought he was about to fuck me right there in the stairwell.”

“I mean ... it wouldn’t be the first time you’ve been screwed within an inch of your life in a stairwell.”

“Yeah, but not in my apartment building. That’s just ... I don’t know. What if someone saw, and then I have to see them every day? Like, no one needs that kind of shit.”

Nat laughs. “Enough about the stairwell. I need to know exactly how Crew Ledger gets down, and don’t even think about sparing any of the gory details.”

Without hesitation, I launch into my recap of the night, telling her how it all started in the shop and how he fucked me on my table before demanding to take me out to the bar so he could bombard me with his feelings. I tell her everything he

said before going over exactly what happened once we finally got back to my apartment.

I tell her how he made me scream, how many times he made me come, which positions he fucked me in, and just how damn good it was. Then just to make sure she really gets my point, I tell her again.

By the time I've finished my recap and told her every delicious detail of my night with Crew, we're already a few drinks in, and I'm way past the tipsy stage.

“So, what happens now?” Nat asks. “Does this mean you're together? Because like, I knew you'd always end up together, but I kinda thought you wanted to just fuck around and have fun for a while first.”

“I ... I don't know,” I finally tell her. “We're definitely not together, and you're right, I see us being something in the future, but he's been a little overbearing today.”

“What do you mean?”

“I don't know, I could be overthinking it, but the way he was talking to me in the shop, it felt as though he thought he suddenly thinks he gets to have a say in what I do and who I see.”

Her brows furrow as her lips twist with irritation. “What do you mean?”

“Well, Viper for example. He's been trying to warn me away from him—”

“But he does that all the time,” she says, cutting me off.

“I know, but it’s been a little more intense today, and then I have this new neighbor who’s been trying to ask me out, and he showed up at the shop today wanting to take me for lunch, and Crew got his panties in a twist about it. Not to mention, since leaving work tonight, I’ve already gotten three texts from him wanting to know exactly where I am. It’s ... I don’t know,” I say, deep in thought. “It’s like I spread my legs for the guy and he thinks he owns me. I swear, just the idea of me looking at another man got him all pissy and worked up.”

“Shit,” she says with a heavy sigh. “And to think I was rooting for him for so long.”

“I don’t know. I could be overthinking it, and maybe this is just some type of jealous thing. I mean, Viper doesn’t make it a secret that he wants me, and he practically rubs it in Crew’s face because he knows it sets him off, and as for my new neighbor guy ... it doesn’t help that when we got back to my apartment last night, his number was taped to my door, and I didn’t immediately go to throw it out.”

“Wait ... what?” Nat says. “You never date neighbors.”

“I know, but this one is ... different,” I say just as a stupid grin stretches across my face. “He’s hot as all hell and is the biggest flirt I’ve ever met, but he also gives off alpha, big-dick energy. Usually, I wouldn’t be so turned on by someone like that, but today when he stopped by the shop and I went out with him, he pinned me up against the wall in a dark alley and was so dominant that I would have done anything he wanted. I could barely breathe, and then he just left me there gasping.”

Her brows furrow. “What do you mean he just left you there?”

“I’m telling it wrong, but I promise it was hot as fuck,” I explain, sipping on my drink until there’s nothing but ice left in the bottom. “I was panting, and I swear, had he hung around for another second, I would have been on my knees begging to suck his dick. But then before he left, he said he wanted to take me out for real, and until I knew what I wanted, he wasn’t going to touch me. But then promised that by tonight, I’ll be fucking myself while thinking about him, and when I am, he’ll be coming right along with me.”

“What in the ever-loving fuck, Ky? Why the hell am I only just hearing about this guy now?” she demands. “Do you have a picture?”

“No,” I laugh before launching to my feet and holding up a hand, trying to explain just how tall and broad he is. I tell her about his dark, intense eyes and how every time he looks at me, I become captivated by his stare. By the time I’ve finished explaining just how sharp his stubbled jaw is, she’s demanding that I go home and fuck him for real.

We order another round, and by the time those are finished and we’re well and truly drunk, Nat has convinced me that going out with Alex is somehow in my best interest. Her new friend, Sullivan, wanders over, and when he shoves his tongue down her throat and she melts into his arms, I decide that perhaps it’s time for me to make my way home.

Making sure that Nat is alright and certain she's going to go home with this guy, I grab my things and head to the exit, swiping away the new notifications from Crew, demanding to know where the hell I am, and trying to search through my apps to book an Uber.

Nat has always been sure about what she wants, which is the only reason why I feel so comfortable leaving her here. If she were anyone else, I would have dragged her out by the hair. But not Nat. She's a free spirit and likes to fuck, whether she's drunk or sober, or if there's one partner or four. She's a live-for-the-moment kind of girl, and I love that about her, but I'm not going to lie, sometimes, she worries me. Tonight is not one of those nights though. She knows what she wants and she's not going to stop until she's completely satisfied.

Stepping out into the street, I keep my gaze down at my phone. The street is busy with a lot of people from the bar spilling out and others trying to find their way home. Hell, it's just as noisy out here as it was inside.

I try to shuffle back away from the crowd, leaving them space to keep partying while I try and figure out a ride when a man steps into me. "The fuck are you doing out here by yourself?" a familiar tone rumbles over me.

My gaze snaps up to Viper, and I can't keep the stupid grin off my face. "You don't think I can handle myself?"

His gaze narrows on mine, studying my eyes as though trying to commit them to memory. "How much have you had to drink?"

“Enough to know that standing in front of you isn’t supposed to be good for my health.”

“Shit,” he says, pressing his lips into a hard line. “How are you getting home?”

Flipping my phone around, I show him my screen, midway through trying to book an Uber. “Working on it,” I tell him, just as another angry text from Crew appears on my phone. I grit my teeth, and before I can pull my hand away, Viper takes the phone and opens the string of notifications.

Crew - Fuck your girls’ night. Come to my place.

Crew - The fuck, Ky? You ignoring me?

Crew - Where the fuck are you?

Crew - Missed call.

Crew - Missed call.

Crew - Answer my fucking calls. Where are you?

Crew - We fucking talked about this last night. Call me.

Crew - Are you fucking kidding me? Is this all because of the bullshit that happened at the shop today? You’re all pissy because I don’t want you fucking every guy with a pulse? No girl of mine is going to whore herself out, Ky. You’re mine. That sweet little cunt belongs to me.

Crew - Missed call.

Crew - It’s past two in the fucking morning. Why the fuck aren’t you home yet?

That last one grates on my nerves. How the hell does he know I'm not home, and judging by the look in Viper's eyes, he's wondering the same damn thing. He shakes his head and exits out of my notifications before locking my phone and stepping around me, sliding it into the back pocket of my jeans. "Come on, I'm taking you home."

I scoff. "You and I both know that's not a good idea."

"Kyah, you're fucking drunk. I'm not about to take you home and fuck you blind when you can't even walk in a straight line," he says. "That's Crew's specialty. Not mine."

"Huh?" I say, my brows furrowed. I start shaking my head, not liking where this is going. I mean, I know I might have let it slip that something happened between me and Crew, but I don't like the insinuation that he took advantage of me. "What are you talking about?"

"Last night, Ky. You got drunk at that dive bar across the street from your apartment and let him touch what's mine, and the second you turned your back and walked out with that other asshole, he couldn't fucking wait to brag about it."

Unease pounds through my veins. "I'm not yours, Viper," I say, needing to throw that out there, despite knowing it's landing on deaf ears. "But you're wrong. Crew wouldn't do that to me. Now, I get those texts don't look great, but that's not really who he is. What happened between us is none of your damn business."

“Exactly, it’s none of my fucking business, so why the fuck did he feel the need to tell me all about the way you tasted on his tongue?” Viper just stares at me, giving me a second to process, and the longer he waits, the quicker I start to realize that Crew would do exactly what Viper’s accusing him of.

Crew is brutal and cruel to everyone but me, so why the hell wouldn’t he try to weaponize what we did, especially if he thinks it could give him an edge over Viper? Or at the least, use it to get under his skin. Fucking me is the perfect knife through Viper’s back, and Crew couldn’t wait to be the one to get to do it. Though, Viper only cares because he wants to own me, not because the thought of being with me like that makes his heart race.

It’s not as though I care if Viper knows I slept with Crew, but I thought it meant something, that it was a step in the right direction for us, even though it terrified me. What I didn’t expect was that I could have just been a notch on Crew’s belt.

It felt like so much more.

Has he been playing me this whole time?

There’s got to be more to this, or at least some sort of explanation as to why he would possibly think I’d be okay with him using our sex life as a bragging tool against Viper. I mean, I completely get why he did it, but surely he knows me well enough to know that I wouldn’t be down with it. Either way, the betrayal stings.

If I knew he was going to be like this, knew he was going to look at me like a possession he has the right to make demands

from or use what we did as a weapon to hurt other people, bragging about it like it was some kind of bet, I never would have put myself in that position, never would have opened myself up to him like that.

Hell, the way he was acting in the shop today, he's never treated me like that before. And now these texts? What the fuck is that about?

I just don't get it, there have been plenty of times where we've screwed around, where I've dropped to my knees for him and taken him right to the back of my throat, and he never once said a word about it. So why now? Why ruin it now that things have finally started to shift?

Fuck. I never knew that sleeping with Crew was going to be something I would regret.

Viper clenches his jaw, stepping closer into me so that his big body presses in against mine. "When the hell are you going to realize that you have no fucking idea who Crew Ledger really is?"

I swallow hard, my mood plummeting, everything I thought I knew about him now being brought into question. "I mean, I knew he was an asshole, but he's never been one to me," I say, still feeling the need to defend him. After all, Crew has been one of my closest friends for six years. Surely that's supposed to mean something.

Viper shakes his head, looking at me as though I were some kind of lost puppy he's been left to deal with, and I fucking

hate it. “Come on, Ky,” he says, his hands slipping into mine, his grip almost bruising. “I’m taking you home.”

Letting out a heavy sigh, I let Viper pull me along, and before I know it, I’m straddling the back of his bike with my head a mess of emotions. Part of me is still riding the high of this new excitement brimming with Alex, while the other part crashes through the lows, the idea of Crew’s betrayal tearing me to pieces.

But then Viper goes and kicks over the engine of his Harley Davidson, and as the vibrations rock right through my core, suddenly there’s only one thing on my mind. “Oh God,” I grumble, my arms locking around Viper’s waist as I plaster myself to his back. “When I throw myself at you later and beg you to fuck me on the back of this thing, promise me you’ll be the perfect gentleman.”

I feel Viper’s laugh rumble through his decorated chest. “Cross my heart and hope to die,” he tells me, amusement dancing in his deep tone. “Now hold on, baby. Let me take you for a ride.”

REID



The deep rumble of a motorcycle echoes through the empty street as I gaze out Kyah's bedroom window, finding her on the back of some asshole's bike. It's almost two thirty in the morning, way past her bedtime, but damn it, she looks so fucking good on the back of that bike that I might even forgive her for keeping me waiting like this.

Her arms drape over the rider and I grit my teeth, watching as the asshole climbs off the bike and offers her his hand. She takes it greedily, looking up at him as though he were her whole world, and soon enough, she's going to look at me like that.

I can't fucking wait.

Kyah climbs off the bike and steps right into the guy, her hand pressed against his chest, and I hate that I can't hear a damn word they're saying. She's fucking dazzling, and I know

if she were looking up at me like that, I wouldn't be able to resist a damn thing she wanted. Hell, if she asked to strap on a fucking ten-inch monster cock and peg me, I'd be straight on my knees telling her which drawer I keep the lube in. But fuck, if she wanted to go in dry ... shit. I don't know about that. Ahhh, who am I kidding? I'd still do it with tears in my eyes, only for her though.

Fuck. Ending her life is going to be harder than I thought.

These past few weeks, I've imagined every possible way I could end her life and how good it would feel, and damn it, it would, but the thought of doing it so soon ... shit. I can't bring myself to want to. There's still so much I have to learn about this woman, so much I want to explore, and what really fucks with my head is that for the first time since I started playing this messed-up little game, I can't see the ending in sight.

It's always been so straightforward. I find a woman, I learn about her, I fuck her a few times, mess with her head a little, and then finish it. It usually lasts no more than two weeks. But with Kyah, I'm five weeks in already. I'm taking my time, really making it count, and while the thought of dragging a blade across her throat excites me, it also chills me to the bone.

I'm not ready for this one to end, not yet.

Kyah pushes up on her tiptoes, her hand sliding up higher on the guy's chest before whispering something in his ear. I can read his body language from all the way up here, and there's no mistaking it; this guy wants to fuck her. He wants to take

what's mine, and judging by the way she's looking at him, she might just let him.

In a flash, the guy curls his big arm around her waist and throws her up against the wall of the apartment, pinning her with his body. It fucking grates on my nerves that from Kyah's bedroom window, I can only partially see them, but I see enough to know that despite the way Kyah is openly begging him to make a move, he's resisting.

Maybe this guy knows what's good for him after all. It'd be a shame to have to end his life too, though there's no denying how immensely I'd enjoy it. Probably won't make me hard in the same way it does when I end a woman's life, but there's no denying I'd definitely walk away from it rocking a semi.

He says something to her, whispering directly into her ear, and she shivers, anticipation clearly buzzing through her body. She wants it rough. She wants this guy to grab her and make her scream, but then he's gone, leaving her panting against the wall as he climbs back onto his bike.

She watches as he straddles it, her face falling, and fuck, I don't know whether I want to kill him for thinking about touching her or kill him for leaving her all worked up like that. What kind of red-blooded man leaves a woman wanting, especially a woman like Kyah? Fucking pig. I'll be more than happy to teach him a lesson.

He says something else to her before putting his bike back in gear and finally taking off, leaving Kyah all alone on the street. She walks out into the middle of the street, looking out

after the guy before flipping him the bird. “Yeah, fuck you too, Viper,” she calls after him. “You wouldn’t be able to find my clit even if I smacked you in the face with it.”

A smirk settles across my face. She’s such a fucking fireball. I can’t wait until it’s me she’s screaming at like that. The only difference is, I wouldn’t dare leave her all worked up. Hell no, I’d rather have her screaming at me while my head was buried between her pretty thighs.

Realizing her biker friend isn’t about to turn around and give her what she wants, Kyah gives up and turns to face the building, muttering to herself as she makes her way toward the door. She’s hidden beneath the small shelter that covers the main entrance of her building, but I can picture her so clearly fumbling over the small buttons on the keypad as she hashes in the code—3821.

She disappears completely, and I can only assume she found the right numbers. Realizing she’s on her way up to me, I shuffle across her small room and slip inside her closet, leaving the door cracked just an inch to give me the perfect view of her.

I wait only a minute before hearing her key in the lock. Her apartment is dead quiet and every slight noise she makes sounds like it’s made with a megaphone. She slams her door behind her and takes a moment to bolt all the locks, and judging by the sounds coming out of her, she’s wasted.

Kyah sings to herself, sounding like a drowned rat, and I find it oddly soothing, like something I’d happily wake up to each

morning.

She shuffles through her apartment, scuffing her feet as she goes, her bag and keys crashing against a hard surface. The singing stops as she bolts for the bathroom while muttering about Viper being a little bitch with a useless cock.

Frustrated grunts come from the bathroom, and before I know it, she's half naked, striding into her bedroom with nothing but her phone in her hand. My gaze immediately lingers on her body, and I'm thankful when she bypasses the light, striding through her room in the dark.

It's an overcast night, clouds filling the Brooklyn sky, leaving only a dull glow of moonlight to pour through her bedroom window. I see enough though, barely a silhouette, but it's more than what I need for tonight.

Kyah scrambles into bed, tossing and turning for a moment, and over all the nights I've watched her, she's never seemed so frustrated. Something's bothering her, and I can't fucking stand that I don't know what it is. Surely this can't just be because that asshole refused to fuck her. No, this has got to be something more.

The tossing continues and then finally, a frustrated groan tears from deep in her throat and she scrambles for her phone. Swiping her thumb across the screen, it lights up her face, and my dick hardens when I'm able to see the hard peaks of her nipples through her thin tank.

Reaching down, I fist my cock, giving a hard squeeze. I'm already so worked up, but I don't dare take my eyes off her as

she types out a text, and then, biting her bottom lip, she hesitates. A moment passes, and my hands itch to pull out my burner phone to see what she's written, but before I get a chance to even consider it, a fucking gorgeous smile tears across her face and she hits send.

Kyah laughs to herself, placing her phone back on her bedside table, and then in a moment of pure heaven, she reaches over the side of her bed and drags open her side drawer. She fumbles around inside and then pulls out a fucking huge silicone dildo.

My cock flinches in my hand, too fucking excited for its own good, and I watch, already panting as Kyah tears her flimsy tank over her head, her fingers rolling over her pert nipples. She scrambles onto her knees, her blonde, messy hair creating a halo around her head with the dull moonlight streaming through the window.

She groans, and I'm completely captivated with pre-cum already beading at the top of my cock. I've never felt a rush like this in my life. I need her to hurry up, to show me exactly how she likes to fuck herself, to hear what she sounds like as she comes. But on the other hand, I want her to take her time, for this to last all night. Judging by the frustration in her groans, this is going to be a quick one tonight, and if it is, I'm going to be ready, right there, coming along with her.

Kyah frees herself of her panties, and despite her not even having started, I find myself inhaling deeper, desperate to smell her scent in the air. My grip tightens around the base of

my cock, and as she pushes up higher on her knees, completely naked, I watch as she continues to caress her nipple, softly groaning and tilting her head back.

Her other hand trails down her body, and she jolts as her fingers skim over her clit, moaning with pure satisfaction. She does it again, starting to rub tiny circles over her needy clit, and I can tell that she's trying to take her time, wanting this to last, but she's too worked up and her fingers quickly dive a little deeper, pushing up inside her cunt.

I groan before catching myself, cutting off the sound before she hears me, my fists working furiously up and down my cock, imagining just how good it'd feel inside her.

Kyah rides her fingers, her thumb working her clit, but it's not enough for her, and she quickly pulls out and reaches for the monster cock laying beside her knee. Her other hand moves down her body, continuing to work her clit as she lifts the dildo to her lips, opening wide and lubing it up with her saliva before finally reaching between her legs.

She props the dildo on the bed and adjusts herself over it, and the huge tip barely penetrates her entrance at first, and then as she rolls her fingers over her clit, she lowers herself down, those sweet walls stretching wide as she groans with blissful satisfaction.

“Ahhhh fuck,” Kyah moans, taking it so fucking slowly. Inch by inch. Deeper and deeper.

Holy fuck.

My knee starts to shake, and I grip my tip, willing myself not to come just yet.

Fuck, she's so gorgeous, and as I take a deep breath, I can finally smell her, so fucking sweet. It's the best kind of torture I've ever experienced, and then she drops right down, taking the monster cock until she bottoms out. "OH GOD," she cries before slowly coming back up, the dildo soaking in her arousal.

Her fingers move over her clit like lightning, working herself just how I wish I could, and as her sweet cunt adjusts to the large intrusion, she finally starts to move. She fucks the dildo hard, taking it deep with long, forceful thrusts, one hand gripping her headboard just to keep herself balanced.

It's intoxicating, and I work myself right along with her, matching her fast thrusts and squeezing hard as I grit my teeth.

She's fucking perfect, so damn beautiful. I've never seen anyone like her. I need to touch her, need to taste her, but she's not ready. Soon though. So fucking soon.

Kyah cries out again, and when her thighs start to shake, she throws herself back on the mattress, her legs spread wide, giving me the perfect view of her soaking pussy as she reaches through her legs and grips the dildo. I can't tear my eyes off her, watching the way her cunt stretches around the thick cock and as she throws her head back, her fingers furiously rubbing her clit. I push the closet door open, not wanting to obstruct my view of her a second longer.

My cock is throbbing, the hard angry veins pulsing as my balls tighten. I'm so fucking desperate for a release, but I hold on to it, determined to come with her.

Kyah pants loudly, barely able to catch her breath, and if it weren't for her groans and desperation, she would have heard the way my fist moves up and down my cock or the subtle grunts tearing from the back of my throat.

I inch closer through the darkness, needing to see the way her arousal glistens on the dildo, and fuck me, it's everything. She pushes it deeper, taking long forceful thrusts, and as she clenches her eyes, her head tips back, and I know this is it.

"FUUUUCCCCCKK," she groans, coming so goddamn hard I can see the way her pussy shudders, clenching around the thick dildo, but she doesn't stop thrusting, doesn't stop rolling her fingers over her clit as she rides out the high, and as I watch the way she falls apart, her scent so thick in the air, I come hard, blowing my load right across her fucking bedroom, my hips jolting forward.

My whole body feels paralyzed as the hot spurts of cum shoot out of me, and God dammit, I've never come so hard, and judging by the way Kyah cries out into the night, she's right there with me.

Her high finally starts to ease, and she slows her movements, panting so fucking heavily she doesn't even hear as I tuck myself back into my pants and inch away from the foot of her bed, keeping myself hidden in the darkness.

Kyah takes shaky breaths, her fingers falling away from her clit, and as she slowly pulls the dildo out of her sweet pussy, she cringes, and I can only imagine just how sore she is as she tosses the glistening dildo across her bed. The overwhelming need to ease her pain blasts through my veins, desperately wanting to crawl into her bed and part those pretty thighs, gently pushing my fingers inside of her and massaging her sore walls until she's coming all over again, my tongue leisurely roaming over her pretty clit. But instead, all I can do is stare at the used dildo.

Kyah instantly crashes against her pillow, grabbing her blankets and pulling them right up over her shoulder, and I'm sure had she not been drinking so much tonight, she'd be more than aware of me standing in the shadows. But tonight, I'm thankful that she's not because if she were, I wouldn't be able to creep forward and reach across her bed.

My hand closes around the base of the dildo, lifting it to my lips, and without even a moment of hesitation, I open wide, lapping up every drop of her arousal and tasting just how fucking sweet she is.

My knees buckle, and as I place the dildo exactly where she'd put it, I drop down, catching myself at the base of her bed, being careful not to wake her, knowing without a doubt that Kyah Bailey is about to change the fucking game.

Soon, Kyah, my sweet little devil. So fucking soon.

KYAH



My eyes spring open as a loud banging booms through my apartment, and I cringe, the morning sunlight streaming through my bedroom window. My head immediately starts to pound, and I instantly regret my decision to try and keep up with Nat last night.

What the hell was I thinking? I know better than that. Nat is a beast when it comes to holding her liquor. On the other hand, I like to think I can handle it, but in reality, I'm the biggest lightweight to ever walk the planet.

Dragging my hand over my face, I try to adjust to the bright morning, but let's face it, it's no use. Nothing but a screaming orgasm is going to help this hangover. Though the one I had last night was pretty fucking good. Hell, I still feel my legs shaking.

That was intense. I don't usually use the big boy, but when my hand curled around the base and I pulled it out, I couldn't resist giving it a go. I had to take it slow at first. I wasn't sure it would really fit, but the tequila and the vibration of Viper's bike under my pussy really gave me the extra encouragement I needed. Then once I was comfortable and I'd adjusted, there was no stopping me. Hell, I don't think I can go back to using my other ones now. It's a sad day in hell for the rest of my collection. I'll have to host a wake for them. I could make miniature caskets and then send them out in a blaze of glory.

A soft beep fills my room, and I groan, rolling over to find my phone, and as I scoop it up, I see a new notification from Alex. My stomach sinks.

"Oh no," I mutter to myself, dread filling my veins.

What the hell did I do?

As I unlock my phone and open the next text from Alex, I mentally prepare myself, trying to go over everything that happened last night and hoping like hell I didn't throw myself at him and embarrass the shit out of myself. But come to think about it, maybe it was Viper I was throwing myself at.

Shit. This calls for damage control.

Ignoring the thousand new texts from Crew, I open the single one from Alex.

Alex - Open the fucking door, Mace.

What the fuck?

My gaze scans over the message just as the same loud banging sounds through the apartment again, and I fly up in bed, my eyes wide with horror. My blanket falls to my waist and I quickly realize I'm still butt-naked.

What the hell did I say to this guy to deserve an early morning wake-up call in the form of loud banging? Perhaps I did try and throw myself at him after his declaration in the alleyway not to touch me until I'd worked out what I wanted.

Fucking tequila. Every time I have even a sip, it's as though my body just decides to be a reckless asshole with no concern for my health or safety. Hell, last time Crew poured tequila down my throat, I let him screw me all night, and look how that turned out. I'm just glad Viper had the decency to keep his hands off me, though I'm almost certain I offered to suck his dick in the middle of the street.

The banging at the door sounds again, and I cringe, my gaze falling back to Alex's message only to realize there's a message above, but not the one I remember sending last. No, this is a brand-new text from me, one sent at precisely two thirty-eight this morning.

Dread fills my veins, and I scan over the message, my heart racing faster with every passing second.

Kyah - You're right. I thought about fucking you all day. Thought about your tongue working my clit. Your fingers pushing deep inside of me. How it would feel riding your

cock, and how my walls would squeeze you so damn tight you wouldn't be able to walk the next day. I want you, Mr. Parkour, but you don't get to touch any of this. I'm about to fuck myself. I'm going to take myself so fucking deep, and when it's too much for me to handle, when I come so hard I pass out, I'm not going to scream your name.

Oh no. Tell me I didn't.

Ding!

Shit.

A new message pops up below his last, and my hands shake as my gaze drops, reading over his latest message.

Alex - Two fucking seconds before I kick this fucking door down. I know you're awake, Mace. I can see you've read my text.

“Fuck,” I mutter, throwing myself to my feet and grabbing the throw blanket off the end of my bed and pulling it around my naked body, doing a shitty job at trying to cover up. My new favorite friend sits at the end of my bed right where I left it, and I mentally battle with myself, wondering if I can spare an extra second to kick it under my bed or risk Alex coming right through here and seeing what I got up to last night.

“ONE,” I hear called through the door.

Shit. My heart races just a little bit faster, my hands shaking with a strange mix of nervous anticipation and excitement, not knowing what I will get with this intriguing stranger. Fuck the monster dildo. I don't have time. I'm going to have to risk it.

“TWO.”

Fuck.

“Hold your horses,” I call through the small apartment, noticing something wet on my bedroom floor, but not having a second to stop and see what it is. I hurry out of my room, listening to the heavy thumping coming from my door, and I scramble, hoping like fuck I can open it before Alex pisses off our neighbors.

Hastily unlocking the dead bolt, I turn the main lock and then finally grip the handle before yanking the door open to find Alex in nothing but a pair of workout shorts, a sheer layer of sweat coating his defined body as though he's just spent the morning working out his frustrations on the street instead of working them out on my body.

I barely get the door open before Alex barges in, his strong arm scooping around my waist as he whips us both around, somehow slamming the door in the process. My back flattens against the closed door, and Alex instantly crowds me, his forehead tipped against mine as he breathes heavily, his eyes closed. “Fuck me,” he mutters, the darkness in his tone instantly making me wet as my fingers splay across his strong chest. “Tell me you're not naked under this.”

A wicked grin stretches across my face, and without hesitation I release my grip on the throw blanket, letting it fall to the ground, parts of it getting caught between our bodies.

Alex groans, his fingers going straight to my waist, holding me so fucking tight as I feel him harden beneath his workout shorts, and good god, this man could rival the monster cock that's currently chilling out on my bed.

“Do you have any fucking idea how it feels to listen to you come through the walls and not hear my name on your fucking lips?” he growls, looking as though he could crumble.

“Probably about the same as you slamming me up against a brick wall and putting your hands all over me but not giving me what I want.”

He clenches his jaw. “I won't touch you,” he rumbles. “Not until you know what the fuck you want.”

“Sounds like a *you* problem,” I murmur, placing my hand over his on my waist and dragging it up my body, letting him touch me wherever the hell he wants, his fingers skimming over the curve of my breast.

“*You're* a me problem Kyah,” he tells me, his fingers pulling away to ball into a fist, forcing himself not to touch me a second longer. “I can't get you out of my fucking head.”

Lifting my chin, I meet his gaze, my tongue rolling over my bottom lip. I lower my voice, barely a subtle whisper, but enough to get my point across. “So what do you plan on doing about it?” I murmur, holding his gaze hostage.

“Get dressed, Mace,” he says. “I told you yesterday that I’m not playing your fucking games. I want you. I want to take you out, and after spending the night listening to you coming without me, I swore to myself that I would never let that happen again. I don’t give a shit about the list of people you refuse to date. I’m breaking your fucking rules, and there’s not a damn thing you can do about it.”

“Alex,” I warn.

“No. Get dressed, Kyah. We’re doing this.”

“It’s barely seven in the morning,” I remind him. “I don’t care what kind of rules you want to break, but you’re not getting me out of here anytime before ten. Plus, I smell like a bar. I need a shower—and a really cold one at that. Otherwise, you and I aren’t making it anywhere.”

Alex nods before dropping down and reaching for my blanket to cover me up, only he glances up at me, his face barely an inch from the apex of my thighs, and he groans low, taking me in. All I’d need to do is hook my knee over his shoulder and we’d both be goners. Neither one of us would be willing to say no at that point.

“Fucking hell,” he mutters, his darkening gaze sweeping over my body before coming back up to meet my heated stare. “You’re so fucking gorgeous, it hurts.”

“Touch me, Alex,” I murmur.

He visibly swallows. “Say my name again.”

“Alex,” I say, lowering my tone. “Touch me before I’m forced to take matters into my own hands again, and I swear, I won’t even picture you while I come.”

He clenches his jaw, his eyes now jet-black as he rises back to his feet. “When I finally touch you, it’ll be because the anticipation is physically killing you, when you can’t fucking breathe another second without feeling my hands on your hot-as-fuck body,” he growls. “You told me you want a man who’s going to respect you, to know when to push your limits and when to hold back. You said you’re not going to be an easy screw, and I don’t want you to be. I want to work for it, Kyah, because after I do, it’ll feel so much better.”

With that, Alex pulls the blanket up around my shoulders, fixing it back into position as I simply gape at him, not knowing how to handle his kind of raw intensity, but shit, I think I’m already addicted to it. One minute he’s hot and the next, he’s even hotter.

“Ten a.m.,” he says, holding my stare. “And you better be ready.” Then not a moment later, I’m standing right where he was, watching as he walks out of my door, leaving me wondering what the fuck just happened.

It takes almost an hour for me to wrap my head around everything before I realize this is really happening. I’ve somehow agreed to let Alex take me out this morning. Though perhaps agree isn’t the right word for it. I think it was more like shock and not knowing how to tell him no, but honestly, I don’t think I wanted to tell him no.

The idea of getting to know him intrigues me. There's something so dominant and yet sweet about him. He's not like the guys I'm used to dealing with. He knows what he wants and he's not afraid to go after it.

On the other hand, Crew has tiptoed around the topic for six years, stringing me along only to get what he wanted and then treat me like a possession. And Viper ... I have no idea what's happening with him, but he's insane if he thinks I'm ever going to end up with him. Though perhaps that's my fault for leading him on. It's not as though I do much to deter his advances. I think when it comes down to it, I kinda like Viper's attention. I like the security he could offer me, and when it comes to sex, I know we would be compatible, but as far as emotions run, that's about it. I don't think Viper is capable of falling in love, and despite not being ready for anything like that, I still hope that one day I can find that all-consuming, fireworks type of love. Crew and Viper ... I'm never going to get that with them.

Still having a few hours before Alex is due to screw with my head again, I find a sketchpad and start working on the design for Spider's chest, Viper's latest project, and quickly get lost in what I'm doing. Then all too soon, I'm looking up at the clock and realizing I'm almost late.

Shit. I bet a little tardiness wouldn't go down well with a guy like Alex. I bet he's the type to hand out kinky punishments. Though why the hell does that excite me so much? The idea of his hand closing around my throat, squeezing just a little ... goddamn. I've never had a man do that before and can't even

begin to understand why I would want to now, but I do. Only with him though.

I'd never trust Crew to do that, not now. I haven't spoken to him about his texts or the way he used that night together as a weapon against Viper, but he's broken my trust, and I really don't know how to feel about it.

Realizing I'm distracted again. I hurry off the couch and fly into the bathroom before quickly hurrying through a shower, and when I'm confident I don't smell like a bar, I turn off the taps and get my ass ready, wanting to put just a little extra effort in.

I don't think I've ever been on a morning date before. It's only ever been after-work hook ups and shitty cheap dinner dates that generally ended with an expectation that I'd put out, reminding me that most of the time, men are assholes.

After quickly drying and straightening my hair, I hurry through my makeup while keeping my eye on the time. Something tells me that Alex isn't going to be even a second late, and what's more, I don't want to be late for him.

Once I'm finally ready, I make my way to my front door with exactly a minute and a half to spare and as I wait impatiently, I pull my phone out and send off a quick text to Nat, making sure she made it home okay.

Kyah - Alive?

Nat - Hardly. My knees have never shook like that before. I'm just about home but haven't slept yet. I'll call you tonight and tell you all about it. But damn, that Sullivan! Holy shit! I think he just knocked Mark out of the top spot for best screw of the year.

I gape at my phone, my brows arched. Best screw of the year. Shit. Sullivan should be proud. Nat doesn't offer up titles like that to just anybody. He must have a magical tongue personally gifted to him by a raunchy sex demon found only in the deepest pits of hell. Though if that's the case, I sure hope I get to live out eternity with that demon. I mean, surely I'm going to hell anyway, so I hope I get to enjoy it.

Glancing up from my phone, I realize I have all of ten seconds left and I creep in closer to my door, leaning in to peek through the peephole, and the second it ticks over to ten a.m., I see Alex's door open. My mouth waters taking him in. He always looks so good and I can only imagine just how good he smells. He's like the perfect snack, and I can't wait to devour him, but then, I can't stop thinking about what he said—not touching me until he's worked for it, building the anticipation, and damn it, I think he's right because when he finally takes me, I know it's going to be explosive.

My hand curls around the doorknob, and just as Alex steps forward to knock, I open the door, pulling it wide so that we stand face to face, each of us appraising the other as though we both haven't got a damn clue how the hell this is supposed to go down. "Punctual," he states, a smirk playing on his lips.

“Arrogant,” I throw back.

His eyes glisten with silent laughter. “You’re confusing confidence with arrogance,” he tells me. “It doesn’t make me arrogant for knowing what the fuck I want.”

“And I’m assuming that’s me?”

“Damn straight it is,” he says. “Now, are we going to stand in the hallway all morning, or are you going to let me take you out?”

I laugh and step out into the hallway, pulling my door closed and making sure to lock up behind me. “I’m assuming I don’t have a choice in the matter, Mr. I Don’t Give A Shit About Your Rules.”

“I’m glad you’re finally learning,” he murmurs, placing his hand on my lower back and leading me toward the stairwell. We fall into easy conversation, and I find that the second sex is off the table and neither of us are trying to get the other on their knees, everything becomes so simple.

He’s a flirt with a cocky smile that makes my stomach do flip-flops, turning me into a giddy teenager who’s talking to her crush for the very first time, and I absolutely love it. But I’m not going to lie, when he throws me up against the wall and that dominant streak comes out to play, I love that too.

Alex is the perfect gentleman, offering me his arm as we make our way down the stairwell and holding the door open for me as we step out into the street. “I’m assuming you had a big night,” he asks.

“A little too big,” I admit as he leads me down the street. “My friend who I was meeting was already a few drinks deep when I got there, and I insisted that I try and catch up with her. But I should have known better. No one can catch up with Nat, especially when she’s on a roll.”

“She sounds like trouble.”

“She is. The best kind though,” I laugh, glancing up at him. “She’s intrigued by you.”

His brows furrow, and he glances down at me. “What’s that supposed to mean?” he asks. “You’ve been telling your friends about me?”

“Don’t get ahead of yourself. I didn’t paint you in a very good light,” I tease. “As far as Nat’s concerned, you’re my pushy neighbor who doesn’t like to take no for an answer.”

Alex smirks and curls his arm around my waist, pulling me into his side as he tips his head down toward me, his breath tickling my neck. “You’re telling me that you didn’t tell your best friend how your body shudders every time I touch you or how you whimper and your knees go weak when I pin you against the wall with a burning need pulsing through your body, so fucking desperate for more?”

I swallow hard, needing to clench my thighs as we continue walking down the street. “Don’t know what you’re talking about,” I say, my raspy tone giving me away.

Alex laughs, his grip tightening around my waist. “You’re a fucking terrible liar, Kyah.”

“Perhaps,” I say, that giddiness returning as a wide smile stretches across my face. “But I think you like that about me.”

“You’re damn fucking right, I do.”

We arrive at a small café after a short ten-minute walk, and by the time Alex is pulling out a chair for me, I already know that this guy is going to be important to me. He’s not going to be a quick screw that I’ll use for a good time, he’s going to be something so much more, I’m just not quite sure what yet.

He’s cocky and smart, charming and flirty, everything that makes my heart race, and the more time I spend with him, the more intense the anticipation builds. I’ve barely spent more than a handful of minutes with this guy so far, but already I’m starting to wonder if I was wrong about being a relationship kind of girl.

Alex makes me want something more, makes me want to explore something I’ve never explored before, and honestly, that scares the shit out of me, so much more than the thought of potentially starting something with either Crew or Viper.

My hands shake when I’m around him, and I turn into a nervous bundle of excitement. When his hand skims past my waist, I get goosebumps, and when his lips twist into that delicious cocky smile, I swear I could die right here in the middle of the busy Brooklyn café.

But this is new—too new—and when it comes down to it, I don’t know shit about this guy. He could be a serial killer for all I know. I can’t rush into it. I need to keep myself guarded while I try and figure out what the hell this burning insanity is

between us. But that doesn't mean we can't have fun while we're working it out.

KYAH



“I don’t think I know a damn thing about you,” I say as Alex leads me back toward our apartment complex, a strange disappointment firing through the pit of my stomach, realizing our breakfast date is almost over.

“There’s not really much to know,” he tells me, his hand resting in the back pocket of my jeans.

“I’ll be the judge of that,” I tell him. “Where’d you grow up?”

“Everywhere,” he says as we reach our building and he hashes in the passcode. “I was a bit of a troubled kid. My mom abandoned me at seven, and I jumped around foster homes until I enlisted with the Marines at eighteen.”

“Shit, that sounds rough,” I say as he holds the door open for me and waves me in, devastation weighing on my chest,

picturing Alex as a seven-year-old boy being abandoned by his mother. “I’m sorry you had to go through that. I never had a great relationship with my mother, but I couldn’t imagine how horrible it must have been to be abandoned at only seven.”

“It’s fine,” he murmurs. “It was a long time ago.”

“Have you seen her since then?”

“Nah, I was an angry kid and didn’t want anything to do with her, and by the time I was old enough to understand that perhaps there might have been a reason apart from the fact she just didn’t love me enough, it was already too late.”

My brows furrow, not following, and he’s quick to fill in the blanks. “She died a few years back, during my first tour,” he explains. “Drug overdose.”

“Shit. I’m sorry.”

“You don’t need to be sorry, Mace,” he says as we make our way up the stairs. “She was nothing to me. Just some stranger who birthed me and didn’t care enough about the son she brought into the world.”

“Yeah, I get that, but it doesn’t change the fact that it must have really sucked for you. Jumping from foster home to foster home couldn’t have been easy.”

“I don’t want you feeling sorry for me, Kyah. It was shit, and I had more than my fair share of run-ins with my foster parents, but I grew up and got over it. The military gave me the discipline I needed, and then I was able to make a life for

myself,” he tells me. “And considering it’s brought me right here to meet you, maybe it was all worth it.”

My cheeks flush like a goddamn teenage girl, and as I try to smother the ridiculous smile cutting across my face, we reach the landing on the third floor. “Has anybody ever told you that you’re a shameless flirt?” I ask, only his strong arm shoots out in front of me like a steel bar, stopping me in my tracks. “What’s—”

“I know you locked your door,” Alex says, his brows furrowed as he cuts me off.

My gaze shoots down the long hallway toward my apartment, and a sharp gasp tears from the back of my throat, finding my door hasn’t just been pushed open, but kicked in, breaking right through the locks. “What the hell?” I mutter, creeping toward my apartment, only Alex holds me back, his big hand curling around my elbow.

“Stay here,” he says, his whole body going rigid. “I’ll check it out.”

Not wanting to argue, I remain by my door as Alex slips inside my apartment, nervously peering in and hoping like hell whoever did this is already long gone. Hell, I’m just glad I wasn’t here when this asshole decided to break in. Who knows what they might have been looking for.

I track Alex across my apartment, watching as he moves around my living room and kitchen, checking inside my bathroom and then moving into my bedroom. I hear as he opens my closet and even drops down to look under my bed,

and when he's finally done, he strides back out of my bedroom. "It's clear," he calls out to me. "Whoever broke in is gone."

Relief surges through my body, and I creep into my apartment, immediately getting hit with a familiar cologne as I glance over the broken door, wondering how the hell I'm going to fix this. I don't know the first thing about hanging doors. Hell, I don't even know who I'm supposed to call, let alone where I'm supposed to get a new door from.

Moving into my living room, I glance around, making sure nothing is missing, and from what I can tell, everything is right where it was when I left, which means the asshole who stormed in here wasn't looking to raid my apartment, he was looking for me.

Anger bubbles through my veins, and I clench my jaw, knowing exactly who's responsible for this, and considering the slew of jealous texts and missed calls I've been dodging for the past fourteen hours, I think it's about time Crew and I have a little talk.

Alex walks right up to me, a smirk playing on his lips. "I don't think anything's missing," he says. "But I did find something in your room."

My brows furrow, and I look up at him, meeting his stare as fear begins pounding through my veins, my mind immediately taking me to the worst-case scenario. Crew is an asshole at the best of times, and he's never done anything to make me question him, but this new crazed version of him ... I don't

know what he's capable of, and to be completely honest, it scares the crap out of me.

I stare up at Alex with wide eyes, waiting for him to break the news, my heart pounding so hard I fear I could collapse, but then he pulls his hand out from behind his back, my giant dildo braced between his fingers as a starved smirk crosses his ruggedly handsome face. "Surely this doesn't fit, Mace."

Humiliation booms through me, and I lunge for the dildo, but Alex is way too fast, tearing it back out of my grasp. "Seriously, though. This has gotta be a joke, right?" he asks, springing up onto my couch as I barrel toward him, his hand held so high above his tall frame, I don't stand a chance in hell of getting it back.

Alex laughs as my cheeks flame, enjoying my humiliation. "This is not happening," I mutter, mentally scolding myself for not putting it away when I had the chance this morning.

Alex locks his other arm around my waist, holding me against his strong body. "Just tell me one thing, Mace," he murmurs, his voice deep and rumbling through his chest. "Is this what you used last night while you were thinking of me?"

I nod, tilting my head up, figuring there's no point in being embarrassed about it now. I might as well own it and use it to my advantage. "Uh-huh," I say, my eyes hooded as we stand on my shitty, cheap couch. "You should have seen how hard I fucked myself with it. Had to take it nice and slow at first. I wasn't sure if I could stretch that wide, but once my body adjusted, it felt too fucking good to stop."

Alex groans, his hand dropping to my ass and giving a firm squeeze as I feel him hardening through the front of his pants. “Show me.”

I shake my head, a wide grin stretching across my lips. “No chance in hell, Mr. I Won’t Touch You Until The Anticipation Is Killing You. You left me hanging yesterday and this morning, and now it’s your turn to walk out of here feeling the same throbbing ache.”

“Kyah,” he growls, his eyes flaming with red-hot desire.

“Take a cold shower,” I tell him, pulling out of his arms. “It’ll help.”

Alex groans and reluctantly gives in, jumping down from the couch before offering me his hand to help me down, not that I’m so precious that I couldn’t have jumped myself, but I kinda like the way he’s a gentleman. Once I’m firmly on my feet, he leans into me, pressing a soft kiss to my cheek, lingering for a moment too long and making me crave so much more.

When he finally pulls back, he holds my stare. “I’ll call a friend of mine. He’ll come fix your door,” he tells me before striding over to my broken door. Then with one quick move, his arm shoots up above the door frame, and before I know it, my giant dildo is suction cupped to the drywall, way too high for me to reach.

Alex turns back, grinning at me like the fucking devil, and as I shake my head, he slowly backs out of my apartment, leaving

me giddy, worked up, and grinning like a fucking idiot as the dildo gently sways above.



It takes a little over an hour for Alex's friend to show up with my new door, and I watch eagerly as the two men get to work. To my disappointment, they have the new door hung in less than twenty minutes, but the job isn't done without a few suggestive glances from Alex, each one getting me more worked up than the last. Especially considering the massive dildo that hangs above his head.

His friend refuses payment as he was apparently repaying Alex for a favor, and while I'm grateful that this bullshit hasn't left a dent in my wallet, I'm also apprehensive about the fact that I now owe Alex a favor in return. Though, something tells me that'll easily be repaid.

Crew hasn't stopped blowing up my phone and the minute Alex and his friend are out the door, so am I. I've had enough of this shit.

Pulling out my phone, I send off a quick text, ignoring the string of unread ones that flood through my phone.

Kyah - Where the hell are you?

Crew - High Voltage.

Anger burns through my body, and I storm out of my building, hitting the street and hightailing it to High Voltage. I don't know whether to be angry, confused, hurt, or betrayed. Maybe all of them. All I know is that I've never regretted being with Crew more.

I just don't get it. Everything was so cool between us before we had sex, but I guess what they say is true—sex changes everything. I guess I just wasn't expecting it. Especially after our talk at the bar. He seemed so chill with everything, he was down to keep waiting while knowing that I was still in my *wanna have fun* phase. We agreed, but at the shop yesterday morning, that whole plan went to shit.

Did something happen that I missed? Did I misunderstand his intentions? Or did he just assume that after spending the night rocking my world, I wouldn't be able to resist falling madly in love with him?

God. Sometimes men can be such idiots.

The walk to High Voltage only takes ten minutes, and before I know it, I'm gripping the door handle and throwing it open. "What in the ever-loving fuck is wrong with you, Crew Ledger?" I demand as the bell chimes above my head.

I storm around the reception area to find Crew sitting at his station, working on sketches, a bottle of whiskey open beside him. His head snaps up, and there's nothing but pure fury in his dark eyes. "The fuck did you just say?" he demands,

getting to his feet. “I’ve been calling you since last night, and you’ve ignored every single one of my fucking messages. Where the fuck have you been?”

Crew strides right into me, his eyes glassy and bloodshot, and I shove my hands against his chest, forcing him back a step. “Are you kidding me?” I snap, the anger raging through my body as I tear my phone out of my back pocket and bring up his messages. I start reciting them for him. “*Where the fuck are you? Answer me now. You better not be whoring yourself out. Missed call. Missed call. Missed call. Answer my fucking calls, Kyah. Where the fuck are you?* And that’s just the messages from this morning,” I spit. “I’m assuming you don’t need me to read through the bullshit I got last night?”

Crew snatches the phone out of my hand and tosses it across the shop, aiming for the chair in my station, but it slides right off and the screen smashes against the ground. “WHAT THE FUCK IS WRONG WITH YOU?” I roar, whipping around to grab my phone and check the damage, only Crew grabs my elbow and yanks me back toward him.

I stumble and fall against his chest, his grip bruising around my arm. “You belong to me,” Crew growls.

“The fuck I do,” I spit, ripping my arm free of his tight grip. “Do you hear yourself right now? We fucked. It was fun. But that’s it, and considering the way you’ve been behaving ever since, I guarantee that was the last time you’ll ever touch me. You have no fucking right to me. You don’t get to message me at all hours of the night, demanding I come over, and you sure

as fuck don't get to kick down my fucking door and welcome yourself into my apartment. We're over, Crew. Whatever the fuck you thought was going to happen between us is done. You've crossed a line."

Crew clenches his jaw, and in a flash of lightning, he rears back before striking forward, his fist cracking against my jaw. I fall back, crying out in agony as I crash into Crew's table with relentless momentum, my ribs instantly bruising against the sharp corner of the table as ink and equipment sprawl across the floor.

My face aches, and I grasp my cheek, almost certain my jaw is dislocated, and as I catch myself, stabilizing on my feet, I turn my horrified stare toward Crew, barely able to process what the fuck just happened.

He hit me. The one man who's supposed to love me, who's stood by my side since the day I stormed into High Voltage Ink at seventeen. The man who vowed that one day he'd be my forever. He broke my trust. Betrayed me, and now ... He laid his fucking hands on me.

Never again.

My hands shake as Crew gapes at me, unable to believe what he's done. "Ky," he breathes, looking down at his closed fist in shock. "I didn't mean ... I swear, Kyah. I didn't mean to hurt you. I'm sorry."

Crew inches toward me, and I flinch, backing up a step, hating the traitorous tears that well in my eyes. "Don't you dare come any closer," I warn, spitting through my clenched

jaw as the pain rocks through my face, but considering I'm able to talk, maybe it's not dislocated after all, just fucking sore.

“Kyah, please,” he says, staring at me in horror. “It was an accident. I'm sorry. I didn't mean to. I was just worked up, and you were saying shit and it ... it just happened. I love you. You have to believe that. You know me.”

“You don't fucking love me, Crew,” I spit, disgusted by the pathetic excuse of a man standing before me. “You want to own me. I'm nothing but a fucking possession to you, and letting you touch me, letting you fuck me ... I've never regretted anything more. So hear me now, Crew—we're done. You'll never fucking touch me again.”

And with that, I grab my smashed phone and storm out of High Voltage Ink, and as tears roll down my cheeks, I vow to myself that from here on out, Crew Ledger is dead to me.

REID



My hands coil into tight fists at my side as I watch Kyah storm out of High Voltage Ink, rage pounding through my veins like poison, infecting me from the inside out. The way she grips the side of her face, agony flashing in those bright blue eyes ... fuck.

I've always gotten off on seeing the woman I've toyed with screaming for her life, but there's something different about the way Kyah hurts. I don't like it, and it grates on my nerves that I don't understand why.

When I followed her here this afternoon, I expected a lot of things. I've seen the messages Crew sent her and watched as she gritted her teeth while ignoring his insistent calls. I expected him to get on his knees and grovel for forgiveness, that she would put him in his place and then coddle him like she always does, but instead, she stormed in there like the

vicious little devil she is and laid down the law. It was the most thrilling thing I've ever seen—until it wasn't.

When his fist cracked across her jaw, I saw red, and when she cried out loud enough for me to hear the agony in her tone from outside the shop, I've never wanted to kill someone more in my life.

I always knew Crew Ledger was a small man with his begging and incessant whining, but when it comes to Kyah, I didn't think he could take it this far. He knows he fucked up, but he doesn't realize how badly yet. He put his hands on what's mine, and for that, he will suffer the consequences.

There's no mistaking it, Crew Ledger is going to die.

He's a piece of shit and there's no doubt in my mind that Kyah has no fucking idea who she's been screwing with, because if she knew, if she had any fucking idea what kind of bullshit Crew was involved with, she wouldn't even be able to look him in the eye. She'd despise him and go out of her way just to see him locked up, even if it meant risking her life in the process.

It wasn't hard to figure out. Crew Ledger is a messy guy and leaves trails of breadcrumbs everywhere he goes. It was only a matter of putting the pieces together, and when you're as observant as I am, finding out people's dirty little secrets comes as natural as breathing. And Crew Ledger, he's about as bad as they come. But what's worse is the way he has everybody fooled, especially Kyah.

To be fair, it's not as though he's the mastermind behind the organization. No, that honor goes to his big brother, Mason Ledger, the number one organized crime boss in the state. He specializes in human trafficking. Crew, bless his cotton socks, resisted working for the bastard for quite some time, but desperate men do desperate things, and over the past year, Crew has taken to the family business like a duck to water.

Like I said, piece of shit.

But today, the family business is about to experience one hell of a setback.

I'm under no illusion. I know I'm no better than that asshole. My chosen career isn't exactly winning me any awards, but at least a woman knows what she's getting when she interacts with the man who sneaks through her bedroom window. Crew Ledger pretends he's a knight in shining armor, but then he does shit like beat his woman behind closed doors.

I mean sure, I might enjoy a little murder here and there, and it might get me off in a way sex never could, but at least I'm not Crew Ledger.

My gaze trails down the street, watching as Kyah disappears around the corner, and the second she's completely out of sight, I step out of the shadows, the rush of adrenaline pumping through my veins.

God, I love this.

The excitement pulses through me, and I have to keep myself from breaking into a sprint, using the short walk across

the street to figure out a game plan. I usually go into this with caution, never unprepared, always making sure I have the tools required to clean up after myself and keep my identity hidden. But Kyah's got me all fucked up.

I'm being reckless and rushing into this. I don't usually get off on killing men, and yet the image of Crew's fist cracking against Kyah's jaw spurs me on. Hell, just knowing what he and his brother have planned for her has me ready to slaughter him like fucking cattle.

No one touches what's mine.

I go through my options, figuring out how to do this while mentally mapping the security cameras inside the shop. There's one in each corner. I'm going to have to keep my head down, perhaps stage a break-in. It's not the first time I've had to do it. Like I said, it's reckless, but there's no stopping me now.

Reaching the sidewalk, I pull the sleeves of my black hoodie down over my hands before reaching for the door handle, being careful not to leave a single fingerprint behind. I've always been cautious with my kills, making sure the feds can't link this shit back to me, and I'm not about to start making their job easier now.

Shoving past the door, it opens wide, and the bell chimes through the small shop.

"We're closed," Crew slurs from somewhere in the back.

Not responding, I keep my head down and continue through the shop as my gaze shoots from left to right to quickly figure out a game plan. It's gonna be messy, but the good ones always are.

Hearing that I haven't left, Crew stands, whipping around with his glassy stare. "I said we're closed," he spits, wobbling on his feet, the bottle of whiskey almost empty on his table.

A grin splits my face. This is going to be better than I anticipated.

Striding past Big Jim's station, I swipe everything off his table and watch as ink bottles scatter and shatter across the room, saturating the floor with vibrant colors.

"The fuck do you think you're doing?" Crew growls, storming toward me as I casually stride around Big Jim's station, not daring to venture over to Kyah's. After all, this is going to be messy, and I couldn't bear the thought of leaving something like this for her to clean up.

Crew reaches for me, but I quickly sidestep, almost laughing in his face over how easy it is. Though I'm sure it has everything to do with the whiskey making its way through his bloodstream. Any other day, he'd be a good match. Hell, he might even make me sweat for a minute, but not today. He's sloppy. Wasted. It's pathetic.

Leaning my ass against Big Jim's tattooing chair, I evade Crew again. It's a child's game of cat and mouse at this point, and it only pisses him off as he catches himself against the table.

My covered hand hovers over the tattoo gun left on the small tray table beside me, and catching the movement, Crew narrows his gaze, finally realizing he has a reason to be suspicious. “I ... I know you,” he says, visibly swallowing, and though he’s spoken the words and made the statement, I see he’s still trying to figure out where the fuck he knows me from. But considering the shop front has a floor-to-ceiling window for anyone to look into, I don’t have time to wait for him to figure it out. I need to make this fast.

“I was willing to let you live, Crew,” I say, my hand still hovering over the tattoo gun. “But you made one big mistake.”

“The fuck are you talking about?” he grunts, clutching the table to stay upright.

I laugh, getting back to my feet and taking the tattoo gun with me. I walk right up to him, nearly a head taller, and honestly, it surprises me. He seemed so much bigger from a distance. “Let me let you in on a little secret,” I whisper, watching his brows furrow and his lips twist. “You put your hands on my girl, and because of that, I’m going to kill you, but that’s not the exciting part—” I pause, smirking as his gaze whips toward me, and honestly, I have no idea if it’s because I mentioned he touched my girl or because I told him I’m going to kill him. “Once I’m done with you, I’m going to end her life too. Not tonight. Maybe not tomorrow, but soon, and when I do, she’s gonna beg for it.”

Crew clenches his jaw. “If you fucking touch her—”

“You mean like you did?” I question, purring in his ear, focusing on the rapid beating of his pulse at the base of his throat. “Does it make you feel big bruising her face? Hearing her cry out in agony? What about the way she looked at you? The betrayal in her eyes? The fear? Did it get your cock hard like it does for me?”

The anger explodes, venomous rage flashing in his dark stare, and he lunges for me again, only this time, I let him. Crew grabs me by the front of my hoodie, throwing me back down on Big Jim’s chair as he comes down over me, hovering with his face barely inches from mine. “If you lay a fucking hand on her, I’m gonna kill you.”

My excitement rages like a wild storm brewing beneath the surface, and as I meet Crew’s gaze, all I can do is smile. “Ooooh, I think it’s a little too late for that,” I laugh, taking in the way his whole body seems to shake. “Do you have any idea how fucking pretty she is when she comes? How she clenches her eyes and screams out? How sweet she tastes? Fuck. I think I’ll head back to her place tonight.”

Rage burns through his gaze, and I see the very second he makes the decision to end my life, but it’s too little too late for him. I hold the tattoo gun in a tight fist, so fucking sure and precise with my movement as my hand snaps out and creates the perfect arc. The tip of the gun plunges deep into the base of Crew’s throat, and my fucking cock springs to life.

Good fucking God. I almost come in my pants, my whole body shuddering with intense satisfaction. I try to hold onto it,

but I don't think I can, and when I yank the tattoo gun back out and blood spurts from Crew's carotid artery, splattering across my chest and mixing with the spilled ink on the floor, I can't take it a second longer.

I explode, coming in my pants like a fucking teenager. My hips jolt with the intense release, and as Crew holds my gaze, his blood quickly soaking me, all I can do is stare back at him.

Holy fuck. I didn't even get to stroke myself before coming. Not even a squeeze. Sometimes I like to play around first, you know, really draw it out, edge myself just a little before finally allowing myself to come, but fuck. Today, my cock had a brain of his own.

One second, I could have sworn I was still getting hard, and the next ... shit.

I'm a grown-ass man, and I just jizzed in my fucking pants.

A pained grunt comes from Crew above me, and I force myself to focus, not wanting to miss a second of this. Life quickly fades from his eyes, and as he collapses to the ground like a heavy sack of shit, I'm left paralyzed in Big Jim's chair, the intensity of the kill still shooting through my veins.

All I can do is breathe, replaying the moment over and over in my head, and when I finally regain the ability to move and think clearly, I feel more energized than ever before. I spring up from Big Jim's chair, gazing down at Crew's lifeless body, absolutely stunned.

I've always been a lady killer. Plain and simple. That's what's gotten me off, but the rush of killing Crew Ledger in the name of protecting Kyah ... fuck. I've never felt so liberated or alive. And what's more, that need to end Kyah's life has diminished just a little bit more.

I can't explain it. This girl is fucking with my head. But for the first time, I don't know if I'm going to be able to finish this. Despite knowing how good it's going to feel, I don't know if I can handle the idea of never seeing her again, never being able to breathe her in or taste her sweetness.

Fuck. What is Kyah doing to me?

All I know is that right now, everything is shifting. There's a slight hope building in my chest, slowly growing and telling me that if I were to sate my need to kill by taking out the assholes who mean Kyah harm, then perhaps I could keep her forever. Maybe I won't need to end her life.

Then with that murderous need within me finally satisfied, I think about my next steps. There's blood all over me, coated from my forehead down the front of my clothes, and walking out the front door like this without drawing attention is never going to happen.

I need to play it smart.

Then with the afternoon sun still streaming through the front window of High Voltage Ink, I go about my business, trashing the shop. Pushing everything on the counter onto the floor. Upending chairs and smashing the vials of ink.

With any luck, it's going to look like a robbery gone bad.

My hood shields me from the cameras as I work, and I cringe knowing I got way too carried away before I sank that tattoo gun into the side of Crew's throat. There's a possibility my face was captured on the security cameras, and I'm going to have to check that out, but first, I need to scrub this place clean of fingerprints.

I've had my sleeves down over my hands the whole time, but I'm not risking it. No chance in hell.

Grabbing a few alcohol wipes, I get busy wiping over the handle of the tattoo gun and anywhere I've touched. Then despite knowing that one look in the camera feed will show that this was anything but a random robbery gone wrong, it's enough to throw the cops off course and leave them scratching their heads. At least for a little while. Besides, the feds know damn well who Crew Ledger is and exactly which honey pots he's got his fingers in. It won't take them long to make assumptions and connect this back to his brother.

As for me, I'll be as free as a bird to continue watching over Kyah.

And with that, I push out the back door of High Voltage Ink, keeping my head down as a wicked grin stretches across my face.

God, that felt too fucking good, and even if I got caught, that rush was more than worth it, even now being able to feel my cum spreading through my pants. I give it five shiny fucking stars. Definitely recommend.

KYAH



I suck in a sharp hiss of pain as my fingers poke my bruised jaw, doing what I can to try and cover up Crew's handiwork with concealer.

I've been up all night just staring at my ceiling, trying to convince myself not to quit my job just so I can avoid having to see him ever again. I still can't believe it. I don't know whether to focus on the shock or the betrayal, but most of all, I'm trying not to think about the way he's going to grovel the second I walk into the shop.

No matter how I look at this, it's going to suck. Hell, I still can't believe it happened. Crew was supposed to be the one person who'd never hurt me, and now ... I have no idea what he's supposed to be to me. Dead sounds right though.

Today is going to be hell. He's kidding himself if he thinks I'm going to just roll over and forget it ever happened. I'm not

usually very chatty about my personal life, but soon enough, Big Jim is going to figure out something happened between us. If he can't get answers out of Crew by force, he's bound to see for himself when he goes over the security feed, and when that happens, all hell is going to break loose for Crew. He's going to want to run fast. Hell, and that's just Big Jim. I can only imagine what will happen once Viper finds out, and he will. Viper makes it his business to know this kind of shit, that's how he's kept his position for so long. He's dangerous like that.

Staring at my face in my bathroom mirror, I decide it's good enough to face the day. I'm not one to go cheap when it comes to makeup, so it should last me until I'm standing in this same spot twelve hours from now. At least, I hope. I don't think I can handle Big Jim finding out just yet. He'll give me that disapproving father look and demand answers, and I'm almost certain the moment he does, I'll burst into tears.

After grabbing my phone, keys, and wallet, I spy the monster dildo hanging above my front door like a fucking mistletoe and can't wipe the grin off my face as I grab the door handle and yank it open. I come to an abrupt stop, finding Alex hovering in his open doorway, wearing nothing but a pair of workout shorts with that deliciously toned torso on display. I swear, this guy must spend every spare minute of his life working out.

"Morning," he purrs, that thick, rich tone filling the narrow hallway as I bite my lip and turn my back, pulling my door closed behind me.

“Morning to you too,” I murmur, glancing back over my shoulder and seeing the way his gaze roams over my body, stopping at my ass with a deep hunger. His eyes lazily trail back up until they meet mine, and the smirk resting across his lips is enough to make my knees weak. “Is there something I can help you with?”

Alex’s grin widens, his eyes expressing everything he’s not saying out loud. Though he doesn’t need to voice his comment, I hear it loud and clear.

Finally getting the door locked, I turn around, stepping into him, barely able to refrain from resting my hand against his bare chest. “You know,” I start, tilting my chin and gazing up at him, lowering my voice to a flirty whisper. “There seems to be a monster-sized dildo suction cupped to the wall above my door, and something tells me you’re not about to help me get it down any time soon. But here’s the problem. You know, that just so happens to be my favorite one, and I was just curious what you expect a girl to do when she’s lying in bed getting all hot and heavy and her new favorite toy is so far out of reach?”

Alex groans low, his eyes flaming like molten lava, and he inches away from me as though he doesn’t trust himself not to toss me over his shoulder, barge through my door, and show me just how much I don’t need the mistletoe monster cock dangling from my wall.

He drags a hand down his face, visibly needing a moment to compose himself, especially now that there’s a very large bulge appearing in the front of his workout shorts. God, I

wonder if he's the type to let me drop to my knees and take him in my mouth right here in the middle of the hallway. "Don't you need to be getting to work?" he questions, his voice coming out all high and squeaky.

I laugh, never so proud of myself in my whole damn life.

My gaze trails down his body, making a point of looking at his very erect junk. "Between you, me, and your fist, one of us needs to be getting to work."

Alex grunts and adjusts himself as though that could possibly help the situation. Then ignoring the obvious fire poker staring right at me, he meets my stare. "You need me to walk you to work?"

I shake my head, my cheeks flushing at the kind thought, even now while he's probably very uncomfortable and dying to get his hand down his pants to work out his frustrations. "You don't think I can handle myself?" I ask.

"Mace, I know damn well you can handle yourself," he tells me. "But that's not going to stop me from wanting to walk you to work."

I give him a small smile. "I think you have other things you need to be dealing with right now," I tell him. "But if you're a good boy and agree to walk me home after I get off work, I might just let you think about me while you sort yourself out."

Alex laughs and steps into me, reaching around me and curling a tight fist around my hair before gently pulling, forcing my chin up as his lips hover just above mine, stealing

the breath right out of my lungs. “You’ve got yourself a deal, Mace,” he murmurs in that deep, thick tone, his chest rumbling against mine as I feel his hardness against my waist.

And just like that, he’s gone, and his door closes between us, leaving me panting in the hallway.

I blow out a heavy breath, needing a minute to sort myself out. There’s just something about my new sexy neighbor. I’ve never felt so intrigued by someone in my whole life.

Everything about him draws me in. I’m so desperate to know who he is, to know what it’s like to feel his hands caressing my body, to feel the way he’d stretch me, to know how he tastes. But more than that, I want to know what it feels like to fall for him, to be the only woman he ever wants to look at.

Shit. I’m definitely getting in over my head.

Realizing I’ve been standing in the hall, gawking after him for way too long, I get my ass moving. Scrambling through the hall and down the stairs, I race out into the fresh Brooklyn morning. The second I’m hit in the face by the cool spring breeze, I finally feel my head starting to clear.

Mr. Alex ... wait. I don’t know his last name. How am I supposed to curse him and his wicked charm if I don’t know his last name? Shit. I’m going to have to fix that soon. Though, in order to do that, I’m going to have to get close to him again, and I don’t know just how much longer I can resist him. Though, it’s becoming extremely evident that his self-control is a lot better than mine. Hell, at this point, I think it’s safe to say that I don’t have any at all.

As I walk along the street, I pull my phone out of the back pocket of my jeans and call Nat, listening to all her insane updates about her new bar friend, Sullivan, and the whole time I gape, never having known Nat to go back for seconds with the same guy, no matter how well he puts it down. Especially considering that it's barely been a little over twenty-four hours since she met the guy.

He must have really blown her mind.

I ooh and ahh at all the appropriate times as she tells me everything I need to know about this guy, but as I turn the final corner and peer down the street toward High Voltage Ink, I come to a stop.

People barge around me, muttering under their breaths and telling me to get out of the fucking way, but all I can do is stare at the array of cop cars lining the street and the police tape sectioning off High Voltage Ink.

“What in the ever-loving fuck?” I breathe, taking in the crowd of people hovering around the shop, trying to figure out what the hell is going on.

“Ky?” Nat says, clearly picking up on the confusion in my tone. “You good?”

“I, umm ... don't know. I have to go,” I tell her, picking up my pace and all but storming down the street. “Something is going on at High Voltage Ink.”

“Shit, okay. I'll talk to you later.”

I mutter something before ending the call, but I can't really be sure what the hell I said, all that matters is the shop. Shit. What if something happened to it? But what could bring all these cops here and force them to use the police tape? Unless it's some kind of structural damage and they're concerned about the safety of the public getting too close.

Crap. I hope it's not because that would mean Big Jim needs to close the doors while he gets it fixed, and there's no way in hell I'll be able to afford my rent if I can't work for a few weeks. Though, I'm sure Viper wouldn't mind allowing me to set up a little studio in the back of his clubhouse to keep working on his men. At least twelve of the Grim Reapers members are ongoing clients. I'm sure if I'm allowed to quickly duck inside High Voltage Ink and grab my things, I'll be able to figure something out.

Barging through all the people, I finally get a front-row view of the chaos unfolding at High Voltage Ink and realize there's a shitload more cops here than I'd originally assumed. There are too many of them hovering out front to be able to see through the window, but as I scan the grim expressions on their faces, my heart races.

A familiar black jacket catches my eye, and I find Big Jim talking to a few of the cops. His head is down, and while he looks frustrated and worked up, he also looks devastated. His voice rises over the crowd, and it's clear their conversation is getting heated, so I grab the police tape and lift it over my head. "Jim," I call out, striding toward them as a cop reaches

for me, probably assuming I'm just some eager bystander looking for information.

Big Jim's gaze snaps toward me, and he quickly waves off the cop, relief flashing in his eyes. "She's with me," he says, and the cop immediately backs off as I walk right into Jim, stopping barely an inch before him.

"What the fuck is going on?" I demand, keeping my voice hushed as I try to peer around the bodies blocking the view through the windows.

"Fuck, Ky. I ... shit," he breathes, putting a hand on my shoulder before pulling away from the storefront to where it's a little more private. I peer up at him, not liking the tone in his voice, and as I meet his eyes, I see how broken he is. "I don't know how to tell you this, kid," he continues. "But the store was broken into last night and—"

I gasp, cutting him off, my eyes going wide. "Shit. Really? Don't tell me they've ransacked the place."

"No, well ... yes. They have, but that's not the issue, it's ..."

Big Jim pauses, his brows creasing, and with every second that passes, my heart races a little bit faster. "What is it?" I ask, my tone so low it's a miracle he can even hear me. "You're starting to scare me."

"It's Crew, Kyah," he finally says. "He was here during the break-in, and from what we can tell, he tried to fight them off and ... fuck. Ky, I'm sorry. He didn't make it."

“What?” I question, my back stiffening as my brows furrow, confusion pulsing through my veins. “What do you mean *he didn’t make it*? I just spoke to Crew yesterday. He was fine. Well, drunk out of his mind and being a complete asshole, but he was fine.”

Jim shakes his head, and the devastation clouding his gaze makes it hard to breathe. “I’m sorry, Ky,” he says as I desperately try to wrap my head around what he’s saying. “Crew’s gone. Whoever broke in trashed the place and then killed Crew. He bled out trying to save our shop.”

I start to heave, unable to draw in a full breath. “No,” I say, shaking my head. “No. I just talked to him yesterday. He can’t be gone.”

Panic begins pulsing through my veins, infecting me like poison and weighing me down until I find myself on my knees, gasping for air. My throat starts to close up, and my mouth goes dry as I realize my face is soaking wet. Am I crying? I don’t know. I’m too numb to figure it out.

How could he just be gone?

I know things were rocky between us, and I was determined to make him suffer for the hell he put me through over the last few days, but I could never have wished for this. Shit, maybe I did. I told him he was dead to me, and now ... fuck. What were my very last words to him?

“You don’t fucking love me, Crew. You want to own me. I’m nothing but a fucking possession to you, and letting you touch me, letting you fuck me ... I’ve never regretted anything more.”

So hear me now, Crew—we're done. You'll never fucking touch me again."

Shit. He was drunk and reckless, probably wallowing in self-loathing after almost breaking my jaw, and then suddenly he was dying. He was all alone, thinking I hated him, thinking I wanted him dead.

Fuck. How can I ever forgive myself? He died thinking the worst, and now he will never have the chance to make it up to me.

Bits and pieces of our fight from yesterday come swarming back. I was horrible to him, but he was worse. How could that be the last conversation we ever had? After all of the good times we spent together, after the mind-blowing night we shared, how can it just be over?

For so long, Crew was my salvation. I couldn't have made it through those shitty times without him forcing a smile across my face. And now this. Gone ... just gone.

Feeling a strong hand wrap around my arm, I look up into Big Jim's dark eyes. He pulls me up off the dirty ground and into the warmth of his arms, holding me to his chest. "It's going to be okay, Ky," he murmurs. "Whatever happened between you two, he knew you loved him in your own way."

"We had a fight," I say, barely able to get the words out over the lump in my throat.

"I know. He called me and told me what happened," he says. "He didn't know how to make it right, and honestly, I don't

know if it would have even been possible. Hell, I know I wasn't about to make it easy for him. He was going to head out for a few weeks to give you some space, and ... that's the last I heard from him."

I nod, not really sure what to say.

"We're gonna get who did this, Ky," he promises. "We won't allow this to go unpunished."

My heart breaks, agony gripping hold and refusing to release me, and before I know it, I'm being escorted aside by two cops, leading me in front of the shop window and asking a bunch of questions I don't know how to answer. Only I can't focus on what's being asked as from here, I have the perfect view into the shop, my gaze lingering on the motionless body beneath the white sheet and the blood splatters across Big Jim's station.

My stomach clenches, and I barely manage to hold on to my breakfast.

The tears continue streaming down my face, and as I look around the shop, I remember the security camera in each of the corners. "Can ... Can you use the security feed to find out who did this?" I ask.

"Wish we could," the cop closest to me says, pressing his lips into a hard line. "Seems your boss hasn't paid the security company in over six months, and they cut off services. Those cameras are useless."

"Shit."

“My thoughts exactly,” he says.

Stepping away from the cop, I turn away from the window, not able to handle the sight in my peripheral vision, and as I wipe my watery eyes on the back of my arm, I notice a familiar face hidden out behind the crowd, looking toward High Voltage Ink as though he were watching some kind of movie. His big arms are crossed over his chest and his gaze is narrowed, clearly deep in thought.

Glancing back toward the cop, I hold his stare to keep from allowing my gaze to wander. “Are we done here?” I ask, the longer I wait, the more antsy I become, my hands balling into fists at my side.

“Yes, I believe so,” he says. “Unless you have anything more to add.”

I shake my head. “No, that’s everything,” I say before giving a polite nod and striding toward the crowd and away from High Voltage Ink.

Then keeping my gaze locked on Viper’s, I keep moving until I’m standing right in front of him, my finger digging into his wide, inked chest as fury and betrayal rock through my body. “How the hell could you do this to me?”

VIPER



Rage fires through my veins as I stare down at the woman who's somehow managed to evade every one of my fucking advances for over six long years. My hands ball into fists at my side, my jaw clenching as I try to control myself, but I see it in her eyes, she's all fired up and not even close to letting it go. Hell no, Kyah is only just getting started, and I can't trust that whatever's about to fly out of her mouth isn't going to land me in hot water, no matter if I had anything to do with it or not.

My hand snaps up, closing around the back of her neck, and as her eyes widen, I drag her away, slipping into the shadows and disappearing from the street like a fucking ghost. I take her down the closest alley, and once we're completely concealed by the building, I push her up against the wall and

drop my hand, but I don't dare release her from my stare. "The fuck did you just say to me?"

Tears run down her face, and the anger flooding her eyes is clearly enough for her to forget who the fuck she's talking to as she shoves her small hands against my chest, trying to push me away. "You heard me," Kyah spits. "You did it, didn't you? You killed him."

"I didn't have anything to do with this."

"Bullshit," she cries. "You said it yourself. You said if he ever hurt me, you'd ... you'd—"

"I'd what?"

She shoves at my chest again. "You'd kill him."

My gaze narrows, and I pull back just an inch, hanging onto her words as she furiously wipes the tears off her face, and the more she does, the clearer the ugly bruise across her jaw becomes. "What the fuck are you talking about?" I growl, gripping her chin and forcing her head up to better see her bruised jaw. "He did this? Crew fucking touched you, and I'm only just finding out now?"

Heat blasts through my veins, and I can barely hold onto the rage, needing to make the bastard suffer for what he did to her. Crew knew she belonged to me, he knew she would be my old fucking lady. He had no right to touch her. I knew they'd been fucking and had screwed around in the past, and I was down to let it go. I expected her to have fun, but there's an unspoken rule when fucking with a woman who doesn't belong to you—

you keep your fucking hands off her. You treat her right. And this ...

FUCK.

I step back from her, my hands at my temples. “I could fucking kill him for this,” I spit, unable to regain control.

“It’s too late for that,” Kyah throws back at me. “You already did.”

“I swear, Kyah,” I rumble, clenching my hands into tight fists. “Say those fucking words one more time, and I’ll end you right here on the fucking street. I didn’t have anything to do with it.”

She shrinks away from me, and I clench my jaw, regretting my choice of words, but at some point, she needs to remember who the fuck she’s dealing with. I might want her as my old lady, and I’ll end up taking her by force if it comes to it, but she needs to learn to respect me, otherwise, our time together isn’t going to be fun for her.

Kyah tips her head back against the wall, breathing heavily. “You really didn’t do this?” she questions, her tone finally starting to simmer as she gathers herself, finding the control I’m still desperately searching for.

“No. I didn’t.”

“Then why are you here?” she pushes. “How did you just know to show up?”

I let out a heavy breath, finally finding just a shred of control and clinging to it like my life depends on it. “I’m the Vice

President of the Grim Reapers, Kyah,” I remind her. “I make it my fucking business to know. If someone, even assholes as fucking low as Crew Ledger, is murdered in my town, then you can guarantee that I’ll be there.”

Hearing noise from the main street, we both turn to look, and I feel at ease seeing a few of my men hovering at the end of the alley. I have to give it to them, they have balls showing up here, especially considering that more than a few of them have warrants out for their arrest and that the street is crowded with cops, some a little more crooked than the others.

Turning back to Kyah, I find her gaze already on them with the kind of determination that reminds me just how strong she is. That’s exactly why I want her to be mine. At some point, I’ll step up as President of the Grim Reapers, and when that happens, I’m gonna need a strong woman at my side, someone who’ll keep me grounded and turn a blind eye to the bullshit. I’m still trying to figure out if she can handle that last part, but I think she’ll be alright.

“The other day,” she says, her voice breaking, “you said Crew was no good for me, that he wasn’t a good guy—”

“Kyah,” I breathe, stepping right into her and bracing my arms on the wall beside her, caging her in as I tip my head, my forehead just an inch from hers. “Don’t ask me what you’re about to ask me.”

“He was one of my best friends, Viper. I knew him for six years, and after the past few days, I’m starting to wonder if I

even knew him at all. I need to know,” she says, her chest heaving. “What was he involved in?”

I clench my jaw, reluctant to have this conversation with her. He was a piece of shit, and he was involved in some unsavory business, but it all came back to his bastard brother. Hell, if he wasn't around, I'm sure Crew might have been able to keep his nose clean, but his brother made sure that if he was going down, he was gonna drag Crew down with him.

Mason Ledger is solely responsible for the biggest human trafficking ring in the state, and to be honest, I don't know how the bastard is pulling it off considering he's not the sharpest tool in the shed. Twelve months ago, Crew got himself in trouble, and instead of doing the right thing and working his ass off to repay his debt, he borrowed money from his big brother with the condition that if he fails to pay him back, Mason will take payment in the form of Kyah. Naturally, Crew's overinflated ego agreed to the deal.

He had only a few weeks left before his time was up, and it was no surprise when I found Crew in my fucking clubhouse, begging on his knees for me to find a way to save Kyah, and of course, I would have. I already have my plan in place for when the time comes, but considering Crew is now dead, perhaps my plan needs to change. Whether Crew is dead or not, Mason will still come looking for what he's owed, only now there's no reason to wait.

“It's not my business to get into, Ky, and if you were smart, you wouldn't go looking for answers.”

“Viper—”

“No,” I growl, my hand falling to her waist and squeezing tight. “Don’t fucking push me on this. Crew was a piece of shit, and I’m not getting myself involved by opening my fucking mouth. That’s all you need to know, so do yourself a favor and keep your eyes open and don’t go looking for information, otherwise, you’ll end up just like Crew.”

Ky’s eyes widen, fear blasting through her bright blue stare, and while I hate scaring her like that, it’s for the best. There’s no reason to tell her what Crew was involved in, no reason to have her constantly looking over her shoulder.

She has me. She’ll be fine.

Spider clears his throat from the opening of the alley, and as I glance back toward him, he nods, silently letting me know it’s time to get out of here. I turn my attention back to Ky, stepping back to give her space. “Get out of here, Ky. Go home,” I tell her. “The cops will eventually start asking more questions and when they do, keep your mouth shut. Don’t tell them you were at the shop yesterday. Don’t tell them he hurt you. As far as the cops were aware, you were home all day. I’ll give you an alibi if I have to.”

Ky visibly swallows, but she continues to hold my stare before finally nodding. “Okay,” she says in a small tone.

“Good,” I say, pressing my hand to her lower back and giving her a nudge to get moving. “Now go home. You don’t need to be here.”

Kyah moves out from the wall, her hands shaking at her sides as the tears continue to well in her eyes. “If I find out you’re lying to me, and you really did have something to do with this ...”

She lets her words fall away, her empty threat sitting between us, and I’m not going to lie, I don’t fucking like it. People have lost their lives for making comments like that to me, but when it comes to Kyah Bailey there’s not a lot I wouldn’t forgive.

Besides, she’s free to make any assumption she wants; it doesn’t change anything. She still belongs to me, whether she fucking wants to or not.

KYAH



By the time I push through the door of my apartment, I'm a blubbering mess. My eyes hurt from crying, and honestly, I don't even remember the walk home. All I can think about is Crew. How I've let him down. How I didn't really know him. How the past six years were all a lie. Did he even really care for me or was I just some naive girl to pass the time?

Shit. I should have stayed after our fight. I should have tried to work things out with him. Maybe then he would have left the shop and he'd still be alive. But how could I have stayed after what he did? Maybe if he'd been the one to leave and I was the one to stay ... would it have been me who was attacked? Would I be the one currently rotting in the city morgue?

The guilt tears at me, and after throwing my things onto the couch, I stumble straight into the bathroom. Hanging my head into the sink, I splash cold water over my face as though that could somehow make the pain go away.

He was supposed to be my future, and now ... he's gone.

Just like that.

I don't know what to think or how to process this. On one hand, I want to hate him for how he acted, but on the other, how am I supposed to just disregard six years? Does one mistake erase all the good times?

Panic pulses through my veins, and I take deep, calming breaths, trying to find clarity and grasp what little control I have, just like Viper in the alley. I saw him ready to snap, and I knew he was losing control, but I couldn't stop myself from pushing him. It's as though I needed the people around me to feel what I was feeling just so I wasn't alone, and Viper did just that. He allowed me to push him and to say things he wouldn't usually tolerate.

After splashing more water over my face, I straighten up, finally feeling my mind start to settle. Grabbing the small hand towel, I dry my face before tossing it onto the bathroom counter. As I stride out into my living room, I'm hit with a cool breeze.

My brows furrow, and I glance across the apartment, finding my living room window wide open.

What the fuck? I know I was in my own world when I was leaving for work this morning, but I know damn well that I wouldn't have left with the window open like that. That's just asking for trouble. But hell, it's not the first time I've done something stupid. After all, stupid seems to be my specialty lately.

Shivers race down my spine and I hurry across my apartment, quickly shutting and locking the window. As I turn back, visions of Crew's lifeless body beneath that sheet haunt my mind and I make my way into my bedroom, grabbing the pillow and comforter off my bed before trudging back out to my couch. I make myself comfortable in front of the TV, not that I'm actually going to watch it, but right now, I need some form of distraction. Anything will do.

I snuggle up, cuddling my pillow to my chest as I clutch my phone in my hand, desperate to hear the familiar *ding* of one of Crew's incoming texts, even if it was one of his asshole-ish ones that I've been getting lately.

A knock sounds at the door, and I lift my head off the armrest before dropping it right back down, too emotionally exhausted to get up off the couch. I don't call out, don't bother to do anything apart from hope whoever it is will go away. Only the knocking sounds again and I groan. "I know you're in there, Mace."

Shit.

Letting out a sigh, I keep my gaze locked on the blank TV screen. "It's open," I murmur, not sure if I've projected my

voice enough for him to hear through the closed door, but he seems to have heard it just fine when the door creaks open a moment later.

My gaze shifts toward the door, finding Alex standing directly below the mistletoe monster dildo, and despite the very sight of him, I can't even pretend to smile. Taking me in, his brows furrow, and he quickly steps inside the door and closes it behind him. "You good, Mace?"

Shifting my gaze back to the blank TV, I shake my head, not trusting myself to say the words out loud without falling to pieces.

Alex watches me a moment longer before muttering something to himself and quickly crossing my apartment. He welcomes himself onto my couch, lifting the blanket over him before grabbing hold of me and pulling me right into the warmth of his strong arms. "What happened?" he questions, his hand cradling the back of my head and holding me close.

"My ... my friend was killed last night."

"Shit," he mutters, holding me tighter as the tears begin to spill all over again, and yet Alex doesn't seem to care how they soak into his shirt. He just keeps holding me as though he'll never let go, and it's the most welcoming place I've ever been. "I'm sorry, Ky."

I shake my head, wanting to tell him that he has nothing to be sorry for, that this wasn't his fault, but I can't find the strength to form the words. Then as the emotional trauma quickly catches up to me, I fall into a fretful sleep right there,

sprawled out across his chest as his fingers move back and forth over my hip.



The memory of Crew's lifeless body assaults my mind, and I'm jarred awake, gasping for air. A set of strong arms lock around me, holding me in place, and I quickly realize that I'm still lying on the couch, using Alex as my personal pillow. "Shit," I mutter, cringing as I rub my sore, puffy eyes. "I'm sorry. I didn't mean to fall asleep on you."

"I wouldn't want to be anywhere else," he murmurs into the quiet room, a muted hockey game taking up residence on my TV.

I swallow hard, my mouth dry as I try to find my bearings. "How long was I out?"

"Uhhhh," he says, his gaze shifting to the armrest as he lights up the screen of his phone. "A little over two hours."

"Two hours? Shit," I say again, trying to pull myself off his chest, but Alex tightens his hold on me again, refusing to let me go, and honestly, I'm not disappointed. "I hope I haven't ruined your plans for the day."

"It's all good, Mace," he says, tipping his chin and pressing a feather-soft kiss to my temple. "I don't want you worrying

about that. Not today.”

I nod, lifting my head to meet his gaze, my brows furrowed as I find myself completely taken by this perfect stranger. He’s been everything over these past few days, and he has somehow kept my mind off the most horrendous things and made me feel as though everything is going to be okay.

The tension burns between us, growing stronger and brighter by the second. His fingers dig into my hip, and then finally, he closes the distance, tipping his head until his lips brush over mine in the sweetest kiss.

My hand slides up his strong chest and around the back of his neck, holding on to him as I scramble to my knees and straddle his lap. As I deepen the kiss, his hands rest at my hips.

It’s everything I thought it would be, but he’s holding back. Despite the way he hardens beneath me, he’s keeping it respectful. I know he’d rather take this a lot further, but he doesn’t strike me as the type to push the limits with an emotionally depleted girl.

His lips move over mine just right as his tongue explores my mouth, and as a soft moan rumbles through my chest, his arms tighten around my back. As he pulls me in closer to his chest, I become completely overwhelmed by how damn good he smells.

My fingers knot into his hair, and as the intrusive thoughts about the last guy I kissed in this apartment flash through my mind, I pull back, breathing heavily and tipping my forehead

against his. “I’m sorry,” I say, gently shaking my head. “I just —”

His hands fall back to my hips, his thumbs gently brushing back and forth. “Do you wanna tell me about it?”

“I, umm ... I don’t really know what to say,” I tell him, pulling back just an inch, my hand knotting into his shirt and giving me something to focus on apart from the way his dark eyes seem to penetrate right through to my soul.

“You said it was a friend,” he prompts.

A soft smile pulls at my lips. “He ... sometimes,” I admit. “Sometimes he was a friend. Sometimes he was more. And sometimes he—” I cut myself off before I admit that sometimes he was the man who taught me how it felt to have someone you love betray you in the worst way.

“He what, Kyah?” Alex pushes. I press my lips into a hard line, not wanting to keep going, when a sadness flashes in his dark gaze. He lifts his fingers to my face and gently skims across the bruise that marks my jaw, and I quickly realize that I never covered it up after washing my face earlier. “Did he give you this?”

Shame fills me, and I drop my gaze, unable to meet his eye as I nod. “We got into a fight yesterday,” I tell him, my eyes filling with tears. “He was drunk and acting like a jerk, like I owed him something simply for existing. We’d gotten together earlier in the week, and since then ... I don’t know. Everything shifted. He became possessive and angry, and then all of a sudden, people were warning me away from this guy even

though he had been one of my closest friends for the past six years. Now that he's gone, I don't even know if I ever truly knew him at all."

"What happened, Mace?"

"We got into a fight. I was yelling at him, just like I've done a million times before, but this time was different. He just snapped, and the next thing I knew, I was on the floor," I tell him, an ugly heaviness resting on my shoulders and weighing me down. "I told him he was dead to me, and ran out of there, but if I knew that was the last time I would ever see him ... I never would have said that. I wouldn't have fought with him."

Alex clenches his jaw, his fingers digging into my hips as he closes his eyes, needing a moment to compose himself. "Why didn't you come to me, Mace? I hate that you were just across the hall, hurting."

I shrug my shoulders. "I was so ashamed. I still am," I admit. "I've never wanted to be that girl that people look at with pity—like I've already seen people doing today. I couldn't stand the thought of you looking at me like that too, and if we're really being honest, I didn't know if I could come to you. Whatever this is between us is still so new, and I don't know where we stand. I'm still trying to figure it out."

"Let me make it clear for you," Alex rumbles, his arm locking around my waist and pulling me in, our bodies pressed tightly together. I suck in a gasp, that same tension snapping like an elastic band between us, my heart racing. "I'm going to fall in love with you, Kyah. A week from now, a month. I

can't be sure, but it's happening whether you want it to or not, and I don't give a shit if that scares the shit out of you."

I swallow hard, knowing I should be terrified by his admission, only I've never felt so at ease. "I'm not an easy person to love," I warn him.

"I'll be the judge of that," he tells me.

"But I don't even know your last name."

His brows furrow, and he watches me through a quizzical stare. "Is that important?"

I nod, knowing I had a reason for wanting to know, remembering this morning I felt like it was some kind of big deal, only now it seems so irrelevant. "I ... maybe. I'm not so sure anymore."

He grins, his gaze softening. "It's—" An insistent, thumping knock sounds through my apartment, cutting Alex off, and both our gazes snap toward the door. "Are you expecting anyone?"

I shake my head, unable to figure out why I suddenly feel on edge, and as I climb off Alex's lap and watch him get up to answer the door, my hands start to shake. Perhaps it has something to do with Viper's warning this morning, letting on that perhaps Crew wasn't who I thought he was. But that leaves the question—who the fuck was he then?

Alex glances back at me as he makes his way across my apartment, but when the knocking sounds again followed by Nat's demand to hurry up and open the damn door, I breathe

out a sigh of relief. “You know this chick?” Alex confirms, his fingers hovering on the door handle.

“Yeah, my best friend, Nat,” I tell him. “If you don’t let her in, she’s just going to scale the side of the building and break in through my bedroom window.”

Alex laughs. “Shit. Wouldn’t the fire escape up to your living room window be easier?”

“You’d think,” I tell him. “But Nat doesn’t do anything the easy way.”

Alex smirks then twists the handle and pulls the door wide open. Nat steps forward, expecting to find me in front of her before pulling up short, her eyes going wide. Her gaze trails over him, clearly liking what she sees. “Well, hello, Mr. Sex On Legs,” she says before double-checking the number on the front of my door, making sure she’s barging into the right apartment. “Who the hell are you?”

I roll my eyes and force myself to my feet, bringing my comforter with me and wrapping it over my shoulders. “This is Alex,” I tell her, watching as her sharp gaze shifts to me. “He’s the neighbor I was telling you about.”

“Ahhh, yes. The big-dick energy dude who slams you up against walls and tells you he wants you to beg for it,” she says, assessing him all over again, this time looking at him in a new light, her brows arching with interest as a wicked smirk pulls across her lips. “I approve.”

“Uhhh ... thanks,” Alex says, his gaze darting between me and Nat.

“What are you doing here?” I ask.

Her expression sobers, and just like that, I realize she knows. “I had a call from Big Jim,” she explains. “He told me what happened and thought you could use the company. Though if I knew you were already busy with your hot neighbor, maybe I would have waited an hour or two and let you get your rocks off first.”

I roll my eyes and walk into her, wrapping my arms around her in a tight hug, my comforter now around us both. “No rocks were getting off,” I tell her, barely able to manage a smile. “He wants me to die of sexual frustration, remember? But between you and me, I think he’ll cave first.”

“Ummm ... You realize I’m still here?” Alex mutters, waving a hand to get our attention. “And for the record, I’m not caving, but we won’t need to wait long. You’ll be on your knees begging in no time.”

I can’t resist glancing toward him, a sultry smile spreading across my face. “That sounds like a challenge, Parkour,” I say. “You better not be starting something you can’t handle, because between the two of us, only one is going to be begging, and it ain’t gonna be me.”

Alex laughs and leans into me, his hand low on my back as he presses a kiss to my cheek. “Uh-huh. Whatever helps you sleep at night, Mace,” he says, pulling back, then with a wink that almost has me crumbling to my knees, he says, “Good

luck reaching for your monster dildo tonight. I know you're gonna need it."

And with that, Alex strides out of my door, his rich, delicious laugh trailing behind him.

KYAH



Rolling out of bed, I hold my breath as I creep across my room, peeking my head out into the living room and staring straight at the window, finding it open once again. It's been a week since Crew was killed, and a week since I came home to find my window wide open.

At first, I was more than willing to shrug it off as nothing more than a coincidence, but when it happened the very next day, I knew this was something more. Now, every single morning, I've woken up to find the window wide open. The only question is, is this a neighbor playing some stupid joke, or is this something a little more sinister?

Letting out a heavy sigh, I grit my teeth before padding across my apartment, subtly looking around and staring into all of the dark corners, certain I'll find someone staring back at me. Only there never is, and at this point, I'm about ready to

scour the internet for a straitjacket. Surely I'm going insane, right? Because the only other option is that someone is coming into my apartment at night, and that shit doesn't sit well with me.

Hell, I'd bet every dollar I have that it's Viper. He can be a fucking weirdo like that. But what am I supposed to say? *"Uhh, Hi, Mr. Viper, Sir. Would you possibly mind letting me know if you happen to turn into a psychopathic stalker every night and sneak into my apartment? Mmmkay, thanks."* Shit. He'd laugh in my face and then say some bullshit about being the Vice President of the Grim Reapers, and if he wanted to see me, he wouldn't need to stoop to levels like stalking, he'd just kick my fucking door in and take me caveman style.

Crap. It really isn't Viper.

A shiver sails down my spine, and I quickly grab the window and slide it back into place, making sure to lock it, just as I've done every other day this week, which has me wondering how the fuck it's getting opened in the first place since it can only be unlocked from inside.

That thought sends another shiver down my spine.

Shit. I'm in trouble here. I can't say I've ever wished to have a ghost living in my apartment, but a ghost seems so much better than the alternative.

Not wanting to spend a single minute longer than necessary in this apartment, I rush through a shower and scramble to get ready for work. Today's my first day back at High Voltage Ink,

and honestly, I'm not sure if I can handle walking through the doors. I haven't been back there since the day it all went down.

The cops kept the shop locked up for a few days while they investigated, and by the end of the week, they'd done everything they needed and allowed Big Jim access to clean the place up. I can't imagine how hard that would have been. I didn't see what state the shop was left in after the cops were done, and I can only assume all the blood had already been scrubbed clean, but it still would have been hell for Big Jim. Crew was like a son to him, just as I'm the daughter he never had.

Big Jim canceled all of our appointments for the weekend, giving everyone time to grieve, and now, Monday morning, I'm supposed to head back to High Voltage Ink and get on with life as though there isn't a big chunk of it missing.

Heading out the door, my gaze shifts toward Alex's. He usually makes an effort to come out and say hi when he hears me walking out, but knowing that my station at work is going to be a mess and I'll need the extra time to go over my schedule and fit in some of Crew's more important clients, I'm leaving a little early today. I wouldn't be surprised if Alex was still out in the streets, working out and putting on a dazzling show for the women of Brooklyn.

He's been giving me space over the past week, trying not to crowd me as I grieve for my lost friend, but for the most part, he can't resist checking on me at least twice a day. He hasn't

kissed me again, and while I desperately crave to find out what else Alex has been holding back, I also respect his self-control.

I haven't been in the right frame of mind to start something new, and as if sensing that, Alex has backed off, just doing what he can to offer me comfort when I need it. But that doesn't mean he's dared to move the mistletoe monster cock. That's still hanging proudly above my door like some kind of trophy. Not gonna lie, I kind of wish I had gotten the chance to clean it before he went and stuck it up there, but it is what it is, and I'm just going to have to learn to live with it.

The walk to work goes by all too quickly, and before I know it, I'm standing outside High Voltage Ink, holding my breath. I'm worried that walking inside those doors will send me into a tailspin, but seeing Big Jim through the windows all alone, I suck it up and push through the door.

Jim's head lifts as he hears the chime above the door, and he stretches a forced smile across his face. "Hey, Ky. How're you doing?" he says, stepping out from his station and opening his arms just in time for me to step right into them.

I shrug my shoulders, not really sure how to respond. "I'm ... I don't know. Fine, I guess."

"That's the biggest load of shit I've ever heard," he mutters as my gaze slowly moves around the room, expecting to see little drops of blood that have accidentally been forgotten. "How are you really doing?"

I swallow hard, pulling out of his arms and moving to my station before dumping my bag onto my chair. "I just ... I

don't know how to feel. I have so much guilt for being this angry with him, and it's so selfish. I should be focusing on how much I miss him, and I do miss him. I miss him so much. Since the day I met him, I haven't gone a week without hearing from him or getting some ridiculous text, and yet every time I think about him, all I can remember is the way his fist felt cracking against my jaw."

"You're only human, Ky," he tells me. "It's not selfish, and you sure as fuck shouldn't feel guilty about it. You did nothing wrong, and no one's going to hold it against you for being angry. You have every right to feel that way. Crew was one of your closest friends, and he hurt you. Whether we lost him or not, it was still going to take some time for you to be able to move on and learn to trust him again. Hell, even if you decided to never trust him again, that's okay. That's your decision. But don't feel guilty for having a human response. You can love and hate him at the same time."

I swallow hard and nod, grabbing my schedule and flipping through the pages for a distraction to keep my tears at bay because if I have to keep soaking up Big Jim's words, I'm surely going to break.

Realizing I need a few moments to myself, Jim nods toward my sketchpad. "Why don't you put all that emotion into a design?" he says, moving around his station and preparing for his first client of the day. "It'll give you somewhere to channel all of that bullshit."

My brows furrow as I glance toward my sketchpad, intrigue building in my chest. I haven't picked up a pencil all week, too afraid of what kind of designs might come out of me, but Big Jim is right. I need somewhere to channel all of this guilt, and where better to get it out than a design? Perhaps I could do something dedicated to Crew. After all, there's a blank space on my arm that he never got around to completing.

With my mind set, I quickly sort out my schedule and start making calls, trying to squeeze in as many of Crew's clients and hating how I have to explain over and over again why I'll be taking over all of his appointments. Then after making sure everything in my station is exactly where it should be, I focus my attention on my sketchbook.

I start working on a design with angry, harsh lines and quickly get lost in it, hating the darkness that stares back at me. A hooded skull with hollowed-out eyes resembling the grim reaper, its teeth almost fang-like as it reaches out toward me, looking as though it's trying to pull me under, and as I finish the initial outline of the design, I catch my breath.

It's haunting, terrifying even, like something out of a nightmare. The design is elegant and yet angry as though you'll never truly know its real nature, just like Crew. There's a viciousness about it, and yet it's still so charming.

A hand comes down on my shoulder, and I jump, my eyes going wide. I was so focused on my sketch that I didn't hear anyone behind me. "How are you doing, Ky?" Big Jim asks, glancing over my shoulder at my design, his eyes widening in

surprise, though I can't quite work out why. I usually spend hours a week making designs that are just as haunting as this. "Your first client's here."

"What?" I mutter, whipping around to see Aaron, one of my regulars, waiting by the reception desk. "Shit. Sorry. I was so lost in my own world, I didn't hear the bell."

"All good. He only just got here," Big Jim says as I hastily pack away my sketchbook and glance over my station before deciding to do a quick sanitize despite doing one just after I walked in. But hell, one can never be too clean, right?

Jim keeps an eye on me as I hurry around my station, his gaze narrowed.

"You're staring," I point out.

"I think you should use that piece to finish out your sleeve," he tells me, leaning back against his table, crossing a foot over the other as casually as ever, as though completely unaware of how his words have sent me into a blind panic. Though they shouldn't. This is just a normal conversation between us. He couldn't possibly know how I had to dive into the darkest pits of my soul to capture the perfect essence of Crew Ledger in that design, and now he thinks I should wear it on my arm like some kind of badge of honor, representing the man who almost crushed my jaw.

Shit.

"I don't know," I mutter, turning away, fearing he might see the panic flashing in my gaze as Aaron makes his way back to

my station.

“Just say the word and I’ll clear my schedule,” Big Jim says.

I flash Jim a tight smile. “I, uhhh ... yeah. I’ll let you know,” I tell him before turning my attention on Aaron and putting an end to the discussion. “Long time no see,” I say to Aaron. “I hope you’re ready. We’re in for a long one today.”

With that, Aaron holds up a set of headphones as a cheesy smile rips across his face. “Oh, I’m ready. Music and all,” he tells me. “I don’t think I’ll survive if I have to listen to the shit Big Jim calls music for the next three hours.”

“Hey, I heard that,” Jim throws across the shop.

“You were meant to,” Aaron teases, and just like that, he whips his shirt off and drops down onto my chair. “Alright, let’s do this before I turn into a little bitch and chicken out.”

Precisely three hours later, I stand with Aaron as he gazes into the mirror, a dorky smile stretching across his face as he takes in the new ink that takes up a large portion of his back. “Holy fuck,” Aaron grunts. “Have I ever told you how fucking amazing you are?”

I laugh, one of my first real laughs in over a week. “You might have mentioned it once or twice.”

“I second that,” a voice sounds from behind me, making me jump.

I whip around, finding Viper standing barely a few feet away, and I mentally scold myself for not paying attention to the bell chiming over the door again. Maybe this is why

someone is so easily getting away with screwing with my window every night. My mind is blocking everything out. Perhaps this is some kind of natural coping mechanism for my brain, trying to protect itself, but right now, all it's doing is fucking with me.

“What are you doing here?” I ask as Viper steps into me, his hand falling to my waist as he leans in and presses a gentle kiss to my cheek.

“Just came to check on you,” he says, his gaze subtly shifting toward Crew's empty station. “You doing alright?”

“I'd be doing better if people quit asking me that,” I quip, not wanting to discuss my feelings with Viper. Hell, having to come clean to Big Jim this morning was bad enough.

“Message received loud and clear,” Viper says.

“Hey, listen,” I say, moving with Aaron back toward my chair to start his aftercare as Viper makes himself at home in my station. He leans against the table, almost mimicking the stance Big Jim was in earlier, only Viper has to go one extra step and cross his big arms over his chest in case passersby didn't already think he was intimidating enough. “I, ummm ... I think I owe you an apology.”

“The fuck you do,” he mutters.

“No, really,” I continue. “Last week I came at you and made ugly accusations without a shred of evidence, and you didn't deserve that. But not only that, you resisted biting my head off, despite how badly you wanted to.”

“You don’t know that’s what I wanted.”

“Yeah,” I scoff. “I do. It was written all over your face. But either way, I’m sorry. You were really cool about the whole thing when I didn’t deserve it.”

Viper nods, accepting my apology, and something tells me that’s all that’ll be said about it. He’s not the type to linger on a topic or draw something out, which is surprising seeing as though he’s been relentlessly hanging on to the idea of making me his old lady for years, despite my constant refusal.

“Alright, if you’re all good, I’m gonna jet,” Viper says. “Got shit to take care of.”

A soft smile pulls at my lips, and despite not needing him to check up on me, I appreciate the thought and the time he’s taken out of his day to stop by. He goes to push off the table when I find myself reaching out toward him. “Before you go,” I say, my brows furrowing, unsure why I’m even asking this of him. “You wouldn’t happen to know anyone in security, would you?”

Viper immediately steps closer to me, his body going stiff. “Why the fuck do you need someone in security?” he demands, his gaze quickly scanning the street before flicking toward the back of the shop. “Did something happen?”

“No. Shit. Calm down. Everything’s okay,” I say, resisting the urge to laugh, because honestly, in his line of work, I suppose looking over your shoulder is just a part of the job description. “I was just thinking about getting some security

cameras installed in my apartment. I think one of my neighbors is screwing with me so I figured, why not?"

Viper holds my stare a moment longer than necessary, and it's clear he knows I'm lying, that there's another reason I want to get security cameras installed, but it'll be a cold day in hell when I actually tell him that I think I have a stalker sneaking into my apartment every night, somehow unlocking my window from outside. If he knew, he'd never leave my side, and in the blink of an eye, I'd have his men stationed outside my door while he slept sitting in the armchair across from my bed. Hell, that's assuming he doesn't go complete caveman and just kidnap me instead, insisting I move into his home like some kind of twisted romance novel.

"I know a guy," Viper finally says. "He'll have it installed by the time you're home tonight."

"Huh?"

"You heard me," Viper says. "Keys."

My brows furrow, and he holds his hand out toward me. "I'm not going to ask again. Keys, Kyah," Viper growls, that familiar anger flashing in his deadly eyes.

Shit.

Hastily scrambling for my bag, I fish my keys out and drop them into his hand, and as he turns away, I call after him. "Wait. How much is it gonna cost? I've got some cash saved up."

“Don’t worry about it, Ky. It’s on me. The fucker owes me a favor anyway.” And with that, Viper is gone, leaving me gaping after him while kinda terrified of the thought of having him and his henchmen alone in my apartment.

It’s dark by the time I start for home, walking through the waning crowd in the streets of Brooklyn. Exhaustion clouds my mind as I continue thinking about the design I created this morning. Hell, I haven’t been able to stop thinking about it all day. It really is terrifyingly beautiful, and it speaks a dark truth about the man I’m not sure I really knew at all. It’s every fear and tormenting thought in my mind displayed before me on paper.

Maybe Big Jim is right. Maybe I should use the design to complete my sleeve. I’d have to make a few alterations to make it fit the space available, but I could make it work, and there’s no denying it would be beautiful. Plus, it’s also a bonus that I know Big Jim would do an incredible job with it.

My phone dings in my back pocket, and my brows furrow. Maybe it’s Alex checking in. I’m usually home by now, but it was a long day. Even though I had a week off work, the rent is still due, so I’ll be doing some longer hours to make up for the missed work, otherwise, I’ll find myself not only down a friend, but down an apartment too. Though if it were to come to that, I’m sure Nat would take me in, but it wouldn’t last long. There’s only so much of each other we can handle before needing a break.

Glancing down at my phone, I prepare myself for whatever ridiculous message Alex has sent, a thrill already pulsing through me, only as I unlock my screen, I realize the message isn't from Alex at all. It's an unknown number.

Curiosity gets the best of me, and I open the text and quickly scan over it while doing my best not to run headfirst into the people on the street.

Unknown - Yo, this Kyah? Crew's funeral is Thursday, downtown. He'd want you there.

What in the ever-loving fuck? Who the hell is this? If anyone was going to organize a funeral for him, it'd be me and Big Jim, and we decided that some big fancy funeral is the last thing Crew would have wanted. He would have just preferred we all get wicked drunk and talk about how much we loved him.

Kyah - Who's this?

Unknown - Crew's brother. You coming or what?

Okay. Now I know I didn't read that right because as far as I was aware, Crew didn't have a brother. He was an only child, and as for his parents, I don't think he even mentioned them once.

Kyah - Crew didn't have a brother.

Unknown - Shit. Is that what he told ya? Fuck me.

Not wanting to respond anymore, I lock my phone and keep it clutched tightly in my hand, my head spinning with the possibility that Crew might have a brother out there somewhere. But yet, the more the idea circles my mind, the more I think this guy is lying. I mean, I know Crew certainly had secrets. That much has been made painfully clear, but surely the fact that he had a brother would have come up at some point.

Reaching my apartment, I take note of the six Harley Davidsons parked outside my building, and as I crane my head toward the sky, I realize the light is still on in my apartment and let out a heavy sigh. The last thing I want is to have to deal with Viper and his men tonight, but at the same time, Viper still has my keys, and I'd really prefer not to spend the night sleeping in the hall outside my door. Though something tells me that Alex might just be kind enough to offer me his couch, and if I'm lucky, he might even welcome me into his bed. Just to sleep though. He wouldn't dare risk losing our little challenge, especially now we've been putting so much effort into resisting each other. Alex doesn't strike me as the losing type.

Making my way up to my apartment, I push through the door to find Viper and his men just finishing up with the cameras scattered throughout my apartment.

Spider hovers in my kitchen and the second he sees me, a smirk cuts across his face. “Nice decor,” he murmurs, glancing above my head to my new favorite art piece that stands proud and tall, and so damn thick, for the world to see.

I go to respond, but before I get a chance, Viper is standing before me, his hand out expectantly. “Phone,” he snaps.

Not wanting a repeat of what happened in the shop, I quickly hand it over before kicking the door closed behind me and watching as Viper unlocks my screen. He scrolls through the multiple pages of stupid apps I don’t even use before finally finding my app store, and I watch as he downloads some kind of security app.

“Hey, did you know Crew had a brother?” I ask as the app starts its download.

Viper’s icy gaze cuts to mine, and it sends a chill sailing down my spine. “Who told you that?”

“The brother did,” I say, pointing toward my phone. “I just got a text from him, inviting me to Crew’s funeral.”

Viper immediately goes into my texts, clearly not having any issues breaching my privacy, and he takes a screenshot of the text exchange along with the unknown number at the top. “Crew’s family had a private wake for him three days ago,” Viper tells me, that icy gaze returning back to mine. “There is no funeral, Kyah. The bastard’s trying to lure you out.”

My brows furrow. “What do you mean he’s trying to lure me out? Who the hell is he?”

“A fucking dead man,” Viper tells me. “You hear me, Kyah. You’re not to involve yourself with this asshole. Is that understood?”

I arch my brow, not liking the audacity pouring out of him, assuming he has any say in who I involve myself with, but judging from the deadly look in his eyes, it’s not something I’m willing to push right now. “Yeah, got it,” I say, watching as Viper blocks and deletes the number from my phone before checking on the progress of the app download.

A few minutes pass and before I know it, Viper has me set up with an account for my new cameras and shows me exactly how to work it. “There’s a panic button,” he says, showing me how to find it on the home screen. “But in a real emergency, if someone is trying to break into your apartment, you call me directly, and I’ll be here. No matter what.”

I nod, knowing exactly when to play along with his demanding nature.

He goes over my alarm, showing me how to enable it each night and explains that the security company will receive a notification when it’s tripped. Then after practically giving me a pop quiz, Viper and his men are gone, and before I get a chance to even set the alarm for the night, I fall face-first onto my bed and crash, the exhaustion of the day, knocking me out cold.

REID



“**W**hat a clever girl,” I murmur to myself, watching as the Grim Reapers fly down the street after spending the last few hours installing Kyah’s new security cameras, their bikes rumbling like a thunderstorm through the night.

I knew she was starting to sense me there, starting to feel that something was off, and installing security cameras was the perfect confirmation. She’s finally starting to play my game, and I’ve never been so excited.

Oh, the fun we’re about to have.

A heavy rush pulses through my veins as I cross the road and make my way toward the front door of the apartment complex. It’s not the first time one of my girls has had security cameras and alarms installed, and from experience, it only makes it better.

I'm going to have to be careful from here on out, but first, I need to get inside her apartment and figure out what I'm dealing with.

After hashing in the code at the main door of the building, I slip inside before making my way up the three flights of stairs to her apartment, and as I creep toward her door, I shift my gaze up and down the long hall, making sure I'm not about to get caught. Each passing second brings us a little closer to midnight, and from what I can tell about watching the people who occupy this building, midnight is my golden hour. Most of the time. I'm not going to lie, I've had a few close calls over the past few weeks, but nothing I can't shrug off as a one-night stand.

Pulling out the burner phone cloned from Kyah's phone, I quickly search it to find a new app staring back at me, and a grin tears across my face. Fuck, my sweet little Kyah makes it too easy.

Opening the app, I shake my head, realizing that on day one, she already forgot to set her alarm, giving me perfect access to her apartment, not that something as menial as an alarm was going to stop me. Then looking at the camera feed, I'm able to determine exactly where her new cameras are and just how many have been installed. I have to give it to Viper, he did a thorough job making sure there were no blind spots, but unfortunately for him, the lack of blind spots won't be an issue for me.

Going into the settings of the app, I record a loop, and considering she's already passed out in bed and there's no other movement inside her apartment, I don't need to record for long. Then after hacking into the app's mainframe, I set the video to play on a loop for the next two hours before disabling her cameras. And with that, I slide the copy of her front door key into her door and walk straight in.

A grin lingers on my lips, and the second I close the door behind me, I inhale deeply, loving the way her scent wraps around me. She's so fucking intoxicating. Everything about her just does it for me.

It's been challenging trying to see her this past week, but I've done what I can to make it work. I don't understand it though. She took the death of that asshole really hard, but it shouldn't have broken her this way. I was doing her a favor, giving her what she needed. Doesn't she see how wrong he was for her? But it's fine, sometimes these things happen, and handling human emotions isn't always as easy as we hope it's going to be. Sometimes we just break, even when it's not warranted, and I'm not going to hold that against her. Instead, I just laid with her through the night, holding her close as she cried in her sleep, and as much as I want to do that again, I can't risk it. Instead, I've played with her in other ways.

The thought sends my gaze straight toward her living room window and a smirk lingers on my lips. God, it's been fun playing this little game with her this week. I like to think that it's given her something to look forward to each morning. Only now she's started locking it, and that shit doesn't sit well

with me. I'd usually come in through her window to avoid the risk of exposure when having to go straight through her front door, but these past few days, it's been necessary.

Making my way through her apartment, I head toward her bedroom door, making a mental note of all of her new cameras as I go. Seeing them through the app was enough to tell me exactly where they were, but there's something comforting about seeing them with my own eyes.

I love that she's playing along, doing all of this just for me.

It's going to be the best fun we've ever had.

Stepping through to her bedroom, I find Kyah sprawled out on her bed, her blanket down around her waist, and as I walk over to her, I take the blanket and pull it up to her shoulders, knowing that's how she prefers to sleep. Then crouching down beside her, my gaze trails over her beautiful face, and I gently brush her hair back behind her ear, obsessed with the soft moan that slips from between her lips.

God, I need to hear it again.

Leaning into her, I press my lips to her soft cheek. "I hope you're ready for me, sweet Kyah," I whisper into the darkened room before pulling back. There's so much more I want to say to her, so many wicked promises that I know will have her clenching those pretty thighs, but it needs to wait. She's not quite ready, but she will be soon. Every day, I feel her inching closer to me, preparing for what's to come, and I can't fucking wait.

Then turning around, I pull the lipstick I took from her bathroom before quickly uncapping the lid. Facing the wall, I raise my arm, and with a twisted smirk stretching across my lips, I get to work.

KYAH



Fear blasts through my veins like a bullet, rendering me breathless as I stare at my bedroom wall. The early morning sun streams through my window and shines upon the message scrawled across the drywall like a spotlight.

But fuck. It more than has my attention.

I swallow hard, my hands shaking as I grasp my blanket, holding it to my chest as though it could somehow offer me protection as I scan over the words for the millionth time.

PRETTY, PRETTY, KYAH.

ARE YOU READY TO PLAY?

What in the ever-loving fuck is that?

I was right. Someone is coming into my apartment each night, but more than that, this asshole was in my room while I slept.

Chills sweep down my spine, my blood turning ice cold as my heart pounds a million miles an hour. I knew something was happening. I was starting to come to terms with the possibility of someone sneaking into my apartment, and not just some crazy neighbor fucking with me, but this? FUCK.

This asshole is escalating. It's not just sneaking into my apartment now. He's leaving me messages, asking me if I'm ready to play. What the hell does this mean? Is this guy dangerous? And what does he mean by play? Is he going to try and fuck with me? Play mind games? Or is it something much worse?

I swallow over the lump in my throat and get to my feet, my knees shaking wildly beneath me.

This guy knows my name. This is more than just some random guy sneaking into my apartment. He knows who I am, and from the looks of it, he's only just getting started.

How long has this been going on? I started noticing the open window last week, but has it been longer than that? That day I came home with Crew before heading out to the bar, my window was open and there was the smell of a man's cologne. I assumed it was my upstairs neighbor, but what if it wasn't? Could this have started back then? And what about last Sunday when I'd gotten home to find my door kicked in? I'd assumed it was Crew because of his message that went along

with it, demanding to know where I was, but is it possible the door wasn't Crew at all? Did I get in his face and accuse him of something he didn't do?

Shit.

My chest heaves, barely able to take in a proper breath, and despite it being way too early to get to work, I haul ass, not wanting to be here a minute longer than necessary. I hurry toward the bathroom, my gaze bouncing around my apartment, trying to take in every last corner, when I notice the wide-open window.

I come to an abrupt stop, my heart pounding so damn hard I feel it will send me to an early grave. Shit. What if that's what this asshole is trying to achieve?

Oh God. I can't handle this.

I'm not exactly a good girl and don't entirely lead the kind of lifestyle that would please a man's mother, but I draw the line at psychopathic stalkers who sneak into women's bedrooms at night and leave messages on their fucking walls. Like what the hell is that even about?

Wait. That was lipstick, right? Not blood? Ahh shit.

I'm not cut out for this.

After darting across the room and hastily closing and locking the window once again, I make my way into the bathroom, only I find myself pausing before taking a step back toward the living room. My gaze lifts toward the ceiling, spying the camera above my head.

If someone was in my apartment last night, then it'd be caught on camera, right? So why the hell didn't my alarm go off when it caught movement?

My brows furrow, and I find myself hurrying back into my bedroom, finding my phone on my bedside table, and yanking it so hard I pull the charger out of the wall outlet. I drop down on my bed, and as I go to search through the endless pages of apps I have loaded on my phone, a vision of a hand snaking out from under my bed and clutching my ankle plays on repeat in my mind, and I find myself pulling my legs up under me.

I didn't check under my bed.

What if this guy is still here?

Fuck.

My whole body starts to shake, and almost twenty minutes pass before I finally get the courage to throw myself down on the ground and peer under my bed. It's dark under here, but there's enough morning sunshine streaming through the window to confirm that it's all in my head, and I let out a heavy sigh of relief. There's no psychotic stalker under my bed.

But what about the closet?

Taking another ten agonizing minutes to build up the courage once again, I finally scramble across my room with shaking hands and lunge forward. Before I can chicken out like a little bitch, I grab both of the closet doors at the same time and tear them open, immediately assuming the stance of

an MMA fighter as though I'm about to face down the heavyweight champion.

The closet is just as empty as under the bed, but it chills me to the bone seeing how all of my clothes have been pushed to one side, leaving enough space for somebody to hide here if they needed to. But surely I would have noticed if somebody had been hiding in my closet, right? I mean, the only reason someone would have to hide would be if I were in here at the same time.

Pushing that thought out of my head, I take my phone out into the living room, not feeling comfortable in my bedroom right now, and I finally bring up the security app to look over the cameras. They're all on and working, and when I go to check the alarm, I realize I hadn't actually set it last night.

Fuck. How stupid could I have been?

What's the point of going to all of the trouble to get a security system installed if I don't remember to turn it on?

Bringing up the footage from last night, I scroll through it, trying to see anything that could tell me who the hell this guy is, but after fast-forwarding through the whole thing and seeing nothing but me tossing and turning in my bed, my brows furrow.

There was nobody in my apartment, but the fucked-up message on my wall clearly shows that there was. Did I imagine the words staring back at me?

I shake my head, and just to be sure, I stride back into my bedroom. Sure enough, the message is still scrawled across my wall in big, creepy lipstick letters.

Fuck. That must mean my new security system is nothing but a piece of shit. Hell, I'm glad Viper didn't make me pay for that, otherwise, I'd be pissed. Though, he should really reconsider looking for a new security guy because whoever the fuck he's using now clearly doesn't know what he's doing. Though, it could definitely have something to do with the dumbass bikers who installed it for me.

What am I supposed to do now?

Still not feeling great about spending so much time in my apartment, I hurry through a shower and find myself looking all around the bathroom, making sure there are no hidden cameras watching me, and despite seeing nothing, I can't keep the paranoia from circling my mind.

After getting dressed, I hightail it out of my apartment, putting extra effort into locking up. As I get to work early and sit alone in the shop with my sketchpad, I find myself wondering what this guy looks like. Is he creepy or is there something dark and intriguing about him?

Is he the type to slit my throat in my sleep, or is he there because something about me excites him? Does he spend his nights watching me sleep, looking over the curve of my body and wishing he could touch me?

My heart races, and as I lose focus on the drawing in my sketchpad, I find a thrill pulsing through my body at the

thought of this mystery stalker, and I immediately scold myself. I shouldn't feel that way. He shouldn't excite me, and yet, the thought of some sexy-as-sin man touching me in the night has my blood pumping faster than ever before.

Shit. This is all Alex's fault. He's kept me sexually frustrated for the past two weeks. If I wasn't so worked up and my favorite monster dildo wasn't so far out of reach, I would have been able to satisfy that raw, relentless craving, and I would probably be thoroughly repulsed by the idea of the wicked things my stalker would do to me.

Yep. It's official. I'm sick in the head, but hell, maybe me and my stalker might have something in common, you know, apart from the fact that we both like hanging out in my apartment.

Trying to put all the thoughts of this mystery stalker out of my head, I drop my gaze back to my sketchpad and let myself get lost in what I'm doing. My pencil glides over the pages effortlessly, and it feels a lot more natural than it had yesterday. I can't help but wonder if it's because this new development with my stalker is keeping my mind off the guilt I feel about Crew, or if pouring all of my emotions into my design yesterday has somehow managed to clear my head. All I know is that today, I haven't been hung up over Crew's death. Don't get me wrong, not having him here still kills me, but today it seems so much easier to breathe.

A few hours pass when I hear the familiar chime above the door, and I glance back over my shoulder to find Big Jim

making his way in. “Hey, kid,” he calls out through the shop, raising his voice over the music I’m playing. “How’re you feeling today?”

“Alright,” I say with a slight shrug of my shoulders as he strides to his station and dumps his shit on the table.

“You good? You never beat me in.”

“Yeah, fine,” I tell him. “Just wanted to get a head start on a few designs. I got a little behind last week.”

“Sure thing,” he says before holding my stare, his lips pressing into a hard line as if deep in thought. “Hey, listen. I wanted to run something by you.”

My brows furrow, and I wait in silence for him to continue, not sure I like the tone in his voice. It feels as though I need to prepare myself for whatever is about to come.

“If it’s too much or too soon, you need to speak up, but with Crew gone, the workload is just too much for the two of us to maintain. You’re doing crazy hours trying to take on Crew’s ongoing clients, and I know you like the cash, but you’re gonna burn yourself out.”

“What are you getting at?” I ask, hearing the familiar rumble of a bike rolling to a stop outside the shop. As I glance toward the front window, I’m not surprised to find Viper peering inside, his dark, unreadable gaze already locked on mine.

Big Jim lets out a heavy sigh. “I know it’s only been a week since Crew died, but I need to hire someone new.”

My back stiffens, and I whip my gaze back toward Big Jim. “You want to replace him?” I ask, hating how reasonable it sounds, and yet at the same time, the idea of seeing someone else at Crew’s station makes something ache in my chest.

Big Jim nods. “Have a think about it,” he tells me. “If it’s too much to handle, then we’ll figure something out. We might have to turn away a few clients, but I have a business to run, and making sure neither of us burns out is my top priority. If either one of us goes down, I’m not sure the business could survive it.”

“Shit.”

“My thoughts exactly.”

I press my lips into a hard line, and just as my gaze shifts back toward the front window, I watch as Viper takes off again, the roar of his engine practically shaking the whole fucking building.

What the fuck was that about? Is he checking up on me?

I don’t get to linger on it as my phone vibrates against the table and as Alex’s name appears across the screen, a smile pulls at my lips. Grabbing my phone, I unlock the screen as I glance down at his text, and my smile turns into a beaming grin.

Alex - I’m taking you out on Saturday night, and if you even think of telling me no, I won’t hesitate to kick down your fucking door and drag you out by the teeth.

Kyah - Wow. Drag me out by the teeth, huh? Sounds brutal. But to be honest, I pictured you more as a collar and leash kinda guy.

Alex - Don't fucking tempt me.

Kyah - Down boy!

Alex - Yes or no, Mace? I need to know if I have to stop by the pet store to grab a leash.

Kyah - Are you suggesting that you already own the collar?

Alex - Wouldn't you like to know.

Kyah - I think you have a whole bunch of dirty little secrets that I'd like to know. But to answer your question, yes. You can take me out, but you better blow my mind. Otherwise, I'm not giving you another chance.

Alex - Liar.

Alex - Your new collar will be waiting for you when you get home.

I laugh to myself, placing my phone back onto the table as my next client strides through the door. Then just as I get him settled into my chair with the design I spent nearly three hours on last week stenciled onto his skin, my phone buzzes with another notification, only this is a sound I've never heard before.

My brows furrow, and as I scoop up my phone, I realize it's my new security system alerting me that my alarm is going

off, and I suck in a gasp, quickly unlocking my phone and checking the security footage to watch in real time as Alex breaks into my apartment and looks directly up toward the camera, a wicked grin on his face.

“What the hell?” I mutter to myself just as he reaches up high, having to push up onto his tippy toes, and loops something over the mistletoe monster cock—a fucking collar.

Looking more than proud of himself, Alex faces the camera again, and damn it, the way he’s staring directly at the camera tells me he’s looking right at me. He fists the hem of his shirt, and as a wicked smirk stretches across his face, he pulls his shirt up, giving me the perfect show. Only when I think he’s about to drop his shirt back into place, those dark, delicious eyes sparkle with silent laughter and he presses his pointer finger right to his useless man-nipple and rubs tight little circles.

A laugh tears from the back of my throat, and I have to smother my hand over my face to keep from howling like a fucking animal as I watch this ridiculously gorgeous man caress his own nipple, and as stupid as it is, I find myself insanely jealous.

Alex can’t keep a straight face, and he laughs as his shirt falls back into place, hiding his sculpted abs. With that, he makes his way back out of my apartment, pulling the door closed behind him.

Unable to help myself, I close out my security app and open a new text.

Kyah - Since when did you have a key to my apartment?

Alex - You really think I was going to let my friend replace your door without keeping a key for myself? Come on, Mace. I thought you knew me better than that.

Kyah - I think we need to discuss boundaries.

Kyah - Also, the camera feed went a little fuzzy. I'm gonna need a replay of your titty-rubbing technique up close and personal. You know, for educational purposes.

Alex - Only if I get to see your monster cock thrusting techniques up close and personal. You know, for educational purposes.

Kyah - You couldn't handle my monster cock thrusting techniques.

Alex - Wanna bet? Bring that bastard over to my place.

Kyah - I would, but some asshole mistook it for a ceiling fan.

Alex - Shit. He sounds like a real prick.

Kyah - The biggest!

KYAH



Alex's hand rests in mine, his arm looped over my shoulder as we make our way along the East River, gazing out toward the Brooklyn Bridge, and despite having lived here my whole life, I'm blown away. I love my home. It's so damn beautiful, especially at night. There's just something magical about the lower Manhattan skyline and seeing the way the city lights sparkle against the darkened sky.

It's everything. I don't know if it's an age thing or maybe I've just been too busy trying to build a life for myself, but I don't think I've ever taken a moment to stop and appreciate its beauty. The fact that I get to do it with Alex right beside me only makes it that much better.

I've never been so giddy, and it has everything to do with the way he looks at me. It's as though I'm the most tempting snack he's ever been offered, but at the same time, I can tell he

wants to know everything about my life and how I ended up here. Alex actually listens as though he's hanging on every word, not just trying to make small talk like most guys on a first date, and it does something to me.

Every time his fingers brush over my skin, I'm left with a trail of goosebumps where he touches me. When he leans in closer and murmurs something a little risqué in my ear, I can't help but bite my bottom lip and discreetly try to clench my thighs together.

I've never experienced anything like this, and it scares the crap out of me. If I'm not careful, I'm going to fall hard and fast. But Alex isn't the kind of man to stand back and let me fall. No, he's the kind who's going to strap a helmet to my head and push me right off the edge. But he'll jump right along with me, holding my hand the whole way down.

"Are you sure you really want to know all of this?" I ask him as we slowly trail along the river's edge, making our way back toward our apartment complex after leaving one of the most delicious Italian restaurants I've ever been to. "It's really not that interesting."

"I meant what I said, Kyah," he grumbles, his hand tightening in mine. "I want to know everything there is to know about you. So quit stalling and give me what I want."

I laugh. "You mean the way you've been giving me what I want for the past two weeks?" I tease. "Oh wait ... you haven't."

“Don’t make me throw you in the fucking river, Mace,” he warns. “Because I’m going to be really fucking pissed when I have to jump in to get you.”

My eyes widen at the thought of being tossed into that river. I’m a great swimmer, but the East River isn’t exactly a kiddie pool. It’s more like the kind of river the local mafia would use as a dumping ground.

When I don’t respond fast enough, Alex dives for my waist, pretending to follow through with his threat. I squeal, darting away from him, but he quickly pulls me right back in, his arm falling back over my shoulder. “Okay, okay,” I laugh, trying to figure out where to start. “I’ve always been a Brooklyn girl. Born and raised—”

“Siblings?” he questions.

I scoff. “Who knows,” I tell him. “I never met my father, and judging by the way my mom would talk about him, he was a man-whore who took off the second the pregnancy test came back positive.”

“Shit. What about your mom?”

“She, umm ... I don’t really know how to sum up my mother,” I admit. “I have mixed feelings about her. There were a lot of good times before the bad ones came along. She was a good mom for the most part, you know, when it mattered the most. We didn’t have much. Most of the time she struggled to put food on the table, but in those early years when I was just a kid, she did what she could to give me a good life.”

“But?” he prompts.

I shrug my shoulders. “I suppose she got exhausted from always trying to pretend that everything was going to be okay. I got older and could see through her act. After that, I think she just kinda gave up. She stopped smiling,” I tell him, letting out a heavy breath. “Then she stopped asking me how school was and stopped caring who I was hanging out with until eventually, she just stopped coming home altogether.”

“Fuck. How old were you then?”

“Seventeen,” I tell him, trying to keep the hurt out of my tone. “But it’s fine. I remember when Mom stopped paying the rent. I came home to find the eviction notice stuck to the door. It’s the first time it really hit me that my mother didn’t give a shit about me anymore, but Nat’s family had pretty much taken me in at that point.”

Alex leads me away from the East River and across the road as we get closer to our building. “So, how’d you end up at High Voltage Ink?”

A fond smile stretches across my face as I recall the day so perfectly. “Nat and I had been getting into a little bit of trouble, and her parents were at their breaking point. They told me it was time to go. I was walking the streets, terrified that I was about to spend my first night on the street when I walked past High Voltage Ink. It was a stormy night and it was the only storefront that offered a little bit of shelter from the rain, and before my ass could even hit the front stoop, Big Jim was

hauling me inside,” I tell him, pausing a moment as the memories come flooding back.

“Viper had only recently been promoted to Vice President of the Grim Reapers and was just starting to really experiment with ink. Big Jim had been working on him when he dragged me in there looking like a drowned rat,” I say, a stupid smile resting on my lips. “Crew had been there that day too, though despite what he always said, it took him a little while to warm up to me, and as Big Jim worked on Viper, he gave me something to eat and demanded to know why the hell someone as young as me was wandering the streets so late at night. The rest is history. He gave me a job, and I’ve just recently learned that Viper is the reason I have my apartment. They looked after me. Big Jim, Viper, and Crew, they’re my family. At least ... Crew was.”

“I’m sorry,” he murmurs, pulling me in closer as we near our building. “Losing family is never easy.”

I glance up, meeting his gaze. “Are you referring to your mom?”

Alex scoffs. “Fuck no,” he says. “My foster brother, Landon. We were together for a few years when I was around ten or so and got really close. He was being abused by our foster father, and I didn’t find out until I was reading his suicide letter.”

I suck in a gasp, horror spreading through my veins, unable to imagine just how terrible that would have been. The guilt for not having known or being able to do anything to help him

while so young ... shit. "I'm so sorry," I whisper, my heart breaking for Landon.

Alex nods as we reach our building and he reaches out to hash in the access code. "It was a long time ago," he tells me as if trying to shrug it off, not wanting to linger on something so painful.

Not wanting to push him on it, I let the topic fall away, hoping that one day when he's ready or if he feels he needs to talk about it, he's comfortable enough to open up to me. Instead, I give him a beaming smile as he holds the door open for me.

We make our way into the apartment complex and immediately turn to the right, heading for the stairs. Alex takes my hand again, and as we start to climb, I'm hit with that familiar disappointment that comes every time my night with Alex is coming to an end.

The walk to the third floor is quiet, both of us clearly lost in our thoughts, and as we reach our landing and make our way toward our doors, I find myself clutching his hand just a little tighter. "What is it?" he asks, those dark eyes lingering on me.

"I don't think I'm ready to tell you good night."

"Good, because I had no intention of ending this here," he says. In a blinding flash, Alex grabs me by my ass and lifts me into his strong arms. His lips crash down on mine, sending a low groan rumbling through my chest. Before I know it, my back slams against my door, and I lock my legs around his waist as my short skirt rides up.

His tongue plunges into my mouth, and my eyes flutter closed as his rock-hard cock grinds against my pulsing core, my panties already soaked with need.

God. It's everything, and when we pull away to catch our breath, his lips trail straight down to the sensitive part of my neck. My fingers knot into his dark, unruly hair, and I groan with hunger as I tilt my head to the side, needing so much more. Hell, I need all of him.

The anticipation of waiting is surely going to kill me. I can't stand it a second longer.

"Alex," I pant as his lips come right back to mine, cutting off whatever I was going to say. But it's fine because I really had no idea what the hell I was going to say.

He keeps me pinned to my door, taking full control, and as he continues grinding against me, showing me just how ready he is, my core begins to throb. "Tell me to stop," he growls against my lips, but I shake my head. That's the last thing I want.

"Mace," he warns. "I can feel how fucking hot you are for me. If I don't stop, I'm going to fuck you right here in the hallway. Tell me to fucking stop."

I shake my head again, not giving a flying fuck if he wants to tear my clothes off my body and bend me over right here where we stand. Hell, I'll start taking my clothes off for him if it'll save us some time. All I know is that I need to feel him inside of me.

“Please,” I groan, jolting my hips to get more traction against him. “Don’t you dare walk away leaving me this fucking desperate for you.”

“Ky,” he groans, his lips furiously moving against mine as his hands roam over my body. “I don’t want to take you like this. Not the first time.”

“I’m not a wine and dine kind of girl. I don’t need the romance,” I pant, my fingers tightening in his hair. “I just need to come.”

“You said,” he grunts, barely holding on to that shred of control. “You fucking said if I was to take you out, that I was to respect you.”

I shake my head, hating how damn good his memory is. Hell, I can’t even remember what I ordered at the restaurant. “Disrespect me, Alex,” I demand. “I also said that when I tell you you’re welcome to my body, you can take it. And fuck, Alex. I need you to take it.”

He groans low, and I feel the vibration through his chest, and before I even know what’s going on, his grip tightens on my ass and he throws me up until my thighs are braced over his strong shoulders, his face hovering right in front of my needy cunt. “Holy shit,” I breathe, my chest heaving.

“Hold the fucking frame, Ky,” he says, his gaze pointedly shifting to the door frame just behind my head, and I don’t hesitate, my hands flying over my head as I cling on to the narrow ledge to keep my balance, trusting Alex to hold the rest of my weight.

His gaze darkens with an intense hunger, and as they shift from my eyes back down to my cunt right in front of him, I know exactly what he's seeing—the front of my soaked white thong just daring him to come closer.

“Alex,” I moan, watching as he tilts his face toward my pussy, inhaling deeply and sending me into near heart failure at the pure animalistic groan that tears out of him.

“Fuck, Ky. I need to taste this sweet pussy.”

“Please,” I groan, not giving a shit that he's about to eat my pussy in the middle of our hallway. All that matters is how it's going to feel when I come on his tongue.

Alex hooks his arms over my thighs and tears the thin material of my soaked thong at the seams, leaving me fucking bare for him. “God, I knew you'd have the prettiest fucking cunt, Mace,” he growls, his voice so damn thick and low, speaking right to the whoring vixen who lives within me and pleasing her more than ever.

Alex pushes my thighs further apart, spreading me wider until my legs are just about falling off his shoulders. He braces his elbows against my door to keep me up, and just as the desperation begins eating me alive, Alex dives in, unable to wait a moment longer.

His tongue immediately strokes through my core, starting at my entrance and trailing up to my clit, making my hips jolt with a fiery need. He does it again, and as he groans, I feel the vibrations from his lips right against my clit. “Oh God,” I cry, releasing one of my hands from the frame behind my head and

knotting my fingers into his hair as though I could hold him right there against my cunt for the rest of time.

His tongue begins circling my clit, working it as though he knows my body better than I do, and my eyes grow hooded as I shamelessly watch the show. He flicks his tongue over my clit then closes his mouth over me, gently sucking before taking me harder.

Alex works me so perfectly, his tongue roaming up and down my cunt and making my body shudder with pure, unadulterated pleasure. It's not long before I feel that familiar build deep inside of me, coiling like a spring, getting ready to explode.

He sucks and nips at my clit, every swipe of his tongue taking me higher.

I cling on to him, my fingers tightening in his hair as I cry out, the intensity creeping up on me. "Alex," I groan. "YES!"

Then as he sucks against my clit, his tongue furiously flicking, it's all I can take as the coil springs free, my orgasm exploding like a rocket and sending me soaring. I clench my eyes, my fingers balling into tight fists until my nails bite into my skin, the frame above my head long forgotten.

My pussy wildly convulses, and as I come hard, the intensity shatters me like glass. Alex continues working my clit, his tongue greedily lapping up my arousal like a starved man desperate for more.

My walls contract, and despite the overwhelming satisfaction and release of the wild sexual frustration I've felt since first meeting Alex, I'm still desperate for him. This small taste wasn't nearly enough to satisfy the hunger within me.

As I finally come down from my high, Alex reluctantly pulls his lips away and knocks my thighs off his shoulders, easily catching me in his strong arms. He lowers me back to my feet, and I clutch his shoulders as my knees shake beneath me, certain I'm going to crumble to the ground. As I take a moment to find my footing, Alex fixes my skirt around my ass, covering the goodies.

"Shit," I breathe, barely able to comprehend what the hell just happened out here in the hallway.

He hovers closely, and as his straining cock presses up against my hip, my gaze drops between us. "Let me repay the favor," I purr, more than eager to drop to my knees right here.

Alex shakes his head. "Mark my words, Kyah. You'll repay the favor, but not like this," he tells me, leaning in and letting his hot breath skim across my neck. "When you take me in your mouth for the first time, I want you on your knees in black lingerie with that collar strapped tightly around your throat. Only then will you taste me."

My knees give out, and Alex tightens his grip on my waist, keeping me standing. "Go to bed, Mace," he tells me. "I'll swing by tomorrow and show you exactly how I want you."

I swallow hard, barely able to catch my breath as I try to come up with a smartass response, but I've got nothing. This

dominant side of him renders me speechless, and I absolutely love it.

He watches the way I react to him, and those dark eyes fill with a devilish excitement, and as a grin rips across his face, I see that boyish charm that drove me insane the first day I met him. “Bed, Mace,” he scolds. “You’re gonna need all the energy you can get.”

Rolling my eyes, I find I’m still lost for words, barely able to string two syllables together. He steps into me and slips his fingers just inside the cup of my bra, fishing out the key to my apartment, but I don’t know how the hell he knew that was there. Then with a smirk playing on his delicious lips, he unlocks my apartment and swings the door wide before offering me the key.

I reluctantly take it, still wishing we had more time tonight, but soon the sun is going to make an appearance. Alex leans in and presses a feather-soft kiss to my cheek. “Goodnight, Mace,” he murmurs, hovering outside my door.

“Night,” I whisper.

Alex holds my gaze a moment longer, and before I know it, he’s closing the door between us, and I quickly crumble against it, needing a moment to breathe as I come to terms with everything that just happened.

That was incredible. Not just the way he threw me in the air and ate my pussy, but the whole night, and I can’t wait to do it again. I just hope he feels the same way because I can easily see myself getting in over my head with this guy.

Realizing just how late it is, I wander into my bedroom and throw my phone down on my bed, and as I go to turn away, my gaze catches out the window, finding a familiar bike parked in the shadows across the street.

Fucking Viper.

I let out a frustrated breath. I've been seeing him a lot lately, ever since Crew's murder, and at first, I told myself that he was just checking in on me, but this is becoming ridiculous. Is it because I asked him to install the security system? Maybe I gave him the impression that I was in some kind of trouble. Hell, maybe this has something to do with that text message I received from Crew's brother. Viper was weird after that came through. Maybe it was a mistake letting him know.

Reaching for my phone again, I quickly type out a new text.

Kyah - I don't need a babysitter.

Viper - The fuck you don't. Go to bed.

I groan. This has become a nightly ritual with Viper, whether it's him or one of his men. There's always someone stationed outside my apartment as though I need some kind of protection, and no matter how many times I tell Viper to lose the guard dogs, I never seem to win.

Knowing a losing battle when I see one, I do my best to ignore him before striding over to my chest of drawers and finding a new pair of panties and a silk pajama set. I strip out of my clothes, and as I go to step into my new panties, I pause.

I'm too worked up after all of that. I'm never going to be able to sleep like this. I need to calm myself down, and what better way to do that than by having a quick shower?

Strutting through my apartment in the nude, I reach into the shower and turn on the taps before waiting for the water to warm. And just as I expected, as I step in and the water cascades over my body, my overactive mind begins to calm.

I take my time, and as I lather up the loofah and move it across my body, I can't help but picture Alex, imagining his hand moving over my body. A subtle moan slips from between my lips when a distinct creak sounds in my living room.

My blood runs cold, and my hands fall away, the water quickly rinsing off the body wash as I realize someone is in my apartment.

My hands start to shake, my heart pounding with fear.

Is this my stalker? The asshole who left me the message at the beginning of the week. Has he come to play whatever game it is he's been waiting to play?

Fuck.

The creak sounds again, and the fear becomes too much as I whip around in the shower, grabbing the taps and turning them off before reaching out and fisting my hand around my towel. I hastily wrap it around my body, and with shaky hands, I open the shower door and peer around through the open bathroom door. "Hello?" I say, my voice cracking.

I swallow hard, and when no response comes, I try it again. “Is someone there? Viper, is that you?”

Again, I’m met with silence, and as I try to convince myself that it’s all in my head, the fear only gets worse. The creak comes again, and it’s all I can take before completely losing my shit and racing from the bathroom. I sprint to the front door of my apartment, not daring to look back in fear of what I might find.

“FUCK. FUCK. FUCK,” I panic, my wet hand slipping on the door handle, certain I’m about to be slaughtered like cattle. After all, it’s always the dumb bitch who can’t work a door handle who gets killed first in all the horror movies.

Then finally, I get leverage on the handle and yank the door open, and with my towel clutched tightly around my dripping-wet body, I race out into the hallway, slamming the door behind me.

ALEX



*B*ANG! BANG! BANG!

A heavy pounding sounds at my front door, and I hurry toward it, wearing nothing but a pair of pants after standing in a cold shower and trying to work Kyah out of my system.

Fuck. She was delicious, my new favorite snack, and the way she smelled ... God. I need to have her again.

BANG! BANG! BANG!

The pounding sounds again, this time more forceful, and coming with a desperate panic, and I pick up my pace, my brow furrowed. It's well after midnight, and despite having sent Ky home to bed, the likelihood that it's her has me moving faster. Nobody knocks on a door like that unless it's an

emergency, which means over the space of the last eight minutes, something must have gone very wrong.

“Alex, please,” Kyah cries quietly from the other side, yet even through the door, the sound somehow speaks directly to my soul.

I all but leap the last step, my hand diving for the handle, and I barely get a chance to tear the door open before Kyah shoves past me, her eyes wide and filled with terror as she grabs the door and quickly slams it closed. Her chest heaves beneath her towel, her body dripping wet, and I immediately move into her, my eyes darting around as if searching for a threat, my military training keeping me on edge.

“What’s wrong?” I demand, my hand clutching her wet upper arms, fear shining through her big blue eyes.

Kyah visibly swallows, holding my stare as though silently begging me to be her knight in shining armor, and fuck, at this point, I’ll be absolutely anything she needs me to be. “There’s ... there’s someone in my apartment.”

My eyes widen, my gaze snapping up toward my door as if expecting someone to come barging through it. “The fuck?” I grunt, my fingers digging into her soft skin, searching her terrified gaze. There’s only a handful of things someone waiting in a woman’s apartment would want with her, and every single one of those things sends me into a blind rage. “Are you okay? Did he touch you?”

She shakes her head, her hands visibly shaking as she reaches for my chest, her fingers digging in as if clutching me

like a physical lifeline. “No, I ... I didn’t see him. I could just hear him moving through my apartment,” she says, still heavily panting, unable to calm herself, “and I just ... I ran.”

I pull her into me, crushing her chest against mine as I wrap my arms around her. “Shhh,” I murmur, desperately trying to soothe her as I listen intently to any noises coming from outside my apartment. “You’re safe with me. I’m not going to let anything happen to you.”

Kyah reluctantly nods her head against my chest as if not sure just how fiercely I could protect her from this, and from what I’ve learned of her so far, I’m sure she’s warring with herself over asking me for help in the first place. She’s so independent, never asking anyone for handouts, not that she needs them, but this is different. I know she’s strong and can handle herself, but having someone in her apartment isn’t the same as dealing with some loser catcalling on the sidewalk.

This is different.

Pulling my hands back to her shoulders, I gently push her back to meet her eye. “I need to go and check it out,” I tell her. “Stay here.”

She nods, her eyes still so wide and it fucking kills me.

Hell, how could I have sent her in there without checking it out first? It’s not as though I haven’t noticed Viper and his men tailing her for the past week. Everywhere she goes, they’re always watching, and considering how Viper cares for her, that could only mean he believes there’s some kind of threat she needs to be protected from.

Sending her in there alone was foolish, but I wasn't thinking. I was out of control, more than ready to break every fucking rule we've established. All I could think about was how fucking tight she'll feel when I sink my cock into her sweet little cunt, and the thoughts were quickly overwhelming me. I needed to step away before I grabbed her and fucked her right there in the hallway.

I should have been thinking about her safety.

Kyah clutches my forearms, her nails creating little half-moons in my skin, and as I step away and reach for the door, she refuses to let go until the very last second. The door opens, and I step out into the hallway, my gaze trained on Kyah's door, and as mine closes behind me, she quickly locks it.

Taking a deep breath, I prepare myself for the worst as I curl my fingers around the door handle, pushing into the silent apartment. I close the door behind me, not risking leaving it open and offering a straight line right to Kyah.

My gaze quickly sweeps the apartment, shifting to every shadowed area, but I don't feel anyone here.

I slowly make my way around her apartment, checking beneath the couch, behind it, and around it before checking the linen closet and her kitchen pantry. I check every single cupboard throughout the small apartment before double-checking it just to be sure.

There's no sign of anyone in here. She must have been imagining it. Unless there was and the asshole somehow

managed to slip out the window in the time it took Kyah to come pounding on my door.

Certain her home is clear, I make my way back to my apartment, guilt starting to build with each new step I take. She's starting to trust me, starting to lean on me and open up, but I haven't exactly been honest with her. If she knew ... everything would change.

Kyah deserves better than that. I can feel her starting to fall for me, and I'm right there with her, more than ready to see where this is going. We fit together perfectly, and it'd be a shame to fuck it up now, so until I know she can handle it and she won't be able to just walk away, my secrets will stay hidden with me.

Is that fucked up? Maybe. But there's something about Kyah, and I don't want to risk losing her just yet.

Making my way back across the hall, the door of my apartment opens before I get a chance to reach for the handle, confirming that she's been watching out the peephole, probably freaking out the whole time.

Stepping into my apartment, she quickly closes the door behind me. "You good?" I ask.

Her gaze flicks back toward the peephole. "Did you find him?"

I shake my head. "There was no one there," I tell her. "I checked everywhere twice. Under the bed. The closet. Even

your pantry. If there was someone there, he was gone before I got there.”

Kyah lets out a shaky breath, her brows furrow. “I, umm ... I’m sorry,” she says with a cringe. “I could have sworn I heard someone there.”

“It’s okay, Mace,” I say, pulling her into my arms. “I’d rather you came pounding on my door for a false alarm than to not say anything at all and end up in trouble. You know my door is always open to you.”

She gives me a small smile that doesn’t reach her eyes, and I know she’s still thinking about it, not entirely convinced that her apartment is clear. “Thanks,” she says, those bright blue eyes falling away, gazing down at my bare chest. “I should probably get to bed.”

I arch a brow. “You sure you’re good?” I ask her. “You look like you’d rather sleep with a mountain lion than risk going back in there. You can take my bed if you want.”

A sparkle hits her eye, and she looks back up at me, her lips twisting into a wicked smirk. “You and I both know that’s not a good idea,” she says, reaching for the door and pulling it open. Then as she steps over the threshold, she glances back at me. “Besides, if I don’t date my neighbors, then I certainly don’t sleep in their beds.”

I grab her, my arm locking around her waist as I pull her back into my chest. “Try telling me you don’t date your neighbors again, see what happens,” I dare her.

Kyah grins wide, but she's smart enough to keep her mouth shut. "Good night, Parkour."

My fingers splay across her back, more than aware of the fact that she's completely naked with nothing but a towel wrapped around her gorgeous body, and it kills me to not tear it off and take her to my bed. "Good night, Mace," I murmur, not wanting to let go, only she inches back, and I reluctantly drop my arm from around her waist.

She steps back through the doorway, stopping midway again, her fingers lingering on the frame as she glances back at me. She doesn't say a word, just holds my stare as a breathtaking blush begins to spread across her cheeks. And with that, she walks away, leaving my heart galloping inside my chest.

KYAH



Making my way back into my apartment, I can't keep the smile off my face. There's just something about Mr. Parkour that does it for me. He's everything I didn't know I wanted. I've been surrounding myself with men like Crew and Viper, ones who want to control me and tell me how it's going to be, and it's never made me feel the way Alex does.

Sure, he has that dominant, controlling streak, but so far, it only seems to come out when things are getting hot and heavy between us. Every other time I've been with him, he's been playful and cocky with that boyish charm that makes my knees weak. Hell, the way he raced me down to the laundry room still plays in my mind.

I'm already addicted.

Despite Alex checking the apartment, I quickly scan it for myself before realizing it must have all been in my head.

There's no message left on any of my walls, no random scent of men's cologne lingering in the air, and the living room window is closed and locked.

It was definitely in my head. I must have imagined it all, allowing my paranoia to run wild, and now I've gone and humiliated myself in front of Alex. He probably thinks I'm an idiot, making up stories in my head just for an excuse to see him.

God! How stupid can I be? Besides, this asshole who's been using my apartment for his own sick and twisted games generally waits until after I've gone to sleep. He's not bold enough to try sneaking in here while I'm awake. At least, I don't think he is.

Either way, my situation is messed up.

Certain I'm alone, I double-check the window lock before double and triple-checking the deadbolt on my front door. No one is getting in here tonight. Feeling better about the whole situation, I wander into my bathroom to fix my dripping hair and get dressed before finally taking myself to bed, turning off my bedroom light as I go. Then just to be sure, I open the security app on my phone and check over everything, coming up with nothing and proving once and for all that it was all in my head.

It's been a huge day. I worked all morning, squeezing in a few extra clients and exhausting myself to the point I finally caved and told Big Jim to hire a replacement for Crew. I mean, no one is going to be able to create the kind of designs he was

so good at and be able to make me smile when I first walk through the door in the mornings, but we desperately need the help, and I'm sure that we'll eventually find someone who will be a welcomed addition to the High Voltage Ink family.

After getting home from work, I barely had fifteen minutes to get dressed and ready for my date with Alex. I had every intention of being on time, waiting by the door just like last time, but apparently, finding an outfit that screams *I want you but please don't think I'm a slut* is a lot harder than it seems.

Climbing into bed in nothing but a pair of skimpy panties and a crop, I pull my blanket up to my chin, but despite my exhausting day, I find it impossible to fall asleep. Tonight was simply amazing, and the way Alex threw me around like a fucking rag doll has me more than excited to see what else he has in store.

He ate my pussy as though he would die without it, easily getting me off, but I'm not going to lie, I needed so much more, and despite the incredible, intense orgasm that tore through my body, I was left still hungry for him. Though I guess that's what they say—always keep them wanting more. Hell, I feel as though he must have heard that old saying and took it as gospel.

The thought has a stupid grin cutting across my face, and as I replay everything that went down in the hallway, I find my hand slipping down between my legs, unable to sate the hunger I have for him. I've never been so needy for a man

before, but the more that cocky smile of his flashes my way, the more I want to throw myself at him.

My fingers roll over my clit, and my hips jolt, picturing the way Alex would touch me—his fingers, his tongue, his huge fucking cock that I can't wait to explore. My head tilts back into my pillow, and a low groan rumbles through my chest as my fingers rub tight little circles.

“Oh God,” I groan, gritting my teeth.

Wanting so much more, I drag my hand down my body to my needy cunt, finding myself soaking wet, and I can't wait, pushing my fingers deep inside. I split my fingers, gently massaging my walls as my thumb continues working my clit, but it's too much. My body is already so worked up.

I thrust my fingers a little deeper, and just as I start to pant, a soft groan rumbles through my room and my eyes spring open.

What in the ever-loving fuck was that?

My hand pauses under the sheets, my heart lurching out of my fucking chest when I hear it again, the groan coming from across the room, not even concealed behind the closet door, but the small armchair in the darkest corner.

The lights are out, and it's pitch black in my room, but I feel him, sense him watching me, and I fucking missed it. How could I be so stupid? Alex came through here, checked every fucking room, looked everywhere, and he insisted the apartment was clear. I so blindly trusted that I was safe. So where the fuck did he come from?

Is this guy a figment of my imagination? Am I going crazy?

FUCK!

No, this isn't my head screwing with me. I know it's not. I feel it in my bones. This is as real as it gets, and something tells me he's not just here to watch me sleep anymore. This is some kind of vile game to him, and it terrifies me. I mean, who is this guy? He was capable of evading Alex during his search, and that couldn't have been an easy feat. Alex has military training and was relentless in his search. So how the hell did he evade him?

All I know is that this guy clearly isn't here for a little innocent stalking, and considering the subtle groans coming out of him, he's obviously in the middle of getting off. My stomach clenches realizing that he's getting off while watching me get off, but what the hell am I supposed to do now?

If I stop, if I pause for just a little too long and he becomes suspicious that I know he's here, is it game over for me? Do I try to run, risking the sprint through my apartment in the dark and having to try to unlock my door with him quickly gaining on me? Can I even make it back to Alex in time? And what happens if I do? Does he beat the shit out of this guy and make matters worse?

Or do I just keep going? Finish what I started and pretend to go to sleep as though I have no idea he's sitting right there in the corner of my room, hoping like fuck he doesn't try to touch me ... doesn't end my life?

Fuck. Fuck. FUCK!

If I were to finish and sleep, there's a chance he'll eventually just walk away, right? He'll get what he needs from ... whatever the fuck this is and then slip back out the window or the door or however the hell he's getting in here and be gone.

Tears well in my eyes, but I blink them away, not wanting my fear to be evident in the way I breathe. I can't have anything alert him to the fact that I know he's here. Hell, maybe that's what he wants. Maybe he's searching for an excuse to kill me.

My heart has never raced like this, not even when finding out that Crew had been killed. Then before I end up like him, I close my eyes and tip my head back, letting out a shaky breath as my fingers thrust deeper inside my cunt.

I gasp, my body still so worked up that as the fear mixes with my arousal, it suddenly makes everything feel so much more intense, and the new groan that slips from between my lips is as real as the ones out in the hallway.

The familiar sound of a zip fills the room, and I suck in a breath, listening intently to every little sound as my eager thumb works over my clit. I hear the subtle noises as he releases his cock from his pants, and as he really starts working himself, he pants heavily through gritted teeth.

I work myself faster, so fucking hungry for it, and as he jerks off, the strangest thrill shoots through me, and I find myself desperate to please him and hear how he sounds when he comes. "Oh fuck," I groan, tipping my head as my back arches off my mattress.

I kick the blankets off, giving myself more freedom, and his sharp inhale of breath sends goosebumps soaring across my skin. Fuck. I've never been so turned on in my life. I want him to touch me. I want him to do nasty things to me.

“YES,” I cry out, my fingers splitting inside of me again, working my walls, but damn it, I need to be stretched, I need to feel the fullness that only the mistletoe monster cock attached to my wall could offer me, and until I get it, I'm never going to truly feel satisfied. But damn it, this fucked up moment of insanity is coming in a close second.

I listen as my stalker furiously fucks his hand, feel his heated gaze locked on my body as though he can somehow see through the darkness. I hear as he shifts on the armchair, and every panting breath he takes, I'm right there with him, despite how fucked up it might be.

That familiar tightening starts deep in my core, and my eyes roll in the back of my head. “Oh God,” I groan again, the intensity quickly building, but I don't dare let up. I keep massaging, keep rolling my thumb over my sensitive clit until finally, I explode, coming hard as I cry out.

My orgasm tears through me, shattering me as my pussy spasms around my fingers. I clench my eyes, my head tipping back as my toes curl, and damn it, I've never felt so alive, not even when Crew fucked me within an inch of my life.

A deep, guttural groan tears through my room, and as I pant, I grin wide, knowing he finished with me, and damn it, why does that get me so excited? The fear fades into a distant hum,

still there, hidden beneath the surface, but it's overpowered by the thrill of giving him a show. I know come morning when I start wondering what the fuck is wrong with me, that fear is going to return ten-fold, but for now, all I can do is bask in the undeniable pleasure pulsing through my veins.

That felt so wrong in all the right ways, and I fucking loved it.

My body finally starts coming down from the high, and as I pull my fingers free and struggle to catch my breath, I hear my new creepy friend tuck his cock back inside his pants. Then as I pull my blanket back up and snuggle against my pillow, trying to pretend he's not here, I close my eyes and listen, hyperaware of every sound within my room.

He gets up from the chair, and I track the sound of his soft footsteps through my room, my heart racing faster with every step he takes closer to me. He stops at the edge of my bed, crouching down until I feel his warm breath gently brushing across my collarbone.

I keep my breathing shallow, goosebumps rippling across my skin just as he reaches out and strokes something across my bottom lip—his thumb, maybe. But there's something left on my lips. Is that ... No. Surely not.

It's his cum.

“Roll your tongue over your lips, Kyah,” he murmurs into the darkness, his voice so low it's impossible to make out any distinctive tones, but one thing's for sure, he's more than aware I'm not asleep. “Show me how you taste me.”

Nerves rip through me, leaving my hands shaking under the blanket. Then not knowing what will happen if I refuse him, I let my tongue roll out over my lips without hesitation, tasting him there and hating my soft moan that betrays me and lets him know just how much I liked it.

“That’s a good girl, my sweet, sweet Kyah,” he tells me, his voice still so low, only now there’s something more to it—a raspiness—something I’ve only ever heard when a man is right on the edge, almost pained from pure desperation. “So fucking pretty when you come, but next time you tease me like that, I won’t be able to resist you. I need to have you, Kyah, but something tells me that’s exactly what you want.”

And with that, he’s gone, slipping away into the darkness like the devil in the night, leaving me gasping for air and wondering why the fuck he’s so right.

KYAH



What the hell is wrong with me?

I work on my client, shaking my head as I almost screw up a simple text tattoo—a few cursive letters of the woman’s child’s name—because my head is stuck on the fresh hell that happened in my bedroom last night.

Did I really get off for my stalker? Did I really lick my lips to see how he tastes? And shit, do I really want him to do it again? He terrifies me in the worst ways, so how the hell can I justify feeling like this?

I need to focus on Alex and how he makes me feel, because honestly, I’ve never felt a connection like that. I know it’s only been a little while, but every time those dark, sultry eyes find mine, I see my whole future. I see something there that needs to be explored. But am I putting him in danger by allowing

him to get so close to me? What kind of lines is this stalker willing to cross?

Shit. Maybe I need to pull away from Alex until this goes away. It's only been two weeks since I lost Crew. I can't lose Alex too. I'm not strong enough to withstand that kind of devastation again so soon.

The same bunch of haunting thoughts circle my mind all day long, and before I know it, it's the end of the day, and I watch Big Jim scoop up a pile of papers—applications for all the artists who are hoping to replace Crew. “You ready to get out of here, kid?” Big Jim asks as my pencil hovers over my sketchbook, starting and re-starting the same design over and over again, unable to focus.

My lips press into a tight line, cringing as the thought of going back home leaves my hands shaking. “I, umm ... I might just hang out here for a little bit,” I tell him. “I've got a few designs I need to nail down for next week, and if I go home, I'm going to end up binging Sons of Anarchy and I'll never get anything done.”

Big Jim watches me for a moment, his gaze calculating, suspicious because I'm usually the first to want to get out of here at the end of a long day. “You sure? I could give you a ride.”

“No, really. I'm alright. I'll only be an hour or so.”

He lets out a heavy breath, still a little unsure before finally nodding. “Alright. Be safe. You know the cops still haven't caught the asshole who attacked Crew, so if you see anything

or even feel a little unsafe, take off. Don't hang around to see what's going on. We can replace things, but we can't replace you."

A fond smile settles on my lips. "Thanks, but I'll be good," I tell him.

"Alright. Call me if you need anything," he says, reaching for the front door, the papers piled high in his arms. "And don't forget to lock up."

"You got it," I say, and with that, he pulls the door open and slips out into the night, and I can't help but hurry after him to pull the door closed and deadbolt it. I turn out the lights for the front of the shop before turning off the little OPEN sign that sits in the front window.

Heading back to my station, I drop down at my table and focus my attention back on my sketchpad while trying to clear my mind. I listen to the busy Brooklyn night, to the Harleys coming and going up the street, the drunken idiots passing by, and the busker trying to make a dollar with nothing more than his voice, a bucket, and a pair of drumsticks. At least, I assume they're drumsticks. Otherwise he probably just pulled a few branches off a nearby tree. Can't lie though, he's pretty good.

When the clock ticks close to midnight, I put my pencil down and decide it's time to give up. I'm sure by this point, my creepy new friend has already come and gone and is probably pissed off that I'm not tucked in my bed for him to play his fucked-up little games. But there's no denying that I

can still taste him on my tongue, and I hate that I want so much more.

Packing up my station, I hurry through my sanitizing routine, making sure everything is perfect for the next day. Then making my way into the back, I double-check the doors and windows are locked before turning out the lights and making my way back to the lobby.

Digging in my bag, I find my keys, and after glancing back into the shop to make sure I've done everything right, I finally push out into the night, a yawn tearing out of me. Pulling the door closed behind me, I shove the key in the lock, and just as I crouch down to lock the floor deadbolt into place, a shadow looms over me.

I gasp, throwing myself back up as I twirl around, and for a moment, I think I'm seeing the ghost of Crew standing right in front of me. My jaw drops, and I suck in a breath, my heart racing, but as he creeps a little closer, I realize that this isn't quite the friend I once knew.

It's Crew's face, but older. Fewer tattoos and not quite as built.

I wonder if this is the mysterious brother I never knew he had.

"You Kyah?" he grunts, his tone deeper than Crew's but still somehow so familiar.

An ache settles deep in my chest, and I have to keep myself from reaching out to him. "You look just like him," I breathe,

trying to remind myself that in the end, Crew was an asshole and doesn't deserve my pain. I shouldn't miss him like this, but goddamn it, I miss him more than ever.

"That's the funny thing about sharing genes," he mutters, slowly inching closer and making my skin crawl. Even though he shares Crew's face, there's something much darker within his eyes, and something tells me to run as fast as I can. "You never showed up to his funeral. What kind of woman skips out on her friend's funeral?"

"The kind who knows what's good for her," I say, backing up a step.

He steps right with me, only he takes a much larger stride, closing the gap. "I don't think you have any idea what's good for you," he says, his gaze trailing over my face and then down my body. He reaches up, his fingers brushing across my jaw. "You really are pretty, aren't you? My brother might have been a sick bastard, but he always had good taste."

Slapping his hand away, I back up again with venom in my eyes. "Don't fucking touch me."

Crew's brother laughs, his eyes lighting with excitement. "He told me you had a feisty side, but for some reason, I never quite believed him," he says. "But it's nice to be proved wrong every once in a while, don't you think?"

"What the hell do you want with me?" I demand, knowing damn well that despite how things ended between me and Crew, he never would have stood for something like this. He

always wanted to protect me, you know, except that one time he didn't. "There's nothing here for you."

He inches toward me again, and I scold myself for staying back tonight. I should have let Big Jim drive me home and everything would have been fine. But then he might have shown up at my apartment. Though, then he might have had to deal with my new creepy friend, assuming he was there, of course. Who am I kidding? After last night, he was definitely there for more. Unless this is the asshole who's been sneaking into my room.

"Oh, there's plenty here for me," he says, leaning closer, trying to intimidate me, and damn it, it's working. "It's a real shame my brother didn't introduce us sooner. We could have had a lot of fun with a sweet thing like you."

"Back off. Otherwise, you'll find out just how much fun I can be."

The corner of his lips lifts into the smallest grin, and despite his face only moving the tiniest bit, the change is enough for his whole demeanor to shift and show me the true devil inside.

I was right. I need to run.

Not waiting another moment, I barely take a step before crashing into a solid wall of pure muscle, and a set of warm hands grip my hips. My gaze tilts up, and I have to crane my neck, more than ready to scream, but I let out a heavy sigh of relief finding Viper. "You good?" he spits, his gaze locked on the man over my shoulder.

I nod, ready to keep running, but he doesn't let go. Instead, I grip his cut as though it could offer me some sort of protection. "This ain't your territory," Viper growls, a tone I've only ever heard once—when a member of a rival club wandered into the store. "You're crossing a line."

"I'm collecting a debt," Crew's brother says.

Viper's hand shifts behind his back, and in a flash, a gun appears in front of me, and without giving even the slightest warning, he pulls the trigger. Only as I scream, the two men remain ridiculously still, with a chunk of concrete torn from the ground directly between the asshole's feet. "Leave. Otherwise, the next one is going between your eyes."

Crew's brother holds Viper's stare a moment longer, his jaw clenched, but Viper is relentless and unforgiving, and it's clear to everyone here that he's not about to give up anytime soon. The asshole's gaze quickly flickers to me, and that wicked smirk widens. "I'll be seeing ya, Kyah." And with that, he turns on his heel and stalks off into the darkness.

The second he disappears, my body crumbles, and Viper holds me up. "You good, babe?"

I swallow hard and nod, turning in his arms to meet his calculating stare. "What the hell was that about?" I demand, realizing he knows much more than he's willing to let on.

"The fuck do you think you're doing leaving work alone at midnight?"

“What?” I say, my eyes widening. “How the hell is this my fault? I’m not the asshole lingering in the streets trying to talk to vulnerable women.”

“No, but you’re the fucking idiot putting herself in a vulnerable position. Now get on my fucking bike. I’m taking you home.”

I clench my jaw, shaking my head. “I need answers, Viper,” I growl. “And while you’re at it, you can tell me why the fuck you’ve been following me everywhere for the past two weeks.”

Viper’s only response is to grit his teeth tighter. “Bike. Now.”

I hold his stare, and just like with Crew’s brother, I know I don’t stand a chance in hell. “Tomorrow,” I tell him, trying not to shrink under his lethal stare. “I’m giving you tonight to cool down, and then tomorrow, I expect answers whether you like it or not, and I don’t care whether I have to get them from you or directly from that asshole.”

He looks at me like a child having a tantrum, but I just stare back. “I mean it, Viper,” I add. “I’m fucking sick of you big-ass beefy assholes thinking you can dictate my life and keep me in the dark. All of this shit that’s been going on with Crew and his brother has something to do with me, so you have two choices, Viper. You tell me or he does. Take your pick.”

“I don’t take kindly to ultimatums.”

“Him it is then.”

Viper's hands ball into tight fists, anger pouring through his dark stare. "Fine. If I come by the shop tomorrow, will you get on the back of my fucking bike so I can take you home?"

I give a firm nod. "Yes, I will."

"Tomorrow it is then."

And with that, he curls his strong hand around my upper arm and pulls me away.

KYAH



Standing by my apartment door, I wait until Alex has left before slipping out and making my way to work, immediately feeling like a piece of shit, but last night with Crew's brother was just another blinding reason why I shouldn't be getting involved with anyone right now.

My life is a mess. I have a stalker who is more than willing to cross boundaries, and now Crew's brother has made his intentions disturbingly well known. I hope Viper honors his part of the deal because while I'm aware of the asshole's intentions, I don't know the extent of it, and something tells me Viper has been keeping a tight lid on this shit, and I'd really hate to have to go searching for answers somewhere else. Besides, if I weren't in some kind of danger, there's no way in hell Viper would spend his days following me around.

Making my way into High Voltage Ink, I sit down at my table, listening as Big Jim talks on the phone, clearly having a conversation with one of the new applicants who'll be interviewing for Crew's position. As I listen to the one-sided conversation with gritted teeth, I stare down at the designs I spent the night working on and immediately deem them all shit.

My head hasn't been in the game these past few days, and it's showing in my work, which really fucks with my head. I set a high standard for myself when it comes to my art. I don't exactly get off on earning myself the title of being one of the best tattoo artists in Brooklyn, but I do like to ensure that I am offering a quality service and delivering on my clients' expectations.

Hence why it's time to call it quits with Alex.

I really don't want to. Hell, just the thought of it has been tearing me apart all morning, but I would never forgive myself if I were to put him in danger just by being close to me. I need to wait until all this bullshit has passed, and then hopefully he'll still be there when I come out the other end ... assuming I can somehow survive, of course.

Who knows what kind of plans this stalker has for me. If all he wants is to get off while watching me, then I can live with that. He'll eventually get bored and find someone else to torment, but if he wants something more, something vile and wicked ... I don't want to drag a good guy like Alex into that.

Letting out a heavy sigh, I grab the designs from last night and tear them out of my sketchpad before scrunching them up and tossing them into the trash. I drop down into my chair, a heaviness weighing on my shoulders as I take my phone and peer down at the screen, trying to work up the courage to actually do this.

Ending things with Alex is the furthest thing from what I want.

With him ... everything is easy. He makes my heart race, makes me swoon, and the attraction is like nothing I've ever felt. It's astronomical. Not to mention, the way he gets me worked up. I know that when it comes time to being physical with him, the wait is going to be well worth it ... assuming I ever get the chance after this.

God. He's probably going to hate me, and running into him in the hallway after this is going to be awkward and weird, just as I knew it would be. Which is exactly why I made a rule to never date my neighbors, especially the hot kind who live directly across the hall from me.

Knowing if I don't do this now, I'm never going to find the lady-balls to end it, and I swipe my thumb across the screen, unlocking it. I open a new text to Alex, feeling like a piece of shit for not being able to end it in person.

Kyah - I'm sorry. I can't do this.

Alex - I know you're not trying to end this before it's even gotten started.

Kyah - That's the point. I need to end it before I get too deep. I really like you, Alex, but this can't work right now. It's just not the right time. I'm sorry. It's over.

Alex - The hell it is.

Fuck.

Something tells me ending things with him isn't going to be as easy as I'd hoped. Hell, he's so demanding that I should have known he wasn't just going to accept being told no without a fight. Though I'm not going to lie, the fact that he's not willing to just accept me pushing him away kinda makes me feel a little tingly inside.

Hearing the bell chime above the door, I abandon my phone on the table and get busy with my work. I've got a lot to get through today considering I need to re-do these shitty designs and talk with Viper, assuming he actually shows up, of course. Otherwise, I'll be hunting the bastard down. Though I'm sure he won't take too kindly to me showing up at his clubhouse uninvited like that. Nor is that really somewhere I want to be.

I keep myself busy over the next few hours, and when the bell chimes over the door again and Viper comes in with a hard expression and a clenched jaw, I don't know whether to be anxious or relieved.

He holds my stare from across the shop, and I quickly clean up my things. My last client was done ten minutes ago with the next not due until after lunch. "Hey Big Jim," I say,

grabbing my phone off my table and trying to figure out where I left my bag. “I’m heading out for lunch.”

Jim glances up, his gaze flicking between me and Viper, a deep suspicion flashing in his eyes. He’s always had respect for Viper and appreciated his business, but there’s no denying that over the years, he’s made it clear what he thinks about the idea of Viper wanting to make me his old lady.

“Alright,” Jim says slowly, his tone low as he settles his gaze back on Viper. “If she doesn’t return the way she’s leaving, I’m coming for your fucking throat.”

Viper simply nods, but I don’t think Big Jim’s threat is necessary. Viper has made it clear that he has no ill will toward me. He goes to extreme lengths to protect me, but he can’t exactly be trusted. If I was to push his boundaries a little too far, he’d snap without warning. There’s no flex when it comes to Viper. He’s not like an elastic band that can be stretched a million different ways. He’s like tempered glass; he can handle the weight and stress, but if pushed the wrong way, he’ll break.

Walking out of the shop with Viper, he presses his hand to my lower back, leading me down the street. “What do you want to eat?”

“I don’t,” I tell him, stopping halfway down the street and looking up at him. “I didn’t ask you to meet me today so we could go out for some romantic lunch date. I want answers, Viper. I want to know why the fuck Crew’s brother is

cornering me in the middle of the night, and I want to know what kind of bullshit Crew was involved in.”

Viper presses his lips into a tight line, his gaze shooting up and down the street, making sure our conversation can't be overheard. “Fucking hell, Kyah. Lower your goddamn voice,” he says, gripping my elbow and pulling me across the road toward a small café.

Viper pushes through the door, and the lady behind the counter widens her eyes, clearly terrified of the big guy. “Two coffees and a turkey sub,” he barks at the woman, continuing past her to the table in the back, dragging me along.

I let out a heavy breath and am delightfully surprised when he pulls the chair out for me. “Sit,” he demands, instantly ruining the appeal of his gesture.

Not willing to push his limits just yet, I do as he says, taking my seat and watching as he drops down on the other side of the table, barely able to fit his large frame into the chair. “You can't be talking about this shit out in the open like that,” he says. “You don't know how many eyes and ears Mason has on you.”

“Mason? Is that Crew's brother?” I ask. Viper nods, and I swallow hard, unsure why my hands are shaking beneath the table. “What's he involved in?”

“Have you ever done a Google search on Crew? You didn't hear anything on the news after he was killed?”

Viper pauses, waiting for my response, and I shake my head. “I could barely get out of bed after Crew was attacked, let alone turn on the TV to listen to the news,” I tell him, unsure where he’s going with this. “I don’t understand why the news would want to cover anything to do with Crew’s death. It was a robbery gone wrong.”

“Was it?” he questions, letting out a heavy sigh and leaning back in his chair. “Mason Ledger is a piece of shit. He deals in stolen goods.”

My brows furrow. “What kind of stolen goods?”

Viper holds my stare, his gaze quickly flicking around the small café again. “I need you to understand that what I’m about to tell you can not come back on me,” he tells me. “This ain’t my business, and if it gets back to Mason that I opened my fucking mouth, it’s gonna come back on my club, and I can’t have that.”

I nod. “I won’t say a word.”

“I’m fucking serious, Kyah,” he says. “This is the type of shit people lose their lives over. Once you know, there’s no going back, and it’s going to change the way you see Crew. All those memories over the years will be replaced with nothing but vile ugliness.”

I clench my jaw, feeling an intense pressure settling over my shoulders, but how can I back out now? I need to know what the hell is going on. “Just tell me, Viper,” I say. “What kind of stolen goods is his brother dealing in?”

“The human kind.”

I suck in a breath, my eyes widening in shock. “What do you mean?” I ask. “Are you saying he’s involved in human trafficking?”

“Exactly that,” Viper tells me. “The Ledger family has created the biggest and most profitable human trafficking ring on this side of the fucking globe, and Mason stands at the head of it.”

My face falls. “No. No, that can’t be right. I would have known if Crew was involved in something like that.”

“Why do you think he never told you who his brother was, huh? He wanted to protect you from that part of his life, keep you hidden from it. He knew exactly what his brother would have done to such a beautiful young thing like you. For a long time, he resisted working with his brother, but over the past year, he started to take on more of an executive kind of role.”

“No, you’re lying.”

“I wouldn’t lie to you, Kyah, especially not about something like this.”

My heart races, and my whole world flips upside down. He has to be lying. I would have known if Crew was involved in something like that. In those last few days, he was an asshole, but I knew his heart beneath that, and he wouldn’t hurt a fly. I would fucking know.

I shake my head, my chest heaving. “I ... I ...” My words fall away, not knowing what to say, but the proof is right there

in the way Mason cornered me last night. “I don’t understand how he could do something like that.”

“People are never who we think they are,” Viper tells me. “Hell, I can guarantee that there are things I’ve done that you would never be able to forgive. You wouldn’t even be able to look me in the eye again, but I don’t fucking pretend to be something I’m not.”

I swallow hard, trying to process everything he’s told me. “This is why you’ve always warned me away from him,” I say. “I just figured it was some kind of pissing contest between you and Crew. I never thought there was real weight to what you were saying.”

“At first, perhaps,” he tells me with a slight shrug of his big shoulders.

I nod, trying to work through all of the information. “You said he started working with his brother over the past year.”

Viper presses his lips into a hard line, and the way his eyes darken suggests that this is the part he’s been trying to protect me from all this time. “I don’t know all the details, and I doubt I ever will, but from the intel I’ve been able to find, Crew got himself into some financial trouble last year. He had a hard-on for the underground.”

“What’s that? Like fighting or something?”

“Mm-hmm. He was a gambling man, and he made some bad choices with money that didn’t belong to him. When those

debts caught up to him, he had no choice but to either ask Mason for help or lose his fucking life.”

I never knew that he liked to gamble.

“What does asking for his brother’s help actually mean?”

“From what I can tell, Mason paid his debts, and in return, Crew would work for him, sourcing women for Mason’s henchmen to snatch off the fucking street, and if he couldn’t bring in enough women to cover those debts ... Well, that’s where you came in.”

My eyes widen. “What? What do you mean, *that’s where I came in?*”

“You’d been in Crew’s life for quite a while, and Mason isn’t the type of man to allow himself to be blindsided. He makes it his business to know everything about everyone, and when this beautiful seventeen-year-old with no family connection and nobody to miss her came storming into Crew’s life, Mason saw dollar signs. He’s been wanting you for a long time, and Crew has always protected you from that, but twelve months ago, that changed.”

I shake my head, not wanting to hear this and already fearing the worst, but Viper isn’t the type to stop on account of my feelings. “Part of their deal was if Crew failed to pay back his debt, Mason gets you, and usually in this world, spilling blood is just as good as any currency, however Mason wasn’t the one to spill that blood, so according to him, Crew bailed on his debt. Now Mason has free rein to take what he’s owed.”

I drop my face into my hands, my head spinning. This is so much worse than I was expecting. I thought maybe he was just some asshole who perhaps gets a little rough, but this? Fuck. How am I supposed to handle this on top of a stalker? It's too much. Hell, not to mention the betrayal pounding through my veins that Crew could have ever agreed to a deal like that in the first place.

“So, umm ...” I start, unable to get my wild thoughts in line. “What happens now?”

“Nothing,” he says. “Everything.”

“What's that supposed to mean?”

“It's up to you, Kyah,” Viper starts. “You can either continue as you are, stay in your apartment with my men on watch, or you can move into my place until this shit has been dealt with.”

“What do you mean by *dealt with*?”

Viper looks me dead in the eyes. “I'm gonna kill him,” he says nonchalantly, as though this kind of shit just happens every day.

Horror blasts through my veins, quickly drowning me with fear. “What the fuck, Viper?” I screech, nervously looking around. “You can't just say shit like that. Why can't you just call the cops? Have him arrested.”

“And get a reputation as a rat?” he grunts in disgust. “Do you know what the fuck would happen to me then? Fuck, babe. I know you're smarter than that.”

Shit. He's right. I can't pretend to know anything about what it's like to be a part of a club, but I've watched enough episodes of Sons of Anarchy to know that being labeled as a rat is far worse than any death sentence.

"I'm not living with you," I tell him, ignoring his jab.

Viper nods. "That's what I thought."

My gaze falls, and I realize the two coffees and the sub Viper ordered are sitting at the edge of the table, the coffees now cold. "You should have told me the second you found out Crew made that deal," I tell him, my heart breaking for a million different reasons.

"Like I said, it's not my business to tell," Viper says. "All you need to know is that I'm doing what I can to protect you. I've been keeping an eye on it, Kyah. Nothing was ever going to happen to you. Besides, Crew knew I would have ended him if he ever let his brother anywhere near you."

My brows furrow, and I glance back at him, staring into those lethal dark eyes. "I don't understand you, Viper. Why are you going out of your way to protect me when I've gone out of my way to reject you over and over again?"

Viper lets out a heavy sigh before grabbing some cash and putting it on the table. He gets up from his chair and walks around to my side, offering me his hand like the perfect gentleman, though we both know he's anything but.

Letting him help me out of my chair, he leads me through the back of the café, and a strange nervousness settles deep in

my gut, getting worse when he pushes through the back door and out into a dark alley. “Let’s get one thing straight,” Viper says, pulling on my hand and forcing me to a stop as he presses his big body into mine. “You belong to me, Kyah. You always have, and I know I said I would wait until you were ready, but I am becoming impatient. You forget that I have access to your security feed, and I see you with your new neighbor. You’re letting him get too close. Letting him come into your apartment, letting him eat that tight little cunt out in the hallway—”

“Excuse me?” I grunt, cutting him off as I shove against his chest, but he doesn’t budge. Instead, his hand locks around my throat, and he pushes me back until I’m pinned against the filthy wall behind me.

“Don’t interrupt me when I’m speaking to you, Kyah,” he growls, leaning in, his big hand squeezing just enough to leave me gasping for air, and more than certain that I’ll be permanently scrubbing his name off my schedule. “I’ve invested too much time into you to allow you to fuck around with someone else, especially now that Crew is out of the picture.”

I clench my jaw, narrowing my gaze to furious slits. “I’ll never belong to you.”

Viper just grins, adjusting his hand around my throat until he’s pushing my chin up, my gaze locked on his. “See, that’s where you’re wrong,” he tells me before crushing his lips to mine in a forceful, bruising kiss, his tongue invading my

mouth. He pulls back, clenching his jaw as though he didn't just violate my mouth. "You already do."

REID



A deep rage filters through my body as I sit back in the café across from High Voltage Ink, barely able to control myself, the need to kill bursting through my body, making it almost impossible to breathe.

Not only did I just learn that Mason Ledger cornered Kyah when I wasn't there to protect her, but Viper just shoved his tongue down her throat when she's made it more than clear that she doesn't want any kind of relationship with him.

I need to do something about this. Neither of those bastards are going to get away with this bullshit. But considering Viper currently has a protection detail on Kyah that benefits her safety, I'm gonna have to start with Mason Ledger.

Being in my line of business, it's not hard to find the right contact who can point me in Mason's direction, and by the time night has fallen, I stand outside one of his many

warehouses, each one filled with the horrors of what he does for a living.

I trust that Viper would have eventually done this for me, but he seems to enjoy taking his time, and that shit isn't going to work for me. Every day he's allowed to pass is another day where Kyah has been in danger while under his protection, and if something had happened to her, there's nowhere he would have been safe from me.

After completing a full perimeter walk of the property, I get a good feel for what I'm going to expect inside, and it's clear that Mason has hired more than his fair share of security, but unfortunately for them, they won't be seeing any action tonight. I'll be in and out before they even realize their boss is dead. Though the security cameras might be an issue. This system is far more complex than the one in Kyah's apartment. I won't even bother trying to hack into it. I'm just going to have to be cautious. Though, is anybody really going to go searching for the man who killed Mason Ledger? They should be too busy celebrating his death. Besides, what are they going to do, call the cops to say that someone just murdered the head of their human trafficking ring and to come down to their warehouse immediately? Yeah right. I think I'm safe.

Not having the patience to draw this out, I find the best point of entry and pull a black mask over my face before making my move and keeping to the shadows. There's one security guard covering this door, and as he peers down at his phone, assuming he's safe, I slip in behind him, my hand covering his mouth as my other arm locks around his throat. I squeeze tight

as he struggles against my hold, but it takes only a moment before the asshole is out cold.

He drops like a heavy sack of shit, and I drag his body into the shadows while doing my best to evade the cameras. I steal the key card off his hip and unclip the radio from his belt before letting myself through the back door.

The warehouse is a fucking maze, and the amount of women in cages makes my stomach turn. Don't get me wrong, I love getting a good hard-on for ending someone's life, but even I have lines that I won't cross. And this here ... fuck. The idea of Kyah ending up in this warehouse to be sold to the highest bidder makes my skin crawl.

There must be at least forty or fifty women of varying ages, and considering the way they're each presented in lingerie and scattered throughout the warehouse with numbers on the front of their cages, I can only assume that tonight is auction night. Though, unluckily for Mason, I'll be the only bastard reaping rewards tonight.

Not wanting to be caught before I get the chance to satisfy this wicked need burning inside of me, I move through the warehouse, heading for the back, knowing a man like Mason Ledger is probably lounging in his office with his feet up while his men do all the dirty work.

The warehouse doesn't have a great setup, and it doesn't take long to figure out what I'm looking for. I creep through the maze-like hallways with my head down, evading both the

cameras and Mason's henchmen before finally coming to his office.

The door has been left open, however, Mason is nowhere to be seen. Judging by the cold drink on the desk with fresh condensation around the glass and the phone left out beside his laptop, it's fair to assume the asshole has probably gone to take a shit.

Slipping inside the office, I step in beside his shelving unit, keeping me hidden from the door while I wait. The lights are out, so it doesn't take much to keep me concealed, and after only a short ten-minute wait, the man of the hour finally returns.

Mason switches on the light as he passes over the threshold and strides into the office, his gaze so focused on his desk that he fails to notice me. He takes his seat at his desk before swiping his hand over his phone and checking his notifications. His back is to me, and I shake my head. This fucker is making it too easy, but in a warehouse full of hired security, easy is what I need tonight. Though there's no telling if this will sedate the burning need to spill blood within me. Either way, I'm sure it's still going to be fun.

Stepping out from beside the shelf, my hand silently swipes across the end of Mason's desk, collecting an old computer cable, and I quickly unravel it as I move in behind him. Then just as his back stiffens and he finally senses that something isn't right, I snap the cable around his throat and pull tight.

Mason immediately struggles, clawing at the cable, but it's no fucking use. My hold on him is rock solid. I lean forward, bending down toward his ear as he gasps for air, struggling and failing to fill his lungs. "You made the biggest mistake of your life going after my Kyah," I tell him, purring in his ear as I feel my cock thickening. "She belongs to only me."

Mason doesn't even bother to try and respond, and as he begins to weaken, I feel that same desperation I felt when I killed his brother.

I'm not going to make it.

I'm going to come in my fucking pants again.

"Ahhh fuck," I grunt, adjusting my hold on the cable around his neck, freeing one of my hands to plunge into the front of my pants and fist my cock, but it's not enough. I whip it out, my tip hovering right by Mason's ear. "Don't mind me," I hiss through gritted teeth as I rest my cock over his wide shoulder. "Just gonna leave this here."

My hips jolt as Mason lets out a strangled groan, and I can't help but start jerking off, right there on his fucking shoulder, but damn it, it's just too good. I tighten my hold on the cable, pulling even tighter, and just as Mason's body goes slack, I come like a horny fucking teenager. "Fuck," I groan low, my hips jolting forward as hot cum spurts from my cock and splatters against Mason's suit jacket.

I stand there for a minute in shock, my chest heaving.

I really need to get to the bottom of this whole spontaneous ejaculation while murdering the men in Kyah's life thing. Perhaps I need to book a therapy session, though I don't know what I'm supposed to say without getting myself locked up. All I know is that it feels fucking incredible.

Once I catch my breath, I release my hold on the cable and glance down at Mason. He's covered in my cum, and usually, I would do everything in my power to clean up behind me and not leave even a shred of evidence that could bring a kill right back to me, but let's be honest, the cum splattered over his suit jacket is a fucking work of art created in Kyah's name. How could I possibly destroy that? Besides, the assholes who work here aren't exactly calling in the feds to look into this, and they sure as fuck don't have the necessary means to DNA test my cum. Not to mention, the likelihood of someone being responsible for scraping my cum off his jacket is next to none. And if you ask me, I think it's the perfect gift to offer his workers ... perhaps even a warning.

Ahhh, my sweet Kyah. She makes me careless, reckless, but I wouldn't have it any other way.

Hearing noise out in the hallway, my gaze snaps up, listening intently to the sound of the footfalls and realize they're coming this way.

Shit. I guess my time is up.

Taking the cable with me, I jam it into my pocket before darting across the room to the small window and sliding it open. I launch myself out into the night, and just as I find my

feet and close the window, I watch as two of Mason's men appear in the open doorway.

A grin settles across my face as they dart into the office, one of them grabbing hold of Mason's shoulder and quickly pulling his hand away in disgust, realizing he has a palmful of cum. I laugh to myself. This day couldn't get any better.

Then with a stupid grin across my face, I take off into the night, more than proud of myself.



It's a little after one in the morning when I arrive at Kyah's apartment. Slipping in through her living room window, I grin to myself. It's locked just as it always is, but with the right amount of wiggle, it slips right open.

A breath of relief sails out of me as I step inside her apartment, her familiar scent welcoming me in, and without hesitation, I make my way toward her bedroom. The door is open as usual, and as I hover in the doorway peering in, I find her asleep. Only there's something different tonight.

She's tossing and turning, unable to find peace while she sleeps. She almost seems frustrated, sad maybe, and it puts me on edge.

I silently make my way across her room, not making a single sound, but even in her sleep, I know she senses me here, she always does and I appreciate when she doesn't try and act up. She allows me just to be, for us both to remain in peace, and a part of me wonders if it's because she's just as hungry for me as I am for her.

Knowing how the armchair likes to squeak when I sit down, I take my time, lowering myself into it carefully before leaning back and watching her. She's so fucking beautiful when she sleeps, but I hate the way she tosses and turns. She groans and grunts, and I wonder if maybe this is some kind of nightmare. After having to deal with Crew, Mason, and Viper, I wouldn't be surprised if she started having nightmares. It makes sense. She's dealing with a lot right now, but I'm doing everything I can to try and minimize that stress.

Perhaps all she needs is to relax, and that is something I can more than help with.

My tongue rolls over my bottom lip as my cock hardens within my pants, and I can't help lifting myself out of the chair. I stride toward her, lingering at the foot of her bed.

God, she's so fucking beautiful.

I take her blanket, fisting it into my palm and slowly lifting it over her and pulling it back, taking my time so that I don't startle her. She wears a tiny black thong and a loose-cropped tank that rides up her body, gathered just beneath her perfect plump tits. My mouth waters.

I need to have her now. I need to fucking taste her.

Creeping around the side of her bed, I drop my fingers to her ankle, slowly dragging them up to her knee before trailing further up her inner thigh. She groans, instantly relaxing into my touch, and it's the most beautiful thing I've ever seen.

I do it again, and this time, she groans a little louder.

"That's right, my sweet Kyah," I whisper into the dark room. "You like that, don't you?"

She continues moving around in her sleep, and I gently kneel at the end of her bed. Taking her knee, I slowly roll her to her back and her thighs open wide like a fucking offering to take exactly what I want, but this isn't about me. This is about giving her what she needs.

Taking my time, I settle between her legs. My lips brush against her creamy thigh, and I inhale deeply, smelling her arousal in the air and almost coming in my pants for the second time tonight. My fingers skim across her hip, and the more she groans and pushes against my touch, the more I know she wants this.

My arms scoop beneath her thighs as my hand twists around her body, curving over her ribs and up toward her full tits. I bury my face between her sweet thighs, and even through the fabric of her thong, I can feel how ready she is. Then, not able to wait even a second longer, I reach down and grip the fabric of her thong and pull it aside, exposing that sweet cunt.

My mouth immediately closes over her clit, and I flatten my tongue against her before taking slow, purposeful strokes over

her sensitive clit. Her body shudders beneath me, her hips rocking for more, and I don't dare stop.

I take her slowly, my tongue working back and forth as Kyah groans against her pillow, her fingers skimming across her body and lingering on her perfect tits. And then as her hips start to rock a little faster, I pull back one arm and press my fingers against her entrance, slowly pushing inside.

My fingers roll inside of her, massaging her slick walls, and when they clench around my fingers and a sharp exhale sounds through the room, I realize Kyah's finally woken. She doesn't try to push me away or stop me, so I keep going, working her body as she pulls her knees up higher, spreading those pretty thighs even wider.

"Holy fuck," she breathes into the night. "Oh God. This is so wrong."

A deep growl rumbles through my chest, and I grind my cock against the edge of her mattress, dry-humping her bed like a fucking teenager. As I pick up my pace, my tongue flicks over her clit with a little more pressure, and her body really starts to come alive beneath me.

She squirms and groans, her hips jolting as I add another finger. "Fuck. More," she cries out, panting as she tips her head back, her fingers brushing over her hard nipples. "Don't stop. Please, don't fucking stop."

That's my sweet girl.

Not one to disappoint, I keep working her, keep pushing her to her limits, and fuck, she tastes so damn good. I could eat this pussy every day for the rest of my life and never get bored of it.

Kyah grinds against my face, greedily taking it all, and I suck against her clit, my tongue flicking over the tight bud as she cries out. My fingers curl inside her, splitting and massaging before thrusting even deeper.

My balls tighten, desperate for a release, but I hold on to it, refusing to come alone, and as her walls begin clenching around my fingers, I realize just how close she is. I work her faster, pushing her to her limits as I suck, flick, and stroke, giving her exactly what she needs, and then finally she cries out, her head tipping back. "OH FUCK," she groans through a clenched jaw. "YES!"

Her walls clamp down around my fingers, and as they start to spasm with an intense orgasm, I come hard, letting out a deep groan, but I don't fucking stop. My tongue continues to work her clit as her orgasm powers through her, reaching new fucking highs that I know she hasn't reached since the day I started watching over her.

But nothing will ever compare to how fucking sweet she tastes, how fucking good she feels beneath my hands, or knowing that this beautiful woman came on my fingers. God, how could I ever end her now, especially knowing how fucking good it is with her?

Kyah's whole body shudders, the wild, convulsing of her walls making her whole body spasm and jolt until she finally collapses against her bed, her body relaxing as the high dwindles and allows her the chance to catch her breath, and before I get carried away and flip her over onto her knees and feel that sweet ass up in the air, begging to be fucked, I pull away.

"Sleep in peace now, my sweet Kyah," I murmur into the room, keeping my tone down. "You're safe now."

I go to walk away when I hear her move on her bed and glance back, seeing her sitting up and grabbing for her blankets as though she needs some kind of protection from me. "What's that supposed to mean?" she asks. "Did ... did you ...?"

She lets the words fall away, but I know what she's asking, and I nod, despite knowing she can't see it in the darkness. "You won't need to worry about Mason Ledger ever again," I tell her. "Now sleep."

Not willing to risk this a moment longer, I walk away while listening as her sweet voice fills her bedroom behind me. "Wait. Don't go," she calls after me. "Who are you?" But as I hear her climb out of bed and scurry out of her room, I slip out through her living room window, leaving it wide open, knowing that by the time she races over and peers out into the night, I'll already be long gone.

KYAH



Okay, so I've always known I was fucked in the head. How could I not be after having my mother abandon me at seventeen? She forced me to have to grow up and figure myself out, but I never thought I was this bad.

I let him fuck me with his fingers. He closed his mouth over my clit and made me come, and damn it, I didn't even try to push him away. The moment he touched me, I think I knew. I was dreaming that Mason Ledger had taken me off the street last night, that Viper never made it in time, and I was taken away to be sold, but then everything shifted.

My body came alive as I slept, and I was hit with overwhelming desire, and I couldn't get enough, but when my dream started to feel too real, I woke, and I realized he was right there between my legs, his warm tongue flicking over my clit and bringing me right to the edge of orgasm.

It was incredible. I've never felt so insanely alive, and the way he worked me ... holy fucking shit. He needs to write a manual for other men. It was mind blowing. And despite not being able to see his face or know his name, I couldn't find it within me to tell him to stop.

I needed it. I craved him, and what's more, if he were to walk back into my room again, I'd already be spread out for him, begging for more.

What the hell is wrong with me? What kind of self-respecting woman allows her stalker to sneak into her room and eat her pussy in the middle of the night?

Unsurprisingly, I couldn't sleep after he left. I stared out the window, hoping to get just the slightest view of him, but he slipped away into the night like some kind of ghost, and while my skin crawled with fear, it also burned with excitement. It's the most thrilling game I've ever played, and I don't want it to end.

Shit. There really is something wrong with me.

It's just after ten in the morning, and since the new guy is doing a trial with Big Jim this morning, I don't need to be in until eleven, so I take my time. I shower and shave, a little embarrassed that my new creepy friend caught me a little unprepared last night. If I knew I was about to have my mind blown with an exceptional tongue, I would have shaved before bed, but something tells me he didn't mind.

After washing and conditioning my hair, I do a quick exfoliation while my mind wanders to the blank space on my

arm, still trying to figure out what the hell I'm going to do with that. Then coming up completely blank, unsure if I even feel comfortable having any of Crew's designs on my body, I get out of the shower and start getting ready for my day.

As the clock ticks dangerously close to eleven, I grab my bag, phone, and keys off the counter before hurrying to my door. Only I find myself pausing and glancing back at the window.

I locked it after he was gone last night. It felt like the right thing to do, only now ... I'm not so sure.

The thought of never getting to experience something like that again saddens me, but it also makes me feel as though there's something messed up in my head. But I suppose it's already too late for that. When it comes to me, normal gave up a long time ago.

I hesitate for a moment too long, my hands starting to shake at my side, and I hate how desperately I want him to come back. If I leave the window unlocked, I'm sending him a message, though I'm not entirely sure what that message is. And if I leave it locked ... doesn't that also send some kind of message?

Shit.

I'm becoming addicted to my stalker.

My very dangerous stalker.

Not only did he make me come last night, he also told me that he took care of Mason Ledger. That I no longer need to

fear him, and I have no idea what that really means. Did he kill him on my behalf? Though one thing is for sure, I've only ever spoken to one person about Crew's brother, and that was Viper.

Is he who's been sneaking into my apartment all this time? Because if he is, I'm not sure how I feel about that, but on the other hand, don't I owe it to myself to find out who the hell had their fingers buried deep inside my cunt last night?

All I know is that I need to hurry up and make a decision. I have maybe seven minutes to get my ass to work, and with that, I let out a shaky breath and quickly hurry back across my apartment to unlock the window.

My mind immediately begins to swirl, and as I pull my door open and step out into the hallway, I find Alex standing right in his doorway, that gorgeous body of his on display as he leans against the frame.

A smirk lingers on his lips, and as his dark gaze meets mine, my whole body goes weak. I pause, swallowing hard as a fierce need to throw myself into his arms threatens to consume me. God, why do I have to like him so much?

Alex doesn't say a word, but he doesn't need to. I see everything he's trying to say in those addictive dark eyes—*This isn't over. Not by a long shot.*

And before I get the chance to ruin everything and go back on my decision to push him away, I scam down the hall, desperately needing to get out of here.

ALEX



No way in hell am I about to let this insanely addictive woman walk away from me just as things were starting to get good.

Over my dead fucking body.

It's too good with her, too real, and I'm not about to let her run away from this. What we have is worth exploring, and fuck, I want to explore it like I never have with anyone else. And sure, maybe that makes me pussy-whipped for feeling this strongly about her so soon, but there's no doubt in my mind that Kyah means something more.

She's feisty as fuck, and her attitude is the sexiest thing I've ever had the pleasure of experiencing. I've never met anyone who keeps me on my toes the way she does. The second some bullshit comment flies out of my mouth, she throws one right back at me, putting me in my place, and I fucking love it.

She's the first thing I think of when I wake up, and after finally getting to taste her Saturday night, I know there is no going back for me. Seeing her this morning in the hallway with those big blue eyes, looking at me as though she hasn't nearly had enough, I know she feels it too.

This isn't just some one-sided crush. It's as real as it gets. So, why the fuck did she try to end it? It doesn't make sense to me, but it won't be long until I get my answers.

I've given her a little over twenty-four hours to sit with her bullshit, and now her time is up. I'm going to get what's mine.

Grabbing my phone and keys off the counter, I lock up behind me and make my way out of the building. As I hit the street and make my way toward High Voltage Ink, I can't help but wonder why things changed. Everything was going so well.

Is she able to sense that I haven't entirely been honest? Can she tell that there's something more to me, something I've hidden away? Because if so, she should run. Just ending things isn't enough. If she really knew what I was capable of, she'd already be gone, but I could never hurt her. What I did to my mom, I could never do to her.

She's safe with me. Surely she knows that.

Creeping closer toward High Voltage Ink, I see Kyah's biker friend, Viper, sitting outside the shop on his phone. As I stride past him toward the door, his narrowed gaze locks on me, and I overhear his conversation.

“The fuck do you mean dead? Someone got at him?” My brows arch, and I find my pace slowing. I knew Viper and his men were into some shady shit, but I didn’t realize just how deep that ran. There’s a slight pause before he barks into the phone again, his gaze falling away from mine. “When? Last night?”

Viper glances through the front window of High Voltage Ink, his gaze focusing heavily on my girl, and I can’t help but wonder if there’s history between them. He looks at her as though he already knows how fucking sweet she tastes.

He mutters something under his breath, and just as I reach for the front door of the shop, Viper takes off, his bike rumbling so loud I feel its vibrations right through my chest.

The bell above the door chimes, alerting everyone to my arrival, and I watch Kyah as her head lifts from the sketchbook. A soft smile lingers on her lips, and as she meets my eyes, that smile falls away and she sucks in the slightest gasp.

I hold her stare, and the longer I look at her, the harder she becomes to resist, especially as she tries to fight a smile, only proving that she belongs with me. If she really wanted this to be over, she’d already be bitching me out, telling me to leave. Instead, her fingers are flinching at her side as though she’s trying to convince herself that she doesn’t want to touch me.

“What are you doing here?” Kyah asks, getting up from her table and meeting me at the counter, though she does her best to keep her distance.

My gaze lifts around the shop, noticing her boss, Big Jim, watching me like a hawk, and some other dude I've never seen before working on a client's back. "You got a new guy?"

"Mm-hmm," she says, sparing a glance toward him. "He came in for a trial this morning and Big Jim thought he was great and offered him to start straight away."

"No shit," I mutter, my gaze falling back to hers. "How do you feel about that?"

She shrugs her shoulders. "It's weird looking over there and seeing someone else in Crew's station, but I was drowning in work without him. I've finally had a chance to breathe and just focus on my own stuff today."

"So, what I'm hearing is that you have time."

Kyah's face falls. "Alex, I ... I was serious yesterday. You and I can't work right now."

"Oh," I laugh. "You think I'm here because of you and me? Nah, babe. I'm flattered that I've had such a profound effect on you that you now assume everything is about getting together, but I'm here for ink. I figured, why not get the best in Brooklyn to do it."

Kyah narrows her gaze on me. "You want a tattoo?"

"Mm-hmm."

"You're a terrible liar."

I grin wide, loving how she sees right through me. "It's fine, babe. If you can't handle it, I'll get the new guy to do it."

“Fucking hell,” she mutters, grabbing my wrist and pulling me around the counter and toward her station, muttering under her breath. “If anybody is putting ink on your skin it’s gonna be me.”

A wide grin cuts across my face, and as she drags me along, I brush my thumb across the inside of her wrist. Her steps falter as she glances back at me with a deep sadness in her eyes, almost as though this distance she’s trying to force between us is killing her just as much as it’s killing me.

She pulls me into her station, and as she turns her back to grab some paperwork from her desk, I step into her. Then as she turns back around to face me, my hand falls to her waist. She sucks in a breath, not having expected to find me so close.

My gaze lingers on hers, and a feeling of euphoria settles over me as her hand falls to my chest. “Alex—”

“I’m not going anywhere,” I tell her. “I know you feel this between us. It’s not just in my imagination, and I’m not about to let you slip between my fingers because you’re scared.”

“I’m not scared,” she argues.

“Then what the hell is going on? One minute, everything is great, and the next, you’re sending me bullshit messages trying to end it,” I remind her. “And in case you haven’t worked it out, I’m not the kind of guy who’s just going to back down without a fight. Especially not now that I know how fucking sweet you taste.”

Kyah's cheeks flame, and I press my fingers to her chin, lifting until her gaze settles back on mine. "Tell me what you want, Mace," I all but beg of her. "If you really don't feel this and don't want to see where it's going, then tell me now, and I'll back off, but if I'm right and you're getting in just as deep as I am, then don't push me away. This is too fucking good to screw it up now."

"I ... "

"What do you want, Mace?"

Kyah visibly swallows, her gaze dropping to the papers in her hand before a grin lifts the corners of her lips. "I want you to fill out your consent form," she tells me, shoving the forms against my chest. "Unless getting a tattoo was just a ruse to get close to me."

A wicked grin stretches across my face as I pluck the papers out of her delicate hand. "I would never."

Kyah rolls her eyes and steps away from me, moving around her station to find a pen. She shoves it into my hand and points toward her desk for me to get a move on, and I jump to it, realizing that in order to stay right here and be close to her, I'm gonna have to go through with this.

As Kyah prepares her station, sanitizing everything before checking over her tattoo guns, I drop down at her desk, my gaze sailing over the design open in her sketchbook, and I'm blown away. I've seen a few of her sketches laying around her apartment. She likes to binge-watch shows while working on

her designs, but she gets so lost in her work, I think the TV is just background noise.

I start filling out the consent form.

First Name: Alexander

Last Name: Reid

Address: Apt 3E—

Contact Number:

My pen stops on the paper, and I glance up at her. “Ahh ... what’s the rest of my address?”

Kyah’s brows arch, and an amused grin cuts across that beautiful face. “You’re screwing with me, right?” she laughs. “You don’t know your address?”

“In my defense, I’ve only been there a few weeks.”

Kyah rolls her eyes and steps into my side. “Just fill out the medical stuff and sign at the bottom,” she tells me. “I’ll fill out the rest of it.”

“Yes, ma’am,” I say, scanning over the list of medical questions before going through and ticking all the NO boxes. I sign it at the bottom, and as I get up from the desk, Kyah takes the pen and quickly scribbles in the rest of my address. Then plunging her hand into her handbag, she grabs a familiar slip of paper to copy down my phone number. “You kept that?” I ask, remembering the exact moment I stuck it to her door.

“Don’t get ahead of yourself,” she tells me, pointing toward her tattooing chair for me to take a seat. “Once something gets dumped into my handbag, it might as well start paying rent because it’ll never come out again.”

I laugh and drop down into her chair, watching as she rolls toward me on her wheely stool, her knee brushing against mine. “What do you want?” she asks, her gaze trailing over my body.

“You, Mace.”

Her gaze snaps back to mine. “That’s not what I—”

“I know what you meant,” I say, cutting her off and taking her chin, holding her gaze hostage.

Hesitation flashes in her eyes. “This isn’t a good idea.”

“The tattoo, or you and me?”

“You and me,” she murmurs, her voice so low as though she’s afraid of saying it any louder.

Pushing forward in the chair, I lean into her, my hands dropping to her thighs and rolling her in even closer. “Don’t fucking lie to me, Mace. I see the pulse at the base of your throat speed up every time I come close,” I say, brushing my fingers across her neck. “You want this just as much as I do.”

Kyah nods and relief pounds through my chest.

“Then whatever it is that’s holding you back, we’ll work through it.”

“It’s not that simple,” she tells me. “Being with me is ... it’s complicated. I could be putting you in danger.”

I scoff. “What? Because of those biker dudes who follow you everywhere you go?”

“You noticed that, huh?”

I lean in even closer, my lips brushing over hers. “How could I not?”

Kyah’s lips gently move with mine, kissing me back, and when she pulls away, there’s a reluctance in her bright blue eyes. “I don’t want you to get hurt because of me,” she tells me. “I’d never be able to forgive myself.”

“I can handle myself, Mace,” I tell her. “And for what it’s worth, if something were to happen to me simply for being close to you, then it’d be worth it.”

Kyah groans and shoves me back into the chair, her cheeks flushed. “You’re impossible, you know that, right?” she questions with a wide grin. I laugh as she quickly recovers and tries to get serious. “Okay, but really, what kind of tattoo do you want and where?”

My lips quirk up into a smirk. “Okay, so you know Pinocchio?” I ask, watching as her brows furrow and she slowly nods her head. “I was thinking of getting the top of his face right in the center of my groin. You know, just up to his eyes, and then the start of his nose would be where my dick is, so every time I got hard—”

Kyah's booming laugh cuts me off. "Holy shit. Why does that image come with sound effects in my head?" she questions, shaking her head. "But for the sake of your sex life, I'm not turning your dick into Pinocchio's nose."

"Come on, Mace," I tease. "You'll be begging me to lie to you."

"Lying to women might get you hard, but nothing's going to dry me up faster. Besides, from my experience, I don't need you to lie to me to get you hard. I can do that all on my own."

Fuck. I adjust the front of my pants. All this talk of Kyah getting me hard works like magic.

Her gaze travels down my body, catching my movements, and a smirk settles across her beautiful face. "Point proven."

I can't help but laugh. "Alright, fine. A Pinocchio dick is off the table, but that leaves me fresh out of ideas."

Kyah scans over my body again before her gaze comes back to meet mine, a seriousness flashing in her eyes. "For real though, are you actually down with getting a tattoo? Because you have perfect virgin skin for me to mess with, and I have this epic skull design that I've been working on that I think would look amazing on you."

"Yeah?"

She nods eagerly. "Yeah, can I show you?"

Kyah scrambles off her chair, scurrying over to her desk and flipping through her designs until she finds what she's looking for and whips back around. She strides back over to me as her

eyes light up with excitement. “I picture it as a chest piece,” she explains, handing me the piece of paper.

“Fuck me,” I breathe, taking it in and instantly being blown away by Kyah’s talent. The design is of a butterfly, only it has an almost demonic gothic feel to it. The wings are beautifully haunting, each side making up the eyes of the skull while the butterfly’s body is the nose, but at the bottom of the design, the butterfly almost appears to be melting away, making up the jaw and teeth of the skull. It’s disturbingly fascinating, and despite having walked in here with no intention of getting a tattoo, I can’t possibly walk away without it.

Meeting her gaze, I nod as my blood pumps just a little bit faster. “Let’s do it.”

KYAH



A thrill shoots through me as I transfer the stencil onto Alex's skin. I've been playing around with this design for over six months, always making slight adjustments until it was perfect. I never really had a plan for it, but now that I see it stenciled across Alex's chest, I could never turn back.

It looks incredible on him, and the fact that it's my design that he's allowing to be permanently tattooed onto his skin somehow makes it better. I knew he was screwing with me when he first walked into High Voltage Ink. All he wanted was a moment of my time to try and figure out where my head was, and I stand by what I said—I'm terrified of getting too close to him. My new stalker friend might have eliminated the whole Mason Ledger threat, but that doesn't mean that he's not a threat in himself. I don't know what he would do if he knew there was a man in my life, and the idea of Alex getting

hurt because I couldn't control myself around him has haunted me for the past two days.

Not to mention, Viper is starting to become an issue. It was fun at first, a little innocent flirting here and there, but things are shifting with him, and I don't like it. It makes me nervous. Viper isn't the kind of man to hold back because something is right or wrong. He does what he wants and doesn't care about the fall out, and I can see he's growing impatient, especially now that Crew is gone.

With Alex ready to go, I sit back down on my rolling stool and get comfortable, trying not to focus on the way his abs seem to stare at me, demanding attention, and his deep V begging me to run my fingers across it.

These next few hours are going to be challenging.

The new guy took off twenty minutes ago and as the clock ticks closer to seven, I see Big Jim starting to pack up his things. I hadn't planned a late night tonight. Hell, I specifically kept my schedule clear so I could enjoy a night off, but there's nowhere I'd rather be right now.

Reaching for my tattoo gun, I lean in toward Alex, and just as I place my gloved hand over his chest, he blanches. "Ahh fuck. Okay," he says, taking a deep breath. "Before you start, there's something you should know."

"Like what?" I say, my tattoo gun hovering over his chest.

"Shit, Mace. This is embarrassing. I've been trying to play it off and keep my cool, but now that the gun is right there, I

gotta let you know,” he says, swallowing hard, his Adam’s apple bobbing up and down. “I’m like ... deathly afraid of needles. Like, shit my pants type of phobia.”

I grin wide, taking in the absolute fear in his eyes and loving every second of it. “You’re serious, aren’t you?”

“I’d really appreciate it if you didn’t laugh at my misery.”

“Oh, it’s way too late for that,” I tell him, unable to wipe the grin off my face. “I’m going to be laughing about this for the next year. But do you need me to stop? It’s not too late to back out now.”

“Hell no. We’re doing this,” he tells me. “Now that I’ve seen that design, I’ve gotta have it. Besides, I’ve always wanted to cover myself in tats but have never had the balls to face the tattoo gun, but now that it’s in your hand and I’m desperate to look tough, my ego won’t let me give up. Plus, I don’t think you’ll ever let me live it down if I were to bitch out.”

“You’re damn right about that,” I tell him, meeting his gaze. “You just need something else to focus on.”

“Like what?” he murmurs.

Taking his hand, I drop it down off the chair and to my thigh. “I’ll make you a deal,” I tell him. “Every time you start thinking about your fear of needles, I’ll let you slide your hand just a little higher up my thigh. And for every time you overcome it and start to relax, I’ll lose a piece of clothing.”

His brow arches just as I hear Big Jim hurry up with his things, suddenly feeling the overwhelming urge to get out of

here as fast as he can. My gaze lifts, and I watch as he scurries out of here, stopping by the front door to glance back at me, a clear warning in his eyes that says, *don't fuck this asshole in my shop.*

I grin wide, and Big Jim shakes his head, realizing his warning is lost on me, and as he walks out and locks the door behind him, I turn my attention back to Alex, turning on the gun in my hand. “What do you say?” I ask, watching as his eyes widen, gaping at the gun. “Do we have a deal?”

“Fuck,” he says, blowing his cheeks out. “You’re going to be the death of me.”

And with that, I lower the gun to his chest as he turns his face away, not able to watch, and as he slowly starts to relax into it, I feel his hand creeping up my thigh.



Two hours later, I’m sitting in nothing but my bra and thong, my head thrown back as Alex plunges his thick fingers deep into my cunt. “Fuck,” I groan, my tattoo gun hovering over his chest.

Turns out, I set myself up and made myself a losing deal. Apparently, Alex is the type of man who faces his fears head-on, not only overcoming them, but making them his bitch.

He's been driving me wild with need for the past hour, and I'm fucking soaked for him. I've pushed through it, trying to focus on his tattoo, but I can't do it anymore. It's too much, and when his fingers start massaging my walls, I let the tattoo gun fall away. This design is too good to screw it up now.

"Oh fuck, Alex," I groan, needing so much more.

He sits up a little higher on the chair, clearly realizing I've abandoned his tattoo, and he locks his other arm around my waist, yanking me up off my wheely stool. He settles me over his hips, and I immediately grind down over him, feeling just how fucking rock hard he is.

"Shit, Mace. I've got to have you," he grunts, his hand curling around the back of my neck and pulling me in until his lips fuse with mine. He kisses me deeply, and I melt into him, needing everything he could possibly give me.

His fingers keep working me as I reach around my back and hastily unclasp my bra, letting the flimsy material drop down between us.

"Fucking hell," he mutters, pulling back just enough to scan his hungry gaze down my body, his eyes filling with an intense desire. He immediately cups his hand over my tit, his thumb brushing over my nipple and gently pinching it as it hardens beneath his touch. "Always so fucking responsive."

I groan, tipping my head back as he pinches my nipple again, sending an electric current shooting through my body and down to my core. "Mm-hmm," I whisper, tearing off my

gloves and throwing them somewhere behind me. “Only for you.”

He pulls me back in, those warm lips crushing mine, and as his tongue wars with mine for dominance, a fiery need slams through us both. I have to have him. I can't possibly wait another second. “Alex,” I whimper, my hands plunging down between us and reaching for his belt.

“I know, Mace,” he mutters. “Me too.”

Getting his pants undone, I reach in and curl my fingers around his thick cock, not able to close my hand fully around him. Alex sucks in a breath, hissing through gritted teeth, and as I pull him free from the confines of his pants and really start working him, his hips jolt forward, pushing up into my hand.

His cock is fucking stunning, standing tall and thick. There are angry veins up and down his impressive length and my mouth immediately waters, desperate to know how he tastes, but I'm not fooling myself. Both Alex and I know there's not going to be time for that tonight. The hunger is too much. I'm famished, and I need to feel the way he fills me, feel how he stretches me, and when I finally get what I want, I'm going to fuck him into oblivion.

His fingers plunge deeper into my core, his thumb rolling tight circles over my clit, and despite how good it is, I don't want to finish like this. I need to come while riding his thick cock, and I won't accept anything else. “Tell me we're done waiting,” I pant, my chest heaving with a fierce desperation.

“Fuck yes,” he growls, his arm locking around my waist and lifting me just enough to tear my thong off my body, having no choice but to pull his fingers free at the same time.

“Thank God,” I breathe, my fist tightening around his huge cock, suddenly pleased that I prepared myself for this moment with the mistletoe monster cock stuck to my wall, because I don’t plan on taking my time or easing into it. I want to drop right over him and take him whole.

I’ve never felt desperation like this before, and I don’t hesitate, lifting higher on my knees and positioning him right at my core, his thick tip pressing at my entrance. Alex hisses, sucking in a deep breath. “Fuck, Mace. I can already feel how fucking ready you are.”

Pride surges through my chest, and I hold his stare as my tongue rolls over my bottom lip. I drop down over him, taking him whole until he’s bottoming out. “Oh God,” I cry out, my pussy walls already spasming around him as I get used to the delicious intrusion.

“Holy fuck, Mace,” Alex grunts, thrusting his hips higher as my pussy squeezes around him like a warm glove.

My walls stretch, and my eyes flutter as I brace my hand against his chest, being careful not to touch any of the places I’ve already inked. And then I start to move, rocking my hips and moving back up his impressive length.

Both our breaths are shaky, and when I drop back down again, I throw my head back as Alex grabs my hips, his fingers

digging into my skin. “Baby, I need you to fucking move,” he grunts, a pained note in his deep tone.

Yes, Sir.

I start to really ride him, bouncing up and down over his thick cock, and my walls contract around him. When he presses his fingers to my clit and rolls tight little circles, I almost lose my fucking mind.

I lean down over him, the lingering ink on his chest rubbing against mine as I kiss him deeply, my hips doing everything they can to blow his fucking mind.

God, just the idea of this man exploding inside my little cunt sends me over the edge.

I feel him getting close, hear it in the way he groans, and just when I start to see stars, Alex locks his arm around my waist and pulls us both up from the chair. He spins me around, putting me back down on the chair. “On your fucking knees, Mace,” he growls, more than ready to take control. “Let me see that sweet ass.”

Oh God. I’m a goner.

I do exactly as he wants, bracing on my knees before flattening my chest against the chair as I feel him step in behind me, his thick tip resting at my entrance. “Are you ready to play?”

Something about his words strikes a chord within me, pulling at a memory, but I’m too worked up to figure it out. I

nod eagerly, needing everything he can give me, my pussy throbbing and desperate to be filled.

Alex growls, his voice shifting, filled with a deep hunger. “How do you want it, Mace?”

“Make me scream,” I tell him.

He takes my hips, and I make a show of arching my back, offering myself to him like a fucking buffet. “Your wish is my,” he thrusts hard and deep into my cunt and I cry out, “command.”

Holy fuck.

Alex starts to fuck me, taking me hard and fast as his fingers dig into my skin, and I push back into him as he rocks his hips and gets me at all the right angles. “Touch yourself, Mace. Show me how you play.”

I don’t hesitate, slipping my hand between my thighs and rubbing my clit before reaching a little higher and feeling the way he pushes into me. “Fuck, baby. I wish you could see yourself like this, see how fucking well you take me.”

The sweetest shivers trail across my skin, and I push back even further, panting and groaning as my body teeters on the edge of bliss. My whole body jolts and clenches as my fingers move back to my clit. “Fuck, Alex. I’m gonna come,” I tell him, not able to hold on much longer.

“Damn straight, baby,” he says. “Don’t fucking stop. I need to feel how you come on my cock.”

Oh God. His words are like the sweetest addiction, always knowing exactly what to say, and as his hand moves up to my ass and firmly spans it, I cry out for more. “Again,” I beg. He does as I ask before reaching out and curling his hand around my hair and giving a firm yank, arching my back.

My walls immediately clench around him, loving every damn minute of this. “That’s right, Mace,” Alex growls. “Take it all.” And when he presses his thumb to my ass and pushes down, it’s all I can take.

I come hard, my pussy shattering like glass as my whole body starts to shudder. I cry out, but he doesn’t release me. He keeps pulling back on my hair and spanking my ass again, each firm hit sending an electric shot straight through my body.

My pussy explodes around him, wildly convulsing and squeezing him tight, and when he thrusts forward one more time with a deep, booming groan, he comes with me, shooting hot spurts of cum deep inside my cunt.

My orgasm pulses through me, and as he continues to fuck me, it only gets more intense, working through to my fingers and toes as I clench my eyes, barely able to breathe. And then finally, I reach the apex of my high, and as I start coming down, I collapse against my tattoo chair, and Alex loosens his hold in my hair.

His hands return to my hips as he remains buried deep in my pussy, and we both just breathe, needing a moment to calm down from the high. But one thing is for sure, Alex was right,

waiting for this and building that tension between us only made it that much better.

“Shit, Mace,” he breathes behind me, his thumbs gently brushing over my hips. “Are you okay? That was rough.”

“Never been better,” I tell him, my pussy shuddering with every slight move he makes, suddenly overly sensitive to his touch. “That was incredible.”

“You’re telling me.”

I grin and look back at him. “What can I say?” I ask before adopting my best customer service voice. “We strive to offer a full-service experience here at High Voltage Ink.”

Alex laughs as he slowly pulls out of me, and I suck in a breath, a little bit sore. “Sorry, Mace. I didn’t even think about using a condom,” he says. “We just got a little carried away.”

“I know,” I admit. “I realized halfway through, but the idea of you coming inside of me was too good, and I couldn’t stop, but it’s fine. I’m on birth control.”

“Good,” he murmurs, leaning down and pressing a kiss to my reddened ass cheek as it remains high in the sky, only when I feel him begin to leak out of my pussy, he groans. “Holy fuck. That’s the hottest thing I’ve ever seen.”

I don’t dare move, loving the way his eyes darken with hunger. He lifts his hand back to my pussy and presses against my clit, and I gasp, feeling as he strokes back up toward my entrance, scooping up his cum before pushing it back inside me.

His fingers plunge deep, and I immediately clench around him, wanting him to fuck me all over again. He draws his fingers back, and when he reaches around and presses them to my lips, I can't help but open wide. "See how good we taste together," he murmurs.

I suck his fingers dry and a deep hunger returns in my chest. "Alex," I whisper.

"Yeah, Mace?"

I hold his dark stare, letting him see the desperation in my eyes. "I'm going to need you to fuck me again," I tell him. "And this time, I want it to last all night long."

Alex grins, his hand dropping to his cock, and I suck in a breath, seeing just how ready he is. "I'm right there with you, Mace." And with that, he wraps his arm around my waist and pulls me up so that my back is flush against his chest.

He cups my tit, flicking his fingers over my sensitive nipple, and before I even get to tell him just how I want it, he's already pushing back inside me, more than ready to blow my mind all over again.



It's a little after one in the morning when Alex curls his arm around my waist and leads me down the street toward

our apartment building. I'm starving, and I have to admit, I've never been so grateful for the fact that Brooklyn is filled with so many late-night diners.

I didn't expect Alex to come in today, and considering I'd planned for an early escape from work, I skipped lunch. But what we just did is considered more than just a workout. It was the best kind of insanity, but I'm exhausted now. I can barely keep myself on my feet. Hell, when we were locking up High Voltage Ink, I had to ask Alex to bend down to lock the deadbolt because I simply couldn't bend to do it.

My legs have never shaken like this.

Having heard my stomach growling for the last hour, we stop by a food truck and I get the best kebab known to man, and as we keep walking, I find myself glancing up at him. "You're staring, Mace," he says without even glancing my way.

"I'm sorry. I just ..." I pause, letting out a heavy breath, unsure if I'm going to ruin everything by bringing this up. The slight pause has Alex stopping dead in his tracks and meeting my stare, his brows furrowed as he waits for me to figure out whatever the hell it is I'm trying to say. "If we're really going to do this, then there's something I should probably let you know."

"What's wrong?" he questions, stepping closer and dropping his hand to my waist.

"I, ummm ..." I blow out my cheeks, not knowing how to even start. "You remember the other night when I kinda

freaked out and ran to your apartment?”

“Because you thought someone was in yours.”

“Yeah,” I say slowly. “I don’t mean to freak you out or try to scare you away, but that’s kinda been going on for a few weeks now.”

“What? Thinking that you’re hearing someone in your apartment?”

“No, someone has been sneaking in at night,” I tell him, hoping he doesn’t think I’m crazy. “It started small where I would come home from work and the window would be left open or I’d smell men’s cologne in my apartment. But recently it’s started to escalate.”

“What do you mean?”

“Well, the other night I was kinda, you know, having a little alone time in my bed, and I heard someone in my room,” I admit.

“The fuck?” he questions, that dark, curious gaze searching my eyes. “Did he say something?”

“Not exactly,” I say. “He was jerking off. I could hear him groaning while he fucked his hand, and I didn’t know what to do. I mean, if I stopped, he would have known that I knew he was there, and if I ran over to your apartment, I didn’t know if I could make it to the door and unlock my deadbolt before he caught up to me. So I just—”

“Kept going,” he finishes for me. I nod, almost ashamed of how that all went down. “Is that it?” he questions. “I don’t

want to sound like an ass or anything, but all of that seems like stuff that could have been imagined, you know? I checked your apartment, and there was definitely nothing in there, and if you called the cops, none of that is going to hold up. They need concrete evidence, like actual proof that someone was in there. What about your cameras?”

I shake my head. “You think it’s all in my head, don’t you?”

“No, Mace. I saw the fear in your eyes when you ran into my apartment the other night,” he tells me. “That kind of fear can’t be made up. I just want to know what you’re dealing with.”

I swallow hard and nod, wanting to trust him. “He left a message for me the other day. I woke up to find words scrawled across my bedroom wall in lipstick.”

“Fuck. Really?” he says, taking my hand and continuing down the sidewalk. “What did it say?”

Chills sweep down my spine. “It said ‘pretty, pretty, Kyah. Are you ready to play?’”

“Fucking hell,” he grunts. “That’s messed up.”

“Not as messed up as him sneaking in and eating me out while I slept.”

Alex stops again, his eyes widening in horror. “The fuck, Kyah?” he grunts. “That bastard touched you in your sleep, and you’re only now just telling me? Why the fuck haven’t you said anything sooner?”

I shake my head, pulling away a step, conflicted by the whole thing. “This is exactly why I didn’t tell you. I don’t want the judgment.”

“Baby, I’m not judging you, I just don’t understand,” he says. “Is this why you tried to end things and why there’s been a constant show of Grim Reapers cruising past our building?”

I cringe and nod, not really wanting to explain the whole Mason Ledger thing, but it serves the same purpose. “Yes,” I finally tell him. “I don’t know what to do about this guy. That’s why I had the cameras installed, and so far, they’re turning out to be a waste of time, but what it really comes down to is that I don’t know what this guy is capable of. I don’t want him finding out about you and then doing something to hurt you because of some sick belief that I belong to him. And like I said, things have been escalating with him. Each time he slips through the window or door, or wherever the hell he’s coming from, he pushes the boundaries just a little bit further.”

Alex watches me just a little too closely, his gaze narrowed. “It excites you, doesn’t it?”

My eyes widen, and the guilt in my expression is too clear to try and deny it. “I ... maybe,” I say with a heavy breath. “I’m sorry. I know that’s probably not what you want to hear, but I want to be honest with you.”

“I only ever want you to be honest with me,” he tells me.

“Do you hate me for being excited by that?”

“I’m not going to lie, it’s a definite shot to the ego,” he admits with a stupid grin, “but I could never hate you, Kyah. I respect you for telling me and thinking enough of me that you would push me away in order to keep me safe from this bastard. But if I have to fight some horny stalker to have you, I’ll fucking do it, Mace. I meant what I said back at the shop, I want to see where this goes, and if I’ve gotta sneak into your apartment and fuck you with a mask to get you off, then all you gotta do is say the word.”

A grin rips across my face, and I clench my thighs before instantly cringing. My pussy needs at least a day or two to recover. “You’d do that for me?”

“Damn straight, I would,” he says. “But I have to be completely honest. I don’t like the idea that you’re not safe in your home, and maybe until you know what this guy’s intentions are, you should stay with me.”

I shake my head. “I don’t know if that’s really a good idea. I don’t want to do anything that’s going to set him off.”

“Babe,” he says, his tone low. “Have you considered that maybe fucking you while you sleep could only be scratching the surface of what he wants?” he questions. “I don’t want to wake up one day and find you dead in your bed.”

“That’s not going to happen.”

“How could you know that?”

“I ...” I let my words fall away because honestly, he’s right. I don’t know that, I’m just blindly trusting that he wouldn’t

hurt me, but in reality, there's absolutely nothing to suggest he wouldn't. He's already shown that he's messed up in the head, already shown that he's willing to cross boundaries, so what else is he capable of? And what is it that he actually wants from me?

“Come on,” Alex says, pressing his hand to my lower back and leading me down the street, clearly seeing how conflicted I am by the question. “Let me take you home.”

I nod and let him lead me along the sidewalk, hoping like fuck it's not a question I have to think about for long.

VIPER



Anger booms through my chest as I crash down onto my couch. I spent the night watching Kyah's neighbor fuck her in the tattoo parlor, making it clear that she has no fucking respect for the talk we had yesterday.

That pussy is mine. I should have been the one bending her over and fucking her like that. Hell, I'm the one who's put in the years coming to her shop, put in the effort to keep her protected in this fucking town, and yet she still doesn't fucking respect me.

I'm her old man, and the fact that she doesn't even acknowledge or see that makes me fucking burn inside. I'm reaching my limit, and the more I see her flaunting this new shit with her neighbor, the more humiliating it becomes.

My club knows she belongs to me, knows that I've gone out of my way to protect her, and she repays me by rubbing it in

my fucking face and making me the fucking laughing stock of my club. This shit isn't going to fly another day.

She's mine, and her time for fucking around is up. But first, there's one little speed bump standing in my way, but it's nothing I can't handle.

Alex fucking Reid will die tonight, and it will be my pleasure.

I've been looking into this bastard, and he's not as squeaky clean as I originally assumed. Hell, there's a murder charge and a warrant out for his arrest. Apparently, mommy dearest did something to really ruffle his feathers because he did a number on that bitch, and judging from the crime scene photos, it wasn't a spur-of-the-moment thing. It was premeditated and carefully planned. It's no wonder he was dishonorably discharged from the military. Though, it's that same military who has given him the skills to evade lockup all these years, but not anymore. Not now that he's in my town.

Bringing up the security feed of Kyah's home, I watch as she walks across her small apartment and over to her window. It's wide open, and her hands hover on the frame, peering out into the night, though all she's going to see in the street is Spider sitting out on his bike, watching over her. Though with Mason Ledger dead, I could probably pull her protection details, only I can't quite find it in myself to do it. I like to have this kind of control, knowing where she is at every moment of the day, knowing who she sees, and who she talks to.

A soft breeze catches in her hair from the open window, and when she finally slides it back into place, she doesn't grab the key and lock it. I shake my head. She's never been one to think about her safety. She's daft like that, but it won't be something she will have to worry about once I make her my old lady. There's nowhere she will go without my say-so, and absolutely no one will have access to her. She will be protected at all times. And as for that job of hers, she can continue working at High Voltage Ink as long as I have full access to her schedule and the ability to approve her client list. Though one thing is for sure, the long hours spent working on half naked men will be over, and there will be a lot of tramp stamps in her future.

Kyah disappears from the camera's frame, and I skim through the different feeds until I find her in the kitchen, pouring herself a glass of water and digging through the freezer for ice. She drops the cubes into the glass and strides into her room. Flipping to the next camera angle, I watch her place the glass on her bedside table and pull her phone out of her back pocket, tossing it down on her bed.

Then as she grabs her tank and pulls it over her head, she makes her way into the bathroom. I switch over to my private feed, watching through my hidden camera as she gets undressed and steps into the shower. The water rains down over her, and as she rubs her loofah all over her body, I slip my hand into my pants, imagining the day that I will take her for myself.

As she finishes in the shower and gets ready for bed, I switch back to the main feed and take a look at the movement in her hallway, making sure all is as it should be, and realizing that now is as good a time as ever, I grab my cut and walk straight back out the door.

The ride to Kyah's apartment complex is short, only fifteen minutes in the dead of night, and I pull up beside Spider, nodding as he meets my gaze. "Take off, man," I tell him. "I've got it from here."

He doesn't hesitate, letting his bike rumble to life before taking off into the night, and I waste no time, cutting my engine and making my way across the street. As I approach the front door, trying to remember the access code for the building, a movement in the shadows catches my attention.

My head snaps up, and when the shadows seem to swallow the person whole, I move toward it, darting around the corner of Kyah's building and toward the fire escape that leads right up to her window. Only I come to a stop, not seeing anybody.

I peer into the darkness, checking up and down the length of Kyah's building, but come up blank. I could have sworn I saw someone sneaking around here. Was it just a trick of the light or am I finally starting to lose my fucking mind?

Figuring it was nothing, I go to make my way out of the alley when I feel something press into my back, only before I get the chance to grab the bastard, a sharp burn appears at the base of my throat. My eyes widen, and I clutch my neck to find blood pouring over my hands.

Have I been cut?

I start choking on my own blood as the body at my back leans in once again. “You’ll never have her. She’s mine, Viper. All fucking mine.” And before I even get a chance to look back or fight, I drop to my knees and feel a rush of cold overwhelm my body, darkness edging my vision.

As blood pours from the deep gash in my throat and quickly pools beneath me, I stare up at the starry night sky. My limbs go heavy, too heavy to continue clutching my throat and my hand falls lifelessly beside me. The stars above begin to blur until the world completely fades away and then finally, I close my eyes, losing grasp of consciousness.

KYAH



Wailing sirens pull me from my sleep, and as my eyes spring open, I see the red and blue flashing lights illuminating my bedroom. I throw myself out of bed in a blind panic.

What in the fresh hell is going on out there?

I scurry across the room, my legs wobbling as I make it to the window, catching myself on the frame. Grabbing the handle and yanking it open, I peer into the night and see a flood of police cars and cops sectioning off the street with yellow tape.

The cops linger in the alleyway beside my building, and as the distant roar of motorbikes grows closer, unease settles into my veins.

Needing to know what the hell is going on, I hurry out of my bedroom and into my living room. As usual, I find my window wide open, but instead of fretting over it, I throw my head through it, peering down at the chaos below.

A heavy thumping sounds at my door, but I ignore it as I search through the crowd below, trying to figure out what has their attention. Then as my eyes adjust to the darkness, I finally see it—a body.

A sharp gasp tears through me when I catch a glimpse of the familiar Grim Reapers cut.

“Holy shit.”

The thumping on my door continues. “Mace, baby. You in there?” Alex calls through the door.

My heart races, and I pull myself away from the window, trying to remember who the hell Viper had stationed outside my building last night. I was so focused on Alex and trying to justify why the hell I’m so blasé about allowing my stalker full access to me, I can’t remember it clearly.

Was it Spider? I’m not so sure.

I remember walking past and giving him a small smile, and while I looked up, I didn’t really see. It was like a natural instinct—look up, smile, mind your own business, and keep walking. There was no conversation or any real acknowledgment of why he was still here even after Mason Ledger was found dead.

“Mace. Come on, babe. Don’t make me bust this fucking door down,” Alex calls from the hall. “I need to know you’re okay.”

Shaking off the uneasy feeling, I pick up my pace before clutching onto the latch and trying to unlock the door and then the deadbolt. It takes way too long in my sleepy haze, but hearing me fiddling with the locks from the other side of the door seems to ease Alex’s worries, and he chills out with the heavy pounding.

When my door swings open, Alex immediately strides in, his hands going to either side of my face as he pulls me in, looking over me in a blind panic. “You’re okay?” he rushes out, pulling me into his bare chest and crushing me against him.

I hastily pull back, knowing that couldn’t possibly feel good with his new ink, and I press my hands to his warm skin. “I’m okay,” I tell him. “But something is going on outside. I think it’s one of Viper’s men. You know, the one we saw chilling outside when we got back.”

“Shit, really?” he asks, a slight relief in his tone. “After everything you told me last night about this asshole who’s been sneaking into your room, I thought the worst.”

“Really, I’m okay,” I tell him, pulling him deeper into my apartment and kicking the door closed behind us. I drag him across the room, leading him toward the living room window before pointing down to the chaos below.

“How can you be sure it’s one of Viper’s men?” Alex asks, peering into the darkness, the glow of the red and blue flashing lights dancing across our faces.

“Apart from the deafening sound of every Harley in the city heading this way, he’s wearing his cut,” I explain. “I’m not entirely sure, I can’t quite see, but I think it might be Spider.”

“Spider?” he asks. “You know their names?”

“Kinda,” I say. “I don’t know them on a personal level, but over the past few years, at least half of them have been a client at some point, and they don’t usually come alone. For long sessions, they generally bring someone with them to keep them company. Spider though, he was the silent, brooding type. I’ve only had one session with him. We were only just getting started, but he would just sit in silence, glaring at the ceiling the whole time. It was a very uncomfortable three hours.”

“Fuck, Mace. I’m sorry.”

I shrug my shoulders. “Like I said, I didn’t really know any of them on a personal level, but it still sucks. Though, I can’t help but wonder what happened to him,” I say, my brows furrowed. “Do you think he got shot?”

Alex peers back out the window, gazing down at the scene below. “I don’t know. It’s too hard to tell from up here, but you would have heard a gunshot. Unless they used a silencer.”

The guys from the Grim Reapers MC roll to a stop, and the sound is so loud, it vibrates right through the building and I’m

forced to close my windows just so I can hear myself think. Then because I'm a nosey bitch, I head back into my bedroom and watch over the street, looking at the club members as they park their bikes and throw themselves over the other side of the police tape.

"There's no way in hell I'll be getting back to sleep now," I murmur.

"You could always come over to my place and crash in my bed," Alex says, leaning against the doorframe of my bedroom. "You'll still hear all the bullshit going on out on the street, but at least you won't have to deal with the flashing lights."

Glancing back, I flash him a stupid smirk before immediately feeling guilty for smiling when someone's just been murdered outside my building. "Nah, even then I won't be able to sleep. I'm not sure if you've figured this out yet, but I'm nosey as fuck. I don't think I'll be sleeping until I know exactly what—woah. Wait," I say, clutching onto the window ledge and leaning closer to get a better view of the street and the biker I just watched arrive. "That's Spider there."

"Huh?" Alex mutters before striding in next to me and glancing down at the street. "If that's Spider, then who the fuck is dead in the alley?"

I shake my head, that same uneasiness settling back into the pit of my stomach. "I don't know," I breathe, already rushing through my apartment. "I ... I'll be back in a minute," I call over my shoulder.

“Where the fuck are you going?” he says hurrying after me.

“I need to know,” I tell him, grabbing the door handle and yanking it open, despite the fact that I’m wearing nothing but a tiny crop top and sleep shorts.

“Need to know what?” he says, hurrying after me, easily keeping up with me on the stairs.

“I don’t know,” I say, clutching the railing to keep from falling to my death. “I just ... I have a bad feeling about this, and Viper—”

“You think it’s Viper?” he asks.

“I’m not sure, but I just ... I need to find out.”

“Alright, Mace,” he says, taking my hand. “The cops aren’t going to let you anywhere near him, but we can ask some of the club members. But if this is one of their brothers, they’re not going to be open for prying. Find someone you know, ask what you need to know, and get out of there. These aren’t the kind of guys you want to be messing with, especially in the face of something like this.”

I nod as Alex leads me down the rest of the steps, forcing me to slow my pace so I don’t end up needing a nose job. As we hit the front door and break out into the chilly night, he keeps me right at his side.

The noise out here is deafening, and as news reporters and more cops show up, Alex leads me over to the police tape. “See anyone you know?” he asks, nodding toward the group of bikers who are all hovering around one another, a few of them

glancing up toward my apartment while a few look as though they're ready to slaughter everyone who even thinks about looking at them wrong.

I nod as I spy the president's wife, or I suppose old lady is what she'd prefer to be called. "Estée," I call out, watching as her gaze flicks toward me.

She's a sweet girl, definitely way too young to be married to the president of an outlaw motorcycle club, but she has an edge to her and can more than hold her own. She hurries over to me, crossing her arms to fend off the bite in the early morning air. "Girl, you shouldn't be out here," she warns me.

"What?" I grunt, my brows furrowing. "What do you mean? What's going on?"

She glances back at her club, her husband watching her cautiously, never letting her out of his sight. "It's Viper," she finally says, her gaze softening as she reaches out and places a comforting hand on my shoulder. "I'm sorry, girl. I know you guys were maybe going to be something one day."

"No," I say, shaking my head. "It's not Viper. Spider was on watch tonight. Viper wasn't even here."

"He relieved Spider a little after one in the morning, told him to go home," Estée says. "After what happened to Mason Ledger, he wanted to look out for you tonight. Wasn't sure if the threat was really gone."

Fear pounds through my veins at the mention of Mason's name, and I grab Alex's hand, glancing up and meeting his

curious gaze. I see the question in his eyes, wanting to know what the hell Estée is referring to, but now isn't the time or place to go into it. That's a conversation to have behind closed doors.

Glancing back at Estée, I shake my head, refusing to believe what I'm hearing. I just lost Crew. The wounds haven't even begun to heal yet, and now she's trying to tell me that Viper is gone too. "No," I breathe, my gaze shooting back toward the alley, only with the sea of bikers and the cops lingering around, it's impossible to make out a body.

My heart races, cracking a little more with each wild beat until it's nothing but a shattered mess on the floor. Tears fill my eyes, and while I always knew I was never going to end up with Viper, he was still one of the only people in this life I could depend on. "Are you sure it's him? Did you check? Did the cops let you check?" I break into a panic, my chest beginning to ache. "It can't be him. I ... I wasn't finished with his chest piece and—"

"It's him," Estée tells me, gripping my chin a little too firmly, demanding I keep my cool. "We checked. His throat was slit. But like I said, you shouldn't be down here. A lot of these guys at my back aren't happy that they'd been put on protection detail for a woman who wasn't an old lady, and right now, they're looking for someone to blame. So I suggest you get your perky little ass out of here, and while you're at it, do what you can not to flaunt the fact that you're fucking someone else. Don't try and shit all over Viper's memory like that. Let him go with dignity."

I swallow hard and nod. “Of course.”

“I know you and Viper weren’t anything serious yet,” she says, speaking about us as though it was somehow already a done deal. “But some of us already considered you part of the family. We obviously haven’t worked out the details yet, but we’ll have a private burial for our VP in a few days. I’ll text you with the details. And in the meantime,” she adds. “Don’t be surprised if my boys come around asking questions.”

“Sure thing,” I say, glancing back toward the alley one more time before looking over the club members, hating how a few of them look at me with a deep suspicion in their eyes.

Estée doesn’t hang around, walking straight into her old man’s arms, the two of them speaking quietly between themselves, and as his terrifying gaze lifts to mine, I whirl on my heel and get my ass back up to my apartment.

By the time I’m pushing through the door, my face is streaked with tears. Alex immediately pulls me into his arms. “I’m sorry, Mace. I didn’t realize how close you and Viper were.”

“We weren’t. Not really,” I tell him. “He always had this fantasy that I would be his old lady one day, and every time he’d say it, I’d subtly shut him down. But to be fair, I was barely seventeen when he first started asking me about it, and at first, I thought he was just kidding, you know, trying to be flirty. But as it went on, I realized he was serious. That life though, always being on the run from the cops and dealing with the kind of secrets and lies that could get you killed isn’t

for me. I never would have cut it, and on some level, I think Viper knew that, but he wasn't ready to give up the dream just yet."

"What do you mean *just yet*?"

"He was just getting a little more persistent is all," I say, shrugging my shoulders as I pull out of his arms, mulling over everything that's just happened. I drop onto the couch, pulling one of the cushions into my chest, when a thought occurs to me, sending me into a wicked spiral. "What if this is my fault?"

"The fuck?" Alex says, walking over and crouching down in front of me, holding my chin as our gazes collide. "How the hell could this be your fault? You were asleep."

"Yeah, but ... what if it was the guy who's been sneaking into my room?" I say, my hands shaking with the thought, terrified that if the Grim Reapers were to come to the same conclusion, my life would be in imminent danger. "Every night those bikers sit in front of my building. They never get off their bikes, just sit there smoking their shitty cigarettes. But Viper changed the rules. He got off his bike, and the only reason he would have done that is if he saw something, right? And when I was woken by the sirens, my window was open again, meaning my stalker had been here again."

"Mace," Alex says, his tone shifting with concern.

"What if my stalker did this, Alex?" I ask, the tears now streaming down my face. "Viper was here to protect me, and my stalker was here because I've failed to do anything about

it. What if Viper saw him leaving my apartment and confronted him? What if Viper's throat was slit because of me?"

"Fuck, Mace," Alex breathes, grabbing my hips and yanking me off the couch and into his arms. I drop down, my knees falling on either side of his strong thighs as he wraps his warm arms around me. "It's going to be okay, Kyah. This isn't your fault."

"The Grim Reapers might not see it that way," I tell him. "What am I supposed to do? If I keep this from them, I look guilty, but if I tell them, I could be leading myself into an early grave."

"I'm sorry, Mace. I really don't know what to tell you, nor is it a decision I can make on your behalf," he tells me. "But if I were you, I would use today to grieve. Cry all your tears, get fucking wasted if you have to. Then come tomorrow, we can work out a plan."

I lift my teary gaze, my heart racing so fast it hurts. "We?" I ask, sniffing.

"Yeah, Mace. We," he tells me, pressing a gentle kiss to my temple before pulling back, the sweetest boyish grin gracing his face. "You didn't think I was about to leave you to face a mob of angry bikers, did you?"

A small smile pulls at the corners of my lips, and as his eyes sparkle like the night stars, I take his hand and lift it to my lips, pressing a soft kiss to his knuckles. "Careful now," I whisper. "You're gonna make me fall in love with you."

“Good,” he murmurs, reaching up and brushing the tears from my face. “Because I think I’m already there.”

KYAH



I t's been one hell of a long day, and a terrifying one at that. Today, I was a special guest at a biker burial, and if it weren't for the fact that I was allowed to have Big Jim accompany me, I don't know if I would have been able to make it. Alex was a firm no to the point I didn't even bother asking if he could come with me, and I sure as hell wasn't about to put Nat in that position. Hell, knowing her, she probably would have tried to jump in one of their beds and accidentally pick one who was already attached. Though to be honest, I think she might still be getting her rocks off with Sullivan.

Considering many of them already know and trust Big Jim, he was the most logical option, and he was honored to accompany me. Though, when the president sat me down and started asking me questions, Big Jim was more than on edge.

But I swallowed the fear and told them everything they needed to know. Though the video surveillance from my apartment still fails to show anyone entering or exiting, so, they didn't consider my stalker a viable suspect for Viper's death. Hell, a few of them even questioned if my sanity was intact, but the good ones, the ones who actually give a shit whether I live or die, promised to look into it.

The rest of the burial was more of a wild party. Once everyone had said their goodbyes, they opened the bar and everybody started to fuck around. I saw club whores sucking dicks in the middle of the bar, men snorting cocaine off coffee tables, while some scrawny dude who was screaming about being innocent was duct taped to a wall and used as a human dart board. Which is exactly when Big Jim and I decided it was a good time to bail.

It's been three days since Viper's death, and since then, my creepy bedroom friend hasn't swung by to pay me a visit despite the window remaining unlocked. Though considering the crime scene beside my apartment complex, it's probably not a great idea to get caught sneaking around.

Despite the club's denial that my stalker might have had anything to do with this, there's something in my gut that's screaming at me that they're wrong.

I think about it the whole way home from the clubhouse and barely manage an audible goodbye to Big Jim before he drives off, making sure to hang around until I've entered my building. I make my way up to level three, and despite how

desperately I want to collapse into Alex's arms, I find myself detouring past his door and shoving my key straight into my lock.

Since Viper was found dead, I haven't been able to stop considering the very real possibility that my stalker was the one to do it, and I haven't been able to shake the fear that I'm putting Alex in danger.

I'm falling head over heels in love with him, and after already losing Crew and Viper, I'm not sure I can emotionally handle losing Alex as well, and I think he knows that. I've been pulling away, and considering everything that's gone down, he's allowed me my space, but it won't last much longer. He simply doesn't possess the self-control to keep away. And honestly, I think I love that about him. He knows when to push and when to hold back, and more importantly, he knows exactly how to do it in a way that always leaves me wanting more.

Making my way into my apartment, my gaze lifts right to the window, and I despise the little flash of hurt that soars through my chest at finding it closed.

He hasn't been here, but why the hell should I want him to?

It's been days since he's been in my room, days since he touched me last, days since I felt that strange rush of electricity as his fingers brushed over my thigh. I shouldn't want him like that. Hell, I don't even know what he looks like, still don't even know his name, but I can't help myself. I still crave that wicked presence.

Maybe it's the danger or the thought of being forced to put my trust in a man who desires vile things from me, having to trust that when he touches me, he'll do it without force, that when he puts his mouth on me, he'll only take as much as I'm willing to give. But most of all, I have to trust that if he ever grows bored and is ready to slip into another woman's apartment, he'll leave me with the ability to keep breathing.

I hate that I don't know his intentions, but considering how quick I am to assume he's responsible for Viper's death, I think I might already know the answer to that.

My stalker is a bad man. He's dangerous and capable of terrifying things, so why the hell am I still so wildly attracted to the thought of him sneaking into my room at night? Of him closing his mouth over my clit? Of him pushing his fingers deep inside my pussy? I've been dreaming about how it would feel when he fucks me. How he would feel. If he'll take me rough and slam me against the wall. Will he demand to have me on my knees? Does he think about how it would feel to fuck my mouth? I can guarantee that I've thought about every possibility.

After kicking off my shoes, I trudge into my bedroom and slap my hand against the light switch. As I turn toward my bed, my feet falter, and my jaw goes slack.

The most delicious black lingerie set lays on my bed, and I suck in a breath as I take it all in. The skimpy thong and bra are gorgeous yet somewhat standard in sets like these, but it's the black bondage-style harness and thigh-high stockings that

make my breath catch in my throat. The harness clips around my waist with straps leading down my thighs to hook onto the top of the stockings, and while I dreamed about doing a boudoir photoshoot in a set like this once my tattoos were completed, I never got around to actually buying it.

A pair of black heels linger on the floor beside my bed, and just to the side of the lingerie set is a black blindfold with a tube of deep red lipstick.

My heart starts to race.

Clearly he's asking me for something tonight, but can I really go through with this? Can I trust him so blindly to cripple my vision with a blindfold? Though, I suppose every night he's crept into my room, the lights have always been out. I've never seen his face, never been able to anticipate his next move, so I guess adding a blindfold doesn't really change anything.

Shit. Am I actually considering this?

A wicked grin stretches across my face.

Hell fucking yeah, I am.

Grabbing the lingerie set, I walk into the bathroom and start figuring out how the hell to get this on, and as I start pulling the thigh-high stocking up my legs, it occurs to me that this might not have been left by my stalker. It could have been something given to me by Alex.

He's made it clear that he has a copy of my front door key. He could have easily slipped in here when I was out, but then,

I'm sure it would have shown up on my cameras, and I would have received a notification from my alarm, which begs the question—why the hell doesn't my alarm go off when my stalker sneaks into my apartment?

I really need to get to the bottom of this.

There's been a working list in my head. Crew, Viper, and possibly Mason, but so far I've been able to tick them off, and for a while, maybe it could have been Alex, but I'm already with him. He has no need to stalk me when he has full access to me as it is. So who the hell could this man be?

Maybe one of Viper's men? It would make sense. Viper had them stationed outside my building. Maybe Viper figured out which one of them was getting into my apartment and tried to intervene. I mean, the guys in the Grim Reapers MC aren't exactly law-abiding citizens. Murdering someone in cold blood is nothing but a regular Tuesday for them.

After slipping my feet into the heels and pulling the blindfold on, leaving it hovering over my forehead, I peer into the mirror, my gaze trailing up and down my body. I love it. I feel like a fiery vixen, and the anticipation for what he has in store for me burns brightly through my body.

The thong cuts in a little at my hips, and it's giving Victoria's Secret on a McDonald's budget vibes, but I absolutely love it. The bands from the harness that trail down like suspenders make my heart race and leave me feeling like a goddess. And honestly, any man who can do that for a woman has to be alright ... right?

Shit. Look at me trying to justify my stalker because he gave me sexy lingerie. What the hell is wrong with me? I should be thoroughly repulsed, but instead, I'm finding it impossible to squash the thrill that pulses through me. I should be burning the lingerie in the bathtub, not turning around in the mirror to see how it looks at all the angles. And I've gotta be honest, I like what it's doing for my ass.

Finishing off the look, I lean toward the mirror and uncap the red lipstick before taking my time to paint my lips. It's not exactly my favorite shade of red, but I love it either way. Then with everything in place, I take myself back into my room.

My nerves begin to pulse, first making my hands shake as the minutes tick by and the anticipation builds, then my whole body starts to shake. I lay in my bed, then get up and hover by the window, not knowing how I should be waiting for him. I mean, it's awkward lying in bed with my heels on.

The blindfold remains on my forehead as the clock ticks past midnight and well past one, and just as I start wondering if I should just give up and go to sleep, I hear the soft slide of my living room window moving across the tracks.

KYAH



Holy shit. He's here.

I suck in a breath as I stand by my bedroom window, my heart racing as I peer down at the cleared crime scene below. I reach up and slowly drag the blindfold over my eyes. It was already dark in my room, just as it always is, but with the blindfold on, I have no choice but to solely rely on my other senses.

I listen intently, gripping the window frame as I try to drown out the noises from outside, focusing on the footfalls that slowly inch closer to my bedroom. My pussy throbs, and the anticipation is almost too much for me to bear.

I take short, shaky breaths, unable to settle the fear that pounds through my chest, but the thrill of the unknown keeps me rooted in place.

He enters my room, stopping by the door, and I hold my breath as though that could somehow help me hear him better. A deep groan rumbles through his chest, and I've never felt so proud in my life. His feet shuffle slowly against the hardwood floor, and the sharp drag of his cologne makes the little hairs over my body stand up. When his feet still nearby, butterflies take flight in the pit of my stomach.

I sense him right behind me, warmth radiating off his body as he closes the space between us, and his big hand takes my hip. Everything about him is big. He towers over me, but not in the same way Viper did. My shoulders sit somewhere around his chest, and as he presses into me, I feel his huge cock against my lower back. My mouth immediately waters, desperate to see how he feels in my hands, my mouth, my pussy.

“Hmmm. Good girl, my sweet Kyah,” he rumbles, his voice so low that I still can't work out if I recognize it, but there's something familiar there, something I can't quite put my finger on.

His fingers bite into my hip before immediately loosening again, and I suck in a gasp when I feel his hand move. His knuckles brush up my waist toward my ribs, leaving a trail of goosebumps as his other hand flattens against my stomach. I push back against him, uncrossing my ankles as his hand begins sliding down my waist, over my bondage harness, and finally cupping my pussy.

I grind down against his hand, desperate to relieve some of the tension that's left me wound so tight, and as he leans in and I feel his warm breath brush across my shoulder, I suck in a breath. "Mine," he growls in my ear, cupping me tighter until a breathy moan slips between my lips. And damn it, I know he feels how soaked my thong is with my arousal.

I nod, already panting. "All yours."

He releases my pussy, his fingers continuing to trail and brush across my skin, and every new touch sends me over the edge. He explores my body, his fingers diving into the cup of my bra and feeling just how rock hard my nipples have become. When he curls his hand around my hair and forces my head to the side, he drops his lips to the base of my throat, and I almost come instantly, especially as his tongue rolls over my sensitive skin.

"Turn around," he growls, his hands so rough against my body. I don't hesitate, quickly whipping around until I feel his straining cock pressing against my waist. My chest heaves, and I feel the way his razor-sharp gaze trails over my body, appreciating every slight curve, and honestly, that's exactly what I wanted. After all, he dressed me up like the best kind of Christmas present.

My mouth goes dry, and I roll my tongue over my lips, the anticipation burning in my chest.

"Knees," he rumbles, and the way I drop down with eagerness is almost comical. "I'm going to fuck your sweet

little mouth, and when I'm done, I'm going to fuck that tight ass. Nod if you understand me.”

I don't hesitate, nodding like a fucking bobblehead.

“Open wide,” I hear him say in that rich, wicked tone as the sound of his fly unzipping fills the air.

I can't help but roll my tongue over my lips one more time, spreading my knees as far as they'll go before opening my mouth wide. I listen intently as he reaches into his pants and fists his cock, and then he pulls it out, his warm tip bobbing against my lip.

I groan.

“Take it, Kyah.”

Reaching up, I curl my hands around his cock and whimper, feeling just how heavy and thick he is. I can tell there are angry veins leading up to his bulbous tip, and I find myself opening even wider.

I take him into my mouth, tasting the bead of moisture on his tip and swallowing it eagerly, desperately wishing that I could see his face. And as I start to move up and down, my tongue working around him, his hand curls into my hair once again.

A subtle grunt fills the air, and as he thrusts his hips forward, pushing into the back of my throat, I groan, never having been more turned on in my life. I pick up my pace, needing both hands to work his base as I feel the rush of excitement between my thighs.

His subtle grunts quickly turn into desperate, pleasure-filled moans, and as his grip tightens in my hair, he takes control of my pace, fucking my mouth. I almost come undone right here on the floor.

I keep my hands moving as my tongue works up and down his thick shaft, and just when my jaw can barely take it a second longer, he thrusts forward and comes in my mouth. Hot spurts of cum shoot down the back of my throat, and I greedily swallow him down, taking every last drop he has to offer.

He pulls back, breathing heavily, and I instinctively reach up to the blindfold, needing to see his face, but he captures my wrist and hauls me to my feet. Before I can even steady myself on my heels, he spins me around.

“Don’t move,” he growls into my ear.

My heart races as he pulls away, and a moment later, I hear the sound of my bedside drawer opening. My brows furrow, but he’s back just as quickly as he disappeared. “Bend over,” he instructs. “Brace against the wall.”

Nervousness fills me again, but I do exactly as he asks, folding my body over and bracing my hands against the wall. “Like this?” I breathe, closing my eyes beneath the blindfold and preparing for whatever’s to come.

“Mm-hmm,” he says just as I hear a subtle *hum* fill the air.

Holy shit. It’s one of my vibrators.

I suck in a gasp, and before I can figure out his game plan, he reaches down between my thighs and trails the vibrator

right over my clit. My body jolts, and I suck in a loud gasp, my knees shaking. “Oh fuck,” I grunt, pushing back against the wall, silently begging him to do it again, and he doesn’t disappoint, holding it there just long enough to make my eyes roll into the back of my head.

He pulls it away, but it only lasts a second when I feel his touch against my core, fingering the flimsy material of the black thong and pulling it aside. Excitement drums through my veins, and then I feel the vibration again. Only this time, it doesn’t stop at my clit. He trails it down to my cunt before pushing it right inside me.

I suck in a breath, not having expected that, and when he lets go of the vibrator and fixes my thong back in place, I almost die from the thrill. My chest heaves as I feel his hand land on my lower back. “Lower,” he instructs.

I start walking my hands further down the wall until my ass is well and truly in the air when I hear the distinct sound of a bottle cap being flicked open. I listen closer, trying to figure out what he’s doing, when a cool drop of strawberry-scented oil trickles down my ass.

Oh, God. I’m already seeing stars.

“So fucking pretty,” he murmurs, his voice thick with a deep lust.

His thumb presses against my ass, gently spreading the oil and as the vibrations inside my cunt continue, my knees start to shake. I don’t know how long I’m going to be able to handle this.

His fingers close around the thin strap of fabric over my ass, and he pulls it aside to tease me with his thumb, pushing against my hole before releasing the pressure. He does it again and again, each time pushing a little bit deeper until my body shudders.

“Yes,” I pant, pushing against his touch, needing everything he can give me, but I don’t know if I can take it. His cock is huge, and while I’m definitely no stranger to a little ass play, I certainly haven’t taken someone as big as him.

When I feel him start to inch closer to me, he places his hand at my hip. “Show me how you rub that pretty little clit,” he tells me, and as I drop my hand from the wall, eagerly diving between my legs as the vibrations continue to drive me wild, he presses that bulbous tip tight to my ass.

He drags his thick cock through the body oil, and I shudder as my fingers roll over my clit. It’s too much, and with the blindfold, I’m forced to focus fully on the feel of his hands on my body.

The vibration hits me harder, and my panting becomes heavier. “Please,” I beg, pushing back against him again. “Take me.”

He doesn’t hesitate, pressing his oiled tip to my ass, and this time, he gives me exactly what I crave. His thick cock stretches me wide as he slowly pushes into me, taking me inch by inch as I suck in a gasping breath.

God it burns, but I need so much more.

I try to relax around him, sucking in breaths through a clenched jaw. “Too big,” I groan, rubbing at my clit and trying to focus on the vibrations rather than the intense stretch.

“You can take me,” he says, just as desperate as I am.

I breathe through it until he’s finally seated all the way inside of me, and then he pauses, allowing me a moment to adjust to his size. “This sweet ass belongs to me, Kyah,” he tells me, slowly beginning to pull back.

Then with a powerful thrust, his fingers dig into my hips, and he slams back inside me. “You are mine.”

“Ahh, fuck,” I cry.

He pulls back, this time going just a little slower, giving me a moment to recover before taking me again, and with each new thrust, I push back, taking him deeper.

I’ve never been stretched like this, and as I keep working my clit and my vibrator hums deep inside of me, I feel that familiar hunger starting to build deep in my core. I clench my eyes, every passing second becoming more intense until my panting gasps have turned into full-blown cries of pleasure.

“Oh, God,” I cry, not caring if the neighbors hear. “I’m going to come.”

His only response is to dig his fingers deeper into my skin, and I know that by tomorrow, I’ll have the perfect impression of his fingers bruised on my hips.

He thrusts into me one more time, and I can’t hold onto it a second longer. I come hard, my orgasm exploding through me

like a sonic blast. Everything starts to shake as my knees give out, and if it weren't for his strong hands at my hips, I surely would have crumbled.

I clench around him, and as my walls convulse, he sucks in a sharp breath before roaring his release. He shoots hot spurts of cum deep into my ass, and as he holds me, I collapse against my bedroom wall, unable to handle it a second longer.

“Fucking hell,” he hisses as I struggle to catch my breath. “I knew you were ready to play.”

My back stiffens. Ready to play? Why does that sentence keep popping up in my life? He wrote it on my wall, probably in the same exact lipstick I'm wearing on my lips right now, but then I heard Alex mention it at High Voltage Ink when I rode him on my tattooing chair.

That couldn't be a coincidence, right?

Is my stalker Alex? Has he been making a fool of me this whole time? It has to be him. Nothing else makes sense. He has a key to my apartment, he's close by, knows when I'm home and when I'm at work. How could I have been so blind?

My brows furrow, and as he pulls out of me, I go to whip around, reaching for my blindfold, only as I steady myself on my heels, I find him already gone. “Wait,” I call after him, racing out of my bedroom, my gaze shooting toward the open window. “Wait.” But just like last time, he's already long gone. It's as though he knew I'd figured it out.

I shake my head, still so wound up and shaky from that intense orgasm, and with the vibrator still going to town inside of me, I hastily reach to pull it out and turn it off. My body instantly starts to relax, but my mind is far from it.

Surely I'm thinking too much into this. I know Alex likes to push the limits and live on the wild side, but there's no way in hell he would do this. He wouldn't cross my boundaries like that ... and Viper? No. I refuse to believe it.

My mind is a mess of insanity, and before I even know what I'm doing, I'm out the door and pounding my fist against Alex's door. "Open up," I yell, banging a closed fist against the wood. "Open the door."

I hear grunts and groans from inside, and it seems to take a lifetime before I hear the sound of Alex working the locks on the other side of the door. He quickly pulls it open, his dark gaze coming right to mine. "What the hell, Mace? It's three in the fucking morn—" he cuts himself off, his eyes widening as he takes me in, and I realize far too late that I look like a Victoria's Secret wet dream, not to mention the heels and lipstick that I failed to lose along the way. "Well, fuck. Guess my birthday came early this year."

"I ..." I let my words fade away as I take a moment to really look at him. He's shirtless, his tattoo still bandaged across his chest, and the only clothes he wears are a pair of loose basketball shorts. His dark, unruly hair is a little more unruly than usual, as though he'd just been asleep, and I simply stare

at him, unsure what to think. “You’ve ... you’ve been here all night?”

“What the fuck is this about?” he asks, his gaze lifting above my head and into my apartment with a deep curiosity. “Are you okay?”

“No, I ... you weren’t just in my apartment?” I ask, realizing I was wrong. Alex isn’t my stalker. Besides, he just crawled out of bed. My stalker was fully dressed, and I highly doubt he would have had enough time to climb out of my window, get to the bottom, and race back up the fire escape on the other side of the building in time to answer his door.

“As much as I wish I were in your apartment, spending my night in your bed with my face between those creamy legs, I’ve been right here.”

“I’m sorry,” I tell him, my brows furrowed as I start to feel myself beginning to spiral. “It’s just this whole stalker thing. I could have sworn it was you. Something he said just reminded me of something you said at High Voltage Ink and I just ... I guess I hoped it was you so I could quit freaking out about it.”

“Shit, Mace. He’s been there again?” he says, stepping into me and pulling me into the safety of his warm arms. “You did all of this for him?”

I nod against his chest before remembering his fresh ink and tilting my head again, not wanting to hurt him. “Yeah, I’m sorry,” I say. “I know considering everything that’s going on between us, that probably isn’t the easiest thing to hear, but he left this lingerie set out for me with a blindfold, and I didn’t

want to risk him showing up in my apartment to find I hadn't obeyed his instructions. I know that's a bullshit, lame excuse, but until I know just how dangerous this guy is, I don't want to do anything to set him off."

"I get it, babe. I fucking hate it, but I understand why you did it," he says, his hand rubbing soothing circles on my back. "But I'm not going to lie, I'm jealous as fuck."

I laugh and can't resist burying my face into his chest, his ink be damned. "I'm sorry," I whisper into the darkened hallway. "You know I wish it were only you."

"You know what?" he says, a teasing tone in his voice that has me pulling back and lifting my gaze to him. "If you want to make it up to me, you could always keep this little number for me."

I can't help but laugh. "This dude has got excellent taste."

"That he does," Alex agrees, his cock stiffening against my waist as his fingers brush over my skin. "Though, I can't lie. I'm curious to know exactly what he did to you."

My tongue rolls over my deep-red lips. "Instead of telling you," I whisper, my fingers dragging down his body and clutching onto the waistband of his basketball shorts. "Why don't I just show you?"

His gaze darkens, and not a second later, his lips are crushing down on mine as he drags me into his apartment, kicking the door closed behind us.

KYAH



My gaze lingers on the subtle bruises that are just starting to appear on my hips after my insane night with my stalker, and I really don't know how to feel about it. Am I wrong for absolutely loving it? Yeah, he kinda terrifies me, but the sexual thrill I get with him is wildly addictive, and I hate how much I crave it. But what I hate more is how it gives me conflicting thoughts about being with Alex.

I want to keep him safe, but at the same time, I want to spend every last moment with him. There's no denying it any longer; I've fallen madly in love with the cocky bastard next door, and I know we haven't been seeing each other long enough to really know that, but I feel it. This one is different.

His smile, the way he smells, the way he can so effortlessly throw me up against a wall and tell me exactly what he wants to do with me, but also knowing exactly when I need him to

shelve the dominant bullshit and be the man who holds me when my world is falling apart.

He's slipped right into my life, and now, I can't imagine having to go a single day without seeing him. He's everything, and for the first time, I'm starting to plan for the future, want things I've never wanted before, but if this were to fail, if he doesn't feel the same way ... shit. I'll be devastated. Though, I suppose that's not exactly at the top of my list of priorities right now. You know, considering I'm dealing with a stalker who may or may not be a murderous psychopath.

Fucking hell. How did I get myself into this mess?

I have so many questions for my stalker. Why me? How did he even find me? How long has this been going on? It's insane. Every time he sneaks through my window, I'm left with even more questions. But mostly, what I really need to know is what he plans on doing with me. Is he just screwing around, enjoying the thrill of welcoming himself into my apartment and loving how I like to play along, or is this leading up to something? Am I in more danger than I could ever know?

Crap. My hands start to shake.

I'm in big trouble here. I'm going to end up on the news.

A heavy pounding sounds at my door, and my back stiffens. It's almost nine on a Sunday night. Who the hell would be trying to break down my door? You know, apart from Alex, but he doesn't usually use a knock that could wake the dead.

Fixing my shirt back into place to cover the bruises, I make my way out into the living room, the heavy pounding booming through my small apartment, and while I would usually call out, telling the person that I was coming, I also don't feel as though I should be alerting someone to the fact I'm here. What if this is a break-in? Just like what happened at High Voltage Ink the night Crew died.

Creeping toward the door, I peer through the small peephole and let out a heavy breath as I find two of Viper's men, Spider and Fuse. Both of them have been my clients, though I haven't worked on Fuse in a while because, apart from his dick, I don't think he has even an inch of available skin left on his body.

"Open the door, Kyah," Spider grumbles, not the type to be kept waiting. "I know you're in there."

Shit.

Before he gets the chance to kick the door down, I twist the locks and release the deadbolt before finally reaching for the handle. I open the door, and before I can even ask what they want, they push past me, striding into my apartment as though they have every right to be here.

Fuse kicks the door closed behind me as Spider glances over my cameras. "Ummm ... someone wanna tell me why the hell you're here?"

Spider reluctantly looks back toward me and pulls his phone out of his pocket. "I've been looking into what you said, about having a stalker—"

“Really?” I say, cutting him off as my back stiffens, wondering if this is when I finally start to get some answers.

His gaze sharpens, clearly not appreciating being cut off. He holds my stare, a clear warning in his eyes to keep my mouth shut until I’ve been invited to talk. I swallow hard. I’ve only met Spider a handful of times, and he was pleasant enough, but since Viper’s death, he’s been promoted to Vice President of the Grim Reapers, and I assume a position like that doesn’t come without hardships.

“You said your security system we installed was fucked,” he continues, and not wanting to open my mouth out of turn, I simply nod. “But that doesn’t make sense. You have one of the best systems money can buy. Viper made sure of it. He wanted his old lady safe.”

“I wasn’t his old lady,” I supply before immediately cursing myself out. How stupid can I be?

Spider just glares at me again. “In his eyes, you were, so as far as the rest of us are concerned, you’re part of our family, and we protect our own,” he states. “But I’ve been looking into it. At the clubhouse the other night you mentioned someone’s been coming into your apartment, but the cameras and the alarm aren’t picking it up.”

“That’s right,” I say with a nod.

“Something’s not adding up,” he says, opening the security app on his phone and bringing up the feed from my apartment.

“Wait,” I say, my eyes widening in horror. “How many of you have access to the security feed? I thought only the security company, and me and Viper did.”

“We all do, baby,” Fuse admits.

My jaw drops, shock pounding through my veins. “So, when I ...”

Fuse grins. “Mmm-hmm,” he says, his gaze lazily trailing up and down my body as though he knows exactly what’s hidden beneath these clothes. “Thanks for the show.”

“Fuck,” I say, my cheeks flushing with embarrassment, realizing I’ve been making porn films in the privacy of my own home and distributing them to the whole fucking club. “You guys need to leave.”

“You want us to reboot your cameras, or what?” Spider grunts, clearly growing irritated with me.

“Why would you need to reboot them? What’s wrong with them?”

“What’s wrong with them is that we don’t currently have control of the system,” Spider says. “Whoever the fuck has been hacking into it has overridden control of the system and has been setting a loop each night.”

“Setting a loop?” I ask. “What the hell does that mean? I’m not sure I’m following.”

Spider presses his lips into a hard line before letting out a heavy sigh and striding toward me. He’s probably mentally reminding himself that I’m only twenty-three, and when it

comes to shit like dealing with stalkers and security cameras, I don't know shit.

“Here, look,” Spider says, holding up his phone so I can see. The feed from last night appears, and I see myself in my bedroom, hovering by my window in the outfit my stalker left for me. He points down at the time stamp. “Take note of the time,” he says before fast-forwarding through the video. I watch as the clock quickly climbs, and just when my stalker should have been climbing through my window, the clock jumps back an hour, and instead of me pulling the blindfold over my face and preparing for him to walk in, the feed simply shows me peering out the window.

“What the fuck?” I ask, grabbing hold of Spider's phone and bringing it closer to my face to better see the little numbers in the corner of the screen. I fast forward, watching the clock start to climb again only to jump back again until an hour later when I'm seen racing out of my apartment in a sheer panic. “This isn't right. He was in my apartment during this time. He left that outfit for me to wear and then fucked me. How can none of that show up?”

“A loop,” Spider says, his brow arching just enough for me to realize that I probably shouldn't have given quite so many details. “He makes a copy of the footage before he comes in and replaces the real footage with that.”

“Holy shit.”

“Mm-hmm,” he agrees. “But once we reboot the system. In theory, we should be able to gain control and override his

access. He shouldn't be able to get in.”

“Get into the security feed, or get into my apartment?” I question. “Because something tells me that disabling his access to my feed is only going to piss him off, and I can't have him escalating things more than he already has.”

“You really think this asshole killed Viper?”

I shrug my shoulders. “I mean, I really have no proof,” I tell him. “It's just a gut feeling. He was in my apartment that night. What if Viper saw him coming or going and crossed the street to check it out? It's just ... it's the only thing that makes sense to me. Unless there was some other kind of club business going down that night and I'm completely overshooting here.”

Spider shakes his head. “Nope. No club business that would be going down in the alley beside your building.”

“That's what I thought.”

Spider drags his hand over his face, his lips pressed into a hard line. “Look, we'll reboot your system and give you control, but I think until this shit is sorted out, we'll keep someone stationed outside the building,” he says. “That's what Viper would have wanted.”

I give him a small smile, never so grateful in my life, but let's be honest, the club has been on protection detail for weeks and hasn't once been able to catch this guy sneaking in and out. “Thanks, I really appreciate it,” I tell them.

Both Spider and Fuse nod before getting on with it, and I make myself comfortable as they find the control box for the cameras hidden within my linen cupboard and start messing around with it. Then once they're done with that, they go about the apartment checking over all the cameras and making sure they're all working as they should be. Spider disappears into the bathroom, and I think nothing of it until he comes out with a grim expression, his jaw firmly clenched with a bunch of wires dangling from his fingers.

He doesn't say anything about it, and judging by the dark look in his eyes, questions aren't welcome. "Alright, that should be it," Fuse tells me. "Do you need another rundown of how to access everything?"

"Nah, I should be good," I say with a small smile. "Thank you."

They both nod, and as I follow them to my door and hold it open for them, Spider turns back to meet my eye. "Call me if you see or hear anything," he tells me as something sinister and vile flashes in his dark eyes. "I'd like to have a word with this guy."

I don't respond, but he's not looking for me to. Instead, he simply walks away, and the two of them disappear down the hall. I let out a shaky breath, my gaze settling on Alex's door. Usually, when I'm out in the hallway, he'll hear me and come and hang out, but his door remains closed. He must be out, or maybe he already crashed. He tends to wake early every day and put himself through a grueling workout, and while I could

never, I really appreciate that he does because he likes nothing more than putting that impressive strength and fitness to the test every time he touches my body.

After quickly locking up my apartment, I take myself back to my couch and curl up with my comforter, but curiosity gets the best of me, and I bring up the security feed on my phone. I start searching through all the settings, trying to figure out how the hell this guy could have hacked into the system in the first place, but to be honest, when it comes to shit like coding and hacking, I'm out. That shit flies right over my head.

As I go through everything, I look back over the old footage and find what appears to be a small hidden folder for old data. My brows furrow as I open it. My gaze sails over the files, and they look just like the rest in the main folder, only there's something different about these, and as I open one and look at the file details, I realize they're all deleted files that have been restored when Spider and Fuse rebooted the system.

My heart starts to race as I look at the footage from last night, and just like the beginning of the footage I watched with Spider, I'm seen standing at my bedroom window, peering out into the street, only this time, I see the moment my back stiffens and I pull the blindfold over my face. As I look over to a different camera view, I watch as the living room window slides open.

My heart races.

This is it.

A man appears in my apartment, and due to the lack of lighting, it's almost impossible to make out any of his features, but I can see just how tall and broad he is, and my heart stops for just a moment, a wicked thrill pulsing through me. There's something about a tall, broad man that I like.

Shit. I shouldn't be searching for reasons to like this guy more than I already do. I should be repulsed, yet watching the way he silently makes his way through my apartment has my pussy throbbing for more.

He moves with ease, with a confidence that reminds me of Alex. Alex is confident like that, taking each step with purpose, knowing exactly what he wants. It's one of the things I love about him.

My stalker moves into my bedroom, and I watch as he pauses, taking a moment to look me over, and I remember what it felt like in that moment, feeling his appraisal, and now seeing it like this makes it that much better. He moves toward me, and over the next hour, I watch as he makes his demands and how I succumb to his every need.

I watch as I take his thick cock in my mouth, and I watch as my whole body shudders as I do. He looks like a fucking god as he comes down my throat, but when he pulls me back to my feet and takes my ass, I've never been so engrossed in my life.

Is it odd to be turned on by my own sex tape?

When he finishes, he turns around, and for a fleeting moment, he lifts his gaze right to the camera, but then he's gone, disappearing from my room like a ghost in the night.

Something pulls at my chest, just like it did when I heard him utter those words *ready to play*.

Rewinding back until he glances up into the camera, I pause the footage and take a screenshot. It's too dark to make out his features, but I wonder if I were to adjust the color settings of the image if I might be able to make out a face.

Unable to help myself, I open up my image gallery and select the screenshot before hitting the little edit button. I start playing, adjusting the contrast, brightness, and trying to minimize the shadows, and with each new adjustment, the image becomes just a little clearer.

Adjusting the brightness once again, I finally see him, and my heart tears right down the center. My phone drops into my lap, horror blasting through my chest as I struggle to suck in a deep breath.

How could he do this? He lied to me.

I shake my head, not wanting to believe what's right in front of my face. I asked him point blank, and he said no, but the proof is right here.

God, he really made a fool out of me. I stare down at the proof in the palm of my hand, the devastatingly beautiful face of the man I'm falling in love with—Alex Fucking Reid.

REID



Standing out on the fire escape, I pull the cloned phone out of my pocket and open up the security feed of Kyah's apartment, only she's nowhere to be seen. It's late, creeping close to midnight, and while most nights she's usually in bed by now, it's not unusual for her to stay late at work or crash in the living room while binge-watching some ridiculous show.

But I better check things out, you know, just to be on the safe side.

I try to hack into the app to create the loop, just as I do every night, only the system blocks me, forcing me out. My brows furrow, and I try a few more times before suspicion begins creeping through my chest. What the fuck is going on?

My jaw clenches. I don't like the idea of going in there without covering my bases, not to mention, she's left the house

and forgotten to turn off the lights, meaning despite it being the dead of night, the cameras will be a pain in the ass to avoid.

But if something has changed, if there's something wrong, I need to know what the fuck I'm dealing with. Has she worked out that I've been fucking with her security system, and that it's not just a faulty camera? She's a clever girl, and a part of me has been hoping for this. I like the chase, the thrill of her paranoia. When I can scent a woman's fear in the air, it turns me on, but it's different with Kyah. The fear is there, but there's also something more—a deep, erotic desire to see just how far I can push the limits.

She loves it. She loves when I sneak through her window and fuck her blindly. Hell, last night was fucking incredible, and the way she looked in that lingerie was simply exquisite. I need to have more. She's such a good girl, being able to take me like that. Not many women can handle it. They like to think they can, but they focus on the pain. Kyah though, she embraces the pleasure, and the way she came undone for me? Fuck. I'm hard just thinking about it.

Perhaps I'll leave a little something on her pillow tonight to let her know I've been thinking of her.

Despite my better judgment, I reach for the window to slide it open, only it's locked.

What in the ever-loving fuck? This window hasn't been locked for the past few days. Why would she suddenly change her mind? Has something changed? Is she not feeling it

anymore? The unlocked window was a message, welcoming me in, but this ... I don't like it.

I have to jimmy the window open like I used to, and as the lock eventually gives, I slip into the apartment. My gaze quickly sweeps around the room, hating that the lights have been left on. It feels like a fucking trap.

I keep my head down, deviating from the cameras, and as I look around, I find no sign that she's been here all night. Her bag is usually sprawled out over the counter next to a half-eaten take-out container. But tonight there's nothing.

Making my way into her room, my gaze automatically goes to her bed, finding it made, and my brows furrow. I've been watching Kyah for a little over two months now, and she's not once made her bed, so why the fuck is today special?

Not liking this one bit, I turn to walk out of her room when I finally see it—the same blood-red lipstick that painted her lips last night is now scrawled across the wall in big block letters.

I KNOW IT'S YOU, ALEX.

SMILE FOR THE FUCKING CAMERA.

A wide grin stretches across my face. What a clever girl. I knew she was close to figuring it out, but I'm not going to lie, I've been enjoying this part of our little game. I wish she could have dragged it out just a little bit longer, but it's okay. I'm following her lead now. She's calling the shots.

Not bothering to hang around without her here, I turn, and as I go to walk out of her room, I pause and glance up at the camera above the door, knowing her eyes are on me. “You better run, my sweet Kyah,” I tell her, unable to keep the wicked grin off my face.

And with that, I walk straight out her front door, more than ready for the real fun to start.

KYAH



“Holy shit,” Nat breathes, leaning over and watching the live footage of Alex in my apartment. “Why are all the hot ones unhinged? I had such high hopes for him.”

“Right?” I say, letting out a heavy sigh. “I thought I was falling in love with him.”

“I know,” she says, throwing her arm over my shoulder and pulling me into her side as we overtake her small one-bedroom apartment across from the beautiful Central Park. “I thought you were too, but it’ll be okay. We’ll figure out something to keep you safe from him.”

My gaze drops, and I scotch down in her bed, my head dropping against her pillow. “Am I wrong for not wanting to be away from him?”

“Uhhh yes,” she scoffs. “I know he might have made you fall for him as your sexy, over-the-top cocky neighbor, who likes to throw you up against walls, but that’s not who he is. He’s been sneaking into your apartment at night, eating you out while you sleep. Who knows what he’s really capable of? Hell, what if moving into that apartment wasn’t a coincidence? What if he already knew who you were and did something to the previous tenant just to be close to you?”

A shiver trails down my spine, not having considered that yet, but I suppose she could be right. Alex only moved into the building a little over two months ago, and despite me telling him that I wasn’t interested in dating my neighbors, he didn’t really give me a choice. He was adamant and kept showing up in my life until I couldn’t possibly resist.

The signs have been there all along, and instead of seeing what was right in front of my face, I ignored it all, blinded by the way he made my heart race. What the hell is wrong with me? And where am I supposed to go from here? I can’t just return to my apartment and give him free access to me, but that’s my home.

Do I call the cops or tell the Grim Reapers what’s going on? Spider will take care of it if I really need him to, but his version of taking care of it would be to put Alex in a shallow grave and I don’t know if I can handle that. Despite everything, despite the stalking and sneaking into my apartment every night, Alex has also made me fall in love with him, and how the hell could I possibly be responsible for hurting the man who owns my heart?

Shit. I hate this.

“So,” Nat says, a hesitant tone in her voice. “I don’t want to make any accusations or anything, but just wondering, now that you know the stalker is Alex, does this mean you still believe he’s the one who killed Viper?”

My eyes widen, and I sit up in bed again, my heart pounding a million miles an hour. “Holy shit,” I breathe, fear lodging in my throat and making it hard to speak. “I hadn’t considered that.”

“But now that you have ...” she says, arching a brow.

“I, umm ... I really don’t know,” I tell her honestly, trying to think of everything I know about Alex, but who knows if anything he’s ever told me is even real. Do I really know him at all? “I was positive that the stalker had killed Viper. It made so much sense, but now that I know it’s Alex ... I’m not sure. I don’t know what he’s capable of. Up until a few hours ago, I never would have thought he was the stalker, but now, I just don’t know. I mean, yesterday I kinda accused him of being the stalker because of something he said, but I don’t think I really believed it. At least, I didn’t want to believe it, but then he proved to me that he wasn’t and he was so convincing.”

“Shit, Ky. I hate this. It’s scaring the shit out of me. I don’t know what I’d do if something happened to you,” she says, pulling me into her arms again. “But we have to be smart about this. We don’t know what he’s capable of, so I think you should move in here for a little while and perhaps start looking for a new apartment. We can get you a new number and—”

“Do you really think that’s going to work?” I ask her. “He knows where I work, who my friends are, and how I spend my time. I don’t think moving away is going to help anything. He’ll find me, Nat. Besides, I don’t want to run the risk of pissing him off.”

She lets out a heavy sigh. “Ky, I just ...”

“I know,” I say, my heart breaking while so conflicted with the idea of having to move away. That apartment is my home. I was forced to grow up within those walls, but what really hurts is the thought of having to leave Alex. Despite everything, I can’t figure out how to not love him. Society tells me it’s the right thing to do to move away, to force distance between us, or at least file for a restraining order, but there’s no denying the thrill I’d get when I heard him slip into my bedroom at night. I don’t fear him, even though I should, and for some reason, I can’t bring myself to admit that to Nat. “We’ll figure it out. If we were able to get through our late teens, then dealing with Alex is going to be a piece of cake.”

She scoffs. “Not gonna lie, I kinda figured between the two of us, I’d be the one to bring home a psychopathic stalker.”

I can’t help but laugh because honestly, it’s not the first time the thought has entered my brain. “There’s still time,” I tell her. “It doesn’t need to be a competition.”

Nat laughs, and we both scotch down into her bed again, pulling the blankets right up to our chins just like we used to when we were kids sleeping over at each other’s homes. “Do

you think he's done this before?" she muses, rolling over to face me.

My brows furrow as I start thinking it over. "I mean, because it's Alex, I kinda want to be the only woman who's ever made him cross lines like this, but he's too good at it for this to have been his first time," I tell her. "From the way he was able to hack into my security system and seamlessly create loops to how confidently he welcomed himself into my apartment. Someone doing that for the first time would have been nervous and made mistakes, but he had me playing his game the whole way through. I didn't even get a sense that he'd been in my apartment until he wanted me to know that he was there."

"Well, maybe if he'd done it before, there might be something about him online."

"I don't know," I say, clutching the blanket as though it could somehow protect me from all of this. "I doubt he's the kind of guy to allow a story like that to get out."

"Right, but surely if he's done it before, these women might have filed police reports or something like that? There has to be some kind of trail, something we can look into."

I shrug my shoulders, and before I know it, she has her phone in her hand. "What's his last name?" she asks, already typing into her search bar.

"Ummm," I start, thinking back to the name I saw scrawled on the top of his consent form for his tattoo. "His full name is Alexander Reid, but it's super common. I doubt you'll find anything."

“We can always try,” she says before getting busy in her search. She rolls onto her back and holds her phone above her face so that we can both see the screen, and I watch as she starts clicking on random links.

Nat searches for about ten minutes before finding a news article. As she reads through it, I look away, certain we’re not going to find anything, only as she gasps, my gaze shoots back to her phone. “What?” I rush out.

“Holy shit,” she says, her eyes widening as she continues scanning through before scrolling back up and pointing out sections. “Look here. Decorated soldier discharged from the military after the murder of his mother, Francis Reid.”

“What?” I say again, my eyes widening as I grab the phone from her hand and start looking over the article. “Alex told me his mom abandoned him and he lived in foster care until he aged out, and then joined the military. He said she died while he was on tour.”

Nat scoffs. “I think he might have fudged the details just a little there.”

“Shit,” I mutter, continuing to scroll. “It says here that he was never caught. After killing his mom, he basically became a ghost, and there’s a message for citizens to be on the lookout and exercise caution if they come across him. Don’t interact, and call 911.”

“Fuck, girl. I really don’t like this.”

“Are you sure this is the same Alex?” I ask, my heart racing. “There could be a million Alex Reids out there.” Nat gives me a blank stare before clicking on the attached image, and as if on cue, a photo of Alex appears on the screen, dressed in his military uniform. “Fuck.”

“Yeah,” Nat agrees.

My heart shatters, feeling as though everything I’ve come to love about Alex has been nothing but a cold lie, and while we haven’t known each other for long, I had thought there was a real chance at a future together. Don’t get me wrong, I wasn’t even a little close to thinking about marriage and kids or any of that stuff, but what I felt for him—*feel*—is as real as it gets.

Rolling onto my back, I stare up at the ceiling, and before I know it, Nat crashes, leaving me with nothing but my torturous thoughts and the tears I’m desperately trying to hold back. I’m not the girl who cries over a man, but he made a fool out of me.

It’s almost two in the morning when a text comes through on my phone, and I reach over to the small bedside table, scooping it up. My breath catches in my throat when I find Alex’s name on my screen, and for a long moment, I simply stare at the notification, not wanting to open it and actually read what he’s written.

My hands shake, and as my nerves get too much to handle, I pull myself out of bed and walk into Nat’s living room, curling up on the couch with her throw blanket, still staring at the phone.

Another ten minutes pass before I finally find the balls to open the text, and when I do, my heart begins to race.

Alex - Where are you, Mace?

I stare at the words for way too long, knowing I shouldn't respond, but the way he calls me Mace is my kryptonite. Hearing the nickname come out of his mouth every day has done something to me that I can't even begin to explain.

My fingers hover over the screen, trying to work out what the hell I'm supposed to do, when another text comes through.

Alex - There's nowhere you can go where I won't find you.

Alex - Don't keep me waiting.

Fuck. Needing this to stop, I start typing out a response, despite knowing that all I'm doing is playing into his vile game of cat and mouse.

Kyah - This needs to stop. I'm done, Alex. It's over.

Alex - *MULTIMEDIA TEXT*

My brows furrow as an image comes through, and without even a second of hesitation, I open the picture to find a screenshot of a Google map, pinning my exact location. Only

there's a second pin—his location—and if I'm right, if I'm seeing this properly, he's a lot closer than I could have ever imagined.

My heart comes to a dead stop, fear pounding heavily through my veins.

He's not just close by, he's in this fucking apartment.

“What did I tell you, my sweet Kyah?” a familiar tone rumbles through Nat's apartment. “You better fucking run.”

ALEX



Kyah sits curled up on her best friend's couch, and I watch with a sly grin as her phone casts a brilliant glow across her face. It's just enough in the darkness to make out the fear shining in those big blue eyes.

God, she's so fucking gorgeous.

I stand in the kitchen, concealed by shadows, and as Kyah's head snaps up, she looks around in a panic. I can almost hear her heart thumping from here. She flies up from the couch, backing up toward the front door, her eyes wide as she continues scanning the small one-bedroom apartment.

I step out of the shadows and watch as her gaze follows my movement, snapping right to mine, only her jaw drops, and I live for the fucking small gasp that tears from the back of her throat, knowing exactly what she sees. I stand barely a few feet away in nothing but a pair of black pants and a mask

pulled over my face, and while it's too dark for her to make out any of my features, I know she sees the bandaging across my chest from the tattoo she spent hours working on.

Kyah continues backing up until she physically runs into the main door of Nat's apartment, and I see the confusion in her eyes. She doesn't know whether she wants to fear me or fuck me, but surely she knows that I could never hurt her. Not now.

Her hand hovers behind her back, and from the way her muscles are tensing in her arm, she's trying to work the lock. Then the second I hear the soft click fill the apartment, I take a purposeful step toward her. "Run."

Kyah gasps, and I watch as she scrambles, whipping around and fumbling with the door as I slowly walk toward her. After releasing the deadbolt, she tears the door open and spares just a second to glance back, catching my eye, and fuck, I've never been so hard.

She whimpers, and like a flash of lightning, she's gone.

I follow her out the door, taking my time as I watch her bolt down the long hallway, her feet slamming against the ground and echoing back up the hall.

She hits the stairs and catches the railing, using it to propel her around the corner before flying down them. Despite how badly I need her to run, to keep this insane thrill pulsing through my body, the thought of her taking a misstep or falling down those fucking stairs makes my skin crawl.

As Kyah starts putting distance between us, I pick up my pace, not willing to lose her for even a second, and as I reach the stairs, I grip the railing and propel myself right over the edge, just as I'd done the first day I'd officially met Kyah and raced her to the laundry room. Only this time, it's so much better.

I drop straight down through the stairwell, bypassing the second floor, and landing in a deep crouch on the first floor. Kyah hits the bottom step. "FUCK," she squeals as I all but appear beside her, and I watch with a raging hard-on as her eyes widen again, but she doesn't miss a step, launching herself toward the main entrance of the building.

My chest burns with the need to touch her, but I'm going to take my time. Her next move is easy to anticipate, and as she flies out of the building and straight out onto the street, I follow right behind her.

She looks back over her shoulder with fear, trying to keep an eye on me as she races across the road and into Central Park. A wide grin stretches across my face. I love how fucking predictable she is. Instead of running into the busy New York streets and screaming for help, she races into the bushes, the only place we will truly be alone in the city that never sleeps.

She wants this just as much as I do, only she doesn't realize it yet. I'm more than happy to show her though.

Kyah wants to love me, she wants to see me as the charming, lovable guy who moved in next door, and she doesn't want to believe what she already knows. She's struggling to separate

the two, but I hope she knows deep down that I couldn't hurt her. Maybe at first, all I thought about was how sweet it would feel to end her life, but now, all I want is to protect it. But that doesn't mean the games have to stop. Hell, what's life without psychological mind games and kinky fuckery?

She'll figure it out soon enough, and there will come a time when she'll be begging for me to chase her through the woods in nothing but a mask. Until then, I'm going to enjoy showing her just how much fun this can be.

Kyah runs deeper into the park, and I follow her every step, barely able to keep myself from coming in my pants. When she deviates from the path and shoots into the trees, my excitement almost brings me to my fucking knees.

"You can't escape me, Kyah," I growl, listening to the sound of the fallen twigs and leaves breaking under her feet. "There's nowhere you can go where I won't find you."

She darts behind the thick trunk of a tree, and the sound of her heavy panting is like a fucking beacon drawing me in. I step around trees and push through the smaller bushes. I'm in heavy boots, but Kyah's got no shoes at all, and I can only imagine the cuts along the soles of her feet. Not to mention the scrapes and gashes that are no doubt decorating her creamy thighs. But it's fine, it only adds to the excitement of the adventure.

God, I love a fucking adventure.

Slowing my pace, I creep through the thick trees, listening to every sound of the night, loving how the trees seem to block

out the noise of the busy street, making it easier to focus on my girl. Her panting gets louder, and she shoots forward again, the subtle glow from the moonlight illuminating her just perfectly as she darts through the trees. I break to the right, following her like a hound in the night.

When I told her she couldn't escape me, I meant every fucking word.

Kyah runs herself into a corner, but the trees are too cramped to slip between. Her only choice is to turn back, but I'm already there, and as she turns and comes face-to-face with me, she whimpers, backing up against the trunk of a massive tree. "Please," she begs, her eyes wide as she quickly scans over me, taking in the mask, my bare chest, and then sinking her gaze even lower and seeing just how ready I am for her.

She sucks in a breath, her eyes shooting right back to mine, and in a second of insanity, she breaks into a sprint. She darts to my left, but my arm shoots out, catching her around the throat and throwing her right back against the tree. "Now why would you go and try something stupid like that?" I growl, pinning her to the tree as we both strain to catch our breath.

She's terrified now, but she's also worked up, and as I grind my cock into her, she whimpers again, confused by her own emotions.

My fingers tighten around her throat, and as the tree scratches up her back, the subtle moan that slips from her lips is music to my fucking ears. This is usually the time when I would end her life, feeling the electrifying thrum of her pulse

in the base of her throat, but there's nothing usual about this. Nothing usual about her.

I don't know how she managed to do it, but over the past two-ish months, the axis of my world has shifted, and suddenly it doesn't revolve around my own needs anymore. It revolves around hers.

I lean into her, watching how her sharp gaze tracks my every movement. My other hand comes down on her thigh, and I slowly drag it back up to her waist, goosebumps spreading over her skin. My head tilts down toward the curve of her neck, and I breathe her in, so fucking addicted to the sweet scent. "Look at you, baby," I murmur. "See how you come alive for me?"

I feel as she swallows hard, her eyes meeting mine as she hesitantly nods. "Let me go, Alex."

I shake my head. "You and I both know that's not an option," I tell her. "But that's not really what you want, is it?"

Her brows furrow as though she's terrified of actually admitting what she wants. That would mean that she's more like me than she ever realized, and there's not a damn thing wrong with that. If you ask me, it's a thing of beauty.

"Are you ... are you going to kill me?" she whimpers, her eyes fluttering as my fingers sweep over her waist.

"That's up to you, Mace," I tell her, pressing my body against hers and trailing my hand back down to her thigh before hitching it up over my hip so I can really grind into her.

“Lie to me, and you might find yourself in a position you don’t want to be in.” I pause a moment, letting the words sink in before asking her once again. “What do you want, Kyah?”

She whimpers again but brings her hand up to clutch my shoulder, digging her nails into my skin. The hesitation remains in her eyes, but there’s also a flash of hunger, of a deep burning desire to play out her wildest fantasies. “Fuck me, Alex,” she grits between a clenched jaw, raising her chin as if to prove something to herself.

I grin wide, my tongue rolling over my lips, but beneath this mask, she wouldn’t be able to see. Instead, I grab her wrists in one hand, holding them captive above her head and whipping her around until her chest is pressed against the bark of the tree. “How?” I growl in her ear, my cock straining to be inside her, and while this is more than I could ever want, I’m also more than aware that this is quickly becoming her fantasy too, and I plan on letting her enjoy every fucking second of it.

“Hard,” she pants. “Fast.”

Keeping her hands pinned above her head, I reach down between us with my other hand, quickly working my belt buckle and freeing my cock. Then the second Kyah feels me, she presses her ass back into me, hungry for it.

Gripping the soft material of her little booty pajama shorts, I tear them down her legs, and she hastily steps out of them, panting heavily as she tries to look back, but with her arms up, she can barely move.

I kick her feet apart, spreading those pretty thighs before reaching down and pressing my fingers to her sweet cunt. She's fucking soaked, just as I knew she would be, and I don't hesitate, thrusting my fingers deep inside of her. Kyah cries out, tipping her head back as she arches, pushing her hips back and silently begging for more. I do it again, taking her hard and fast just as she demanded before pulling free and dragging my fingers forward and skimming over her sensitive clit, loving the way her body crumbles beneath my touch.

My fingers are soaked with her arousal, and I pull her back against my chest, not releasing her wrists for even a second, and I lift my fingers to her lips. "Suck."

Kyah doesn't hesitate, greedily opening her mouth and sucking my fingers clean. "See what I do to you?" I growl in her ear before pushing her chest back against the tree, her hands going high above her head once again. "No other man will ever make you feel the way I do, won't ever make you come like I do."

Kyah groans, nodding her head as I step in behind her, fisting my cock. I work my hand up and down as I position myself right at her entrance, and with one powerful thrust, I slam inside her tight cunt.

"Ahh, fuck," she cries out, her walls immediately clenching around me, squeezing so fucking tight, she could tear my fucking cock right off if she wanted.

"That's right, Mace," I rasp, gritting my teeth as the overwhelming pleasure rocks through me. I pull back and

thrust again, both of us gasping. “Fucking take me.”

“More,” she demands, and I give her everything she needs, fucking her like I’ll never get the chance again. I thrust into that sweet cunt over and over, feeling the way she clenches around my cock, soaking in the intense pleasure, and when her knees start to shake, I know this won’t take long.

My balls tighten, desperate for a release, but I hold out, waiting for her while wishing I could lose the fucking mask and bite that creamy inked shoulder, but I won’t dare. I have plenty of time for that. “Fuck, Alex,” Kyah grunts, her hands balling into tight fists above her head. “I need ... I need—”

“I got you, baby,” I growl, taking her hip and tilting it back just an inch. My cock plunges into her at a new angle, instantly driving her wild with need, and as she cries out again, I reach my hand around and dive deep between her thighs to rub tight circles over her clit.

Everything clenches, and as I roll her clit between my fingers, she detonates, coming hard. Her whole body shudders, and she collapses against the tree. She’s practically hanging from her wrists, locked in my tight grip as I fucking explode, coming right along with her and emptying my load deep inside her cunt.

“Oh, God,” she pants, her chest heaving with heavy breaths as I lean into her, needing a minute to find my composure.

I release her wrists, and her hands fall lifelessly by her sides as I take her waist and turn her to face me. I press back into her, keeping her pinned against the tree and hating the small

cuts on her face from the bark, but to be honest, I don't think she even realizes they're there.

Finding the strength to lift her hand, she presses it against my chest, her palm flat against the design she inked into my skin. She visibly swallows, lifting her gaze to mine, struggling to find words. "You terrify me," she finally says, her pulse thrumming wildly at the base of her throat.

I hold her gaze and slowly nod, my hand digging into my pocket. "I know," I tell her, unapologetically. And with that, I reach out and watch as my syringe pierces her flesh before pushing a strong sedative. Her eyes widen just a fraction, a soft gasp on her lips, and before she even gets a word out, she crumbles right into my arms.

KYAH



My head spins as I open my eyes, peering into a darkened room lit only by a flickering industrial light above me. I groan, trying to figure out where the fuck I am as a repetitive *drip, drip, drip*, echoes through the room, each little drip like a bullet straight through my skull.

My vision fades in and out of focus as my pounding head wills me to close my eyes and fall into a deep unconsciousness, but something warns me that I need to have my wits about me, that something isn't right here.

My brows furrow, and I groan as I try to roll over. Only something catches on my wrists, and as I peer through the darkness, I find a silver cuff around my wrist, connected to a heavy chain, and the moment I make out the unfamiliar bed beneath me, everything starts coming back.

Nat's house. Alex's text. Running. My heart pounding. The fear. I hit the park, my feet getting all cut up beneath me, and then he caught me. I remember the way my heart raced, how conflicted I was. Terror warring with desire until he finally demanded an answer. What did I want?

Him. Always him.

He fucked me right there in the middle of the thick trees in Central Park, made me scream until my throat was raw, and then I came, but it wasn't like the other times he's brought me to the edge. This was animalistic. Wild and needy. I cried out for more, and he gave me exactly what I needed as though he knew my body better than I ever will, and after drowning in a sea of undeniable pleasure, he ... fuck.

It all went dark.

There was a brief flash of a syringe followed by a sharp pinch at the base of my neck, and then ... nothing.

Trying to ignore the fear in my chest, I look around the room. It's small, and judging by the metal shelving and old cans of non-perishable foods, this has got to be some kind of forgotten storm cellar. The bed I lay on is dirty, nothing but an old, stained mattress with a single pillow. The room has a damp, musky smell to it as though the leak currently doing my head in has been there for quite some time.

Testing the cuff and chains, I pull on my wrist, and while the chains have a little bit of slack, allowing me to venture out from the bed, the cuff is securely in place, making it clear that this is not Alex's first rodeo. Hell, the old rusty stains on the

ground could have told me that, only it's not rust at all—it's blood.

I'm not the first woman he's kept down here, not the first woman he's cuffed and chained. The only question is, where the hell do we go from here? Surely he doesn't intend to let me live after he's taken it this far. I can identify him, and considering what he did to his mother, I'm sure I wouldn't have to work very hard to ensure he's put behind bars. So why the hell is that the last thing I want for him?

God. That must make me some kind of monster. He's a killer. A stalker. I shouldn't want him like this. I shouldn't be so excited about the idea of seeing him again.

If I make it out of this alive, perhaps it's time to look into seeing a therapist. I'm sure they'll have plenty to say about my current state of mind. Hell, if they're smart, they'll have me strapped to a gurney in a straitjacket with no visitation rights because surely I'm certifiably insane. There's no other explanation.

I sit on the old mattress for what feels like an hour until the sound of a heavy lock clattering pulls me back to reality. My heart races, my hands shake, and I throw myself to my feet, the heavy chains dangling from my wrist weighing me down.

I watch the door with wide eyes, and every passing second feels like a lifetime. When blinding sunlight tears through the small cellar, I wince against it, my head instantly rejecting its brightness as Alex pushes the big door open. Judging by the daylight flooding in, I must have been here for at least a few

hours. It was around two in the morning when his texts came through, and then I sat on Nat's couch for a while before finally running out into Central Park.

He was hard and fast when he finally caught me in the trees, but it didn't last long, not like the night in my bedroom when he took my ass. It must have been a little after three in the morning when he shot me up with that sedative. The sun doesn't usually rise until at least seven, so I must have been passed out for a minimum of four hours.

Shit. Nat is going to be a mess.

Alex steps into the damp cellar and pushes the heavy door closed behind him, blocking out the hard sunlight. I'm blinded for just a moment as my eyes try to adjust to the darkness, but when the light above me flashes back into existence, I find Alex standing across the room, leaning against the metal shelving, his ankles crossed as he peers at me.

He's deathly silent, his arms crossed over his wide chest, and all I can do is stare at him.

My heart pounds, but I honestly don't know why. Out of fear? Maybe. Or maybe it's because it always beats like that whenever his dark eyes rest upon mine.

The silence stretches between us, and when it becomes too much to bear, I blurt out the first thing that comes to mind. "You're fucked in the head. You know that, right?"

A wide grin stretches across his face, and I hate how much I love it, hate how it brightens the whole fucking cellar. "Oh,

my sweet Kyah,” he drawls in that deep tone that drives me insane. “Of course I know that. How could I not? But what really turns me on is that you are too. You just haven’t realized it yet.”

I arch a brow. “Okay, now I know you’re definitely insane,” I tell him, lifting my wrists and dangling the heavy chain. “Feel like explaining this, Parkour?”

“You still have your sense of humor,” he notes. “Good.”

“Seriously?” I scoff, gaping at him. “You’ve been stalking me for weeks, sneaking into my apartment and fucking me in the middle of the night. You chased me through Central Park in a mask, and I’m almost certain you’re responsible for Viper’s death, but you’re worried about my sense of humor. What the hell is wrong with you, Alex? Do you have any idea how messed up all of this is?”

His gaze darkens, and he pushes away from the metal shelving, making my mouth go dry. I swallow hard, suddenly not feeling so brave. It was one thing to give him attitude when I thought he was nothing more than the guy across the hall who I was falling in love with, but this man before me isn’t that guy. He’s my stalker, a possible killer, and provoking him now is foolish.

Alex strides toward me, stopping just an inch out of my reach. “Messed up is the fact that I haven’t killed you yet.”

My eyes widen, his comment sobering me to my new reality. “Why?” I ask, my tone dropping to a near whisper, my lips trembling.

Alex reaches up, and I don't even try to flinch away from his touch as he brushes his knuckles down the side of my face. Hell, I lean into him, hating how much I love him. "My sweet Kyah, haven't you figured it out yet?" he murmurs, his dark eyes softening as he watches the way I so deeply crave his touch. "I could never hurt you."

I gaze up at him, letting him see the true fear in my eyes. "You're hurting me right now."

A heaviness flashes in his eyes, and he steps into me, his hands gripping my ass and effortlessly lifting me into his arms. He walks back to the shitty bed and sits down on the edge so that I'm straddled over his lap, my arms and the heavy chain dangling down his strong back. "I'm sorry, Mace," he murmurs, those loving eyes lingering on mine and making me believe that I can trust him. "This is only a precaution, just until I know that you're not going to do something stupid."

"What do you mean?"

"You know too much," he tells me. "What I've been doing ... Usually the women I play with end up in shallow graves across the country, and I don't need to concern myself with the possibility that they will report me to the authorities, but you're different, Kyah. I can't bring myself to end your life, which means that you currently hold a power over me that I've never allowed before, and I don't know what to do with that." He pauses, taking a breath as his gaze lingers on mine. "I've never allowed a woman close enough to know my name, know my face, and I sure as fuck haven't allowed her to mark my

body with a design that could be used to identify me. I play it carefully, always covering my tracks, but with you, I've been a mess. I can't keep away from you."

My fingers twine into the back of his hair, unable to keep from touching him despite the terrifying reality of our conversation. "You're never going to let me go, are you?"

Alex presses his lips into a tight line. "That's up to you, Kyah," he says. "Like I said, I don't get off on hurting you. That's not what I want, but if I can't trust you to protect me the way I've protected you, then no, I won't be allowing you to leave."

Tears well in my eyes, and before I get a chance to blink them away, they roll down my cheeks. Alex trembles at the sight, his heart on his sleeve. "Baby, don't cry. I can't handle your tears."

"I just ... I don't know what to think or say. I want to be terrified of you, but for some reason, I just can't, and it has me questioning everything," I tell him, lifting my shoulder to wipe the tear off my jaw. "Was any of it real?"

"Of course, it was," he says. His brows furrow, almost looking horrified at the idea that I would think to question it. "Every fucking day, I wake up and think of you, even after we've been together, and I've walked you back to your apartment. I wonder what you're thinking. What you're doing. If you're happy or sad. I'm fucking crazy about you, Mace. Just because I take that crazy to a whole new level, doesn't mean that any of it was any less real."

I swallow over the lump in my throat and hold his gaze, my heart racing a million miles an hour. “Why am I so different from the other women you’ve killed?” I ask.

“You want an honest answer?”

I nod, unsure if I really want to know.

“With them, it was about getting off. I’d fuck them, but it was always missing that adrenaline rush that comes when you take somebody’s life. Watching the light fade from someone’s eyes has always gotten me off in a way nothing else could.”

“You don’t think you’d feel that rush with me?” I ask, wondering why I want to know this so badly.

“Fuck, Kyah. The opposite,” he admits, giving me the cold hard facts. “Ending your life would be the biggest rush I’ve ever felt, but I quickly realized that I couldn’t bear the thought of what would come next.”

“And what’s that?”

“Having to grieve you,” he says bluntly. “I don’t want to miss you, Kyah. I don’t want to wake up every day and not have you living across the hall from me. I don’t want to be sneaking into some other woman’s room. Not now that I know how fucking good it is with you.”

I let out a heavy breath, my cheeks blowing out in the process as I try to process everything he’s saying. “Shit, Alex. You’re making it really fucking hard to hate you right now.”

“I know, baby.”

The tears continue down my face, and he holds me tight, pulling me into his chest so that I can rest my head on his big shoulder, his hands roaming up and down my back, gently soothing me. “I thought I was falling in love with you,” I tell him, my heart breaking at the thought of having to end things with him.

“You still are,” he tells me, his voice like velvet flowing across my skin. “I’m still the same guy you met in the hallway. There’s just a deeper complexity to me that you’re still discovering. I have a dark past and indulge in a lifestyle that isn’t socially acceptable, but that doesn’t change a damn thing between us.”

“How can you say that?” I question, my voice trembling. “It changes everything. You stalked me for weeks. I put lingerie on for you and let you do things to me that I wouldn’t have been so brave to do with you so soon in our relationship. I was happy exploring those messed-up fantasies with the stranger in my room because it didn’t mean what it would have meant had I known it was you. It was a thrill that I never knew I was even into, but in a relationship, they’re things that I would have liked to explore with you and taken my time when I was ready. Hell, for those few weeks, I feared for you. I thought this stalker was going to realize that I was falling for you and hurt you, and you allowed me to believe that.”

“That’s just the thing, Mace. Everything that I threw at you, you were more than ready for. You just didn’t know it,” he says. “Running through the park last night, it was the fear that got you off, not me. Before I’d even touched you, you were

already soaking wet, but had you known what I was planning, it wouldn't have been the same.”

“So, what? You're saying I have some kind of fucked-up fear kink and that I should be thanking you for helping me discover it?”

“That's not what I'm saying at all, but for the record, a fear kink is exactly what you have, and there's nothing wrong with it. It's hot as fuck, and as long as you know where to draw the line, they can be the best sexual experiences you've ever had.”

I scoff, pulling away just an inch, but that's as much space as he's willing to allow. “I don't think you know a damn thing about drawing lines.”

He shrugs his shoulders as that cocky, boyish grin I love surfaces on his face. “Perhaps you're right,” he tells me. “But ask yourself, have I ever hurt you? Have I ever crossed a line when it comes to sex?”

My brows furrow as I think over the times he's snuck into my bedroom. He's always scared the shit out of me, always left me trembling with fear, but he's not once physically hurt me. You know, apart from the syringe in the neck, but desperate times call for desperate measures, I suppose. And as for crossing the lines, there's been plenty of times, more than I care to count, but when it came to being physical, I was always more than eager to allow him to touch me. I was more than a willing participant.

“I mean, you ate my pussy while I slept,” I point out. “A girl can't exactly consent to that while she's sleeping.”

“Are you telling me if you could go back and tell me no that you would?”

I swallow hard and shake my head. He’s got me there. He knew I wanted it. He knew how much the feel of his mouth closing over my clit turned me on. Hell, if I could go back, I’d tell him to do it a million times over.

Pride flashes in his dark eyes. “That’s what I thought.”

A heavy silence surrounds us, and I find myself clutching his hands, wishing that things could be different, that we could have fallen in love the normal way and then he could have slowly introduced me to all of this craziness instead of dumping it on me like this. “I want to trust you, Alex,” I tell him, meaning every single word.

“You shouldn’t,” he says. “Just because I don’t want to end your life, doesn’t mean that I won’t slip. If you push me too hard or I’ve had a bad day ... I’m not sure I will always have the control to hold back, Kyah. You need to be careful with me. I talk a big fucking game, telling you that I’m not going to hurt you, but the truth of the matter is that I’m only human, and I have plenty of downfalls. I lose control just like everybody else.”

I shake my head, snaking my arms back around his neck and pulling him in, his lips barely an inch from mine. “I think we’ve already proven that I’m a little messed up too, and for some reason, I trust you. You’re not going to hurt me, Alex. You’ve had plenty of opportunities to take my life. You stood

over me while I slept and didn't lay a finger on me. I trust you."

Alex considers me a moment, leaning back onto his hands, just sitting there deep in thought. "What do you want, Kyah?" he asks. "I don't want to let you go, nor do I think I'd be able to leave you alone if you were to walk away, but I also care about you too much to keep you locked up like this. I know you love your home, and you're proud of your work. It's a part of who you are, so I don't wish to keep you from that, but now knowing who I am, what do you see?"

I roll my tongue over my lips, trying to figure it out, but it's not exactly an easy question. "I ... I don't really know," I tell him honestly. "I've only just found out, and it's a lot to take in. I mean, you've just told me that you're a serial killer and get off on ending women's lives—"

"Men's, too," he adds just for clarification. "That's uhhh ... that's a new discovery."

My brows furrow, and despite how badly I want to delve into that, I feel now isn't exactly the right time to ask. "What I'm trying to say is that I'm going to need a little time to figure it out, but in the meantime, I know it's kinda messed up for me to admit, but I don't want anything to change."

His brows furrow as if he didn't expect that response, but I go on before he gets a chance to change his mind. "I like feeling the breeze through my window and knowing you're there. I like the anticipation of knowing that when you get closer, you're going to touch me. I like the way my heart races

and the way my gasps get caught in my throat. But most of all, I like it when you grab me and spread my legs so far apart it hurts.”

I pause, letting out a shaky breath, feeling wrong for admitting all of this out loud, but once the words start, it’s impossible to stop. “When I was blindfolded, and I was just waiting there in my room, knowing that you had something so unbelievably wicked in store for me, I couldn’t control myself. I’ve never felt a rush like that. And last night, running through the park with bare feet, knowing that when you caught me, you were going to fuck me while I screamed, was the biggest thrill I’ve ever experienced. I don’t want that to end, Alex. But I also can’t stand the thought of losing the guy I’m falling in love with, the guy I can run to across the hall when I’ve had a shitty day. The idea that everything could change is killing me, and that honestly scares the shit out of me. I should be running from you. I shouldn’t want you like this, but every time you touch me, I become more addicted to everything that you are.”

He pulls me in and crushes his lips to mine, and despite knowing everything that he’s done, knowing the brutality of his actions against other women, I can’t help but melt into his delicious kiss. He takes his time, his tongue moving against mine until finally pulling back. “Baby, nothing has to change if you don’t want it to,” he says. “But I need to know you won’t run when it gets too hard or if I cross a line you’re not willing to bend on.”

A slow grin stretches across my face, and I lean in closer, my heart starting to race once again. “So what if I do?” I

challenge. “You’re only going to find me again, and judging by the raging hard-on I felt in your pants in the park, something tells me you like it when I run from you.”

Alex grins right back at me, and the way his eyes sparkle with lethal excitement has everything south of the border clenching. “You’re damn fucking right, I liked it,” he growls, his hand curling around the back of my neck as he stands, picking me up with him and slamming my back against the cellar wall, pinning me with his big body.

As his lips come down on mine and he grinds that thick cock against my core, I groan, feeling the most intense rush pounding through my body.

Alex pulls back just an inch, his curious gaze locked on mine. “I don’t scare you,” he comments as though the thought is foreign to him.

I shake my head, pulling him back into me, more than ready to be fucked in this filthy storm cellar. “Not even a little bit,” I tell him. And with that, his hand locks around the base of my throat, and I look deep into the eyes of my wicked stalker—the chilled-out, cocky asshole from next door now nowhere to be seen.

KYAH



So much for letting me go. The asshole has kept me here for three days, though I suppose that's a bit of an exaggeration. He took me out of the storm cellar and brought me into an old, rundown suburban home. While it's nothing special, it comes fully equipped with a bathroom and coffee, and that's always a bonus in my eyes. Don't get me wrong, that bathroom is about as far as I can go. I'm still bound to a bed, but it's definitely an upgrade, especially considering he's given me a sketchpad and pencils to occupy my time.

Not gonna lie though, the past three days have flown by, solely because it's been nothing but a fuck-fest in here. I've barely had a chance to come up for air.

Alex sleeps on the bed beside me, his big hand gently splayed across my bare thigh. Most nights, we've fallen asleep together, but tonight, my thoughts have run wild, and I

couldn't resist picking up the sketchpad to help channel the madness occupying my mind.

Almost every wild thought that has plagued my mind over the past few days has centered around the fact that the breathtaking man beside me is a killer. There's blood on his hands, and I'm struggling with the fact that I'm willing to keep my mouth shut about it. Does that make me just as guilty? Is the blood of his victims now staining my hands for not handing him over to the police and giving their loved ones some form of justice?

God, I'm such a mess.

Placing my pencil and sketchpad down on the small table beside the bed, I fall back against the headboard, the guilt weighing me down. My gaze sails over Alex's face as he sleeps, and when he's like this, he appears so innocent. If I hadn't seen his face on my security footage, I never would have figured out that it was him. He's so clever, so sneaky, and when it comes to lying through his teeth, he doesn't even flinch.

As I sit and watch him, stewing in my thoughts, I play with the cuff around my wrist. He switched it out for a more comfortable one with padding on the inside, kind of like the ones they use in mental hospitals. My fingers trail over it, mindlessly pulling at the binds when the old lock snaps right off.

My eyes widen, and I glance down at the cuff, barely able to believe what I'm seeing.

That didn't really just fall off, did it?

My heart lurches in my chest, and my gaze immediately snaps toward Alex, making sure the slight drop of the cuff landing on the mattress between us hasn't woken him.

Seeing he's still sound asleep, my mind starts to race.

I'm free. I could run.

I could escape this crazy man beside me. I've been gone for three days, and after everything that Nat and I talked about in her apartment, I'm sure she's already got Big Jim, the Grim Reapers, and the whole police department out searching for me.

Shit. The police.

I didn't think about that. Is that going to set Alex off? Is he going to punish me for talking to Nat about it, or is he going to go straight to the source and hurt Nat for calling the cops? Fuck. I've been too scared to ask him about Viper, but if he were to hurt Nat, there's no going back for me. That's the one line I won't allow him to cross. But if she has spoken to the police or the Grim Reapers, Alex is no longer safe.

The Grim Reapers aren't going to let him get away with the murder of their Vice President. They'll kill him without a second thought, and it will be brutal, but that's assuming they get to him before the cops do. Otherwise, he's about to spend the rest of his life behind bars.

I have to get out of here. I have to speak with Nat. Maybe I could tell her it was all a misunderstanding, that I took off on a

spontaneous retreat to a spa in the middle of the night, leaving all my shit behind at her apartment.

She definitely wouldn't believe me, but at least it would give her reason to pull back. Let's be honest though, no matter how many times I tell her that Alex and I are together, she'll never trust him, but she trusts me, and that's got to count for something. If I tell her that I'm in love with him and explain the whole fear kink, she'll come around much easier, but she'll always be wary of him. As for the article stating he killed his mother ... I have no idea what we're going to do about that.

Trying to figure out my game plan, I glance around the room. Getting up and running out the door isn't going to cut it with a machine like Alex. He's proven time and time again just how strong and fast he is. I don't stand a chance, but if I could somehow slip out of here silently, I might just make it. But what happens then? He's going to find me, and he'll be pissed that I ran, but it's not as though he doesn't enjoy the chase. After all, I've gotta keep things interesting in a relationship with a serial killer.

Goddamn. What is wrong with me?

Letting out a shaky breath, I spy Alex's things on his side table, and my brow arches. There are car keys, two phones, a pocketknife, and his wallet. It's a strange little mix of things to be carrying around, but I could definitely use the car keys and one of those phones. We're out in suburbia and back home, I would usually just walk everywhere, but getting anywhere from here on foot is going to take forever. Hell, I'm not even

sure where here is, but I'm sure the phone will help with that. The second I can get far enough away, I can pull over, figure out where I am, and call Nat to let her know I'm alright. After that, who knows.

With a bunch of old moving boxes piled high on Alex's side of the bed, I have no choice but to reach over him, and I curse myself for even attempting this. Maybe I would have a better chance if I just take off on foot. Though that begs the question, how did Alex find me in the first place? Does he have a tracker on me?

Being my only chance to make a move without the cuff, I try to gain control of the wild butterflies soaring through the pit of my stomach before pulling myself up onto my knees. I think light thoughts and inch toward him, hoping like fuck he doesn't wake. Then trying to offset my weight, I grip onto the headboard while slowly lifting my knee up and over his hips.

Think light thoughts. Think light thoughts.

I'm as light as a feather. I'm a soft breeze blowing through the wind. I'm a falling leaf, gently sailing through the air.

My knee comes down gently on his other side, and I find myself holding my breath as I start to lean over, reaching toward the bedside table. I hold my breath, stretching my arm out as far as it'll go. Just another inch and I'll be there.

Alex's body stiffens beneath me and before I can even drop my gaze, his hand is shooting up to my throat and squeezing tight. I suck in a gasp, fear pounding through my veins.

Fuck. I'm an elephant.

His furious gaze locks on mine, and I panic, terrified that this could be the end, but as a wicked smirk cuts across his face, I glance down, finding his pocketknife braced in the palm of my hand, the sharp blade pressed firmly against his throat.

I remain still, unsure where the hell to go from here. Despite the knife in my hand and the damage I could inflict on him, he still clearly has the upper hand. "What are you doing, Kyah?" he questions as I stare down into his dark gaze, the one belonging to the vile stalker who I see each night, not the dazzling man from across the hall.

"It's been three days, Alex," I remind him, my brain barely working as I scramble for something to say. "I'm bored of playing your little house bitch. I'm going home."

He narrows his gaze, quickly assessing the situation like a perfect soldier, and despite the cuff laying freely beside us, he doesn't make a move to lock me up, knowing damn well that any move I try to make can be easily counteracted. "You'll leave when I say you can leave."

Pressing down on the blade, I watch as its sharp tip digs into his flesh. "I'm not fucking around," I tell him, my heart thundering in my chest. I've never held someone's life in my hands before, and knowing that I have the ability to end him with nothing more than a flick of my wrist is intoxicating.

His gaze darkens, and as he holds my stare, I realize he's daring me to do it. He wants me to know what it's like, wants me to feel the power pulsing through my veins just as he does

whenever he takes someone's life, but I could never. Not to him. Because when I look down at him, beneath the eyes of my wicked stalker, is the heart of the man I've fallen completely head over heels in love with.

A heavy silence settles in the air between us, creating a thick tension as we fight for dominance. His lips quirk into a twisted grin, and as his hand closes over mine on the blade, I suck in a terrified gasp.

Then just when I think he's going to turn the blade on me, he presses down harder, the sharp tip piercing his skin before he drags the blade along the length of his throat. My hands start to shake, my eyes widening. The cut isn't deep enough to cause any real damage, but it sure as hell is enough to bleed.

His blood begins to trickle down the side of his neck, staining the bedsheets and pooling at the base of his throat. The second he releases my hand, I let go of the blade, letting it clatter against the old hardwood floor beside the bed.

His terrifying eyes darken with a fierce desire as he hardens beneath me, and he reaches up, clutches the hem of my tank, and pulls it up over my body until I'm completely bare before him. He takes my hand once again, and as my fingers shake, he swipes them through the blood pooled at his throat.

I don't say a word, waiting and watching what he'll do, and as he turns my hand back toward me, I suck in a subtle gasp. He presses my fingertips to my collarbone before slowly dragging them down over the curve of my breast, leaving a

trail of smeared blood over my body before lifting my fingers to my mouth and swiping them across my bottom lip.

Alex groans as though the sight of me painted in his blood has him more turned on than ever before, and his hunger for me only works me up. My body trembles, heat flooding to my core as he grinds his thickened cock against me.

I test the limits, reaching back down toward him, my fingers gently brushing through the small pool of blood, only instead of lifting them back to my body, I drag them down over his chest and abs, unsure of why I feel so desperate.

His gaze widens, and in a flash, his big hand locks around the front of my throat. He pulls me down into him, our lips crashing together, and the second his tongue invades my mouth, a wild, desperate frenzy consumes me.

The hunger is intense as I reach down between us, slipping my hand into the waistband of his basketball shorts and curling it around his thick cock. He groans, thrusting up into my grip as I work up and down.

Alex quickly pushes his shorts down past his hips, giving me the freedom to work, but I need so much more, and I need it now. As if sensing the urgency pounding through my chest, he reaches around me, grabs the flimsy material of my panties, and tears them right down the seams.

His strong arm locks around my waist, and he lifts me just enough so I can position him at my entrance. He doesn't wait to lower me over his rock-hard length, and I groan, bracing my hands against his strong body as I sink right down.

I ride him hard, bouncing up and down as I rock my hips, taking him deep as he locks his bloodied fingers around my throat. His grip tightens, constricting my airway, but it only has me desperate to ride him harder.

Our bodies quickly grow sweaty, and when he can't handle the lack of control for one more second, he grips my waist, throws me down onto the mattress, and fucks me from behind, my chest squished against the soft bedsheet while my ass hovers high in the air.

He takes me even deeper, ramming into me over and over as I thrust my hand between my legs, greedily rolling my clit between my fingers. "Fuck, Alex," I cry, my other hand fisting the bedsheets. "I'm gonna come."

"Show me, Kyah," he rasps through a clenched jaw. "Show me how you squeeze my cock."

I do just that, clamping down around him as I detonate, my orgasm rocking through my body until I'm seeing stars. I clench my eyes as my pussy wildly convulses, and every last part of me shatters like glass.

As my walls spasm around his thick cock, I cry out, loving the way his strong fingers dig into my hips. He thrusts forward one more time, and that's all he needs to fall apart, coming undone as he empties himself deep inside me.

He groans low, and as we both come down from the high, he collapses onto the mattress beside me, opening his arms for me to climb right into them. I move in, my knee hooked high over his hip as I feel his warm cum leaking out of me, but I love

every second of it. And I realize that right here in this moment, I've never been so content in my life.

My fingers trail up over his chest to the small wound at the base of his throat, still confused about the whole thing. I mean, I was down with the fear kink, but I didn't realize I had a hard-on for blood play as well. I let out a heavy breath, my gaze locked on the ceiling. "Wow," I murmur. "I really am fucked in the head."

Alex scoffs. "As much as you liked that, that one was all for me."

A sly grin cuts across my face. "Yeah?" I ask. "You liked that?"

"Oh yeah," he rumbles in that thick, delicious tone. "We'll work you up to it, but soon enough, it'll be you bleeding, and when I fuck you, I won't be able to control myself."

My tongue rolls over my lips at the thought of Alex becoming unhinged while inside of me. "I don't know how I feel about the idea of you cutting me, but I don't want to say no just yet."

"It's okay, Mace. We'll explore your limits and figure out what you like." A soft smile spreads across my lips as he pulls me in closer, that deep tone rumbling through the room again. "Baby, where the fuck did you think you were going?"

I swallow hard, a strange nervousness pulsing through my veins, and while I feel I can trust him not to hurt me, I'm not quite sure if that trust expands to my friends. "I, umm ... I

wanted to go and see Nat,” I admit, choosing my words carefully. “When I showed up to her apartment the other night, I was a mess, and then she woke up to find me gone, and it’s not in my nature to just disappear like that. It’s already been a few days, and at some point, she’s going to call the cops. Same goes for Big Jim. It’s not like me to fall off the face of the earth. They’re going to be looking for me, and knowing Nat, she’s probably a wreck right now.”

Alex reaches over to his bedside table and grabs one of the phones. “You don’t need to worry about them,” he tells me.

“Uhhh ... I don’t know how much recon you’ve done on my friends, but you’re dead wrong.”

He rolls his eyes and hands me the phone. “I’ve messaged both of them and said you were sick. Big Jim knows not to expect you at work for a few days and Nat has been sending you ridiculous memes to make you feel better.”

“Ummm ... what?” I mutter. “What do you mean you’ve been messaging them? How? I left my phone at Nat’s apartment.”

“Yeah ...” he says slowly. “No, you didn’t. I went back and got all your shit so it was believable that you’d gone home during the night.”

“Wait,” I say, pushing up onto my elbow and gaping at him. “Does that mean you went back into her apartment while she was sleeping?”

“Well, yeah,” he says slowly, clearly not understanding just how fucking crazy that is. “How else was I supposed to get your shit?”

“Jesus Christ, Alex. You can’t be sneaking into women’s apartments in the middle of the night anymore. It’s messed up.”

A cocky grin stretches across his lips, and I know what’s coming out of his mouth before he’s said a single word. “You seem to like it.”

“Yeah, well apparently, I’m not a regular woman,” I mutter. “Now, where are these messages? I need to see the damage for myself.”

He indicates the phone in my hand, and I unlock it before my brows start to furrow. It has the same setup as my phone. All the apps are in the same position, not to mention, the same wallpaper image of me and Nat is staring right back at me. Only it’s not my phone, not even close. “What the fuck is this?” I ask, glancing up at Alex. I know crossing boundaries gets him off, but having a copy of my phone is messed up.

He shrugs his shoulders, not even a hint of guilt in his eyes. “How else was I supposed to know what was going on with you?”

Realizing I’m not going to get far by scolding him about the phone, I open my texts and scan over the messages Alex has so thoughtfully sent on my behalf. “Yeah, I give it another twenty-four hours before she calls the cops and demands a welfare check,” I tell him, shaking my head. “I mean, you

didn't even respond with a laughing face emoji when she sent those memes. She definitely thinks I'm dead in a gutter somewhere."

Alex scoffs. "I'm sure she'll be fine for one more night."

"One more night?" I ask. "Does that mean I'm going home?"

"Yeah, Mace. I think it's time to go home."

A smile pulls at my lips, and I scramble back to my knees and straddle his hips once again. "Does that mean you trust me not to run?"

Alex laughs. "Not even a little bit," he admits. "But I trust that if you do, you'll come back. And if you don't—"

"You'll be right there to find me," I finish for him. He nods and I grin. "You know, just in case it's slipped your mind today, you realize how fucked up all of this is?"

"Trust me, it's not lost on me," he says, those strong blood-stained hands gripping my thighs.

I press my lips into a hard line, my gaze shifting to the window above the headboard, trying not to think about just how fucked up it really is, but I can't help but wonder just how much he still hasn't told me. "Can I ask you a question?" I murmur, my gaze shifting back to his, watching as he nods. "The night I heard you in my apartment and ran across the hall in nothing but a towel to knock on your door, how'd you get back into your apartment so fast?"

An amused grin stretches across his face. "I didn't," he says, softly chuckling to himself. "I was in bed the whole fucking

time. I hate to break it to you, Mace. But that shit was all in your head. I was never in your apartment that night. At least, not until after you'd gone back to your place. Then I came over to play. But what you heard when you were in the shower was just your paranoia fucking with you. Why the hell do you think I ran across the hall so fast? If it wasn't me, that meant it was someone else, and I'm the only bastard who's allowed to be sneaking through your apartment and fucking with your head. I was ready to tear some random asshole to shreds, but it turns out, your imagination is just as wild as you are in bed."

My cheeks flush, and I let my gaze fall away, not sure if I'm supposed to be happy that there was no one there or concerned that my head was screwing with me just as much as Alex was.

"So, what about the night you took me along the river walk and we got back to find my door kicked in? I had assumed that was Crew, but a part of me had also wondered if it was the stalker."

He gives me a blank stare. "I'm gonna give you a minute to think that one over," he says, a smug grin pulling at his lips.

My brows furrow, and I think back over my question, wondering what the hell he's getting at when it hits me. Alex couldn't have kicked my door in. He was with me all night. But during that time, I hadn't considered the fact that Alex and my stalker could have been one and the same. In the back of my mind, I hadn't bothered to connect those dots, and now that I've said it out loud, I feel like a complete idiot.

"Forget I asked," I say, my cheeks flushing all over again.

Alex laughs and grabs my waist, rolling us until he hovers over me. He slowly inches toward me, his lips barely a breath away. “I fucking love you, Kyah,” he rumbles as his hand trails down to my thigh, hitching it up over his hip. “But if you ask me about another man while I’m in bed with you, I’ll hang you by your wrists and fuck you until you can’t even remember your name.”

I swallow hard, a thrill pulsing through me, and before I can even respond, he crushes his lips down to mine and kisses me until the darkest night turns into day.

40

KYAH



I t's late on Tuesday night when Alex leads me down a familiar street before coming to a stop outside of High Voltage Ink, and I turn to look at him with furrowed brows. "What are we doing here?" I ask. Though I should just be happy that I'm not chained to a bed in some old run-down home, but I'm not going to lie, despite the cuff around my wrist, those three days with Alex were some of the most thrilling days I've ever had.

"We've got a lot to talk about," he tells me, taking my bag off my shoulder and digging through it until he comes out with the keys to the shop.

"Okay. We could have done that at my place," I say slowly. "Or when you had me locked up for three days."

Alex rolls his eyes. "I'd hardly call it locked up."

“I was chained to a bed.”

“Jesus Christ, baby. You’re acting like I’m some kind of psychopathic serial killer. You were safe with me. I wasn’t going to hurt you. Not unless you wanted me to.”

I arch a brow and give him a blank stare. “You are a psychopathic serial killer,” I remind him. “And I never suggested I wasn’t safe with you. I know you’re not going to hurt me, but that doesn’t mean we don’t need to have a very big talk about what society deems normal behavior. Because somewhere along the lines, you’ve got your wires crossed. Chaining women to beds isn’t normal.”

Alex scoffs and shoves the key into the front door of High Voltage Ink. “What I was trying to say is that we have a lot to talk about. I know you have a lot of questions and you’re not going to stop overthinking shit until you get the answers you’re looking for. And I think it’s best we have this conversation while you’re calm, and I’ve never seen you more relaxed than when you were working on my tattoo.”

A soft smile pulls at my lips, butterflies swarming through the pit of my stomach, realizing how well he notices the small things about me. When I’m working, the whole world fades away. A zombie apocalypse could be raging through the streets of Brooklyn, and as long as I was working on a design, I’d have no idea.

I peer up at him as he holds the door open for me. “I’ll have to see just how much of it has healed, but are you sure?” I ask.

“You nearly shit yourself when I held my tattoo gun to your skin.”

“I’ll be fine,” he says.

I hold back a grin as we walk into the shop, flipping on lights as we go, and judging by the chemical smell in the air, I’d say Big Jim only took off a little while before we got here. I turn on the music, not being able to work without it, and by the time I step into my station, Alex is already pulling his shirt over his head.

As always, I get distracted by the sharp ridges of his toned body, and as he lowers his big frame into my chair, I force myself to get in the zone. Grabbing my gloves, I stride over to him and drop down onto my rolling stool before glancing over his tattoo.

It’s only had a little over a week to heal, and while it’ll still be raw and scabbed, there are other sections I will be able to work on.

I start preparing everything I’ll need and a few minutes later, I have my gun in hand. My gaze shifts to his face, holding back a grin as I find him white as a ghost, and without hesitation, I grab his hand and place it on my thigh, just as I’d done the first time. “How can a man who spends his days fantasizing about ending someone’s life be so terrified of needles? I mean, fuck. You cut yourself with a blade like you were chopping up a roast chicken, and you had no issue jamming a syringe into the side of my neck, but this has you breaking out in a sweat. It makes no sense.”

“Fucking tell me about it,” he grits through a clenched jaw, his gaze locked on the ceiling, refusing to watch what I’m doing.

I laugh to myself, pressing the gun against his skin and watching how he flinches away from it. My terrifying serial killer stalker boyfriend is scared of needles. Wait. Is he my boyfriend?

“What?” Alex questions, his gaze coming to mine.

“Huh?”

“You made a face,” he comments, blowing his cheeks out as he clearly tries to use whatever this is as a distraction. “Something’s on your mind.”

“Oh, I umm ... it’s nothing, really,” I tell him, my gaze shifting back to his broad chest. “I was just laughing to myself about my serial killer boyfriend being a little scaredy-cat, but then it occurred to me that I didn’t actually know if you were my boyfriend. I mean, is that ... is that what you want, or is that not how things work in the serial killer world? This whole screwing your stalker thing is new to me, so I don’t really know how it works.”

Alex grins, his eyes softening, and for just a moment, he doesn’t look as though he’s about to throw up. “You wanna be my girlfriend, Mace?”

“I mean, it sounds so trivial when you say it like that.”

“How else am I supposed to say it?”

I let out a frustrated groan, rolling my eyes as I try to focus on what I'm doing. "You're impossible, you know that, right?" I tell him, before gently biting down on my lower lip, feeling shy all of a sudden. "But for what it's worth. Yes. I'd like it very much if, from this point on, you referred to me as your girlfriend. Or your highness. Either works."

Alex winks, and every part of me swoons. "I think I'll stick with Mace."

A stupid grin settles across my face. "I think I can deal with that."

His hand on my thigh squeezes. "Alright, let's stop dancing around," he tells me. "I know you have questions, and it's been killing you not to ask for the past few days."

Rolling my tongue over my lips, nerves begin pulsing through my body, and as I meet his eyes again, I let out a shaky breath. "Your mom?" I ask him. "I was curious about you, and the other night when I was at Nat's place, I found an article that suggested you killed your mom and were discharged from the Marines with a warrant out for your arrest."

His face scrunches, and he sucks in a breath, probably trying to buy himself some time to work out how he's going to explain this. "Starting with the hard stuff, huh?"

"Sorry," I murmur just as my phone blasts through the silence, cutting me off. I glance over to the screen, getting ready to silence it when I find a FaceTime call from Nat.

“Shit,” I say, picking it up and showing him the screen. “If I don’t answer, she’s going to get worried.”

Alex nods, and I place the tattoo gun down and quickly accept the call before it rings out. Nat’s face instantly appears on my screen, a glass of wine in her hand. “Girl, where the hell have you been?”

“Sorry,” I say with a cringe. “I didn’t mean to scare you.”

“Scare me? Ky, you fucking terrified me. I went to sleep with you right beside me, and when I woke up, you were gone. Like *fall off the face of the earth* kind of gone.”

“I know, I’m sorry,” I say again. “I was feeling kinda off, and with everything going on, I guess I just misread all the signs. And then after you fell asleep, it just kinda hit me, and I didn’t want to get you sick too, so I went home.”

“Just like that?” she questions. “Just packed your bags in the middle of the night and took off without even a goodbye, right after you told me that your hot-as-fuck neighbor was your stalker.”

“I mean, I tried to say goodbye, but you were sleeping like the living dead,” I tell her, immediately feeling like shit about the lie while also trying to figure out how the hell I’m supposed to explain the whole Alex thing when he’s sitting right across from me. “As for the stalker, it turns out it was all a bit of a misunderstanding.”

“A misunderstanding?” she grunts, not believing me for even a second.

I spare a glance at Alex, noting how he watches me, wondering how I'm going to play this, and honestly, I don't even know at this point. If I confirm all of my suspicions with her and tell her that everything we talked about at her apartment is true, she'll think I'm insane. But I don't like the idea of lying to my best friend, especially over something so huge. "Okay, so ... maybe not so much of a misunderstanding," I say, my brain scrambling for something to say. "I can't really say much, but just trust that I'm okay. I'm safe and I'm happy."

Nat stares at me through the phone, the silence dragging on a moment too long. "You weren't sick, were you?"

I scrunch my face, hating how easily she can read me. "Umm ... no."

"So where the hell have you been?" she demands. "Did that guy do something to you?"

"No," I tell her. "He did nothing that I didn't ask for."

"What the hell does that mean?"

I let out a heavy breath, realizing she isn't going to be okay with any of this until she can finally start to understand. "Okay, calm down," I tell her. "Alex kinda took me away for a few days and—"

"You mean he kidnapped you?"

I roll my eyes. "He didn't kidnap me, or well ... I suppose if you want to be technical, then yeah, maybe he kidnapped me, but I liked it," I tell her, waiting for her to lose her mind. "He's

opening my eyes to things that I probably wouldn't have explored on my own, and when I tell you that I trust him, I need you to really understand that. He's not hurting me. Quite the opposite actually."

Nat gives me another blank stare. "What the hell is the opposite of him not hurting you?"

Alex groans and reaches for my phone, snatching it out of my hand and turning the camera to face him. "I took Kyah away, chained her to my bed, and fucked her for three days straight," he tells her. "Sometimes I fucked her hard and fast, sometimes it was slow. And sometimes, she was the one fucking me. Now, if you don't mind, Kyah is trying to ink my chest, and I'm really trying to get through it without shitting my pants, so could you do me a solid and wrap this shit up?"

Alex hands me my phone, and I turn the screen to face me, finding Nat gaping at her phone. "I umm ... okaaaaaay."

"Are you good?" I ask. "That was a lot to take in."

"I need more wine."

"Okay," I laugh. "But really, I have to go."

"The hell you do," she screeches. "Do you have any idea how many questions I have now?"

"I can imagine," I tell her. "Are you working tomorrow night? Why don't you come over? We can get wicked drunk at the bar across the street from my apartment and I'll tell you everything."

“Okay, you’ve got yourself a deal,” she tells me. “But when you say everything, I want *everything*, right down to what positions he fucked you in.”

I roll my eyes and can’t help but grin at my best friend. “I’m hanging up now,” I warn her.

Nat groans and rolls her eyes. “Fine. I’ll see you tomorrow.”

A wide grin stretches across my face. “Love you.”

“Yeah, yeah. Whatever,” she says, and with that, ends the call.

I let out a heavy breath, feeling as though that went just about as well as it could have gone. I mean, she’s going to drill me tomorrow night for every last sordid detail, wanting to know exactly how it all went down and how I ended up dating my stalker. Then once I’ve done that, she’s going to get me drunk on tequila, take me back to my apartment, and have me act out every last scene, but it’s fine, especially considering that there will be a crazy, obsessive stalker watching me through my security feed. Though, knowing his eyes will be on me, only makes it that much better.

Putting my phone back down, I switch out my gloves for a new pair before settling back on my stool and picking up the tattoo gun. “Sorry,” I tell him. “She would have started to panic if she didn’t hear from me soon.”

“It’s fine,” he tells me. “Though I was hoping to spend all of tomorrow night inside that sweet cunt of yours, but I guess it’s going to have to wait.”

I roll my eyes and take sweet satisfaction out of the way he gasps when I press the tattoo gun back to his chest. “Weren’t you about to tell me about your mom?”

“Shit. I was hoping you’d forgotten about that.”

“Nope. Memory like an elephant,” I tell him. “Though, I don’t want to pry. I don’t need you to spill the dirty details. I just need to know if it’s true. Did she really die of a drug overdose when you were deployed?”

Alex holds my stare, the silent seconds passing between us holding so much weight. “No,” he finally tells me. “She died in my arms after I tore her heart right out of her body.”

My hand falters over his chest, and I swallow hard, my heart pounding. “Shit.”

“Mm-hmm,” he says. “I don’t have any intentions of lying to you, Kyah. If this is going to work between us, then you need to fully understand what you’re getting yourself into, but you shouldn’t take that for granted. Don’t ask me questions if you are not prepared to know the answers.”

“And what happens if I don’t like the answers I’m getting and decide that I can’t do this with you?”

He presses his lips into a hard line. “If only you knew just how much of my time that question takes up,” he admits. “I honestly don’t know. I wish I were the kind of man who could just accept that you didn’t want to be with me and walk away. But then I run the risk that you would be out in the world,

knowing all these things about me, and I am not sure if that's in my best interest."

"You would kill me?"

"It would be the smart thing to do, but if it really came down to it, I don't think I'd have the strength to follow through," he admits. "Either way, I don't believe it will be an issue because whether you wanted to be with me or not, I would not be capable of letting you go."

I nod, working on his shading to help keep my mind at ease. "But you wanted to kill me, right? When you first started following me."

"Absolutely, I did," he tells me in that thick, rich tone, his body tensing beneath my hands. "When I first saw you, I knew immediately that you would be my next victim. I dropped everything I was doing and followed you. I had to know everything about you, and over the next few weeks, I learned everything there was to know about Kyah Bailey. The more I learned and the closer I got, the hungrier I became. I had it all planned out so perfectly. You were going to be my most thrilling kill yet."

"When did it change?" I whisper, my heart pounding a million miles an hour.

"I'm not entirely sure," he muses, deep in thought. "Perhaps it was after I met you in the hallway and you raced me down to the laundry room. I knew then that there was something more to you, and I needed to explore it, but I suppose things really shifted after I realized just how much you got off on the

fear. You excite me, Kyah. No woman has ever done that before. The ones I've killed in the past have been a means to an end, an object to use in order to get off. Taking their lives was a rush, but I don't need the rush of murder with you, not anymore. I get that rush just by seeing your face in the morning, and when I slide inside of you, it's better than any kill I've ever had."

My gaze lifts to his, and I stop what I'm doing, my hand hovering just an inch above his chest. "I don't know what to make of that," I tell him honestly. "There's a part of you that terrifies me. Knowing exactly what you're capable of and having to spend my days hoping that you won't change your mind. But then there's this other part that is terrified of not seeing where this goes. I should be trying to run from you."

Alex nods. "Yes, you should," he agrees. "But it would really fucking gut me if you did."

"I think you gave me everything I didn't know I needed. Everything I didn't know I even wanted," I admit. "The man I met as my neighbor makes my heart race in the best ways, and I so easily fell in love with him. You're charming and smart, and you have this insane ability to make me smile in a way no other man has. Not to mention, that dominating side of you got me so worked up. But then there's the man who snuck into my apartment. And yes, at first, I was terrified. I didn't know what your intentions were, and I was scared you wanted to hurt me, but then you started to touch me, and I'd never felt so alive. And suddenly, I found myself looking forward to your visits. You give me the closeness that I need and the insanity that I

crave. Despite the whole serial killer thing, you're kinda the perfect man."

Alex reaches out, his fingers gently gripping my chin and holding my stare. "Only perfect for you."

My cheeks flush, and not knowing where to go from here, I drop my attention back to his chest, still having two very big burning questions raging inside my head. "Don't hold back, Mace," he says. "If there's something you need to know. Ask me."

I swallow hard, and my eyes well with tears, I hastily try to blink them away, but one traitorous little tear falls and rolls down my cheek. I lift my chin and watch as he zeros in on the tear sliding down my face. "Kyah—"

"No, I'm fine," I say, cutting off whatever he was about to say. "I just ... Crew and Viper. Tell me you didn't do it."

Alex holds my stare, just like he had when telling me he'd killed his mom, and I know the answer before he opens his mouth. "They needed to go, Kyah," he tells me, watching me closely, clearly choosing his words carefully. "Crew was no good for you. I was here when he hit you. I saw the way the force of his fist threw you across the room. There wasn't even a shred of real guilt in his eyes."

"So that means he deserved the death penalty?"

"No," he says so calmly. "The deal he made with his brother did though. I wasn't about to let that happen."

"That's why you killed Mason too?"

“Yes. He was closing in on you. I had hoped after Crew died, he would forgive his brother’s debt. However, when he showed up here, he made it clear that it was still his intention to claim you. Besides, considering what he did for a living, did I really need an excuse to end his life? He was a bastard who kidnapped vulnerable women off the street and sold them to be raped and enslaved.”

I nod, not able to disagree one bit. “And Viper?” I ask, my hands shaking as another tear falls.

“Viper was becoming an issue,” he says bluntly. “Just like Crew, I don’t believe you fully grasp what kind of man he was. He didn’t have your best interests at heart, and even after only knowing you a few months, I watched as he became more possessive every day. It was only a matter of time before he took you away, just like Mason wanted. Only instead of selling you to the highest bidder, he wanted to keep you for himself.”

I swallow hard, my mouth suddenly dry because deep down, I think I know he’s right. Did he deserve to die for it? I really don’t know.

“Are you okay?” he asks, hesitantly reaching out for me again, and when I don’t flinch away, he drops his hand back to my thigh, gently squeezing.

“You killed them to protect me?” Alex nods, and I let out a heavy breath, choosing to be okay with it. “I don’t want you killing people for my sake. That can’t happen again.”

“I can’t promise you that,” he tells me. “I can’t just turn it off. This need to kill is ingrained in who I am, and I can’t

guarantee that I won't kill again if somebody threatens you. I'm going to want to protect you the only way I know how, but I can promise that I will try."

I nod, realizing this is probably the best I'm going to get. "I don't know how this is supposed to work between you and me."

"Trust me, baby," he says, that cocky grin I love spreading across his face. "Neither do I, but isn't it going to be fun working it out?"

KYAH



After putting Nat in her Uber twenty minutes ago, I stand in my apartment with a hollowness in my chest. I haven't seen Alex all day, and in the grand scheme of things, that isn't very long, but I've gotten used to his constant presence in my life—whether it be innocent or downright fucked up.

Usually, when I get home from work or I'm just getting up in the morning, I can look out into the hallway and find him waiting for me, but tonight is different.

I war with myself for another twenty minutes, wondering if I should just go over there and knock on the door, but after pulling all the skeletons out of his closet last night, maybe he's feeling differently about me now ... Or maybe I'm just overthinking it.

Shit. He's told me everything I could ever need to destroy his life, and a man simply doesn't do that for a woman he doesn't intend to keep forever. I need to find my lady-balls and just knock on his damn door. Hell, maybe he'll chain me to another bed, maybe even hang me from chains like he threatened he would.

I go to make my move when the sound of an incoming call cuts through the mental battle plaguing my head, and as I glance down at my phone on the armrest of my couch, a wide smile cuts across my face.

Hitting accept, I hold the phone to my ear. "I was just about to come visit you."

"Already?" Alex questions. "You home already? I could have sworn you'd be out until the bar staff were physically kicking you through the door."

"Yeah, that's what I thought too," I tell him. "But Nat went a little too hard on the wet pussy shots, and when she threw up in the back alley behind the bar, I decided it was probably a good time to call it quits."

"No shit," he laughs.

"So, I take it you're not home since you didn't know I'd gotten in already?" I question, a little disappointed that I can't just race across the hall and throw myself into his arms ... or his bed.

"Nope."

I drop down on my couch, pulling my comforter up. “Doing anything exciting?”

There’s a slight pause before I hear him let out a heavy breath. “I’m trying really fucking hard to keep my promise,” he tells me.

My brows furrow, and I sit up a little bit straighter. “What do you mean?” I question. “What promise?”

“That I’ll try to give this whole cold-blooded killer thing a rest.”

My eyes widen, and I suck in a gasp. “You’re ... you’re doing that now?”

“Trying to convince myself not to,” he admits, a real gut-wrenching pain in his tone. “I know technically I promised that I would try not to kill in order to protect you, but whether it’s to protect you or not, I know you’re not comfortable with this, so I’m fucking trying, babe. But the need is eating me alive, and the more that I stare at this cocky asshole abusing his girlfriend down by the river, the more I want to beat the shit out of him and toss him in the fucking water.”

Fuck.

“Babe,” he groans. “I don’t want to do this, but being with you ... it’s like a fucking rollercoaster for my emotions. I need the kill, but I don’t want to let you down.”

My heart starts to race, my hands shaking. The way he’s described it to me is kinda like an addiction, he can’t help himself. He needs the rush, the thrill that comes along with

ending someone's life, but then, didn't he say he gets that same thrill when he looks at me? When he's pushing inside of me?

"The only way you could ever let me down is if you don't come home and fuck me," I say, dropping my tone to a subtle purr. "Forget about him, Alex. Come home to me."

"Mace—"

"Uh-uh," I say, cutting him off. "No excuses. I came home from the bar needing you inside of me, and now that I'm here and I'm all alone, I have this raging need that only you know how to satisfy. I need you, Alex. Come home and fuck me. I need to feel the way you slide into me, how you stretch my walls."

He groans. "Fuck, babe."

"Now, Alex," I say, a demand in my tone. "Come home now. Otherwise, I'll be forced to do it myself and then both of us are going to be left without."

"I'm on the fucking edge, Kyah."

"Well, tell me," I say, holding my comforter a little tighter. "Do you get a rush when you're with me? When you sneak through my window and spread my legs? When your tongue rolls up through my cunt and you feel my body spasm beneath you?"

"Fuck, baby. You know I do."

"You told me last night that being with me gives you a bigger rush than when you end someone's life. Was that true?"

“Yes.”

“Then stop wasting both of our time and come home,” I tell him. “Forget about that guy and come give me what I need. Put us both out of our misery.”

He groans again, and a moment later, I hear the subtle brush of the breeze against his phone and a smile pulls at the corner of my lips. “Five minutes, Mace. Don’t even think about touching yourself before I get there.”

“You’ve got yourself a deal,” I tell him. “Though, would it be the biggest pain in the ass if you snuck in through my window? I’m not looking for the sweet, cocky asshole from across the hall. I need the unhinged psychopath who likes to fuck me until I scream.”

I can almost hear the way he grins. “Just you fucking wait, baby.”

Alex ends the call, and I find myself flying up off the couch, scurrying into the bathroom, and peeling my clothes off. I smell like a bar, and probably like Nat’s vomit, seeing as though her aim is about as good as a two-year-old boy toilet training for the first time.

After rushing through a quick shower, I riffle around my underwear drawers, pulling out a skimpy black lace lingerie set. It’s not as incredible as the set Alex bought for me, but it’s definitely a close second.

Fully aware of the clock ticking, I get dressed and lock up my apartment, making sure my living room window is open.

As I walk back into my room, I can't resist stepping into a pair of black heels, knowing just how much he likes it.

I can't help but wonder if this is how we move forward. Last night at High Voltage Ink, it became startlingly clear to us both that we didn't know how this relationship was supposed to work, but maybe we have a fighting chance after all. For some reason unknown to me, I make him better, and the proof is right there in the way he was able to walk away from that guy and his girlfriend, and as for me, he's opened my eyes to a world I never knew I needed, and I can't possibly imagine going back now.

Alex Reid might be an unhinged serial killer with stalker tendencies, but he's *my* unhinged serial killer. And for some reason, we just work.

With a wicked grin playing on my lips and my heart thundering wildly in my chest, I turn out the light and lay down on top of my blanket, making sure he gets the best possible view as he walks through the door.

Then barely even thirty seconds later, I feel a feather-soft touch dragging from my ankle up to my knees before that deep, sexy tone rumbles through my room. "I hope you're ready to play, my sweet Kyah," he says before his hand slips higher up my thigh and between my legs to cup my pussy. I whimper, grinding against his hand, already soaking wet. "Now get on your knees and show me that pretty cunt."

EPILOGUE

KYAH



TWO YEARS LATER

Locking up the main door of High Voltage Ink, I can't wipe the smile off my face. I've just sat with Big Jim for the last hour talking about how he would like to take me on as a partner, and after a few years, once I'm confident in running the business, he'll be taking the leap and retiring, leaving the shop to me.

I've always hoped this would come. I've worked my ass off for it, but I had no expectations. If it wasn't meant to be, I would have eventually left High Voltage Ink to start a business of my own, but this has always been my home, and I can't imagine having to start somewhere new.

After double-checking the door is locked properly, I make my way down the street. It was a late one tonight. I didn't finish with my last client until after ten, and when Big Jim asked to talk, I think we both assumed it would be fifteen minutes max. But then we started talking shit and had a drink to celebrate, then when I glanced up and saw it was already after eleven, we both gaped at the clock, completely dumbfounded by how fast time had flown.

Naturally, Big Jim had offered me a lift home, but after the three shots of whiskey he took, I had no choice but to steal his keys and send him home in an Uber.

As I make my way home, I pull out my phone and send off a text to Alex. I'm so damn excited about becoming business

partners with Big Jim, I can't wait to share the news.

Kyah - You up? I have big news.

My gaze remains locked on the phone, but after passing two blocks, I realize he must have already crashed. But it's fine, I'm more than happy to break into his apartment and wake him up, just like he's so skilled at doing himself. Assuming he's even in his apartment. He rarely uses his place anymore.

These past two years with him have been incredible, and while there has been the odd occasion where I haven't quite managed to keep him from ending someone's life, he's definitely made huge improvements. And instead of murdering someone, he does everything in his power to channel that need into me.

The first six months were a huge learning curve, having to work through all the kinks and quirks of a new relationship while also coming to terms with the fact that I was dating a serial killer. I wouldn't have it any other way though. He drives me certifiably insane, but it's been the best ride of my life.

The moments we've shared together and the moments we've loved have made my little life here in Brooklyn so unbelievably worth it. And as I've gotten to know him on a deeper level, I've realized that I could never let him go.

Alexander Reid is the other half of my dark and depraved soul.

Nearly at the door of my apartment complex, I shove my phone back into my bag and step up into the small alcove before raising my hand to the keypad. As I enter the code for the building, a large figure steps in behind me, casting me in shadows.

My heart starts to race, and before I can even get my elbow back to wind the bastard, a large hand clamps down over my mouth. I try to scream, but the sound is muffled around his palm. I'm dragged backward, his other arm locked around my waist as I claw at his skin, digging deep, bloody grooves from my nails.

Fear blasts through my chest, only getting worse when he pulls me around the corner of the apartment complex and down the side alley, away from any prying eyes. But in the dead of night, there isn't a single person out here to save me.

I bite down on his hand, instantly tasting blood in my mouth, and he quickly adjusts his hold, shoving me up against the brick wall of the building. "Fuck, Mace," Alex grunts, my face squished against the brick as his big body presses in behind me, keeping me pinned. "You're gonna pay for that."

I shove my elbow back into his stomach, landing the perfect hit. "Try me, asshole."

He growls in my ear, and the deepest thrill shoots through me. We've role-played all kinds of messed-up scenes, but it's never been quite like this before. I fucking love it.

Alex grabs my waist, spinning me around, and as he grips both my wrists in one hand, holding them above my head, I

feel something sharp biting into my neck. I suck in a gasp, realizing he has a blade at my throat. My eyes go wide, and I focus all of my attention on him. He knows cutting me is a hard limit, one I won't negotiate, but that doesn't mean we can't play with knives.

A wide grin stretches across my face, and for just a moment, he breaks, leaning into me and pressing the sweetest kiss to my lips. "Hey, baby," he murmurs. "How was work?"

"So good," I tell him.

"What's this big news you've got?"

A beaming smile lights up my whole face, and Alex smiles right back at me, despite not having heard my news yet. "Big Jim is retiring in a few years, and he asked if I'd like to become business partners so I can learn the ropes and be prepared to take over when he leaves."

"No shit?" he grins.

I nod like a fucking bobblehead. "High Voltage Ink is going to be mine."

"Fuck, Mace," he says, crushing his lips against mine. "That's amazing. No one deserves it more than you do."

"Thank you."

"I take it we're celebrating tonight?"

I pull against his tight hold on my wrists, bringing his attention back to the alley and the compromising position he currently has me in. "I kinda thought we already were."

His gaze darkens, hunger booming through his dark stare, and like lightning, the terrifying unhinged psychopath is back. My blood pumps faster than ever before, my body wired as though there were a million tiny electric bolts shooting through me, each one of them leading right to my core.

Knowing my limits with the knife, Alex eases up on my throat and drags the tip of the blade right down the center of my tank top, exposing my body to the chilly spring breeze. He tears the scraps of fabric off me, leaving me in just my bra as he dives for my jeans, holding the blade between his teeth to free up a hand.

I squirm beneath his touch, and being just as worked up as I am, he releases my wrists, giving me the freedom to play as much as I'd like. Desperation pulses through me, and I reach for the front of his pants, my hands greedily diving in, already knowing that there won't be time for foreplay tonight. I need to have him inside me, and nothing else will do.

Releasing him from the confines of his pants, his cock stands proud and so fucking thick, the angry veins begging me to take him. I curl my hands around him as he shoves my jeans down over my hips. I step out of them, needing to hurry this along as my fist works up and down his thick cock. Alex grips my ass and lifts me, my legs hooking around his hips.

"Fuck, Mace. I need to be inside you," he says around the blade.

"God, yes," I groan, clutching his cock tighter and guiding him to my entrance. Alex adjusts his hold on me, positioning

himself just right, and the second I release his cock, he thrusts forward, slamming deep inside of me.

I cry out, throwing my arms around his neck, but with that blade controlled by nothing more than his clenched jaw, I take the hilt in my palm, and he doesn't hesitate to give it up. He thrusts again, and my whole body shudders, but by the grunts and groans tearing out of him, it's clear that he's just as worked up as I am.

He takes me hard and fast, and with each new thrust, I'm forced closer and closer to the edge. My nails dig into his shoulder, and when he grunts my name and I realize just how close he is, a wicked grin spreads across my face.

Taking the blade, I hold it to the base of his throat, just as he'd done to me, but the move doesn't faze him, and he keeps fucking me like the goddamn superhero I know him to be. "You even think about coming yet, and I'll slit your throat."

His eyes spark with excitement. "Oh yeah, Mace?" he questions. "You don't have the fucking balls to follow through." I add a little pressure, not enough to cut his skin, but more than enough to excite him. "Alright, baby. What do you want?"

"Slow, long thrusts," I pant.

Alex groans. He's not a slow guy. He prefers it hard and fast because when he takes me slow, he feels it all—the way my walls clench around him, the way my body shudders, how fucking warm I am. Don't get me wrong, he feels it all when he takes me fast, but when he slows down like this, he soaks it

in and allows himself to indulge, and that has him crossing the finish line even sooner.

More than willing to play my game, he takes his time, rocking his hips right back before thrusting forward again, taking me inch by inch and driving us both insane. “Mace,” he grits through a clenched jaw as he pulls back again.

My eyes roll in the back of my head, and as he takes me again, the intensity builds, leaving me like a coil ready to spring. “Fuck, Alex. Just like that,” I tell him, clenching my walls around him. My head tips back, losing all sense of reality as I focus on nothing but the pure ecstasy rocking through my body. My hand falls away, my palm opening, and just as I hear the sound of the blade dropping to the ground, Alex cries out, his fingers digging into my ass so hard they’ll leave bruises.

“FUCK!”

My eyes spring open, panic tearing at my chest at the pain in his tone. “What?” I rush out, heavily panting as he continues to fuck me. “What’s wrong?”

“Ribs,” he grunts. “You cut me.”

Horror blasts through me, and I shove against his chest, giving me enough space to glance down, and the second I see it, my eyes bulge out of my fucking head. “Holy shit,” I gasp, taking in the deep gash that starts just to the side of his nipple, cutting through his chest tattoo and down over his ribs. Blood gushes from the wound, quickly trailing down his torso and

over his hip, soaking into the top of his pants. "I'm so sorry. That's bad. We need to get you to the hospital."

"Not before I finish fucking you," he rasps.

"What?" I gasp, my eyes widening like saucers. "Are you insane?"

"Are you just catching on?" he demands, thrusting into me again, this time making my eyes roll in the back of my head, my whole body shaking with undeniable pleasure.

"Oh, God," I pant, tipping my head back against the wall and knowing there's no chance in hell he's about to stop. "Fine. Fuck me. But you better make it hard and fast. You have two fucking minutes to make us both come because you are not bleeding out on me in this shitty alley."

"Yes, ma'am," he rumbles, a grin stretching across his lips. "But for what it's worth, I'll only need one."

Oh fuck.

Alex doesn't hold back, giving me everything he's got, and true to his word, sixty brilliant seconds later, I detonate, crying out in the middle of the alley as he comes with me, both of us coming completely undone.

My high rocks through my body, my pussy spasming around his thick cock, only it's cut short when he loses his hold on me, and my feet fall to the ground. He uses his body to keep me pinned against the brick wall until I find my balance, and then he falls back a step, his face going white as the blood loss starts to take its toll.

“Fuck, Alex,” I grunt, not having realized just how bad it is.

He falls against the brick wall, using it as leverage to keep him up, taking his weight as I scramble for the scraps of my shirt left haphazardly across the dirty alley ground. “Lay down,” I tell him, the guilt eating at me. “I need to apply pressure. You’re losing too much blood.”

I help him down and immediately jam the remnants of my tank against his ribs, hating the hiss of pain that slips between his lips. He reaches up, his fingers grazing across my face. “It’s okay, Mace. It’s just a flesh wound. I’ll be okay.”

“I know, but I can’t handle the idea that I’ve hurt you,” I tell him, grabbing my phone and calling 911, desperate for an ambulance.

“It’s all part of the thrill,” he tells me, trying to play it off.

“New rule,” I say. “Knives are officially a hard-pass.”

“Damn,” he mutters. “I was afraid you were going to say that.”

Fifteen minutes later, I hold Alex’s hand as his face turns white, not from the blood loss but from the needle weaving in and out of his skin as he receives his stitches. “Might I ask how you managed a cut like this?” the doctor asks, not appearing to actually care, but doing the bare minimum to be polite.

“Sex injury,” Alex says with a grin, watching as the doctor’s head snaps up. “My girl here has a few kinks that she likes to

explore every now and then, but I think we'll call it quits on knife play for now."

My face turns bright red, and I squeeze his hand so tight, I'm sure something must be breaking. "Holy shit," I mutter in embarrassment. "You did not just say that."

"What?" Alex grunts. "You get to play slice and dice, but I don't get to be honest about it? Where's the fairness in that?"

The doctor chuckles. "He has a point."

Oh, God. Someone kill me now.

I try to zone out and forget about the humiliation of it all when I notice a few of the nurses pausing to glance our way. Seeing me catch their stares, they keep going, but it's only a matter of time before I find the hospital administration doing the same.

My brows furrow. What's so interesting about us? I'm sure we're not the first couple who've come in with sex-related injuries. Besides, the doctor hasn't gone anywhere since he found out, so it couldn't be that.

A hospital security guard creeps in toward the administration desk, and my heart starts to race. "Umm, how much longer is this going to take?" I ask the doctor.

"Few more minutes," he says. "I'm just about done."

I give him a tight smile, and when Alex squeezes my hand, I glance down to find a questioning look on his face, his brows furrowed with concern. "What's up? You look like you've seen a ghost."

My gaze flicks around the hospital again, and I inch in, lowering my voice. “Everyone is looking this way, and a security guard just started hovering.”

Alex glances toward the administration desk, taking note of the staring nurses and the security guard who just happened to invite a friend to hover with him. He presses his lips into a tight line before shifting his gaze back to me. “You didn’t happen to give them my name when we got here, did you?”

My brows furrowed, unsure why he’d ask me that. “I had to fill out the forms—OH SHIT!”

“Yeah, they ran my name and saw the warrant out for my arrest,” he says, confirming what I just figured out.

“Shit. Shit. Shit,” I chant. “What do we do?”

His gaze sails back over the onlookers before coming back to mine. “Considering the guards are still hovering, that could only mean the cops aren’t here yet, so we have plenty of time,” he tells me, glancing down to see how far off the doctor is, and noting how he’s completely in his own world, not paying attention to our conversation. “It’s your call, Mace. What do you wanna do?”

“My call?” I grunt. “You’re the one with the brains when it comes to this stuff. What do you wanna do?”

“We could head out to Nat’s place,” he suggests, his lips twisting, clearly not very fond of the idea but trying to play it safe. It didn’t take long for Nat to come around to the idea of

us being together, but Alex is still wary of her and hates the fact that she knows a little too much.

I shake my head. “Sullivan was moving in this weekend,” I remind him. “They’ll be fucking like bunnies until his dick falls off. What else have you got?”

Alex scrunches his face, shrugging his shoulders. “Do we really have to go someplace to hide? I’d rather go to a dive bar, get wicked drunk with you, and then screw you in the filthy bathrooms until we pass out,” he tells me. “The cops have been searching for me for years. They haven’t found me yet, and they sure as fuck aren’t going to find me tonight. So what do you say?”

“Dive bar sex with the love of my life?” I say, a wide grin stretching across my face. “How the hell could I say no?”

The doctor finishes with Alex’s stitches, and just as I peer out the window and see the first cop car pulling into the lot, he sits up and takes my hand. “You ready to feel another rush tonight?” he says, getting up from the hospital bed, not once letting go of my hand as his eyes start to blaze with the best kind of excitement. “Let me teach you how to run from the cops.”

THANKS FOR READING!



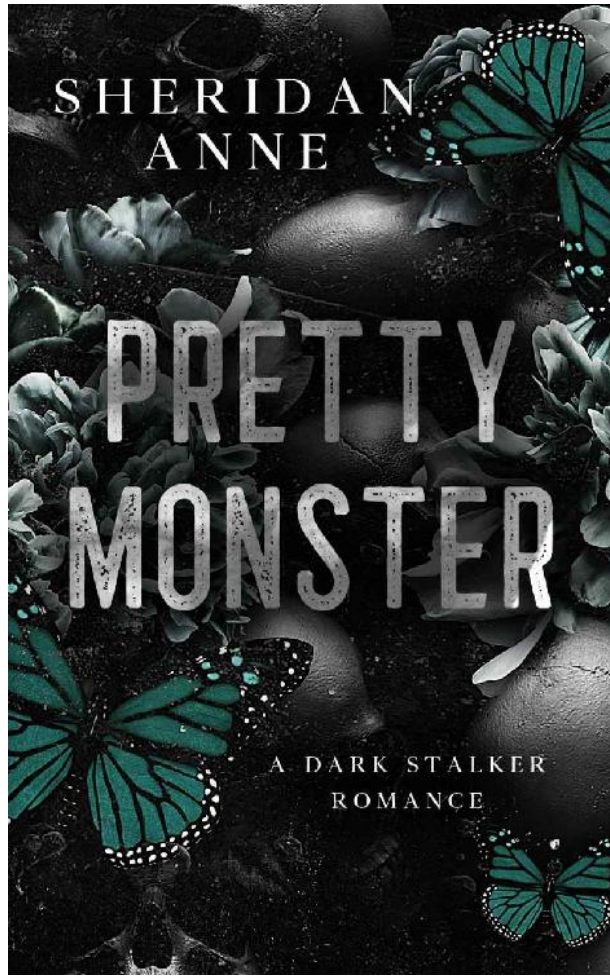
If you enjoyed reading *Pretty Monster* as much as I've enjoyed writing it, please consider leaving a review!

<https://www.amazon.com/dp/B0C6JR1P2W>

SHERIDAN
ANNE

PRETTY
MONSTER

A DARK STALKER
ROMANCE



STALK ME!



Join me online with the rest of the stalkers!!

I swear, I don't bite. Not unless you say please!

Facebook Reader Group

Facebook Page

Instagram

TikTok

Subscribe to my Newsletter

OTHER BOOKS BY SHERIDAN ANNE



www.amazon.com/Sheridan-Anne/e/B079TLXN6K

DARK CONTEMPORARY ROMANCE - M/F

Broken Hill High | Haven Falls | Broken Hill Boys
Aston Creek High | Rejects Paradise | Bradford Bastard
Pretty Monster (Standalone)

DARK CONTEMPORARY ROMANCE - REVERSE

HAREM

Boys of Winter | Depraved Sinners | Empire

NEW ADULT SPORTS ROMANCE

Kings of Denver | Denver Royalty | Rebels Advocate

CONTEMPORARY ROMANCE

Play With Fire | Until Autumn (Happily Eva Alpha World)

PARANORMAL ROMANCE

Slayer Academy [Pen name - Cassidy Summers]