



Saving

+ St. + Nicolas +

CHRISTMAS PARTY SHARED WORLD NOVELLA

BELLA LANE

# Saving St. Nicolas

A CHRISTMAS PARTY NOVELLA

BELLA LANE

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First Edition

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# About The Christmas Party World



□ In the enchanting backdrop of cozy Christmas parties, join your favorite authors as they navigate the whirlwind of holiday romance.

Sparks fly, mistletoe beckons, and love blooms in unexpected places.

Get ready to unwrap the gift of love in this heartwarming Christmas party romance series that will leave you believing in the magic of the season. □

# About Saving St. Nicolas



## **Best Friend's brother...Military Romance...Firefighter Romance**

In the cozy town of Largo, Maine, the holiday season brings everyone together for a Christmas party and wedding like no other.

Riley Winters is a firefighter. When a traumatic incident happens, she finds her best friend's brother watching over her, leaving her with conflicted feelings and naughty thoughts.

Captain Mike Stone is the protector of his family. After years of hidden feelings, he finds his sister's best friend lying in the hospital. His possessive nature takes over, though he knows he needs to walk away.

With a festive Christmas Party in full swing, the gathering turns into a delightful chaos, filled with laughter, love, and holiday cheer.

Yet, amidst the celebration, danger rears its head, putting Mike's life in jeopardy. This time it is Riley who rushes to his rescue.

As the twinkle of Christmas lights surrounds them, will these two finally admit their long-kept emotions and embrace the magic of the season?

Can they find love in the most unexpected place and celebrate a Christmas that will forever be etched in their hearts?

# Chapter One

RILEY



**I**t's been a long shift, and I can see the weariness in everyone's eyes, we are all ready to go home. We've battled two major fires tonight, and I want nothing more than to climb in my bed and sleep for the next twenty-four hours. I know Leia is safe at our cabin, and I'm sure it won't be long before Josh comes looking for me to find out where she is, but today, I can't muster the energy to care about that.

Finally, shift is over, and everyone is dragging to their vehicles. I get in mine, trying to stifle the yawn that I feel creeping up. I pull into my driveway, and thank God, I made it home safely, even with blurry eyes that desperately want to close and sleep.

I get out of the car, and before I register the figure who comes out of nowhere, I am struck with a fist to the head.

"Where is she, you bitch?" I hear Josh scream at me.

I try to stay on my feet to fight him, but the next blow knocks me down. He steps on my wrist, and I feel the kicks to my side. I know immediately he has broken at least one rib. It's hard to breathe, but then he is on top of me, punching me mercilessly, all the while screaming at me about Leia.

"Where the fuck is she?" he asks, but I don't answer him.



“It’s your fault she left me, you stupid bitch. All of this is your fault. I’m going to fucking kill you.”

I feel him wrap his hands around my throat and squeeze. I can’t breathe, everything is going dark, but I can’t die. I can’t let him find Leia. I continue fighting until I feel his weight lifted off of me.

“It’s okay, Riley. You are going to be okay,” I hear my neighbor, Carmel, whisper in my ear.

“How is she?” her husband asks.

“Not good. He beat her up really bad. Riley, hold on, help is on the way.”

“Jesus,” I hear him whisper.

I know I’m safe, so I give into the darkness that is pulling at me.

\* \* \*

Two weeks later

In the distance I hear a beeping noise, not comprehending where it’s coming from. I try to open my eyes, but everything is sore. Finally, I get my eyes open enough to see white walls, white ceiling, and the smell of antiseptic. I know immediately I’m in the hospital. I look over and see Leia sitting in the chair beside me.

“Hey,” I whisper.

Leia looks up, and I can see the dark circles under her eyes.

“You’re awake,” she whispers. “How do you feel?”

“Sore,” I admit, “How long have I been here?”

“Two weeks.”

“Wow, two weeks?” I ask, not understanding what happened.

“I’ll go get the doctor,” Leia says with a smile and tears.

She leaves the room, and I look around seeing Mike, Leia’s brother sitting in the corner.

“What are you doing here?” I ask, still feeling groggy.

“I came home to check on Leia and stayed with her when I realized you were here and took a beating protecting her.”

“Josh,” I whisper as my memories hit me.

“Hey, it’s okay. He will never, never hurt you or anyone else again. Understand?”

I shake my head.

“He’s gone, and you never have to worry about him again. In fact, forget about him,” Mike says, and something about his words has me breathing a sigh of relief.

Then, Leia and the doctor walk in.

“How are you feeling, Riley?” the doctor asks.

“Sore, tired, but okay.”

“You have a couple of broken ribs, a broken wrist, and it may take a little longer for all the bruises to go away, but other than that, you will heal.”

“Yes, I think I will,” I say, looking over at Mike and watch him nod slightly.

“Get some rest, and I’ll have some food delivered to your room later this evening.”

“Thanks doctor.”

He leaves the room, and Leia sits back down in the chair beside me.

“I’m so sorry, Ri. I should have never brought you into my mess with Josh.”

“Hey, it’s okay. I knew the risk, he caught me on a morning where I was exhausted and not paying attention. It’s not your fault.”

The door opens, and Noah walks in.

“Hey, Riley, I’m so glad you are back with us.”

“Thanks Noah. Seems I’ve missed a bunch since I’ve been out.”

“Nah, your girl has been here every day. Couldn’t get her to go back to the cabin to rest.”

I look at Leia and say, “No wonder you look like shit. Go, get a shower, get some sleep. You can come back and tell me everything tomorrow.”

“I don’t want to leave you now that you are awake.”

“I’ll stay with her,” Mike gruffs out. “Go get some rest, you need it.”

“Are you sure?” Leia looks at me, and I nod.

“I’m sure, go on.”

Leia gives me a hug, and then walks out with Noah.

“How do you feel about those two?”

“Apparently, it’s love, and as long as he doesn’t hurt her, I’ll deal.”

“So brotherly of you,” I say with a chuckle that causes me to wince.

“Probably best you don’t laugh for a while. Want me to ask the nurse for some pain meds?”

“No, I’ll be okay. I’m tired, so I think I’ll sleep some more,” I say, unable to stifle a yawn that takes over me.

“Sleep. You’re safe, I’ll be here,” Mike says.

I nod and close my eyes.

A few hours later, I wake up, and Mike is still sitting in the chair with his eyes closed. The same chair that he was in when I fell asleep. I don’t understand why he is, but I do feel safe having him around. I look at him while he is sleeping and take in the changes I see.

I see the hard lines around his face that were never there before when we were growing up, and it makes me wonder what all he has seen and done in his military career. Of course, people could probably say the same about me, with all the things I have seen being a firefighter.

I take in the hard outline of his muscles that have never been there before. It tells me he has worked out a lot over these years.

“Are you done perusing me?” Mike says, with his eyes still closed.

“I’m trying to figure out why you are here, to be honest,” I say, not wanting him to know I was kind of ogling him.

“I promised Leia I would stay with you, and if it allows my sister to get some much-needed rest, then that’s what I’m going to do,” he says as he opens his eyes, looking at me.

“Well, I see no reason that you need to stay. You can leave, I’m fine.”

He jumps up from his chair quicker than I thought anyone could, causing me to flinch.

“You are not fine, Riley. That son of a bitch did a number on you, and you are far from fine,” he says, leaning his face down to mine.

I can't help the fear that seeps into me, causing my heart rate to speed up.

“Hey, it's okay. I'm not going to hurt you. I would never hurt you, Riley,” he tells me as he cups my face lightly.

My body heats up with his nearness and touch. I can feel wetness pooling between my thighs. I lick my dry lips and feel the cut there. I wince with the pain, and see his eyes soften.

“What did you do to Josh?” I ask.

“Nothing. You and Leia are safe, and that's all that matters,” he tells me, before walking back to the chair in the corner.

I take a deep breath and try to get my body under control. This is my best friend's brother, my body should not be reacting like this with his nearness. I need to get him to leave.

The nurse walks in. “Are you okay, Ms. Winters,” she asks, looking over at Mike, then at my monitors.

“Yes, sorry about that. I moved wrong, and things hurt,” I tell her.

“Would you like some medication for the pain?”

“No, thank you. I'll be fine.”

“Okay. Well, if you need anything, press the call button.”

“Thank you,” I tell her with a small smile that causes me to wince again.

She nods before looking at Mike, then she walks out of the room.

“Since you say I’m safe, then you should leave and go get some decent rest yourself. I’m not going anywhere, so there is no reason for both of us to be uncomfortable,” I tell him and watch as his eyes stare at me. I stare back, not relenting or backing down.

“Fine, but I’ll be back, Riley.”

He leaves the room, and I melt into the bed. “Good God, what the hell is wrong with me?” I mutter.

I grab my phone off the table next to me and call Chief Yates to let him know I am awake, and everything is fine. Once I’m done with that call, I close my eyes, falling back into a deep sleep.

\* \* \*

Two months later

We all get in the car, still reeling from the revelations that were just revealed. I’m sitting up front with Mike driving, while Leia and Noah are in the backseat, no one is saying a word.

I look over at Mike and see the tension in his jaws. “You knew, and you said nothing to Leia?”

“First off, I didn’t know all that. Let’s be clear. I was just a kid, but I remember our dad dangling Leia over the bridge, and not understanding why. Then he started crying before he jumped over the bridge himself. I only remember I needed to get to Leia and protect her. After that, dad never came home, but mom said we will always have to protect Leia.”

He looks in the rearview mirror and says, “I’m sorry I never told you.”

I can see the guilt shining in his eyes.

“I’m not mad at you Mike, or at mom, for that matter. I understand, and yes, you were just a kid yourself. This is going to take some time for me to process. It explains why we never went into the haunted house when I was a kid and why you were such a bodyguard, following me around,” she says with a chuckle.

Mike pulls up in front of Noah’s apartment and looks back at her. “I’m sorry, sis, I only wanted you to be safe, and I still do,” he says looking pointedly at Noah.

Leia touches his arm, and says, “I am safe, and I love you for caring so much.”

He nods and says, “I love you too, sis.”

Noah and Leia get out of the car, and we watch them walk into Noah’s apartment building before he puts the car in drive and pulls away, presumably to take me home next.

Ten minutes later. “What?” he snarks out.

“I didn’t say anything,” I respond nonchalantly, still looking out the window at the dark night.

“Oh, your mouth may not be speaking, but you are definitely saying something,” he says as he pulls into my driveway.

“Fine, how could you never tell Leia that she may be in danger and that’s why you were following her, or should I say us, since we were always together? Did you really think Leia should never know?”

“It wasn’t my choice. I only did what my mother told me to do,” he says.

“What if your father is still alive and chooses to come back now? You can’t protect her from your father and Josh. You are unknowingly putting her and Noah in danger.”

He snaps his head my way. “First off, I don’t believe my father is alive, but if he is, he won’t risk coming after Leia now. Second, I told you not to worry about Josh anymore, or ever.”

“Did you kill him?” I ask.

Mike’s hand reaches out to me so fast, grabbing me by the back of my neck, I don’t have time to react, and before I can voice my displeasure, he slams his lips onto mine, slipping his tongue into my mouth and kissing me deep and rough.

His fingers grab my hair at the nape of my neck, and he pulls me back, kissing down my neck, causing my skin to form goosebumps on the outside, while heating up on the inside until his lips are at my ear, then he whispers, “I will always protect what is mine. Now go in the house, Riley and get some sleep.”

He kisses my neck once more, and releases my hair, before leaning over my stunned and overheated body to open the car door, then he unbuckles my seatbelt. I quickly get out, wondering what the hell happened and how am I supposed to forget the hottest kiss I ever had and the man who gave it to me, my best friend’s brother.

“Fuck,” I whisper as I get in my house and lock the door. I lean against it, waiting to hear Mike’s car pull away. Once he does, I make my way to the shower, knowing I need to cool off my body and find a way to forget what just happened.



# Chapter Two

RILEY



A year later

**T**he last year has been a whirlwind of information and events, from finding out Leia and Krista are half-sisters, thanks to their respective parents one-night stand, to Krista and Will Anderson getting married over the summer before he went back to the NFL after recovering from his injury.

Now, Leia and Noah are planning their Christmas wedding. Leia has asked me to be her maid-of-honor, and I couldn't be happier for her.

Mike went back overseas shortly after the truth about Leia came out, but that has not stopped him from starring in my dreams nightly. I can still feel his breath on my skin and his lips as they kissed mine. He wasn't soft about it, and I know a night with that man will not be sweet, but rough and passionate.

I shake my head, to rid my thoughts of Mike. He is forbidden, and I need to remember that.

“What about this one?” Leia asks.

Today, we are shopping for bridesmaid dresses, and Leia is currently holding up a peach dress.

“No, definitely not. I conceded to the pink at Krista’s wedding, but I will fight you on this,” I tell her as my face scrunches up in disgust.

She laughs. “I wouldn’t do that to you.”

I let out a sigh of relief. “Thank goodness,” I mutter.

“I wanted to make sure you were still with me. It seemed your mind wandered off there for a few minutes,” she says, looking at me.

“Nah, I’m still here, but you know this isn’t my thing,” I tell her, and she nods.

“I know, and I appreciate you doing this with me.”

“Anything for you, except wearing that god awful color,” I say quickly as she lifts the dress again.

We both chuckle, and she puts it back on the rack.

“I actually already have the dresses picked out, and I hope you like it,” she says, biting her bottom lip.

“Okay, let’s see it,” I tell her, and she shakes her head. “Why not?” I ask.

“I’m waiting on...”

The door opens, bringing in Emily and Krista. I look over at Leia, and she smiles.

“Now I can show you,” she whispers. “Em, Kris, I’m so glad you both could come,” Leia says.

“I’m happy to allow Jake to spend time with his sons,” Emily says with a smile.

“I don’t have another patient for a couple of hours, so this worked out for me,” Krista says with a smile.

Looking at Leia and Krista, I can see the family resemblance a little in the facial features, mainly the eyes.

I give each of the girls a hug, then Krista says, “You know, if we make this quick, we can go eat lunch.”

We all laugh. Krista is like a bottomless pit when it comes to her stomach.

“Since you said that, Kris, I do have a confession. I already picked out your dresses for the wedding, I need you to try them on,” she tells everyone, while biting her lip.

“This could be a good thing, or a bad thing,” Emily says.

They both look at me, and I put my hands up, “Don’t look at me, I know absolutely nothing more than what you do.”

We all look at Leia, who motions for the retail lady.

“Samantha, could you show them to their dressing room?”

“Absolutely. Follow me ladies, please,” she says, walking away.

“Don’t worry, I’ll be waiting in the sitting area,” Leia says, excitement shining in her eyes.

When I walk into the dressing room that was pointed out to me, I see a gorgeous emerald-green dress hanging up and collectively hear the other two gasp.

I quickly undress and slip the dress on. The dress goes to the floor, but there is a slit up to my mid-thigh on the left side. The front kind of wraps in the middle, while the neckline is low, but not so much that you see the girls, or the cleavage. There is a flared sleeve on the left side, but a sleeveless strap on the right side. The back is draped open to mid back, and the sequins on the gown shimmer in the light. It’s absolutely stunning.

We all open our doors at the same, looking each other over with huge smiles on our faces, then collectively walk out to allow Leia to see us.

“Oh my goodness,” she gasps. “You are all so beautiful, and the dresses fit perfectly. How do you all feel?” she asks.

We all look at each other, making her wait, before we say, “Love it,” at the same time, and the smile that shines on her face is priceless.

“I’m so happy,” she gushes. “Now, who would like their dress hemmed a little more at the bottom?”

“Mine could probably go up an inch,” I say, and the girls agree to an inch as well.

After thirty minutes of pinning and redressing, we are on our way to the restaurant for some food before Krista passes out.

After we have ordered our meal, I look at Leia, who can’t seem to wipe the smile off her face.

“I’m so glad you girls love the dresses. I was worried it would be too dark of a color, but I knew I wanted green to go with the Christmas theme. Red would have washed each of your glorious complexions out.”

“I think you chose perfectly, and it’s not pink,” I say.

“Hey, I thought I picked a pretty color for my wedding,” Krista says with a pout.

“You picked just fine,” Leia and Emily tell her together.

“The dress was beautiful, I’m not big on the color pink, that’s all,” I say.

“Well, you looked wonderful, and all the football players couldn’t seem to keep their eyes off you,” Krista says, and we all laugh.

I shake my head because she isn’t wrong. I ended up with several phone numbers that night that were immediately deleted off my phone once I got home.

“Oh, before I forget, the hospital is holding their annual charity Christmas party in two weeks. Please tell me you all will be there? I’ve got the perfect Santa Claus for the kids, and I’m hopeful that we get enough gifts for the kids in the children’s wing.”

“Are you putting this together?” I ask.

“I’m helping, but I’m not the main planner,” Leia responds.

“That’s good, because your wedding is in four weeks, and I know you still have lots to do for that,” I tell her.

“That’s true,” she admits with a sigh.

“You know we are here to help, all you have to do is ask,” Krista says.

“I know, but I also know you all are so busy with your own lives. Emily has Jake and the twins. Krista, you are newly married, running your practice, and trying to find time to see your husband during his NFL season. Ri, you are a firefighter, keeping our city safe, and working long hours. None of you have the time, and I would never ask you to give up what precious time for yourselves that you get.”

“Oh, this coming from the new doctor in pediatrics, who is helping to plan the annual hospital Christmas party, while simultaneously planning and preparing her own wedding,” I tell her.

“We all have busy jobs and lives, Leia, but it doesn’t mean we won’t make time to help each other,” Krista says, and Emily nods.

“I know. I feel so guilty asking you all for help,” she tells us with tears shimmering in her eyes.

“Hey, hey, it’s okay. We are here for each other no matter what, and if you need help, don’t be afraid to ask,” I tell her as I pull her in for a side hug, and the girls grab her hand, squeezing their support.

“I’m really trying to be respectful of your lives, but I can’t lie. I am so overwhelmed,” Leia admits.

“What can we do to help?” Krista and Emily ask at the same time.

Leia hiccups a laugh. “I need to pick out flowers for the ceremony and reception, but I don’t want poinsettias, though they are the most flowers associated with Christmas. I have to mail the invitations, but I don’t know who to invite. Noah hasn’t given me his list, yet. We are supposed to decide on the cake, but he’s working on a big case right now, and I feel like everything is on me to do,” she wipes the tears from her face.

“Is he working on the storefront cases?” Is there any news?” Krista asks.

“He is, and no, they aren’t sure who is causing the vandalism yet. I’m sorry to unload on you girls, I know it will all work out, and the most important thing is that the groom shows up...” she lets the statement trail off.

“I will pick the flowers for you, Leia,” Emily says. “I am more of a flower connoisseur than you are anyways,” she laughs.

“You and I can sit down and do the invitations. You already know who you want to invite, we will ensure that every person that works with Noah at the PD gets an invite, and if Noah thinks of anyone else, we will deal with those later,” Krista tells her.

“And we can go choose a cake you want for the reception, then Noah can pick what he wants for the groom cake, okay?” I tell her.

“You girls are my everything, you know that?” Leia says, smiling at everyone.

“This is going to be the best Christmas wedding ever,” I tell her.

“Thank you, ladies. I am so lucky to have you all in my life,” Leia says.

“Where are you going for your honeymoon?” Krista asks.

“I don’t know,” Leia says with a sigh. “Noah said he would take care of that.”

“Well let’s hope he takes you somewhere warm,” I say, and we all chuckle.

The waitress delivers our meals, and conversation turns to a happier one while we all enjoy the comfort of each other.

# Chapter Three

MIKE



“Mike, please? I don’t ask a lot of you, could you please do this one thing for me?” Leia asks.

“You want me to dress up as St. Nicolas for your annual Christmas party at the hospital. Do I look like a Santa to you?”

“That’s what costumes and pillows are for, plus you are going to be here anyway to walk me down the aisle, right?” she asks.

“Is this your way of asking me to walk you down the aisle?” I ask her.

“Well, I didn’t think I would need to ask, but if you want me to ask, then yes, Mike, will you walk me down the aisle on my wedding day?”

“I would be honored, sis, and you didn’t really need to ask, but I’m glad you did,” I say, smirking through our video chat.

“As for the St. Nicolas...”

“It could be your wedding gift to me. Please, Mike.” Leia cuts in and begs.

“Fine. I never could say no to you,” I chuckle.



“You have said no plenty of times while I was growing up but thank you so much. When will you be flying in?” she asks.

“I should be there the day before your annual Christmas party. Make sure the Santa suit is ready and clean, please.”

“Of course. Thanks Mike, you are the best brother,” she says with a huge smile.

“Are you sure you want to marry Noah?” I ask. “You could cancel everything.”

“Are you being serious?”

“I want to make sure this is really what you want. Who you really want,” I tell her.

“Mike, I love him, and he loves me. I absolutely want to marry Noah. Are you okay with us getting married?” she asks.

*“Am I okay with it?”* I think about this for a moment, and I’m not really sure how I feel, but then I say what I know she wants to hear out loud, “Yeah, I’m okay with it. I want to ensure you are happy and he treats you right.”

“I am, and he does, Mike. He really does,” she replies with a huge smile, and that’s all I can ask for.

“Okay. I will arrive in less than two weeks. I love you, Leia.”

“I love you too, Mike. See you soon,” she says before we disconnect.

I sit back in my chair, trying to decide how I really feel about my sister and Noah, and not for the first time, my thoughts turn to Riley. The spunky, smart mouth, brunette who calls to me in every way.

My memory floats back to seeing her lying on that hospital bed, her face bruised and swollen from the beating she took. At that moment, I only saw red. I wanted to kill the SOB who did that to her. Everything changed after that. I only wanted to protect her.

When she woke up the second time, I felt her looking at me, and wondered what she saw. I couldn't help the desire I felt in that moment. I knew I needed to stay away from her, especially when I saw desire shining back in her eyes. I watched as fear seeped into her eyes when I was in her face, and I instantly regretted that I was the cause of that. As I caressed her cheek, I noticed her desire shining again.

I knew I needed to leave, and she gave me the out. Like a coward, I took it.

I am not the man she needs in her life. I am dangerous and tainted. If she knew how tainted I was, she would never want me anyways, but that didn't stop me from claiming her lips that night in the car.

I could feel the wave of anger coming off her from the revelation of Leia and my dad. Then she asked about that abuser, and I couldn't help myself. I needed to quieten her up, but the minute my lips touched hers, I lost control. It took everything in me to pull back and get her out of the car, when all I wanted to do was strip her down, and feel her pussy wrapped around my cock, while I pounded into her hard and rough.

I shake my head to rid thoughts of Riley from my mind. She's my sister's best friend, and way too good for me. She needs someone who is not damaged by the evils of this world, she doesn't need me.

I look over my emails from the new commander. Since Major General McLaughlin decided to retire, as well as most of team one, we've been waiting on new recruits to fill the shoes of those who left.

The new Major General is hard to read, and no one can gauge where his head is at. I ensure that my leave form is still approved, because now that I know for sure Leia wants me to walk her down the aisle, I will not disappoint her.

I decide now would be a good idea to get a workout in, and I leave my room for the gym. I have a lot of aggression to work off and the face of a beauty to get out of my head.

\* \* \*

Two weeks later

I read the text from Leia, telling me Noah is at the airport to pick me up. She has to work on some last-minute items for the hospital's annual Christmas party tomorrow night. The one I agreed to dress up as St. Nicolas for. I shake my head, walking down the terminal, putting my phone back in my pocket, and wondering how I allowed myself to get talked into this.

"Hey, man," I hear Noah's voice before I see him.

"Hey," I tell him, still not quite believing he is going to marry my sister.

"I thought we could go grab a beer and talk, while Leia is doing her thing," Noah says.

"Okay, sounds good. Let me get my bag off the carousel," I tell him, hating the awkwardness that is between us.

Noah has been my best friend since elementary school. We've done everything, and there is nothing about him that I

don't know and vice-versa. Knowing everything I do about him is where my problem is.

I know every girl he ever slept with, we never kept any secrets between us, or so I thought. Apparently, he was keeping a big secret about my sister from me. I don't even know how long they were together before I came home and saw them in the hospital room.

I grab my bag off the carousel, turn around, and see Noah smiling at his phone. I walk over to him, and his mannerism changes. He quickly types out a response, then puts the phone back in his pocket.

“Are you ready?” he asks, and I nod.

We walk out to the parking garage, finding his car easily enough. I place my bag in the trunk.

Noah doesn't open the car right away, and I know he has something to say.

“Listen Mike, I need to know, are we okay?”

“Why wouldn't we be okay?” I spew.

“What the fuck is wrong with you?” he asks.

“Wrong with me? Oh, I don't know, maybe the fact that I asked my best friend to look out for my sister and make sure she was safe, instead I came back to find you together.”

“I knew you were going to be pissed,” he starts.

“Pissed? No, I'm not pissed, I'm fucking livid. My best friend didn't have the decency to tell me he was fucking my little sister. Out of all the freaking girls you could have had, you had to defile my sister,” I yell out, not caring who is around. “Is this a game to you, Noah?”

Before I even register, Noah is punching me in the jaw. “If you ever talk about my fiancée like that again, I will make damn sure you have more than a sore jaw.”

“You son of a bitch,” I say as I take a swing on him.

He ducks and hits me again, then says, “You are a fucking asshole, Mike. You should know I would never do anything to hurt Leia. I love her and have since she was eighteen, but out of respect for our friendship, I stayed away from her.”

I look at him, completely taken back and surprised by his revelation. “What?”

“I have been in love with Leia since she was eighteen, but I knew it would ruin our friendship, so I stayed away from her, until you asked me to watch over her. Our relationship was still new when you came home last time, even though we both have loved each other for far longer. You are the reason we stayed apart, and you are also the reason we are together,” he tells me.

I take stock in his words, letting them meld through my mind.

“I knew you were lying to me, when you said you always thought of me as a brother,” he tells me shaking his head.

“I didn’t lie,” I mutter, “I just hadn’t had time to process everything in the moment.”

“Look man, no matter what, to me you will always be my best friend and brother, but I am not giving Leia up. I will always love and protect her. You have a choice to make, you can accept this, or you can get back on the plane and go back to your unit.”

“I’m not going to break my sister’s heart, and you damn well better not either, or I promise you your body will never be

found,” I tell him matter-of-factly.

“Yeah, we know how good you are at that,” he mutters.

“What was that?”

“Nothing. I know nothing, and I don’t want to know.”

“Didn’t you promise me a beer?” I ask, avoiding the conversation path he started to go down.

“Yeah,” he says, shaking his head and unlocking the car.

We get to the bar, and the first thing he does after ordering his beer is look at his phone. I watch the smile that forms across his face, before he says, “Your sister wants to know if you’ll be having dinner with us tonight?”

“Sure,” I say as I continue watching him.

He’s almost oblivious to everything going on around him as he continues to stare at his phone with a smile.

Finally, he puts it back in his pocket, and we talk about general things for an hour while drinking our beer, almost like the altercation in the parking garage at the airport didn’t happen.

When I was debating whether to order another beer or not, Leia walks in. She spots Noah immediately, and the smile that graces her face as her eyes light up, I realize in that moment, she really does love this asshole next to me. Then I look at Noah and see the same goofy look on his face, and I know my sister will be taken care of.

There is a pang in my heart, and I quickly realize it’s jealousy. I’m jealous that my best friend and sister have found a once in a lifetime kind of love. I shake out of my stupor in time to hear Leia squeal, “Mike. I’m so glad you are home,” right before she slams into me for a hug.

“Hey, sis. I promised you I would be here, and here I am.”

“Yes, you did, and thank you so much,” she says as she grabs Noah’s hand.

“Is everything ready for tomorrow?” I ask her.

“It is. The venue looks beautiful, and I have your suit all ready for you in the back room. I’ll show it to you tomorrow.”

Then she looks at Noah and says, “Did you ask him?”

“No, he was being an asshole!” Noah mutters.

“Ask me what?”

“Why were you being an asshole?” Leia asks.

“I wasn’t. I was being an older brother. Something Noah doesn’t understand,” I say, glaring at him.

She looks at me, then looks at him and says, “It’s your call.”

“What?” I ask, getting a bit frustrated and irritated at the same time.

Noah takes a big sigh, then says, “I was going to ask you to be my best man, but now I’m rethinking it.”

“You were?” I ask, flabbergasted.

“Yeah, well, you have always been there for me, and as you pointed out at the airport, you know everything about me. Who else would I ask?”

“Do you still want to ask me?”

“Would you say yes?”

“Oh, you guys are absolutely killing me. Would you both grow up already?”

“Yes, I would,” I say, trying to ignore my sister.

“Great, then you can be my best man,” Noah says with a smile.

“Wait, did you ask me?”

“Of course he did, meathead. Now come on, I’m starving,”  
Leia says, and we all chuckle.



# Chapter Four

RILEY



**M**y shift is finally over, and I am heading out to the parking lot with Chief Yates and Samantha Yates walking beside me.

“Is everything ready for the charity auction next month?” Chief asks.

“I believe we are on track, Chief. Though trying to convince the guys to allow us to auction them off for a night is proving too difficult with many of them pushing back,” I tell him while trying to stifle a yawn.

“Who’s pushing back?” Samantha asks.

“Tyson Strahn, for one. Ever since that whole incident with Sharon last year, he has pretty much sworn off women. I honestly think he really loved her,” I say.

“He did, but I thought he was getting better,” Sam says, biting her bottom lip and looking at Chief.

“I’ll talk to him,” Chief says. “Come on, let’s get you home before you collapse, and then we will pick up Ray from Alisa’s babysitter,” he tells her before they both say good-bye and head off to the Chief’s truck.

I get in my car and leave the firehouse, knowing I need to get as much sleep as I can tonight. Tomorrow is the Hospital's annual Christmas party, and Leia is expecting me to be there.

I don't know why I agreed, except that I expect her help with the firehouse's charity auction next month getting all the single nurses she can there and making bids, so it's only fair that I support her annual Christmas party.

I pull into my driveway, looking around before getting out of my car to ensure no one is going to sneak up on me again. Once I'm in the house, I let out a sigh of relief as I always do.

I know Mike said I had nothing to worry about, and even though it's been a year, with no proof of capture or a body, I will always be leery that Josh could come back and cause trouble, or maybe this is my PTSD from the incident.

I still have nightmares about it, and wonder if my neighbors had not intervened, would he have killed me? I think he absolutely would have, and I think that's the part that frightens me the most.

I quickly jump in the shower before climbing into bed, feeling the fatigue of the last shift hitting me.

I wake up seven hours later, feeling better and rested at least for the time being. I make some coffee before deciding to head to the gym and get a quick workout in. I know I need to go to the grocery store, I haven't been in two weeks, and my cabinets show with the lack of food available.

I get into my workout gear and pack a bag of clothes to change into. I walk outside to my car and hear Carmel call out to me.

“Good afternoon, Riley, how are you doing?”

I turn to look in her direction and see she is standing at her mailbox with a blanket wrapped around her.

“I’m good, Carmel, just heading to the gym to get a quick workout in before I go to the grocery store.”

“Oh, that’s so good. I should workout too, but it’s way too cold for that,” she calls out and I laugh.

“It’s probably better if you stay wrapped in a blanket and read a good book today,” I call out to her.

“That’s exactly what I am going to do, dear. You be safe,” she says, walking quickly back to her house.

“I will, and enjoy your book,” I respond back before getting into my car.

Maine winters can be brutal with the cold, snow, and wind, but I couldn’t imagine wanting to be anywhere else.

I turn the radio up and sing along to the song as I continue making the drive to the gym. Walking in, Christmas music is playing through the speakers, reminding me we only have two weeks left. Two weeks until Christmas and Leia’s wedding. I sign in and make my way to the locker room to store my belongings before hitting the treadmill.

My mind goes back to last week, helping Leia pick out wedding cake flavors and design.

*“Welcome to Galore Cakes, can I help you?” the lady at the counter asks as we walk in.*

*“Yes, I have an appointment for a wedding cake,” Leia tells her.*

*“Are you Leia Stone?”*

*“Yes, ma’am.”*

*“Perfect, we have everything ready for you, please take a seat, and I’ll bring out the samples.”*

*“Thank you,” Leia says as we both go to the table.*

*We take our seats, and Leia looks at me, “Thank you for coming to do this with me.”*

*“Of course. I would never let you do this alone. Noah still working on the case?”*

*“Yes. I hope he can close it before our wedding. I don’t want this to be on his mind when we are supposed to be on our honeymoon.”*

*“Has he told you where you are going yet?”*

*“No,” she says, shaking her head and looking sad.*

*“I’m sure he has it planned,” I tell her.*

*“Maybe,” she says with a shrug, not sounding confident.*

*“Here we go Ms. Stone. These are our Christmas Wedding flavors, here we have a Chocolate Matcha Pair, it’s a rich, dark chocolate cake with the nutty flavors of matcha icing. This is our Chocolate Hazelnut Truffle, the cake itself is a chocolate cake filled with mocha buttercream and chocolate ganache. Here we have a Spiced Carrot with White Chocolate Buttercream, it’s paired with white chocolate buttercream between the layers. This is our signature White Butter Cake with Eggnog Custard and Spiced Buttercream, this is a traditional wedding cake with buttercream, but for the holidays we add eggnog and baking spices. This one is a Salted Caramel Banana, although this combo isn’t exclusively seasonal, it’s a richer flavor that’s winter-appropriate for a wedding. This is also another signature cake of ours, Dark Chocolate with White Chocolate Peppermint Buttercream, this pairing the dark chocolate with white chocolate and*

*peppermint seems like the perfect combination for a winter wedding. Finally, we have the Brown Butter Spice Cake with Cream Cheese and Maple Buttercream, this is a brown butter spice cake, frosted with cream cheese and maple sugar buttercream fillings. If none of these meet your needs let me know, I have a few more other samples in the back I can bring out."*

*"Thank you so much," Leia replies.*

*"Where do you want to start?" I ask.*

*"Let's start with the White Butter Cake with Eggnog Custard and Spiced Buttercream," she suggests.*

*We both take a bite, and immediately I need a drink of water. The spice level is very intense, and I can't help the cough that comes over me.*

*"What the hell is that?" I sputter in a whisper, drinking more water. I look over and see Leia is not a fan of it either.*

*"I don't know, but it's a definite no for me," she says, drinking her own water.*

*We look over the rest of the table, and then she says, "I'm a little nervous to try the dark chocolate with white chocolate peppermint buttercream."*

*"I understand. If the other is any indication of their signature cakes, I'm very nervous to try any of these."*

*We take the chance though and get a little taste of the dark chocolate with white chocolate peppermint buttercream, and it wasn't bad. It was more enjoyable than eggnog and spiced whatever.*

*By the time we finished the tasting, she made her choice. Some of the cakes were awful, and some were good or at least*

*okay, and thankfully she went with the best one, Brown Butter Spice Cake with Cream Cheese and Maple Buttercream. Hopefully Noah remembers to order his groom cake.*

I get pulled from my thoughts with the ringing of my phone in my ear. I see Leia's name come across my screen. I stop the treadmill and hit the Bluetooth in my ear to answer.

"Hey Leia, what's going on?" I ask, walking towards the locker room.

"I thought I would call and check on you, make sure you are not backing out on me," she chuckles.

"Well, if you're giving me an out..." I start to say.

"Absolutely not," she quickly interrupts and responds.

"Yeah, I didn't think I would get that lucky. I hope you have plenty of nurses ready to participate next month," I say, dryly.

"Don't worry about that. I have you covered."

"Is the venue ready, or do you need some help?" I ask, pulling my bag out of the locker.

"The venue is finally ready. We finished the last little touches a few minutes ago, and I am on my way to meet up with Noah and Mike for dinner," she says.

"Mike?"

"Yeah, he flew in this afternoon. I am so excited to see him," she says, her voice conveying her excitement.

"That's great, I know you miss him when he's not here," I say, trying to stave off my beating heart.

"Hey, do you want to come have dinner with us?"

“I’m going to have to pass tonight. I’m currently at the gym, then I need to do some grocery shopping, but I’ll see you tomorrow night at the Christmas party,” I tell her.

“I understand I did wait until the last minute, and really, it was because I wasn’t sure if Mike was going to make it home. I’m sorry I interrupted your workout,” she says apologetically.

“It’s okay. Enjoy dinner with Noah and Mike, and I will see you tomorrow night,” I tell her.

“I’ll see you tomorrow, Ri,” she responds before hanging up.

I take a deep breath to bring my heart rate down before I get in the shower. I need to forget about Mike, his lips, and the way he made me feel. Maybe I’ll get lucky and not see him at the Christmas party.

I shower quickly, then head to the grocery store, ready to get back home before I accidentally run into anyone I don’t want to see right now.

\* \* \*

The next night, I’m standing in my room, taking in my appearance as I look in the full-length mirror. I’m currently wearing a dark emerald green, knee length dress, black six-inch heels, my hair is down with waves of curls in it. My makeup is lightly done, and jewelry is minimal.

It’s not often that I dress up like this, so it takes me a moment to realize that I am looking at myself and not someone else.

I’m used to my hair either in a ponytail for work, or up in a messy bun while I am at home or out with the girls. I hardly

ever wear makeup, and my clothes consist of yoga pants and either a t-shirt or sweater when I'm not working, other than that, I can be found wearing my firefighter uniform.

For the fiftieth time tonight, I wonder if Mike will be at this event. I can't see why he would want to go, and I don't know why I'm so nervous if he does. I'm sure he didn't mean for that kiss to mean anything. I need to get Mike off my mind and remember I am there to support Leia.

My phone pings with an incoming text, and I see my Uber is here. I opted not to drive in case I have more than two drinks. It's always better to be safe, than make a mistake later that I can't take back. I see enough of that in my job.

I grab the gifts by the door and make my way out to the car.

"Do you need any help ma'am?" He asks.

"No, I've got them, thanks," I respond with a smile on my face, and he nods, holding the back door open for me.

When we get to the venue, I get out of the Uber. "Thank you so much," I tell him.

"Here, let me give you my direct number. You can call me directly when you are ready to be picked up, and I'll make sure you get home safely."

"Thank you, that is very sweet of you," I tell him, grabbing his card, while holding gifts to be donated.

"Happy to help. Have a good night and be safe," he calls out.

"You too," I reply with a smile.

I walk inside, placing my presents into the box labeled donations for children's wing, sticking the Uber drivers' card



in my clutch, then checking my coat before making my way into the festivities. I look around and see the hospital out did themselves this year with the decorations, it's homey and yet classy all at the same time.

I watch as the kids run around in an area set up for them, and I can't help the smile that crosses my lips. They are all toddlers, ranging between a year and three. They are all dressed so cute.

I walk in a little further, looking for Leia, when the waiter comes next to me.

"Would you like a drink, ma'am?"

"Yes, please," I say as I grab a drink off the tray. "Thank you," I tell him before he walks away.

"You made it," Leia says as she excitedly walks up to me.

"I told you I would be here, and here I am."

"You look gorgeous," we both say at the same time, then again with "Jinx," until we fall into giggles.

"I'm so glad you are here," she says as she hooks her arm around mine and leads me over to where the stage for Santa is currently set up.

I look at the Christmas tree, taking in the beautiful lights and decorations.

"Did you do this?" I ask her.

"I did," she replies, beaming. "Well, me and some of the other volunteers," she concedes.

"You all did a beautiful job. Wait, what is that burning smell?" I ask, concerned.

“The cooks probably burned another dish back in the kitchen,” she answers, wavering her hand in the air. “They seem to be having issues in the kitchen tonight, but I was promised they would not serve us burnt food,” she says with a laugh.

“That’s good to know,” I say with a grimace on my face, then I ask, “Is Emily and Krista coming?”

“Krista is here, she’s currently on the phone with Will. Emily and Jake were having a hard time wrangling the kids, but they should be here soon,” she replies.

“I can’t wait to see the twins,” I say with a smirk.

Emily delivered early at home with the help of her husband, Jake. The boys were in the NICU for a while, but they seem to be thriving and causing their parents grief like I knew they would.

“Hey, sorry about that. Wow, Ri, you look gorgeous,” Krista says as she walks up.

“Thanks, Kris, and so do you. When is Will coming home?” I ask her.

“His team plays Christmas Eve, but as soon as the game is done, he is catching a flight home and will be here for Christmas,” she says.

“That’s great news, I know you are excited for him to be here with you for Leia’s wedding,” I say, then look over at Leia, “Tell me again why you are getting married on Christmas Day?”

“Well, this is Noah and mine’s Christmas present to each other, but really, this way he can never forget our wedding anniversary,” she whispers.

We all laugh, but then she says, “Also, I know everyone will be here, and that’s all I really want. My family and friends celebrating with me, and hey, I did make it for late afternoon, so everyone has time to open presents, no matter how it’s wrapped,” she says with a little pout and devilish smirk all at the same time.

“Thank you,” Kris says, but then she sighs.

“What’s wrong,” I ask.

“I’m worried about Will. This will be the first Christmas without his dad. I’m not sure how he’s going to deal.”

Will’s dad passed away from prostate cancer a couple of weeks after Krista and Will got married.

“With you by his side, I’m sure he will make it through. You’ll just have to distract him in the best way possible,” I say with a wink.

“That won’t be a problem,” she smiles back.

“Finally,” Leia whispers.

My heart rate spikes as I assume she must be talking about Mike, but when Krista and I both look over to where she is staring, it’s Emily and her family standing in the doorway.

I let out a sigh of relief, but yet my heart pangs with a feeling I can’t describe. Is it disappointment?

I shake off the feelings of war raging inside me as we walk over to them giving hugs and greetings. The boys immediately take off running, and for being a little over a year old, they are fast. Jake quickly grabs them both and takes them over to the kids’ area, while we get Emily something to drink.

“You look gorgeous, Emily,” I tell her.

“Do I really? It was a rush job. The boys didn’t want to cooperate, hence the reason we are late. I’m so sorry,” Emily says apologetically.

“You are right on time,” Leia tells her. “Santa should be arriving soon, and then that will be more excitement for the kids,” she says with a laugh as Emily groans.

Jake comes back over to us. “Okay, I think I have the boys occupied at least for the next five minutes,” he says exasperated.

“I told you they would be handfuls,” Krista tells them both with a smile.

“You did say that, didn’t you?” Emily glares at her.

Krista shrugs her shoulders. “You should have expected it, they are boys,” I say, lifting my glass to cover the grin forming on my face.

Emily turns her glare on me, and I can’t help the laugh that escapes me, causing Krista to laugh as well.

All of a sudden, the room fills with sounds of sleigh bells, and Leia calls out in excitement, “I think Santa is here.”

# Chapter Five

MIKE



I can't believe I allowed my sister to talk me into wearing this stupid costume. What the hell was I thinking? I think to myself as I look at it.

"It will be fine, and you will make so many kids happy," Leia says, pulling me from my thoughts.

I look over at her and see the huge smile plastered on her face with excitement shining in her eyes.

"You are so lucky you are my sister, and I love you," I tell her gruffly.

"You are going to have so much fun, I know it," she beams at me. "Now I need to get back out to the guests, are you going to be okay putting this on yourself?"

"Of course. It's not rocket science," I mumble.

"Don't be so grouchy, you don't want to scare the kids away. Remember, this is a charity event for the children's wing," she tells me.

"I will be fine, now go check on your guests. I still have plenty of time to get in this costume. By the way, what is that smell?"

“Seems the kitchen isn’t ventilated very well, and the chef is having issues with the temperature of the equipment, so some of the food is burning more so than others, but they promised me they would not serve any guest something burnt, let’s hope they keep that promise,” she tells me biting her lip.

“I’m sure it will be fine, and hopefully the chef knows what he’s doing,” I tell her to calm her down.

“You are right, and it’s only for a few hours. It will be fine,” she says, more to herself than to me.

When she walks out, I sigh deeply, while looking at the costume. “At least she cleaned it,” I mumble.

I decide to wait before putting it on, and I walk out of the room, into the darkened hallway to take in the scene of the venue. My eyes flit to where Leia is walking toward the entrance, and then my breath catches as I see her, Riley.

She’s in a deep green dress that comes to her knees, black heels, and her hair is down. I don’t think I have ever seen her hair down except when she was in the hospital bed. My cock hardens looking at her, and I can’t lie to myself anymore, I want her.

I watch Leia and Riley walk closer to the tree, and hear Riley ask about the burning smell and listen as Leia explains the cook’s situation.

I can’t help but get lost in my thoughts as I stare at Riley. I remember the feel of her lips on mine, the way her tongue felt as she battled with mine, and the way her skin tasted as I kissed down her neck. I imagine her legs wrapped around me, while I press her up against the wall. My hand around her throat as I roughly pound my cock into her tight pussy, making

her scream as she comes. My cock is painfully hard, and I have to adjust myself.

I was so lost in my thoughts, I never noticed Krista walking up, or the girls walking away to the entrance to meet Emily.

I need to get my mind off Riley, she's my sister's best friend, and she is way too good for me. "Now would be a good time to get that costume on," I mumble to myself as I turn and walk back into the room that I am supposed to get ready in. It won't be long before the bells chime, and I am to make my appearance.

I just finished getting the hat on when I hear the sleigh bells. I lean down grabbing the bag full of presents for the kids here at the event. I walk down the hallway, and into the venue yelling out, "Ho, Ho, Ho."

I make my way onto the stage, placing the bag of presents down, before calling out, "MERRY CHRISTMAS," in as deep of a voice as I can go.

The kids are all excited as the adults' call, "Merry Christmas," back. I sit down in the chair, ready to get this over with.

The Department head from the Children's wing and my sister Leia come up onto the stage to thank everyone for coming, donating, and helping the children this Christmas. As they continue talking, my eyes are on Riley. She turns to look at me, and I can't tell if she knows it's me under this costume or not.

She looks away from me when some of the kids start screaming and jumping up and down. I watch as she smiles

brightly, taking in all the children's excited smiles. Jealousy gnaws at me, wanting her to look at me like she is the kids.

At that moment, a child gets put on my lap, bringing my focus back to what I am supposed to be doing.

"Hello, Timmy, have you been a good boy this year," I ask deeply as I start to play my role.

Fifteen minutes later of crying kids, pictures, and handing out wrapped presents, my head begins to pound. I swear there is a smoky haze in the room, but it could be my tired eyes.

Jake brings his and Emily's twin boys, Patrick and Payton, up and I hold them on my lap. They are both looking at me as I talk to them, not sure what to make of me. All of a sudden, I hear a huge pop, that almost sounds like an explosion, and the fire alarm starts going off.

I hand Patrick over to Jake, and before I can hand Payton over, the Christmas tree beside me goes up in flames and begins to fall. I look at Jake's face and see pure panic registering.

"Catch him," I yell before I toss Payton, just as the tree falls on top of me, and I'm knocked to the ground.

My head hits the floor hard, making my mind go fuzzy. I can see the feet of people running towards the exit, then I feel my body heating up as flames start to consume me. I try to move, but between the costume and pillows, plus the weight of the tree, I can't seem to get free.

As I struggle with being pinned down by the burning tree, my eyes begin to burn from the smoke as well as my lungs. It's getting hard to breathe, and I start coughing.

"Cover your mouth with this," I hear someone say, but I can't discern who it is.



“Get out of here before you get burned,” I say between fits of coughing.

“Shut up, and let me do my job,” I think I hear them say, but everything is starting to go dark. I really hope Jake caught Payton, that’s the last thought I have before the darkness pulls me under.

\* \* \*

“Why isn’t he waking up,” I hear Leia ask, panicked.

“It’s only been a couple of hours, Leia, and you heard the doctor, he’s fine, he hit his head pretty hard, though I’m surprised his head wasn’t hard enough to take it,” Noah says.

“That’s not nice,” Leia responds.

“It’s a joke, babe. Mike is a survivor, and he will survive a knock to the head and some smoke to his lungs,” Noah tells her.

“You two are enough to give anyone a headache,” I say, wincing as I try to open my eyes.

“Oh, thank goodness you’re awake. I was worried,” Leia says.

“What happened?” I ask, trying to piece everything together.

“You hit your head on the floor,” Noah says, then adds, “Aren’t you supposed to be a jarhead?”

“That’s Marines, you fucker,” I croak.

“Stop it,” Leia says, lightly slapping Noah as he laughs at his own joke.

Leia looks at me. “There was a fire, and the Christmas tree fell on you,” she starts to tell me, and I remember tossing Payton to Jake.

“Payton, is he okay?” I ask.

“Yes. Jake caught him, he’s alright. He thought it was fun until he saw St. Nicolas under the tree that was on fire. How do you feel?”

“My throat is a bit dry, and my head is pounding, but other than that, I feel okay. So, what happened after I passed out?”

“Riley saved you.”

“Excuse me, what did you say?”

“She said, I saved your ass from burning alive, basically doing my job, you’re welcome,” Riley says from the corner of the hospital room.

Seems our roles have reversed, me on the bed, her in the corner looking surly.

I try to focus on her, but I’m still seeing double, and it’s very hard.

“I think I have a concussion,” I mumble.

“Yes, you do. Want me to ask the nurse on duty to bring you something for the headache?” Leia asks.

“Yeah, that would be great,” I tell her.

“Okay, I’ll be right back, and you,” she points at Noah, “Better be nice.”

“I’m always nice,” he says, mumbling.

Leia walks out of the room, and Noah looks over at me. “You are alright, right?” he whispers.

“Yeah, I’ll live. There’s no way in hell I would miss you getting stood up at the altar by my sister,” I tell him with a chuckle that hurts.

“She’s not going to stand me up,” he says, though his voice says his confidence is wavering.

“Hmmm, sure,” I say, closing my eyes to keep the room from spinning.

“Noah, Leia will not leave you at the altar, and Mike, quit being mean,” Riley says, sounding bored.

I open one eye, so I can look at her, but even with one eye, I’m still seeing double, so I close my eye.

Leia walks in with another nurse, who looks me over, gives me some meds and a glass of water. I take them, then lay my head back down.

“You all should allow him to rest,” I hear the nurse telling the group in my room.

She walks out, and Leia says, “Okay, we will go and let you rest, but I will come check on you when I come on shift in the morning, okay?”

“Sounds good,” I tell her, still not opening my eyes.

“Glad you’re okay, buddy. I’ll see you tomorrow,” Noah says, and I grunt. I hear their feet move to the door, and I listen to the door open and close.

“Why are you still here?”

“Don’t worry about it, sleep. Leia would be upset if you didn’t walk her down the aisle,” Riley says.

“Hmfff,” I grumble out, but sleep pulls me under.

The next time I wake up, my head is no longer hurting, but my throat is still raw and dry. I look over, and this time, I can see Riley. She's currently sleeping in the chair in the corner of the room. I can see the black soot from the fire smeared on her face and her dress. Her heels have been kicked off and are laying under the chair.

I grab the blanket from the end of my bed, and walk over to her, stretching the cords and IV line that I am attached to, to cover her up. I can't help lightly caressing her cheek, but quickly pull my hand back when she moves.

I walk back over to my bed, fixing the lines, and grabbing the cup of water on the table and downing it. I get back into bed, but I can't go back to sleep. My eyes drift over to Riley, and I can't help taking in every one of her facial features as she sleeps. My hands inch to hold her, and trace every line of her curves. I don't know how long I will be able to fight these feelings for her.

# Chapter Six

RILEY



I know the moment Mike wakes up, but I keep my eyes closed, pretending to be asleep. I feel when he lays the blanket across my body, then he lightly caresses my cheek. I have to move, I can't allow him to keep touching me, even though I want him to.

I move a little bit and he quickly pulls his hand away. I listen to him walk back toward the bed and grab the cup of water that was beside it, then climb back into the bed. I know he's watching me, I can feel it, so I continue pretending to be asleep.

I think back to the Christmas party and the events that happened. I heard the pop of an explosion and saw the tree go up in flames. I watched as he tossed Payton to Jake and the tree falling on him.

I didn't know at the time that St. Nicolas was Mike, I just knew I needed to get the tree off of him before he suffered any burns. The room was filling with smoke quickly, and I could hear him coughing.

I grabbed the closest cloth napkin and shoved it in a glass of water, then carried it over to him. Cover your mouth with this," I told him.

“Get out of here before you get burned,” he said between fits of coughing.

“Shut up, and let me do my job,” I muttered as I quickly pushed the tree one way with my foot and pulled him the other way until I had him cleared.

The fire crew showed up to put the fire out and help me get St. Nicolas out to the ambulance.

Once he was on the stretcher, we took his beard and hat off. I finally saw it was Mike, but Leia confirmed it when she ran up crying about her brother. We got him loaded into the ambulance and they placed an oxygen mask on his face.

“I think he hit his head hard, when he landed on the floor,” I say, and the EMTs nod.

Leia jumped in the back of the ambulance with him, while Noah and I rode to the hospital in the car.

I was so happy when he woke up but could tell he was in pain. I watched him sleep after the nurse gave him some medicine, content to hear the heart monitor, allowing me the comfort to know he was okay and would be.

An hour or so later, when he finally went back to sleep, I quietly grabbed my shoes and left the room. I can feel the soreness under the bottom of my foot where I used it to push the tree off Mike. I know it's burned, but only first degree, nothing that some burn ointment won't heal within a few days.

I look at the clock hanging on the wall and see it's five in the morning. I know Leia will be coming on shift in an hour, I would prefer she didn't find me here. I call an Uber, not the one I used earlier, since it's so late, he was probably off shift.

Fifteen minutes later, the Uber picks me up outside the emergency room. I climb in, laying my head back on the seat.

“Rough night, huh?” he asks.

“Yes, thankfully everyone is okay,” I say.

The rest of the car ride is silent, and when he drops me off, I thank him. I open the door, then shutting and locking the door behind me, I head straight for the bathroom, knowing I need a shower.

I walk in the bathroom, looking in the mirror for the first time and see all the black soot on my face. I never once thought to check while I was at the hospital. God, I look a mess. I quickly heat up the water, undress, and jump in the shower, allowing the soot and events of the evening to fall down the drain.

My body relaxes under the hot water. I know if I stand here long enough, I will fall asleep, so I quickly wash up, get out, put some ointment on the bottom of my foot, and jump into bed. The adrenaline dump long gone, I pull the covers around me and allow sleep to finally take me.

It's afternoon by the time I convince myself I need to get up. I have so many questions about the fire and want to stop by the firehouse. I make some coffee, and as I'm getting dressed my phone rings. I look at the caller id and see Leia's name.

**“Hey Leia, how is everything today?”**

**“Good. Mike is being released from the hospital shortly, though the doctor told him to take it easy. I wanted to call and see how you were doing?”**

**“I'm good. I'm on my way to the fire station to see if anyone has any answers to what caused the fire,”** I tell her, slipping my coat and boots on.

**“Yes, I would like to know as well. I mean, thank God no one was seriously injured, but that was scary.”**

**“I know. Hopefully, I’ll be able to get some answers for you. In the meantime, don’t allow this to be a problem on your shoulders. Have you talked to Emily today?”** I ask.

**“Yes. They are all okay, and Payton understands St. Nicolas wasn’t hurt, but I think Mike is going to have to get into another costume to prove to him, St. Nicolas is safe,”** she says, chuckling.

I laugh out loud. **“I’ll bet he thought he was done with that costume when it burned,”** I state.

**“Probably, but I know he won’t want little Payton traumatized.”**

**“No, he wouldn’t,”** I say wistfully. **“Okay, I better go. I’ll call you later when I learn something.”**

**“Great. Have a good day, Ri.”**

**“You too, Leia.”**

I hang up the phone and place it in my coat pocket, while simultaneously grabbing my keys, and heading out to the car. Once the car is warmed up, I make the decision to head over to the venue first. I want to take a look at the wall that the tree was plugged into.

When I walk in, I see Charley is already here doing her investigation.

**“Hey, Charley,”** I say, walking over to where she is at.

**“Riley, what are you doing here?”**

**“I was here last night when the fire started. I came to check the outlet that the tree was plugged into, something has been**



niggling at my brain,” I tell her.

“Walk through your evening, and let’s see if we can both figure it out,” she suggests, and I do.

I tell her about walking over here and smelling something burning, but how Leia said it was the kitchen and not seeing any smoke in the corner I assumed she was correct. Then I tell her about the explosion pop, from the corner where the tree was, and the tree catching on fire.

“Are you okay?” she asks me.

“Yeah, I’m good, and luckily no one was seriously injured,” I remark as I make my way to the corner outlet.

I see where the wall has been smashed in. “The fire was behind the wall?” I ask.

“Yes,” she says with a deep sigh. “The electrical is out of code, and no one has updated as they should have. With so many things plugged in and going, the wires were unable to hold all the power. We are lucky the building is more concrete than wood,” she says. “This could have been a lot worse than it actually was.”

I nod. I can see the burned wires in the wall, and I know she is right. “It smoldered before it really caught fire,” I say, more to myself, but she agrees.

“Thanks for letting me come look, Charley,” I say as I step back from the wall.

“Normally I wouldn’t, but since you were here, it saved me from having to come find you and get a statement,” she says with a smirk.

I laugh. “Okay, I will leave. This whole incident was nagging in my brain. I knew something didn’t feel right. It was

the smell of the burn, but when Leia said the cooks, I just allowed myself to believe it, thanks again.”

“I understand. An electrical fire behind the walls is not one we come across everyday,” she says softly as I walk toward the door nodding my head.

I walk out of the building and to my car, thanking God everyone, including Mike, was okay. Charley is right, this could have been a lot worse.

I call Leia, “Hey, Leia,” I say when she answers.

“Did you find anything out? Was it something we did?”

“No, it was nothing you or your team did. The wiring was not up to code, so having everything plugged in caused the electrical to overload. It wouldn’t have mattered if it was this event or another, it was going to happen eventually.”

“I know you are right, but it did happen at our event, and I feel awful about it. So many people could have been hurt,” she says.

“But they weren’t, and that’s what is important,” I cut in.

“You are right, I know you are right, but I still feel terrible that this even happened.”

“What are you doing right now?” I ask her, hoping to get her mind onto something else.

“I’m on my way to do my final fitting for my wedding dress. Do you want to meet me there?”

“Sure, I can do that,” I tell her as I turn the car around, going back the way I came. “I’ll see you in about ten minutes?”

“Perfect,” she says, and I can hear the sigh leave her mouth.

“Everything will be okay, no more worrying,” I tell her.

“Okay, see you soon,” she says before hanging up.

Ten minutes later, I’m walking into the dress shop and see Leia standing on the box in her wedding dress.

“You look stunning,” I whisper in awe.

“Do you like it?”

“I love it. You picked the perfect wedding dress for yourself,” I tell her, my eyes tearing up at how beautiful she looks.

I watch as her smile gets bigger, while the alterations lady is walking around her, taking everything in and looking for places for adjustments.

I sit on the couch as I watch, knowing my best friend is going to be the most beautiful bride to walk down the aisle. I thought Krista and Emily were beautiful at their weddings, but Leia is radiating sunshine in the gown.

She looks at me through the mirror, and I smile brightly at her. I am the only single one in the group left now.

# Chapter Seven

MIKE



Two weeks later

“Are you sure you still want to do this? I can drive us out of here, and take you anywhere you want to go,” I tell Leia as I look at her in her wedding dress.

“Will you stop,” she says with a laugh. “There is no place I would rather be. I want to spend my life with Noah,” she tells me.

“I know. I just thought I would give you another option,” I tell her, chuckling. “Noah is a lucky man, and I hope he cherishes you every day. If he doesn’t, you better call me, and I will straighten his ass out.”

Leia walks into my arms. “I love you, big brother, but you don’t have to worry. Noah will always be good to me, and I will cherish him. He is your best friend for a reason, right?”

“Yes. I know he will love and protect you, but you will always be my little sister. The girl I always looked after and kept safe. It was my job, and now I’m being told my job is done,” I tell her.

I watch the tears form in her eyes. “Don’t make me cry,” she laughs. “You will always be my big brother, and there is

nothing that will change that. I know no matter what you will always be there to protect me if I need you,” she says as the tears begin to fall.

I wipe the tears gently away, so as not to mess up her makeup. “I will, always, now let’s go get you married, shall we?”

“Yes, please,” she says as she turns back to mom. “I love you mom.”

“I love you too, baby, and you look absolutely beautiful,” mom says, tears falling down her face.

“Merry Christmas,” Leia says.

“Merry Christmas, it’s time to get you married,” I tell her.

We walk out of the room and head down to the doors of the chapel. When we get to the bottom of the stairs, mom makes her way into the chapel to take her seat, led by one of the ushers, a police officer that works with Noah.

I look at the girls standing in front of Leia, seeing Riley up front, then Krista and Emily. Before I can get a good look at Riley, the doors open, and each one begins the walk down the aisle.

The doors close behind Emily, allowing Leia and I to walk to the doors. I can hear the wedding march start.

“Are you sure you’re ready? It’s not too late,” I say one more time.

“Will you stop. Of course I’m ready,” she replies, putting her arm around mine, and smiling brightly.

“Let’s do this,” I say as the doors open. Everyone is standing as I walk Leia to the front of the church.

I look down and see her eyes have found Noah, and when I look at him, I can see he only has eyes for her.

I have to admit, I couldn't have picked a better man to marry my sister, though I will never tell him that outright.

I see Mr. Strauss, Krista and Leia's father, sitting in one of the pews. I can only assume Leia decided to invite him after all.

We get to the front of the church, and the preacher asks, "Who gives this woman to this man?"

"Her family does," I respond, before shaking Noah's hand, and then placing Leia's hand in his.

I step up beside Noah and into my best man role. I look beyond Leia and see Riley for the first time since she snuck out of my hospital room. I take in the long green dress she is wearing, with a slit up to her thigh, her hair is pinned up with small curls to the side, and she's holding two bouquets of flowers, hers and Leia's.

I'm unable to take my eyes off Riley, while I listen to the preacher talk about marriage and unity. As if she can feel me, she looks up, and her eyes lock on mine. I somewhat listen as Leia and Noah say their vows, then hand Noah the rings, never once taking my eyes off Riley.

Finally, the preacher tells Noah he can kiss the bride, then announces to the church, "Mr. and Mrs. Ashton."

Everyone claps, and the happy couple makes their way down the aisle. Riley puts her arm in mine, causing electricity to race up my arm and straight to my cock. We walk down the aisle together, and I can't help but notice how well she fits perfectly next to me.

"You look beautiful," I whisper to her.

“Uh, thanks,” she says, sounding shocked.

Once we get outside, she breaks off to go with the girls, and I chuckle. If Riley thinks she can run away from me, I will have to show her that’s impossible.

I head over to the hotel where Leia and Noah are holding their reception. Ironically, it’s the same hotel I am currently staying at. I didn’t want to stay with mom and Tom while in town, and there was no way I was staying with Noah and Leia in his apartment.

I walk into the event room and see the makeshift dance floor, where I am sure everyone will be doing the electric slide and the cupid shuffle later tonight.

All the guests are starting to come in looking for the table they will be sitting at. Half the police force is here, including the Chief.

I take in the decorations of the room, noticing Leia went simple, but elegant, complete with a Christmas tree in the corner, everything screamed happy, just like her. She or Noah hired a DJ for tonight instead of a band, and he seems to be playing some good music as we wait for the married couple to show up.

I turn in time to see Riley gliding into the room, the slit in her dress showcasing her leg as she walks straight to the DJ booth. I watch as she says something to him, and he nods his head, picking up his mike. Riley looks toward the doors, and I see Emily and Krista standing there. The newlyweds must be getting ready to make their entrance. I take notice of the wedding party table and see Riley’s seating card is next to mine, that brings a small smile to my face.

The DJ turns down the music, lifts the mike, and says, “Ladies and Gentlemen, please welcome the newly married, Mr. and Mrs. Noah Ashton.”

The room explodes in hand claps, watching Leia and Noah walk in together. Leia hands her bouquet off to Riley again, as Noah leads her to the dance floor for the first dance. The DJ starts the song, and I’m surprised but not surprised by the choice, it’s ‘All of Me’ by John Legend.

After about two minutes, the DJ calls out, “Wedding party. Please join the newlyweds on the dance floor.”

I walk over to the dance floor, as Riley gets there, and I pull her into my arms, fitting her close to my body. I hear the gasp she lets out but continue swaying on the dance floor like I never heard her.

The song ends, and I’m shocked by what happens next, Leia motions for Mr. Strauss to come on the dance floor, as the DJ calls for the father/daughter dance. He begins playing the song, ‘Dance with my Daughter’ by Jason Blaine. I look over at my mom and see the tears falling down her face, and she’s not the only one, Krista is crying too, though none are sad tears.

I catch Leia’s eyes and can see the happiness shining through the tears, and I smile back at her, knowing she needs this, and it was right. How mom and Mr. Strauss handled things may not have been right, but this moment is, and that’s all I can ask for.

Once the dance is done, everyone takes their seats, and the meal is served. Riley sits in the chair between Leia and myself. I purposely keep rubbing my leg against hers throughout the meal, though she pretends it doesn’t affect her, I see



differently. I also notice when any of the males come close to her, she pushes against me, and I enjoy it.

Once dinner is over and the cake is cut, Leia and Noah give their speech.

“We want to thank everyone for coming out and celebrating our very special day with us,” Leia starts.

Someone yells from the back, “Only Ashton would choose to get married on Christmas Day.”

Everyone in the room chuckles, then Leia continues, “Well, he wasn’t given a choice, I wanted to make sure he remembered our Anniversary,” this gets more laughter as Noah shrugs his shoulders, but with a cheeky smile on his face.

“Thank you again, and Merry Christmas to you all,” Leia finishes. “Now let’s dance,” she adds after kissing Noah.

Everyone gets on the dance floor, and of course the first song is the electric slide. I laugh watching my mom, Tom, and Mr. Strauss out there doing it. Riley pulls me up from my chair and says, “Let’s go. This is a mandatory dance, and if your mom is out there, you will be too.”

I don’t argue with her, because whether she knows it or not, I would follow her anywhere, even to a dance floor.

Two hours later, it’s finally time to say goodbye to the newlyweds, as they get ready to go on their honeymoon. Leia doesn’t know it yet, but Noah booked them flights to Scotland for a month, the one place my sister has always wanted to go. They will be staying in several castles, and my sister will get the princess treatment.

We see them out to their car, blowing bubbles as they walk through the line, then Leia throws her bouquet, and Riley

catches it without even trying. The shocked look on her face is priceless, and I have to look away to keep my laughter contained. Once they leave, the rest of the guests start to leave as well.

I watch Riley walk back into the hotel, into the reception room. The DJ is taking his gear down, and the hotel staff is cleaning up the dishes and tables. I hear Riley ask if they could box up the cake for when the couple comes back, and they agree.

She walks around the room, making sure nobody left anything of value, then starts to make her way to the door. She stops when she sees me.

“What are you doing here?” she asks.

“Checking to see if you need any help with anything,” I say, my voice deep.

“Umm, no, I think we are good here. I was getting ready to head home,” she says a little too fast.

I chuckle as I watch her breathing pick up the closer I get to her. “Home, huh?” I ask in a whisper.

“Hmm, yep,” she responds as her eyes dilate.

“Why did you leave my hospital room, Riley?” I ask, lightly skimming her shoulder with my finger.

“Because you were fine, and I didn’t need to stay,” she says, her eyes closing as she starts to melt under my touch.

I walk around behind her, grabbing her hips and pulling her ass hard to my cock, as I skim my lips lightly down her neck, watching the goosebumps form on her skin. I slowly walk her out of the room and to the elevator. It’s not until I get

her in and press the button to my floor does she pull herself together.

“What are you doing, Mike?” she asks moving away from me.

“Isn’t it obvious?”

“We can’t do this. You’re my best friend’s brother,” she spits out. Whether to convince herself or get me to back off, I can’t say for sure.

“I don’t see what the problem is. Leia married my best friend.”

“So is this supposed to be payback because she took your best friend, you think you can take hers?”

I stalk toward her, backing her into the corner of the elevator. “Don’t pretend that you don’t want me, Spitfire.”

“I don’t,” she tries to say, but her body betrays her words.

I wrap my hand around her throat, feeling her pulse under my thumb, and slam my lips on hers. She pushes her body into mine, while lifting her leg, and moaning. I reach down, lifting her up by her ass as she wraps her legs around my waist. The elevator doors open, and without breaking the kiss, I carry her to my room and get the door open. Once I get her inside, I slam the door closed and push her up against the wall.

“Do you want me, Riley?” I ask her, while my hand cups her breast, squeezing it through her dress.

I can feel how soaked she is, as she rubs her pussy against my pants.

“Yes. Yes, I do want you,” she breathes out.

“I don’t make love Riley, I fuck. I fuck rough and long. I will make you come multiple times, and you will still beg for more.” I reach under her dress, ripping her underwear off. I slide my finger inside her and begin thrusting, “You are so fucking wet. You want me to fuck this wet pussy, don’t you?” I whisper in her ear.

“Yes, please,” she says.

“Please, what?” I growl out.

“Please fuck me, Mike,” she calls out as I hit her sweet spot with my finger.

I pull my finger out of her pussy and put it in my mouth to taste her. “Hmmm, I’ll have to feast on you later, right now, I want your pussy wrapped around my cock.”

I set her down on her feet, pull her beautiful dress over her head, and toss it on the bed closest to me. I lift her back up against the wall, kissing her mouth, down her neck, to her breast and suck her nipple into my mouth as I switch between biting and sucking.

“Oh,” she calls out.

I undo my pants, allowing them to fall to the floor. I guide my cock to her entrance, slamming my lips on hers as I thrust my cock deep into her pussy.

“Fuck, you are so fucking tight,” I growl, pushing her up against the wall, wrapping my hand around her throat, and thrusting deeper inside her.

“Oh, God,” she calls out.

“Not even close, Spitfire. I’m more like the devil,” I say, between gritted teeth, while pounding into her.

She's clawing my arms through my shirt, while she meets me thrust for thrust.

"That's right, Spitfire, I can feel your walls tightening up. I want you to come all over my cock. Show me how much you want my cock to make you come."

"Fuck," she calls out as she comes all over me.

"That's it," I tell her, continuing to pound into her, going deeper, while pushing her more against the wall.

"You feel so fucking good wrapped around my cock. I can't wait to fuck this mouth," I tell her as I kiss her, our tongues battling.

"I'm going to come again," she calls out.

"Come for me again, Spitfire," I tell her, feeling her orgasm explode inside her, causing me to come deep inside her. "Hmmm, that was definitely worth the wait. I plan on doing that over and over all night," I tell her, carrying her to the bed.

# Chapter Eight

RILEY



**M**ike carries me to the bed and lays me down gently. A lot gentler than how he just fucked me, but I can't say that I minded. He finishes getting undressed and then lays down in the bed next to me. I can feel my eyes growing heavy, and I can't keep them open any longer.

“Sleep, Spitfire. You are going to need your rest for what I have planned later.”

My body reacts to his words, and even though I came twice, I feel like I could go another round, but my eyes refuse to open.

Mike pulls me into his body and says again, “Sleep.”

I sigh with contentment as his arm is wrapped around me and I'm nestled in his chest. I don't know if it's the two orgasms I had, or Mike himself, but I fall into a deep sleep.

I half wake to Mike pounding into me from behind, while squeezing my breast and whispering in my ear.

“That's right, Spitfire, it's time to wake up and ride my cock. You make me so hard, I can't get enough of this perfect, tight pussy. I'm going to own this pussy,” he says, thrusting into me hard as I meet him.

“Fuck,” I whisper.

“Hmm, yes, fuck me. Fuck me with your tight pussy, make me come inside you,” he whispers in my ear.

God, his fucking words spur me on. I want to fuck him and make him come. I want him to want me.

He rolls us over so that my face is in the bed. He lifts my hips up and takes me from behind in doggy style. He pounds into me like a man on a mission.

“Oh, that’s it, Spitfire, show me how much you like my cock inside you. Make me go deeper inside you, ride my cock like a bitch in heat.”

I push back, meeting him thrust for thrust. Our skin slapping is the only sound that can be heard besides my moans in the mattress. He reaches down and around, grabbing and squeezing my breast, pinching the nipple hard, before going back and grabbing my hip again.

“Damn, you feel so fucking good. I need more,” he says as he gets to his feet on the mattress and lifts my hips higher, so he can get deeper.

Fuck, it feels like he found the top of my uterus, “Oh my God, Oh God,” I call out as my orgasm explodes in me like a tsunami, crashing through me.

“Fuck yes, keep coming all over me,” he says, as he flips me on my back, lifting my legs over his shoulders, and pounds into me like a man on a fucking mission to tear my insides apart. “So fucking good. I can’t stop, I don’t want to stop,” he growls out in between his thrusts.

“Oh my God, I’m going to come again,” I call out damn near a scream.

“I’m going to make you come over and over again. You are mine, Riley, no one else can have you,” he says possessively.

*What the fuck?* But my thoughts don’t stay on his words for long as his mouth sucks on a nipple and flicking the hard bud with his tongue, as we fuck each other. I can feel another orgasm building up inside me.

“OH FUCK,” we both call out as we come together, our bodies slick with sweat, and our breathing erratic.

Mike puts my legs down as he pulls his half-softened cock out of me, and lays on the bed next to me, still breathing hard. “Damn,” he breathes out.

“Yeah,” I say, my own breathing still hard.

“Do you want to take a shower?” he asks.

“I don’t think I can move right now,” I say softly, allowing a yawn to take over.

Mike pulls the covers up over the both of us, wrapping his arm around me again, pulling my back into his chest, and kissing my neck. “We can sleep, then take a shower,” he whispers in my ear as I drift off to sleep.

I don’t know how long I sleep, but when I wake, my body is sore, like I put it through a rigorous gymnastics’ session. Holy shit, thinking about everything Mike and I did has my pussy getting wet all over again with need and want.

The man knows how to stay true to his word, there is nothing gentle about him, but damn if it doesn’t feel good every time. I should get up and leave, go home, and forget this ever happened. The problem is I don’t think I’ll ever be able to forget. I scoot out of bed, making my way to the bathroom. I quickly relieve myself before turning on the shower, once it’s



hot enough, I get in and allow the water to cascade down my body, easing the soreness that I currently feel.

“Started without me?” his voice asks, causing my core to tighten.

His hands slide down my body, and I can feel his hard cock, pressed against my ass, as his hands find my breasts, squeezing them, while his lips find my neck.

He slides one hand down to cup my pussy, while gliding a finger through my folds and into my heat.

“Hmmm, your body is so responsive, Spitfire. Your pussy is soaked, and I’m hungry,” he says, turning me around to face him and pushing my back up against the tile, while getting down on his knees. “Now be a good girl and put your leg over my shoulder, I want to enjoy my breakfast,” he says.

I put my leg over his shoulder like he told me, my breathing picking up in anticipation of what he is getting ready to do. He swipes his tongue between the lips of my pussy, humming, then he begins to eat me like he’s never eaten.

“Fuck,” I breathe out, my eyes rolling into the back of my head, while I hold his head and ride his face, all while he fucks me hard with his tongue.

*God, this man knows what he’s doing when it comes to getting women off,* I think to myself, feeling my orgasm building.

He applies pressure to my clit with his thumb, rolling it, making it harder for me to breathe.

“OH, FUCK,” I cry out as my orgasm washes through me.

He continues lapping and sucking all my juices, causing me to come again. My legs are shaking, and when I think I

can't handle anymore, he makes me come again, this time harder than before.

He licks me clean, then lets my leg down, while standing up. I can see the precum on the tip of his cock, and my tongue darts out instinctively wanting to taste him.

“Get on your knees like a good girl and let me feel that mouth wrapped around my cock,” he tells me with authority, and fuck if I'm not wet again.

I get down on my knees, bringing my hand to his cock and pumping him, before darting my tongue out to taste his precum.

*Damn, he tastes good.* I open my mouth, taking him a little at a time, licking up his shaft, while simultaneously working his cock with my hand. He's so big that it takes me a while to get him comfortably in my mouth.

“Oh, yes, that's it, loosen that jaw and suck me down more,” he tells me.

I do and take him further into my throat, making me gag, causing my eyes to water, but it doesn't stop me, I continue sucking him, like he is the best damn lollipop I ever had in my mouth.

“Oh, Spitfire, your mouth feels so fucking good sucking my cock,” he tells me, wrapping his hands in my hair tight and thrusts his cock hard into the back of my throat. “Yes, Yes, oh suck me,” he says with his eyes boring down onto me, watching his cock slide back and forth in my mouth.

“Relax your mouth, I'm going to fuck it hard, come down your throat, and I want you to swallow it all,” he demands, and I can't help the moan that escapes me, vibrating through his cock, causing him to lose all abandonment.

I look up to see his head thrown back, his mouth open a little, his breathing erratic, all the while he thrusts his cock in my mouth, hitting the back of my throat, pushing in more and more, causing me to gag, tears to leak down my face, but I allow him because I know he is enjoying this, and so am I.

“FUCK,” he calls out as his cum streams down my throat while he holds my head, his cock making it hard to breathe. He pulls his cock back a little, allowing me to catch my breath and swallow what is left in my mouth.

I twirl my tongue, licking him clean, then allow his cock to pop out of my mouth. My body is so turned on, I can only sit there rubbing my thighs together looking for some relief.

“Oh, my girl is still needy,” he says, noticing what I am doing.

I watch as his cock hardens again quickly.

“Look what you do to me, Spitfire. I’m a walking hardon around you,” he says, grabbing my arm, helping me up, then spinning me around until my chest is pressed against the shower tile.

He swipes his fingers through my folds, and I hear his intake of breath, “Damn, you are soaked. You loved sucking my cock, didn’t you? You loved when I fucked your mouth hard?”

I moan as he pulls my hips back with bruising authority, causing me to place my hands against the shower wall, and thrusts his hard cock into me, “Oh damn,” I mutter out.

I feel him wrap his hand in my hair, then he pulls my head back, pushing my back down, then he smacks my ass with his other hand, while continuing to pound into me hard.

“What the...” I call out from the smack to my ass. I didn’t know whether I liked it or not, but his cock pushing into me had me moaning as it continued to hit my g-spot.

“I’ll bet your ass is really tight,” he mutters, while his thumb plays with my back hole.

I tense up, and he tells me, “Relax.”

I do, or try to until his thumb breaches my hole, “Oh, it’s so tight. I can’t wait to fuck you here too, but we have time to work up to that, relax and enjoy the feeling,” he tells me.

He lets go of my hair and places his hand on my hip, while simultaneously pounding into me with his cock, and fucking my ass with his thumb.

I have never felt this much pressure, almost a full feeling, and my senses are overloaded, my body feels like it’s on fire and I’m going to combust any second, and I do as my orgasm shoots through me.

“OH FUCK,” I scream out.

“That’s it,” he says as he continues pounding deeper into me.

My legs are shaking, I can’t stand on my own, and he doesn’t stop.

“So fucking good, so fucking tight, so fucking perfect,” he says through his gritted teeth. He leans down across my back, grabbing my shoulders and ramming into me with his cock.

“Fuck,” I say, because no other words come to mind in this moment, I’m completely lost in the feeling, lost in his words, only this man could make me come multiple times during one session.

I feel him reach between my legs, rubbing my clit, before he pinches it, causing my orgasm to detonate like a fucking bomb, “OH GOD, MIKE,” I scream out.

At the same time, he roars, “RILEY,” as he releases his streams of cum inside me.

He continues to hold me in the shower, since I can't feel my legs, my body, nothing. I vaguely remember him washing me up, drying me off, and taking me to bed. I am utterly and completely spent.

# Chapter Nine

MIKE



**A**fter our session in the shower, Riley couldn't keep her eyes open. Her body was completely relaxed, so I quickly washed her up, dried her, and carried her to bed. As soon as I was dry enough, I crawled into bed next to her and wrapped my arms around her naked body.

This was not supposed to happen. I should not be falling for this woman, but she is quickly weaving her way into my soul. I crave her even when I'm asleep. I should have known one time with her would never be enough, she gives it as well as she takes it, and I never thought I would meet my match. I close my eyes, allowing the heat from her body to soak into mine as I fall asleep.

I wake a few hours later not feeling Riley beside me. I listen to see if she is in the bathroom, like last time, but I know she's gone.

"I can't believe she left again," I mutter, remembering how I woke up in the hospital to Leia beside me and Riley nowhere around. I was upset then, this time I'm pissed.

I walk in the bathroom to take care of business, brush my teeth, then I get dressed. *If this woman thinks we were one*

*night, she's going to learn better. I should put her over my knee and spank her ass.*

My cock twitches at the thought, and a smile forms on my lips. *I might just do it anyway*, I think to myself, the idea calming me down.

I get in Noah's car and drive over to Riley's house, images of spanking her floating through my mind. My hand twitches at the thought, knowing how drenched I can make her.

I park in her driveway and walk up to the door. I try the handle, but it's locked, as it should be. I would be very disappointed if she left her front door unlocked for anyone to walk into. I'm trying to decide whether I should be a gentleman and knock on the door, or be the asshole, and break in. It wouldn't be hard to pick this lock.

I decide to be an asshole and go for surprise. If she can sneak out of my hotel room, then I can sneak into her house. It only seems fair, I tell myself internally.

I make quick work of the lock, using my gerber tool, which also has a few extra tools. I quietly open the door, then close it, checking the lock to make sure it's in place. I silently make my way through her house, and find her coming out of the bathroom with a towel wrapped around her.

The room smells like lavender, and I wonder if she soaked in a hot bath. *Was I too rough on her?* I internally ask myself.

I watch as she drops the towel, showing me her naked backside. I see the bruises I left on her hips, and twitch. I like it rough, but I never meant to hurt her. We are going to need to come up with a safe word so I know when it's too much for her to handle.

I walk behind her, reaching around and grabbing her by the throat.

“Ahhh,” she starts to scream, but I put pressure on her throat, effectively cutting off sound, while she tries to kick and hit me.

“Oh, Spitfire, I do enjoy your fight. Maybe you should have stayed in the hotel, and I could have shown you all the ways I’d like for you to fight me,” I whisper in her ear.

She relaxes a little when she realizes it’s me, but only a little. She’s still pretty tense.

“Now, that’s twice you left me without saying anything. How should I punish you?”

“What?” she tries to spit out, so I relax my hand around her throat.

“What was that?” I ask, knowing what she said.

“What do you mean punish? We fucked, we slept, we fucked more, slept, and I left. Why would you punish me for doing exactly what you wanted?” she looks at me quizzically.

“Did I tell you, you could leave?” I ask.

“I didn’t realize I needed to ask your permission,” she spits out.

I turn her to look at me. I want to see her eyes.

“Didn’t I tell you, you were mine and no one else can have you?” I ask calmly.

“You only said that in the heat of the moment. We both know you didn’t mean it,” she starts to walk away, and I grab her around the waist.



“Oh, how wrong you are, my Spitfire,” I say, sitting on the bed and holding her across my lap with her ass in the air. “Give me a word?”

“A word?” she asks.

“Yes, a word.”

“What are you doing, Mike?” she asks as I bring my hand down on her ass. “Oww, what the fuck, Mike? I’m not a kid.”

I smack her ass again, then gently rub it. “Each time you scream out, I’m going to add another spanking to the amount you are already getting, now give me a word,” I tell her, smacking her ass again and watching how pink it turns, causing my cock to swell more in my pants.

“I didn’t agree to this,” she breathes out, but her pussy is already drenched, letting me know she is not against this action. “

I smack her other cheek, then lightly run my finger over her pussy lips. I watch as the goosebumps form on her skin. “A word.”

“Pineapple,” she screams out.

I smack her ass again, then say, “If it becomes too much for you to handle say the word, but I’ll only stop if you say Pineapple,” I tell her with a chuckle.

I alternate between her ass cheeks as I continue to spank her ass a little more, feeling her pussy juices soaking onto my pants. I grab her hair and pull her head up, kissing her mouth with a dominating force. When I pull back, her lips are swollen, and her eyes are completely dilated with want and need.

I lift her up off my lap and lay her on the bed, opening her legs and getting between those thighs. I need to taste her pussy, my mouth watering, remembering the last time I ate her out in the shower.

I open her lips and swipe my tongue, tasting her juices before thrusting my tongue in her heat and fucking her with my tongue. Her body bucks up, as she throws her head back and clinches tightly to the blanket on the bed.

I wrap my arms around her legs and pull her closer to me, wanting and taking everything she has to give. I want all her orgasms, and I plan on making her scream my name until her voice is hoarse.

I can feel her walls tightening, and I know she's close to her first orgasm, but I want her to beg, so I slow my thrusts with my tongue.

“Oh my God, Mike, please, I need to come, please,” she begs.

I continue my slow assault on her pussy until she's thrashing and begging, then I fuck her deep and hard with my tongue until her juices flood my mouth, and then I start over. She's going to learn she belongs to me.

Once I've wrung three orgasms from her with my mouth, I climb up her body and thrust my cock inside her while she's still in the aftershocks of her last orgasm.

“Oh my God,” she calls out.

“You should start saying my name, Spitfire. God could never make you come this many times,” I tell her as I pound into her tight pussy.

I lean down sucking on her nipple, before moving to the next and showing it the same amount of attention.

“Mike, more,” Riley calls out, as her fingers ding into my back, while meeting my thrusts with her own.

“You want more, Spitfire, or you want deeper?” I ask, as I push deeper into her.

“Oh, yes, that, deeper.”

“Hmmm, yes, so fucking deep and good. I could fuck your pussy all day,” I whisper in her ear, while holding her hips down so I thrust into her deeper and deeper.

“OH, MIKE, OH,” she screams out and I love hearing my name leave her lips.

I lean down and kiss those lips. Listening to the sound of our bodies slapping against each other, sweat coating both our bodies. I feel her walls tighten, squeezing my cock, and I know I’m going to come with her this time.

“MIKE!” she screams out, as her orgasm pulls us both over.

“RILEY!” I roar out at the same time.

I lay on top of her, both of us catching our breath, before I take her lips in a kiss.

I roll over onto the bed next to her, still breathing hard.

“Where is this going, Mike?” she asks after a few minutes.

“I thought I made that perfectly clear, Riley,” I say.

“No, no, you haven’t. You broke into my house, which I want to know how, telling me I’m yours, then ‘punished’ me, before you fucked me boneless, but no, you have not made anything perfectly clear,” she says, and I chuckle.

“Your ass looked so pretty pink from my punishment,” I say.

“And now you deflect. I don’t think you are serious about anything,” she says, getting up from the bed and heading to the bathroom.

I get up and follow her, cornering her at the bathroom counter between my arms. “I’m not deflecting, I was reminiscing, but to answer your question, I meant what I said, Riley, you are mine. I’m a possessive asshole when it comes to you, I always have been.”

“You are full of shit, Mike,” she spits out.

“Oh, you think so? The first time I felt possessive over you was when you were fifteen and got in the car talking about meeting some football player at the fair. I wanted to find that son of bitch and kill him.”

“What?” she asks in a whisper.

“When I saw you in that hospital bed, bruised and beaten, I saw red.”

“Did you kill Josh?”

“Only after I tortured him, and that’s one body that will never be found,” I admit to her.

I watch the emotions on her face from my admission, but I can’t tell if she’s repulsed by the monster that I am.

“How did you torture him?” she asks, and not what I expected.

I look at her, before I ask, “You really want to know?”

She thinks about it, then shakes her head. “No, because if anyone asks me, I don’t want to have to lie. This way I can say I have no idea what they are talking about.”

I laugh. “They will never ask, because Noah is the only one who assumes, and even he doesn’t know for sure. Plus, I know how not to leave anything behind, but I won’t lie to you Riley, I am not a good person, I really am the Devil. I’ve done stuff you could never even understand, seen and done things that would break a person.”

“I never thought you were innocent, we both have seen cruel things in our perspective line of work, we both save people, we just do it differently, and I understand that. I would never dismiss what you have to do in your job, but I also know you can never tell me about it either. I don’t think you’re a devil or a monster, you are a protector and a saver,” she says. “I may think of you as a jerk, but you will never be a monster in my eyes,” she adds, while caressing my cheek, and my body relaxes.

“I don’t know how to be anyone other than what I am,” I tell her.

“You don’t need to be anyone other than who you are,” she says.

“I want to fuck you again,” I whisper as my lips are so close to hers.

“What are you waiting for?” she asks.

I lift her up onto the bathroom counter, taking her lips, and thrusting my cock into her soaked pussy. “Tell me your mine,” I grunt out as I thrust deep into her.

“Mike,” she calls out.

Tell me,” I demand.

“I’m yours, always,” she says, and I slam my lips on hers taking everything as she gives it to me.

“You are so fucking perfect and mine,” I tell her, bringing her to orgasm, and continuing to pound into her, not satisfied until I wring another one out of her.

When we finish having sex on the counter, I pull her into the shower with me washing us both up. We get dressed and go for something to eat.

“When do you go back to work,” I ask her.

“I’m on shift tomorrow. “When is your leave up?” she asks, over burgers.

“I fly back overseas tomorrow,” I tell her, the first pang of regret hitting me.

“It’s okay. I understand the military is your life, and I know from Leia you can’t always communicate if you are on a mission,” she says.

“I will skype you every chance I get. I want to make this work between us,” I tell her.

“The only time we won’t be able to talk is when I’m on shift, but I’ll send you my schedule so you know when I’m working and when I’m off. I only ask that when you get ready to go out on a mission, you send me a message so I know,” she tells me.

“Agreed,” I say, leaning over and sealing it with a kiss.

“If I counted correctly, we have about nine hours left, so maybe we should go back to my place and make the most of it,” she whispers with a naughty glint in her eyes.

“How do you feel about handcuffs and a blindfold?” I ask her.

“I don’t know, how about we try it and find out. By the way, I’ve decided to change the word, my safe word is now

Jack.”

“Why, Jack?” I ask, wondering who the hell is Jack.

“For Jackass. I can’t say Jackass since you may think that’s an invitation, so I’ll yell Jack, and I know you will stop, trying to figure out who Jack is,” she tells me, laughing.

“Ohhh, I think you need more spankings,” I tell her with a grin.

“Maybe,” she smirks with a wink.

“Oh, my girl is naughty, let’s go,” I say, grabbing her hand and quickly walking back to the car while she is laughing.

# Chapter Ten

RILEY



Two months later

**T**he town is still reeling from the events that had happened before Christmas, and then finding out who the culprit was. I know Noah worked on the case, but it wasn't until after Christmas that the whole town was told about it. To say it was a shock would be an understatement.

The Bachelor Auction was a huge success last month, even Tyson has started to change a little bit. I'm not sure if it has to do with the woman who bid on him, or if he is finally realizing he can't control other people's actions, but I'm happy for him either way.

Leia came home from her honeymoon, telling us all about Scotland, everything they did and saw. She told us about all the castles they stayed in while they were traveling all over Scotland. I'm happy to see her so happy.

I'm currently at the restaurant of Leia's choice this month, waiting for her and the other girls. It's our monthly dinner date. Now that they are all married, we only get to see each other once a month.

I still haven't told Leia about Mike and I. I'm not sure why, I know she wouldn't be upset, but maybe a part of me is



concerned that no matter what Mike said, this will only be a one-time event. Even though we have been skyping nightly since he left, except the nights that I'm on shift. Our conversations consist of a lot of on-screen sex. He has opened my eyes to a few new bedroom things. I guess I'm not as vanilla as I thought I was.

I really enjoyed being handcuffed and blindfolded more than I thought I would. Mike even brought an ice cube in and used it as he ate me out, and holy fuck, I really enjoyed that. I returned the favor on him, and he really enjoyed it as well. Cold ice cube and my warm mouth on his cock had his hips gyrating while I sucked him, but seeing him handcuffed and blindfolded gave me so much power, it was exhilarating.

I rub my thighs together just thinking about what we did and how it felt. Fuck, I'm missing him, and I never thought I would feel like this. I'm still skeptical, but I figured I would enjoy this while I can.

“Hey,” Leia says, walking up to the table.

“Hey,” I say, standing up to give her a hug. “Are you okay?” I ask, looking her over.

“Yeah, I'm tired. It's been very busy at the hospital.”

Before I can ask anything else, Krista and Emily show up. The waitress comes around and takes our order before we all catch up. Emily catches us up on the twins' new antics of hiding and the heart attack they almost gave their mom.

“I'll say it again, they are always going to be handfuls,” Krista says, and we all laugh at the look Emily gives her.

Our food comes, we eat, talk, and enjoy our evening together.

“Hey, are you ready to come home?” Noah comes over to the table and asks Leia.

“I’m sorry girl’s, but I should go home and get some rest.”

“Did you tell them?” Noah whispers to her.

“Tell us what?” I ask, though I’m sure I already know.

She looks at all of us and says, “I was going to wait a little longer,” glaring at Noah, “But we are pregnant.”

“I knew it,” I say with a smile.

“Congratulations,” Krista and Emily say at the same time.

“How far along are you,” Emily asks.

“Nine weeks,” Leia says.

“I’m so happy for you,” I say, getting up and hugging her again.

“Yeah, congratulations, sis,” Mike’s gruff voice says from behind us.

“Mike, your home. I wanted to tell you first, but my husband ruined that,” she says, hugging Mike.

I can only stare at him, as he looks at me. When she pulls back, she asks, “What are you doing home?”

“I came to claim my woman,” he states.

“What? What woman?” she asks.

Mike pulls me into his arms, kissing my lips, and Leia screeches. When he pulls back, he says, “Hello, Spitfire.”

“Hello, Devil,” I say, with a smirk on my face.

I turn and look at the girls, who all have shocked looks on their faces, except Leia.

“I always knew you two would get together,” she admits.

“Huh? How?”

“It was how he acted when you were in the hospital and the fact that you stayed in the hospital when he was there. I knew it was a matter of time. Next month we expect details,” she says, and the other girls nod.

“Ready?” Mike asks.

“Yes,” I say breathlessly. I turn to the girls, “Goodnight, ladies.”

“Goodnight,” they say collectively.

“What are you doing here?” I ask.

“I needed to see you and not on a screen, so I took some leave, plus I have a job interview,” he says, opening the passenger door for me, then going around to the driver’s side and climbing in.

“Huh? What interview?”

“I’ve applied to be a bodyguard with the Top Grunt Protective Services. Of course nothing is guaranteed, but all the guys there were Special Ops Forces, so I thought I’d throw my name in and see what happens.”

“Are you serious about leaving the Army? You know I don’t mind your career, right?”

“I know, but I miss being with you everyday, that is what I want. I hated being so far away from you,” he admits. “Plus, with Leia pregnant now, it might be time that I came home.”

“I missed you too,” I admit to him as he drives to my house.

We get to the house, he unlocks the door, opening it and allowing me to go in first. I walk into the living room, nervous.

“What’s wrong, Spitfire,” he asks from behind me. I never heard him move.

“There’s something I need to tell you. I was going to do it tonight when we skyped. I had this whole conversation planned out, but now that you’re here, I’m not sure how to tell you.”

“Are you seeing someone else?” he demands in a voice I don’t think I’ve really heard before. “I promise you I will kill whoever it is.”

“Calm down, Devil. I am not seeing anyone else,” I laugh, unable to help it. “Let’s keep the body count down for now, okay?” I tell him as I still giggle. “So possessive, lord, how is this going to work?”

“What do you mean?” he asks.

“Mike, Leia isn’t the only one pregnant,” I say, allowing my words to sink in.

“You’re pregnant?” he squeaks out, and I can only nod, not sure if his reaction is good or bad.

“I’m going to be a dad?” he asks, and I nod again, tears forming in my eyes.

He grabs me by the back of my head, and slams his lips on mine, then pulls back. “We are going to have a baby,” he says, and I nod again.

“We are getting married,” he says.

“What?” I sputter out.

“You heard me, we are getting married. I was going to ask you, had everything planned out, but we are having a baby, so I hope you don’t want a big wedding because we are getting married this week at the courthouse.”

“The hell we are, Mike. You want to marry me, you are going to do it right, or we will not be doing it at all. Who the hell do you think you are telling me we are getting married? You have lost your fucking mind, thinking you are going to tell me to do something outside the damn bedroom,” I tell him storming off to the room, muttering about what an asshole he is.

“Oh Spitfire, you have made my cock hard with that mouth, I think you need to be punished,” he says, and I can’t help clenching my thighs together.

*Damn him*, I think to myself. He knows how to turn my body into a puddle. Then a thought occurs to me, and I turn the script on him.

I undress, throwing my clothes onto the floor before climbing onto the bed. “Well, I didn’t get any dessert,” I smirk.

I watch his eyes fill with lust as I lick my lips. Before I know it his cock is standing at attention in front of my face, and I waste no time sucking him into my mouth.

“Fuck,” he grunts out as I take him deep and moan around his cock, causing him to lose control.

His hand goes to the back of my head, and he fucks my mouth just how I like it. Rough, hard, and deep.

“That’s it Spitfire, suck me down, suck me harder. Oh Fuck, such a good girl,” he mutters out as I continue sucking

until he comes down my throat. Then I lick him clean before allowing his cock to pop out of my mouth like a lollipop.

“Now, what were you telling me?” I ask him.

“I’m sorry, Spitfire. I should know better.” He walks over to his pants, pulls out a black box. He gets down one knee next to the bed. “Riley Winters, will you do me the honor of becoming my wife, and spending your life with me?”

“Yes, yes, I will marry you,” I tell him.

He places the ring on my finger, then kisses me.

“Yes, we can get married at the courthouse as long as our friends and families are there,” I concede, because formal weddings are not my thing.

“For that, I’m going to make sure you get five orgasms tonight.”

I laugh. “One will be enough, I need some sleep,” I tell him.

Three orgasms later, he finally lets me sleep.

# Chapter Eleven

RILEY



Six months later

**M**ike was able to get a position with the Top Grunt Protective Services. Everyone is like a family over there. I have met all the men, their wives, and their kids.

Mike is happy with his decision to get out of the Army and work with these guys who are still his brothers.

I love that he's been home to be here for every part of my pregnancy. Right now, I'm over being pregnant and can't wait for this baby to come. I've been uncomfortable the last couple of days, but the doctor said I'm probably having Braxton Hicks contractions. Those happen to help you get ready for delivery.

The phone rings, and I see Leia's name come across the screen.

"Leia, what's going on?"

"I think my water broke," she says.

"Where is Noah?" I ask.

“Working a case in the field, the Chief is trying to get a hold of him. Could you take me to the hospital?”

“Of course, I’ll be there in five minutes,” I tell her.

I grab my keys and head out to my car, dialing Mike’s number.

“Hey Spitfire, what’s wrong?”

“Leia called, she thinks her water broke, and Noah is out in the field, his Chief is looking for him. I’m on my way to pick her up and take her to the hospital,” I inform him.

“Okay, I’ll meet you at the hospital. Be careful,” he tells me.

“I will. Love you,” I tell him before hanging up.

I pull into Leia and Noah’s apartment complex. I see her waiting for me on the curb. I get out and walk around to help her get in the car.

“How far apart are your contractions?” I ask her as I help her get seated.

“About seven minutes,” she says.

“Okay, we will be at the hospital shortly.”

I close the door, then go around to the driver’s side. I feel tightness in my belly, but I chalk it up to the nerves of Leia going into labor.

Mike is waiting at the entrance to the ER with a wheelchair and helps Leia get into it.

“I’ll go park the car and meet you there,” I tell them both.

When I get out of the car, I feel tightness in my stomach again, and I breathe through it. Once it subsides, I continue walking to the ER, knowing Mike is waiting for me.



I see him and Leia as soon as I walk through the door. The pain hits me again, but I continue on.

“How are you feeling?” Mike asks as he pushes Leia to the elevator that will take us to Labor and Delivery.

“The same as every day, these days.”

“Is the pain getting worse?” he asks, and I shrug, because at that moment Leia is hit with another contraction.

“Breathe,” I tell her, and she does. “That’s good,” I say, timing her contractions. Then it subsides, as we get off the elevator, meeting a nurse who quickly takes Leia to a room to get her hooked up.

The pain hits me again, and I have to grab the wall.

“What’s wrong?” Mike asks.

“The doctor said I’ll probably have a lot of Braxton Hicks contractions before it’s time for labor. I think that’s what these are. I just need to sit down, nothing to worry about,” I tell him.

He leads me over to the waiting chairs, and I sit down.

Noah shows up looking for Leia, and we point him to the room where they took her to.

“You are looking very pale, I’m going to have a nurse look at you, okay?”

I nod because the pain in my stomach is intense.

“Hey, Riley, I’m nurse Jackie,” she introduces herself as she checks my pulse, then places her hand on my tightening stomach. “How long have you been in labor?” she asks.

“Huh?” I ask, looking at her like she’s crazy. “I’m not,” I tell her.

“I’m pretty sure you are, dear. Why don’t we go into this room and check you out okay?”

I can only nod. I want to cry, we aren’t ready for this baby.

The nurse gets me changed into a gown, then places the bands around my stomach. I hear the baby’s heartbeat and relax a little bit, except for the pain in my stomach.

The nurse says, “Let’s check and see if you have dilated any.”

She lifts the sheet, and with KY on her gloved fingers, she inserts them in me, and says, “Congratulations, you are having a baby today. Let me go get the doctor.”

I nod in shock.

Mike comes in and says, “What’s wrong?”

“She says we are having a baby today. Are we ready to have a baby today?” I ask with tears flowing down my face.

“We are ready, don’t cry love, we are ready,” he tells me as a contraction takes over again. I breathe as much as I can.

The doctor comes in and says, “Hello Riley, I hear it’s time to have a baby. Let me check you so I can see how much longer we may have.”

I nod, as she inserts her fingers, then I feel a gush of water.

“Well, your water just broke, and you are nine centimeters. You are a few minutes away from meeting your baby,” she says, changing gloves as the nurse changes the pad underneath me.

A contraction hits me, and I feel the need to push.

The doctor says, “The head is crowning, so on your next contraction, I need you to push, okay Riley?”

“Okay,” I reply as the contraction hits, and I bear down pushing.

“That’s good. You’re doing good, Riley,” she says as I take a breather.

The next time I bare down to push, the baby’s head comes out. I get to breathe for a few seconds before they ask me to push again. Finally, the baby was out and crying, and Mike is able to cut the umbilical cord.

“Congratulations, you have a boy,” the doctor says, placing the baby on my chest.

“He’s so beautiful,” I whisper.

“You did a great job, Spitfire,” Mike says before he kisses my lips, then looks at our son, before the nurse takes him to weigh him and cleans him up.

“What is his name?” the nurse asks.

“Elijah Jordan Stone,” Mike and I both say at the same time.

“Beautiful name,” the nurse says, handing Elijah back to me.

\* \* \*

Two hours later, Leia delivers her and Noah’s son, Lucas David Ashton.

# More from the Christmas Party Word:

The Prospect Curvy Treat

[Mistletoe Madness](#)

[A Lucky Christmas](#)

[Butting heads with her Mountain Man](#)

[Mistletoe and Moondust](#)

[Gifting the Boss](#)

Candy Cane Kisses

[Christmas Party on Hanukkah](#)

[Hanukkah Party on Christmas](#)

Arianna's Christmas Rescue

Operation: Sheltered Snowbird

[Saving St. Nicolas](#)

[Whispers of Christmas Moon](#)

# About the Author

I'm an author of steamy suspenseful romance novellas.

I have always loved the idea of happy endings, but with real life drama.

I currently live in North Carolina and have always loved the beauty of the Appalachian Mountains. Hiking is one of my favorite hobbies as it helps to clear my mind and allow my imagination to roam freely.

I'm an avid reader of all genres.

I love traveling, especially to small communities, as the people are always so nice and

welcoming, with hidden gems in their sweet little towns.

Come follow me to learn more

Facebook Reader Group - [Bella's Romance Readers | Facebook](#)

Instagram – [https://www.instagram.com/author\\_bella\\_lane/](https://www.instagram.com/author_bella_lane/)

TikTok – [tiktok.com/@bellalane5721](https://www.tiktok.com/@bellalane5721)

Website - <https://www.bellalanebooks.com>

# Also by Bella Lane

## Men of Special Ops Forces

Stroke of Midnight (Roman and Jessi's story)

<https://mybook.to/StrokeOfMidnightBL>

Driving Home for Christmas (Nico and Sarah's story)

<https://mybook.to/DrivingHomeForChristmas>

His Christmas Baby (Jonathan and Shawna's story)

<https://mybook.to/HisChristmasBaby>

A Soldier's Secret Romance (Ryan and Ellie's story)

<https://mybook.to/ASoldiersSecretRomance>

Saved by the Major (Noah and Amanda's story)

<https://mybook.to/SavedbytheMajor>

Claiming Homebase (Justin and Livia's story)

<https://mybook.to/ClaimingHomebase>

Finding Ireland (Liam and Ireland's story)

<https://mybook.to/FindingIreland>

The General's Secret (Connor and Destiny's story)

<https://mybook.to/TheGeneralsSecret>

## Top Grunt Services Series

Protected by the Bodyguard (Scott and Brianne's story)

<https://mybook.to/ProtectedbytheBodyguard>

Falling for the Bodyguard (Brody and Cami's story)

<https://mybook.to/FFTBodyguard>

Loving the Bodyguard (Jax and Lena's story)

<https://mybook.to/LovingTheBodyguard>

Shielded by the Bodyguard (Matt and Alisa's story)

<https://mybook.to/ShieldedbytheBodyguard>

## Heroes of Maine Series

Defending Charley (Derrick and Charlene's story)

<https://mybook.to/DefendingCharley>

Saving Sam (Connor and Samantha's story)

<https://mybook.to/savingsam>

Protecting Leia (Noah and Leia's story)

<https://mybook.to/ProtectingLeia>

Healing the Quarterback (Will and Krista's story)

<https://mybook.to/HealingtheQB>

Saving St. Nicolas (Mike and Riley's story)

<https://mybook.to/SavingStNicolas>

His Curvy Surprise

<https://mybook.to/HisCurvySurprise>