

SIMMERS KEEPERS

GENNA BLAOK



SINNERS KEEPERS

GENNA BLACK

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FATE TRACE SERIES

BOOK 2

GENNA BLACK

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NOTE FROM THE AUTHOR

Sinners Keepers is book two in a series of interconnected stand-alones. It is recommended that you read No Small Sin first for the full context of Sinners Keepers.

This book contains extreme profanity, graphic violence, graphic sexual descriptions, and gore. Reader discretion is advised.

For a detailed list of triggers, please visit
www.authorgennablack.com

To Alice, I love you all the way.

“It’s there, I know it is because when I look at you, I can feel it. And I, I look at you and...I’m home.” – Dory

PROLOGUE

Ijah

Hunt was the most beautiful woman I'd ever laid eyes on, and she was in *my* bed with *me*.

Not that I hadn't had her in bed plenty of times before now—and anywhere else we could find a minute to sneak away to—but she was finally *mine*.

Her delicate, freckled face was more relaxed than I'd ever seen it, her lips parted as her chest rose and fell in soft rhythmic breaths. She was so still, so at peace; something that had eluded her all of her fucking life. The energy surrounding her was finally untouched by the world she'd been thrust into by her father.

I would never let that part of her past touch her again.

With her *husband* out of the picture for good, I would never have to spend another sleepless night sick with worry that I couldn't protect her from him. There would be no more setting him up with constant out-of-town bullshit to make sure she was safe from his demeaning words and violent hands. Mattia had grown paranoid near the end.

Rightly so.

Alec, Law, and I had been undermining him at every turn for months, but it was his paranoia that ultimately cost him his life.

Good fucking riddance.

I ran my fingers along the edge of her cheek, thankful that nothing would ever be the same for *any* of us from here on out.

All that our lives had once been had fallen away, and the guys and I were actively working to dismantle our little corner of the criminal underworld board by board.

For her.

Upon his death, every business Mattia had owned had been passed to me as his second in command, but I was no longer interested in living a life of constantly looking over my shoulder, wondering what might be waiting for us around the next corner. Alec and Law were on the same page.

Beck factored into that equation too, but his girlfriend had taken matters into her own hands to make sure they had a future together.

I'd been biding my time, hoping to get it right because so much was at risk if anything went wrong. But in the end, TK had been the one to pull the trigger that changed fucking *everything*—for all of us—and I was forever in her debt for that.

Hunt's eyelashes fluttered open as she stirred from sleep. Her fiery curls, still damp from the shower, clung to her cheek. A soft smile tugged at her lips.

Fuck. That smile. Those lips.

Having her look at me with such affection was everything I'd ever fucking wanted.

“Hey, cupcake,” I smiled back. “You didn’t nap for long.”

“I could feel you staring at me,” she scrunched up her cute little nose. “*Creep.*”

I was *such* a fucking creep when it came to her. “Get used to it. I’m never taking my eyes off you again.” A shameless one.

She scoffed playfully, turning onto her back to stare at the ceiling.

“What are you thinking?” I asked.

She faced me, looking into my fucking soul with those big green eyes of hers, a tear slipping from one corner. “How this doesn’t feel real. That we can finally be together. No more sneaking around. No more hiding.”

I cupped her face, swiping the moisture away with my thumb, then covered her body with mine. With my hands on either side of her, I pushed myself up and settled between her thighs. Her arms encircled my neck, drawing me in until our lips met for what felt like the millionth time, but every single fucking time I kissed her it was the same; full of every ounce of love and longing each of us felt for the other. The sweet sigh that escaped her as I nudged her lips apart with my tongue melted everything in me, the minty taste of her toothpaste still lingered there.

Neither of us had dressed after showering, I wanted to live and die this close to her, skin to skin.

I gripped my length, running the head of it through the lips of her pussy, circling her clit in a way I knew was torture to her. She was always so fucking wet for me. She sucked in a breath as I teased at her entrance.

I hummed against her mouth, kissing her slowly. She drove me fucking crazy, but I loved to hear her beg. I lived for every desperate sound I could draw from between her pouty lips.

“*This* is real,” I said, punctuating the word with another pass of my dick.

“Please,” she whispered into my mouth, then groaned, exasperated. Her desperation to have me inside her mirrored the intense need I had for exactly the same thing.

I thrust into her, filling her completely in one go. She clenched around me, so fucking tight that I lost my sense of anything else.

We fit together like two pieces of an existential puzzle, longing to come together for all of eternity. This was home. *She* was home.

There was one last thing I needed to take care of for her—her dad. He had to go, there was no question about that.

My girl had been restless with anxious anticipation each day that passed and Ellis Cauley was still breathing, but I’d reassured her he was an easy hit. I wasn’t willing to risk anyone’s safety to get to him. We just needed to wait until he was stir-crazy enough to crawl out of the hole he was hiding in. He couldn’t stay in that dump of a house forever.

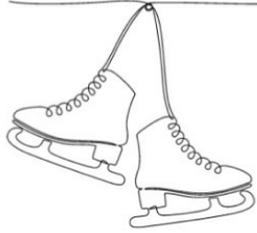
All the things we would need to cross in our path to get from point A to point B were small potatoes compared to what Hunt had already lived through—and what she’d already overcome.

Our happily ever after was just around the corner.

She was my one and only; the other half of my heart. My fucking soulmate. The bond between us was unbreakable, and nothing and no one could ever change that or take it away now.

CHAPTER ONE

Hunt



SEVERAL DAYS LATER...

My husband was dead.

And while there was no way to get back the last eight years I'd lost being forced into a ridiculous, unwanted marriage, there was one thing I could do to ease the constant heaviness carried around inside me—and it was the only thing I had on my mind tonight: *revenge*.

A dish best served cold, and this vengeance had been cooling on the counter for a long fucking time.

Ijah had said we needed to wait, that he would eventually come out to play on his own, and that when he did, we'd be waiting. But I was tired of waiting. So fucking tired of the men in my life making decisions for me. I knew Ijah did genuinely have my best interest at heart, but before him, no one else had. I was no longer willing to leave my future in the hands of *anyone* else, and that included Ijah.

He may have considered what I was about to do a bad idea, but I knew when I returned home to him with one less thing on our *to-do* list, he'd be thankful. He would most definitely punish me for it, but I looked forward to that, too.

Those things aside, this was something I *needed* to do for myself. I didn't *want* Ijah or either of his men to be the ones who got to see the light leave my dad's eyes. He was so adamant that I would not be the one to have his blood on my hands—or *any* blood on my hands.

His worries were valid. I'd never been on this side of things and having been enforcers for my dearly departed husband, they had plenty of experience. But I wanted to be the one to do this.

He'd taken *everything* from me, and I wanted to be the one who took everything from him—or at least, all he had left: his pathetic life.

I wanted to see the regret in his eyes as he took his last breath, if he was even capable of such a thing.

I doubted he was.

My fists clenched at the thought, a familiar fire lighting in my chest. I'd spent so long feeling powerless. Helpless. But now that I was free, I refused to be a victim of my circumstances any longer.

Tonight, my *father* would get a taste of his own.

He'd yet to make his intentions known in the wake of Mattia's death, but I knew him better than I knew myself and there was no shortage of wealthy fucks to whom he likely owed an exorbitant amount of money. And while he still had significant influence in Fate Trace, I knew that behind closed doors he was the same man he'd always been: terrible at managing his filthy fucking income and likely broke as shit again. The fact that I was newly single meant only one thing to him: I was up for grabs, readily available to offer up as payment for his debts.

My heart thrummed in my chest as I carefully grasped the cold steel of the .45. I gripped the slide, pulling it back with only a small amount of difficulty. There was a soft click, and I released an easier breath as the cartridge slid into the chamber. I was no expert when it came to firearms, but I'd seen them used enough that I'd learned the basics and educated myself thoroughly on the rest.

My father had continued living in my childhood home despite the fact that my hand in marriage had cost my *loving husband* a fat chunk. At one time, Dad had been someone worth having ties to, and many men had thought doling out the cash for my hand in marriage would provide them some amount of protection in Fate Trace—that it would make them someone important. Mattia had been the highest bidder, and spending the money he'd been paid on below par drug investments had left my father in search of whatever other shady shit he could find a way to deal in.

When you're the decorative companion of a crime lord, you hear shit. I'd hear story upon story of how a quick buck was all that had ever mattered to my dad, no matter how soon it left his hands after. I figured the only reason Mattia had kept me around once Dad had fallen from favor was because no one else would have wanted a sadistic old bastard like him, and he wanted to spend enough time making me as miserable as fucking possible just to get his money's worth.

I shoved those thoughts from my mind as I trudged across the overgrown lawn and up the front steps.

Just outside of Fate Trace, the single-family home was a nice place at one point in time. Back when my mom was still around, anyway. I often think about how drastically different my life may have turned out if she hadn't been diagnosed with cancer when I was seven. My dad had always been a piece of shit, but it didn't matter because I'd had her to protect me, even

when her body was so worn from the disease that she could barely function.

And then one day I didn't anymore.

I'd spent my young adulthood lost in my own bitterness at how cruel life could be to someone who deserved nothing but *good*.

Paint peeled away from the chipped door frame, revealing thin patches of mold underneath. A crack ran along the length of the right sidelight, and pots filled with long-dead plants sat on either side of the door.

Just like my father to not care for what belonged to him.

I wondered how his *colleagues* would feel if they knew he lived in such a dump. He'd always said it was his way of staying hidden in plain sight. The man had a closet full of Brunello Cucinelli overcoats worth more than this nearly dilapidated hellhole. Of course, his playmates were more than aware that he wasn't as well off as he'd once been even though he continued to let on like he was, but the state of disrepair this place was in was low, even for him.

With my finger on the trigger, I tested the door handle. When it twisted easily—unlocked—my breath caught in my throat.

Voices sounded louder with each set of heavy footfalls, and I darted into the overgrown shrubbery.

I should have known he wouldn't be alone. Rob, his fucking *watchdog*, was forever stuck up his ass, and I could practically feel the full-body shudder caused by his girlfriend Marcia's nasally laugh vibrating through my body just thinking about it. Who knew how many of his other lowlife foot soldiers were hanging around waiting for their next drug run.

I wasn't about to stick around and find out. God, I was fucking stupid. Ijah would absolutely fucking kill me if he knew I'd come here alone. Hopefully he'd never find out, because I was for sure outnumbered and tonight was no longer the night for me to be exacting *anything*—especially without help. Even though my night didn't go as planned, I couldn't wait to get home to him. I could picture him now, still dozing, that messy brown hair of his all mussed from sleep.

I crept along the edge of the house. Holding my breath, I took slow, measured steps, making sure to place each one quietly on the wet grass. Listening for any signs of movement in the dark and hearing nothing, I stepped around the corner.

My hands trembled furiously and I realized I needed to regain some semblance of composure before heading back home. I needed to have my

wits about myself in case anything else ended up not going my way.

I slumped back into the side of the house, releasing a startled scream when my body met a solid wall of chest and abs as opposed to the siding.

A large hand clamped over my mouth, muffling the sound. His other gripped my wrist, angling the firearm away from both of us.

*“**Hunt**, it’s me.”*

My shoulders sagged, the muscles in my back loosening. He held me firmly, not letting go, but giving me enough space to relax. I was safe.

“Let go of the gun, cupcake,” Ijah whispered. “I’ve got you. I don’t want you to hurt yourself, okay?”

Of course he’d followed me. I released the breath I’d been holding, more thankful he’d shown up here than he probably knew, despite the fact that I was now in major fucking trouble.

Hopefully he’d spank me for it. I smirked to myself.

I uncurled my fingers from the warm metal and he gently slid it from my hand, easing it away. Tentatively, he uncovered my mouth and released me.

I pivoted to face him, my stomach lurching at the sight of his gorgeous face. His typically vibrant eyes were dull with... pain? *Regret?* Struggling to keep his emotions in check, a stream of errant tears ran down his cheeks, dripping from his perfect jawline.

Comprehension overwhelmed my senses.

No.

I don’t know if I was more pissed or in awe of him. In awe of his ability to lie so sweetly for so long.

Or maybe I was just broken. More by this than any of the other things I’d been through.

I wasn’t sure how he’d kept his voice even before, but he made no attempt to do so now. “I’m so sorry, cupcake.”

Everything moved in slow motion. He lifted the gun to my chest. I wanted to scream, to run, to move, to do *anything* — but I stood, frozen.

My will to live dissipated with this betrayal. It was too much. Without him, there was nothing left for me.

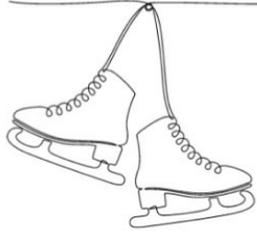
In the brief silence that stretched between us, I experienced an inner death worse than the one in front of me.

A quiet sob wracked my body as I found it within myself to speak the only truth I had left. “Ijah. I love yo—”

He pulled the trigger.

CHAPTER TWO

Hunt



TWO MONTHS LATER...

The low early morning light filled the room. Dimmed by tinted windows, the soft glow plucked at my senses.

I pried my eyes open.

It took more effort than usual.

I scrubbed the backs of my hands over them in an attempt to rub the sleep away. Roving my tongue around the inside of my mouth, I attempted to summon enough saliva to swallow but produced nothing. I coughed roughly and winced, feeling a dull ache in the back of my throat.

Every muscle in my body screamed in protest as I tried to push myself up onto my elbows.

With unfocused eyes, I took in the murky view of the room I found myself in.

White walls. Stark, unwelcoming furniture. Fluorescent lighting I suspected would be downright blinding were any of the lights actually on.

I looked down at myself, at the stiff, unfamiliar gown draped over my body. The white sheets tucked loosely around me were cold and foreign against my skin. Plastic tubing snaked from the IV in my pale, puffy arm to a bag filled with some sort of yellow fluid.

A chill wracked my weak body, causing a sharp stab of pain in my chest.

I was in the hospital.

What the fuck?

Something stirred in the corner of my vision. "Bee? You're awake."

The deep voice echoed in my ears. Only one person called me by that name. *Alec Dans*.

Once, Mattia called me by my first and middle name—Hunter Beatrix—in front of a room full of his men. He'd said it with that demeaning tone of his he'd always used when speaking to me or about me. Alec—being the absolute cinnamon roll he was—had decided to spin it into something cutesy and had called me Hunny Bee ever since. I suspected he'd wanted to make me feel better about myself. It worked. The fact that he actually got away with it was a feat in and of itself, but his continued use of the nickname had softened me toward him over the years. A big, scary hitman... but to me, he

was just silly, adorable Alec. He was an enigma I'd given up trying to figure out years ago. I just *liked* him... so much that it was easy to look past his bloodstained hands.

The corner of my mouth twitched, tilting into a brief smile. I pressed my lips tightly together, willing the muscles there to relax. Now was not the time for *smiling*, but he seemed to always have that effect on me regardless of the circumstances... and pretty much everyone else.

Alec had worked for Mattia for longer than I'd been married to him, and while I'd always been disgusted with most of the men who held such positions, a handful of them had somehow managed to charm their way into my good graces, and he was most definitely one of them.

Ijah's face flashed in my mind, his perfect features twisted in agony just as they had been the last time I'd seen him. I felt like someone had punched a hole straight through my chest. My gut lurched violently as I remembered the awful moment that brought me here.

How could he?

A feverish heat rose to the surface of my skin.

Trembling, I rolled onto my side and dry heaved over the edge of the bed. There was nothing in my stomach to be emptied, my body attempting to expel the broken promises clinging thickly to the back of my throat.

Alec slowly rose from behind me, his large, warm hands massaging my tense back in slow circles. His touch was gentle and soothing; the gesture eased my mind a fraction in regard to his presence. It was wise for me to question everything at this point, regardless of the fact that I had once enjoyed being around him for the small amounts of time I was allowed to be.

Could I trust him?

I had no one else now, anyway.

I thought I could trust Ijah, and I had been so very wrong about that.

My breaths came in quick, forced gasps. "How. How could h—"

I sobbed as he pulled my body into his. "Deep breaths, Hunny Bee. You're going to hyperventilate." He stroked up and down the outside of my arm. "It's never as bad as it seems."

"I don't know how you can say that. Not now. Not about this," I sucked in a long, stuttered breath, expanding my lungs and rib cage to full capacity and flooding my fuzzed brain with fresh oxygen.

"You're going to be okay. You've already been so strong through so much," he said. "You'll get through this. I'm here, and I'm not going

anywhere. We'll do it all together, okay?" He placed a chaste kiss on the top of my head as he spoke, and I couldn't help but find a small amount of comfort in his words. His touch grounded me in a way that caught me completely off guard.

Once I finally gathered myself I asked, "How long have I been here?"

"Just a little while. You're doing so much better than we could have ever hoped for. The worst part is behind you. But now that you're awake, your doctor has a lot to discuss with you. Are you up for talking with her?"

I nodded feebly.

He gave me a sweet smile. "I'll go talk to Nelia... your nurse. She told me to grab her if you woke up again."

Again? I didn't remember waking at all before now.

My mind was addled, but I guess that was to be expected.

"Alec?" He paused in the doorway and turned back to me. The soft, relieved look on his face reminded me of all the reasons I'd always enjoyed his distant presence in my life over the last few years. He was the kind of person who was so comfortable with himself that he made everyone around him feel comfortable, too.

I almost forgot what I wanted to ask him. I scrunched my nose, smiling sheepishly. "Am I allowed to eat, you think?"

He chuckled, low and deep, the sound causing my insides to twitch. My body had only ever responded to one other person in this way. A sick, anxious feeling scratched at my throat at that thought, but I shoved it down.

"Tell me what you want and it's yours, cutie."

I cringed, running my stiff fingers through my seriously tangled hair. I was definitely *not* cute at this moment and probably hadn't been for a while.

Oh my *god*, how rough had he seen me while I was out?

Thinking for a minute before deciding, I replied. "Fuck, I would kill for a fat stack of pancakes slathered in chocolate hazelnut spread with a pound and a half of strawberries." Of course, the first food that came to mind was one from one of my favorite books, *Violence in the Void*. I was freaking obsessed. He looked at me incredulously. "*But...* not sure how my stomach would feel about that, so maybe just some fresh sourdough from the bakery and a hot ginger tea the size of my ass from Hot Wok?"

Ugh. My mouth was no longer dry because now I was drooling at the thought of egg rolls, lo mein, and sweet and sour chicken from my favorite Chinese restaurant. *Simmer down, stomach. One baby step at a time.*

“I think I can handle that,” he winked and disappeared into the hallway.

Alone with my thoughts for the first time in god knew how long, my mind wandered to Ijah again. A lump formed in my throat.

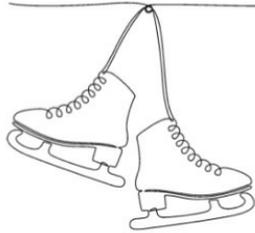
I quickly swept away the tears that had formed in my eyes before the first one even had a chance to spill onto my cheeks. He wasn't worth a single one of them. So many emotions had filtered through me over the last few minutes, but realizing I was still alive after all I'd been through filled me with nothing but gratitude—I wasn't going to let *anything* sour that feeling.

Against my will, my mind reeled with anxieties about Alec and every other fucked up part of my miserable life. I guessed if he'd also wanted me dead, I would be by now. He'd likely had plenty of opportunities to do what he wished with me in my most vulnerable state, and he seemed to be genuinely glad I was awake now.

I wasn't entirely sure why, but it seemed easier to just trust him. So I did. Besides, what other option did I fucking have?

CHAPTER THREE

Hunt



Days passed.

I slept deeper than usual. Maybe because my subconscious knew that at least while in the hospital, I was mostly safe from any outside threats.

Hospitals had security. Surely neither my dad nor Ijah could barge in at any given moment.

Or maybe it had something to do with Alec's presence, but I wasn't ready or willing to admit that to myself just yet.

Unfortunately, neither Alec nor the hospital security could protect me from constantly waking up disoriented, only to drift off again—straight into a fucking nightmare.

I always returned to that night; just after the shot rang out and my body thudded heavily against the ground, my head smacking against the concrete.

The scarlet stain grew across my breast, spreading from my shoulder, across my sternum. Ijah stared down at me with empty eyes. He crouched beside me, running his fingers through the thick liquid as if I were a plaything and not the love of his life bleeding out at his feet. He was empty of every good thing I'd ever seen in him. He rose, laughing sardonically as he stood over me. The blood dripped from his fingers onto the ground; wet, thick splashes hitting the concrete.

My eyes filled with tears, running over my cheeks in a steady stream.

I love you. I love you. I love you.

I jerked awake, shooting up in the bed. It always felt so real, because at one time it had been.

Even in my nightmares, the pain of knowing this man had been all I ever wanted overshadowed everything else.

Alec's steady voice cut through the dark.

"It's okay, Bee," he said, flicking on the dim light. His hands were strong and steady on my body as he pulled me into his solid frame.

This was a nightly thing, but he never seemed to tire of reassuring me that we were in the here and now, despite my embarrassment surrounding the dreams' effect on me.

"Shhh," he comforted, stroking my hair. "Go to your happy place, Hunny Bee. I've got you."

I sucked in a steadying breath, thinking immediately of the smell of *his* sheets. The cedar candle burning in the corner of the room. *His* hands on my body.

My chest burned, unsettled. I felt the all-consuming urge to sob into Alec's chest, but no tears came.

I was so utterly alone without him. Without Ijah.

He'd been my undoing, and still... he was the happiest place I'd ever known. Nothing could replace what we had before that night, or make me stop missing the person who I thought was *it* for me. It almost didn't matter that none of it had been real, because nothing else in my life had ever made me feel the way Ijah did.

I wondered if Alec had any idea how pathetic I actually was.

He pulled back from me, gripping my shoulders in his hands and studying my face as if trying to read my mind and decipher my inner thoughts. I wished that someone could pick them apart for me, because I sure as fuck couldn't wrap my mind around being so fucked in the head that I was still pining after a man who'd used me and lied to me, then shot me in cold blood.

Everything felt wrong now and I wanted to freak the fuck out, to run so far a-fucking-way. But I couldn't do that. I'd tried, even before all of this. That was one of the reasons why I'd wanted my dad dead so badly. There was nowhere I could go that he wouldn't find me. He'd shown me that time and time again.

"Happy place not cutting it this time?" He asked, gently massaging my shoulders now.

"I'm not sure I have a happy place anymore," I admitted.

He stayed silent for a moment. "Then I guess we'll just have to make here and now your happy place," he decided, his voice gruff from sleep. It was so fucking sexy that I almost wanted to ask him to use his mouth and hands to remove every memory of Ijah from my body, but that was ridiculous.

Desperate.

I was desperate, though.

“Why are you here?” I asked the question I’d been rolling around in my mind for days now.

“Because I want to be,” he said, and as if that settled it, he stood and crossed the room to rifle through his overnight bag. He found what he was looking for and climbed back in bed next to me, placing a permanent marker in my hand.

I looked at him confusedly.

“When I was a kid, I had terrible anxiety. My aunt used to have me do this grounding technique. I’m going to teach you, then we’ll go back to sleep. Deal?”

“Sure,” I said, uncapping the marker, unconvinced that anything could settle me, but especially not an art project.

“I don’t have any paper, so…” He trailed off, pulling his shorts up until the hem reached the crease of his thigh. At a glance, this was one of the only stretches of skin he had not covered in tattoos. I had to force myself not to drool over his quads. I knew he was trying to distract me from my spiraling thoughts.

Consider me distracted.

“I want you to pick three things in the room you can see and draw them here,” he tapped his bare thigh.

“You want me to draw *on you*?”

He gave me a stern look. I rolled my eyes toward the ceiling, relenting.

I looked around the room. The first thing I spotted was the empty paper cup from the tea he’d brought me earlier in the day, still perched on my bedside table. With a trembling hand, I gave it my best effort, managing to sketch an exaggeratedly thin outline of a disposable coffee cup and plastic lid, complete with a terrible rendering of my favorite Chinese restaurant's logo on the front.

I lifted my eyes to his. “Go on,” he encouraged.

Next to the cup was a small vase of pink dahlias. They had always been my favorite. Carefully, I brought the marker back to his skin, outlining the delicate petals. I was no artist, but it looked pretty cute. I admired my work with a satisfied smile.

“Next?”

I considered how silly this was, that he was using child psychology on me

to work through post-traumatic stress disorder brought on by being *shot* by the love of my life.

But it was actually helping.

So I looked for the next object.

A wry smile tugged at the corners of my mouth, and when I lifted the marker from his leg for the last time, a beautiful rendering of my right foot was left behind.

“Did you just draw a foot on my leg?”

“My foot,” I said, wiggling my toes at him. “Ugh, I need a pedicure,” I added, looking down at my neglected toes.

“Noted,” he said, tugging his shorts back down over the drawings. “Also, you’re ridiculous. Now, tell me three things you can hear.”

We both went quiet for a moment before I answered. “The movement in the hall, the heat blowing through the vents, and your breathing.” The hospital was always so quiet at night aside from when my nurses would come in to check on me.

“This is the last thing. Move three parts of your body.”

I wiggled my toes again—prompting him to roll his eyes playfully—then my fingers. For the grand finale, I looked up at him and exaggeratedly batted my eyelashes.

“Cutie,” he said, tapping my nose. Butterflies erupted in my stomach.

I shied away from him, lowering myself back down onto the bed. He pulled my blanket up around my shoulders and made to move back to the chair he’d been sleeping in next to me.

“Alec?”

“Yes, Hunny?” he paused.

“Thank you.”

“Anytime,” he smiled.

Then, with every ounce of courage I could muster, I said, “I’d feel better if you stayed with me.”

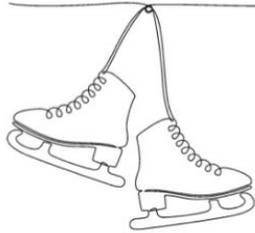
At first, I thought he’d refuse. But he didn’t.

Without a word, he curled his body around mine and rested his head on the edge of my pillow. I relaxed into him, relishing every point of contact between our bodies.

I drifted to sleep with the warmth of him seeping into my bones. The nightmares didn’t return.

CHAPTER FOUR

Hunt



My nurse Nelia was a literal freaking saint.

There were days when Alec had to leave for *work things*, and I knew *work things* meant *unsafe things*. I tried not to think too hard about all the possibilities.

I'd begun to enjoy having him around, and each time he left, a ball of anxiety wound itself tight in my chest.

In all the years I'd been married, I never felt anything but overwhelming *relief* when Mattia left me alone to do the things he did. Fuck, most of the time I hoped he *would* be injured or worse while out collecting the heads of people who owed him money. Then I'd never have to see him again.

I'd always known that Alec did all of those things too—probably worse because my late husband used his men to avoid getting his own hands too dirty by torturing anyone before he popped a bullet in them—but he'd become something more to me now. It was hard for me to align the soft, sweet, caring Alec I'd grown closer to over the last few weeks with the man I knew he was once he stepped outside the hospital doors.

I found myself wondering more often than not what it was he was actually up to now that he was no longer working for my dearly departed husband, but I refused to ask questions. I guess deep down I felt like I was better off not knowing, but in all of those instances, I also found myself spiraling.

The door to my room opened and Nelia entered, pushing her computer cart. She quietly rolled it over to my bedside, a small cup of pills balanced on the corner. I knew what this meant: it was physical therapy day. I refused most pain meds, but she and Alec had both convinced me it would be best to

pretreat on days my body would be more taxed than others.

My stomach dipped—not in the fun way—when I thought about doing this today without Alec.

I'd grown to depend on him, probably a little too much, but physical therapy was fucking *hard*.

Reading the look on my face, Nelia asked, “Would you like some company?”

I gave her a tight smile. “I’m sure you’re busy enough with your other patients.”

She handed me the pills and a small cup of water. “Never too busy for my *favorite* patient.”

I downed them, wishing they could dull mental and emotional pain as well as physical.



I SAT DOWN IN THE REHAB ROOM AND WATCHED AS THE THERAPIST demonstrated exercises with her own arms before guiding me through them. I knew them by heart at this point, but I humored her nonetheless. My shoulder muscles burned as I moved, but gradually the tightness lessened and I could see slight progress as my movements became more fluid. Still, it wasn't easy, and I was thankful for Nelia's presence throughout the process. Just knowing that she was nearby watching helped me push through.

Going through the motions was tedious and exhausting, but I kept at it as best I could and I was super relieved when the session came to an end.

Nelia walked slowly beside me as we made our way back to the room. “I’m proud of you,” she said, causing me to snort incredulously.

“For what?” I asked.

“For showing up every day and doing hard things,” she smiled.

“As if I have a choice.”

She wrapped her arm around my shoulder and pulled me in close. I fought the urge to bear hug her and cry it out. Physical contact always made all the emotions I held at bay bubble up and spill over almost instantaneously.

“I’ve seen plenty of patients simply refuse to participate in their own care,” she replied. “Patients who have been through a lot less than you have,

who just let all the hard things in their life win.”

“Sometimes I feel like doing that,” I admitted. It was really, *really* tempting some days.

“But you don’t,” she said. “So I’m proud.”

I wasn’t sure what else to say, and she was more than happy to let her words sink in, so we walked the rest of the way back to the room in silence.

I hadn’t expected to find Alec waiting there. He was usually gone for much longer when he left.

A wide grin split his face when I entered the room, and he stood immediately, walking to meet me halfway as I walked toward my bed.

“How was therapy?” he asked.

“It was okay. I’m pretty done for the day now, though.”

He hummed, looping my arm through his and covering my hand with his own. “I guess you’re too tired for this then,” he said, picking up a styrofoam container from my bedside table.

He untwined our arms and lifted the white lid, releasing a waft of sweet and savory-scented steam. The pieces of chicken drenched in orange sauce sat next to a mound of steaming noodles and two egg rolls. I couldn’t fight my smile when I saw that it was my favorite thing to eat lately.

“Fuck, I love y—” *yikes*. I caught myself. *You cannot fall in love with everyone who gives you an average amount of their time and attention, Hunt.* It would be so easy to do, though. Especially Alec. And was this average? I doubted it. “—your taste in Chinese dishes.” *Smooth*.

He smirked. *Bastard*. “I grabbed sushi, too,” he said, pointing to the other container still resting on the tabletop.

I settled myself back into bed and Nelia covered my legs with the white sheet and blanket. “You rest, sweet girl. And enjoy your meal.” She squeezed Alec’s forearm as she passed him on the way out the door. The gesture made them seem so familiar with each other, but then again, he *had* been spending a lot of time here.

Alec handed me a set of chopsticks and I took them excitedly, giving him a big smile.

He plopped down on the end of the bed and uncovered my feet, pulling them into his lap and taking my socks off. I jerked away from his touch, self conscious because those were my *feet*, but he just grabbed my ankle and shoved it back down onto his lap. He stifled a small hiss at the contact, and I eyed him suspiciously. *Not asking*. Who knew what he’d been up to today?

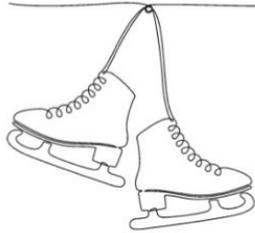
Wordlessly, he pulled a bottle of bright red nail polish from his pocket. He grasped my foot gently, uncurled my toes and began brushing it onto each nail. He was meticulous in a way that told me he'd probably never done this before and I didn't even try to bite back my grin at how cute he was.

This was why I missed him so much during the moments he needed to be away. These simple gestures of his meant everything to me and I was starting to wonder why I was always surprised that he inexplicably continued to be there for me.

He was my new constant—my person, even—and that scared the shit out of me because nothing good ever lasted for me.

CHAPTER FIVE

Hunt



The bullet having somehow missed any vital organs, I'd undergone minor reconstructive surgery to stabilize my collarbone and shoulder while I was out. After those six weeks of inpatient rehab to help reduce pain and inflammation and gain my full range of motion back, I was finally released to go home.

Home.

Not a place I had to return to these days.

But Alec had spent every waking moment with me over the last six weeks, so when he asked me to stay with him until I was ready to be on my own again, there was never really a question in my mind whether I should or not.

I was desperate for some independence—something I'd never actually been afforded in my life—but I wasn't stupid. I knew how to accept help when it was offered. And truth be told, I didn't *want* to be alone yet.

He was an unwavering presence during my hospital stay, helping me with the mundane everyday things and gently encouraging me through each day. His patience and understanding were unbelievable, and I couldn't understand why he was so devoted to someone he'd barely known before that point. I incessantly wondered what his motivation had been, but I quietly appreciated having someone in my corner regardless.

The only other person I could have turned to was probably somewhere on the other side of the world, and all of my friendships from the past had been thoroughly extinguished the day I was forced to marry Mattia.

Alec was literally the only person I had.

And I was falling for him.

The more time I spent with him, the harder it was to deny my growing feelings. But I wasn't ready for another relationship; no matter how much I tried to convince myself otherwise, my heart was still uber fragile from Ijah's betrayal. Every time even a single thought of him slipped into my mind, I felt like a bucket of ice water had been poured over my insides.

In the rare moments I chose to be honest with myself about how I felt, I still missed him.

And I hated myself for it.

My eyes focused on the vase of dahlias perched on my bedside table, everything else in the background blurring. The varying shades of pink were a welcome contrast to the rest of the room. I'd been fighting off waves of depression brought on by spending the large majority of time alternating between watching police procedural drama reruns with Alec and staring at the wall while overthinking.

Dahlias had always been my favorite flower, and I was certain Alec had no idea, which made the fact that he'd been the one to purchase them for me even sweeter. Once every four or five days I'd notice they'd start to very slightly wilt, and when I'd wake the next morning the vase would be filled with fresh ones in a new color.

I smiled to myself. Maybe everything would find a way to be alright.

"You ready to go, baby?" Nelia's kind voice snapped me out of my reverie.

I'd grown attached to my nurses during my time here, but Nelia most of all. She was so motherly and was always sprinkling little tidbits of sage wisdom into everyday conversation. She encouraged me through the worst parts of my recovery and I'll always be grateful that our paths crossed, even if the circumstances were less than ideal. I was going to miss her.

I sat up on the edge of the bed, dressed in sweats and a loose-fitting crewneck. Pulling my high-top sneakers on, I replied, "Yeah. I guess I am."

"Where's that guy of yours?" she asked.

I glared at her playfully. "We've been over this, girl. He's not *my guy*."

"Maybe I'll make him *my guy* then," she shrugged. "You have seen him, yes?"

I rolled my eyes, standing. "Yes. I have *seen him*. And I imagine he's holed up in the hospitality room shotgunning an espresso or something."

"Should I go get him for you?" She was always ready to help me out however she could. Leaving today would be more bittersweet than I'd

originally thought.

“Nah,” I said, walking toward the door. “I’ll grab him. I could use the exercise.” Understatement of the century. I couldn’t wait to get back to moving around and doing all the things like a normal human being.

I trudged down the hallway, taking my time. The antiseptic smell of this place would not be something I would miss. It already reminded me of when my mom was sick, and now I had this fresh new miserable experience of my own recovery to add to my trauma-infused, odor-linked memories. I cringed at the saline taste in my mouth. I never knew if I just imagined it or if I could actually taste it in the air around me, but anytime I set foot in a clinical setting, I always felt like there were traces of it on my tongue.

Just as I was about to round the corner to where I hoped I’d find Alec, I stopped dead in my tracks. His low voice rumbled from inside the hospitality room, “Yeah. We’re leaving today. Yes... She’s well, actually.” There was a pause. “It’s fine, Ijah. I have everything under control.”

Ijah.

In retrospect, I hadn’t felt eager to discuss how to deal with him *or* my dad during my recovery, but Alec *had to know* that I would have wanted to know if he’d remained on speaking terms with him. *Of course* he knew that.

I’d known they were close, best friends at one point. But I had stupidly assumed that Alec cut him off once he’d learned what happened between us, or else he wouldn’t have been here. I’d felt like he’d chosen my side—chosen me.

I wouldn’t have wanted him here at all if I’d known that wasn’t the case. It didn’t matter that I’d been safe all this time, blissfully in the dark in regard to his motives. I would have rather gone through every second of recovery alone than have someone by my side who, at the end of the day, I couldn’t trust.

And the fact that they were speaking *about me* made it so much worse.

Now Alec was just another fucking man to add to the list of assholes in my life who I thought had my best interest at heart, only to fuck me over as soon as I found it within myself to let my guard down even the smallest amount.

The thought made me fucking sick.

What had I been thinking, just blindly trusting him all this time? Trusting that he had cut ties with someone who had been as close as a brother to him?

I rushed down the hall as quickly and quietly as I could, heading back

toward my room. Nelia was still waiting by my bedside. The look on her face turned from joyful to worried upon seeing how frazzled I'd become. "Are you okay, sweetie?"

"No. I'm not," I said honestly. "I need your help. I need to leave—*now*. Before Alec comes back and finds me here."

"I thought you were leaving *with* him?"

"I was. But I'm not now. I *can't*," I said urgently. "I desperately need you to get me out of here without him knowing I've left yet. I'll walk back to my apartment, or call a car. Just... cover for me?"

She looked at me, concern etched on her face. She huffed out an exasperated, worried breath. "I'm not letting you walk. But I know how stubborn you are when you want to be." She slipped her hand into the front pocket of her scrubs and pulled out a set of keys. Sliding one off the ring, she handed it to me. "I'm in the staff parking lot—spot 107. Take this and go."

I hugged her quickly, thanking her profusely. "I'll bring it back super soon. Promise."

"I know you will. It's fine. *Go*," she said, shooing me away. "You best be thanking your stars that you've already signed all of your release paperwork."

I snorted and checked to be sure Alec wasn't in the hallway before slipping out the door. I didn't bother grabbing any of my things. I didn't have much there that I cared enough to keep anyway.

As I drove away from the hospital, I thanked every corner of the universe that I hadn't told him—or *anyone*—about the apartment I'd gotten just before I was injured. I had planned on telling Ijah, but hadn't yet because I knew he wouldn't have let me go out on my own while my dad was still a threat. *Little did I know*.

It wasn't as if staying there for any significant amount of time had ever really been an option anyway. I had no money, no job, and no way to provide for myself. I'd spent every last dime I had on the place, just hoping I'd find a way to make it—money I'd drained from Mattia's accounts before they were frozen. It was the first and only step I'd taken toward starting a new life without having to depend on anyone but myself. The chances of me ever actually having that work out were low, but it was something I had to do if only for my own peace of mind; I needed a place to go that no one knew about. Not my dad, *or Ijah*, or any fucking person. There was not much of anything in it aside from the bare necessities, but it was the best option I had for a place to hide until I figured out what to do next, and I was incredibly

thankful that I'd made that decision for myself despite the fact that it was just a hope and a dream that I'd ever find a way to stand on my own two feet.

CHAPTER SIX

Hunt



I pressed my back against the front door as I closed it behind me, the electronic lock whirring as the deadbolt snicked into place. Sliding to the floor, my ass hit the cold tile and I released a relieved breath.

Being there again brought back the small, fleeting feelings of elation I'd experienced at finally being able to do *something* for myself. Throughout the process, the thought remained in the back of my mind that it was all borrowed time. It couldn't last because my dad would always be somewhere lurking, waiting for the moment he could snatch me up and do with me whatever would most benefit him at the time.

I had known I needed to remove him from the picture if I really wanted a fresh start; that's why I'd been so desperate. I hadn't even fully formed a plan for my future before everything went to shit. I'd tried taking the easy way out and very obviously failed. And even with the possibility of things going badly always fresh in my mind, I wouldn't have ever imagined in a million fucking years that Ijah would have been the one to bring everything tumbling down around me.

I hugged my knees to my chest, wrapping my arms around them tightly and resting my head in the dip between them. I groaned, contemplating my next move.

"*Such a flighty little bird.*" A dark, vaguely familiar voice came from just in front of me, causing me to screech like a fucking... bird.

I scrambled to my feet, grabbing the nearest thing to wield as a weapon—which happened to be a shoe—and chucked it directly at the man's head.

I hadn't turned any lights on and the curtains were drawn. In the dim light of the room, I could barely make out the outline of his form when he caught

the heeled boot with catlike reflexes.

Bastard.

I grabbed another shoe, this time aiming for his crotch. He let out a loud grunt and I knew I'd hit my mark.

The kitchen was just to my left, so I lunged toward the countertop hoping to grab a knife from the block, but he recovered more quickly than I'd anticipated and launched himself in my path.

Wrapping his long fingers around my wrist, he jerked me into him... which was a mistake on his part, because he was bent at eye level with me due to the pain in his crotchal region, so I did what any respectable bad bitch would do in my situation; I headbutted him hard in the nose. There was a nauseating crunch and I grinned in satisfaction before bolting away from him and making a run for it toward the bathroom.

I'd hoped I could barricade myself inside, but I didn't make it far before he tackled me to the ground. I struggled against him but it was no use. He was too big.

But I was nothing if not resilient.

"Fuck. Off. Beefcake."

And a smart ass.

Despite my best efforts to hold my own, he had me subdued in a matter of seconds. I twisted furiously as I felt the unmistakable scratch of rope winding tightly around my wrists.

"Hold. Fucking. Still. I'm not going to hurt you."

Yeah, okay.

"Sure," I grunted out. "Because men generally tie women up just to have fun with them."

He snorted and I realized a moment too late what I'd just said.

"Get absolutely fucked, you unfrosted pop tart," I grunted, rolling my body in a way that twisted my arms to an uncomfortable angle.

He flipped me over in an instant and lifted me more easily than should have been possible, slinging me over his shoulder like a rag doll. The entire time he walked toward the kitchen table I jerked around like a maniac because fuck going down without a fight.

He yanked the first available chair from the table and shoved me down into it, eliciting an *umph* from between my lips. I immediately tried to stand, but he shoved me back down and looped a longer length of thicker rope around my middle, tying me tightly to it. My first instinct was to rock the

chair over, but I thought better of it. What good would it do?

I'd definitely already overdone it and I knew my still-healing body would hate me for it later.

"Don't. Move," he breathed out, winded from the struggle.

Good. *Fucker.*

The light snicked on and when he came back into view, I choked on the breath I sucked in. "Law! You motherfucker. *What the actual hell?*"

I hadn't been around him enough to fully recognize his voice—not to mention the fact that he'd never been known to talk much—but of fucking course it was him.

Evander Lawson. Alec's other half.

I relaxed a fraction that it wasn't one of my dad's goons, but immediately tensed again realizing that given the current state of things, this probably wasn't much better.

He just smirked. "I'm not about to give you the opportunity to run again."

"What the fuck do you even want?" I asked, shifting in my restraints.

"Well. Five seconds to explain why you shouldn't have run from Alec would be nice." He swiped at the blood trickling from his nose. "And also for you to calm the fuck down."

"How did you even know about this place?"

He gave me a look that said, *Really?*

I sucked in a steadying breath and closed my eyes, trying to gather my thoughts just as the lock beeped and the front door flung open again.

Alec strode across the expanse of the apartment, stopping just short of me. He towered over me, his toes barely an inch from my own. I wanted to kick him in his stupid shins.

So I did.

He hissed, stepping just outside my reach. "Why the fuck would you run off like that, Hunny Bee?" He sounded angry... and hurt? "I thought you trusted me."

I scoffed, glaring at him. "Yeah. I did. Until I heard you on the phone with the dipshit who put me in the hospital in the first place. What the fuck is your end goal here?"

He groaned, scrubbing a hand over his face in frustration. "My end goal is to keep you *safe*," he said like I was some kind of moron for thinking otherwise. "Ever heard the phrase, 'keep your friends close, but your enemies closer'?"

I looked to the side, refusing to meet his intense gaze. That was too easy of an answer.

“Do you really think I would’ve stood by you all this time just to hand you back to him at the end of it, Hunt?” He placed two fingers at the side edge of my chin and gently forced my face toward his. I jerked away, still refusing to look at him. He grabbed my face with his massive hand, cupping my chin in his palm, his actions demanding I not look away. “I don’t know about you, but the last six weeks have meant something to me,” he said seriously, his words filled with a level of emotion I’d not yet seen from him. “Something I don’t take lightly and am not willing to put in jeopardy.”

“Since you don’t know how to behave,” Law interjected. “I’m not untying you.”

Alec relaxed his grip on my face and I turned toward the sound of Law’s voice, glowering at him. *Jerk.*

“But you can ask whatever questions you have and once you’re satisfied with the answers, we need to get the fuck out of here,” he continued.

I turned back toward Alec. “Do you still work for Ijah?”

“Yes, bu—”

“But nothing. I know how this works. He says jump, you jump. He says to pull the trigger, you pull the trigger.” And I wasn’t about to be on the receiving end of *that* again.

Law clamped a hand over my mouth. “Can you please just *listen*? Goddamn.” He was so fucking stern. “Or do I need to gag you, too?”

I grunted my defiance, garnering massive stink eye from the pair of them. Law kept his hand in place.

“Ijah has gone a bit...” he searched for the right words. “...off the deep end, if you haven’t noticed. He doesn’t want us to kill you because in his warped mind, if you survived his gunshot wound, you deserve this second chance at life. And we are sticking close because if we know what he’s thinking and planning, we can better protect you from him should he change his mind for whatever reason.” I had no idea I’d been in love with someone so fucked up, and if I didn’t already feel like I hadn’t known him at all, it sure felt that way now. My stomach churned.

I twisted my face away from Law’s grip and Alec leveled me with his intimidating glare, warning me not to speak. “*Which* brings me to my next point. Your fucking *dad* is eager to get his hands on you again, so you’re backed into a corner here until we can take care of things on that front. You

really need to admit to yourself that you need us. And being that we are more than willing to help, just suck it up and trust us as much as you can. If we wanted you dead, *or whatever else*, you would be by now.”

That was pretty much what I’d been thinking all along, but knowing for sure that my dad was already back on his bullshit so soon was really the push I needed. He was right. What other choice did I have? If they could find me here so quickly, so could he. At least staying with them would offer me a small amount of protection. And I maybe I could use them to get close enough to Ijah to return the fucking favor I owed him.

“*Fine*. I’ll go with you.” Where the fuck else would I go? Fucking stalkers. “*But...* only if you pinky promise swear swear promise that you’ll help me kill them both when the opportunity presents itself.”

Law snorted.

“*Yes, Hunny,*” Alec cooed, beginning to untie the ropes binding me to the chair. “*We pinky promise swear swear promise.*”

I stood, rotating my wrists and rubbing my hands over the indented spots. I pointed at Law. “You’re an asshole.”

His eyes roved over me, heating my skin in a way the act shouldn’t, being that he literally just beat the shit out of me and tied me to a chair. “And you’re a brat.”

We left together, and I dragged my feet all the way to the parking lot like a petulant child. I hated feeling like this was my only option because, above all else, I longed for a bit of independence. Law opened the door of Alec’s SUV and I begrudgingly climbed into the back seat. I hadn’t even fastened my seatbelt when the door closed and the locks clicked into place.

Each of the guys slid into their own seats, Alec eyeing me in the rearview mirror as he chimed, “Shall we?”

CHAPTER SEVEN

ljah



3.5 MONTHS PRIOR...

There was so much blood. Too much.

The sight of it wasn't something that normally bothered me at all, but the sight of it gushing from the gaping hole just above Hunt's chest completely unraveled me.

My hands shook uncontrollably as I held pressure to the wound, praying to every god I could think of that it wasn't too late.

It couldn't be.

We hadn't come this far only for me to lose her now. She deserved so much more in this life than the hand she'd been dealt, and I wanted to be the one to give it to her.

I'd had so many plans in store for us, and now this.

Fucking this.

I ran the back of my bloody hand under each of my eyes, violently brushing at the constant stream of tears running down my face as silent sobs wracked my body.

A large hand curled around my shoulder and I jerked before tilting my head to the side to find Alec there. He looked and sounded just as shaken as I was, his eyes filled with unshed tears. "An ambulance is on the way. The house is totally empty."

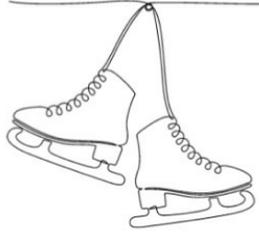
Of course, it fucking was.

Ellis was a fucking piece of shit.

And I would do whatever it took to ensure that he was also a dead man.

CHAPTER EIGHT

Hunt



PRESENT DAY...

When Alec had driven us away from the apartment, I knew he'd be taking me to his home. And I knew that his home was one that he'd once shared with Ijah, but I wasn't prepared for the onslaught of emotions I felt when the familiar estate came into view. My heart dropped into my fucking stomach.

"Hey," Alec said, gently placing his tattooed hand on my forearm. "It's going to be okay. He's not here and he's not going to be here. You've already run once, Hunny, and I need you to promise me you won't again. You *have* to stay with us, okay? It's the only way for us to keep you safe."

Panic swelled in my throat. "I don't think I can... I c-can't," I stuttered out. "It's too much. This is all too much." I shoved his hand off of me and reached for the door handle.

He put the SUV in park and grabbed my wrist, jerking me back toward him. I flinched, memories from the very recent past assaulting my unstable subconscious at the rough way he handled me. It was so at odds with every other interaction we'd had up until this point.

He stilled—perhaps realizing—and loosened his grip. "I'm sorry, Bee. I just *can't* let you do this again." His thumb stroked along the underside of my wrist. "I know this is probably so fucking hard for you, but you've done harder things."

I faced him, still filled with panic-induced tension. "I'm tired of having to do hard things." I was pathetic.

"Sometimes life simply doesn't give us a choice in the matter. This is one of those times." My jaw clenched at his words, and I turned to the door again. "*Hunter*," his use of my full name caught me off guard.

I pulled myself together, reminding myself of all the things the three of us had just discussed.

Taking everything into consideration eased my initial panic a fraction.

Ijah was not here and Alec and Law had both promised me that he wouldn't be. This was all okay. I would be safe here.

Be rational, Hunt.

As if anything about this was *rational*.

He seemed to arrive at the conclusion that I wouldn't actually make a run for it... *again*. He let go of my hand and climbed out of the vehicle, coming around to the other side to open my door for me.

Law was already out and walking toward the front door.

Alec held out a hand for me to take. My eyes trailed over his intimidating form, with every inch of exposed skin covered in impressive art.

He was overwhelming.

His plain black t-shirt was stretched to its limits, highlighting every contour of his chest and biceps. A single dark curl hung over his forehead as he gazed down at me expectantly.

Jesus literal fuck.

My lizard brain still screamed at me that this was a bad idea, but my inner slut screamed back in defiance *I'll do whatever the fuck you want me to do!*

When I placed my hand in his and allowed him to help me to my feet, he encouraged, "That's a good girl."

Inner slut - 1.

I'd only been here once, and even the one time was probably too many. It was too dangerous back then. But I'd been desperate to see Ijah and it felt worth it at the time—worth everything, honestly.

I stepped through the front door onto the large, marble landing, my eyes tracking up to the towering ceiling. The entrance hallway stretched ahead, leading to a spacious living area. There was a direct view of the kitchen and my gaze settled on Law. He was already shirtless and stood with his back to us as he chopped something on a cutting board.

My face and neck flushed thinking about what it would be like living under the same roof as these two. Did they often walk around shirtless? And could I really sleep just a few doors down from them, lonely as shit, without completely losing it and making some unsavory choices that I would likely regret later?

Doubtful.

Even hypothetically considering hopping into bed with either of them had me momentarily giddy at the image of how pissed Ijah would be if he ever found out. Maybe he didn't care about me and wouldn't be sad that I'd moved on, but he probably wouldn't like it very much that his besties were enjoying his leftovers.

I knew that was all I was to him, but thinking of myself in that way made me a little sad. I promised myself then and there not to do it again. I was

worth more than whatever he or anyone else thought about me.

I felt Alec at my back. He placed a hand on the small of it and nudged me toward the staircase. “Let’s get you settled into your room before dinner.”

The realization hit me that I had none of my own things here, and settling in sadly wouldn’t take much effort. Everything I owned was back at the cabin. I hadn’t even begun moving my personal things into the apartment. Maybe I could find time to make the trip there to get the bare minimum until I was ready to pack it all up and move it to my own place.

No way in hell would I ever consider living at the cabin again. I would be sticking a fucking for sale sign on it as soon as logistically possible. Everything happened so fast after TK shot Mattia. I’d been tempted to burn it to the ground, and I would have if I wasn’t in such a shitty financial situation. It was literally the only thing that passed to me after his death, and I don’t even really know how I managed to get *that*.

Alec kept his hand firmly in place as he guided me up the stairs, his free hand gesturing towards the door to the left once we reached the top. My eyes widened as I entered the room; it was more lavish than any five-star hotel I’d ever stayed in, and I’d stayed in plenty. Holed up like some prized jewel, I’d never truly enjoyed my time spent traveling.

The walls of the room were stark white, and the bed alone could have slept a small army. The plush area rug begged for me to lay down and sink into its soft fuzzies. A chaise lounge sat in the corner with a cushion so deep I couldn’t help but wonder what kind of activities it was actually designed for.

I peeked through the doorway leading into the attached bathroom, curious to see if it was just as jaw-dropping. Huge ass shower? *Check*. Massive soaking tub? *Check*.

“Alec, I know this is *not* the fucking guestroom,” I leveled.

He just shrugged. “It is now. Your things are in the closet,” he nodded toward the walk-in. “Food should be ready in an hour or so. Come down and eat.” He winked and left, closing the door behind him before I even had a chance to respond.

I hesitated in front of the closet door, more than curious about what I’d find. I stepped inside. It was filled to the brim with everything familiar to me neatly arranged on the shelves and racks: all of my dresses, my favorite jeans, my boots, and several of my favorite pieces of jewelry—all of which were supposed to still be at the cabin.

I stood in shock for a full minute before taking my favorite comfy sweats

and a loose-fitting crop top from one of the drawers of the armoire. I skipped grabbing a bra because my minor reconstructive surgery came with optional new tits due to the fact that the gunshot wound had damaged my pectoral muscle and a small amount of breast tissue. Everything was all wonky on the left side, and if they were going to fix it, might as well go all out. I'd spent weeks strapped in an uber-constrictive bra while I healed, and I was dying to free the tatas even if only for a brief amount of time. This was definitely the only good thing to come out of the numerous medical procedures I'd needed. I was no longer a member of the Itty Bitty Titty Committee, and I was freaking pumped to see how they looked in actual clothes.

Unsurprisingly, the bathroom was also stocked with all of my things. My body wash and shampoo sat perched on the corner shower shelves. My brush, hair dryer, and straightener were neatly laid out on the countertop. My razors, shaving cream, and lotion; literally everything I could have thought about needing. Even my toothbrush and toothpaste were there.

Fucking hot girl shower for the win.

CHAPTER NINE

Alec



Fuck, this was torture.

When Ijah asked me to step in and be there for his girl, I said yes with only minor hesitation.

Hesitation that came from the fact that I'd been crushing hard on my little Hunny Bee for *way* longer than I cared to admit.

I'd had my eye on her from a distance for so long, fucking captivated by her delicate features and hot-as-sin body—not to mention the little smart-ass remarks she'd always make to men she had no business making them to. I wanted nothing more than to be with her—to just be *around* her, but I knew that could never be a reality.

I would have taken that to my grave... bros before hoes and all that.

I was just happy to help Ijah along with his plans to remove anyone from the picture who happened to stand between *her* and *him*.

But things have shifted.

I said yes because Ijah is one of my best friends and I owe him a lot. He's like a brother to me and he's supported me through a lot of shit.

Not to mention the fact that Hunt simply *needed* someone and I would have rather eaten a five-by-seven rug than sat back and watched someone else help her through her recovery.

Would I have still said yes to him knowing that doing so would lead to my little crush turning into me falling head over heels for a woman who was one million percent off limits? *Yeah*, probably.

None of us were exactly the epitome of moral behavior, and Ijah was flat-out stupid if he thought that would change now.

When I was with her in the hospital, seeing her body all frail and broken

from her injury, my heart ached in a way I didn't think possible. During the slow healing process, I cared for her; doing everything I could to make her comfortable. Each time she looked at me with gratitude in her eyes, I felt myself falling harder. It was impossible to deny the effect she had on me.

I knew that any inkling I was there on his behalf she would run for the fucking hills—and *boy did I stick my fucking foot in my mouth today*—but we had our ways of finding her.

We would *always* find her.

She walked down the stairs and rounded the corner to the kitchen where Law and I were setting up dinner at the kitchen island. We both looked up from our preparations. I groaned internally at her low-slung sweatpants, the flat plane of her exposed stomach, and how amazing her tits looked in the crop top she was wearing. A deep scar peeked from under the neckline and curved around her collarbone.

She was so fucking strong. Brave. *Stubborn*.

I glanced at Law. The look on his face spoke volumes. “Put your tongue back in your fucking mouth,” I murmured out of the corner of mine. He snapped his jaw closed and grumbled something about getting the fries out of the oven.

She sauntered over and pulled a bar stool out next to where I stood filling our drinks, her hips swaying ever so slightly. I couldn't seem to find it in me to pull my eyes away from the curves of her body accentuated by her outfit choice.

Get it together, Alec. It's not like she's wearing a fucking see-through teddy.

I wouldn't have minded if she was, though.

Once I finished, I sidled into the seat next to hers. My hand moved to her upper back without a thought, and when she didn't shy away I felt a twinge in my gut. I didn't know if it was guilt or butterflies or both.

Fucking *butterflies*. What was wrong with me? I was not a fucking 16-year-old boy. Damn.

Law deftly carried two plates of steaming burgers and fries—balancing them in one hand —along with a tray of freshly cut onions, tomatoes, lettuce, and pickles. He set the plates down in front of us next to the ketchup and mustard and presented the topping plate with that unflinching glower of his ever-present on his face.

I smirked. “Thanks, Law.” He grunted in response, frowning, before

taking a seat across from us and I wanted to reach across the island and smooth out the wrinkles between his furrowed brows. *Surly bastard.*

I took a long swig of my beer and turned to Hunt, shocked to find tears welling in her eyes.

Her chin quivered as she inhaled sharply, seemingly trying to will the tears away. She held her breath and clamped her eyelids shut, gritting her teeth. It was kind of adorable.

“What is it, Hunny Bee?” I tilted her face toward mine with two fingers hooked under the bottom of her chin.

She immediately collapsed into my arms, trembling against me as she allowed a stifled sob to release. Having her body flush against mine was drugging.

Now was *thee* most inopportune moment to get a semi. I shifted in my seat.

I patted her awkwardly, locking eyes with Law over her shoulder. He looked like he was about to have a coronary. Neither of us was very apt when it came to dealing with emotions, but I’d had a lot more practice than he had.

“Tell us what’s wrong, baby.” I cringed at how easily the endearment slipped from between my lips.

“Nothing,” she sniffled. “It’s stupid.” She straightened, easily gathering herself back to normal, and began to put her burger together. She was an expert at shoving her feelings down deep, having had to do so for years. At least in front of people.

Yeah, fuck that. “Bee,” I said seriously. “You’re allowed to feel things. You’ve been through *a lot* of shit, very very recently. We’re here for you.”

She inhaled a deep breath and timidly glanced at Law before looking back at me. “It’s just...” She carded her hand through her long red locks. “I’ve never had anyone take care of me. Except... for Ijah. And here you are giving me a place to stay, you brought all of my things... you’re cooking me fucking dinner and acting like all of this is *so normal* when I know you could probably just hire someone else to do it but I guess it’s pretty obvious I wouldn’t feel safe with a stranger in the house right now.”

She was tearing up again.

“I like to cook,” Law stated plainly.

I glared at him.

“I guess the worst part is that all of this is so nice and I don’t know why you’re being so nice or why you think I deserve it and instead of just being

thankful, it makes me think of Ijah and it makes me fucking *miss* him and I shouldn't fucking miss him and I'm so fucking stupid," she spilled out without taking a single breath between any of her words. "I hate it. I hate myself."

I scrubbed my hands over my face because I really didn't even know what to say to that. My heart seemed to break alongside hers every single time she found herself feeling like this.

For her and for Ijah.

After a moment I settled on, "It's not easy losing someone you love, no matter how it is that you lose them."

"I feel like he left a gaping hole in my chest." Then she laughed a bit sardonically. "I guess he did."

With that, her mood rapidly shifted. She angrily shoved the toppings onto her burger and took a massive bite, chewing like she had a personal vendetta against the tomatoes.

This was going to be impossible.

She was entitled to whatever emotions filtered through her, but I wasn't entirely sure how to navigate them alongside her. I would sure as hell try my best, though.

We ate in silence for a while. Now was probably not the best time to bring this up, but I didn't have much of a choice in that matter. We were pressed for time. "About your dad," I started. "We've heard through the grapevine that he owes someone a lot of money that he doesn't have the means to pay back."

Her eyes darted to mine over the top of her burger, mid-bite.

"Roman Barone?" I prompted. She'd likely recognize the name because he was another well-known douche in Fate Trace, very similar to her dearly departed husband.

Her eyes widened as she dropped her food back onto her plate, chewing slowly. She understood exactly what that meant; *she* would be the payment her dad forked over if he could get his hands on her.

Law shrugged, playing it off as no big deal. "Neither of them will have the opportunity to follow through. Your dad has made himself scarce since... the night you were injured. But we *will* find him, and questioning someone who has had recent access to him is a great place to start."

"We have a plan," I assured her. I wanted nothing more than to just say fuck it and ride off into the sunset, but taking Hunt away from the only town

she's ever called home—the only place *familiar* to her—was not in the cards for the time being. I hated the idea of keeping her here, but we had no choice in the matter. She needed to be here if there was any chance of her truly healing. I was relieved every second that passed that she didn't ask us to take her away somewhere. I didn't know what excuse I would be able to come up with to justify her sticking around that would satisfy her if she decided she wanted to go.

I suspected she was keen on staying to put an end to all of the ghosts from her past haunting her for good. Smart girl.

She glared at me. “Well, out with it. Tell me the fucking plan, then.”

“Bee...” I started.

“No,” she cut me off. “I'm sick of sitting on the sidelines while everyone around me pulls all the strings that directly affect me and my life. Tell me.”

I groaned, relenting. “*Fine.*”

Internally, I was at war with myself at the thought of putting her in a position to be hurt again. And for all we were keeping from her.

We were all such fucking idiots to not realize what Mattia had been putting her through, trapped in that diamond-encrusted prison of a house for years. But, security footage doesn't lie... and we'd combed through every second of it.

We'd had to in order for our plan to go off without a hitch.

Dead men tell no tales, and neither does shit caught in 4K if it's been deleted.

“Roman seems to be totally in the dark about anything to do with your situation, or the fact that you're anywhere other than patiently waiting by your dad's side,” Law began.

She raised her eyebrows, genuinely shocked. “How could he not know what happened to me? Fate Trace isn't that big of a place. I was literally shot in the chest.”

I hesitated. I knew the answer to that question but it wasn't information I could share with her just yet. Lying to her was so much harder than I'd anticipated. She deserved the truth more than anyone, but it was the one thing I couldn't give her. Not yet.

“We don't actually know, but the positive in this scenario is that he has no idea we have a target on his back, so he's still hosting the massive charity Christmas party he hosts every year.” I wagged my eyebrows.

“Oh my god, are we going?!” Hunt screeched. She was way too excited

about this, but I guess any party seemed exciting when you've never really been allowed to go anywhere just for fun or truly enjoy any of the places you were allowed to be.

"We are," Law gestured between himself and me. "The plan is to grab him and bring him back here. He's the easiest target and the person most likely to spill where your dad is if it means saving his own ass. He may be a big deal, but his security detail is literal shit."

"Oh, no. I'm going. I have the perfect dress." She was all but bouncing in her seat.

"Bee. We're crashing the party to *kidnap* him. This is not for a fun time," I tried to level with her.

"Sounds pretty fucking fun to me," she responded, swallowing the remainder of her burger and guzzling down the rest of her drink. "When is it?" she asked, already out of her seat.

"Tomorrow night," I admitted. I wanted to bang my head against the countertop because I knew there was no way I could tell her no. Not to this, and probably not to anything.

"I'm going, *okay*?" she prodded.

"Yeah," I sighed. "Fine. Okay."

She squealed, placing her cute little hands on either of my shoulders and leaning around to place a quick kiss on my cheekbone. I scrunched my face and shrugged her off. The last thing I needed right now was her touching me, even innocently. I couldn't think straight.

She clapped, giddy, and darted up the stairs. Probably to try on everything in her closet.

Law chuckled gruffly. "You're whipped, bro."

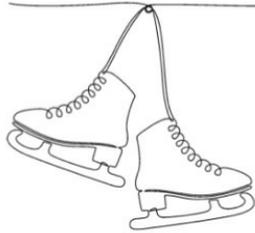
I glared at him. "Am I? You go tell her she can't go, then."

He held his hands up in submission before picking his burger up again and taking a large bite.

"I think we both are," I said under my breath, taking a bite of my own.

CHAPTER TEN

Hunt



I carefully slipped on the tight red dress I'd been *dying* to wear for so long. The plunging neckline showed just enough skin, and I was ecstatic with how it looked on me as I took in my reflection in the mirror. My new tits filled it out nicely, and I was thankful it fit in that area because when I'd purchased it I most definitely did not have much to fill it with. My scars were on full display, making me look like an absolute badass. *Suck it, Ijah*. My looks had been altered by what he'd done to me, but I wouldn't let the flaws he'd left me with change how I felt about myself.

I zipped up the back and shivered at the thought of what the frigid evening air would feel like on my exposed skin, but I didn't care. Looking like *this* made it totally worth it. Sometimes you just have to freeze a little, beauty is pain and all that.

I ran my fingers through the wavy strands of the black wig Alec had given me, fiddling with it until it looked like it might pass as my actual hair. I inspected it closely, feeling the urge to fully commit to the look long term by taking the plunge and dying it this color for real. Doing so wouldn't be totally out of character for me. When I was a teenager, every time I was stressed about something, I'd give myself bangs or dye my hair some random color just to have a little control over something in my life. Probably would have kept up that little habit of mine if it wasn't something Mattia had promptly nipped in the bud. I had to *look* the part even if I had no interest in playing the part.

Once I finished my hair and makeup, I made my way downstairs to find the guys waiting for me in the foyer. They stood at attention, their heads tilting slightly upward and their jaws slackening as they took in the way I'd

dolled myself up for the night. Meeting each of their eyes, I felt a rush of excitement. Who knew what the night had in store for us? But, also... who cared? Their awestruck expressions were all the confirmation I needed that I looked just as amazing as I felt.

When I reached the bottom step, I ran my hands down the front of my dress. It was an anxiety thing for me; straightening things that didn't actually need to be straightened. "Are we sure Roman won't recognize me?"

"There's a chance he might," Alec admitted. "But the chance is low. Your appearance has been altered in multiple ways since anyone last saw you," he said, looking pointedly at my breasts, then tugging at a strand of synthetic hair.

I'd always hated going out to these stupid fucking parties as Mattia's arm candy. If I didn't have such major cabin fever with a dash of FOMO, I would have been a lot more compliant about staying home tonight. They both still looked as hesitant as ever about me going with them.

Alec quickly darted into the side office, returning with a long black coat in hand. Law reached out and interlaced his fingers with mine, guiding me toward Alec. "You're going to freeze in just that," he said as Alec draped the soft cashmere over my shoulders. The coat was knee-length and fit loosely on my frame, the expensive fabric smooth and silky against my skin. It was warm and super comfy.

I adored Cashmere. I'd developed a taste for expensive shit early on in my marriage. *Looking the part* had its upsides, and I figured I might as well get *something* out of the old fuck. How well Alec seemed to know me felt a bit stalkery at times. First the flowers and now this.

"Perfect," he said, grinning and running his hands over the length of my arms and circling his fingers around my wrists. At least he was a nice, happy stalker who liked to give me stuff.

Law led the way to the car, while Alec stayed back to try and give me a better idea of how things would go. "I need you to stay close to me. You can try and treat this as any normal fancy fuck Christmas party, but please know that it is *not* safe. You can't just go off by yourself or anything like that."

I wouldn't have wanted to regardless, but I didn't say that. "Got it."

"You'll be there with me as my date, and for the first part of the night Law will be focused on Cassidy. He's Roman's bodyguard. A big fuck, can't miss him. Under *no* circumstance are you to go *anywhere* near him. He's more dangerous than you could ever possibly imagine and he'd love nothing

more than to corner a pretty little thing like you and take what he thinks he has a right to.”

I shuddered. I was no stranger to that. And Alec was very wrong about what I was capable of *imagining* when it came to men like the ones I knew would be in attendance at this party. I’d likely already experienced worse, but I wasn’t about to tell him that. Not like he could kill someone who was already dead.

“And at a party of Roman’s, he *does*. Not one person there would try to intervene,” Alec added. “The first thing we have to do is eliminate him from the equation. If I’m being one hundred percent honest, I’m not sure how we’ll be able to do that. Not that it will be hard to distract him from Roman, just that he’s... massive, and blowing his brains out in front of all the guests there is not really an option, is it?”

I swallowed roughly and nodded my understanding as we climbed into the backseat.

“If you think he’d be distracted by a woman, why not use me as a distraction?” I asked, already knowing the answer to that question.

“No,” they replied in unison.

I guess that was that. I wasn’t about to push them on it, though. They still had plenty of time to leave my ass at home, and I didn’t want to ruin my chances of getting to be there.

I wondered briefly what the chances of Ijah being there too were... if he’d see me there with another man—one of *his* men—and retaliate in some way. Maybe they were telling the truth and he no longer wanted me dead, but some twisted part of me hoped he *would* perhaps be jealous after all.

The drive there was shorter than I would have liked it to be for the sake of my nerves, but I knew the guys would do their best to keep me safe. It was me who’d not given them an option about whether or not I would be present tonight, so I couldn’t back out now that we were here.

I would make the most of it and hopefully end the night with one less man in my life to worry about. And if we were lucky, he could be coerced into telling us where my dad could be found and we could take care of *that* soon too.

My stomach churned as we rolled up the long and winding driveway to a massive, stately mansion that seemed to stretch for miles. Every window glowed with golden light, and I couldn’t shake the feeling of resentment towards all of these terrible people who had more fucking money than the

average person could even begin to fathom. They didn't deserve even half of what they had, mainly because of how they'd obtained it. It made me sick.

Law dropped us at the front door, foregoing valet parking. It dawned on me then; that he was pretending to be our driver.

An older man opened the door for us. Alec stepped out first, shaking his hand and leaning in to say something quietly to him before pulling away and taking my hand to help me out of the car. I slipped off my coat and left it in the back seat. We weren't far from the door and I didn't want to have to leave it behind if we needed to make a quick exit, which was likely.

As we walked toward the front entrance, I looped my arm through Alec's, resting my hand on his forearm, willing it to stop trembling. He covered it with his own and mumbled out of the corner of his mouth, "Leo is an old friend." He jerked a small nod toward the man he'd just spoken with.

I supposed that was how we'd been able to crash this friendly little get-together so easily.

My eyes widened in awe as we stepped into the entryway. Every square inch of the main room was covered with glittering decor. Garlands hung on the doorframes, and a snow-dusted Christmas tree stood in the far corner. I would have been downright giddy if not for the sinking feeling of dread in the pit of my stomach.

Alec carefully chose a small table tucked away in the corner of the room. It was just big enough for two people and would provide us with the privacy we needed while we were here—and a full view of the room. A waiter appeared as if on cue, carrying a tray of appetizers. I eyed a bowl filled with shrimp dip and immediately grabbed it off the tray. Alec followed my lead, taking a plate of crostini, and quickly thanked the waiter before spooning some of the dip onto my plate.

"Wow. Soupy," I noted, attempting to scrape some onto a crostini. "You'd think the rich asshole would at least have a food quality tester for a party like this."

Alec snorted bitterly, "I think I probably should've left it in the bowl."

"I'll make it work, I'm a hoe for some dip," I said, shoving a bite into my mouth.

He chuckled, scooping a heap from the bowl onto another piece of bread and holding it up for me to take a bite. I hesitated—it almost felt too intimate and I needed to keep my head on straight tonight—but ultimately relented and opened my mouth.

My eyes darted to the side, suddenly fully aware of all the potential eyes on me. I should have been afraid of the thought of Ijah being here, but right now I hoped like fuck he was... and that he was watching.

I could have gotten off on the combination of the crunchy bread and garlicky dip. It may have been watery, but it was good as fuck. As I bit down, the liquid seeped down my chin, dripping onto my neck and chest before I could catch it. With my free hand, I grabbed a napkin while continuing to chew, desperately trying to avoid anyone noticing.

So embarrassing.

Alec's phone buzzed on the table. He tapped the screen, a bit of a grave look taking over his face as he picked it up and typed out a quick response to the text he'd just received. His eyes flicked to mine. "It's Law. He sent out an SOS. Not sure what's happened, but I need to get to him quickly. Can you stay put for five minutes?"

"You're leaving me alone?" I didn't like the idea of that.

"I have eyes on you. I don't want to take you when I don't know what I'm walking into. It may not be safe," he replied. I assumed he meant the guy from out front, Leo. He was older and seemed kind of worn down from this line of work, but I guessed you couldn't always judge a book by its cover.

I nodded, but internally I was panicking.

He stood, and as he walked by me, he palmed the side of my face, tugging me into him and placing a quick kiss on my temple. It was an innocent gesture, and I had to remind myself that we needed to appear as if we were here *together* together. It meant nothing.

He was gone before he noticed my reaction, and I returned my attention to the food in front of me, trying to keep myself occupied and hoping like hell that he wouldn't be gone for very long.

And I hoped Law was okay.

Minutes dragged. I was sure it felt longer than it actually was because I was super freaking anxious, but I wished one of them would at least text me and let me know they were safe.

I nervously tapped my fingers on my phone, then paused when I felt someone's gaze land on me. I glanced up to see a stranger staring at me from across the room and quickly looked away. My heart sank, because even though I didn't recognize the man, I knew by the massive size of him compared to everyone else in the room that he had to be the guy Alec had warned me about.

I sent a quick text to both Alec and Law, letting them know I was leaving the table to use the bathroom. I didn't want them to worry too much, and I could lock myself in there and stay until they sent word that Alec was back in the mix of the party.

I genuinely had no idea where I was going, but I made my way toward what looked like a long hallway, hoping to find a bathroom there. I kept my head down, stupidly oblivious to my surroundings in my effort to remain unnoticed, and made it barely three steps into the dimly lit hall before bumping directly into the very person I was trying to avoid.

Fuck my life.

I smacked into a hard wall of muscle and quickly tried to play off my misstep as if it were nothing at all.

"Sorry. Excuse me," I forced out and attempted to shuffle around him and be on my merry way.

His gargantuan hand wrapped all the way around my bicep before he jerked me backward and forcefully shoved me against the wall. I squeaked in protest, but I knew the only people here who would even attempt to help me were nowhere near. Except maybe Leo... where the fuck was *he*?

"You look... familiar," he growled, dipping to run his nose along the column of my throat.

If he recognized me as my father's daughter, I was even more fucked than I'd originally thought. What a big fucking dumb oaf he was to touch a woman when he didn't know who she might belong to in this world. Had he seen me with Alec before he ran off?

Cassidy's breath reeked of liquor and expensive cigars, reminiscent of the way Mattia had always smelled, and I wanted to vomit. Even more so when he licked a long line across my collarbone. I jerked in his hold, but I knew there was no use.

I fought hard, attempting to knee him in the balls, but he seemed to know every move I would make before I made it.

Would screaming do any good at all?

Knowing my luck, it would probably just make things worse, and Alec had warned me that I'd be fair game here.

"Go ahead. *Scream*," he said, reading my thoughts, probably by the look of sheer terror on my face. He reached down, bunching my dress up around my hips. "As loud as you fucking can, bitch. It's my favorite part. And the best thing about it? Here, no one will give enough of a fuck to try and save

you. Shit, they'll probably want their own turns."

I bucked harder against him, twisting like a fucking maniac. I'd been in this situation so many times, but this was different. This wasn't Mattia and I wasn't that broken despondent girl anymore. Never again would I just relent and take it for the sake of my life. I'd rather die.

Suddenly, he stiffened, pulling back from me with a strange look of unease on his face.

"What the fuck?" he wheezed, straightening and stumbling backward.

I should have used this moment as an opportunity to run, but I stood frozen, my sick curiosity getting the better of me.

"What did you do?" He was panicky now, his face turning pale and blotchy.

"I... nothing. What's wrong?" What a dumb fucking question. Why couldn't I fucking *move*? My muscles were locked firmly in place and my feet seemed to be glued to the carpet. I was paralyzed.

Looking back, it was probably shock. But still idiotic on my part.

He opened his mouth to speak, but only a strangled gurgle came out. Beads of sweat dotted his forehead as he clutched at his throat. Panic danced in his eyes and for a brief moment I reveled in the control I had here. I could hear the wheeze in his breath beginning to worsen, and my heart skipped an excited beat as I recognized the signs of anaphylaxis. I didn't need any more of an explanation; I knew he was running out of time.

I waited a beat longer before taking any action. An allergic reaction this severe could result in death in a matter of minutes, and I knew if I waited just long enough for him to drop there'd be nothing anyone could do to save him.

His body thudded heavily to the ground, and I resisted the urge to kick the shit out of him. I quickly rifled through his suit jacket, finding exactly what I was looking for in one of the pockets. I slipped my hand inside the split of my dress and shoved it in the sideband of my panties, hoping like hell no one would notice the odd shape of it in all the chaos that was about to ensue.

I ran back into the main room. "Is there a doctor here?" I asked loudly enough for the people in the general area to hear. So much for remaining incognito, but this was my best chance at helping the guys. They needed a distraction and I was about to give them one. Several people turned to look at me. "There's a man. In the hallway. He needs help."

I didn't wait to see if anyone followed, I just turned and rushed back toward where I'd left him. A staccato of footsteps sounded behind me.

“Holy shit,” someone breathed and then yelled out, “It’s Cassidy! Fuck.”

Once his name passed through the man’s lips, the hall was overrun with men and I was forgotten in the mix as someone began compressions and someone else rifled through his pockets, cursing him for not having an EpiPen on hand.

With everyone distracted, I finally found it in me to pull myself away.

I turned away from the scene, grinning to myself, and searched for the bathroom again. I actually did need to go now before my frayed nerves made me upchuck shrimp onto the fancy carpet.

Maybe I could aim for Cassidy’s face since it was probably shellfish he was allergic to—to, you know, just doubly ensure he didn’t make it. Fucker.

I spied the bathroom a few doors down and moved briskly in that direction. Before I could take more than a few steps, a large hand clamped around my upper arm and yanked me into an adjacent room.

For. The. Love. I could not catch a fucking break.

I spun around, fully prepared to simply head butt whoever it was and give myself the chance to make a run for it this time.

“Law,” I breathed, relief washing over me. I threw myself into him, squeezing him tightly. He stood there awkwardly for a brief moment, and I’ll admit it probably *was* an awkward thing for me to do, but I’d never been more grateful to see anyone.

He gave me a quick squeeze back before nudging me away and holding me at arm’s length, looking me over to make sure I was okay.

Once he was satisfied I was in one piece, he sighed deeply and pulled me in for another hug.

I was momentarily shocked but then sunk into him, breathing in the scent of his citrusy, spicy cologne. It shouldn’t have relaxed me as much as it did, but I felt safe with him despite everything. Especially in this moment after what just happened.

“I don’t know what the fuck you just did, but your little distraction made grabbing Roman so much fucking easier,” his chest rumbled against the side of my face as he spoke.

He released me and I filled him in, his eyes lighting with rage as I told him what happened.

“I’m so fucking sorry for making Alec leave you like that. I was in a bit of a predicament outside. If he survives this, he’ll fucking wish he didn’t. Whatever hell his soul would’ve wound up in is nothing compared to what

I'll do to him for putting his hands on you if he lives."

I shouldn't have been turned on by that, but apparently, violence in my honor really did something for me.

"Oh, I don't think we have to worry about that," I said, pulling the EpiPen from my hip and waving it in the air in front of him.

A wicked smile tugged at the corners of his lips as he took it from me, wiped it down, and shoved it deep into the potted plant on the console table next to us. He pulled me in again for a side hug and placed a quick kiss on my temple. "Good girl," he murmured against my skin, sending a burst of heat through my body. He interlaced his fingers with my own and led me toward a side exit. "Alec will have Roman back at the house by now. Let's get you out of here before anyone realizes he's missing."

"How did he manage that on his own?" I knew he was capable of holding his own, but a person only stayed knocked out for so long, and it really hadn't been *that* long since he left me at the table.

Law mimicked injecting himself in the neck with something and winked. *Oh.*

He really needed to stop making every freaking thing so damn hot. It was inappropriate.

"The car?" I asked, wondering how we'd get home.

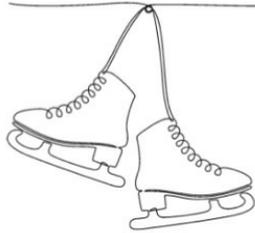
"Oh..." he hesitated, "Someone drove them. The car's still here."

"Leo?" I asked. That must have been where he was when everything went down.

"Uh. Yeah," he gave me a tight smile and tapped his finger to the tip of my nose. "Can't get anything past you, can we?"

CHAPTER ELEVEN

Hunt



The light bulb in the stairwell flickered, and as I descended the spiraling steps, muffled grunts and the sound of heavy breathing grew louder. I was all too familiar with the sounds coming from the dimly lit room below having lived in a crime lord's hell house for the last several years.

I cringed, knowing the scene I was about to walk into would not be a pleasant one. I didn't have to be there, but it gave me some sort of sick satisfaction to know the man who was willing to take a literal human being as payment for a debt owed—to take *me*—would meet his end at the hands of two guys I'd opted to blindly trust without much reason other than the fact that I'd been backed into a corner and I kind of just *felt* like I should.

This solidified that it had been a wise decision to do so. They were on my side in this, and I probably couldn't have handpicked anyone better if I'd been given the opportunity to do so. They were well versed in this lifestyle and all the bonus features that came with living it.

I just hoped they could get even a small amount of information from him first. I desperately wanted to know where my dad was so we could end this once and for all.

Alec stood towering over a man who probably would have rivaled him in size and strength were he not tied to a metal chair that was bolted to the concrete floor. I'll admit, he was devastatingly handsome. Unfortunately for him, looks don't really make up for much when you're an actual piece of shit.

Law placed his hand on the small of my back, anchoring me as we made our way toward them. His firm touch was all I needed to steady my nerves.

"Take a good look at her, Rome. Let this pretty face be one of the last things your sorry ass sees," Alec grazed the back of his hand along the length

of my jawline, the gesture giving me butterflies despite the fact that his knuckles were split and bloody from the beating he'd very obviously just finished doling out. "Since you so badly *wanted her*," he taunted.

"You can keep the scarred, ugly bitch," Roman mumbled, barely holding his head up before spitting a thick wad of blood at me. It splattered between the v of my dress, landing against my bare chest. Bile rose in my throat.

Without an ounce of hesitation, Alec reached behind his back and jerked a gun from the waistband of his slacks, aiming it directly between Roman's eyes and pulling the trigger.

The gunshot rang out in the open expanse of the room, shattering the brief silence.

I stood, shocked, and watched in slow motion as Law's head snapped back, his face looking toward the ceiling before he scrubbed his hands over his eyes and groaned loudly. "Well, he's sure as fuck not talking now."

I had seen my fair share of bloodshed, so when I'd pressured the guys for a front-row seat to all of the night's activities, I did not at all expect to react the way I did. My body tensed and a cold sweat slipped down my back as a wave of nausea washed over me. Law's strong arms wrapped around me, catching me before I hit the ground.

He hefted me up, carrying me back up the stairs, his chest vibrating with each step. I clung to him with my face buried in his shirt, hoping to avoid the gory image being burned into my brain.

We reached my bedroom door and he shoved it open, continuing through to the bathroom. He sat me gently on the sink and walked over to the massive tub, turning on the water.

Muffled footsteps sounded on the carpet, and then clacked across the tile. I'd yet to open my eyes, but I knew it was Alec.

He clasped his hands on either side of my shoulders and tugged me forward, unzipping the back of my dress. I tensed, causing him to pause the action.

"It's okay, baby. I've got you. Nothing I didn't see while you were in the hospital." I thought of all he'd seen. More than just my bare skin. Alec had seen me at my lowest—both mentally and physically—and chose not to look away. "I'll make sure Law closes his eyes," he smirked, reassuring me in that playful way of his.

He held me close, his hands running up and down my back, as he slowly removed the dress. He lifted me to my feet, sliding it down my body. His

touch grounded me as I felt the fabric pool around my ankles. He stood in front of me, blocking Law's view, as I stepped out of it and onto the cold tile.

There was something so alluring about surrendering to them completely, even though I had no tangible proof they were being *completely* honest with me about everything. Sure, Alec had just killed a man for mistreating me, but the fact they remained in contact with Ijah gave me an uneasy feeling I could not shake whenever it came to mind. A small part of me still wanted to run far away and never look back—to find a way to make it on my own—but that wouldn't have been a smart choice, either. I was stuck in this weird limbo, somewhere between what my mind told me I *should* do and how easy it would be to just give in to them fully.

The undeniable draw I felt toward them and the way they seemed to care for me made it hard to continue considering leaving at all.

Even after all of this was over.

The taste of gunpowder sat on my tongue and clung to my nasal passages. I felt as if all of the violence and death that had surrounded me for years had culminated in this moment, hitting me like a tidal wave, knocking me down, and dragging me under.

I'd never been so affected by violence. I had lived surrounded by it, and I didn't know why a simple gunshot had sent me over the edge like this. I'd seen men battered and bloody, shot, their cold dead bodies littering the main areas of my home almost daily for my entire adult life.

Alec and Law seemed to understand the effect it had on me, and even though they knew the things I'd seen and how I lived, they didn't question my reaction in the way I was. I don't think any of us *expected* me to react the way I did, they just seemed to be less surprised by it than I was for some reason.

Maybe they'd always been under the impression that I was weak and not as desensitized to these types of things as I was. *Men*.

"Let's get you rinsed off in the shower while the tub fills," Alec said, nudging me under the spray that Law had already warmed up for me at some point during the last minute. I was in such a fog that I barely registered the things happening around me.

As the water ran over me, warming my chilled body, my tense muscles loosened and my heart rate finally began to slow. Through a patch of condensation on the glass door, I could make out Alec standing with crossed arms, a towel in one hand, his gaze fixed on me with an expression of

concern. His presence made me shiver in a way that had nothing to do with my anxious state.

Once I was free of any remnants of blood or bodily fluids, I turned the water off and reached for the shower door, pushing it open. I expected Alec to wrap the towel around me, but Law waltzed right over and deftly snapped it from his hand before holding it open for me to step into. I waited to feel embarrassed or shy, but those feelings didn't come. I just felt cared for.

Alec led me over to the tub, my brain finally starting to unfuzz. "You don't have to baby me," I said to the pair of them.

He pulled the towel away and helped me step into the deep tub. "The fuck we don't. I just snapped at the sight of that bastard *spitting on you* and likely traumatized you for life."

The water enveloped me as I sunk down into the tub and I suppressed a groan.

"I've seen worse," I snorted, settling myself.

I breathed in the scent of eucalyptus and spearmint, undissolved grains of Epsom salt scraping against the bottoms of my feet.

The scent was so specific that it triggered my once-precious memories of the times I'd soaked like this... with Ijah.

He'd sit on the floor by the tub while I relaxed in my master bath after having disconnected all the cameras in the house while Mattia was away. I can't count on one hand the number of times he'd call Ijah to have *the boys* come fix his security system when they were the ones who'd fucked with it in the first place.

A tear slipped free from the corner of my eye and I quickly swiped it away, hoping that Alec and Law hadn't noticed.

I laid my head back against the edge of the tub and steeled myself against the emotions that threatened to overcome me again.

I couldn't live like this forever, never moving on from the things I wished were real.

They were real to me.

I wondered if they'd ever been real to Ijah at all, or if I was just an easily accessible piece of ass. A challenge. A way for him to stick it to his boss or something. And even if that were true, what led to him *shooting me*? I felt like that was a question I'd be asking myself for the rest of my fucking days.

He'd always been disgusted by my father. There was no part of me that could have ever imagined that he would take his side in *anything*, especially

not to hurt me.

I guess things change.

I turned my head to the side to look at Law and Alec, both of them watching me intently from their seats on the floor. They sat side by side, leaning against the vanity. Part of me wanted to heave myself out of the water so I could go over and squeeze in between them.

“Thank you,” I said softly. “For taking care of me... for caring at all.”

They each nodded, seemingly understanding the things I left unsaid.

“And thank you for... *taking care* of Roman.”

I don't know what I would have done if I hadn't had them to gain the small amount of info they had on what my dad had in mind for me, or what I would have done if he'd actually managed to hand me over to Roman. I shuddered at the thought of it.

“We'll end anyone who tries to take you from us,” Alec said, a look of immediate regret on his face that he'd let the words slip.

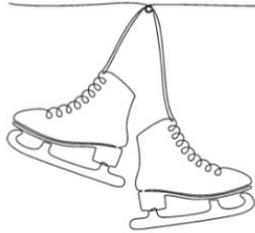
I smiled slightly, then looked away from them again, closing my eyes and willing my body to relax. I was safe here. With them.

Roman's face in his last moments flashed for a split second in my mind, but I felt nothing except relief.

One down, two to go.

CHAPTER TWELVE

Hunt



It was late the next evening when the guys finally came home from *work*.

I had no idea what they were up to these days and I honestly didn't care enough to ask. Whatever nefarious bullshit they continued to be a part of in the wake of Mattia's death was none of my concern.

I'd been home alone for the large majority of the day, and I'd also been drinking away any residual anxiety from the night before. Being alone in general gave me the heebie jeebies since being released from the hospital. I didn't know if it was because I was in an unfamiliar house or because of everything that had happened, but I felt eyes on me at all times. While I knew no one was actually watching me, it didn't stop my skin from prickling each time I had to go from one room to another.

They'd told me to make myself at home while they were gone. I hoped that welcome extended to the wine refrigerator.

If not... oh well, too late.

I was a little tipsy by the time they walked through the front door together, and I eyed them over the back of the couch as they tossed their jackets to the side and loosened their ties in unison. I always wondered why men in their line of work dressed like they were going to a board meeting or something when really their *meetings* usually involved someone leaving in a body bag.

They stood in stark contrast with one another. Alec with his deep brown hair, maple-hued eyes, and dark, tattooed skin. Law was all blond hair, blue eyes, and warm undertones. The only similarities they shared were in the way they carried themselves and the fact that they both looked like they'd been carved from stone.

Drool.

I snuggled into the plush cushions, surrounded by pillows and the thick comforter I'd dragged down from my room. The television flickered, casting a warm glow over the room. An empty bottle of my favorite wine teetered on the edge of the coffee table, evidence of my self-medication. I giggled at the scene on screen—it was as close to softcore porn as a show with a mature rating would allow.

Alec and Law stood over me, both of them staring down at my state with intense interest and maybe a little concern.

Alec's eyes flicked to the empty bottle, then back to me. "Busy day?"

"I was just feeling..." I was a little unsure how much I wanted to share with them. "...on edge, I guess." Of course, they had to know that.

Law walked around the end of the couch and sat down on the coffee table, picking up the empty bottle. "On edge? I guess you just needed a *little* something to take the edge off then?"

"Yes," I said, jerking the bottle from his hand.

Alec plopped down beside me, pulling me into his side. "A little something would've been one glass, Hunny Bee. Not one whole bottle."

"*Semantics*. Or something," I said.

They both chuckled and Law took a seat on the other side of me, his eyes roving over me, then making their way to the TV.

I shifted uncomfortably, overwhelmed at the feeling of being sandwiched between the two of them. The alcohol I'd consumed had my guard down and I was genuinely afraid of what I might say or do. My face and neck flushed at their nearness and I found myself mentally weighing the potential consequences of acting on any one of the many things running through my mind at the moment.

I cleared my throat and reached for the remote, pausing the screen. "So. How was your guys' day?" I asked, attempting to make small talk in hopes they wouldn't draw any attention to what I'd just been watching. We were all adults here.

Alec sighed, casually nuzzling the top of my head and placing a kiss on my unruly hair. He breathed in deeply, eliciting a disapproving grunt from Law.

I was enjoying the unexpected attention and I didn't appreciate his discouragement of it, so in my half-drunk state, I decided maybe he would feel better if he received a little attention of his own.

I looked up at Alec and winked, then wrapped my arms around Law's bicep and pulled him closer to us, laying my head on his shoulder while making sure the rest of my body was still cozy against Alec. I definitely didn't want him to feel left out or anything like that.

Law tensed, but Alec got the message. "Better now that we're home with you," he finally answered, massaging one of my lats like it was the most natural thing in the world for him to have his hands on me.

"Law?" I prompted.

He stared straight ahead, grunting again in response. I wanted so badly to tell him to use his words.

I snorted. "You can't just grunt in response to literally everything. *I asked how your day was.*"

"He had a rough one," Alec replied for him.

"Oh?" I asked, attempting again to grab his attention. "Is there anything I could do to make it better?" I slowly ran my hand up the inside of his thigh.

Okay. Maybe I was more than just a *little* drunk.

His hand snapped around my wrist, halting me from inching any further.

I'd be lying if I said it didn't hurt my feelings a bit, but then he said, "Hunter, I am not a good person and if you don't stop I will *eagerly* take advantage of you while you're unable to consent and *you* will be the only one who regrets it in the morning."

"Make that double," Alec groaned.

Mother. Fuck.

I would *have* to be drunk to even *consider* being with both of them in the same night. Together, separately... didn't matter.

What the fuck was wrong with me?

A lot of things, to be fair.

I thought about the fact that I actually *loved* having drunk sex, and most assuredly would *not* regret anything the next day.

It was a bit of a fetish for me—the heightened sense of feeling so utterly submissive when I'm too out of it to say anything but *yes* to being fucked senseless completely fulfills my CNC kink.

But that wasn't a conversation I could have with either of them now, and thinking of it made me think of the only person who'd ever allowed me a safe space to act on these desires without feeling any kind of shame about the fact that I've never had control of anything in my life. Some fucked up part of me wanted to be the one to have the say-so in giving up that control for once, and

this had always been a safe way for me to explore those desires. Or, at least, I thought it had been. I wasn't sure now how safe I'd ever truly been in his hands.

I hated myself for the way I missed Ijah, and the fact that thoughts of him were creeping into my head was like a bucket of ice water being dumped on me.

I also hated the fact that every part of my life was now tainted by the memories I had of our time together. There was an emptiness inside me that just wouldn't fucking leave, and it felt so at odds with how I was beginning to feel when I was with Alec and Law.

"Sorry," I mumbled, gently shoving myself away from them. "I... I guess I'll just..."

I stood abruptly, deciding it would probably be better for everyone involved if I went to bed. I tugged my comforter off of the couch and wrapped myself up like some kind of loser burrito and scuffled toward the stairs.

"Hunny?" Alec called after me.

I turned to face him, arching an eyebrow.

"Sleep it off, angel. We'll still be here tomorrow when your walls are back up."

I nodded once and turned away from both of them, quickly making my way to my bedroom before I did anything else embarrassing.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

Hunt



I groaned as I peeled my eyes open, the sunlight creeping in through the open curtains searing into my overly sensitive retinas. I licked my cracked lips, trying to find some relief. My throat burned as I swallowed nothing, and my tongue was dry and cracked against the roof of my mouth. My head throbbed with every movement I made.

It had felt like such a good idea to keep drinking, but that particular form of anxiety relief unfortunately came with a price.

After checking my phone to find it was already early afternoon, I peeled my tired body out of the cocoon of blankets, my muscles screaming as I nearly tripped over a pillow that had fallen onto the floor. I dragged my feet across the carpet and stumbled my way down the stairs, every step more agonizing than the last.

I was surprised to find Law and Alec home in the middle of the day, both of them in the kitchen sitting at the island where we always seemed to congregate.

My face heated thinking of the interaction we'd had the night before, but I refused to be embarrassed. I may have felt emboldened by my beverage choices, but they'd *both* reciprocated my interest stone-cold sober.

Hearing me pad into the kitchen, they turned in unison. Their eyes seemed to drink in every inch of my exposed skin and I realized in my sleepy haze that I'd forgotten to put pants on.

Oh well. They'd seen more than this of me, so with false bravado, I completely ignored their presence and walked over to the fridge.

Popping the door open, I peered inside. My eyes were still unfocused, and I'd barely had time to spot the bottle of water I was looking for before Alec's

long arm reached around me and grabbed a bottle of tomato juice.

I peered up at him, scrunching up my nose.

He tapped the tip of it, “Have a seat, we’re making you breakfast.” He shook the bottle in front of my face. “Hair of the dog that bit you, or some shit.”

“I had *wine*, not vodka,” I noted.

“Meh. Tomato, tomahto,” he said, swirling the liquid around inside the container. *Cheeky prick*. He closed the refrigerator door and casually wrapped his free hand around my waist, squeezing the opposite hip gently and dropping a quick kiss on the top of my head.

He touched me like I belonged to him, and I was starting to wonder if maybe I did.

I pulled up a bar stool, gingerly climbing onto it all the while wondering if it was too much or too late to ask if they’d bring me my breakfast in bed.

Law was already heating something on the stove. He had his back to me, so I couldn’t tell what it was, but I hoped it was something he’d already fully cooked earlier that just needed to be reheated.

Whatever it was, it smelled delicious.

Alec slid a glass of ice across the countertop in front of me, then poured the thick red mixture he’d just concocted over it before sticking a stalk of celery and dill pickle spear in it. He topped it off with a splash of pickle juice and swished it around with a stir stick.

I quirked an eyebrow at him, but in reality, I probably could’ve eaten the entire jar of pickles and then drank the leftover juice without batting an eye. I fucking love pickles.

“Electrolytes. Drink up.” He nudged the glass toward me and I accepted it, greedily taking a long drink in hopes it would actually help in any way at all. The briny flavor coated my tongue, a hint of horseradish lingering after.

I finished it off, then chugged my bottle of water, immediately regretting both of those choices when my stomach lurched against the sudden assault of liquids.

I hadn’t even noticed the bottle of aspirin he’d sat on the counter in front of me. I was suddenly thankful I had no issue with swallowing pills dry because the thought of taking even another sip of anything made me want to wretch.

Law placed a plate of crispy hash browns and two fried eggs in front of me, along with a bottle of ketchup.

“Thank you. I don’t know if I can even eat all of this, but you’re seriously the best.”

“Just try,” he said. “You’ll feel better soon.”

I took a bite of the potatoes and just the act of chewing actual food already had my stomach feeling somewhat better.

“Ugh. The only thing that would make this better is a shot of espresso on the side.” Did I say no more liquids?

Caffeine didn’t count as liquid consumption anyway. Unless, of course, iced coffee was all I’d drank that day. Then it totally did. *Girl math.*

Alec was already moving before I’d even finished my sentence. He grabbed the portafilter, inserted it into the espresso machine, and locked it in place. The whirring and hissing of the steam heating filled the room.

“Fuck, you two should marry me,” I said, taking another bite.

“Where do I sign?” Alec responded, waiting for the tiny glass mug to fill.

“Sounds illegal,” Law added jokingly.

“Yes, because you’re *such* a law-abiding citizen,” I jabbed.

“Touché.”

He took the seat across from me and once my drink was finished, Alec sat down beside him, passing it to me across the island.

“So,” he began. “You can’t sit around drinking all day when we’re not here.”

Great, *this*. “It was *one* time, Alec.”

“I’m aware, but we know you’re feeling anxious, and being here alone with not much to do probably doesn’t help. We wanted to offer you some alternatives, and we’ve decided that at least one of us will stick around as much as possible so you’re not left to your own devices.”

What the heck? “I’m not a child.”

“We just want to be here for you,” Law intervened. “And it would do you some good to get a little exercise.”

“*Exercise?*” This was exactly what I wanted to wake up to this morning. Afternoon. Whatever.

“Yeah,” Alec said. “You know...” He was hesitant now. “...as a way to burn off some of the anxious energy.”

I could think of several ways to burn off all this anxious energy that didn’t involve *wine* or *exercise*, but I wasn’t sure that was where they were going with this. “*How, exactly?*”

“You can use the treadmill in my room. It’s made for running and I

legitimately love it. You're welcome to it any time." Of course Law liked to torture himself with running for fun.

"If your body is already reacting to things like it's being chased like prey, you may as well run," Alec shrugged.

Maybe he had a point. That was the most accurate description of anxiety I'd ever heard. "You have such a way with words."

"Thanks," he grinned.

I finished my plate and scooted it to the side, already feeling a ton better.

"I think you need more of a sense of normalcy too," Law said, tapping his fingers across the granite. What had ever been fucking *normal* in my life? "Maybe a bit of a routine would help, and definitely getting out of the house a bit—to do things that don't involve kidnap and murder."

"Where's the fun in that?" I asked dryly, internally considering whether or not it was actually a good idea for me to be going *anywhere* outside the house. I should probably be more worried about Ijah and of course my fucking father. I'd left once after pressuring them to let me walk headlong into a ridiculously dangerous situation, and we all know how that turned out.

Alec huffed a laugh. "You fit right in here."

I rolled my eyes and pushed myself up out of my seat. "I'm going to shower."

"Good. Once you're finished, dress warm and grab your coat."

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

Alec



Law snuck a look at me from beneath his thick brows as she stepped into the foyer. She was wearing black leggings, her bright red-orange hair and porcelain skin a gorgeous contrast against the dark green sweater she had on. I felt my lips part. The back of Law's hand made a loud smack as it connected with my chest, and I stifled a chuckle.

He and I had already discussed the fact that we were both beyond having rational thoughts when it came to Hunt.

We wanted her in an obsessive way.

There was a strong possibility that Ijah would murder us both. I don't think we gave a fuck at that point.

I, for one, had suppressed my feelings for Hunt for far longer than I cared to admit, and being in such close proximity to her, seeing her in such a vulnerable state, hadn't helped at all. I just couldn't take it anymore. Especially not when I knew she was feeling at least a little the same. Law was just as attracted to her. Which was more than fine with me. Sharing with my best friend was my favorite pastime.

We both knew Ijah loved her, but he was the one who'd put us all in this situation to begin with and I wasn't entirely sure that I wasn't feeling a little of the L-word for her myself.

"You guys ready?" She grinned up at us, pulling on a puffy white coat that made her look like a sexy marshmallow.

"Yeah," Law responded, sliding his hand around the nape of her neck to untuck her hair from her coat.

I gave him a sideways glance, unable to stop the corners of my mouth from twitching upward. He seemed... so much less tense than usual. I could

see him becoming more comfortable with her each day. Softer.

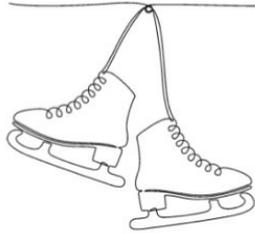
I loved seeing this side of him.

Of them.

I felt kind of disappointed in myself that I hadn't planned something cozier for the three of us this evening, but I was also really looking forward to seeing the look on her face once she realized what I had in mind.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

Hunt



I let out a tiny squeak of excitement as we pulled into the gravel lot of the ice skating rink. I bounced in my seat, the guys exchanging a look I couldn't quite decipher. But I didn't care what they thought about my likely over-the-top excitement. I'd never been before because... sheltered.

I. Was. Pumped.

I was thankful they wanted to do anything at all with me. They were right; I wanted to feel like I had a normal life, to do normal things. While I knew it was just a false sense of normalcy, I would take what I could get until the time came that I actually could just live my day-to-day life without having to worry about things like forced marriage and death threats. I was grateful they were putting me first, realizing that I had this need to do something fun in the midst of all the chaos and finding a way to make it happen for me while still maintaining my safety.

And while my full safety wasn't guaranteed, I was willing to risk being hurt again if it meant not missing out on the opportunity to be here with them. Everything I was up against could fuck right off for the night.

Glistening white snow surrounded the metal open front building that housed rows and rows of skates for rent. The smell of hot chocolate and popcorn drifted toward us as we walked under the canopy.

I couldn't freaking wait to get on the ice.

Law and I took a seat on one of the benches, the cold metal biting into my palms. A chilly gust of wind blew around us and I tensed against it. He reached into his coat pocket and pulled out a beanie and a pair of white gloves. Running his hand over my tousled hair to right it, he placed the soft hat over my head, then gently tugged the gloves onto each hand as his gaze

lingered on mine. We were locked in that moment when Alec came back with a bundle of ice skates pressed against his chest.

“Thanks,” I murmured to Law.

I turned to reach for my skates, but Alec had dropped onto a knee, already tugging one of my boots off.

“You don't have to—”

“Let someone take care of you for once without having something to say about it,” he cut me off.

I rolled my eyes, slipping my foot into the heavy skate and then lifting my other boot to him once he'd finished strapping the first in place. As much as I *did* always have something to say about it, I really did like the way they babied me sometimes.

I looked around the surrounding area, my eyes taking in the various groups of people engrossed in their own conversations and fun. A sense of unease overcame me as my gaze darted from person to person. The feeling that someone was watching me from afar was almost too much to bear.

I tried to shake it off, telling myself I was just overly aware of my surroundings and justifiably paranoid, but a slow-burning panic began to build in my stomach. Taking a deep breath, I refused to let fear take away any of the fun I planned to have tonight.

If anything happened, I knew the guys would have my back.

Alec bent in front of me, tugging his own skates into place. I could see the outline of a gun tucked into the holster clipped onto the back of his jeans. I knew that Law's own concealed weapon mirrored Alec's. They rarely went anywhere without them, and while guns typically made me a little jumpy since being shot by one—something I realized during our little get-together with Roman—I was thankful for the added protection right now.

I had so many fun memories of rollerblading with my mom when I was a child, so I thought this would be easy—how wrong I was. The blades on the skates were much thinner than the wheels and once I'd thudded onto the ice, I made it all of one step before I felt like a newborn giraffe and absolutely busted my ass against the cold surface.

Alec grabbed my arm and pulled me up while Law stood behind me with a hand on my back to make sure I didn't topple back over. “Woah, Hunny. Take it easy.”

I steadied myself again and brushed them off me, “I'm fine. I've got it.”

My optimism that this was going to be a fun night was quickly dashed as

I wobbled unsteadily, the hard metal blades of the skates snapping against the ice beneath me, and my feet slipped out from underneath me again.

This time, the guys each caught me by an elbow before I could hit the ground.

“You want me to get you one of those?” Alec chuckled, pointing to a kid who was probably four years old or less pushing a little plastic penguin across the ice that was very obviously helping her maintain balance.

“Fuck off,” I grumbled, trying to shove them away from me again. With so much of my life in their hands, surely I could figure this one thing out on my own. I wanted to prove that I could do at least one fucking thing by myself. I depended on them for literally everything at this point, which meant the balance sheet was not balancing. Not that anyone aside from me was keeping score. Regardless, the least I could do was hold myself up while fucking ice skating.

Immature? *Probably*. A petty hill to die on? Most definitely, but oh well.

"Here, let me." Law reached for me, a gentle offer to help.

My stubborn attitude melted away. Damn him and his slutty hand veins.

He pulled me with him and seemed to glide effortlessly across the ice as I stumbled along, trying to keep up. I felt safe in his firm grip; he had a natural grace about him, and he guided me with ease.

My mood shifted as our bodies moved in tandem, even more so when I noticed Alec across the rink. He leaned against the railing, watching us with a look of pure joy on his face.

I wanted to kiss him.

Both of them, actually.

My heart was too full and maybe I was crazy, but I was past caring.

We made our way back across the ice, my hand still intertwined with his. Once we were close enough to Alec, though, I felt a sudden rush of boldness and let go of Law's safety line. I flung myself towards Alec with reckless abandon and plowed into his waiting arms, our faces barely an inch apart from the force of it.

Giggling, I closed the remaining distance between us and kissed him. It was a quick, gentle peck that still somehow left me lightheaded. For a moment, panic set in as I wondered if Law would be jealous or angry, but all of my worries melted away when he barreled into us. His goofy grin filled me with heat as he grasped my face in his large palm and smacked a kiss on my lips too.

I blushed, now shying away from both of them.

“Oh no, you don’t,” Alec said, tilting my face back to his, forcing me to look at him.

I smiled sheepishly, scrunching my nose up. I had next to no real experience with men—apart from Ijah—and *that* was nothing like *this*. My experience with Mattia wasn’t even on my radar because it was in no way a loving or healthy relationship. It wasn’t even really a relationship at all.

Sure, a small kiss was probably nothing to either of them, but in a way, it was everything to me.

It was the affection I’d been lacking and desperately craved, and now I had it times two.

I wanted more.

“Wanna trade secrets?” I blurted out. *Smooth, Hunt*. But the reality was, we were on uneven footing. They knew every part of me and I wanted a little piece of them in return.

They both looked at me expectantly, so I guess that meant I would be going first. Great.

I’m a big brave dog, I’m a big brave dog.

“I’m having so much fun, and I’m so glad you guys brought me here...”

“But?” Law prompted, banding an arm around my waist and pulling my body flush with his. He pressed his hard length into my back. The rumble of his chest against my shoulder made my mouth dry out.

Suddenly, I couldn’t find the words I’d been about to say, my thoughts turning to other more *unsavory* things.

“I...”

“You *what?*” Alec said, closing the distance between us, crowding me against Law.

“I want you,” I said quickly before I could lose my nerve. “*Both* of you,” I added. “*And*, I’m sober this time. Scout’s honor.” I held up three fingers.

“Mmm,” Alec hummed, both of them waiting for me to say more.

“I have for a while now, and I wish more than anything we were back home, cuddled up on the couch together so I could kiss you how I really want to.”

There was an expectant pause, and I couldn’t take the waiting for more than a few seconds. “Your turn,” I said, hoping to spur them on.

Law leaned down until his mouth was hot against my ear, “My secret is that the back seat of Alec’s SUV is plenty big enough for *me* to kiss *you* how

I want, so we don't even have to wait until we're home on the couch."

Alec leaned down, murmuring against my lips, "And mine is that I'd love nothing more than to watch that happen from the rearview mirror, listening to every little sound he pulls from these sweet lips while waiting for my own turn." He kissed me again, lingering but not quite long enough. Then he pulled away and we were moving to leave.

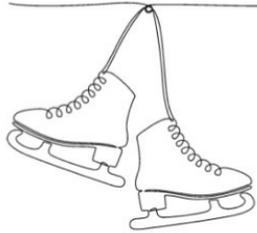
As we piled into the car—Law and I in the back seat and Alec in the driver's seat—for a split second, my gaze flicked behind me to the crowd of people we'd left behind, imagining again a pair of brown eyes peering back at us through the darkness.

Then Law pulled me onto his lap. I straddled him, breathing heavily. He leaned over, pulled the door shut, and his lips were on mine.

Every other thought melted from my head.

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

Hunt



I'd never been kissed like this before.

It wasn't better or worse than all the ways Ijah had kissed me, just different.

Ijah had always kissed me with gentle reverence, tenderly. On the other hand, Law's kiss was demanding, his lips nearly bruising against mine. I desperately wanted to clear my mind of Ijah as Law pulled me closer, but my experiences with him were my only point of reference and I couldn't seem to shake the near-constant stream of thoughts I had of him.

His tongue ran slowly over mine in a way that made me dizzy. He knew how to apply just the right amount of pressure, and when he sucked my bottom lip into his mouth, I nearly lost it. His hands slid down to grip my hips tightly as he pulled me close, grinding himself up against my core.

He shifted one hand to wrap around my leg, grazing the seam of my pants with his thumb. It was fully intentional. I quietly moaned into his mouth, unable to keep it in.

“What are we going to do with you, baby?” He teased, pulling back to peer at me. “You're so wet, I can feel it through your leggings.”

The car swerved slightly. “Eyes on the road, asshole. You can watch once we're home,” he barked over my shoulder at Alec—causing Alec to grumble something I couldn't quite make out under his breath—then softened again when his face returned to mine.

He slid a hand up the length of my back, gripping the nape of my neck and pulling me in for another kiss. I rolled my hips, and he hummed into the kiss.

I was drunk on him.

Drunk on the fact that Alec was mere inches away from us, sneaking gazes in the rearview mirror as he drove, apparently loving this too.

Fuck wine, all I needed was these two like this to rid me of all my thoughts and concerns.

“Mmm, I know you want it, baby. We’re almost home.” He threaded his hand into my hair, gripping it hard at the root as he peppered kisses along my jaw. “So needy, sweet girl,” he whispered, and I thought I might die then and there.

The click of the turn signal sounded and I knew that meant we were likely home. My lips felt slightly swollen, and the entire lower half of my face was deliciously beard-burnt from his stubble.

God, I could get used to this kind of attention.

That scared me as much as it excited me, which was a lot.

Alec pulled into the driveway and put the car in park.

I started to shuffle off of Law's lap, anxious to get inside with the two of them. But when Alec opened the car door to let us out, he jumped into the backseat next to us instead.

The space was cramped and I was about to say as much when he shifted me from Law’s lap to his, cutting off my words with an eager kiss.

He was more rushed than Law, more intense. I was consumed by them, so much so that when Law slid his hand between us and gripped my chin, pulling my face back to his for more, I didn’t falter. Moving from kissing one of them to the other was easy. Seamless. Perfect.

Everything.

“Inside?” I begged, breathless, and thankfully they listened.

We were so wrapped up in one another that no one noticed the extra car in the driveway, and when we stumbled in through the front door, scrambling in the dark to find a light switch, it took a hot minute before any of us realized we weren’t alone.

I pulled away from Alec, attempting to gain my bearings enough to make it to the couch. When I stumbled into the room—my eyes barely focused from the oxytocin-induced haze I was in—my breath caught in my lungs at the outline of a figure in the dark that I would have recognized anywhere. Even if it were pitch black in the room, I still think I would’ve known it was him just by his presence.

“*Ijah*,” I breathed, his name sliding so easily from my lips—still puffy from kissing his two best friends.

The light flicked on and the guys were by my side in an instant.

“You need to leave,” Law all but growled, his voice filled with murderous rage.

Ijah just stood there, totally unaffected. Casually, he leaned against the back of the couch without a care in the world, his arms crossed over his chest, so at ease.

“You can’t be here. You know what this could do to her,” Alec ground out.

“I’m just supposed to sit back and watch from a distance while the two of you take turns fucking my girl?” He asked.

My hands shook furiously as I wrapped my arm around Alec’s waist, clinging to him for any small amount of comfort he could offer.

Ijah’s eyes ran over me, searing into me as they went. I wanted to scream, to cry, to throw up.

My hand halted on Alec’s gun. He stood there, totally oblivious in his barely contained rage.

“You want them, cupcake?” Ijah chided. “It’s been so long. *Of course*, you need them. Need *someone*. You always were so fucking needy.”

I scoffed, grinding my teeth together to keep from speaking. He didn’t deserve a response.

“You still think about how hard your thighs used to shake when my face was between them, don’t you?”

I snapped then, taking Alec’s gun from the holster without another thought. My hands shook violently as I clicked the safety off, aiming it at Ijah’s chest and pulling the trigger.

“No!” Alec and Law yelled in unison, both lunging for me.

It was too late.

The gunshot cracked in the air and my eyes widened as his body jerked violently. I felt the warm spray of his blood across my face as I stumbled backward.

Everything happened in slow motion then, the *real* memories flooding back to me.

A silent sob wracked my body. The only thing keeping me from falling to the ground was Alec’s firm grasp on me as Law carefully slid the gun from my hand.

Everything that had just happened was a mirror image of what I *thought* had happened before, but I’d been so wrong. Suddenly, I was spiraling back

to the night that brought us here.



IT WAS SO DARK, BUT I COULD SEE THE OUTLINE OF HIM; THE CONTOURS OF HIS face, twisted into a demonic mask just before he pulled the trigger.

The pain in my chest was overwhelming, and blood seeped between my trembling fingers. My head pounded, feeling like it was split in half from smacking against the concrete floor when I went down. I was so stupid for coming here alone. I just wanted it to be over, for him to be gone so I could move on with my fucking life. Ijah had said he would take care of it, but I was so afraid of him being hurt; so afraid of losing him that I just had to try and beat him to the punch.

For a moment I thought he might do something to help me. Anything. But then he laughed. "You didn't think I'd do it, did you?" His malicious voice—the voice that had taunted me in the recesses of my mind since I was a little girl—echoed off the walls of the basement, the sound running down my spine like ice.

"You forgot one thing, Hunter," he said, kicking at my limp hand. "My life will always be more valuable to me than yours ever was, no matter how much money a tight piece of ass like yours goes for."

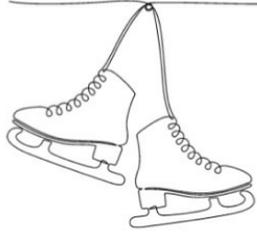
My father's silhouette was nothing more than a blurry shape against the dim light shining in through the now-open doorway. I watched as he stepped into the stairwell and disappeared, leaving me alone in my own pool of blood.



IT HADN'T BEEN IJAH. IT HAD NEVER BEEN IJAH. WHAT THE FUCK HAD I JUST done?

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

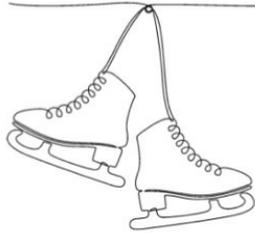
Alec



S hit.

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

Hunt



“About fucking time, cupcake,” Ijah said, grinning through the pain I knew he felt.

He gripped his bicep tightly where the bullet had grazed him, blood oozing from under his hand and running down his arm.

My shoulders shook violently as warm tears streamed down my face, blurring my vision. I bit my lip hard and tried to catch my breath, but my body's response was uncontrollable.

He rushed toward me, Law and Alec delivering me into his waiting arms.

I fell into him, desperate for him in the same way I always had been.

He was my everything, and I'd almost slept with his two best friends.

Almost *killed* him.

He kissed me, the warmth of his lips a fucking homecoming.

His blood ran freely, dripping over my skin as we tangled together like he wasn't bleeding out on the carpet. Like nothing else mattered now that we were together again.

He hurriedly unbuttoned his shirt, pulling it off and handing it to Alec who shredded it in one quick motion and tied a strip just above his wound. Meanwhile, Ijah hadn't stopped kissing me, touching me. I never wanted him to.

He tugged my shirt over my head, and when it dropped to the floor I paused, pulling back from him. I searched his face, feeling overwhelmed by... everything.

I craned my neck and found Law and Alec looking at the pair of us, lust written all over their faces. We were all so fucked in the head. Apparently, I was more so than the rest of them.

“You two can join next time,” he said so fucking casually. “She’s mine tonight.” He lifted me by my ass, wrapping my legs around his waist and carrying me toward the stairs. “I’ve fucking *missed* her,” he said, more to me than them, kissing me again.

“Cockblock,” Alec grumbled loudly.

Ijah just flipped him off over his shoulder and continued his way up the stairs.

“Wait,” I said. “You’re not mad?”

“*Mad?* Baby, why the fuck would I ever be *mad?*”

He kicked the door to my room open, never breaking his stride, and continued on into the attached bathroom.

“I was literally about to fuck your two best friends. And then I *shot* you.”

“You were literally falling for the two men I tasked with taking care of you while I couldn’t,” he corrected me. “And how would I ever expect either of them not to fall for *you?*”

I... didn’t know what to say to that. He looked so relieved, so genuinely *happy*.

I was too.

“Baby, you can have whoever and whatever the fuck you want as long as you save a piece of yourself for me too.” He looked down at his bicep, then added, “And it was barely a graze. We’re going to have to work on your aim, cupcake.”

I knew this man loved me, or I had at one time anyway. I couldn’t believe that he or anyone could love me *that* much. “This feels... not real,” I admitted.

“I think you’ve had enough *not real* to last you a lifetime, along with enough bullshit, and enough of everyone around you always doing the opposite of what’s best for you. Now it’s time for you to let us take care of you, and make you happier than you ever dreamed you could be. We have a lot of lost time to make up for.”

We.

He was serious about this.

He gently sat me down, his hands moving to his belt buckle and deftly undoing it before sliding off his pants and boxers. He then reached for me, bringing my hand to his lips for a tender kiss before sliding his free hand up my back and unclasping my bra.

I stepped out of my leggings and padded over to the sink, pulling the first

aid kit from one of the drawers while he turned the shower on.

As we stepped under the spray, I untied the makeshift tourniquet to better inspect the wound I'd inflicted. I cringed when I realized it would likely need stitches.

"I'm so sorry, Ijah."

"Shut the fuck up." He kissed me then, pressing me into the cool tile of the shower wall.

My heart cracked as he held me against his slick body, the water pouring over us. I closed my eyes, inhaling his familiar scent.

"I feel like I'm hallucinating this," I admitted when he pulled back from me, his dark, coffee-colored eyes boring into my soul.

"It's real."

A single tear escaped and tracked its way down my cheek, mingling with the droplets of water cascading over my skin.

"How does this even happen?" I asked.

"We'll explain everything, but for now I just need to be near you again."

I nodded, tracing a finger through the blood still dripping from his arm. "Can either of the guys stitch this up?"

He cocked his head, inspecting the wound again as I grabbed a bar of soap and lathered it between my hands. "It's not that deep."

I slid my hand over his bicep, causing him to hiss. "*Baby*," I teased, scrubbing away the half-dried blood.

We finished up in the shower, stepping out and drying quickly. He grabbed a thick black towel and wrapped it around his waist, while I pulled my robe off its hook on the back of the bathroom door and secured it tightly around my body. Stray drops of water rolled down my shoulders as I ran a comb through my wet hair. We shared a gentle kiss before I made my way to the hallway, where I yelled for Law.

He was there in an instant, as if he'd been waiting for me to call for him.

Ijah sat back against the headboard, his legs crossed at the ankle. I grabbed the first aid kit and handed it to Law. "He says he's fine, but could you at least look at it?"

"For a kiss," he said.

My mouth opened, but no words came out. I turned away, feeling a flush of embarrassment spread across my cheeks, but my eyes were met with Ijah's cocky smirk. *So glad he was amused.*

Law just stood there silently, his hands tucked into the pockets of his

jeans and an expectant look on his face.

I rose to my tiptoes and brushed my lips gently against his. I started to pull away, but he cupped the back of my neck with one hand and banded his other arm around my waist to keep me close. My knees buckled slightly as he kissed me with all the urgency he had in the backseat of Alec's SUV earlier in the night, and when he finally released me, I was breathless.

He walked around the edge of the bed and climbed in next to Ijah, inspecting his arm up close. "It's really just a small flesh wound, but I don't think a stitch or two would hurt. I don't have anything to glue it with."

I walked over to Ijah's side, taking his hand in mine as I stood by the bed, prepared to support him. As if he needed it. I knew he'd experienced worse, but I felt so much fucking guilt. And I just needed to touch him.

A sly smile spread across his face as he unlaced our fingers and began to untie the belt holding my robe in place. "Think you could keep me distracted, cupcake?" he asked, sliding his hand over my bare stomach and around my back, pulling me close to him.

Law held a bottle of antiseptic spray in one hand and grabbed Ijah's arm with the other. He then pressed down on the nozzle, releasing a fine mist that caused Ijah to flinch against the sudden sting. It was hard not to laugh to myself considering they were treating a gunshot wound as if it were as simple as when they were kids getting a knee scrape on the playground.

I watched as he slowly uncoiled his body, starting with the tension in his arms. He released a deep sigh, then his shoulders slumped and his head lolled toward his chest before rolling his neck back and turning his face to mine. He kissed down my chest and nudged the loose fabric of my robe out of the way with his nose, giving him better access as he slowly sucked my nipple into his mouth.

I melted under his touch, so fucking thankful to just *be with him again* that it was easy to not think about anything but his mouth on my body.

I was tugged back to reality by the sound of Law's gloved hands peeling apart the plastic seal of the suture kit.

Ijah worked the brief reprieve of Law actively working to fix his arm to his advantage, and tugged at me with a hand on either of my hips, encouraging me to climb onto the bed.

"Hold the fuck still," Law chided, pulling his arm back into place.

Ijah laid painfully still as I straddled him, one hand clutching the edge of his towel, the fabric pulled taut over his hips. His arousal was evident, the

hard length of him pressing against the material.

I hadn't imagined our reunion would be like this, but I hadn't imagined a reunion for us at all— so, like, fuck ideal scenarios I guess.

I tugged the towel away, gripping his long, thick cock at the base, and positioned him at my dripping entrance, impaling myself on him in one smooth motion.

The surprised grunt he released was music to my fucking ears. I rolled my hips and his head fell back against the headboard. "Damn, baby. And you got mad at me for saying you were needy," he ground out, fighting to stay still as Law carefully placed the first stitch, and then the second.

He expertly tied off the suture, then adjusted himself in his pants before clearing away the area and climbing off the bed.

He padded toward the bathroom, closing the door behind him as he went.

I leaned down, pressing a kiss to Ijah's lips. "I missed you. Every single day, even though I thought I shouldn't."

He moved a long strand of hair away from my face, tucking it behind my ear and kissing me in return. "It hurt like hell to watch you from a distance, knowing you thought the worst of me, thinking maybe there was a chance I'd never have this again."

His eyes filled with unshed tears. Seeing this side of him, this vulnerability... I couldn't stand it.

"I love you so much it hurts," I told him, tilting my hips as I began to ride him.

"I love you, cupcake. More than anything. Fucking always."

He eased my robe off of my shoulders, his calloused hands running slowly along my back as I bounced on his cock.

"Turn," he demanded.

I smiled, biting my lip as I spun to face away from him without lifting myself off of him. He'd always liked me in this position, and it was admittedly my favorite too because of the way he manhandled me when I was like this.

I found my way to my knees and began to move slowly over his length, arching my back in a way that hopefully gave him an excellent view.

His hand slid over my hip and in between my thighs, rubbing slow, relaxed circles over my clit with just the right amount of pressure.

He loved to torture me like this for as long as possible, and it always put me in a dopamine haze. He got off on totally blissing me out and then

absolutely wrecking me, and I was one hundred percent here for it.

I was moving fast and hard, drunk on him as my ass smacked against his skin, lewd sounds filling the room... when the bathroom door creaked back open.

I stilled. I'd forgotten all about Law.

Ijah slid his hand into my hair, gripping it at the roots and tilting my head toward the ceiling, his fingers never ceasing their movement between my legs.

"Come kiss our girl goodnight," he said, moving in quicker, tighter circles.

I was on the brink of my first orgasm when Law casually strolled over to the edge of the bed, placing one knee on the mattress and covering Ijah's hand with his own as they worked in tandem to bring me over the edge.

I silently screamed at the same moment he shoved his tongue in my mouth, kissing me with everything he had as I shuddered, unable to form a coherent thought.

When I finally came down, he pulled away and stood. "Goodnight, pretty girl." And with one last peck on my forehead, he promised, "*Tomorrow*," and exited the room.

I was going to fucking die.

Ijah shifted me abruptly then, maneuvering me so that I was face down on the bed with my ass in the air.

He shoved my face into the mattress and said while filling me completely, twisting both arms behind my back and holding them there tightly. "You're so pretty when you come, baby. You liked that, didn't you?" I tried to nod my head. *Fuck yes, I did.* "It's my turn now."

He fucked me with a ferocity I'd never seen from him, his thrusts filled with every pent-up emotion he'd held inside over the last several months, and I wanted every single one of them threaded into the very fiber of my existence. I wanted all of him, every second of every day for the rest of our lives.

His hips jerked and he halted his movements, his pelvis flush with my ass as he came, grunting his release. "My perfect fucking girl. God I've missed this pussy, the way we fit together so fucking perfectly," he sighed as he leaned over, tilting my face toward his and kissing along my jawline. "We were made for each other, weren't we?"

"Yes," I breathed. We were.

We snuggled up together, the sound of our labored breaths lulling us into a peaceful sleep.

I felt certain this wasn't all the night had in store for us, but I was more than happy to just *be* for now.



I FELT THE BED SHIFT AND ASSUMED IT WAS IJAH GETTING UP TO USE THE bathroom or something, so I turned onto my side to get comfy again and try and go back to sleep.

Two large hands gripped me, one under my shoulder and one on the opposite hip, shifting me onto my back.

I startled then, fully awake.

“Shhh, baby. You can go back to sleep,” Alec whispered next to my ear, kissing the shell of it.

I turned my head to find Ijah gazing at us blearily. He scooted closer to my body, lifting my leg and draping it over his hip, opening me to Alec. I was too dazed with sleep to feel shocked or shy about it. He nuzzled into my neck and slid his arm over my stomach, gently tickling my skin as he drifted back to sleep.

“Just needed you,” Alec whispered between kisses.

How was this fucking real life?

I ran my hands down his body. He was shirtless, a pair of thin grey sleep pants hanging low on his hips. He hovered over me, looking lovingly into my eyes, “I’m sorry,” he said.

I was so crowded by the two of them. I loved it.

“You have nothing to be sorry for, Alec,” I reassured him.

“I felt like I was lying to you all this time, but I hope you understand that we had to do what your doctors said was best.”

I shushed him this time, kissing him softly on the lips. “We’ll talk about it tomorrow,” I reassured him. I mean, I was confused but it wasn’t hard to put two and two together that the hit my head took had caused some kind of memory loss. “But for now, I need you, too.”

I tugged at his pants, pulling them down just enough to free his erection. It pressed into my stomach and I gasped at the sheer size of it.

He looked at me arrogantly, raising an eyebrow as if to say, “Yes?” as he shimmied the rest of the way out of his pants.

“We fucking know, Alec,” Ijah grumbled, barely awake. “You’re packing an anaconda. It’s fucking massive. Scary, even. Just be gentle and don’t wreck my pussy, okay?”

“Your pussy?” I asked, genuinely bewildered.

He lifted his head and glared at me. “Yes, it’s fucking mine,” he said, “I’m just nice enough to share it.” Then he laid his head back down and closed his eyes again.

I huffed out half of a laugh, but it was cut off by Alec notching his massive trouser snake at my entrance.

“There’s no way. Not one,” I said.

“Relax, baby. I’ll make it fit.”

Dear. God.

He pumped into me, barely an inch at a time in slow, shallow thrusts. It wasn’t lost on me that I was being *willingly* fucked for the first time by someone who wasn’t Ijah, with him lying next to me half wrapped around my body. Was it weird that I was glad to have him here to share the moment with me?

Alec stretched me further with each cant of his hips until he was fully seated. I’d never felt so full in my entire fucking life and the pressure of it was almost too much to bear.

He didn’t move, just relaxed over me, giving me a small amount of time to adjust to his size. “You think it’s a lot now, Hunny Bee? Just wait until you’re full of all of us at once, taking three dicks like the good little slut I know you are.”

Oh my god, I hadn’t even thought of that. “Well. This is a nice warmup, I guess.”

He snorted, sliding his nose along the length of my neck, breathing me in.

“You smell like Ijah.”

“Get used to it,” I retorted.

He lifted his head, lining our faces up nose to nose. “I wasn’t fucking complaining,” he said, pumping his hips once, causing me to suck in a breath, and kissing me deeply as he continued his movements.

I felt like I was being split in half, but the longer he moved inside me, the more my body became accustomed to his size.

“Fuck, you feel so good,” he groaned. “It’s too fucking much.”

“*Two pump chump,*” Ijah mumbled, snaking his hand between us and circling my clit.

Alec barked a laugh, but I was too dick drunk to even think about giggling.

Thanks to Ijah and his magic fingers, I came again in no time whatsoever, my pussy pulsing around Alec’s cock as he filled me with his cum.

He fell down next to me in a boneless heap, the loss of him dazed me as my body clenched around nothing.

I was covered in man limbs.

No complaints here.

“Law is going to feel so left out,” Ijah said, grinding his hard cock against my ass cheek.

“I’ll make it up to him,” I said through a yawn.

Ijah shifted me against him and filled me with his cock from behind. I was sore, but it was a good ache.

I circled my ass, but he tapped me with a light smack. “Go to sleep.”

“But I—how?” I asked.

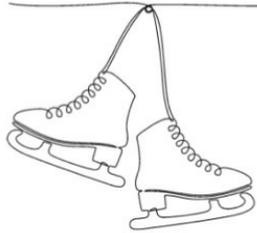
“Close your eyes,” he said, no-nonsense.

Alec’s breathing had already evened out, and I felt Ijah relax behind me.

I forced myself to take a few deep breaths, intentionally unwinding my body. I felt all warm and fuzzy inside that we were both spent and exhausted, but he still needed to feel this nearness to me. I needed it too, more than I would have originally thought. In my mental and physical exhaustion, I fell asleep much easier than I ever thought I would with a literal dick inside me.

CHAPTER NINETEEN

Hunt



My eyes blinked open, feeling the body heat radiating from my guys on either side of me. I turned to my right, peering at Ijah, my vision still bleary with sleep. His soft breath fanned across my face, warming every part of me. Alec scooted in behind me, tangling his legs with mine. I had always been all over the place in my sleep, so I hoped I hadn't kept them awake with my tossing and turning.

Waking with Ijah no longer inside me, I felt a little too empty, but the possessive way he gripped my hip even in his sleep almost made up for it. The plush, down comforter cocooned the three of us tightly together, and I felt so at peace between them that I wasn't sure I could bear leaving the bed.

I turned toward the sound of the door creaking open, and I watched as Law stepped into the room carrying a steaming mug of coffee and a pastry bag from Starbucks that I hoped like hell had a sugar plum cheese Danish inside. Starbucks at Christmastime was my fucking favorite. The pumpkin spice girlies aren't *wrong*, but gingerbread lattes are elite.

"I thought maybe I could pry you out from between these pricks if I came bearing gifts," he smirked, taking a seat on the chaise lounge and placing the goods on the end table next to it.

He crossed one ankle over the other and folded his hands on his lap, waiting patiently. The sunlight streaming through the bay window cast a gentle glow over his broad shoulders and muscular arms. His features were softer than usual, and he looked so unlike himself. There was a warmth in his eyes, an intensity I was beginning to realize only appeared when he looked at me.

I untangled myself from the bed and crossed my arms over my bare chest

as I made my way across the room, quickly rubbing my hands over my biceps in a futile attempt to warm myself from the sudden chill that came from no longer being the meat in the middle of a man sandwich. Law leaned forward and tugged a plush throw blanket from the back of the chaise. When I stepped close enough for him to reach me, he wrapped it around me and drew me into his lap, holding me securely in the warmth of his embrace. His lips brushed mine with a gentle kiss.

I cringed away from him, covering my mouth, and immediately felt guilty for it. But he just said, “Morning breath is hot.”

“Oh my god, you’re insane,” I giggled.

He picked up the coffee and handed it to me. I wrapped my hands around the mug and took a tentative sip, the liquid burning my throat in the best way as I swallowed. He pulled the Danish from its wax paper. Holding it in my hand, I had a stark moment of realization that Ijah had been the one who'd been pulling all the strings, telling the guys exactly what my favorite things were.

The dahlias in the hospital, the Epsom salt bath the night I'd freaked out when Alec fired a gun in front of me... these were no mere coincidences; they had been trying to trigger my memories by surrounding me with things that would remind me of Ijah—of how much he cared for me. I'd thought they were just being stalkery, but it was Ijah all along.

My jaw dropped. I took in the sight of him sprawled out on top of the bed sheets, his light brown hair disheveled from sleep. His chest rose and fell slowly as he snored quietly. I could almost feel the weight of his mental exhaustion from the last several weeks, and the peace that now settled him.

Law's lips tilted into a knowing smile as his fingers traveled through the mess of my hair, tangling in the knots. His breath came out in a huff. “He’ll never stop taking care of you, you know?”

I chewed on my lower lip, fighting off a grin. “Yeah. I do now.”

“Neither will we,” he stated plainly, his eyes on Alec now.

I thought of everything they'd done for me. While I was in the hospital recovering and once I'd come home, they'd stood by me patiently, just hoping something would help me remember. They'd been there to support and encourage me, even when I didn't grasp any of the things that had actually happened to me—even when I thought the worst of the man who'd loved me the longest and had only ever tried to protect and care for me.

“Why?” I asked, genuinely curious why they'd done any of it at all. I

knew why Ijah had, but Alec and Law... I couldn't seem to figure out their motivation in the beginning. Sure, Ijah had asked them to, but the ways they supported me went so far beyond just keeping an eye on me.

"Because you're you," he said, kissing the corner of my mouth. "Do we need any other reason?"

I hummed, taking a bite of the pastry. I'd been inexplicably drawn to each of them from the get-go, too. I felt it even before all of this, I just hadn't realized how deep my feelings went, and I would have never risked what I had with Ijah to explore them. "I guess not." I would have done the same for either of them were they in a situation that called for it. "We're probably all soul mates or something."

I said this nonchalantly. Jokingly, even. But something in the way he looked at me made me feel like maybe it wasn't a joke to him, and every part of me buzzed at the thought of that.

I wanted to be loved that much without having to do anything to earn it, but I wasn't sure I knew how. And what if, in the end, I wasn't enough for them? Was it even fair for me to expect them to want *only* me when I wanted *all three* of them?

I still couldn't fully wrap my mind around each of them having feelings for me that were so strong, they were more than willing to share simply because it made me happy.

I knew that Ijah loved me. I knew he wasn't going anywhere. But what if this wasn't something that could ever really work or last when it came to Law and Alec being in the picture, too?

Last night had me feeling like I was living a wild dream.

I was so afraid of waking up.

I think sometimes it's hard for us to just let someone love us all the way—no conditions—when so few people in the world are capable of actually doing that.

"*Hunter*," Law said, nudging my face toward his. His bright blue eyes were filled with so much affection. "Get out of that pretty little head. No one's coming to jerk the rug out from under you this time. We're not going anywhere."

It was scary how they always seemed to know exactly what I was thinking. I wished I could read their minds, too.

"How can you expect me not to worry?" I asked. "It's hard for me to know what is real and what isn't anymore." I felt confident that I was

currently cognizant of the facts, but who's to say that would last?

He slipped his hand around the back of my neck and pulled me in for a kiss. "You're right, we can't expect that," he admitted. "But we will be with you every step of the way regardless of what happens."

Out of the corner of my eye, the guys stirred across the room, Alec stretching out his long limbs, yawning as he sat up. Ijah rolled over and followed suit, pushing his wild hair away from his face with one hand as he shuffled toward us, butt-ass naked, his eyes still half-shut in sleep.

He stopped in front of us, leaning down to cup my face. His hands were warm against my skin and I melted into his touch. He pressed his lips to mine in a gentle kiss before he straightened again and sauntered toward the bathroom.

Alec repeated the gesture, kissing me then... "Wait," I said when my eyes caught on the tattoo he now had on his right thigh that was *most assuredly* not there the last time I saw it. I eyed the varying shades of pink ink splayed across his quad—a poorly drawn dahlia. The one I'd drawn there, with none of its petals quite symmetrical now filled with color.

He brushed a thumb along the underside of my jaw. "Don't act so surprised," he said, leaving me gaping after him as he stalked after Ijah and went into the bathroom.

I closed my mouth around the lip of my mug, sipping my now-lukewarm coffee while still perched on Law's lap. With the bathroom door open, I could hear running water and the distinct sound of two toothbrushes working in tandem. Every now and then I could make out a few words spoken between them.

Okay, but why did they both already have toothbrushes in *my* bathroom? I guess it was Alec's bathroom before now, but still.

I swallowed the last gulp and leaned forward to set the mug back on the table next to us. Law swatted my ass and started to stand before I could even get to my feet. I scrambled off of him and we filed into the bathroom just as Alec and Ijah were making their way out.

"Meet us in the kitchen," Ijah said before jerking me into him and kissing down the side of my neck. I appreciated him letting me brush my teeth before going for my mouth again. "I'll be just a minute, I need to grab pants. The ones I had on last night need burned," he cringed. *Or you could just not.*

Alec snatched his from the floor beside the bed on his way out and tugged them on.

Law and I stood side by side in the bathroom, scrubbing our teeth. Apparently, he'd decided to move in as well. We barely made eye contact as we moved around each other, but it was so natural to be with him like this. I filled the sink with hot water to rinse away the remnants of my toothpaste as he stepped out to give me space to pee. Then, I washed up before making my way back to the bedroom. We linked hands as we headed to the kitchen.

I really needed a shower, but I hadn't wanted to linger upstairs. I was more interested in hearing what they all had to say than anything else right now. I knew I was fucked in the head, but the fact that any of this was even possible had me questioning everything even more than I had been before. It was hard to know what was real and what wasn't, but I decided to go with what felt right in my gut.

They felt right, and I knew I could trust them.

I was loved and cared for, for the first in my life. Being with them was *everything* to me, and even though my mind was a jumbled mess, I knew they'd help me make sense of it all.



“I DON'T FULLY UNDERSTAND WHY MY DAD WOULD SHOOT ME WHEN I'M worth so much more to him alive,” I said.

Alec poured me another cup of coffee and placed it on the counter in front of me.

Bless him.

“Our best guess is that it was purely self-defense. He was likely convinced you were dead or as good as, so he split. He was gone before we got there,” Ijah paused, his voice cracking as he spoke. He cleared his throat and opened his mouth again, but nothing came out. He closed his eyes and took a deep breath, swallowing hard before continuing.

That made sense from what I could now remember of that night, the things he'd said to me before he left me there.

“We thought you were dead, cupcake. Your body was lifeless and so fucking cold, covered in blood. I lost my fucking mind. If I hadn't followed you that night, you wouldn't be here. And I'll never forgive myself for not getting to you sooner.” His fingers traced along the line of the scar at the base

of my throat.

“It broke something in each of us seeing you like that,” Alec said, brushing my hair over the opposite shoulder with the back of his hand. “I cared so much for you, Hunny Bee. Long before I found it within myself to act on those feelings.” His eyes darted to Ijah’s, probably concerned his friend would take offense at what he’d just admitted, but Ijah just gave him a small smile. “The first moment we had hope that you’d pull through, I knew I would do some damn near shameful things to make sure you never found yourself in a situation like that again.”

“And when you woke up to me in the hospital that first time, convinced it was me who hurt you—” Ijah continued. He couldn’t seem to find the words.

I didn’t remember waking up to him at all. Only Alec. I couldn’t imagine the pain he must have felt, or how hysterical I would have been. It was hard enough waking up to Alec and thinking those things.

I climbed into his lap. I couldn’t get close enough to him, even with our bodies flush. I wanted to crack open his ribcage and climb inside his body. “I’m so sor—”

“Don’t,” he snapped, kissing me roughly. “None of this was your fault. Traumatic brain injuries are so finicky. None of us could have known that the hit your head took when you went down would have caused something like this. I’m just so fucking thankful I had these two to step in when I couldn’t be there for you.”

“Me too,” I admitted. “But why couldn’t you just tell me?” I asked.

“Fuck, we wanted to,” Law said. “More than fucking anything, so many times. But the doctors all advised against it. Trying to convince someone of something true when they’re suffering from memory loss nearly always does more harm than good. If anything, it would have added more stress to the situation and upset you even further. They said it was best just to let your memories return on their own, for us to go along with whatever persecutory delusions you were under and hope for the best.”

“Thank you for not giving up on me,” I said to the three of them.

“If we’d known you shooting that fucking gun was what it took to bring you back to reality, we’d have taken you to the shooting range the day you were released from the hospital,” Alec said, scrubbing a hand over his face.

I suspected it was because I shot it *at Ijah* that triggered anything, and he was probably fucking stupid for coming home like that while I was still living in my own delusions, but I don’t know that I wouldn’t have felt the same

desperation he did were the shoe on the other foot. And at the end of the day, I was glad things had played out in the way they did.

“How did my dad find out I was still alive?” I asked. “This would’ve all been so much easier if we’d just faked my death and moved on with our lives.”

“Trust me,” Alec answered. “That was very much what we wanted to do, but it’s kind of hard to pull something like that off in Fate Trace. When there was nothing in the news about your death, he had men snooping around the hospital the very next day. We put an end to that *real* fast, but he was most definitely given all the details about your health and well-being—or lack thereof.”

“How do we know I won’t just wake up one day and revert back to thinking Ijah tried to kill me? Or one of you? Or something worse?” I didn’t know what could be worse than that, but my anxiety was at an all-time high.

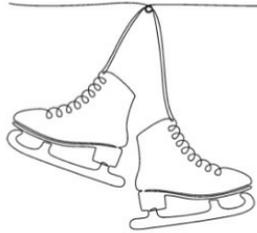
“We *don’t* know,” Ijah admitted with a pained look on his face. “But what we do know is that you’ll be safe and cared for every step of the way, and we will continue to work with your doctors to make sure you stay on the right track as best we can. This is something none of us have any kind of control over, and that scares the absolute shit out of me, but I’m going to take each day as it comes with no expectations, and love you so fucking hard every chance I get. And we’ll get through it together.”

“Big fucking same,” Alec said, planting a kiss on my cheek.

Law stepped in behind me, wrapping his arms around me and kissing the shell of my ear before murmuring, “Always.”

CHAPTER TWENTY

Hunt



Law and I loaded the brown paper grocery bags into the trunk of the SUV, arranging them side by side so they fit snugly in the roomy compartment. The four of us living together apparently meant going through a lot of fucking food.

It had been days and my dad had still made no move to show himself, and I had been dying to get out of the house again.

“Can we stop by the cute little coffee shop on Sumter for a hot cocoa on the wa—” I said, turning to move away from the trunk so I could close the hatch, but Law had other plans.

My words died on my lips as his hands encircled my waist, pinning me to the back of the open trunk. His solid frame pressed against mine, and I instinctively wrapped my arms around his neck, pulling him closer.

His lips moved against mine with a gentleness that caught me totally off guard. His hands were firm on my back as the fluorescent parking lot lights hummed above us; his touch all-consuming.

The sky had changed from its bright, afternoon hue to an orange-tinted gray as the last rays of sunlight faded away. I knew Ijah and Alec were waiting impatiently for us at home, but I was too wrapped up in Law to think of anything outside this moment with him.

His lips trailed along my neck, igniting a fire in the pit of my stomach.

“I can’t fucking stand it anymore,” he murmured against my skin between slow, gentle kisses. “Those other two assholes have had you, and you parade this tight little body around in front of me, so fucking sweet to me, practically begging me to fuck a baby into you.”

I pulled back from him, my mouth fucking gaping.

Where did that come from?

And why did it turn me on?

I kissed him again, more intensely this time.

He couldn't actually fuck a baby into me... because I had an IUD. But he didn't need to know that yet, and I would sure as fuck let him try.

We were lost in each other until the piercing screech of a car alarm sliced through the evening air, jolting us back to reality.

He reluctantly pulled away from me, kissing me one last time before lifting me slightly and planting me back on my feet.

"As soon as we're home," he promised.

"So no cocoa then?" I asked jokingly.

He grasped my hand, his calloused palms rough against my skin. The slam of the back hatch echoed in the parking lot as he guided me to the passenger side and opened the door. After I settled into the seat, he reached across me to buckle my seatbelt, his nearness heating my skin again.

I was down horrendously for this man and as soon as we were through the front door, I was totally jumping his bones. The fact that I hadn't yet was honestly a damn crime.

"We can still stop for cocoa," he said once he was seated behind the wheel. "We'll be fast," he winked.

I wanted to pout about it because I was eager to get home now, but he was just doing what I'd asked, and I also really wanted the cocoa.

The headlights of the car illuminated the street as we drove along in the low light of the evening, the tires humming against the asphalt. The few streetlights that broke through the darkness cast an eerie yellow glow over everything, flashing through the windows as we passed by. Fate Trace always seemed to have this unsettled energy about it. As I reached to turn up the song that had just come on, Law abruptly turned off onto a side street. The motion would have thrown me into the center console if he hadn't reached his arm out to hold me in place.

"That's your dad's fucking car," he said, pulling in close behind a silver sedan parked in the alley.

The sedan was running, and Law wasted no time throwing our own vehicle into park and bolting out of it. He bounded toward the other car, very obviously blinded by his need for this to *just be over* and not thinking. I didn't have much time to think either before scrambling out of my seat and chasing after him.

He jerked the driver's side door of the sedan open, aiming his already-cocked gun at the person behind the wheel.

Law startled for a split second and then said, "Well. *Don't you two look cozy.*"

Without lowering his gun, he reached into his pocket and pulled out his phone, snapping a picture.

I hesitantly stepped forward, and when the person he spoke to came into view, my eyeballs popped out of my fucking head.

It wasn't my dad.

It was *Rob*, his fucking right-hand man, with his pants around his knees and my dad's girlfriend speared on his cock.

"First of all," I said, cringing. "That's disgusting."

Rob jerked her off of him, his hard dick smacking against the front of her pelvis and I nearly vomited as he struggled to unholster his own weapon.

"Don't even fucking think about it," Law said, tipping Rob's head to the side with the barrel of his pistol.

"Every single person connected to your dad has zero fucking brains," he said, tossing me his phone without taking his eyes off of them. "Send Ijah our location."

How was he not at least gagging a little?

I did as he asked and looked at him expectantly, waiting for further instructions.

He glanced at me for a split second out of the corner of his eye. "Can you go back to the car for me, Hunter?"

"What do you need from the car?" I asked.

"Nothing. I want you to go back to your seat and lock the doors until the guys get here."

"But—"

"I said what I said, baby," he cut me off, leaving no room for argument. "Go."

My first instinct was to retort, but I knew he had my best interest at heart and I chose to listen. Mostly because bossy Law was sexy, and I knew he just wanted to keep me safe.

I did as he asked, super anxious about what would happen next. I didn't even want to consider the possibility that he could be injured in any way, especially not right in front of me. I could see him from my place in the back seat, his gun trained on the pair of them. His face was expressionless and I

knew he'd pull the trigger without an ounce of hesitation if either of them so much as blinked the wrong way. But I didn't need to worry for long because the guys arrived in no time at all.

A bright pair of headlights shone through the back window of our vehicle. I released a relieved breath, thankful Law wouldn't have to deal with them alone for much longer. Not that I thought *Marcia* posed any threat, so it wasn't like he was outnumbered or anything.

Ijah tapped on my window as he passed, making sure I knew it was them, and Alec blew a kiss in my direction. I had to bite my lip to keep from grinning.

God, they made me goofy even in the most ridiculous situations.

Then, everything happened so fast.

Alec moved at a ridiculous speed, grabbing *Marcia* by the hair and yanking her from the car. He had her pinned against the side of the vehicle within seconds.

I watched her jerk against him as he pierced the skin at the base of her neck with a needle, and shoved the plunger all the way to the hilt. Her body sagged.

I made a mental note to ask him later what the fuck that was and where they kept it hidden in the house. That was some serial killer-level shit.

He tossed her limp form over his shoulder and walked in the direction of the car they came in, winking at me as he passed by.

In one fluid motion, Law grabbed Rob from the front seat and yanked him out while Ijah simultaneously disarmed him, then further patted him down to make sure they hadn't missed anything. With a swift punch, he crumpled to the ground, unconscious. He was much larger than *Marcia*, so it took both of them to move him.

I was extra grateful they took the time to pull his fucking pants up.

Law returned to me, settling back into the driver's seat slightly sweaty and a bit out of breath.

Buckling up, as casual as ever, he looked at me and said, "How about that hot cocoa?"

CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

Law



Back at the house, the guys had gotten fuck all information from the two twits we now had locked up in the basement—temporary residents in our humble abode in hopes that Ellis would at least come looking for them.

This would either draw him out or it wouldn't, and I wondered which scenario they considered worse at this point. Either we would kill them for simply existing in his orbit, or *he* would once he was given the evidence of their disloyalty to him. It was just a matter of who would make it quicker and easier.

I laughed to myself as I walked up the stairs toward Hunter's bedroom. She'd opted out of witnessing any kind of torture this time around, and I couldn't say I blamed her. She was in a fragile state mentally and none of us really thought it was wise to tempt messing with the progress she'd made. Guns and torture were no bueno for our girl.

I eased the door open quietly and peered in, finding her snuggled under a thick pile of blankets. She really loved being all comfy and cozy. Her lips were parted, her breathing deep and even. She still held the book she'd been reading in the hand draped over her chest. I slid it out of her grasp and placed it on the nightstand.

Brushing a stray strand of hair from her face, I placed a kiss on her temple.

I wanted nothing more than to crawl into bed with her and wake her up with my dick, but she looked so peaceful. I couldn't bring myself to do it. She deserved every moment of peace she could find, and I hoped she was dreaming of something cute, like building a snowman or some shit.

I wanted to build a snowman with her.

I also had a small errand to run, and I didn't want to be rushed. When I finally got my hands on her, I would be taking my sweet fucking time.

I left quietly and headed toward the car without telling the others. This was a mission to keep the peace and if Ijah found out that Alec chugged his last energy drink this afternoon, heads would roll.

Or at least one head would... Alec's.

I steered into the deserted gas station parking lot, barely aware that a car had been creeping along behind me. I threw the SUV into park and cut the engine, but the tense energy of the night's events still pulsed through my veins.

Something felt off, but I couldn't put my finger on what.

I shrugged it off and exited the vehicle, convincing myself that I felt uneasy because Hunter was constantly in the middle of all of this shit. My protective instincts went into overdrive when it came to her.

I slammed the car door and had barely taken two steps away from it when a deafening crack split the air. My body was thrown backward, pain searing through my abdomen as I fell towards the ground. My back collided with the side of the car and I grunted loudly, sliding down the side of it and clasp my hand to the wound as blood wept between my fingers.

My brain felt like it had rattled against the inside of my skull from the impact. I was dazed, unsure if it was from the hit, shock, the pain, or all of those things combined.

I lifted my head toward the direction from which the shot came. My eyes watered, blurring my vision, but there was no mistaking who walked toward me.

"That was fucking fast," I ground out.

Ellis swaggered slowly toward me, his ugly fucking penny loafers clacking against the pavement with each step. His lips twisted into a menacing smirk, making him look like some evil villain straight out of a comic book.

"I don't respond well to others touching what belongs to me," he replied, the cigarette between his lips teetering precariously with the movements of his mouth.

Hunter's face flashed in my mind. She had her father's green eyes and *maybe* his nose, but a delicate elegance he sorely lacked. It seemed impossible to me that such a stunning, perfect human could be the product of someone so vile.

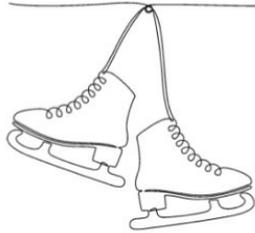
In almost any other scenario, Ellis wouldn't have been able to stand on his own two feet against me, but pumped full of what I assumed was rock salt, I was down for the count.

I felt like I'd been socked in the gut with a thousand tiny needles, the shards embedded into my skin through the thin fabric of my shirt.

The full weight of his punch snapped my head to the side, dulling my senses even further. Before I could react, he grasped me by my collar and slammed my head against the pavement. The asphalt bit into my skin, and my vision tunneled as I lost consciousness.

CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO

Law



I came to, raddled. I squinted in the darkness, frantically searching for any hint of light.

There was none.

I felt around, flecks of dust—or dirt?—nipping at my face with the movement. My fingertips met surfaces on all sides that were unmistakably damp cardboard. Panic rose in my throat as I realized I was completely boxed in. I sucked in a breath, trying to keep my claustrophobia at bay.

My eyelids were heavy, and the weakness in my body threatened to overwhelm me.

Snick. Thunk.

The sound of a shovel piercing the earth, then tossing chunks of dirt into a heap on top of my enclosure sounded from above.

I'd seen somewhere once that a person has two hours of air once buried alive. I hoped this motherfucker worked fast because there was no way I could attempt to make an exit with him still nearby and I had no idea how long I'd already been in there. I was in no shape to fight anyone off.

“*Hurry up,*” a muffled voice hissed, carrying through the pile of dirt and the thin walls of my container. *Ellis.* “This place gives me the fucking creeps.”

I kept completely still, holding my breath so as not to make a single fucking sound. I wasn't about to give them any inclination that I was awake now.

There was a beat of silence before a male voice replied, “Fucking *leave,* then.” I had no idea who it was that spoke. “You're the one who called me out here to do this shit in the middle of the fucking night.”

“It’s your *job* to come when I call,” Ellis replied. “Day or night.”

“Yeah. Well. Maybe next time call me *before* you make a sad attempt at incapacitating someone with the intent to hold them for negotiations,” the guy huffed. “You can’t very well negotiate much of fucking anything when your captive has a head injury like the one you inflicted. The rock salt should have been *enough*.”

“I was *trying* to cover all my bases,” Ellis said. “The fucker is twice my size.”

“You covered them, all right. So here we are, with no collateral in the matter; either burying him to die or sending a message to your precious daughter that says *what* exactly?”

“Shut the fuck up or I’ll be digging a hole next to him for *you*.”

Snick. Thunk.

Each thunk of dirt piled on top pushed the flimsy cardboard closer to my body, making it harder and harder to breathe. I knew the feeling was at least partially in my head, the absolute darkness increasing the sensation of being utterly trapped tenfold.

The shoveling continued relentlessly until I could barely move beneath the suffocating weight... and then it stopped.

“Cardboard fucking *box*,” the voice I didn’t recognize chided.

“I was in a pinch, you fucking asshole,” Ellis replied.

I strained to listen as the voices continued to carry through the soil, growing fainter and more distorted with each word spoken until they faded completely into silence.

The seconds dragged on as I counted in my head, contemplating how long I should wait before making any attempt to move. Then, the low whine of a vehicle’s engine broke the silence, and the sound waned into the distance.

I felt like a wild animal in a too-small cage. Twisting around in the tight space, I squirmed out of my bloody shirt. Folding it and wrapping it around my nose and mouth to keep from eating all the dirt I was about to tunnel my way through, I took a mental inventory of anything I may have on me to make it easier to cut through the cardboard.

Had Ellis been stupid enough to leave me armed? I pressed my back into the bottom of the box; no gun.

That was my favorite gun. Prick.

I shoved my hand into my right pocket, hoping I could catch at least one small break tonight. Not that I couldn’t shred the soggy material with my

bare hands, I just assumed he was at least cognizant enough to duct tape me in.

Then again, maybe not. *Dumb fuck.*

I felt the cold bite of the knife handle and I slipped it from my pocket. I can imagine that he'd felt hurried, but damn he really was so fucking stupid. My fingers trembled slightly as I flicked my wrist, snapping the blade open. With one last deep breath, I clenched the handle tightly and stabbed the tip into the box, splitting it down the middle. I was immediately assaulted by dirt, but at least I could move more freely now, so I began my ascent.

My torso ached with each heave I took to propel myself upward, my weak muscles working against the fatigue as I climbed. Ellis—or whoever the other guy was—was too fucking stupid to even bother packing the dirt down. I felt like a fucking zombie, or some undead creature clawing my way out of the shallow grave.

With one final push, I broke the surface and tore the shirt from my face. Gasping for dirt-free air, I struggled to take in my surroundings. Bits of soil clung to my eyelashes and every other square inch of my aching body.

Rows of gravestones jutted out of the ground, weathered and covered in thick moss. A chill wracked my body.

Not because of the temperature of the night.

Or because of my current state, which admittedly wasn't promising.

No. Neither of those things had my adrenaline spiking any more than it already was.

It was the cemetery itself; the dead fucking bodies, their souls lingering long after being lowered into the ground.

Cemeteries are number one on the list of haunted places I avoid at all costs, and I was *not* about to tango with a fucking ghost tonight. I needed to get the fuck out of there.

They could keep their incorporeal asses away from me.

I opened and closed my hands, the muscles in my forearms contracting as I did, willing my fucked nervous system to get it the fuck together.

I struggled to focus on what I should do next, my skin crawling at the thought of the long-dead bodies in the ground beneath me. This was so disrespectful to the departed. I hoped they somehow knew I was not here by choice.

The wind swept across my face, carrying with it a faint moaning sound. It could've been all in my head, but I was sure I could hear hushed voices

coming from behind each of the nearby gravestones.

I shuddered, then shook it off. “*Thank fuck he’s gone and I can get out of here now,*” I said loudly to no one in particular. I had to double down on the fact that this was all *his* fault. Hopefully, none of the spirits would attach themselves to me once I made a run for it.

My mind wandered to the rock salt embedded in my skin and I released a relieved breath.

Sammy, get the salt! Heh heh. I was probably good on that front.

I could barely stand up straight. My limbs were heavy as I dragged myself away from the scene. Every step was agony, the abrasions littering my abdomen burning with each step.

My throat tightened, and the deep urge to seek Ellis out again tonight seeped into my bones.

I tripped over a stone. Pain shot through my body, reminding me I didn’t have a choice in the matter and wasn’t likely to be able to find him regardless.

I stumbled through the darkness, carefully listening for anyone on my heels, but the creepy fucking silence stretched on. There was nothing and no one.

My heart hammered in my chest as I made my way towards a thicket of trees near the back. With a sharp intake of breath, I cleared the rickety fence surrounding the perimeter, my body screaming in pain as I landed on the other side.

Are woods haunted, too? Fuck. The ones surrounding a cemetery probably were.

I picked up my pace, and once I was certain I was far enough away from any potentially angered spirits, I stopped to take a breath. Leaning against a tree, I felt my pockets for my phone. The dumb shit didn’t even bother taking it. I pulled it out and tapped the grimy screen.

No service.

Great.

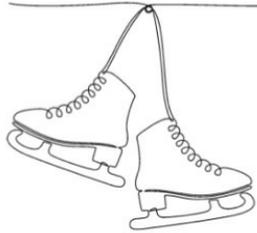
I had no idea where the fuck I was or how I would manage getting home. I was under no delusions that I wouldn’t need medical attention.

I steeled myself against the pain and fatigue and pushed off the tree. I knew I would have to go back in the direction I came if I wanted to easily find my way back to the main road. My heart palpitated at the thought of walking through the cemetery alone at night, but I was stupid to come this

way to begin with, so I sucked it up and made my way back.

CHAPTER TWENTY-THREE

Hunt



The bed dipped at my back, and I turned, expecting to find Law there, but a pair of pretty, dark brown eyes stared back at me.

“Ijah,” I breathed, a smile forming on my lips.

He tugged me into him, kissing along my jawline. “I didn’t mean to wake you.”

“That’s okay. I didn’t mean to fall asleep.” I snuggled into him, resting my head on his chest.

The door crept open and I peeked in that direction, eager for Law to come to finish what we’d started, but it was Alec who came into view.

I plopped my head back down and released a sigh, feeling deflated. Maybe he’d changed his mind? The thought made my stomach twist uncomfortably.

Alec stopped at the edge of the bed, running his hand over my hair. “Sick of me already?” He asked.

“No,” I grumbled. “I’m just anxious about Law.”

“Anxious to get in his pants?” Ijah asked, his deep laugh rumbling against my ear.

I playfully smacked his chest but then thought for a second. “Yeah, actually,” I admitted.

They both chuckled as I rolled onto my back and sat up against the headboard.

“His car is gone,” Alec said nonchalantly as if it were a normal occurrence for him to leave in the middle of the night without telling anyone.

Maybe it was. I hadn’t been here long, so it’s not like I would know.

Alec circled the bed and climbed in on my other side, propping himself

up on his elbow and staring at me with those big brown eyes of his.

I felt a pang of guilt that I was lying in between two of my favorite humans ever, yet I still felt sad that Law wasn't here, too. I guessed that was what it was like when you felt like your whole heart belonged to three separate people. "Do you think maybe he forgot about me?" I glanced over at Ijah, worrying my lip.

His eyes softened and he brushed a strand of hair from my face. "Oh, baby. Of course, he didn't forget about you. I would bet good money he came in to find you asleep and snuck back out to do whatever he needed to do before you woke."

"Ugh," I grumbled again.

"He'll be back in no time," Ijah reassured me.

Alec gently ran the back of his hand over my arm, causing goosebumps to rise on my skin. "Want us to take your mind off it?" he asked.

Of course, I fucking did.

I rolled my eyes, scrunching up my nose.

"I'll take that as a yes," he said, lifting me with ease and settling me so that I was straddling his lap.

"You're insufferable," I giggled, wrapping my arms around his neck and kissing him.

"You love it," he said between kisses.

I did.

He stripped the oversized sleep shirt I was wearing from my body, baring me to two pairs of hungry eyes.

His calloused hands grazed down my ribcage, halting at my hips. He gave me a squeeze, grinding his thick erection against my center, while simultaneously eyeing my cunt and smirking; probably at the fact that I hadn't been wearing panties.

He ran his hands back up my body, cupping my breasts. "Mmm. So fucking perfect. You know what I think?"

"What?" I asked, sucking in a breath as he rolled one of my nipples between his thumb and forefinger.

"I think that when given the option, you chose to have this surgery because you wanted this body tailored to my preferences, didn't you?"

I didn't answer; couldn't have if I'd wanted to.

He tugged at my lip, releasing it and returning his hand to my hip.

"You walk around with this perfect, sweet face and these whore tits,

everyone wants you, don't they? Some of them willing to fork over a quarter of a million for just a taste, but we fucking *own* you, don't we?"

"You do," I said. Everything that had just come out of his mouth was totally true, but it was still all so mind-boggling to me.

I freed his cock from his pants and slowly sank down onto him. I wasn't sure I'd ever get used to how fucking huge this man was. I groaned, feeling stretched beyond my limits.

Ijah tilted my face toward his, unadulterated lust evident in his eyes. "God, you're fucking beautiful like this," he said brushing his thumb over my cheek.

"I love you so much," I said back to him, all the while bouncing on Alec's cock.

It wasn't lost on me that I hadn't said those words to Alec yet, but the feelings I had for him were just as immense.

"I love you too, cupcake," Ijah replied.

"And I love both of you," Alec said so fucking nonchalantly, causing me to audibly gasp and whip my head around. I stilled my movements. He just smirked. "Now get that pretty cock out, Ij," he added, cupping my face and rubbing along my jawline, his eyes never leaving mine. "This little slut of ours needs to be filled *all* the way up."

He began to rifle through my nightstand, but I couldn't keep from kissing him again. "I love you, too," I said, and he grinned against my lips.

I did love him, and it meant everything to me that these two were so adamant about including one another in our time together.

I just wished Law were here too. We had a lot of lost time to make up for. Hopefully, he would be home soon.

I felt an anxious pang in my gut, unease taking hold, but I told myself it was just in my nature to worry. He was fine. *We* were fine.

Alec pulled back from me, his hard cock twitching against my inner walls as he did.

He squirted a small amount of lube into his open palm, and when he wrapped his long, sexy fingers around the base of Ijah's cock, stroking him once from base to tip, every thought retreated from my mind.

My mouth went slack. "How did I get so fucking lucky to be with the three hottest humans on the planet?" I asked.

They both just snorted. "How did we get so fucking lucky to have *you*, baby?" Ijah replied.

Alec smacked my ass, shocking me. I clenched around his length and he grunted. “Turn around for me so I can get that cute little ass ready.”

Is it possible to come from words alone? Because Alec made me feel like it actually might be.

His hands framed my sides, nudging me to turn. I maneuvered myself around, spinning on his cock a full one-eighty. Once I was facing the other direction, he encouraged me to lean forward with his hand flat against my upper back.

The soft sounds of Ijah stroking himself next to us nearly sent me over the edge.

My chest met the bed at the same time the bedroom door clicked open.

A rush of excitement washed over me.

Until I turned to face the door and found Law standing there.

Filthy. Disheveled. *Bloody*.

I felt Alec’s cock deflate inside me as I hurried off of him and bounded toward Law, both Alec and Ijah fast on my heels.

“What the fuck?!” I screeched.

My eyes flicked from injury to injury, unsure where to look first.

His shirt was stained with thick layers of blood and dirt, and the fabric looked like it had been shredded by a cheese grater all down the front. I could see a deep gash on the side of his head where blood had oozed down his neck and pooled at his shoulder. My heart skipped a beat at the sight.

I wanted to grab him. To hold him. To put him back together.

“I’m okay, Hunter,” he said hoarsely.

“No, you’re fucking not!” I was frantic now, standing in front of him butt-ass naked needing answers.

“What the fuck happened to you?” Ijah demanded.

“Ellis happened.”

“Jesus Christ,” Alec muttered, reaching forward to pick a piece of what looked like tiny gravel from Law’s tender abdomen. Sticky, half-dried blood and thick dirt clung to every inch of his torso.

“Call my mom,” Law said, slowly limping toward the bathroom.

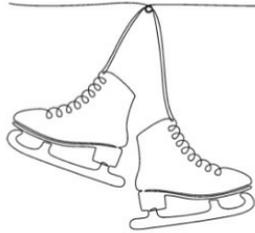
“We’ll never get Hunny off his dick now,” Alec said to Ijah, half joking.

I swatted him in the chest and followed after Law. I was sure they were used to seeing each other come home like this, but *I* wasn’t, and I definitely wasn’t in the mood to joke about it.

He was probably right, though.

CHAPTER TWENTY-FOUR

Hunt



Law hissed through his teeth as Ijah dabbed at the tiny lesions scattered over the full length of his upper body.

He was freshly showered, spread out on the couch while we waited for his mom to arrive. She was apparently a registered nurse and would be able to take a look at him and decide if his condition necessitated a trip to the hospital, which he wanted to avoid if at all possible. I was super nervous to meet her, but also glad he would have someone to check him out at home first. I really felt like he needed to see a doctor, but I also understood why he didn't want to go in. There would be too many questions he wouldn't be able to answer truthfully, and what the fuck kind of story could we make up to explain *this*?

He seemed totally fine other than being super sore. The guys all said being shot with rock salt was usually not a big deal, but my *loving father* shot him in such close proximity that he may have had internal bruising—not to mention the fact that he knocked him out cold.

Thankfully for all of us, my dad was an *absolute pinecone* and couldn't finish a job if his life depended on it apparently.

I was more worried about the gash on Law's head than anything, but once he'd cleaned up the wound wasn't as bad as it had first looked. Ijah explained to me that head wounds bleed more heavily than wounds on other parts of the body because your face and scalp have a lot of blood vessels close to the surface of your skin. It always looks worse than it is and most of the time it's not as severe as it seems like it might be.

The doorbell rang, startling me. My anxiety spiked immediately. I didn't have experience with meeting any significant other's parents. Mattia's

parents were long dead before we'd ever met, not to mention the fact that he was in no way *significant* to me. Ijah was the only real boyfriend I'd ever had and we simply hadn't made it to that point. I stood, straightened my clothes, and raked my fingers through my hair, hoping I looked at least halfway decent.

Law tugged at the hem of my shirt. "*Relax.*"

"Pfft. Easy for you to say."

"It won't be as bad as you think. My mo—"

Whatever he'd intended to say about his mom was cut off. He was mid-sentence when she swept into the room, her bright eyes, rosy cheeks, and infectious grin changing the entire atmosphere.

"*Nelia?!*" I was dumbfounded.

Nelia. My nurse. Was Law's *mom*?

Oh my god, of course she was.

She swept me up into the biggest bear hug. I was momentarily too shocked to hug her back, but when she didn't immediately release me I snapped out of it and wrapped my arms around her. The warmth of her embrace was comforting.

She held me at arm's length, giving me a solid once-over. Once she was satisfied I was all in one piece and well, she moved on to Law.

"Wait a damn minute," I said to literally every single fucking person in the room. "I have questions."

Nelia crouched down next to Law and began inspecting his wounds.

She lightly trailed her fingertips along his chest, then moved down to his stomach, probing and pressing gently. He tensed as her fingers found the most tender spots, flinching away from her touch.

She shone a small flashlight from the outer edge of each of his eyes inward, then pulled a stethoscope from the bag she'd carried in and laid it against his chest. She noted his breathing rate and temperature before also checking his blood pressure. Satisfied that he was stable and in no immediate need of medical attention, she said, "I don't think you have a concussion or any other serious internal injuries, so we're good to keep an eye on you here for a few days. But if at any point I decide that has changed, you will go in. Immediately. No questions asked."

"Yes, Mother," he said, giving her a mock salute.

"Now," she said, turning away from him and back to me. "Questions?"

She continued to catch me off guard.

“So many questions,” I replied. I paused to gather my thoughts. “And... all of them are *what the fuck?*”

Alec chuckled, coming up behind me to massage my shoulders. “You’re wondering why she helped you run away from me?”

“Well. That’s a great place to start,” I said.

Nelia shot daggers at Alec. “If he was stupid enough to make the mistake of saying things you didn’t need to hear in a space where you were incredibly likely to hear them, that was on him. What was I supposed to do? Tell you that you were delusional when you were finally ready to be discharged? I wasn’t setting you back *weeks* of progress just because he chose to be a dipshit that morning.”

Law chuckled. “You were never in any danger, love.”

“Oh, of course not,” Nelia added.

I gasped, recalling my encounter with Law that same day. I turned to him. He had the audacity to seem almost cheeky about it. “The nerve of you to basically tackle me and hog tie me when I had a brain injury. What the fuck?”

“You did what now?” Nelia asked, rounding on her son.

He cowered, holding up his hands in submission. “Listen, I was just playing the part. Do you think she would have listened to me if I’d attempted to sit her down and have a gentle conversation with her about why she needed to come home with us? *No*. She literally threw a shoe at me. *Two* shoes, actually. And one of them hit me in the crotch!”

Nelia scoffed, flicking his ear as she passed him on her way out of the room. “You’re lucky you’re injured right now. Between the two of you, I don’t know which is worse,” she said to Alec and Law. I wondered if she had the full story about how I’d gained my memories back. I was guessing not, because she’d have likely had some strong words for Ijah as well.

“Are you hungry, Nelia?” Ijah asked, following her to the kitchen.

“I’m hungry!” Alec called after them. “Are you hungry, Hunny Bee?” he asked me.

“Oh, I’m fine,” Law said sarcastically. “Don’t mind me, not hungry or in need of anything at all. I’ll just find my way to my room by myself. I can totally climb up all those stairs without assistance. Not like I was pumped full of rock salt and *buried alive* in a fucking *haunted* cemetery or anything.”

He was ridiculous, even as injured as he was. I fucking hated my dad, and seeing Law like this made me wish I could wrap something tight around his throat and watch him struggle for air as the light left his eyes. Not that he had

any light left in him.

I stood in front of Law and reached for his hand. “I’ll help you up the stairs and bring you anything you need.”

He took my hand, but instead of allowing me to help him up, he pulled me down onto the couch next to him and nuzzled his face into my neck. “*Anything?*” he asked.

I eyed him suspiciously, but if I was being totally real with myself, the answer to that question was a resounding yes. “What did you have in mind?”

“Hmm,” he contemplated. “For starters, you could bring me this pussy on a silver platter.”

I giggled, kissing the corner of his mouth. “You’re seriously so silly sometimes.” It was still a bit shocking when he was, but it was nice to see this playful side of him when it came out. Before, I’d just assumed he was always super serious with that permanent scowl of his etched on his face.

I loved his scowl. I gazed down at him, running my thumb across his forehead and smoothing the skin there.

“For the love of all things holy, please wait until I’m out of this house before you say anything about anyone’s genitals again.” Nelia had popped back in, bringing with her a steaming mug of what I assumed was tea.

I appreciated that she didn’t question my relationship with Law—with any of them. I figured she was pretty in the know about all of, well, *us*. They were all very casual about having their hands on me in front of her. But the judgment you’d expect from someone’s mother when it came to the fact that you were sleeping with her son and his two best friends... it just wasn’t there.

Not that I had slept with Law yet. But I was most definitely going to. And he was most definitely not making a point to keep that fact a secret from *anyone*.

Alec stood and pulled me to my feet before offering Law a hand. “Let’s get you in bed.”

“Oh, so you’re trying to get fresh with me now, too?” Law joked.

“First of all, *you* were trying to get fresh with *me*,” I said.

“Yeah. But you liked it,” he replied, grunting as he stood.

Nelia had curled up in the recliner and pulled a throw blanket over her legs. She sipped her tea, giving Law a motherly look that screamed *please just shut the fuck up*.

He stiffly made his way over to her and bearing his weight on the back of the chair, he bent at the waist to place a kiss on the top of her head. It was

more than sweet seeing him like this. I loved when I thought he was only ever really soft for me, but seeing him soft for Nelia gave me a different kind of warm fuzzies. I didn't know how Law ended up in the line of work he was in, especially not if he'd come from a loving home with at least one present parent, but I was thankful for whatever brought him to it because it also brought him to me.

That was probably selfish of me, being that I was pretty certain none of them enjoyed the things they had to do sometimes. I'd seen both Alec and Law looking downright despondent coming back from jobs in the past, and Ijah had explicitly stated to me how much he hated the number of lives he'd taken—and for what? They'd all been trapped in this line of work. It wasn't as if it was something they could easily leave behind once they decided they didn't like it anymore. But I felt like I was allowed to be selfish after all the things I'd been through. Especially when it came to them.

“Love you, Mom,” he said, straightening and taking my hand as he stood. “Thanks for coming over.”

“Love you, too. Rest,” she said to him. “Make him rest,” she said to me. “If you need anything for pain, text me and I'll see what I can do. I'd rather you not take anything if you can manage without it.”

“I'll be fine.”

Once we made it to his room, he immediately fell into bed.

“Mom will most definitely be in to check on me throughout the night. The hit my head took was pretty rough. But I'd like for you to stay. I'll keep my hands to myself.”

I climbed into bed with him. He wrapped his arm around me, tucking me into his side. “What torture that will be,” I said, partially kidding, but it actually would be.

It wasn't likely that I would sleep. I was too keyed up from the events of the night and too concerned with checking on him nearly constantly to even consider closing my eyes. But I was content to lie next to him and watch him sleep.

Alec slipped in just as Law drifted off and shuffled in behind me, snuggling against my back. He ran his hands over my hair, eliciting a sigh from me. “I watched you just like this for so many freaking nights while you were in the hospital. It sucked, but at the same time, it was nice to know you were able to rest. I was always so worried about managing your pain. So when you slept at night, I knew you weren't struggling—at least in that

moment—and I felt so at peace. Everything had gone to shit, but you were resting and that was all that mattered right then and there.”

I hummed, nuzzling against him. “I love you.”

“I love you. You can sleep now, too,” he assured me. “I know you’re anxious to keep an eye on him, but we’ve got it.”

“What about you? You need to sleep.”

“Ijah is just taking a quick shower and he’ll be in. We’ll sleep in shifts.”

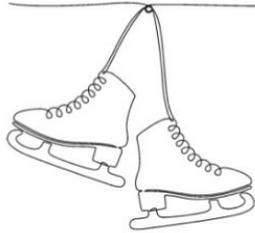
“I wish I could sufficiently snuggle all three of you at the same time,” I said through a yawn.

He laughed darkly, his chest rumbling against my back. “We’ll snuggle in shifts too.”

I smiled to myself, draping my leg over Law’s. I wasn’t sure I could ever snuggle close enough to either of them.

CHAPTER TWENTY-FIVE

Hunt



After three days of Nelia doting over Law like the sassy mother hen she was, he convinced her he was on the mend enough that she could leave and we'd all take great care of him.

I would genuinely miss having her around. Once the shock that she was his mother had worn off, it was nice being with her again. She'd taken such good care of me during my time at the hospital, and now I understood why.

I would also miss the meals she'd prepared for all of us while here. Now I knew where Law had found his love of cooking; it was apparently a love language in their family.

With the house finally empty of any extra guests, I only had one thing on my mind: gently fucking Law's brains out.

I shimmied out of my jeans and stepped into a tight mesh corset-style bodysuit, the sheer black material clinging to my curves. Cute little ruffles lined the edges. It was feminine as fuck.

I looked myself over in the mirror. I looked *hot*, and I was giddy for my guys to see me like this.

I did a little shimmy, because why the fuck not, and pranced down the hallway from my room to Law's.

Easing the door open, I slipped inside.

He was laid up in bed with a bag of popcorn, watching reruns of *Supernatural*. I was glad he was resting, Mama Nelia's orders, but I supposed a *little* activity wouldn't hurt him too much.

All the lights were off, the curtains drawn. The dimness of the room was broken only by the faint glow coming from the TV, casting dancing shadows across the walls and ceiling.

He had a glass bottle of root beer halfway to his mouth, preparing to take a drink, when his eyes caught on me—on what I was wearing.

He all but dropped it on the nightstand, the bottle thudding against the wood, teetering dangerously before he righted it. The bag of popcorn followed, and he eagerly sat up into a more seated position.

“*Fuuuuuck*,” he groaned, reaching for me as I approached the side of the bed. “Are you trying to kill me, baby?”

“No,” I said, climbing onto the bed to straddle him. “I just need you.” I kissed him softly. His lips were pouty in a way that reminded me of every basic attractive fuck boy, but nothing about this man was *basic*.

“I’m still in such rough shape,” he said, his hips jerking toward me of their own volition. “I can’t fuck you how I want to.”

“And how’s that?” I asked, quirking an eyebrow.

He kissed along my jawline. “Face down, ass up, pinned against this mattress by the back of your neck. Hard and fast while Alec and Ijah watch.”

That was... very specific. Damn.

I scooted in closer to him, rubbing myself against his hard cock. “*Please*,” I said, wrapping my arms around his neck. I didn’t care that our first time would be less than ideal. I didn’t need a hot, rough fuck. I just needed *him*. “I’ll be so careful, *daddy*.”

Half a second later he twisted the fabric covering my breasts in each one of his hands, and before I could react, he shredded the entire bodysuit right down the middle.

I huffed out a sound of indignation, “*That was expensive, Lawson!*”

“Oh, with the full last name, huh?” he said, his lips crashing against mine. “You messed with the bull, baby girl.”

I moved off of him, removing the tattered pieces of fabric still clinging to my body. I eyed him indignantly the entire time. He just stared back at me with a cocky smirk.

“I’ll buy you a new one,” he said, nipping at my chin with his thumb and forefinger.

I tugged at his pajama pants, pulling his cock out and giving it a quick stroke before lowering my mouth to the tip. I placed a kiss there, teasing him. His head dropped back against the headboard as one of his hands threaded through the back of my hair.

“Don’t fucking tease me, Hunter,” he said sternly. My heart skipped a beat at his tone.

I stuck out my tongue, curling it around the underside of his cock, and took him to the back of my throat before closing my mouth around him. I gagged on his length, my stomach muscles contracting as I sucked in a shallow breath through my nose. His cock twitched in response.

“That’s it, baby. Gag for me,” he encouraged, pulling my head back, and then nudging me back down. He was in full control of my movements, the way he manhandled me pushing every other thought in my head to the side. I gagged again but willed my throat to relax, taking him further this time. “I love how hard you try for me, sweet girl.”

I bobbed my head, the combination of my movements and his praise making me feel light and floaty. I sighed as my lips brushed the smooth plane of his pelvis, so thankful to be in this moment with him.

The door to the room eased open, but I was so buzzed on Law that I didn’t bother stopping to look. A shadow moved around the bed frame, the sound of a chair slightly scraping across the floor begging for my attention.

I peered up at Law, his features soft in the low light of the room as he stroked my cheek. My eyes shifted to the side to find Alec all cozy as shit on Law’s armchair, watching intently.

I paused, eyeing him.

“Don’t stop, Hunny Bee. Fuck him with your face. That mouth of yours is only good for catching cum, isn’t it? I want to watch it do its job.” The way these men talked to me would be the absolute fucking death of me. *R.I.P. that pussy, aaaye.*

Law pulled me from his cock with a pop, not releasing my hair as he tilted my head so that my eyes were on him. I was in a daze. “Come up here, angel,” he said, jerking his chin. Gingerly, I crawled up his body, careful not to put pressure on his still-sensitive flesh. He kissed me, so softly, his tongue slipping gently inside my mouth. “No,” he cooed. “This mouth is good for so many things.” *Kiss.* “Such a…” *Kiss.* “Good…” *Kiss.* “Sweet…” *Kiss.* “Girl.”

Alec *tsked*, leaning forward. “Hmmm. I don’t know. She’s probably fucking soaked just from sucking you off.” I totally was. “You’re a dirty, cocksucking whore, aren’t you? Tell him.”

I peered into Law’s eyes, trying to force the words to form on my lips. I wanted to obey Alec, but I suddenly felt shy. “Shhh,” he seemed to read my mind. His hand slipped between my legs, feeling exactly how soaked I was for him. “You’re dripping, baby.”

Heat rose to the surface of my skin. How would I survive these two?
Jesus.

Alec had hinted at the fact that he preferred more degrading dirty talk, but he was no longer holding back and I fucking loved it.

I straddled Law and then slowly lowered myself onto his cock. I didn't want to spend another second not showing him that I was his. That he was mine. His lips parted with a quiet sigh; a physical manifestation of exactly how I felt inside.

I rode him slowly, gently. It felt more like making love than fucking, but I did love him. Just as much as I loved the other guys.

Alec sat back in his seat, so relaxed, desire written all over his face as he watched us move together.

“So pretty like this,” Law breathed, running his knuckles over my collarbone, over my scars. The fact that he thought I was pretty—scars and all—fucked me all the way up.

Without really thinking, I reached for Alec. He scooted in closer, taking my hand and placing a kiss against my palm. “God, you just want it so bad, don't you?” The words he spoke were taunting, and teasing.

“*Fuck,*” I breathed, my eye's never leaving Alec's as Law circled my clit. “I do.”

His dark laugh twisted my insides. “Come for him and I'll fuck you like the needy whore you are.” The words were degrading, but the praising tone he spoke them in made me feel like a fucking dog: it didn't matter *what* he said to me, as long as it was with *that* voice I still felt like his good girl.

I clenched around Law, “*Fuck, Law. I love you.*” The words tumbled from my lips as I came so hard my vision blurred. Law bucked into me, his cock pulsing inside of me, filling me with his own release.

I wanted to fall onto his body—wanted to lay with him skin to skin, but I knew it wasn't the best idea. Instead, I eased off of him, lying next to him. I righted his pajama bottoms and covered him with his blanket, cuddling into his side as Alec unbuckled his belt, sliding it out of the loops in one swoop, and climbed into bed behind me.

“I love you, too,” Law whispered against the top of my head, running his hand over the back of my hair.

Consider me melted.

Were the four of us all absolutely nuts? Most definitely. But if being insane meant I got to have *this* with *them*, fucking certify me.

Alec's lips brushed against the shell of my ear. "So fucking sweet of you to go easy on Law, but I know you like it hard." I whimpered at his words. "Such a needy little thing."

He gripped my hips, jerking me forcefully away from Law, then flipped our positions, pulling me with him. I sucked in a startled breath at the way he maneuvered me around like a rag doll. Face down with him behind me, he smacked my ass. "Be a good little slut and put your hands on the headboard for me."

"Yes, sir," I said, hurriedly placing my hands there.

Law *hmp*hed, "So I'm daddy and he's sir?"

Alec paused, angling his head to get a better look at my face. "You called him *daddy*?"

I shrugged, scrunching up my face. "I mean. He is pretty daddy."

"Fair," he replied, unperturbed, then he lined his cock up with my cunt and slammed into me.

I cried out at the force of it. His movements were intense and primal, gripping my body with a feral strength. My breath stuttered as his hips moved in an unrelenting rhythm against my ass.

"*Ungh*. This used pussy is too fucking good," he ground out. "I can feel him dripping out of you."

Law groaned, readjusting himself in his pants. "Hurry the fuck up, I can't take much more of this." *Damn*, their refractory period was non-existent.

He snaked a hand between Alec's legs, cupping his balls. Alec's hips went flush with my ass as he jerked against me, filling me.

"I think you can give us one more," Law said, moving his hand to the apex of my thighs. I was already on the edge of climaxing and sensitive from my last release. When he rolled my clit between his thumb and forefinger, I shattered completely, jerking intensely beneath Alec.

As I came down from the high, he lowered me to the bed and crossed the space into the bathroom. With the sounds of the sink running filling the room, I snuggled back into Law. He slung an arm over me, wincing a bit as he did. My guy was exhausted and sore, but I was so thankful he was *here*.

What is life that something like this could even happen, and who the fuck did my dad think he was?

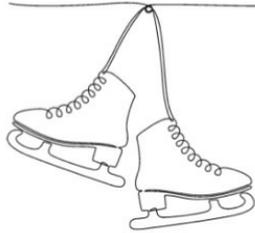
Alec came back into the room with a washcloth. He climbed onto the bed and nudged my legs apart. Kneeling between my thighs, he gently ran the wet cloth over my cunt and inner thighs, wiping any evidence of the two of them.

I was glad for it because I was too boneless to pull myself from the bed to go to the bathroom.

Once he finished, he tossed it into the hamper in the corner of the room and crowded me against Law with the hard length of his own body. He crossed his arm over me, resting his hand gingerly against Law's ribcage. Law covered it with his own, and when they remained like that as they drifted off to sleep, my heart doubled in size.

CHAPTER TWENTY-SIX

Ijah



It had been three days since we'd locked Rob and Marcia up in the basement. I'd given them barely enough water to keep them alive, a bucket to piss in, and nothing else.

They sat huddled in the corner, chained to each other and to the wall, scarcely able to hold their heads up from sheer exhaustion and lack of nourishment.

I didn't feel bad about it, not even remotely.

Anyone who'd had a hand in Hunt's suffering deserved to die a slow and painful death, and while they didn't directly do anything to harm her, they were both close to her father. So fuck them.

Ellis was a fucking coward. He knew where we lived, knew we had Hunt here—and now his precious girlfriend and dickwad lap dog.

But he was too much of a chicken shit to show his face because he knew what was waiting for him here. His only plan of action was to sneak up on us when we didn't have our strength in numbers.

And that wouldn't happen again.

"These two clowns are no closer to talking than they were the day we dragged their sorry asses in here," Alec assessed, propped against the wall of the basement.

"No shit," Law replied. He was sitting on the stairs, leaning back on his elbows. I felt like he needed to take it slow, but he was restless lying in bed all day and fucking stubborn.

"It's wild to me that you two have no problem sleeping around on Ellis, but you won't go so far as to just tell us where he is," I said, taking slow measured steps toward them. "You'd rather die?"

“You’ll kill us either way,” Rob mumbled, barely coherent.

“Yeah, but it would’ve been a lot faster and easier had you talked.” I turned on my heel, pacing back across the room.

I stopped in front of Alec and stared at him intently. He gave a quick nod of understanding. The bastard knew me so well, it was like we shared a brain sometimes.

I held out a hand to Law to help him to his feet before curling my arm around his waist. “Those twats are a waste of oxygen,” I muttered. “And they’re doing nothing but taking up space in my basement, radiating their shitty juju throughout my living space.”

He grunted his agreement. “I can walk,” he grumbled, taking gentle steps as he climbed up the stairs.

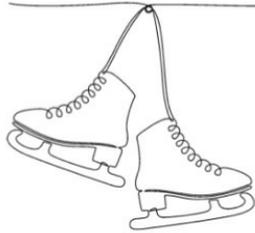
He attempted to remove my hand from his body. “Fuck off,” I said, smacking him away and gripping him harder just because. He relented, slinging his arm over my shoulder.

As we crested the top of the stairs leading into the kitchen from the basement, two loud pops reverberated from below.

I released an easier breath, more content than I had been in days.

CHAPTER TWENTY-SEVEN

Ijah



When we walked into the kitchen, Hunt was already awake making breakfast. I'd hoped we'd gotten up early enough to do what we had to do without waking her, but I was happy to see her nonetheless.

I pulled out a seat for Law and helped him into it. He scowled at me but I knew he secretly appreciated being loved on by all of us.

"Smells so fucking good, cupcake. What are you making?" I asked, coming in behind her and wrapping my arms around her waist. I nuzzled my face into her neck, strands of her sleep-mussed hair attaching themselves to my morning scruff.

"Egg sandwiches," she said, turning her face to kiss the corner of my mouth. "But what you smell is probably the banana nut bread I have in the oven."

Law sat up straighter in his chair. "That's an odd combination. Were you... *craving it*?"

She turned, still in my arms, and leveled him with a glare. "No. The bananas were going bad."

The oil crackled in the pan as she turned back to the stove, slipping the spatula under an egg and deftly flipping it.

"Is Law trying to impregnate you?" I chuckled, snatching a grape out of the bowl on the counter and popping it in my mouth. I knew without a doubt that was most definitely what he meant by that little remark.

"I think he'd be satisfied if any one of you did," Hunt said, plating the eggs. "Fat chance."

"What's that supposed to mean?" Law questioned her, sounding slightly offended. Then it dawned on him. "I see. Well. When I find it, I'm flushing it

down the toilet.” He meant her birth control.

Her eyes widened, but she didn’t turn to face him. She continued buttering slices of bread, making the sandwiches like egg grilled cheeses. I would marry her for that alone. Mrs. Ijah Canmore, breakfast maker extraordinaire.

“Guess I’ll just have to make extra sure it’s well hidden, then,” she said, smirking. I knew she had an IUD, but I wasn’t about to ruin their fun. I loved that she humored him like this. I would be lying if I said I didn’t also like the idea of seeing her with a cute little round stomach, full of our baby. But we were nowhere near that possibility, and I wasn’t sure we ever would be. Some people didn’t need to have kids, and it was pretty evident by our lifestyle that we fell under that category.

I brushed my hand over her abs, kissing her on the cheek. My longing quickly turned to desire. “How can I help?” I asked, my motives not entirely pure.

“Set the plates out and get everyone drinks while I finish up.”

“Do I get a reward?”

“For performing basic household tasks? Uhm, no,” she sassed.

“It was worth a try,” I shrugged and quickly did what she’d requested of me.

Once we settled to eat, Hunt stilled. “Where’s Alec?”

“Did you not hear the sounds coming from the basement, love?” Law asked.

“I mean I did, I just assumed he’d be up by now.”

“Cleaning brain matter from the wall is no quick task, cupcake,” I told her.

She cringed. “Don’t you have someone who does that for you?”

“We do,” I said, looking at her seriously. “But I’m not chancing anyone coming into the house right now. Not until we’ve dealt with your dad.”

“Not even your own men?”

“The only men I trust to be around you are the same ones I enjoy sharing you with.”

It was crazy I was even willing to, being that possessiveness swelled in my chest each time I thought of her. But seeing her with them, seeing her happy—that was all I wanted for her. And of course, they were more than willing to share her as well, so there were no worries about them trying to edge me out.

Loving Hunt was like being swept up in a fucking tornado and I was a goddamn storm chaser. I would do some crazy things for her.

Anything.

“Speaking of the men you share me with, can the four of us draw names for Christmas?” Her pretty green eyes sparkled with enthusiasm as she clapped her hands together and grinned. Her excitement was fucking precious. “I would really want to get all of you something, but I’m also broke as shit and it’s not the same if I ask you to help me buy your own presents.”

“Do you really think we haven’t all already gotten you something?” I asked. “You don’t have to get us anything, we have all we need as long as you’re here with us.”

“I mean, I didn’t want to assume. I’ve never been able to shop for a boyfriend before, and I just thought it would be cute and fun to do it this way,” she said, sealing her lips around the metal straw in her cup to take a sip of orange juice.

Her calling me her boyfriend made my dick hard. And I had something better for her to seal her lips around.

I made a mental note to buy her a few more presents.

“Stop staring at my mouth, you’re making me self-conscious,” she said, using her sleeve to wipe at the corner of it.

I pulled her off of her barstool, guiding her between my legs. From my seat, I was at eye level with her neck. I licked a line up the length of it, nipping at her chin with my teeth. I wanted to suck her skin into my mouth and leave a mark there.

“You never have to feel self-conscious with us, baby,” I told her, pulling her flush with my body. “I was looking at your mouth because I want to put it to good use.” A tinge of pink crawled across her chest.

She moved away from me, dropping to her knees. “There’s our good girl.” My eager, pretty girl.

I stood, and Law moved to leave his seat at the same time. “Keep your decrepit ass in your seat,” I said, unwilling to allow him to push himself too far while he was still healing.

He relented, grumbling, which told me he was worse for wear than he wanted to admit.

“Do you need to go back to bed?” Hunt asked him, her voice full of concern. Apparently, we were on the same wavelength.

“Take his dick out, Hunter.” His tone left no room for her to argue, but

for the first time in a sexual scenario, she did not relent.

“But if you’re in pain, I...”

“*Hunter*,” he cut her off. “The only pain I’m experiencing lies in me waiting for you to do what I said. I thought you were a good girl, what happened?”

She gasped, utterly offended, then did exactly as he’d said. She was so obedient. I fucking loved the way she wanted to please us.

I wanted to please her, too.

Her fingers curled around the base of my shaft, her other hand running along my outer thigh. She wasted no time taking me deep, bobbing her head like her life depended on it.

I glanced at Law, barely holding myself upright as she worked me over. Dick in hand, he moved in slow strokes as he watched Hunt’s every movement so fucking intently. His eyes caught on mine as I twisted the length of her hair around my fist.

Fuck.

The door to the basement opened, but Hunt did not falter. She was growing accustomed to being watched. Shared. Adored by the three of us. I wanted her addicted.

“The dynamic duo is soaking in a warm lye bath,” Alec said, wiping his hands with a blue shop towel. He paused then, taking in the scene before him.

He made to walk over to us, but I held out my hand, gesturing for him to stop. “Keep—*fuck*—your grody hands...over there.”

I grasped the edge of the island, unable to keep my release at bay any longer. My balls tightened as I jerked violently, spilling down her throat.

She immediately pulled off of me, pressing a quick kiss to the head of my dick before literally *crawling* over to Law and taking him in her mouth.

I had barely regained my bearings when his hips jerked forward, pressing himself flush against her face as he stroked along her jaw. He let out a low, throaty noise as he came. The sight of them made my dick twitch, ready for more.

“I’m going for a shower. I’m jealous,” Alec grumbled, then raced up the stairs.

I helped Hunt to her feet. “Let’s get this one to bed,” I said, nodding to Law. “Wanna curl up to him for a bit?” I asked, knowing if she did, he’d rest and relax for a while.

She nodded, taking my hand. I loved that she seemed to feel a bit shy

after taking turns deep-throating the two of us in the middle of the kitchen. She was so fucking adorable.

“I’ll turn a movie on for you and bring up some snacks.” I grabbed Law’s half-full breakfast plate from the island; he hadn’t even finished his sandwich.

I watched as she looped her arm through his and led him up the stairs. My heart swelled in my chest. I would have never thought it would make me so happy to see my girl love anyone but me, but the fact was that she deserved all the love I could give her and so much more. I knew Law and Alec would always protect her and do right by her in all the same ways I would. I trusted each of them with my life—and I trusted them with hers.

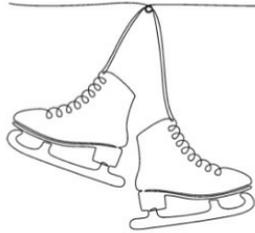
Nothing made me happier than seeing her cared for.

Really, I felt like it would take the three of us loving her to give her anywhere near what she deserved. She had so much lost love and life to make up for.

I couldn’t wait to start the rest of ours with her and for us to be the ones to help her do just that.

CHAPTER TWENTY-EIGHT

Hunt



We'd spent most of the day in bed. Now evening, I nestled my head against Law's chest. I was so content with him that I probably wouldn't have minded just staying in bed with him permanently.

They each gave me a level of comfort I'd never experienced before. Even in the midst of everything going to shit, I could find moments to *just be* and not think about any of it when they were with me.

The television glowed in the corner of the room, a holiday movie playing on the screen. We had the sound turned almost all the way down and the soft, familiar notes of Christmas music hummed low, filling me with the vague sense of nostalgia I always felt this time of year.

"I'm so excited to spend my first holiday with you guys, " I said, speaking softly in the quiet of the room. "I wish I could go Christmas shopping, but I know that's out of the question." I guessed I would have to settle for ordering them each a pair of fuzzy socks online or something. Shopping in person was so much more fun.

He stroked my hair, sending a straight shot of endorphins to my brain. "As long as you're safe, we have all we need, baby."

"I know, but I love Christmas shopping, and gift-giving is my love language," I pouted. It sucked that I couldn't splurge on things anymore in the way I was used to. I didn't have a lot of things in my old life, but I did have money.

"How would you feel if I gave *you* an early present? Something you could, in turn, use to gift the rest of us."

I craned my neck to look up at him, raising an eyebrow in question. I liked the sound of that.

“There’s a gift bag in the back of the closet. Could you grab it?”

I clambered off the bed, anxious to see what he’d been hiding.

I darted to the closet and snatched up the small Christmas bag, then rushed back to his side and presented it to him with a giddy smile. “How are you guys keeping presents hidden from me? We’re together nearly 24/7.”

“Well, when you don’t step foot outside it’s really not that hard to hide the packages from you,” he said matter-of-factly. *Duh, Hunt.* “Open it,” he encouraged.

“Are you sure? It’s still a few days until the holiday. I almost feel guilty opening something early.” Guilty, yes. But also super freaking excited. I couldn’t remember the last time anyone had given me anything that was actually meaningful. I had always been spoiled, but materialistic things meant nothing to me, and I knew whatever Law had gotten for me likely had some thought behind it.

“I’m very sure. We will all be *extra* glad if you choose to open it early.” A smirk played on his lips.

Curious, I pulled the tissue from the top of the bag. Inside, there was a box. I took it out and flipped the lid open to find a chunky gold necklace inside. I removed it, allowing it to slide over my fingers as I inspected it.

Law slipped the gold chain from my hand. Each end had a gold loop attached—one small and one large. He gently wrapped it around the back of my neck, slipping the smaller ring through the larger one and adjusting it in place.

My hand immediately went to the piece of jewelry. “I love it so much and it’s beautiful, but what do *you* get out of me wearing it?” I was a little confused.

“Oh, we get lots of things when you have this on,” he said, tugging at the chain, causing it to tighten against the base of my throat. “When you choose to wear it, the three of us will know that you’re down for whatever. Free for us to use you how we please.”

I was not expecting that at all. My body reacted intensely, goosebumps peppering along my arms and legs. My mouth went dry at the thought.

“When you have this on,” he continued, “...you’re nothing but a fun toy for us to play with.”

Fuck.

“So, uhm. What happens if I opt to just,” I paused dramatically. “Never take it off?”

He nudged my mouth open, and slid two fingers inside, holding my tongue down as he spoke. “*Trust me. You’ll want to take it off, Hunter.*”

Well, maybe he was right, but I for sure didn’t want to fucking take it off *now*.

I shifted, attempting to crawl on top of him, but he grabbed my arm, gripping it tightly.

“Not so fast, sweet girl,” he said, halting my movements. “I may not be able to use you how I really want right now—bring you to the brink until you’re barely coherent—but I’m going to need you to pick a safe word for future use. Because when I can, I promise to sufficiently test both our limits.”

Render me speechless. Damn.

“I’ve never needed one before, so I’m not sure.” I left what I was actually thinking unspoken. How I wish there would have been a word I could have used to keep Mattia at bay. Being cared for like this now was a foreign concept.

After all the things I’d been through in my relationship—if you could even call it that—with him, I knew I wouldn’t be okay for quite some time, and I’d had next to no time at all to begin processing before everything fell apart again. I had fully intended to reclaim my sexual expression by having Ijah fuck me senseless every day for the rest of my life, and now I had the means to *express* myself in that way times three. I knew they’d never fully grasp how much it meant to me—they just loved me and were attracted to me—but being with them healed me in ways I was sure nothing else ever could. Their touch erased every sour memory I had.

“Hmmm,” he considered, seemingly understanding that something in my head had given me pause. He twirled a strand of my hair around his finger. “How about... *red*?”

I loved the way they adored all the things about me that no one else had ever really seemed to pay much attention to. I had always been self-confident despite my circumstances. Even when it felt like no one else in the world loved me, I refused to stop loving myself because *I* was all I had. But even so, seeing myself through their eyes gave me a sense of something more.

“I think I like that,” I smiled.

“Good,” he replied, his hands moving to my hips. “Then take your clothes off so I can see what’s mine, and fucking sit on this dick.”

I let my fingertips skim lightly along my collarbone, brushing over my scar, as I carefully unbuttoned my sleep shirt and then tossed it over the edge

of the bed. Rising to my knees, I hooked my thumbs into the waistband of my panties and slid them off one leg at a time, the lace scratching against my bare skin.

Law's rough hand crept up my thigh as he studied me, his gaze dropping from my eyes to my lips, then trailing down the expanse of my bare skin.

"I love every fucking thing about you," he said in a rough whisper.

I leaned forward, placing a hand on either side of his body, and kissed his pouty lips. "I love every fucking thing about you."

"I love *you*," he replied, making my stomach flip.

"I love you *more*," I said, grinning against his mouth.

"I may be *decrepit* and bedridden, but I'm not so down and out that I can't redden that ass. So, *watch it*."

I very much wanted him to do that and I most definitely would not be watching anything.

"I *do* love you more," I said, looking at him with mock confusion. "Did you want me to lie about it or something? Pretend I don't?"

He grabbed my arm, jerking my body across his and grunting at the impact of the weight of me against his sore torso. I did feel a small amount of guilt knowing he was at least a little uncomfortable bearing the weight of me, but that feeling abated when his massive hand came down hard on my ass. Maybe he liked the bite of pain, too.

He massaged my tender flesh and I melted into him, basking in the way this made me feel—in the way *he* made me feel.

Another sharp smack landed. My body recoiled, relaxing again as he kneaded the spot.

He wrapped his hand around the back of my thigh, running his fingers through the folds of my dripping cunt.

"It's so cute how wet you get for me," he teased, his gruff voice doing things to my insides. "Takes hardly anything at all, huh?"

Yeah. Your nearness is about it, my guy.

He shifted his body beneath mine, grabbing my hips. He gripped me roughly as he positioned me to straddle his face. I planted my forearms on either side of his hips, and the warmth of his breath skating over my inner thigh sent a shiver through my body.

His cock tented his sweats, begging to be touched.

He licked a slow line from my clit to my entrance, then placed a wet kiss near the crease of my thigh before filling me with two fingers and fucking me

slowly.

“I love the feel of this pussy,” he said, thrusting his fingers inside me twice before pulling his hand away and lifting my hips, giving him better access.

I tugged at his pants, taking his cock out and wrapping my lips around the tip. I sucked, popping off of him to lick the precum from my lips. I wanted to die with the taste of him on my tongue. These men really had such pretty cocks.

His greedy mouth on my cunt and the feel of his length down my throat at the same time was sheer ecstasy. I reveled in the give and take, in the extreme desire I had to make him feel as good as he made me feel.

I gasped as he latched onto my clit, sucking until I trembled against him. My breath came in shallow puffs as my orgasm crested, the wave of pleasure made more intense by the fact that I had taken him so deeply into my throat I'd sufficiently cut off my own airway.

His cock pulsed in my mouth, spurting cum. I sucked him greedily, wanting every last drop of him.

He moaned, the suddenness of it sending a jolt through me as the sound vibrated against my sensitive nerve endings.

I righted his pants, kissing along the v-line of his defined abs as I settled the band back in place.

I laid my head on his thigh, fully intending to stay there for all of eternity. I was sated, my mind somewhere in another dimension.

The way being with my guys like this made me forget all the things I would soon have to face was the headspace I wished I could permanently stay in.

Law patted my hip, drawing my attention back to the present. “Bring me those pretty lips. I need to kiss you.”

I turned, drawn up the length of his body by some unseen force. His lips were like a magnet to mine, the taste of myself on them fucking everything.

He pulled on the end of my necklace, tightening the chain around my throat as he ran his tongue over mine.

Everything he did only made me want more of him, and I knew I'd never be able to get enough.

Of him—of any of them.

They consumed my thoughts even though I had so many other things I could be—and maybe should be—dwelling on right now. Law's lips against

mine lit a fire deep within my core. I felt the same with each of them. The feeling of their lust—their love—burned more intensely with each passing day. Nothing would ever smother the fire I had inside for them. The embers came to life again each time their lips met mine, my thoughts constantly straying to wonder how their hands would find their way to my body next.

He tucked me into the crook of his arm, flicking the TV to a different movie. It was one of my favorites, and I smiled as he held me close.

Content, I drifted to sleep before the opening scene began to play.

CHAPTER TWENTY-NINE

Hunt



I woke again sometime in the middle of the night, the chill of being in an empty bed skating over my skin. The bathroom door was closed, and a line of light shone from underneath. I settled myself, listening to the sounds coming from the other side of it as I waited for Law to rejoin me.

I leaned over, taking my phone from the nightstand. 2 AM.

It buzzed in my hand, my heart thudding in my ears when I saw a text flash across the screen. A message from an unsaved number.

UNKNOWN

You have until morning to come home. If you're not here by 6, I'm sending my men to remove you by force and you can watch as your little boyfriends bleed out on the floor.

My stomach lurched.

Just the *thought* of what he'd described sent a wave of nausea over me.

Images of each of them flashed in my mind, broken and bloody in various ways. Shot. Stabbed. Their throats slit.

I couldn't let that happen, couldn't risk seeing any one of them hurt trying to protect me if there was anything at all I could do to prevent it from happening.

I weighed my options, briefly considering just doing what my dad had asked: sneaking out without a word and handing myself over to him. My love for them overshadowed everything else: the fear I felt of going back to my dad alone and my ability to think logically. I shook myself, clearing my head the best I could, and reminded myself of the last time I'd made such a stupid decision with the intention of keeping Ijah out of harm's way.

I couldn't do that again. I had no choice but to tell them. We all knew this day would come. We'd been waiting for it. And now my dad had shown his hand, thinking that I would be so easily fucking manipulated into giving him what he wanted just as I always had.

Not this time.

I slipped off the bed and padded over to the door, knocking softly. I could hear the sound of the shower running. I tested the doorknob, finding it unlocked, and nudged it open to step inside.

"Law?" I said, my voice quieter than I'd intended. I was so nervous, so fucking afraid of what came next for all of us.

I caught sight of him in the shower, standing beneath the water. His sculpted abs stood out against the steam, and drops of sudsy water trickled down the muscular contours of his body.

My lips tipped up, thankful he was feeling well enough to shower. I knew how good it felt to be able to rinse away the stiffness of an injury that had you down and out for any length of time, and I hoped he found even a small amount of relief under the hot spray.

My eyes trailed over him, taking in his broad shoulders and solid chest. The grooves marring his skin were beginning to fade away. When I reached his face, our eyes locked. "You're staring, Hunter."

Fuck yeah, I was.

Still naked from our earlier escapade, I removed my necklace and placed it next to the sink before stepping in with him.

"Bummer, I was hoping you'd leave it on," he said, enveloping me in his arms.

I released a sharp breath through my nose, resting my head against his chest as he ran his fingers through my hair. "I didn't want to get it wet."

"What a shame," he murmured in a sing-songy voice that was slightly uncharacteristic of him, his chest humming against the side of my face. "I guess we'll have to invest in a waterproof one as well."

I tilted my face to look up at him and kissed the side of his neck. I loved him so fucking much.

He grabbed a bottle of shampoo from the corner shelf and squirted it into his palm. "Let's get this pretty hair washed."

With a mask of calm firmly in place, I leaned into the feel of his fingers massaging my scalp, legitimately enjoying this moment. It would not be the last we had like this because, under the hot spray of the shower, I spilled my

guts.



BUNDLED UP IN A ROBE, I SAT ON THE BED WHILE LAW RAN A COMB THROUGH the length of my tangled hair. It was always such a fucking mess, but he was careful not to pull at my scalp as he gently broke through each tiny knot. I really needed to get some detangling spray one of these days.

I was about to ask if he'd hand me my phone so I could order a bottle from the 'Zon, when the door to his bedroom opened. Ijah and Alec stepped in to join us. They each looked about as pissed as I expected they would be when Law texted them to tell them what my dad had sent.

And they were double pissed that we'd finished showering first before caring to fill them in. We still had a few hours to formulate a solid plan, so they'd get over it.

Besides, I already knew how I wanted to move forward. Was I nervous about it? Yes.

But I felt certain that the only way to win at this was to make my dad think he'd turned the odds in his favor.

I would need to offer myself up as bait. I just needed to make the guys accept that fact. I knew that would be the most difficult part: convincing them.

"I'm going," I said to the three of them, ripping the bandaid off.

They each looked at me, slack-jawed, and I felt a tiny bit smaller because I knew they'd think it was a stupid idea, but I was over shrinking myself for anyone, and that included them.

My opinion mattered.

I knew they looked at me as some fragile thing, and I had been fragile mentally for some time. But I'd overcome every obstacle thrown my way and this was the last thing we needed to face together and we could finally fucking move on.

"Cupcake," Ijah started, walking toward me. He stopped just short of me, pausing as if he wasn't sure what to say or do. "We can't—"

"Ijah. I love you, and I know you love me. I know you have my best interest at heart, and I am so thankful that you care so much for me. This is

something we need to figure out *together*. And while I respect your opinions and am willing to listen to whatever it is that you think is best, I would really, *really* appreciate it if you could please consider what I have to say too.” I let my eyes drift from him to Alec, and then back to Law. “I would appreciate it if *all* of you would consider what I have to say.”

Law nudged me forward and scooted in behind me, surprising me when he began to French braid my hair.

He crowded me with his legs on either side of me, his fingers running through my hair as he separated it into three sections, weaving them together, adding more hair into the mix as he worked his way down my head.

“You are so full of surprises,” I hummed. “And also, I don’t know how to French braid, so you’ve just roped yourself into doing this for me for life.”

“For life, huh?” He questioned, pulling each strand of hair tightly in place. He kissed me on the cheek and went back to work. “Tell us why it is you think it’s a better idea for you to go back to your dad’s alone as opposed to us just showing up there and ending him where he stands now that we know he will be there.”

I took a steadying breath, thankful they were willing to listen. I wanted this to all be over. “He’s been hiding in plain sight all this time, hasn’t he? It isn’t as if Fate Trace is this huge place. I really think if I show up alone and make him think I’m just doing what he wants, he will let his guard down. Maybe not right away, but after a bit. And once he does, then you make your move.”

“She has a point,” Alec said, surprising me. “There’s no way he doesn’t have security in place. If we leave right now and head toward his house, he’ll know we’re coming before we’re even halfway there and he’ll either bolt or have us ambushed. If Hunny goes alone...”

“...he’ll think she really fell for what he said and that she snuck out and didn’t tell us,” I listened a little in awe as Law finished his sentence. The way they silently read one another, their familiarity so deep that words weren’t always necessary for either of them to know what the other was thinking. I hoped someday to have that kind of connection with each of them.

Ijah audibly sighed, running his hands over his face. “As much as I want this to all be over with too, I just don’t know how comfortable I am with you delivering yourself right into his hands.”

“What better idea do you have?” I asked. “Let him bring all of his man power here? To our home? Spoiler alert: I’ll be here in the middle of that too,

and it will be a whole lot fucking messier.”

“We all hate this, Ijah, but we’re kind of between a rock and a hard place here. We knew this would all come to a head eventually,” Law said, handing me the end of my hair to hold in place while he rifled through his nightstand for something to tie around it. He pulled his hand out of the drawer, producing a shoestring. I guessed I could just be glad he didn’t have actual hair ties in there because then I’d be questioning who they once belonged to and I didn’t think my brain could handle traveling down that path right now. I wanted to believe the three of them had only ever belonged to me, which was ridiculous, but sometimes I just preferred to be delusional. *Yikes at that thought.* “I can’t see him hurting her if she hands herself over to him. At least not right away. And we all know there’s no chance of him moving her anywhere that we won’t be able to find her.”

I bristled at that, recalling how easy it had been for them to find me at my apartment the day I ran away from the hospital. I twisted my head to the side, eying him suspiciously.

Alec cleared his throat awkwardly, then scrubbed a hand up and down over the back of his head.

My eyes darted between the three of them, expecting an answer to the unspoken question, but no one said anything.

“*What is it?*” I prodded. “We’re running out of time here, stop being assholes and out with it.”

“*Alecchippedyou,*” Ijah blurted out, the sentence coming out as all one word.

“You *what?*” I asked, climbing off the bed and walking over to him.

“Ijah told me to do it!” Alec countered.

I turned toward Ijah. “It was for your safety!”

My flabbers were gasted. “Law?!” Of course they were all in on this, but I still wanted to know what he had to say for himself.

He just shrugged, “I was all for it and I’d do it again.”

I glared at him.

“What? So I want to know where you are at all times, shoot me...”

I placed a hand on my cocked hip and quirked an eyebrow at him.

“...*SUE* me. Sue me. Not shoot.”

We each attempted to maintain our composure, our eyes all widening as our lips twitched trying to keep straight faces. We tried *really* hard not to laugh at that, but failed miserably. We couldn't seem to help ourselves, and

eventually my peal of laughter filled the room, tangling with their dark chuckles.

It was probably too soon to laugh about the fact that I'd shot Ijah, but I guessed you had to have a dark sense of humor to survive the kind of lives we lived.

I regathered myself and gave Ijah an apologetic look.

"Don't you fucking dare," he said, pulling me against him. He took my hand in his and rubbed his thumb over the juncture where my thumb attached to the rest of my hand. There was a small bump there, so small I hadn't noticed it before now.

I tilted my head up and kissed the edge of his jaw. "You chipped me," I said.

"I did," he replied.

"You have to let me do this," I told him. "It's the best path forward."

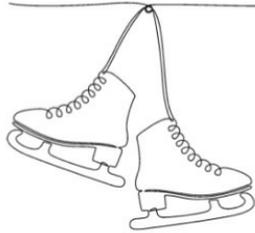
He released a long breath and rested his chin on top of my head. "I really don't want to," he answered, squeezing me tightly.

"I'm not afraid of him," I admitted. "I'm only afraid of what will happen if we draw this out any longer. I want to have a life with you. A real life. With all of you."

He stroked his hand up and down my back in silence for a few moments, then pulled back from me and kissed me on the forehead. Reluctantly, he said, "Let's get it over with, then."

CHAPTER THIRTY

Hunt



I left Ijah and Alec with Law, informing them I needed to go back to my room to get dressed. It was around 4 AM now, and everyone was exhausted. We were all on a weird sleep schedule with Law's injuries. Thankfully, the rush of adrenaline I was currently experiencing had me wide awake.

I dressed quickly and quietly slipped down the stairs. I knew if I lingered any longer or went back to say goodbye to them, there was a solid chance Ijah would change his mind. I felt guilty for sneaking away like this, but they'd notice I was gone in no time and they'd know where to find me.

Before I left his room, Law had given me a small vial of barbiturates and a syringe like the one I'd seen them use on Marcia. The plan was for me to stick around long enough to be convincing and catch my dad unaware. Once he was out, I'd hopefully just be able to call the guys and have them come. All of this was dependent upon a lot of things: whether or not my dad was actually alone, if he took my phone away, if he moved me to another location. It was really all up in the air.

I grabbed the keys from the hook on the kitchen wall and headed for Alec's SUV, my hands shaking. They didn't stop, even as I started the engine and began to drive.

As I approached the exit to my childhood home, my pulse quickened and tears threatened at the corners of my eyes. The pit of my stomach held onto a gnawing sense of dread that wouldn't go away. This was too familiar, too much like the last time when things went horribly wrong. Fear and anticipation warred inside me as I pulled into the driveway and turned off the engine, but I knew that my guys would have my back this time. Not that Ijah

hadn't before, he'd just had no idea what I was planning last time.

The house was seemingly empty. No cars parked out front, no lights on inside. It was too quiet.

I walked up to the front door on unsteady footing, dizzy from the anxiety of it all.

I'd come appearing unarmed in hopes my dad wouldn't view me as a threat that needed to be retaliated against this time, but the full syringe I had tucked in my bra felt like a lead weight against my chest. Maybe he'd believe I was really handing myself back over to him to protect my guys.

In a way, I was—but I wasn't walking away without taking him down this time.

I ran my fingertips over the small bump in the space where my thumb attached to my hand. Alec had confirmed where he'd inserted the chip while I was still very out of it in the hospital. If Nelia had found out, she'd most definitely have killed him. I bit back an ill-timed grin. I couldn't wait to tell her.

I walked up to the front door and forewent knocking. I was shocked to find it unlocked. I twisted the knob and pushed it open, stepping inside. The living room was dark, but a light shone from the kitchen.

My heart beat in my throat as I walked toward the light, my steps too loud against the hardwood floor in the still house. When I rounded the corner into the kitchen, I found my dad sitting at the table with a mug of steaming coffee and a newspaper, casual as ever, his eyes already alert despite the early hour and the fact that I knew he hadn't slept at all last night either. He'd been waiting for me.

Sunlight had just begun to stretch through the windows, giving everything a hazy morning glow. His eyes flicked to mine and whatever I'd thought this reunion would be like, I was so fucking wrong.

"Hunter," he said, beaming. "I'm so glad you finally made it home. It's not like you to stay out so late. I was starting to worry."

His mug clicked against the wooden table as he stood, placing the newspaper beside it and walking over to me.

He reached a hand toward me and I involuntarily flinched, only for him to pull me in for a very fatherly hug. I angled the syringe away from him.

His arms circled my body, startling me into stillness. I felt my breath catch in my throat and the urge to recoil rose within me, but I fought it back. Every sense was heightened; I could feel his heart thumping against my

shoulder, his bony fingers gently holding onto my back, and the warmth of his embrace seeping through every pore. His touch was foreign and every single one of my nerve endings stood on end. I tried desperately to think of something to say. Nothing came.

Hugging him made me physically ill, but a small part of me wanted to lean into him; the little girl who had always wondered why she was never good enough for her dad.

But this couldn't be real. What the fuck was he playing at?

He pulled away from me and walked over to the coffee maker. Pulling a mug down from the cabinet and filling it to the brim, he said, "Have a seat, you must be so tired."

I walked, wordless and in a daze, over to the table and pulled out a chair. He sat the mug on the table in front of me and I stared at it, completely at a loss.

I'd mentally prepared myself for every possible scenario. Or at least I thought I had. Being held at gunpoint, tied up, flat-out shot again... but not this.

Reaching forward mechanically, I pulled the cup toward me across the wooden surface and took a cautious sip. I'd been so caught off guard by his words and actions, I didn't even consider that I shouldn't be drinking anything the man sat in front of me, but it was too late now. I sat the cup back on the table and scooted it away from me.

"Did you have fun with your friends last night?" My dad asked, taking the seat across from me again.

"My friends?" I was so very confused.

"Yes. At the party?" He was downright chipper. I'd never seen him like this.

"The party?" I sounded like a fucking parrot. My face twisted in bewilderment.

"Yes, Cam called to let me know you were safe or else I would have been out looking for you hours ago," he said casually.

Cam. I hadn't heard that name in *years*. She was one of the friends I'd lost contact with after everything. We were close at school, but I'd never *partied* with anyone as a teenager and she sure as fuck didn't have any kind of contact with my dad back then.

"I... haven't been to any party?" My mind was reeling.

"You don't want to talk to your old man about it. I see. That's fine," he

chuckled. Flicking the newspaper open again, he began to read in silence.

My mind raced, trying to sort through the jumbled blur of thoughts and emotions that filtered through me at my father's words. This was all so unlike him and nothing he said made any sense. I couldn't remember a single time in my life when he'd ever been kind to me or sat with me like this. And now that he was, every word that came from his mouth left me utterly confused...

...I couldn't remember.

I took mental stock of all the things I knew for certain: I'd had a brain injury that resulted in memory loss, but even before, during, and after that I had never questioned whether or not my dad was the bad guy in this story.

He was.

Wasn't he?

The guys had said he was... *hadn't they?*

My heart thrummed in my chest and I was more lightheaded than ever. It was difficult to take a full breath as I tried to convince myself I knew what was real and what wasn't.

But what if I didn't actually know? Fear paralyzed me as I considered the possibility. I'd been wrong before. So fucking wrong.

"Why don't you go up to your room and take a nap? Once you've recovered from your night out, you can shower and come down and eat. I'll make your favorite potato soup and we can decorate the tree," he said, smiling like he didn't have a care in the world.

My hand drifted nervously to my hair and ran along the braid there, stopping at the end as I twisted the shoestring holding it in place around my fingers. It was still damp from when Law had washed it, the braid itself holding in moisture.

The shoestring grounded me. *Law* grounded me, and so did Ijah and Alec. I had left our home together—*our bed*—to come here. *Not* a party.

And my dad was fucking with me because he knew I'd been struggling with memory loss that *he* caused.

Well, two can play at that fucking game.

"Oh. Okay. That sounds great, Dad. I am actually pretty tired," I stood, stretching my arms over my head as I yawned, then turned to exit the room. I could play his games for a little longer if it meant ending this once and for all. Pausing in the doorway, I turned back to him. "Dad?" I questioned, prompting him to lift his eyes from the paper.

"Yes, Hunter?"

I plastered a fake ass grin on my face. "I'm really excited to spend the day with you."

He gave me a tight smile. "Me, too." If he'd had any inclination that I wasn't just fucking delusional, he didn't show it.

Everything in the house was so familiar, almost as if it hadn't been years since I'd lived there. There were still family photos scattered along the walls as I climbed the stairs and walked down the long hallway to my old bedroom.

I stopped briefly in front of one, my heart pinching at the sight of my mom's twinkling green eyes staring back at me. Looking at her had always been like looking into a mirror of sorts. We were so similar.

I really needed to be alone for a moment to gather my thoughts and regain my composure.

He was trying to fuck with my head. I wasn't sure what the end goal for him was here, but it wasn't unlike him to toy with someone for his own perverted enjoyment.

I hadn't meant to actually fall asleep, but as soon as I stepped across the threshold of my old bedroom, my veins suddenly felt like they were filled with cement and I could barely hold my eyes open. I stumbled over to the bed and before I knew it, I was out cold.



I JERKED AWAKE TO A SHARP STING IN MY NECK AND OPENED MY HEAVY eyelids to find my father looming over me. He held an empty syringe in his hand, different from the one I'd brought with me. So much for *that* fucking plan. Whatever had been in the one he held was currently quickly making its way through my system.

Looking at him now, standing over me with that sinister look back on his face, I was certain the coffee he'd given me had contained a sedative of some sort. I was so thrown off by the way he'd greeted me, that I'd totally lost whatever shred of logical reasoning I had left. Again, why the fuck did I think it was okay to drink anything he'd given me?

I decided to continue playing clueless.

"E-everything okay, Dad?" I lifted my hand to the side of my neck and cupped it over the injection site. "What was that?"

It wasn't as if I thought he'd actually tell me. I was fighting back panic at what he may have just injected me with. It could have been any number of things, but I needed him to believe I was still neurotic. At least for now.

He pursed his lips. "Just a little something," he said, his words clipped. As he spoke, he brushed the hair off of my forehead. I felt glued to the bed.

I'd fucked up again and I could only hope my guys would get to me in time.

"How long did I sleep?" I asked, trying to sound nonchalant.

How long have I been away from them? Have they noticed I left yet? Have they had time to get to me?

There was something wrong with the way he stroked my forehead and the way his eyes looked when they landed on mine.

"Long enough," he answered.

The room tilted.

My eyes unfocused and my lids fell shut. I lay back against the pillows, feeling as if my body was sinking. Each time I pried my eyes open, the room began to spin around me in a nauseating way, and I fought the urge to vomit.

I closed them again, trying to focus on inhaling and exhaling, on cooling my overheated skin, on abating the shivers that wracked my body.

Opening them, it was as if I viewed the room through a kaleidoscope. Sounds echoed in my head, and colors shifted and swirled. Oily colors oozed from the walls, and I felt my mind unraveling at the edges.

"It works fast, yeah?" My dad said from somewhere far, far away. "LSD can be a fun time. *Or not.* We'll see which it is for you. I'm guessing *not* with that brain injury of yours."

I tried to focus on his voice, to find a thread that would lead me to him so I could grab onto it and pull myself back to reality.

Tried.

And failed.

My breaths came in shallow, rapid pants. My heart fluttered like the wings of a fucking hummingbird, and my stomach turned inside out.

"They don't want you, Hunter. *No one* wants you." I guessed it was no secret that I'd gotten pretty cozy with all three of my guys during their *protective* detail. It wasn't as if we hadn't been public with it during the times we'd been out together over the last several weeks.

Blurry lights and colors crossed my vision as I fell into complete and utter disorientation.

“How could you think you’d ever been good enough for the three of them? They haven’t even noticed you’re gone. That... or they just don’t give a fuck.”

At least he seemed convinced I hadn’t told them, that I’d just done as he asked and came alone.

Time warped; seconds felt like hours, minutes felt like days.

“The only thing you’ve ever been good for is keeping me out of debt, but you can’t even do that now, can you? Scarred fucking bitch. Who would want you?”

My thoughts spun in circles and I felt like I was being pulled down an unstoppable vortex.

“You fucked everything up when you allowed those bastards to kill Roman. He was the only one who had shown any interest in you, the only man who was willing to take the only thing I had to offer up as payment. My connections have worn thin, and you fucked it all up, you’ve fucked up everything in my life from the day you were born.”

He was psychotic, I knew that. But he’d reached a new level. What the fuck was he talking about? Fear coursed through me at the thought of losing control or dying, and I screamed in anguish as the full force of the terror I felt enveloped me.

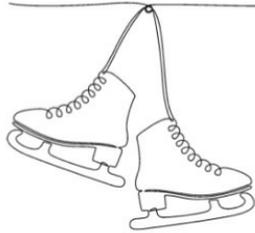
“Your whore of a mother was just like you. She couldn’t keep her legs closed either, even when she belonged to *me*. All I’d ever wanted was a child of my own, and that was the one thing I wasn’t capable of. Then she got *pregnant*, and I knew it wasn’t mine. That *you* weren’t mine, but I played along... biding my time until I could find a way to make her pay. And then she got sick, and I watched her fight and fade away over fucking *years*. Cancer is a bitch like that, but you know. I thought that was enough for me, that she suffered and I hadn’t even had to lift a finger. But when she died, it just wasn’t... *satisfying* enough. So all the ways she fell short shifted to you, and you were so young. I had much longer to dream up exactly how I could make you fucking *hurt*.”

A deafening crack reverberated around the room. The air shifted and the scent of copper permeated the space around me. Something hot and wet sprayed over my neck, arms, and face.

Then, nothing.

CHAPTER THIRTY-ONE

Hunt



The sound of hushed, overlapping voices tugged at my consciousness. My eyes fluttered open and I took in the seemingly familiar room.

The fucking hospital.

I scanned my body, and when my eyes landed on my right hand, it was clasped tightly in Ijah's. His strong grip was familiar, and as he murmured quietly to Alec and Law, his thumb moved absently over the back of my knuckles.

I'd survived. Again.

Alec noticed I was awake first.

He stopped speaking mid-sentence and rushed to my side. "Hunny Bee," he said, grinning like a fool.

Ijah wasted no time going from a seated position to laying down next to me and curling his body around mine. "Jesus fuck, I'm never letting you out of my sight again. What the fuck were you thinking?"

I looked sheepishly from him to Alec, to Law. "You knew I was leaving. I just... thought it might be easier if I didn't give you a chance to change your mind about letting me."

Ijah buried his head in my neck and sighed.

Alec scratched at his five o'clock shadow. "I mean. I was kind of having second thoughts about the whole situation and then realized you were *already gone*," he said, leaning over Ijah to pepper my face with kisses. At least he wasn't too mad at me.

The movement of his head in such close proximity to my face made me dizzy and I swatted him away, giggling weakly.

"What the fuck did your dad do to you?" Ijah asked.

Tiny tremors wracked my body. Nothing around me dripped color now, but I continued to have difficulty focusing my eyes on anything in particular. A dull, heavy feeling lingered in my chest.

Every sound was too loud and each touch felt too intense, but I was just so fucking thankful to be here that I didn't have it in me to tell Ijah that his body being flush with mine was incredibly overwhelming.

“Fucking drugs,” I replied. “Too many drugs.”

He huffed. “Well, that much is obvious.”

I told them about how he'd acted when I showed up at the house, and recounted all the things he'd said during his fucking villain monologue. They all stared at me in complete and utter shock when I told them Ellis wasn't even my real dad. “I'm relieved to know I didn't actually share blood with the fucker.”

The three of them sighed in unison.

Law gave me a soft look, then took my hand and pulled me until I was sitting upright. “Mom juiced you up with all the good stuff to counteract the effects of the LSD.” My face twisted, wondering how they knew because I hadn't specified that yet. “Labs,” he answered my unspoken question. “Your numbers came back in the upper range of what's deemed safe for peak levels. The doctor said you'd be fine in 12 hours or so, to let you sleep it off because it didn't appear that you were experiencing a bad trip, just super fucked up. Which is what we've been doing, but now that you're awake you look like you're about to crawl out of your skin.”

Ijah backed away from me immediately. He'd been so wrapped up in me, that he hadn't recognized how I was responding to his touch. “I'm sorry, cupcake.”

I forced a smile. “It's okay.”

“We were so fucking worried that this would mess with your memory again. It's advised against for anyone with a brain injury like yours to even use any kind of psychiatric medication,” his hand twitched like he wanted to reach for me again, but thought better of it. “But you're awake and not accusing any of us of attempted murder, so I think that's a good sign.”

Again, what the fuck was my life?

“How can we best help you right now?” Alec asked.

I thought for a minute. “Make the room as dark as possible. Someone get me something to eat and drink. Someone get me an ice pack. And whoever is left, just... stay with me please.”

“My girl’s favorite noodles, coming right up,” Law said, heading for the door.

“*Our* girl,” Alec responded, smacking him on the shoulder as he walked by him and exited the room first. I guessed that meant he was getting the ice pack.

That left me and Ijah. “Would a shower help?” he asked.

“Hmm. Maybe later. I don’t know that I have the energy to exert for that and I kind of feel like the heat would just make things worse.”

“The good news is, it’s been long enough that it’s mostly out of your system. I think rest and food are both fantastic ideas.” He toyed with the ends of my hair. I appreciated that he was being careful not to touch me, but it warmed my heart that he still found a way to have contact with me.

Alec returned with an ice pack and laid it on the edge of the bed, allowing me the control over when and where I wanted it to make contact with me, which I appreciated. I laid the cold compress over my eyes, breathing a little easier as the chill of it seeped into my brain. *Not really, but that's what it felt like.* I let it rest there until Law returned with noodles for all of us.

As I chewed the last few bites of my meal and sat my chopsticks to the side, Nelia came in.

She checked my vitals and I briefly wondered how much overtime she'd worked over the last few months just to make sure she was here to take care of me. Mama needed a vacation, that was for sure.

I think we all needed one. *Deserved* one.

My head felt heavy from the last remnants of the drugs, or maybe my body was just spent. My eyelids were getting harder to keep open. I chatted with her for a bit, but I was soon done for the evening and it wasn't long before sleep claimed me.



I WAS RELEASED THE FOLLOWING EVENING, AND I’D NEVER BEEN MORE ecstatic to be in my own bed. I’d slept so fucking hard through my first night back home.

Alec and Ijah were stretched out on either side of me and Law was draped over Alec’s waist with his hand splayed across my stomach.

I placed a gentle hand on Ijah's shoulder, causing him to stir. He smiled blearily. "You okay, baby?"

"I think so," I smiled weakly.

His eyes scanned my face. "Is there something I can do to make you more comfortable?"

I readjusted myself against my pillow, covering Law's hand with mine and gently rubbing small circles over his skin. "Lay with me for a little longer?" I knew they likely had things to do today, but I wasn't ready to see any one of them leave my bed just yet.

"That I can do," he said, settling back in.

We lay next to one another, a comfortable silence surrounding us. I kept my eyes on Alec and Law snuggled together, their chests gently rising and falling with each deep breath they took. The sun had started to rise outside, casting its morning light in the room, and eventually, they woke too.

Law tickled my hip bone. "You hungry?"

"Fucking starving," Alec replied.

Law gave him a grumpy look. "I wasn't talking to you."

"Like you're only going to cook for Hunny and not the rest of us," Alec retorted.

"That's exactly what I'm going to do now," he sat up and Alec ruffled his hair.

My throat tightened, tears stinging my eyes. Happy ones, for once.

Sure, the beginning of our relationship had been a *trip* and they each had their own difficulties with navigating how to approach my memory loss, but something like that is simply uncharted territory for the large majority of people.

It had to be difficult to find a balance between maintaining a sense of normalcy and making the push to trigger any kind of memories. I know Ijah in particular felt some level of desperation because he'd eventually acted on it against *everyone's* better judgment, but I wouldn't have changed anything about that day. It brought me back to him.

I don't think I would have changed *any* of it, given the circumstances. There had never been anything truly *normal* about the lives we'd lived up until this point, and I knew they'd always had my best interest at heart despite the fact that some of the situations we'd landed ourselves in during my recovery were a little less than ideal.

For the first time maybe ever, I took a steadying breath and realized that

today really was a new day.

“What did you end up doing with the body?” I asked. I wasn’t sure why I cared, honestly.

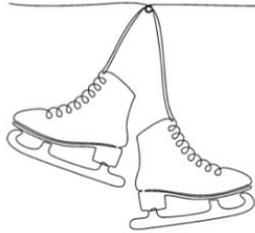
“*Body?*” Ijah looked at me confusedly.

“Ellis’s?” I prompted, fucking glad I no longer had a reason to call the piece of shit my father.

A feral grin split his face. “There is no *body*, cupcake. Do you really think we’d deny you the gift of that kind of satisfaction? At *Christmastime?*”

CHAPTER THIRTY-TWO

Law



With her hand on the door that led to the basement, Hunter hesitated. The three of us knew that it wasn't a good idea to have her sitting in on any kind of torture at this point, but we at least wanted to give her the option to see him one last time for closure if she felt like she needed it. He may have not actually been her father, but she'd spent her entire life thinking he was.

"You don't have to go down, cupcake," Ijah said, reiterating what we'd all already assured her of. "Please do not feel pressured to do this. We just wanted you to have a say in whether you did or not. We can take care of this just the same without you there."

Alec came in behind her, banding his arm around her waist and pulling her into him. He laid a line of kisses along the base of her neck and my dick twitched against my zipper at the sight of them. "You should know, Hunny... he's not exactly in stable condition."

That was a restrained statement. We hadn't necessarily been gentle transporting him back here. Or any of the times each of us had taken turns going down to *check on him*. Not to mention that Ijah had blown his kneecap out when he shot him, and we hadn't given him any kind of medical attention for it aside from staunching the bleeding.

We'd had to staunch a *lot* of bleeding.

Ijah caged her in against Alec, sliding his hand around the back of her neck and pulling her lips to his. Alec made no move to give them any space and my dick *really* liked that. I readjusted myself in my pants and Alec smirked at me over Ijah's shoulder, so I flipped him off. Fuck.

It didn't matter the scenario, seeing Hunter loved was my biggest kink.

When he stepped back from her, she took a steadying breath. "I want to at

least try and go down.”

I reached for her hand, and tugged it toward my mouth, kissing the top of it. “If you change your mind at any point, just say the word,” I told her. I wished that she could enjoy this. I felt like at one time in her life, she probably would have, but Ellis had taken that away from her too.

She nodded shakily. I wanted to scoop her up and take her back to bed, but it wasn’t my choice.

Alec pulled the door open and led the way down the stairs. Hunter and I followed with her hand still in mine, and Ijah stepped in behind us.

When Ellis came into view, she gasped. I tensed beside her, ready to grab her and bolt if that’s what she needed. “Is he…” she trailed off.

“Just sedated, Hunny Bee,” Alec answered.

Her eyes moved from injury to injury, her face completely unreadable.

Ellis’s body was slack against the wall in the corner of the room, the dim light shining over his wrecked frame. We hadn’t even had to tie him up. He couldn’t have gone anywhere if he’d wanted to. His leg sat at an unnatural angle, his face beaten into a bloody pulp to the point that he was barely recognizable thanks to both me and Alec. She swallowed roughly, taking in the full scene. I was worried she would lose her lunch when she noticed his left hand was detached from his body, lying on the floor next to him all crumpled up like a dead tarantula. That had been Ijah’s doing, and while we were all looking forward to quite literally tearing Ellis limb from limb, I knew that he’d get the brunt of it from Ijah.

Alec and I were willing to relent a little on this; Ijah needed and deserved this vengeance in a very physical way, and how Ellis received his punishment didn’t matter to us as long as he got it. The fact that Ijah was currently containing the level of rage I knew he felt inside while in the same room as Ellis was a feat in and of itself, and a true testament to how much he cared about Hunter’s wellbeing.

Hunter’s eyes scanned over each of us. Finally, she said, “Thank you. I’m ready to go back up now.”

I was worried that even just seeing him like this would be too much for her, so I was incredibly thankful that she knew her limits.

I turned back toward the stairs, taking her with me as I went. Out of the corner of my eye I saw Alec pull a capped syringe from his back pocket and hand it to Ijah. I’d filled it with LSD just after Hunter decided she was ready to come down, and I smiled with sick satisfaction as Ijah stepped toward

Ellis's limp form.



HUNT

Law had offered to stay with me, but I knew he wanted to have his go at Ellis too.

I really thought seeing him like that would have had more of an effect on me than it did, but when I took in the damage they'd already done to him, I felt nothing but gratification. *Release.*

I felt loved. *So fucking loved.*

Law had wanted me to at least go back to my room to rest, but I was too keyed up. My mind raced with thoughts of what they would be doing down there, and I knew that trying to relax was completely out of the question.

I briefly considered going for a jog on Law's treadmill, but the thought was fleeting. I was pretty glad they hadn't pushed the issue of me exercising after the first day they mentioned it, but I realized now they were just super anxious about my consumption of alcohol because of my brain injury.

I could have used a stiff drink at the moment. It was probably safe being that my brain had survived an LSD trip, but I knew I shouldn't until I was cleared by my doctors.

I stayed in the kitchen for the better part of the time they were in the basement, anxiously munching on every snack I could find and wearing a hole in the tile floor with my pacing back and forth.

After three and half agonizing hours, the sound of a clip being emptied carried up the stairwell and I released the first unrestrained breath I'd taken in eight years.

CHAPTER THIRTY-THREE

ljah



CHRISTMAS EVE

I hadn't thought this would all be over in time for us to have a true, relaxed holiday season together. But here we were, all piled up on the couch on Christmas Eve with movie snacks, Alec, Law, and I waiting on the literal love of our lives to come down from her shower.

The lights twinkled on the tree in the corner of the room. After everything that had happened over the last few days, I was glad that Hunt had felt like helping decorate because I knew she would be giddy about it, and she was. A massive amount of presents sat wrapped underneath. 99.9% of them belonged to Hunt, and I was so anxious to watch her open them in the morning.

"What are we watching?" Law asked, flicking through the options.

"Hunny told me she wanted to watch *Pulp Fiction*," Alec replied.

Law glared at him. "No she fucking didn't. Stop using her to manipulate us into watching your dumb-ass movies and pick something Christmassy."

"It's not dumb," he said, jerking the remote from Law's hand.

Law lunged to take it back, but Alec held it out of his reach. Unfortunately for him, that meant it was within my reach, so I snatched it, shoved it between the couch cushions, and promptly flung my body over the seam.

They both stood, and I prepared for attack.

"Boys..." Hunt said as she entered the room, using a voice a mother would use to scold her rowdy children. That's what we were like, though.

We probably drove her nuts, but it was nice that we all felt so *light* these last few days.

We all jerked our heads toward the sound of her voice, and I felt my heart skip a beat. I took in her long, slender legs. She was wearing thigh-length socks with a candy cane print, the rest of her body completely naked. My eyes roved up the rest of her body, catching once on her bare pussy and then again on the necklace dangling between her breasts. She'd already taken to wearing it more often than any of us had expected.

I found myself struggling to swallow.

She sauntered across the space between us, and I rushed to right myself as she dropped to her knees in front of me.

She was a fucking goddess.

I grazed my thumb along the underside of her jaw, my hands drawn to whatever part of her I could reach first.

This woman does things to me that I can't explain. She always has.

She undid my jeans and tugged at my boxers, palming my stiff dick. I realized that with her necklace on, I was free to use her however I pleased, but when she sealed her lips around my hard length, I couldn't consider any other possibility than allowing *her* to do whatever she wanted with *me*.

But Law and Alec had other plans.

I inhaled sharply as she took me to the back of her throat, my dick already twitching at the feel of her hot, wet mouth.

"Shit, baby," I groaned, threading my fingers through her long red locks. "*Fuck*, I love this mouth. Love you." She hummed the sweetest sound in response.

Alec dropped down behind her, his hands moving to massage her hips. The sight of his hands on her skin caused my hips to buck involuntarily. He whipped his shirt off and tossed it to the side. "Mmm... we all know this needy little plaything can't bear to be filled with only one dick, can she?" His hand smacked down hard on her ass, causing her to tense around me in the most delicious way. I grunted at the sensation, and Alec just smirked, smacking her again on her other cheek.

"Hmm," Law grumbled, standing behind Alec and gripping the back of his neck. "Make her sit on your face and I'll be right back."

Alec didn't need much convincing, but even as he moved into place, he said, "You saw the necklace, Lawson. I don't give a single flying fuck about making her come tonight. Our little fuck toy serves only one purpose. She's just a set of pretty fucking holes." He didn't mean a word of that, but if Hunt was a toy, she was a voice activated one and we all knew it. The submissive look in her eyes and the way she took me further into the back of her throat was proof. She was so easy to melt.

He situated himself on his back underneath her and tugged her hips down, thrusting his tongue inside her. She struggled not to choke on my dick at the feel of him, and I struggled not to blow my load right then and there.

She stroked and sucked me, a moaning, writhing mess, and she fought to hold her orgasm at bay.

Law came back into the room and tossed a bottle of lube on the couch. He ditched his own shirt and settled himself beside her with his back against the

couch, so fucking casual.

“I just wanted to see this pretty face,” he said. He rubbed slow, easy circles along her chest and collarbone, inching toward the base of her neck.

“Fuck, her eyes are beautiful behind those damp eyelashes. Hold her throat for me,” I ground out.

He wrapped his long fingers around her delicate throat, squeezing tightly enough that I knew her vision would tunnel. I shoved her head down over and over and she met each thrust of my hips damn near enthusiastically as she rocked against Alec’s face.

“You can’t keep that needy little pussy still, can you baby?” I asked, spurring her on.

“Good girl, Hunter,” Law crooned, tightening his grip. “Make him fight for air.”

She bobbed her head, gripping the base of my shaft. My dick throbbed against her tongue as she fought back the urge to release a whining sound and failed.

“I love hearing you whimper for us,” I said, my breathing ragged as I roughly massaged the back of her head.

She tensed, moaning around my length as she came. Alec grasped her hips, holding her against his mouth as he worked her through it.

I shoved myself deeper, grunting as I spilled down her throat.

Wobbly, she sat back on her haunches, her ass settling against Alec’s chest. She licked her lips and tugged that pouty bottom lip of hers between her teeth.

Law stood and lifted her like she was nothing, her legs wrapping around his waist. I tucked my dick back in my pants, content to watch because I knew they were about to fuck her senseless.

I snorted thinking of Alec’s little comment about not caring whether she came or not, and wondered exactly how many times she *would* come for us before the night was over.

Law held her away from his body as he jerked his pants off of his hips, then speared her on his dick, still standing. He ran his hand over the seam of her ass, toying with the base of the tie dye silicone plug she had in place. She was plugged for us most hours of the day on days like this, so she’d always be ready for us. And we were most definitely always ready for her, because that level of submission kept each of us bricked right the fuck up.

She was fucking perfect.

Alec took the lube from the couch and stepped in behind her, sandwiching her between the two of them. He gently removed the plug and drizzled the cold liquid down the crack of her ass. She tensed at the sensation, then melted further into Law as Alec fucked her tight hole with his fingers.

She'd taken Law and me there multiple times at this point, but not Alec.

Law held her steady as Alec nudged at her back entrance with the head of his huge dick. She gasped, jerking upright, suddenly very aware of what was about to happen.

Her big green eyes bulged out of her head. "Alec, you *cannot* put that monster cock in my fucking ass."

Law and I both chuckled, but Alec just smirked, grazing his lips along her shoulder. "Are you using your safeword?" he asked.

She seemed to think on it for a moment, then hesitantly said, "No, not yet."

Alec slipped his hand up the front of her body, sliding his index finger into the loop of her necklace and tugging it until it banded tightly around her neck. "Then, yes. I *can*."

He shoved into her barely an inch, "Don't be afraid, Hunny," he said, his hips canting another few inches. "It will only hurt a little," another notch forward, "and I promise you'll like it," he finished, pushing his dick the rest of the way inside her ass.

The sound she made as they gave her a moment to adjust told me that, yes, she very much did like it.

I watched as they fucked her in tandem, alternating thrusts. She looked outside of her own body. "You're fucking gorgeous like this, cupcake," I said.

Eager. Pliant. *Used*.

I'd just come so fucking hard, but my dick still throbbed painfully as I watched them together, apparently uncaring that we'd already had our turn. I had to physically restrain myself from going over to them and yanking her away. I *always* needed more of her.

Law shoved her hard down onto them, both of them tensing as they came, filling her at the same time.

Alec stepped away first, taking her with him as he did. He cradled her against him, her head lolling against his chest as he walked over to me and sat her on my lap before padding off to grab something to clean her up with.

I tucked her into the hollow at the base of my neck, cupping the back of

her head.

“I love you so much, cupcake,” I murmured against her hair. She smelled like peppermint and vanilla and I wanted to breathe her in forever.

“I love you, Ij,” she said, settling further against me. “So much.”

Law grabbed a throw blanket from the back of the couch and tucked it around her, and when Alec returned with a damp cloth and a bottle of water for her, the two of them settled on either side of us.

He shifted the blanket just enough to give him access to the mess they’d just made, and once she was *mostly* cum free, he tucked her back in and encouraged her to drink.

We were in no way finished with her for the night, but we seemed to have silently agreed to give her a break before continuing. I guessed we’d be watching a movie after all.

Law shoved his hand between the couch cushions, glaring at me as he fished the remote from where I’d left it. He pressed the power button and the screen came to life.

He flicked through the options, but I couldn’t have cared any fucking less what he landed on.

I rested my cheek against the top of her head and closed my eyes, soaking in the feel of her.

Everything around us faded away and I thought to myself:

This is where I belong—with her—and I’m never fucking leaving again.

The sins we’d each committed stretched on endlessly.

The lies—both blatant and by omission. Our pride. Wrath.

Lust.

But it was all for her.

“We’re keeping you,” I whispered, placing a kiss against her forehead.

In the end, that was all that really mattered anyway.



CHRISTMAS MORNING

Hunt

“Santa came!” Alec’s loud ass voice pulled me from sleep. I pried my eyes open to find him standing in front of the Christmas tree wearing his green plaid pajama bottoms and a Santa hat.

I grinned up at him, shoving myself up into a seated position while scrubbing the sleep from my eyes. I climbed off of the couch and sauntered over to him, sliding my hand around his waist and pulling him flush against me. “How many times did Santa come?” I asked, flicking the ball end of his hat. It was a sad attempt at a silly joke, but his cock twitched against my stomach.

I rolled my eyes playfully and stood on my tippy toes to place a quick kiss on his cheek before going upstairs to dress and brush my teeth.

There was a clattering in the kitchen and the smell of bacon and something sweet drifting through the house that told me Law was already up for the day. I could hear footsteps upstairs, which meant Ijah was already up and about as well. I smiled to myself, excited to get the morning started.

I’d taken the first two steps up the stairs when a hand came around the front of my throat and eased me forward onto my hands and knees. I realized then that I was still wearing my necklace from the night prior, but I wouldn’t have been surprised at Alec’s actions even if I hadn’t been.

I was still naked, and when he parted me from behind with two of his thick fingers, I shivered under his touch.

“Hunny, I’ve been thinking about this pussy all morning waiting for you to wake up,” he said, slipping one finger inside me as he pushed my cheek into the cold hardwood of the step. I whimpered, pushing back onto his hand “So fucking wet and begging to come again already. Mmm. I love it.”

He pulled his hand away from me so quickly that I gasped, and tried to angle my head to get a better look at him, but his firm grip on my hair held me in place.

The tip of his cock breached my entrance, and he slowly slid the rest of the way inside me until his hips were flush with my ass. He was so fucking big, it always surprised me that I didn’t feel him all the way to the bottom of

my throat when he fucked me.

“Too bad, isn’t it?” he teased, pounding into me. He was rough, relentless, the force of his thrusts driving me forward with each drive of his hips. He wasn’t planning on letting me come this time. I was fine with that. Letting them use me like this was more than enough for me, and I knew when the time came that I was allowed my own release, it would be well fucking worth the wait.

Plus, they never left me hanging for long, and it was Christmas after all.

He drove into me one last time, stilling above me as his hips stuttered. He ran his hand over the length of my spine and banded his forearm around the front of my hips as he helped me stand.

My legs were wobbly and I could feel him dripping down my inner thighs. I rubbed them together, hoping for friction, but he just smacked my ass. Kissing me on the cheek from behind he said, “Go get cleaned up and dressed for breakfast.”

I turned, giving him my best set of puppy dog eyes, but he was wholly unaffected. He stood there with his arms crossed and his pants already back in place, sternly waiting for me to head to my room as he’d asked.

Fine.

I did need a quick shower, that was for sure.

I darted up the stairs, but when I opened my bedroom door, I could hear that the shower was already running. I didn’t have to ask who was in there.

I padded into the bathroom and took my necklace off, placing it on the counter before brushing my teeth. I felt Ijah’s eyes on me the entire time, but I didn’t say anything. *Yet.* I just pretended he wasn’t there, because I knew it would drive him nuts.

What was life living with three boyfriends if you didn’t have a little fun with it?

I took my sweet time, and when I finally made my way over to the shower and opened the glass door, he grabbed me by the wrist and roughly jerked me into him. “Teasing me?” he asked, and I giggled, running my free hand over his hard abs. “And on Christmas?”

I pulled him down for a kiss, but he wouldn’t allow me to pull him close enough.

“Two can play at that game, cupcake,” he said, his lips barely an inch from mine, and I knew I was about to really regret ignoring him.

He plucked my loofa from its hook under the shower head and placed it

in my hand before squirting a good amount of my body wash onto it. “Get cleaned up and I’ll wash your hair when you’re finished.”

“Ooh-kay,” I said, bringing the pink poof up to my chest and hesitantly began to scrub myself.

Didn’t seem like much of a game to me... until he leaned against the cool tile of the shower and took his long, thick cock into his hand and began to stroke it slowly, his eyes never leaving my body.

I couldn’t peel my own eyes away from the movements of his hand. I watched, probably drooling, as he worked himself, the quiet puffs of breath sneaking from between his lips maddening. I dropped the loofah and took a step toward him.

“Do not touch me,” he said, and I paused midstep. His words felt like a slap, and I think he noticed by the look on my face. I liked being bossed around by them, but sometimes I could be caught off guard, even if they meant it to be sexy. I wasn’t used to having men be kind to me, unless it was brief and they turned around and did something ten times worse not long after.

His eyes softened, “Pick it back up, cupcake,” he said, his voice low and sweet now. “I want to watch you run it over every square inch of that tight fucking body, and I want you to watch me come for you as you do.”

My mouth formed an o-shape, momentarily taken aback. Then I bent to pick the loofah back up and did as he asked of me. I circled each of my breasts slowly with the loofah, paying extra attention to my nipples. I was putting on a show for him for sure, and the look on his face as I slowly trailed the suds down the front of my body told me it was an excellent show indeed. I stopped just short of my dripping cunt, watching as he stroked himself nowhere nearly rough enough to make himself come. He was holding off, and I thought I knew why.

I washed the rest of my body just as I would if I were alone, paying no attention to the ragged sounds coming from Ijah in the corner of the shower.

Well, trying to pay no attention to them anyway.

My body was fucking buzzing.

I faced away from him and bent to wash down the front of my legs, giving him a full view of my ass and cunt.

That was all it took to snap his restraint. He pulled me forcefully into him under the spray of the shower and slammed into me over and over as the rivulets of water ran down my body, rinsing away any remaining suds.

He jarred my slick body with each rough pump of his hips. This was all about him. He was still in the mindset of using me for his own pleasure despite the fact that I'd taken my necklace off, and that was okay with me.

He wrapped his long fingers around the front of my neck, squeezing until all I felt was him. Everything else faded away.

With one last shove into me, he shivered against my ass as he filled me up, pulling me upright until I was flush against him.

He gave my throat a final squeeze and kissed just behind my ear. "Take your time finishing up, but once you're dry and dressed, I want the necklace back on."

He didn't need to tell me twice.

"Okay, Ij," was all I could get out.

"Leaving something on the bed for you," he said, stepping out of the shower. I missed him the second his body heat was gone from me.

I was breathless. Spent. Fucked twice this morning and I still hadn't come.



I DRIED OFF AND WRAPPED MYSELF IN THE LONG, PLUSH TOWEL, TIGHTLY tucking it into itself before padding across the carpet into the bedroom. I was curious to see what Ijah had left for me, and when I saw my necklace shining against the black duvet, I rolled my eyes.

He'd also left a sheer, red babydoll with a satin bow that tied in the front over my tits. I tugged at the fabric. The bow was not just for decoration. It was fully functional because of course it was.

I picked up the piece of lingerie and searched for the thong I assumed came with it, but came up short. I guessed I wouldn't need panties anyway if they'd planned on making good use of me for the day.

I was already a bit sore from our earlier escapades, but I loved it feeling them long after they were gone from my body. I pulled open the drawer of my nightstand and took out a bottle of anal lube and a plug. I wanted to be ready for whatever they threw at me today, because I had an inkling that this was about to be my kinkiest Christmas ever.

I *dressed*, clasped my necklace in place, and made my way downstairs to

the guys, excited to get the day started. In the kitchen, Law had whipped up a full spread Christmas brunch. I snuck in behind him and wrapped my arms around his waist just as he cut off the gas stovetop and plated the last pieces of bacon.

“Mmm, the cinnamon rolls smell delicious,” I said, nuzzling my face into his back.

His large hand covered mine just long enough for him to finish what he was doing, then he turned around and held me at arms length. His eyes raked over me before he spun me, walked me forward, and bent me over the kitchen island.

The countertop was cold and it seeped into me, chilling me to the bone.

“You think you can waltz downstairs wearing this little getup and go on about your day as normal?” he asked. His calloused palm scraped over my thigh and up the curve of my ass. The back of my little getup was flyaway, so I was completely bare to him.

I heard soft footsteps tacking across the tile floor and tilted my face to find Alec and Ijah pulling out barstools and taking their seats for a frontrow show.

My skin heated, and I felt so small surrounded by the three of them.

Law’s thumb nudged at the plug in my ass. “Our good girl, always so ready for us,” he said, undoing his zipper.

He rubbed the hot head of his cock against my entrance and leaned over me, murmuring in my ear, “How are you always so fucking wet?” he asked, sliding into me an inch at a time.

“It’s hard not to be when you have me splayed out like this and the three of you are looking at me like *I’m* Christmas brunch,” I responded.

“Maybe you are,” he said, thrusting into me one hard time, prying an *mmp* from my mouth.

He fucked me roughly but slowly, my hipbones grinding into the edge of the countertop each time he drove into me. He pounded me to the brink of an orgasm, and I hadn’t thought I could come from penetration alone. I was *right there*, when he jerked shakily, filling me up.

He pulled out of me and I wanted to scream. I knew this was a game they were playing, and the reward I would get for winning at it would be well worth the wait, but *UGH*.

I was *very* tempted to just make myself come, but more than I wanted to come I wanted *them* to make me come. *Together*. Merry fucking Christmas to

me. *Sigh.*

I climbed onto the stool next to Ijah and leaned over, laying my head on his shoulder as Law made my plate for me. I was flustered, and when he slid it across the counter to me, he just smiled at me with a smug fucking look on his face.

Law's cinnamon rolls were the best I'd ever had, and while I very easily could have kept my ass sat at the island finishing off the pan of them, I resisted. There was a spark of anticipation filtering throughout the room. We were almost as bad as kids on Christmas morning.

I excused myself to go get cleaned up—*again*—while the boys cleared away our plates. It probably wouldn't be very much appreciated if I put on sweatpants like I wanted to, but I was cold, so I threw on a thick robe over the lingerie I was wearing and headed back downstairs.

They were all waiting for me in the living room now, each of them sitting on the floor with a present in their lap looking giddy as ever, practically bouncing.

A frown formed on Alec's face. "Why'd you cover it up?" he pouted.

I really struggled not to roll my eyes at him. He was adorable. "I'm cold, babe," I said, taking a seat next to him.

"Fine," he said, shoving a small wrapped box into my lap. "Open mine first."

I peeled the shiny green paper away from the box, a little befuddled at what I found inside. "A DNA test?" I asked.

"Yeah. A lot of people find their families with these things. I thought, you know, if you ever wanted to know... you'd have the option." He seemed like he was worried it may not have been the best idea, but once I understood why he'd gifted it to me, my heart melted. I wasn't sure I was ready to find out who my real dad was, or if I ever wanted to know, but just knowing I had the option was nice.

I pulled him in for a kiss, "Thank you. This is so very thoughtful of you."

He grinned down at me, then Law slid a huge box across the floor toward me.

I eyed it, wondering what the fuck could be inside.

"Open it," he said.

And when I did, my mouth fell open, "You're not serious."

"I very much am," he said, crawling across the floor to smack a kiss on my cheek. "I have just the perfect spot for it in the kitchen."

I was one of those industrial size cappuccino, latte, and hot cocoa dispensers like you see in gas stations, and he bought one for our *home kitchen*.

“All the hot cocoas,” he said, causing me to grin like a fool.

“Thank you,” I said, my insides complete goo now at how sweet they were.

Ijah patted the floor next to him, and I scooted in beside him. He seemed nervous about whatever it was he was about to give me.

“Please know that if you’re not happy with this, it’s easily reversed. I didn’t exactly go about it in the most legal of ways to begin with.”

I tilted my head to the side, eyeing him as he handed me the thin package. I ripped it open and pulled out the first document lying on top of several others. “*Canmore?*” I breathed.

“Hear us out,” Alec said.

My eyes flicked from one of them to the next.

“Neither of us could stand the fact that you still bore Mattia’s last name,” Law said.

“And we knew you’d have no interest in taking Cauley as your last name again,” Ijah added.

“So we *all* voted,” Alec said, looking at me seriously, I suspected in hopes to get the point across that the last name choice wasn’t just Ijah’s. “And we picked the name we thought was the coolest, so if ever there’s a day you decide you want us to all have the same last name, we’d take that one too.”

Ijah hooked a finger under my chin and forced me to look at him. “I’m not claiming you as my own, we are claiming you as ours.”

Tears welled in my eyes as I considered how much thought they’d each put into this.

Being fully free of the two men who’d had me under their thumb for so long was the best Christmas gift they could have given me, and while there were plenty others left to be opened, I only had one thing in mind that I wanted.

Them.

I threw myself into Ijah’s arms, kissing him hard with everything I felt inside for him. This man who had only ever had my best interests at heart.

“I think she likes it,” Law chuckled. Alec huffed a laugh at his words.

I forced myself to pull away from Ijah and turned to the pair of them. “I

want your names changed as soon as fucking humanly possible.”

Their faces lit up, and briefly wondered if Law would change his first name to Lawson since no one called him Evander anyway, but I didn't have the opportunity to voice that out loud before I was all but tackled to the floor by Ijah.

He made quick work of my clothes, or lack thereof, briefly making a show of untying the ribbon covering my breasts.

I lay naked by the Christmas tree, the lights shining over me as I watched them each strip naked, looking at me like I was the best present they could ask for.

They were that to me for sure.

None of us felt the need for any foreplay. We'd been at it all morning and with the preparation I'd done ahead of time, I was more than ready to be *fucking around the Christmas tree*.

I watched with a dry mouth as they each shared generous amounts of lube with one another, and Ijah grabbed some pillows from the couch and made a little nest of them next to me.

He laid down beside me and leaned back onto the pile before tugging me on top of him. He gripped my hips, fucking up into me for a nice little warm up. I couldn't seem to pull my eyes from his. I loved him so much. I bent forward to kiss him, and when I slid my tongue across the seam of his lips, I jerked at the sensation of Law behind me, pulling the red-jeweled plug from my ass and warming me up in a whole different way with a cold squirt of lube and his thick fingers.

Once he was satisfied, he pulled his fingers out and replaced them with the head of his cock. A string of curses fell from my lips at the fullness of it all. I wasn't sure my body would ever get used to being fucked like this, but I didn't want it too.

Being with them felt new and exciting every single fucking day and I never wanted this honeymoon phase to end. *Fuck*, it had barely even begun.

Alec kneeled beside my head as I groaned into Ijah's mouth and forced myself to pull away from him again.

“Open that pretty fucking mouth for me, Hunny Bee,” he said, pressing down on my chin with the crook of his finger.

I looked up at him through my eyelashes, opening wide to accommodate his girth and sealing my lips around him.

“Such an obedient little slut,” he cooed.

Ijah grunted from beneath me. “Keep fucking talking to her like that and I’m going to blow before we even get started. Her pussy just clenched so fucking tight around me when you said that. I...” his words were cut off by his own gasp when I clenched again, this time on purpose.

He gripped the back of my neck, and law held tightly to my naked hips.

They each found their pace, fucking me stupid, and I gave myself over to it.

I was lost in them—in each of them—just as I had been from the very beginning.

I had always known I had this much love inside to give to others, but they’d shown me that I was more than worthy of all that love in return and more.

They were my forevers, and I wouldn’t change a thing about the crazy, fucked up path that led us here.

EPILOGUE

1 YEAR LATER...

The guys had spent a long time cleaning up Mattia's shit, and last week we'd signed over the last of his businesses to a local buyer.

And yesterday, we said goodbye to Fate Trace.

At least for a little while.

Sweat beaded along my hairline. It was so fucking hot here and I already had sand in every crevice of my body, but I was in heaven for a couple of reasons.

For one, I was surrounded by the three loves of my life in literal paradise.

The four of us were soaking up the sun, me in between Law's long legs, resting against his bare, muscular chest. His abs twitched against my back as he took a sip from the icy beer can he held, condensation dripping down the sides of it.

In addition to that...

"God, you guys are too freaking cute," my best friend said, stepping through the sliding glass doors that led to her kitchen.

She was carrying a watermelon that was almost as big as she was, her new puppy nipping at her ankles as she walked across the wet concrete.

"Kairo, you're going to make your mama slip and fall. Calm the fuck down," her husband scolded the little guy as he followed behind her carrying a butcher knife and a cutting board, he slid the door closed.

She plopped the watermelon onto the outdoor kitchen countertop and brushed her long black hair over one shoulder. Bending to pick the wiggly ball of black fur up, she said, "Mama doesn't mind, does she? Does she?" He licked her face like a little maniac as she held him against her chest, stroking him in a soothing manner.

"Yeah, well. *I* mind, cuore mio," Beck said, touching the tip of the knife under her chin. He gently tilted her face toward his with the blade, capturing her lips in a quick kiss before turning to slice the fruit.

God, they made me fucking swoon.

I was so goddamn thankful to be here with them. I'd always wanted to travel; the Dominican Republic was a great place to start. And if not for TK, none of us would be here at all.

She plopped down on the concrete next to Law and me. Sitting crisscross applesauce, she leaned back on her hands. Kairo settled into the empty space between her legs.

“Where do you think you’ll go after here?” she asked.

“I hear *Paris* is lovely this time of year,” Alec inserted himself into the conversation.

TK cackled, but I just rolled my eyes, ignoring him. “I don’t totally know,” I responded. They could take me anywhere, and as long as I was with them, I’d be happy.

“We’re going out later to get a few things for dinner tonight. Do you need us to pick anything up for you?” she asked, scratching behind the puppy’s ears.

“I think we’re good—” I started, but Alec cut me off.

“Champagne,” he stated plainly.

I cringed, and Ijah caught my eye. “We’re celebrating, cupcake.”

“Celebrating?” I asked curiously.

“Yeah,” Law replied, rubbing circles over my stomach. “Celebrating us knocking you the fuck up.”

I smacked his hand away. They were all referring to the fact that I had an appointment to have my IUD removed once we were home. It had been five years since I’d had it placed, so I needed to have a new one inserted. But I had news for them. “I’m not having a baby. Adopt a dog like these two,” I said, gesturing to Kairo.

Law groaned, splaying his hand over my stomach again. I knew they didn’t actually want kids either—we’d discussed it in depth—but *for the love*, they really enjoyed fantasizing about the knocking me up part.

Especially Law.

The afternoon went by in a blur, the sun blazing as I guzzled down one fruity drink after another. I’d finally been cleared to drink after having a clean bill of health with no incident for some time now... and the fact that I’d been drinking before I knew I shouldn’t have been without any issue.

We laughed and chatted with Beck and TK, catching up on all the things we’d missed in one another’s lives over the past year or so. My inhibitions were slowly ebbing away as the alcohol fogged my brain. The rattling of ice cubes against our glasses echoed in the background until they announced they were headed out to grab dinner and the rest of us went inside. As the front door closed behind them, my vision swirled. I was straight wasted.

Alec locked it behind them, and Ijah pulled me flush against his body.

“I need a shower,” I giggled, the room tilting slightly.

“Better get you out of this bikini, then,” he said, untying the strings at my hips and letting my bottoms fall to the floor.

Law crowded me against him, untying the ties at my back and the nape of my neck.

“TK will *not* be happy if we have an orgy in her living room.”

“Fine,” Alec said, pulling me from between them and scooping me up. The walls tipped inward as he carried me down the hall and plopped me on the bed.

The sudden movement disoriented me, and my brain didn’t have time to catch up to the fact that I was surrounded on all sides until I felt someone suck one of my nipples into their mouth and someone else’s fingers knuckle-deep in my cunt.

I turned to the side, Ijah’s pretty brown eyes meeting mine. My vision swam, but I smiled, pulling his lips to mine.

I gasped into his mouth, the sensation of everything heightened by the fact that I had next to no control over my motor abilities because I was drunk off my ass.

I loved it.

I ran my fingers through Law’s hair, recognizing it was him at my breast as I tugged at the roots.

Alec paused his movements, his fingers so deep inside me that I felt like I might spontaneously combust. He stroked my inner walls in a come hither motion, his head tilting curiously.

“You know,” he said, tugging on the strings of my IUD. He was gentle, the sensation no different than when I’d had to check the strings myself to make sure it hadn’t migrated to someplace it shouldn’t be. “Sometimes these things just... fall out.”

I gasped, feeling the pressure of it shifting slightly inside me. “Don’t you dare!”

Law sat up straight, his face twisted in confusion, then understanding lit his features before being replaced with the most feral look I’d ever seen.

“Red, red, fucking red!” I blurted my safe word. This was the first time I’d ever had to use it.

Alec immediately removed his fingers and covered my body with his. “I wouldn’t really, Hunny Bee. I’m sorry I scared you,” he said, kissing me

softly.

Ijah and Law moved in close on either side of me, taking turns giving me kisses of their own.

Our small, sweet kisses began as a gentle brush of lips but intensified into something more heated. Their hands were everywhere as they took turns greedily exploring my mouth with their tongues and teeth. I was drowning in them, and the moments prior disintegrated into nothing.

Alec slipped out of his swimming trunks and plunged his cock inside me, filling me so deliciously that I wasn't sure I needed much else to come. He shifted our positions so I was on top and pulled me down so my body was flat against his.

He held utterly still and I felt someone—I wasn't sure if it was Ijah or Law—stretching my ass with lubed fingers.

A knee dipped the bed and I looked up to find Law there, stroking his thick cock in my face with one hand and leaning against the headboard with the other.

I opened my mouth, sticking my tongue out in a way I hoped would let him know that I fucking wanted this as much as he did.

I was floaty from the alcohol, and I knew having him down my throat would exacerbate that feeling. My literal favorite fucking feeling.

He toyed with me at first, rubbing the head of his cock over my tongue. I sealed my lips around his length, and at the same moment I felt him hit the back of my throat, Ijah's cock slowly filled my ass.

Neither of them gave me a moment to adjust to the feeling of being full of all three of them at the same time, and I preferred it that way.

They each fucked me with less-than-gentle thrusts, and it was heaven.

They were heaven.

Ijah's hands were tight on my hips, jerking me into him roughly as his hips stuttered and his body stiffened behind me.

I would never get enough of them using me for their own pleasure.

He pulled out of me, his cum dripping down the backs of my inner thighs as he did.

Law finished next, his groin against my lips as he spilled down my throat. I sucked him obsessively, drawing in air through my nose as he nearly collapsed from his own contentment.

Ijah banded his arm around my chest, pulling me against him. "Turn, cupcake," he instructed before he and Alec helped me face the opposite

direction, Alec's cock still inside me.

I leaned back on my hands, bouncing once before Alec stilled my movements. "Hold the fuck still. I'm not coming before you do."

Ijah dipped his head between my thighs and lapped at my clit before sucking it between his lips. My senses were so overwhelmed that it didn't take much else.

I shattered, my entire body spasming.

Alec threaded his fingers through my hair, yanking my head back as he thrust up into me. "Such a good fucking slut."

"So good," Law said, sucking my bottom lip into his mouth and tugging it with his teeth.

Alec's hips canted one last time as he groaned his release.

I didn't know how the fuck I would sober up before dinner, and I honestly didn't care.

We lay in bed, our bodies a sweaty tangle of limbs, as my breathing slowly returned to normal.

I *definitely* needed a shower now, but it could wait just a few more moments.

I was right where I wanted to be.

ALSO BY GENNA BLACK

[Haverhill Burning](#)

[No Small Sin \(Fate Trace Book 1\)](#)

[Sinners Keepers \(Fate Trace Book 2\)](#)

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Okay, I’m gonna go cry now. BYE.

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Genna Black is an author of Romantasy, Romance with a Dark Comedy twist, and absolute chaos.

She lives in the Southeast U.S. with her husband and children. She suffers from debilitating ADHD, which absolutely shines through in her writing. She is an introvert above all else, which makes being an author her ideal career path, as she prefers books (and coffee) to people.

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