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A REVERSE HAREM HOLIDAY ROMANCE

EVE NEWTON

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PREFACE

Dear Reader,

This is very, very , VERY loosely based on a previous book called Knot a Tie. This has now been unpublished and completely rewritten as a real contemporary romantic comedy. You will maybe see vague references to the old book but most of this is completely brand new work. Character names, locations, and the entire plot has been changed.

Thank you!

Happy Reading.

Love Eve x

RAVEN

“Are you absolutely sure you’re sticking to the diet, Raven?” Doctor Smith asks me for the third time.

“Yes,” I state with as much finality as I can muster. I’m not that great at being assertive, but I do try now and again when it suits me.

Her steely grey eyes pierce mine, searching them, looking for signs of...well, I don’t really know. The possibility that I’m going to take the insulin I need and shove them up my arse? Not likely. I need them. I am a week away from my twenty-fifth birthday, and I’ve been diabetic since I can remember. I need a break. Andy, my bestie, and I have a plan to celebrate my birthday the way I want to, no prying eyes and no judgemental looks at what I’m eating. But the downside to that is, I need to make sure I have my meds while I’m away, and the appointment was set for then. Coming in early was an inconvenience, but the doctor is acting like I’m being shady about it.

I mean, what does she want from me? To go without?

Needing to get away from all the men sniffing around me constantly, trying to date me, Andy suggested a getaway.

I readily agreed because while one of them floats my boat, he is kinda off limits. Older, brooding, sexy...you know the kind. Sadly, he doesn’t even know I exist. The rest of them are puppies. I want a man; I know that much, but all I get are boys. It comes with the territory when you are wealthy, pretty, and, of course, the big one...*single*. However, even if I

manage to find a guy I like in the next few days, no way am I not going on this trip. A snowy inn in the middle of nowhere where we can curl up with books, Christmas TV, hot chocolate, and mulled wine, while stuffing our faces.

“You know you cannot mess with your injections; your diet has to be perfectly balanced, and your blood count has to be right or there are serious consequences. You young people never realise how serious this is, always out partying and eating what you like. You cannot do that. You have diabetes.”

“I know, and I am.” I cross my arms over my chest, hopefully to show her I mean business. She is my dad’s personal physician and has been for as long as I’ve been alive, if not longer. She is elderly, heavysset, with grey hair and a constitution that usually scares the knickers off me.

Not today, Raven. Stay your course.

“I will have to give your father an update on your change of dosage, of course,” she says as a test. I know it’s a test. I can see it in her eyes.

“Go ahead,” I say, coolly. “He knows I’m here.”

The surprise in her eyes makes me want to giggle. She so wasn’t expecting that, the old twat.

“Really,” she says in such a derogatory tone, I nearly flinch. “Well, in that case, get on the scales.”

I blink and swallow. Okay, this was the part I wasn’t looking forward to. I avoid scales like the plague. I’m five foot one, fairly large breasted, with thighs that meet in the middle. To say I’m a bit curvy is definitely accurate. I’m not huge, but I’m not super skinny either. I dress to accentuate my assets with the help of a personal shopper, but scales? They don’t lie to you. If I were taller, I’d be happy with my body, but I’m so fucking short, it makes me cringe.

Slipping my skyscraper heels off, plus the chunky black cardigan, leaving me in my black trousers and vest top, I take off the feminine gold Rolex from my left wrist and place it carefully on the desk of this grey office that matches the dour doctor to a tee. Then I remove the gold bangle from my other

wrist, along with the pretty aquamarine and platinum ring that matches my eyes and that I wear on the middle finger of my right hand. I set them down and lick my lips. Doctor Smith is sitting back, her arms crossed, watching this with amusement.

Horrid old cow.

She probably knew I had a phobia about this.

Clearing my throat and throwing my head back so my light brown hair bounces around my shoulders in waves, I walk the two paces to the big doctors' scales and step on. Sucking in my stomach, like that's going to help, I close my eyes, not wanting to see what it says.

She stands up and moves in next to me. "Hmm," she murmurs.

I crack an eye to see her peering down at the scales, bent over like she needs to get closer to read what it says.

Then she straightens up and goes back to her desk to type it into her computer.

Hmm.

Hmm.

Hmm?

What the fuck does 'hmm' mean?

"Everything okay?" I croak out, needing to know, but stepping off the scales quickly so I don't look down.

I hear the needle fire back to zero and wince.

"Fine," she says. "A little heavy for your height, but we can't all be supermodels, can we?" She gives me a superior glare that grates on my last nerve.

"No, we can't, as I'm sure you know yourself."

Burn, witch, burn.

She gives me a sneer and then goes back to tapping into her computer. My hands are shaking with the small confrontation. I'm a people pleaser, mostly. I like to see people

smile and be happy with me. But the old bat has definitely rubbed this girl up the wrong way.

Reaching for the jewellery, I replace it with trembling fingers.

Slipping my shoes and cardi back on, she sets the prescription printing and whisks it off when it's done.

“Six months’ supply. And while you’re here, I’ve topped up your contraceptive. If you are still hell bent on partying and ignoring my advice, don’t expect to feel better. I cannot help you manage your condition.” She holds the small, green piece of paper between us like it contains the plague.

Snatching it from her, I bend down to grab my *Michael Kors* handbag. Shoving the prescription inside, I give her a curt nod and a tight-lipped smile.

“Thanks,” I murmur and disappear as quickly as I can from her office before she judges me anymore. I know she’s thinking I’m a raging slut who just wants to party and sleep around, but that isn’t the case. I party, of course I do, I’m nearly twenty-five, but I monitor my drinks. As for being sexually active, I’ve had a couple, okay, three or four, sexual partners so far. I’m picky. I won’t fall into bed with just anyone. A pretty face doesn’t cut it. I want to laugh, be treated like a princess and have them care about me. In a nutshell, I want to be loved, and I want to love back.

Stepping out into the freezing cold December morning, I take in the dull, cloud-filled sky and gaze at the sight of the huge Christmas Tree in the big round flower bed outside the doctor’s office. A beautiful, sweet aroma from the bakery a few doors down fills my senses up and makes me smile, and it washes away the last of my anxiety from this appointment. Walking down the street, a spring in my step, I make my way to first the bakery for a blueberry muffin and then the pharmacy for my prescription.

A few minutes later, after the lovely woman in the bakery gives me the biggest muffin they have, almost as if she knew I wanted to give two fingers to the good doctor, I head into the chemist and hand over my prescription, hoping they are quick

so I can go outside and stuff this deliciousness into my face before I head back to the enormous country estate that I call home.

JACOB

There aren't many things that render me speechless, but on this crisp winter day, however, *she* is one of them. Spotted across the courtyard, coming out of the bakery, I actually stop and stare. She is short with curves to die for and this beautiful wavy, light brown hair that I want to run my fingers through before I scoop it up into a ponytail to hold her in place while she sucks my cock.

“Fuck.” The pant escapes me before I can stop it.

“Jacob?”

Turning my head towards my younger brother, Sawyer, to glance at him briefly before I look back at the woman across the courtyard. “What?”

“Who are you slobbering over?”

“Hmm?”

I cross over the cobblestones, keeping the delicious creature in my sights as she slips into the chemist.

“Ah,” Sawyer says as the penny drops. “She is a fine-looking filly. I would like to bite that peachy arse.”

“That’s not where I want to bite her,” I murmur, without even thinking.

“Whoa,” Sawyer says, grabbing me by the arm and drawing me to a halt. “You got something to share, brother?”

Turning towards him slowly, I search his green eyes. He is the spitting image of our father with his blonde hair and high

cheekbones. I take after my raven-haired, blue-eyed mother.

“A man has kinks. What can I say?” I retort, but something about this vision has thrown me completely out of my comfort zone. Turning away from his amused expression, I inhale deeply.

The sheer decadence of her curves has sent a reaction straight to my dick. Groaning softly, I close my eyes, feeling my cock stiffen.

“Jesus,” Sawyer mutters. “What the fuck?”

Eyes still closed, I grab him and shove him in front of me. “Look at her, Sawyer, and tell me you don’t want to hit that.”

I hear him draw a breath into his lungs and then let out a frustrated huff. “Can’t see her through the window. We need to get closer.”

“Interest piqued?” I taunt, opening my eyes and pushing past him. His tongue is practically hanging out of his mouth.

“No one catches your attention like this. It’s usually tap it and leave it. This girl? I need to see her with my own eyes for more than just a second.”

Marching over to the chemist, we peer in the wide window like two crazy stalkers. I can see her there, waiting for her prescription and eagerly eyeing up her bakery bag. I’m dying to know what’s in it. Impulsively, I reach for the door handle when my phone rings. Under *any* other circumstances, I would ignore it, but the special ringtone tells me it’s Jones. And I don’t miss calls from Jones.

Pulling it out of my pocket, I hover outside the pharmacy and answer it. “What is it?”

A heavy sigh comes over the line. “Sorry, Jay. You’re on a wild goose chase.”

An annoyed groan escapes me. “You mean *you* sent me on a wild goose chase?”

“Yeah,” he admits reluctantly. “But he has definitely been spotted in the city.”

“The city which we left a couple of hours ago to come to this country village because you said he was here?” I snarl.

“That’s the one. Sorry, mate.”

“Fucking hell,” I spit out.

“It’s worse,” Jones ventures.

“How? How could it be worse, Jones?” I rub my hand over my face, moving further down the street, needing to pace, to move restlessly as Sawyer joins me, frowning fiercely.

“He’s been seen with the Jets. They are bad fucking news, Jay.”

“The Jets?” I need Jones to say that again because there is just no way. He *knows* that the police have a dedicated task force that is actively hunting the drug dealing, sex slave running, troublemaking arseholes and prosecuting them to the fullest extent of the law. What the fuck is he thinking? “Tell me that’s a joke? Or another goose chase?”

“Sorry, definitely confirmed with my own eyes. I’ll send you the image taken from a CCTV cam outside the Hand and Dagger pub.”

“Jesus.” I pull the phone away as it dings and check the image Jones just sent me. “Fucking hell!” That is definitely Richard hanging out with a bunch of thugs.

Gripping the phone tighter, I shake it at nothing before I visibly calm myself and breathe. “Thanks,” I grit out and hang up the phone. “Richard, you utter dick!” I kick out at a tree planted in the middle of the pavement, hearing the bare branches shake over my head.

“What is it?” Sawyer asks.

“We need to go home. Now.” I spin and start stalking back to the pharmacy. “Dammit!” Looks like she just left.

Turning this way and that, I spot her, devouring an unmistakable blueberry muffin with her cherry red lips before she unlocks her car. Sliding inside, she fires up the engine as I lurch forward, not wanting her to slip through my fingers.

However, I'm too late, so I watch helplessly as her black Porsche 911 blasts down the courtyard.

I click my fingers at Sawyer, who is closer to the vehicle. "Reg number!" I yell at him.

He snaps his head back to the car and squints at the retreating Porsche. "S-U-6-A-R something," he huffs out.

"Great. Just great." Incensed we lost her while prattling about on the phone, I cross over to the pharmacy and open the door.

The pretty chemist smiles at me, giving it all that, as most women do in my presence. They know a catch when they see one. Too bad for them, I've never been interested in anyone enough to take them seriously. However, a charming smile goes a long way.

I lean on the counter and stare at her name tag. "Sandy. How are you?"

"I'm good. How're you?" Her bright smile goes a bit sultry.

I cast my gaze up to her mouth, seeing her pout her pink lips slightly. I give her the impression that I'm thinking about them around my cock, but all I can think about is the blueberry muffin woman. Looking up, I search her eyes. "Sandy, any chance you could tell me the name of the lady who was just in here? She dropped something outside; I want to return it."

Sandy blinks once, her disappointment crashing down over her. "I can't give out that information," she says stiffly.

"Please?" I ask, giving her my best flirty gaze, biting my lower lip in a way that I know is sexy because it's worked a thousand times in the past.

She stares at my mouth, her cheeks flushing.

Unfortunately, a thousand and one isn't today.

Her professionalism falls into place, and she steps back. "No can do," she says. "If you persist in harassing me, I will call the police."

Okay, wow. Epic fail there, Jay.

Straightening up, smile still in place, I hold my hands up. “Not here to cause trouble, just wanted to return something.”

“You can leave it here. I’ll give it to her if she comes back.”

“My brother has it outside,” I say and back out of the pharmacy, well and truly cock-blocked for the first time, ever.

Sawyer is staring at me, trying his hardest not to laugh. “Fucking fail, Jay. Ouch.”

Stopping in front of him, I flick him on the forehead. “Shut the fuck up, bellend.”

He glares at me and rubs his forehead. “Oww.”

“Come on. We’d better get back to London. Ring Jones and ask him to do everything in his investigative power to find me that woman. I’m not letting her go as easily as this.”

“You’ve really fallen, haven’t you?”

“Haven’t you?”

His glance down the road where her car roared off is all the confirmation I need. Two votes out of four, but mine weighs heavier because this was my idea. Trying to find someone the four of us could all be with together is special and perfect. My younger brother and my two best friends and housemates, mean a lot to me and the thought of seeing us split up and move on with separate women is sad. This way, we get to stay together and have someone we can love. There is no doubt in my mind that when the other guys see her, they will agree. Blueberry-muffins is going to be ours, and I don’t care how I make that happen. She has bewitched me, and I thought I was immune to such charms. That alone makes me *need* to know her.

RAVEN

Getting out of the car in the huge, red bricked driveway of the country house that is my home, I lean over to grab my shoes and slip them on my feet. I can't drive in these things, it's impossible. Snatching up my bag stuffed full of the contraceptives, insulin and blood monitoring paraphernalia from the passenger seat, I slam the door shut. Skipping up the four stone steps that lead to the big red double front doors of the house, I push one open and shout, "Daddy, I'm back."

He appears out of his office, which is the first door on the right. "Hi, Ray-ray. Did you get sorted?"

Closing the front door, I cross over the entrance hall, the thick, plush Windsor patterned carpet, soft under my heels. "I did. She is a real battle-axe. Did she ring you after I left?"

My dad chuckles and nods his head. "She did."

"Witch," I mutter under my breath. "Why did you make me go there? Don't you pay her a lot of money every month for her to come here?"

Daddy tuts at me. "If I had shown you preferential treatment, she wouldn't respect you."

"She doesn't, anyway. She thinks I'm a party girl with a death wish."

"Raven," he warns me. "You know she's only doing what's best."

“Yeah, well, she needs to sort her bedside manner out,” I sulk and cross my arms over my chest.

“Look, Ray-ray, we know you don’t take this lightly and you live your life as you want to, and we support your decisions. That’s all that matters.”

My sour mood forgotten, I grin and go to him, slipping into his embrace. He gives me a tight squeeze and then holds me out at arm’s length. “There’s someone here to see you.”

My face falls into a frown. “Oh?”

“He’s in the informal sitting room.” The tone tells me all I need to know.

“Daddyyyyy,” I whine, dropping my arm so that my bag swings and hits my leg. “Who are you trying to set me up with?”

“Why, no one, dear,” he says with a smug smile and then hastily disappears back into his office, shutting the door promptly in my face.

“Mean!” I call out and hear him chuckle.

I smile, and with an eye roll, I lift my bag back onto my bent arm and head towards the informal sitting room on the left-hand side of the staircase, opposite the formal sitting room, or as I like to call it, the mausoleum.

The second I walk into the room, I catch his musky aftershave. “Andy,” I say, spotting him looking out of the window at the far side of the room.

“Ray-ray,” he says, turning around to smile at me. “How’s things?”

I cross over to him, meeting him half-way and give him two air kisses before stepping back. He’s cute, in a cute puppy kind of way, posh and nerdy. We’re besties, but Daddy wants us together. He doesn’t do it for me in that way. Yes, I may have only had four sexual partners since I had my first shag two years ago, but that doesn’t mean I haven’t enjoyed them along the way. Andy here took my v-card and after we’d dated for a while many moons ago, but the spark fizzled pretty

quickly, and we decided we were better off as friends. My dad jokes around every so often, wanting me to marry the posh, nerdy, puppy dog, but nope. I want posh and hot, sexy and growly, older than me, preferably, so I feel taken care of in ways that young Scrappy Doo here couldn't possibly do.

"Fine. Just got back from the battle axe," I reply. "You?"

"Oh, fun...not. I'm good. Just wanted to check in that we were still on for the weekend?"

"Yeah, of course, wouldn't miss it. In fact..." I look conspiratorially over my shoulder before gazing back at Andy. "Why don't we go early? Like tomorrow? Make it a weeklong thing?"

His eyes light up. "Oh, fuck yes. I could do with a few more days of doing nothing but slobbering about and stuffing my face. I'll ring the hotel and see if they can extend us."

"Let me know. I've gotta head upstairs and stab myself now."

"Of course, babes. Enjoy being stabbed by something that's not a massive cock."

"Fuck off, you douche," I snarl good-naturedly, but he knows me too well. I'd take even a teeny wiener over the injections any day of the fucking week.

With a soft smile, he heads out and I exhale, gearing myself up for this. You'd think I'd be used to it by now, but I really hate it. "Time to get stabby."

Making my way up the wide staircase, trailing my hand over the light, highly glossed wood to the first floor, I pass the portrait of my mum and dad on their wedding day, and smile. They look so happy, *are* still happy. I envy them, but only in a happy way. I know I will find my bliss, eventually. I've known since I first learned about love and relationships that I wanted to be married and have kids. Hopefully, it is closer than my prospects currently indicate.

Entering my pretty, pale pink bedroom, I close the door and head into the ensuite and shiver. Pulling the box of tiny vials and injections out of my bag, along with the small yellow

sharps bin, I arrange the injection on the countertop, taking a moment to check my blood sugar count as I do a bit of adjusting and pull up my clothes to expose my stomach. Picking it up, I remove the sterile cap with my teeth and then jab myself in the bit of flesh I've squeezed together.

"Oww, you tiny prick," I mutter around the lid, making this joke every time, just to make myself feel better.

Putting the vials into the small fridge I have here just for them, I drop the needle in the sharps bin and close the lid, placing it on top of the small wall cabinet out of the way.

Dropping my top back into place, I smile and kick off my shoes, ready to relax the rest of today practically on top of the radiator before I go about haranguing my dad to let me help with his business. He's a government big-wig and he can open doors for me that I wouldn't normally have access to. The law has always been something that has fascinated me, but dad is old-skool. As much as I love him, his whole 'everyone should make their own way in the world' schtick is boring as fuck. What is the point in having a rich, powerful dad if he isn't going to give me a leg up when I need it? Sure, I'm going to work for it, be the best damn lawyer I can be, but at the end of the day, I want more, and I want it fast. Never let it be said that Raven Harlow was a patient woman, because it would be a big fat lie.

SAWYER

It is three long-arsed hours since Jacob and I spotted that girl this morning. Jones did a thorough search on all black 911s with that partial licence plate, but none came back registered to anyone even remotely close in area or owner. Assuming it's her dad's or worse, *husband's*, he's still digging, but the longer it takes, the grumpier Jacob is. He is not a patient man, and these two situations have him at the end of his rope. The other one being Richard. Older brother number two. Or number one if we are going chronologically.

Three years older than me, Jacob often acts like he's my dad. I'm thirty-two, a grown-arsed man, and yet one look from him can chastise me more than our actual dad can.

Right now, I'm being bellowed at by him in his fancy office on the ground floor of the big mansion where we reside in Chelsea. I tuned him out a while ago because I'm still not sure what I've done wrong. I'm not taking it personally. Someone is in need of a good fuck with a hot blueberry muffin-eating woman, but that is not happening. Jones is good, but he isn't *that* good that we've found her yet. I mean, technically, we are stalking her now and that is obviously bad, but at the same time, I've never seen anyone rile Jacob up so much in my entire life. He is practically drooling over this girl. I caught a glimpse of her face, more of her arse, and she is definitely noteworthy. But Jacob's fixation on her is more than enough to convince me to keep Jones on the case. My brother is not usually this choosy, but he does lack in the commitment area, which is sort of where I currently reside as well. When

he came to me and the other guys about maybe finding someone we could have together, we were intrigued, but I was not immediately sold. How would that work? Would we be jealous of each other? Would it end up tearing us apart rather than bringing us closer? All these questions were rolling through my head, but Jacob was convinced it was a good idea and we came around. It would be great to stick together and seeing as Jacob and I have the same taste in women, that is definitely a plus.

“Are you even listening to me?”

I blink and focus on Jacob. “Huh?”

“Sawyer!” he roars. “Have I been talking to myself for the last twenty minutes?”

“Yep,” I say and stand up out of the uncomfortable chair on the other side of his big walnut desk. “I don’t even know why you’re yelling at me.”

“Because you’re here and...” He glares at me and then huffs. “I’m frustrated.”

“No shit, Sherlock. Look, I’m in the same boat as you, but if we can’t find her, we can’t find her. Besides, it’s only been a few hours. Let Jones do his thing. He found Richard, didn’t he?”

Big mistake.

Jacob practically growls at me as I remind him of the goose we are also trying to chase down.

“That fucking asshole,” he snarls, getting his back up. Mind you, his back is that far up already, he might as well go and live in Notre Dame.

“How about we take a road trip?” I say soothingly, knowing how to calm the beast that is simmering under Jacob’s less-than-cool exterior. “We’ll go back to the village where we saw her and do some sleuthing. Ask around. Someone has to know her that will spill the beans.”

He nods slowly, his thinking face on. “Has it really come to this?” he sighs. “Us chasing down half the people in the

country and getting nowhere?”

“Fraid so. But it’s only two, and one is more important than the other right now.”

“Bollocks.”

“Yep.”

“Guess we’d better find Richard first,” he says, slumping into his big, comfy-looking, black leather desk chair.

No. “Yes.”

“A road trip. We stay overnight and make a concerted effort.”

“Deal.”

He raises his chin at me in acknowledgment, and off I go to pack an overnight bag. Crossing the white, marble-tiled hallway and up the thick, white carpeted stairs, I make my way to my bedroom. It’s airy and light with a wooden floor and huge four-poster, king size bed in the middle of the room. Stripping off, I flex my shoulders, relieved to be free from the burden of clothes. Naked is much more freeing. Pulling a bag out from inside the wardrobe, I go around the room, throwing a few things in that I might need overnight, and then pause. A shiver goes down my spine. I tense up and look over my shoulder, but of course, no one is there.

“What the fuck was that?”

An omen?

A sign?

Destiny knocking?

Who can guess?

All I know is, it was creepy as fuck and encourages me to hurry up. Reluctantly, I put my clothes back on, a white t-shirt and black combat pants, black boots and a black cashmere coat. Picking up my bag, I head down the stairs and run into the very irritated Quentin on my way down.

“Where are you going?” the giant, dark-haired guy snaps, giving my overnight bag the stink eye with his spooky black eyes.

“There is this girl. Gorgeous curves, bouncy brown hair, likes muffins...she has bowled Jacob over, and me, truth be told, but we don’t know who she is. She drove off before we could find out.”

He grunts, a man of few words. He hunches his shoulders. “And?”

“You’d have to ask Jacob the rest of that.” No way am I being the one to explain what the hell we think we’re doing chasing after some girl or tell him about Richard *or* tell the ferocious brute that he can’t come on the road trip. I like my head attached to my shoulders.

“Where’re you going?” Connor asks, appearing out of nowhere. “Can I come?”

I groan. The baby of the group at only twenty-eight, he is like a joyful, light blonde-haired puppy. It’s irritating as fuck on days like today where I just want to focus and get on with shit.

Luckily, I’m saved by the bell...or bellow, in this case.

“Sawyer, move your arse!” Jacob yells up the stairs.

“Coming!” I call back and with a fake apologetic look, I duck around Quen and take the stairs two at a time.

“What aren’t you saying?” Quen snarls. “And what the fuck is this about a girl? We agreed and you’re leaving us out?”

“We don’t know who she is, what her name is, or where she lives. You don’t even know what she looks like. You won’t be of any use to us searching for her,” Jacob has the balls to say.

“We can help seek her out,” Connor pants, following me down the stairs. He was the most eager when Jacob laid out his idea for us all to get with the same woman. I don’t think he even batted an eye.

I exchange a look with Jacob. The two of us are focused, but we both know this is about more than just the woman. We have to find Richard before he does something so monumentally...*dick-ish*.

“Fine,” Jacob huffs out, probably just so we can stop deliberating and move out. “But you come right now, or not at all.”

Connor nods enthusiastically. Quentin is less so, but he plods down the stairs with just the clothes on his back.

I sigh.

This is going to be fun times.

And if you didn't catch the sarcasm there, then we can't be friends.

“Shotgun,” Connor calls out as Jacob slides into the driver's seat of the black Range Rover.

“Fuck you and the horse you rode in on,” I growl, grabbing him by his preppy shirt, and yanking him out of the car. I sling my bag into the footwell and get in, slamming the door in Con's face.

“You're a dick,” he jibes, but it's like being yapped at by a small dog.

I feel a bit bad and turn to give him a real apologetic look. He's a good man. “Sorry, get carsick in the back,” I inform him truthfully.

“Oh, yeah,” he says with a nod. “Okay, you're not a dick.”

“Thanks,” I murmur with a small smile. The car jostles when Quentin folds his enormous frame into the back seat of the car and slams the door.

“Let's go and sort this shit out, one way or the other,” I mutter into the uneasy silence.

No more words are spoken as we head out of London on the fifty-mile drive to the village of Lakesview, hoping and praying that this muffin-eating goddess lands in our lap,

somehow or other, and that it doesn't turn out to be a huge waste of time if we aren't compatible.

Oh, and also that we find the prodigal son and drag him back by his short and curlies if we have to stick Quentin on him to do it.

RAVEN

“I don’t want you driving all that way,” Mum complains in my direction as I pack my bag excitedly for my trip with Andy. He’s meeting me there as he couldn’t get off work yet, but I don’t mind the drive to the Cotswolds, which from here will only take about an hour and a quarter if traffic is kind. “The snow is really coming down now.”

Glancing out of the window, I snicker inwardly. There are a few flakes, if that. “I’ll be fine. Don’t worry so much.”

“You’ll ring me as soon as you get there?”

“I’ll text you.” I give her a pointed look. Phone calls make me nervous. Why call when I can email or text, is my philosophy.

She nods. “Okay. Don’t forget Daddy took your car for its service, so you’ll have to take mine, since you decided to go earlier than planned. I need to go and take that video call. Be safe.” She leans over to give me a kiss.

“Got it.” Wagging the keys at her, I give her a little wave. She runs her own clothing company and is a busy woman, but she is happy and fulfilled.

I wish I was.

I can’t wait to be working as a lawyer and settled down with someone to love in my own home. After my gap year, I’ve studied part time because I wasn’t sure about my path and I’m not really into structured attendance and classes, but I finally got my law degree in the summer, and I’ve been

messing about trying to find somewhere that will have me as an apprentice. It's not easy when you didn't exactly excel, hence why I feel Daddy's help will be needed at some point, but that is January's problem now.

Hastily, I shove the rest of my stuff into my small suitcase and then chuck my phone in my handbag. I already said bye to my dad earlier, so picking up the two bags, I make my way downstairs and out to Mum's car, a sleek black Mercedes SLK.

Slinging my bags in, my stomach tensing up slightly at the thought of being away from home for a while, I start up the car. It roars to life, and I edge out of the driveway, trying to calm my nerves. As soon as I drive through the gates, I start to relax and head towards the main road, which will lead me directly into the Cotswolds. I have about half an hour until I reach it, so I flick the radio on low and enjoy the music.

Driving out of the village and through the winding country roads, I finally reach the, what passes for, a main road about twenty minutes later. Indicating to turn left, I wait for the big black Audi A8 to go past. I ease out and around the first bend and put my foot down. I shoot forward with a smile and settle in for the journey to the gorgeous inn in the Cotswolds, excited to just be me and Andy. The snow starts to fall a little heavier, the deeper I get into the sticks, so I flick the windscreen wipers on slow, to remove the flakes from my line of view.

The minutes tick by and the car eats up the miles. After about forty-five minutes, I check the clock and I'm making good time. I'll be at the Inn, which also serves as a bar and restaurant way before Andy, who is arriving after work. It's mid-afternoon, but already the sky is darkening, heavy with clouds. Shivering, I turn up the heating a little. It is now getting into proper snow territory. There must've been a heavy fall overnight as the snow is piled up on the sides of the roads from the ploughs and the road is snowy and icy.

"Shit!" I cry out as the car loses its grip and swerves to the side. "Fuck."

Sweating, I grip the steering wheel as the car jostles. “Eek!”

The last fucking thing I want is to end up in a snowbank in the middle of nowhere.

The ice is treacherous on this stretch of road and as soon as I’ve righted the Merc, I go skidding again, this time spinning around in a circle as my life flashes before my eyes.

“Shit!” I gasp and come to a halt, the sweat beading on my forehead and then jolt forward as the car stalls. “Great.”

Muttering to myself as I shift the car into neutral to restart the engine, I’m not impressed when all I get is a click and silence. Trying again, I’m greeted with the same response and my skin prickles as my blood spikes. Fuck. Fucking fuck.

“Please, please, please don’t let me be stuck out here, please, please.”

Trying again, I hear the dreaded *click* and then slam my fist on the steering wheel, hurting myself in the process. “Dammit! You useless piece of crap! My Porsche wouldn’t have done this to me!” I realise how ridiculous that sounds. I don’t know if I would still be stuck here with snow falling down around me in my own car. I mean, this car is no slouch but trust me to end up with it dying a death right when I need it to be moving the most.

Taking a breath, I switch everything off: the heating, the lights, the windscreen wipers, the radio, everything. Deciding to give it a minute; it’s probably been startled by the sudden arrival of a mound of snow in its face, I breathe slowly and pull out my phone.

“Oh, you have got to be fucking kidding me!” I shriek as I have no bars. Not one single bar. “You’re going to make me get out, aren’t you, you arsecrack?” Grumbling, I grab my brown woolly hat from my handbag and shove it on my head. Climbing out, I hold my phone up and get a face full of snowflakes that are decidedly chilly.

“Brrr.” I shiver and reach back in the car for my scarf, which I wrap around my neck and lower face, and hold the

phone up again, squinting at it to see if I have a signal.

I don't.

Glancing around in frustration and panic, all I see are fields of snow, the odd hedge and some sheep prancing about without a care in the world.

“Lucky them,” I mutter and chew my bottom lip, thinking furiously.

Now, I like to think of myself as fairly capable. I can cook, clean, sew; I'm fairly handy with a screwdriver and arts and crafts are my jam, but anything beyond checking the oil and water on a car is a big, fat nope from me. But this is why I have Breakdown Cover. Which, at the moment, is fucking pointless, because I can't fucking ring them!

My heart hammers as the reality of my predicament crashes down around me. I'm going to have to walk, in a snowstorm, to the nearest village or farmhouse I come across. Problem is, with no signal, I have zero idea how far that would even be from here. I could be walking for hours, getting lost and with night fast approaching, I'll be a sitting duck. Maybe my best bet is to get back in the car and wait until someone drives past. The problem with that is, no one has driven past since I came to a grinding halt and thinking back, I don't remember seeing anyone on this road for ages when I was still mobile.

“Fuck.” I grip my phone; glad I've worn my flat boots with a good grip on the soles to drive down. If I have to walk, I can walk without falling on my arse.

Looking up as I hear a sound that excites me, I'm glad when I see a car coming down the road. They overtake me and keep on going.

“Hey!” I yell, waving my hands about and running into the middle of the country lane. “Hey! Help!”

Seeing the arse of their car drive around a bend, I curse loudly. Who doesn't stop to help a woman on the side of the road? Who? Okay, most people probably wouldn't. I could be

a murderer or some kind of nutjob, but I'm not and I need help.

People suck.

Tears prick my eyes as I realise I'm truly on my own right now. "This is not good, but come on, Raven. You've got this."

Shoving my phone in my coat pocket, I climb back in the car and try one more time to start it up.

It fails me in a way that I will likely never get over.

"Right, if I'm on foot, I need to get moving. It will be dark in just over an hour, so I have to do this fast."

Gathering up my handbag, I get back out and slam the door more forcefully than I should've and then kick the tyre. "Arsehole," I mutter and lock it, pocketing the key and hoisting my bag over my shoulder.

As luck would have it, just as I set off, a car comes trundling down the road. It's the same one that drove past me a few minutes ago.

"Oh, thank God!" They must've been looking for a place to turn around safely.

Running up to meet them, the car stops, but no one gets out. When I reach it, the front passenger side window slides down and I come face to face with a group of guys, probably a bit older than me.

"Thanks so much for stopping!" I exclaim.

"You in trouble?" the driver asks, leaning over.

"Yeah, I broke down and no signal."

"Get in," he says with what could only be described as a sinister smile.

It puts the brakes on my excitement that I might get out of this to the Inn before nightfall. "Erm..." Straightening up, I take a step back.

"Get in," he growls, but there isn't a cat's chance in hell I'm doing that.

Shit.

Fuck.

RAVEN

Stumbling back in the snow, I grip the handle of my bag. “You know what? I think I just got a signal. Thanks, though.”

The passenger guy sneers at me, and they shoot off.

The tears that were pricking my eyes earlier, slide down my cheeks. It’s typical that the *only* car within a hundred miles is full of a bunch of creeps, possibly dangerous ones at that.

Watching them go, to make sure they don’t sneak back up on me, I drag my phone out of my pocket again and praying for a signal, I hold it up.

Still nothing.

“I’d better get a fucking refund for this,” I spit out, shoving it back in my coat.

Looking up as another car comes from the same direction as the creepos, I walk backwards to the Merc, deciding to try it again on the basis that Christmas miracles happen and it’s nearly that time of year.

The black Range Rover pulls to a stop little bit away from the Merc and the driver’s side door opens. A man climbs out, dressed in a black coat that he zips up as he shuts the door and turns to me. His dark hair is a sharp contrast to the snow that surrounds him as he approaches me slowly.

“You okay?”

“Peachy.”

When he is within a few feet of me, my heart plummets to my feet before zinging back up, sending my blood dancing through my veins.

No fucking way.

It's him. It's *him!* The brooding, gorgeous *man* that I've seen around the village a couple of times who sits on his own and doesn't talk to anyone in the bars. I've never approached him, even though I've wanted to, but he gives off serious 'leave me the fuck alone' vibes.

"You look like you're in trouble," he says, his voice a delicious baritone that sends shivers skittering down my spine.

"Well, maybe a bit," I backtrack, my cheeks flushing as I lower my eyes, giving him the full-on flirty gaze.

"What's up?"

"I went skidding and then it stopped."

He raises an eyebrow and pulls a beanie out of his pocket, that he shoves on his head. "Just stopped?"

"Uh-huh."

"Weird," he mutters under his breath. "You call Breakdown?"

Holding my phone up as evidence, I say, "No signal."

"Ah, yeah. It's a dead zone."

"Oh, nice."

He gives me a curious gaze as I shake my head at myself in my mind.

"Okay, not nice. Can you help?"

"I can take a look. Not really a mechanic, though. Pop the bonnet."

Staring at him in disbelief because I have no idea where the popper is, I press my lips together. "Uhm, sure..." I duck around the side of the car and unlock it, brushing snowflakes out of my eyes as I open the door and bend down, looking for something that would "pop the bonnet".

As it happens, I don't see anything.

"Fucking hell."

Rising slowly, I give him a slow smile. "Can't find it."

He narrows his eyes and joins me at the driver's side. His aftershave is a gorgeous mix of spice and fruit that hits my senses and makes me lick my lips. He brushes past me, which is probably my cue to move out of the way.

I don't.

I want his body pressed against mine.

"Excuse me," he mutters, bending down to reach in and pull a lever that was completely not there a minute ago when I looked. The bonnet clicks open, and he rises, towering over me as he gazes down, his face serious and so good looking I want to lick the snowflakes off him.

He shuffles awkwardly out of the space where I've trapped him between me and the door and moves over to the front of the car.

"I'll see what I can do, but I'm not promising anything. If this is out of my wheelhouse, I'll drive you to the Inn where you can call Breakdown."

"Thanks," I murmur, closing the door again and moving closer to him. He is drawing me in with his presence. I want to reach out and touch him all over, but those 'stay away from me' vibes are strong right now. Glancing down at his left hand, I see he isn't wearing a ring, so not married. Hopefully, he is single and when he drives me to the Inn, which I assume is the one I'm headed to anyway, he will stay for a drink at least, that I'll buy him for rescuing me.

"What's your name?" he asks quietly, startling me out of my daze.

"Raven," I murmur, staring at his delectable mouth before I look into those stunning blue depths that nearly drown me in deliciousness.

"Hi, Raven," he murmurs, his eyes never leaving mine. "I'm Richard."

RICHARD

My gaze is riveted to hers. Raven. It's the prettiest name for the prettiest woman. Her blue-grey eyes are shining, and her cheeks are flushed as she stands on the side of the road, trying to be brave but I can see how anxious she is under her flirty exterior.

I've seen her around a few times. The first time was in a pub in the small village of Lakesview when I was trying to lie low. I saw her go in with her friend and followed her, sitting at the bar while I kept darting furtive glances her way. She had no idea. Or if she did, she didn't let on.

As much as I wanted to talk to her, I kept my mouth shut and my head down. It's my preferred method of dealing with things. But once caught up in that flame, I had to keep going back. I would drive nearly two hours each way just to hopefully catch a glimpse of her, but that is as far as I went. It is as far as I could go.

"Rrrrrichard," she practically purrs at me, which not only bewilders me beyond comprehension, but sets the man inside me alight with the burning flames of desire.

She bites her lip and clutches her bag even closer to her, almost as a lifeline. She is on the verge of panicking and it's only her flirting with me that's staving it off right now. She needn't worry though. I won't let anyone touch her. I have fallen like Wile E. Coyote chasing the Roadrunner off a cliff.

Suddenly. Shockingly. Scarily.

I don't 'do' relationships, or feelings, or love, or any of that shit. I just don't want to. No one has ever even come close to bringing that out in me. I hate touching anyone in a sexual way, and to have them touch me back like that turns my stomach to the point where I have to physically stop myself from throwing up. Whatever this woman is doing to me, she is making the thought of her hands on me appealing in a way that has taken me completely by surprise.

Reaching under the bonnet for the latch to lift it up, I pause as a car comes cruising down the road.

Raven looks where I am, and blinks when I look back at her. She moves in even closer to me and I frown.

When the car pulls up next to us, and the window slides down, I groan and close my eyes briefly. This is the last thing I wanted.

"There you are," Mick, the driver of the vehicle, says. "We've been looking for you."

"Well, you found me," I retort blandly. "Well done."

Mick sneers and opens the door to climb out. "You are coming with us, and she can as well. Seems your knight in shining armour is going to be me after all, sweetcheeks."

Shoving Mick in the chest as my fury ignites that he is even looking at Raven, never mind with a disgusting leer that she is cringing from visibly, I step in between them.

These guys are seriously bad news. They call themselves the Jets and Mick is their leader. They run drugs and trafficking of all sorts through London and somehow, in one of my deepest, darkest phases, I got caught up in the middle of their shit. I've tried to extricate myself a few times, but once in...and all that.

"Oh, struck a nerve, have I?" Mick snarls, squaring up to me. He is shorter and squatter and in an all-out fight, I'd probably win, but he plays dirty. He looks around me at Raven. "Pretty little thing. Want her."

"You're going to have to get through me."

Mick cracks his fist against his palm, grinning wickedly, as the other three guys join him. “I was hoping you’d say that, asshole.”

Hearing Raven’s choked whimper of panic, I ignore it. I want to tell her she has nothing to worry about, that I’ll protect her, that I’m stronger than these idiots dumped together, but when they crowd me and Mick goes for Raven, I lose my shit completely.

“Raven!”

My voice seems like it’s coming from a few miles away, even to my own ears, as everything happens in slow motion.

I kick out at Mick, aiming for his kneecaps.

He grunts and to my surprise, Raven steps forward with a cry and whacks him over the head with her handbag. The feeling of triumph when he goes down is clear on her face, so she whacks him again. And again.

“Raven!” The victory is cut short as I’m dragged away from Mick by the other three guys.

“You aren’t going anywhere, sweetheart,” Mick rasps as he staggers to his feet.

As he launches for her, it ignites my rage and I shove the three guys out of my way, kicking and elbowing until I reach Mick and punch him in the side of the head so hard, his eyes roll back, and he drops like a rock.

“Eep!” Raven squeals and jumps back as someone dives on me, trying to throttle me from behind.

“Gak!” My choking noise is feeble, but this wanker has got me in a vicious hold.

Raven lashes out with her handbag again, only this time, she fucking gets me with it.

“Ooof!” I exclaim when she catches me on the side of the head.

“Sorry!” she cries out sheepishly. “Sorry!”

“Run!” I rasp. “Fucking run.”

“I’m not leaving you!” she shouts back, slamming her bag into the correct man now, stunning him momentarily. But it’s enough to get him off my back.

As I stagger, trying to get my balance on the icy snow, the four of them swarm me, sending me down as they kick and punch me hard.

“Richard!” Raven’s scream cuts through the air.

“Go!” I snarl. “Take my car and go!”

“No!”

Her stupidity and hesitation to leave me is her downfall. Mick stops attacking me and goes for her with a roar of rage.

JACOB

“It wasn’t him,” I insist, not wanting to believe Sawyer is telling the truth.

“Turn this fucking car around and go back, I’m telling you, that was him,” Sawyer growls at me, his hand threatening to strangle me. He probably would try if I wasn’t driving, thus killing all of us.

“You’d better be right,” I snarl and search for a place to turn around.

There don’t seem to be any good spots on this narrow country road. It’s lined with trees and hedges on both sides, with no turnoffs in sight. I sigh in frustration, gripping the steering wheel tighter.

“Just risk it and swing it around when you get a chance,” Sawyer urges impatiently.

I spot a slight gap in the hedge up ahead and brace myself. “Hold on!” I warn the others as I swing the car hard to the left.

The tyres skid on the snowy road as I cut the wheel, ramming into the hedge. A massive snowdrift cascades over the windshield, blinding me momentarily.

“Fuck!” I slam the gear into reverse and fish-tail backwards, glimpsing a pair of headlights bearing down in the rearview mirror.

“Watch out!” Quentin yells from the backseat.

I stomp the gas and crank the wheel, narrowly dodging an oncoming black Audi that roars past, the driver honking angrily.

“Jesus!” I exclaim. “Slow the fuck down, asshole. This is a waste of time.”

“Let’s go and find out,” Sawyer says,

“This is...”

I don’t even bother finishing the sentence, because it’s pointless. There are no words to describe how ridiculous this is. Once again, Richard has sent us on a wild goose chase for him because he is the master at evading us. We would probably be faring better if we’d gone after the girl instead.

Revving the engine and skidding around, now not caring if I hit an oncoming car or send us into a snowbank in the process. We speed off down the road, snow spraying up behind us. I hope this chase proves worthwhile and doesn’t end up like the last, with Richard giving us the slip yet again.

Sawyer directs me as we barrel down the narrow road, causing Quentin and Connor to grip the backseat for dear life. I can feel my heart pounding as sweat beads on my forehead. Something about this entire situation is getting my hackles up. I’m just not sure why.

As we round a sharp bend, we see a commotion in the middle. A black Range Rover is parked on the side of the road, with another two cars pulled up haphazardly around it.

“Stop the car,” Sawyer commands.

I do as he says and bring the car to a skidding halt on the side of the road. We all pile out, Sawyer leading the way. As we get closer, I can see a fight going on with five guys, and a girl swinging her handbag like a wild thing and cursing like a sailor.

Sawyer charges forward as he does without thinking things through first, getting involved in the scuffle immediately. Quentin and Connor pile out of the car and join in, throwing punches left and right as they see a woman in distress. I hesitate for a moment, taking in the situation and sighing as I

see one of the guys on the ground is Richard. But then one of the guys swings a hammer at Sawyer's head and that's all the motivation I need to get involved in my brother's shit.

Grabbing the nearest guy by the collar, I punch him in the face, sending him tumbling backwards. Another guy comes at me, and I dodge his swing before landing a blow to his stomach.

In the middle of all this, another car arrives, and more guys pile out in the middle of this idyllic country setting like some sort of movie.

What the fuck is going on here?

Occupied with taking care of the newcomers, we are now vastly outnumbered but holding our own.

The next thing I see makes me roll my eyes. Richard is on his feet and is literally throwing guys off him, like some superhero.

“What a douche,” I mutter.

He smashes some guy in the face, sending him sprawling over the snow before he reaches down and snatches the girl out of the grip of another guy. He flings her over his shoulder, her bag hitting him in the arse. Richard stumbles, going down to his knees, dropping the poor woman on her arse in the snow as he groans and clutches his ribs.

“Jesus,” I mutter and stride over, slamming my fist into some guy's face as I march over to my brother and drag him to his feet as Sawyer helps the girl up. “Hello, arsehole. What the fuck is this shitshow?”

RAVEN

“Richard!” I exclaim when another guy handles me, his blonde hair smelling strongly of product.

“Jacob!” he bellows. “We need to go.”

“Just go,” Richard says, slumping against the newcomer, who has his back to me. “Get her out of here.”

“We aren’t leaving you, you utter prick,” Blondie says as he takes in the scene that has unravelled before my eyes that I still can’t comprehend. It was surreal. We are surrounded by angry, bloody men and I’m about to pass out from the levels of anxiety roaring through my body.

“This is not a fight we can win,” he mutters. “He asked us to take this one to safety.”

Blondie’s eyes land on me and then widen slightly before raising his eyebrow and giving me a smile that reeks of charm. “Well, hello, there, gorgeous.”

“Excuse me?” I snap, brushing snow off my coat. “Do I know you?”

“Not yet.”

“Oh puh-leeze,” I groan under my breath and turn away from him. “Richard? Are you okay?”

“Yeah, love, I’m fine.”

“He’s not,” the other guy says, pulling his beanie further down and trying to manhandle Richard into some state of standing upright. “Let’s get you in the car.”

“Mine,” Richard says. “I don’t want to leave it.”

“What about mine?” I interject, turning my back on them to look at the other two guys who arrived to save us. My gaze lands on a model-handsome man with light blonde hair, who grins at me and waves and then I take in the other guy. Going from the model man’s eyeline, I hit the other guy in the chest and keep looking up.

Whoa.

He is enormous and very severe.

“Her car broke down. She needs breakdown,” Richard says behind me. “This is a dead zone. Head half a mile up the road and you should get a signal.”

“Let’s go,” Blondie says as he leads me to a car parked up a little way from where we’re standing.

“Wait, hang on! I don’t know you! How do I know you’re not with those guys?”

“You can trust them,” Richard grunts, wrestling with the other man to get him into the Range Rover passenger seat.

Well, that’s all well and good, but can I trust you?

Weirdly, something tells me that Richard wouldn’t have gone to all the trouble to defend me from Mick and his cronies if he wanted to hurt me. He would’ve joined in with them.

Right?

Either way, I have two choices. Stay here and wait for Mick and his guys to gather themselves into a state of consciousness where they will for sure abduct me, or worse, *or* go with Blondie, Model-man and the Not-so Jolly Giant half a mile down the road to get a signal.

It pretty much boils down to one choice. I’d rather take my chances with the Three Stooges than Mick and the Dicks.

“Thank you for stopping and, you know...” I shout through the driver’s side window of the Range Rover to Richard.

He waves a hand at me as the other guy, who I have yet to see, straightens up and slams the door.

“Come,” Blondie says and leads me away from the Range Rover. “We’ll get you safe and sorted.”

“Okay,” I bleat, now only coming to terms with this entire shitshow. I don’t know what else to say. Richard trusts them, so I can trust them. Can’t I? I’m honestly too tired, mentally, physically, and emotionally, to care right now. This has been a day from hell, so when Blondie gently leads me into the backseat of the car, I climb in and he slides in next to me, I fall into an exhausted heap.

The Giant gets in the driver’s seat and has a hushed word with the mystery man and then he walks away back to Richard’s car, leaving me alone with three men who seem nice enough, but who can tell really?

Still, I remind myself as we set off, better than Mick and the Dicks.

QUENTIN

Jacob gave me clear instructions to follow him and Richard to a cabin roughly five miles from here, off the beaten track. I'm concerned. Marginally. This woman we have in our midst, is causing quite a stir. Sawyer hasn't stopped staring at her with a doe-eyed gaze that immediately triggers a response. Something tells me this is the girl that they were looking for, magically falling in our laps along with Richard. She is pretty, I'll give them that. And feisty too. I wouldn't want to come within arm's length of that bag. It looks like it weighs a ton. Sawyer definitely has a thing for her, and Connor would chase the skirt on a sheep if it suited his mood at the time. Right now, he is being a major pain in the arse.

"Fuck off, will you?" I growl, placing my hand on his face and shoving him gently away from me as I keep the other on the steering wheel. He is too close, leaning through the gap in the front seats to get a good look at our passenger. I dislike anyone in my personal space. I take up a lot of it. I'm not a small man. At six-five and built like a brick shithouse, like my father and grandfathers before me, I try to be as unassuming as possible. I don't speak much, I try not to cause waves, but I feel strongly about staying away from people. My discomfort comes across as aggression, but it's not really. Most of the time. I can lose it as much as any guy, but mostly, I'm just trying to keep the focus off me and literally, anywhere else.

I didn't have a pretty homelife, so at thirty-five, I'm grateful to be away from them and with these arseholes, even

if it means being a guard dog to Sawyer. He has a temper that defies all logic, and the rest of the guys look to me to have his back when he does something outrageously unwarranted. I think it's because I'm the only one who can lift the slighter man off his feet and sling him over my shoulder to physically remove him from situations he definitely causes. Everyone can see he's a wildcard and they do their best to avoid confrontation with him. Sadly, he gets off on the conflict and seeks it out wherever and whenever possible. And if it's not there, he creates it.

"I'm Connor, by the way," he says. "Who are you?"

Glaring out of the window, hunching my shoulders to try to diminish the amount of room I'm taking up, my heart thumps as I manoeuvre through the snow to follow the Range Rover down the icy road. Outwardly, I don't show any sign of being ruffled, but I'm more than cautious.

"Uhm..." the woman mutters. "Raven Harlow."

"Harlow?" Sawyer says immediately as if he has heard of her before.

Flicking my glare to Con, I see him looking a bit out of the loop as well, but that's not hard. To say he is all pretty face and no brains, wouldn't be doing him a disservice.

Before anyone can say another word, I grit out, "So Richard? What exactly are we doing about him?"

"Please don't make me go into this now," Sawyer says, his tone telling me all I need to know. It's deeply personal, painful even, and he will talk about it when he's ready. "Just wait for Jacob."

I get that.

More than anyone, I get that.

Giving him a grim nod, hoping that this doesn't upset the balance of our group.

Casting my glance at the woman in the back seat, looking a bit shellshocked now, I hope that she is everything Jacob and Sawyer want her to be and that these two idiots haven't just

built up in their minds. I won't allow myself to take this too seriously until then.

Only then.

"I'm Quentin and the one gawking at you is Sawyer," I mutter, seeing as none of us have given her our names, and yet we expect her to trust us. Especially as I'm not driving her to where the signal is back, but to a cabin in the middle of the woods. Normally, I would protest the action, not being into abducting people against their will, but I do see why Jacob and Richard thought this was the lesser of two evils. Mick and the Jets are seriously bad news. Leaving this woman, Raven Harlow, anywhere near them will not end well for her. She needs to be safe and where they can't get to her. The same could be said for Richard after this. I know little about the older Carlaw brother, but I do know that Jacob and Sawyer have been trying to find him for quite some time with no luck.

"Is your dad Chief Justice Harlow? Sawyer asks, and the penny drops for me, making my blood run a little bit cooler. Have we just taken his daughter off the side of the road with intentions to take her to a cabin in the middle of fucking nowhere?

Fucking hell.

Could this day get any worse?

"Don't answer that," I murmur to myself as Con gives me a weird look. "This is only the beginning of what I can see is a veritable nightmare."

"Gee, thanks," Raven says. "And yeah, Clive Harlow is my dad."

"Ouch," Sawyer says.

"I should ring him and my mum. I should've been at the Inn ages ago, and they're expecting a text from me to say I got there. Are we at the place where there's a signal yet?" she asks, rooting around in her bag. "Fuck." She roots some more. "Fuck." She shoves her bag at Sawyer and checks her coat pockets. "Fuck! I've lost my phone. We have to go back!" She looks over her shoulder.

“No way, sweetheart,” I grunt. “We are not going back to look for your phone. Mick and his guys will be raging right now, and you do not want to mess with them.”

“But I need it. I don’t have their numbers memorised. Fuck’s sake!” she snaps. “Fuck! Fuck!”

I jolt forward as she kicks the back of the driver’s seat.

“Sorry, sorry,” she murmurs.

“I understand your frustration, but we can figure this out.”

“Where are we going?” she asks, looking around. “We’ve come more than half a mile already. Where are you taking me?”

“Richard wanted me to bring you to his cabin. Look, we’re following them.” I point it out and she shoves Con back from the middle of the seats where he is still panting over her. Leaning through them she glares out of the window. “You had better not be baddies,” she states, flopping back. “I’m too tired to fight you all.”

Sawyer snickers. “You don’t need to fight us or worry about your safety. We are definitely the good guys. My brother Jacob and I know your dad. We work with him at the Justice Department.

“Oh, so you’ll have his number then?” Raven brightens up a bit.

“I have his work number, but I’m sure they will pass the message along when you tell them it’s urgent.”

She nods. “Okay, thank you. Thank you all for rescuing me and Richard. I wasn’t sure if we would make it out of that... whatever it was. They were looking for him. He’s in trouble if they’re following us.”

“They aren’t following us,” I reassure her, knowing this is true because I’ve been watching closely.

She nods and slumps in her seat, looking exhausted.

As we bounce off the road onto a track, I murmur, “Nearly there,” wanting to reassure her. She is starting to affect me.

She is a warrior. In the midst of all of this chaos, she is still grateful and humble enough to thank us for helping her, as well as worried about her parents.

That alone has piqued my interest in her because I can tell you for free that the last three women I've attempted to date would have been going into a meltdown right about now and shrieking only about themselves.

It's little to go on, but it's a start.

CONNOR

She is gorgeous. That's all I can say. She has completely thrown me for a loop. I knew she had to be special if Jacob and Sawyer were trying to track her down, but I wasn't expecting this. I wasn't expecting anything. This idea that we all share a special someone is a nice one, but the realistic part of me didn't think it would ever happen. How would we all find someone we find attractive, was my main concern, but also there's the jealousy aspect and if the woman in question actually wants to be with the four of us and not have some fantasy about it being one big orgy and nothing more.

Raven is keeping it together remarkably well for someone who was just in her situation. She is scared, but she hasn't zoned out like I thought she would.

Rubbing my injured hand, which smashed in more than one dickhead face, I smile to myself. I haven't had a good punch-up in years. I grew up with my fists swinging. You have to when you attend an all-boys boarding academy and getting into fisticuffs with the upperclassmen was a daily occurrence. If you didn't learn quickly how to protect your nose and your nuts, you were written off as a wimp and picked on even more. Being smaller than the average guy, with a good-looking face and rather attached to my nuts, I learned super-fast how to defend myself and even enjoyed it on occasion. But I downplay my ability to fight. It draws too much attention to me, and then people start inquiring about you and what else you are capable of if they find out you're good at something.

It's why I act like I'm all pretty face and no brains. It lowers people's expectations when they think you're a himbo. Not that I'm the smartest tool in the shed, but I'm not as dumb as I make out either. Even to the guys. It's just easier to fly under the radar.

As we pull up to the remote cabin in the woods behind Jacob and Richard, I leap out, wanting to give the woman a bit of breathing space. Quentin takes up the space of two men, so disappearing out of her presence will hopefully make her less anxious in the presence of all these strangers. Although, she seems to know Richard, she doesn't know us from Adam.

"Help me," Jacob mutters, as he gets out of the car.

Richard is the worst for wear. His nose is bust, his lips are split and bleeding, his eyes are swollen shut and he's clutching his side in a death grip. He really went all out to save this girl.

"What are we going to do with him?"

"He's badly injured. We need to get him to a hospital."

I blow out a breath and look around, feeling the snowflakes land on my face and shiver. "The nearest one must be miles away."

"Dammit," Jacob mutters. He gives me a frown, and I shut my mouth, going back to pretty and uninformed.

With an inward sigh, I speak up. "I know a guy," I murmur. "An old school buddy lives a bit further south of here. We can go there."

Jacob gives me a grateful look.

"Head south and I'll direct you from there."

"Thanks," he mutters.

Quentin trudges over as Sawyer seems to have attached himself to Raven Harlow. "We going inside? Raven needs to ring her parents. She lost her phone back there."

"Raven?" Jacob says.

"Yeah, that's her name, Raven Harlow."

“As in Chief Justice Harlow,” I point out, unnecessarily, judging by the look on Jacob’s face.

“Fuck. Tell me you’re joking?” He rubs his hand over his face.

“Nope.”

“Great, just fucking great. Look, I’ve got to get Dickhead some medical attention. Pretty sure his ribs are bust.”

“Fair enough, but what about the rest of them? Shouldn’t we ring the police?”

“I don’t think there’s much point. Mick and his guys will have scarpered by now. We need to get Raven sorted out and get her back on the road before her dad sends in the troops looking for her.”

“Agreed,” I say. “You and Sawyer stay with Raven and get her organised, Jacob and I will take Richard to the doctor.”

Quentin simply nods and saunters off.

“Key’s under the mat,” Jacob calls after him.

He gives a backhanded wave, and we turn from them and slip back into the Range Rover.

As we pull away from the cabin, I can feel Jacob’s frustration radiating off him in waves. He’s not happy about the situation we’ve found ourselves in, but he’s keeping it together for the sake of the group. I respect him for that. We all have our roles to play, and Jacob is the leader by default. He keeps us together, focused and on track.

He is the responsible one, in other words.

“So, who’s this friend of yours?” Jacob asks, breaking the silence.

I give him a sideways glance. “Just an old schoolmate. He used to be a private physician in the city but gave it all up to be the local doctor at some village out here in the sticks.”

“Nice,” he says, nodding his head. “But can we trust him?”

“Yes,” I reply with certainty. “He won’t ask too many questions.”

“Okay, then.” Jacob seems to accept my answer and settles into his seat. We drive in silence for a while longer with me directing him back the way we came, about half an hour or so down the road, before finally arriving at the small village where my friend lives.

I direct Jacob to a large cottage set back a bit off the village road. “Stay here,” I tell Jacob as I get out of the car. “I’ll explain first.”

As I make my way up to the front door, I wonder what Raven is doing right now. She has taken over my thoughts and I’m eager to get back to her and the other guys, hoping I don’t miss her while we sort out this mess.

RAVEN

It feels like my brain has given up and left the building. Or at least the part that can think and feel. Actions are coming easily enough. The trembling of my hands won't quit, which is seriously annoying and is shaking my bag which is tight in my grip as Quentin the Giant bends down to retrieve a key from under the mat.

Can't say that is the safest place I know of to put the key to your home, but maybe things are different out here in the middle of nowhere.

Once the door is open and we file in, I stamp the snow off my boots and look around. It's dark and cosy, idyllic really. A bit spartan with regard to furniture, but it has the basics and will do while I sit out the wait for Breakdown.

Although I'm still not sure what will happen with the car. I don't want to go back there in case Mick and his guys are lying in wait, but nor can I leave my mum's car on the side of the road, dead or not, she will kill me.

Blinking, I turn my head to the side, then I reach out and grab Sawyer by his shirt. "Richard. Where is he?"

With a kind smile, he unpeels my hand gently from his shirt and lowers it carefully. "Jacob is taking him for medical attention. Don't worry. He is your...boyfriend?"

He can't hide the curiosity behind his innocent tone. It draws me in. I shake my head.

“No. But he was trying to save me. Even though he didn’t stop them from trying to kill him and take me. Who were those idiots?”

I see the spark of anger in Sawyer’s forest-green eyes, but it’s gone in a flash. “Idiots about covers it and there isn’t really any more to say.”

“Fine, whatever,” I say with a sigh, rubbing my eyes tiredly. This day has caught up on me. “I feel terrible for what happened. It was my fault. If he hadn’t stopped to help me, he wouldn’t have got hurt.”

“You can’t blame yourself. Richard stopped because he is a good guy.”

I nod slowly. “He is your older brother?”

“Yep.” He doesn’t say anything more than that, so I don’t press him.

“I need to ring my parents,” I say instead, “and Breakdown.”

“Where are you supposed to be right now?”

“The Kilkenny Inn. I’m meeting my friend there for a pre-Christmas getaway.”

“Okay, sounds nice.” He gives me that dazzling smile that I bet gets him all the girls.

“You’re safe here, Raven,” Quentin says softly. His voice is deep and growly. I think he is being quiet so as not to scare me any more than I already am. I give him a weak smile and inhale slowly, startling the room when my stomach growls loudly from hunger.

My cheeks flame with embarrassment but it’s a good reminder that I need to eat before my blood sugar drops too low.

“I’ll get you something to eat and a hot drink,” Quentin mutters, disappearing further into the cabin.

“I’m sure there’s a room upstairs where you can rest while you wait,” Sawyer says, looking out of the window.

Joining him to stare out at the pretty snow-covered grounds, I sigh. The snow is really coming down now. Our footprints from the car have already been covered up. Turning back to survey the cosy cabin, I take in the small details.

The walls are made of wood panelling, and the room is lit by a couple of lamps on dark wood end tables. The fire is banked in the hearth, but the room is still warm. The scent of pine and woodsmoke fills my nostrils, giving it a gorgeous wintery feel. The furniture is simple, with a worn-in leather sofa and armchair that look like they've been loved for years. There's a bookshelf in the corner with a collection of well-read novels, and a few objects scattered around the room. There are warm, rustic blankets thrown over the back of the sofa.

Quentin returns with a tray filled with a steaming bowl of soup and a mug of hot cocoa. I can feel my mouth water at the sight and smell of it all. "Thank you so much," I say gratefully, eagerly digging in.

"It's microwaved, hope that's okay," he says.

"More than," I reply, knowing I'd eat it cold right now if I had to.

"Raven, the weather is turning really bad. I can't imagine Breakdown will be there anytime soon, even if you call them now."

"You're probably right. Can I have your phone so I can ring my dad's office?" I don't know what I'm going to do about getting to the Inn, but at least I'm out of the cold and eating something warm and tasty with two attentive men, who admittedly, picked me up off the side of the road, but they seem sweet and caring. I don't feel as if I'm in any danger, but I will keep my guard up and I have marked my exits, just in case.

He walks over with a nod and unlocks it before he hands it to me.

Giving him a smile of thanks, I glance down at the screen and groan.

No signal.

“You have got to be fucking kidding me!”

RAVEN

“**W**hat? What?” Sawyer is quick to lean over my shoulder and check what on earth I’m ranting and raving about. Peering cautiously at the screen, he sighs and rubs his face with his hand. “Oh, really?”

“Seems so.” We exchange a glare of epic proportions. It appears he is just as pissed off about this as I am. Well, that’s not surprising. He is now lumbered with me.

“I’m really sorry,” I murmur, feeling bad and not wanting to be on the receiving end of his frustration. There’s that people pleaser again.

His face softens. “Hey, it’s not even in the region of being your fault.”

“Well, it kind of is. I brought this trip forward and forgot my car was going in for a service, so I had to bring my mum’s car. Which is the one that broke down.”

“Cars break down in the bad weather all the time,” he assures me.

“I know, but still....” I chew my lip.

“Why don’t you finish up, and we can get you to the Inn?”

Nodding as I hand him back his phone and continue eating. I have no choice. I have to eat or face the consequences.

Quentin is watching me silently, almost as if he is waiting for my reaction to his microwaved canned soup.

“Mm, delicious,” I murmur, and he smiles before looking away. Bless him. He isn’t as ferocious as his appearance makes out. I bet he’s like a giant teddy bear, really.

He moves across to the TV and flicks it on to the news channel, where naturally, a weather warning has come up for this part of the country, amongst others, advising people not to travel unless absolutely necessary.

Finishing up my soup, I go to the window with my mug and stare out at the whiteness. “What do you want to do? I’m not going to force you to take me to the Kilkenny Inn. It’s a good few miles away yet, and on these roads with this snow...”

“If you want us to, we will,” Quentin says without hesitation.

“Or we could stay here and sit it out,” Sawyer says.

“Which could take days. With no signal. My friend will be worried, and he will contact my parents, and all hell will break loose. You don’t know my dad. Okay, scratch that. You do know my dad. So you know he will bring merry hell down on the Cotswolds until he finds me.”

“So you want us to take you?”

My shoulders slump. I know in my head that I need to get back to civilisation, but looking out of the window at the snow drifts building up, I shiver. I’m really not so sure about heading back out in that. Not to mention, I don’t even know how Richard is doing.

“Maybe there’s a signal upstairs,” I murmur.

“Free to try,” Sawyer says, handing me his phone again after he unlocks it.

Placing my mug down, I bring up my dad’s number and grab my bag on the way up the stairs, searching for a signal while keeping the phone unlocked. Moving from room to room, of which there are surprisingly four quaint, rustic bedrooms, I’m disappointed to discover that not one of them gives me a signal. If anything, it’s worse, if that’s even possible. Ending up in a gorgeous, cosy room with a white and

pastel floral print on the bed, I look around. It's getting dark now, and I need to make a decision. Sit this out or ask these poor men to take me to the Inn and then send them back out in the snow to come back here, or home, or wherever it is they will go.

I flick on the light, illuminating the room in a low-level brightness, which my tired eyes appreciate.

Dumping my handbag on the ornate, old dresser, I glare at myself in the mirror and then my gaze drops to the bag. "You are fucking amazing, my friend. You were worth the four hundred quid and more." Feeling idiotic but not caring, I give the bag a hug. This thing fought off my attackers and then some. It's got some serious heft to it. It makes me realise that I should probably clear it out of some junk, but then again, had it been lighter, I wouldn't have been able to kick Mick's arse with it.

I really hope Richard is okay and on his way here, right as rain with his brother. Finding that I don't really want to leave until I know he is okay, I make the decision to stay. It's best for everyone. Crossing over to the window, I look down, and the car is covered in snow. This is the serious stuff that will stick for days on end, even after it stops.

Sighing heavily, I go back to my bag and open it, peering inside for the small zip-up pouch in which I'd stored a week's worth of insulin injections. Not finding it immediately, I frown and root around some more, scrabbling to find it.

When I don't, even in the depths of the handbag, where the fluff monsters reside, I tip it up on the dresser, my heart pounding in panic.

"No, no, no, no, no!" I exclaim as the contents scatter across the dark wood. Everything from various tubes of lip gloss to a half-eaten packet of Polo mints, an open packet of pocket-sized tissues, some gum, my purse, a roll-on deodorant, some perfume, more fluff than I care for...but no pouch.

"Fuck!" I roar. "Fuck!"

It must've joined my phone in the snow when I was swinging my bag away like a mad woman at Mick. Fuck.

I lean on the dresser, tears pricking my eyes. This is bad. Really, really bad. I'm supposed to be boosting up my injections for the next few days to ensure their success at keeping my diabetes in check. Without them, the low-level headaches and the brain fog will come back and kick me while I'm down. The relief will quickly fade, and I will be back to square one and put myself at risk.

I *need* to get back to the car where my suitcase is and the rest of the meds. There are no two ways about it now. I can't even go to the Inn. I need my meds, and they are miles in the opposite direction. I'm fucked off that in all the upheaval, I totally forgot about my damn suitcase. Who does that?

Scooping up all the crap, I dump it back in the bag.

Marching out of the bedroom room, I gather up my courage. I'm going to have to tell these guys that not only do we have to head out into the snowstorm, but they have to drive me all the way back to my abandoned car, which might have thugs lying in wait. *If* it's even still there. Knowing my current luck, Mick will have started it up on the first go and stole it.

Heading down the stairs, I find Sawyer sitting on the third to last, flicking through a book on birds.

"Going somewhere?" he asks with a droll tone that, despite my fear, anger, disappointment and whatever else I'm feeling, I smile at.

"Back to my car."

"Yeah, nope, BM. Can't let you do that."

"BM? And why not? Am I a prisoner here?" I hand him back his useless phone.

"Blueberry-muffins is a bit of a, err, mouthful," he says, looking over his shoulder at me with a dazzling smile that really lights up his eyes. "And no, of course not, however, if you fancy your chances with the three inches of snow out the front there, be my guest. Train station is a long way on foot

and probably closed. Quen and I have made an executive decision. We're staying to see what happens tomorrow."

I hesitate. "Three inches?"

"Yep."

"And you are just sitting here reading about birds?"

"Better than the Christmas movies on the very basic TV we've got going on here," he replies.

"Ugh," I groan, scrunching up my nose as I flop down next to him on the stairs.

"So, I'm stuck here?"

"Looks like. And by the way, there are worse people to be stuck with." His mildly insulted tone makes me giggle like a stupid fool.

Hysteria.

Definitely hysteria setting in.

I let out a loud laugh and slap my hand over my mouth, meeting his amused gaze. "Sorry," I cackle. "I have no idea what's so funny."

"You're in shock, probably. You should rest."

"I can't," I say, sobering up as everything comes crashing back down on me. "I'm upset, angry, tired, and I need my meds..."

"Meds?"

That has caught his attention.

"Yeah, I'm diabetic. And it appears my jabs went the same way as my phone earlier. I'm out, and if I don't get insulin soon, you're going to have a case on your hands."

His eyes are serious when he fixes them on mine. "Shit," he murmurs. "Raven, I don't think we can make it back to wherever you live without getting stuck, or worse."

"I see that, but you don't get how much of an issue this is for me. And it's only back to my car, where stupidly, we forgot my suitcase."

He exchanges a glance with Quentin.

“Fuck,” Sawyer says eventually. “We might have to go on foot. I don’t think we can get the car out of here without a shovel, some grit and whatever else is needed.”

“Let’s load up then,” I say, clapping my hands and standing up.

“You’re joking, right?”

“Nope, meds or certain death. Your choice.”

“Okay, when you put it like that,” he grumbles, also rising. “We need some serious supplies if we are heading back to your car on foot.”

“This is not advisable,” Quentin interjects. “We could get really lost without a mobile signal.”

“Then what do you suggest? I need my bag.”

Silence falls as the guys get the severity of this situation.

Once again, there are two choices, and one of them is as bad for me as being taken by Mick and the Dicks.

JACOB

Pacing up and down the front room of this large cottage in a village a few miles away from Richard's cabin, I wonder how such a prominent doctor fell so far down the ladder that he takes on dodgy clients on snow-stormy evenings at his home in the middle of nowhere.

I cast a glance at Connor, who is seated in an armchair, his ankle on his opposite knee, flicking through a magazine.

"How do you know him again?" I ask, wildly curious that enthusiastic Con has a dark side.

"Went to Harrow together," he replies, not looking up from his flicking. "Saved his face a few times."

"Huh," I murmur and then look up as Dr Philip, last name not given, enters the room with a grim expression.

I gulp.

"He's going to be fine, but he should be in a hospital."

I shake my head. "No hospitals."

"I get that, but I have to say it."

"Okay," I say. "Is he awake?"

"He is. Follow me."

Con's gaze follows me out of the room. His own curiosity is well beyond piqued, but he knows me well enough to know that he won't get answers right now, so he doesn't bother asking.

Entering the room right behind the front room, I stare at Richard. He is awake, just about, but completely unrecognisable.

“You’re a dick,” I inform him loftily.

“Grrrrnnn,” he groans, holding his left side where I’m assuming his ribs are cracked.

“What was that?” I ask, cupping my ear and being a complete twat.

He grimaces. “Never gets old.”

“Unlike you, you’re a mess.”

“Fuck you, cuntweed.”

“Nice. I see your new pals have taught you some lovely new insults.”

“Don’t,” he warns me as I sit down.

“Someone has to tell you the shit you get up to is dumb.”

Richard snorts through his bust nose and then yelps with pain. “Some things never change.”

“Fuck off, you know I’m right.” Avoiding his glare, I ask the question that has been burning a hole in my soul. “The woman...” I pause because I have no idea how to ask him. I don’t even know how to talk to him anymore.

“Is she safe?” His words tumble quickly through his split lips.

“Yeah, Sawyer and Quen got her to the cabin. She’s fine. Scared and confused, probably, but safe.”

“Probably?”

“Communications are down.” I shrug, and growing a pair, blurt out, “What’s she to you? Your girlfriend?”

“I wish,” he grits out, shifting to get more comfortable but not finding it. “She deserves better than me.”

“Don’t,” I snap, getting pissed off suddenly. “Don’t go looking for pity from me. You’re a fucking bellend.”

“I know.”

“No, you don’t. You just fucking left. Not a word in over eight years. There are *no words* to express how much of a cuntweed *you* are.”

“You’re not telling me anything I don’t already know, Jay.”

“Fuck. Off.” I give him the middle finger. Standing up, I growl, “We’ve been searching for you for years. Seeing you now, I wish we hadn’t bothered.”

“Fuck off then and leave me alone, asshole. I never asked to be found.”

I resist the urge to punch him in his already battered face. Instead, I stalk out of the room and out of the house, Connor scrambling to catch up with me.

“So, we’re just leaving him?” he asks as I fire up the Range Rover. “This is *his* car.”

“Get in and shut up or stand there yapping to no one.”

Without hesitation, he gets in, and I shoot off at breakneck speed in the direction of the cabin. Our family cabin, which I’ve gone back to and searched a dozen times in the last eight years, only to find no sign of him. This is recent, which tells me he is in even more trouble to go and live out in the sticks in the middle of winter. This day has gone to the dogs, and I need a stiff drink. Also, I need to find out more about this woman and what in the hellfire she was doing entangled in this mess.

We need to have a big old meeting about all of the events that unfolded today. To find both Richard *and* the woman we were searching for together on the side of the road embroiled in a massive fight is...concerning.

To say that I’m not looking forward to it, is a vast understatement, and once again, I curse Richard for being a selfish prick.

About twenty minutes later, I take a left instead of a right, and we head back to Raven’s car.

Raven.

Raven Harlow.

I've been trying not to think of her in terms of her name because of who her father is and her being somehow involved with Richard enough that he would get his arse kicked to protect her.

Cautiously, pulling up next to the Merc, luckily for us, everyone seems to have left the scene of the crime. Climbing out of the Range Rover, I try the door of the Merc and find it is open. Glancing around for...something...my eyes land on a small suitcase tucked behind the driver's seat. Dragging it out, I figure she's going to need it, so it can come with us. Slamming the door shut, I crunch over the worsening snow, my foot landing on something and cracking it. Bending down, I see a phone peeking out of the snow, so I lift it out of the soaking mess and pocket it, along with a black makeup bag I discover a little way from the phone. It's like Hansel and fucking Gretel over here.

"Anything else?" I mutter.

But without digging through the snow to look, I don't find anything else visible, so I straighten up and hoist the suitcase in my grip and sling it onto the backseat of Richard's car.

Giving Con a brief nod, I set off again and soon we are pulling up outside the family cabin right when visibility becomes impossible. Grabbing the case, I open the door and get out, slamming it as Con races forward. Shoving the front door open, we fly through it, wanting to escape the freezing snow. I see Sawyer, Quentin and Raven standing near the doorway, dressed in coats, hats, scarves and gloves, with a backpack of what appears to be food and water and an old paper map spilling out.

"Richard!" Raven exclaims. "Wow, you look a lot better than I thought you would. I'm so fucking glad you're here and you're okay." She steps forward and envelopes me in a tight embrace that I return with envy building up inside me for my twin brother.

'Ouch' doesn't even cover it.

RAVEN

Richard pushes me away gently, and I blink a couple of times and then squint at him.

“Not Richard,” he says, his hand on his chest.

“Yeah, I see that now. Hmm...you are?”

“Jacob Carlaw. Richard’s twin brother.”

“No shit.”

“Is Richard okay?” I ask, peering around the men in a show of where-the-fuck-is-he?

“Yeah, fine. We need a group meeting.”

I turn my attention to the cute, light blonde-haired man called Connor, with the most remarkable hazel eyes, who got out of the car earlier and went with Jacob and Richard.

“Hi again,” I say, awkwardly giving him a wave.

“Hi!” he responds enthusiastically. “Were you guys going somewhere?”

“To my car... I need my case, but by the looks of it, you already went for it.” I give Jacob a pointed glare and grab my case from him.

“Oh, yeah. Are these also yours?” He holds out my cracked, soaking-wet phone and my meds pouch.

“Yes! Fuck! Thank you!” I take them from him, and relief floods me.

“So, I’m guessing we are safe from heading back out there?” Sawyer asks.

Nodding, I give him a smile. “Yeah, but what about Richard?”

“Raven...” Jacob’s delicious murmur sends a shiver down my spine.

“Mmm.”

“Excuse us.”

“Come with me.” He grabs Sawyer and hauls him down the hallway whispering furiously and gesturing wildly as Connor and Quentin follow him.

“Uhm...am I supposed to come to this group meeting?” I call out, feeling like a popped-out left tit.

When no one replies, I shrug and trek after them, wondering where Richard is. I’m also left wondering if he is really okay. That was left a bit up in the air. *Yeah, fine* isn’t exactly reassuring.

Walking past the door that leads to the kitchen, I hear the men in a room a few paces away. I follow the noise and peek around the door to see an office-type room, roughly about the same size as the room you walk into from the front door.

“Raven.”

I look over at Jacob and venture further into the room.

“Come in, sit down,” he says, gesturing to the squishy couch in the corner.

Lingering in the doorway like a fart in a thunderstorm, I dither and debate about whether I should make myself at home or not.

He gives up on me in the end and carries on talking. He is telling Quentin and Connor about his twin brother and how they’ve been trying to find him on and off after Richard just left in the middle of the night.

He slides his gaze across to me briefly before addressing the men again. “We took him to a doctor that Con knows, and

we got into an argument. I walked out. I'll go back for him tomorrow." He heaves a heavy sigh.

"So, he's really okay?" I ask into the silence that falls.

Those blue eyes that are exactly the same as Richard's, search mine. "He'll be fine." Moving his gaze back to the guys sitting on the couch in front of him while he stands in front of the TV, he is about to say something when Sawyer blurts out.

"You can't go back for him. It's a fucking shitshow out there."

When no one says anything, I raise my shaky hand like the nervous new kid in school. "What are we going to do, then? We can't leave him out there with no transportation."

"Raven," he says in a kind voice. "Leave this with us. We'll sort this out."

"I hope so. I feel so bad for getting him into this mess."

"Richard is a grown-ass man who can take care of himself. He wouldn't have left you on the side of the road needing assistance."

"Yeah, but still..."

"Look, we have to go back for him. There is no other choice in the matter," Connor says. "And I suggest we do it sooner rather than later." He gives Jacob a pointed look.

I can't help but give him a smile. "Yes, thank you. I know it's dangerous out there, but I'm worried, and I feel guilty. I need to know he is okay and to have him here in his own home that we have all invaded."

"We will," Jacob says and blinks when I stare at him. "Right now?"

"Better now than when it gets even worse out there. Your car isn't snowed in yet like ours was."

"That *is* my car!" he exclaims, but then lets out a huff when my guileless expression gets the better of him. "Fine. Sawyer, you're it."

"Why can't Con go?" he complains.

“Richard is also your brother.”

“Fine,” he grumbles and stands up. “We had better not get stuck out there because you couldn’t control your temper around him in the first place.”

“You know what a dick he is.”

“I also know what a dick you are.”

“Guys!” I interrupt, standing up and holding my hands up. “Go now before you end up getting stuck out there.”

To my surprise, they both nod and move out, obeying my orders like good little boys. Turning back to Quentin and Connor, I smile. “We should see what we can make in the way of food and hot drinks for when they get back.”

“You mean if they get back,” Quentin mutters under his breath.

“Wow, defeatist, much?” I chirp. “Come on. Rally. We’ve got work to do. Does anyone know how to make a fire?”

“Me,” Connor says. “Was a boy scout.”

“Why does that not surprise me, at the same time shocks me to my core?” Quentin says.

Connor lets out a loud laugh and goes off to make a fire while I lead Quentin to the kitchen and flick on the lights, taking in a beautiful farmhouse kitchen that appears to be well-stocked, when I go searching through the cupboards and fridge.

QUENTIN

Watching as this delicate, curvy, unbelievably beautiful woman moves confidently around the kitchen preparing food and beverages for the wanderers, I lean against the doorframe casually and see her weary expression, and it makes me feel something for her.

She looks despondent and tired.

“Can I help with anything?” I ask quietly. Maybe too quietly, as I don’t think she heard me.

“For this day to never have happened,” she replies a few moments later, not stopping what she is doing.

I click my fingers, and the sharp noise makes her look up and across to me.

“Sorry, it seems like my powers of time travel are on the fritz.” I give her a small smile.

She giggles. It’s a cute sound, and it makes me warm inside.

“Soup man is a funny guy.”

I tilt my head.

“Sorry, I associate you with soup now.”

“Forever?”

“Depends. Will we know each other forever?”

“Maybe.”

Her smile warms, and she leans against the counter. “Want a biscuit?” She reaches for one herself.

“Sure. I love choc-chip.”

“Me too.”

Finding common ground with her will go a long way to helping her trust in us. We munch in silence and then she asks, “Do you think they’ll be alright out there?”

Nodding, I reply, “I’m sure they will. The situation sort of calls for them to be or get stuck out there.”

“Like most urgent situations.”

“True, but Jacob is good in a crisis.”

“Is he? He left Richard at the doctor’s because he was angry with him. Sounds more hotheaded to me.”

“He can be that as well when it comes to Richard.”

“Sibling rivalry.” She says it wistfully as if she wants to experience it.

“I looked for a landline, but I didn’t see one.”

“Jesus,” she giggles. “Landline? What is this, the nineties?”

“Like you’d know,” I chide her. “You are what? Twenty-two, three?”

“Twenty four,” she says with a huff. “It’s my birthday soon.”

I nod, taking that in. “So your trip was to celebrate your birthday.”

“Sort of. It was about many things, really.”

“I’m sorry you didn’t get to make it.”

She glances out of the window and sighs. “Yeah, me too.”

Wanting to cheer her up, I move in closer. “I did find something interesting, though.”

“Oh? What’s what?”

Her interest is piqued, so I chuckle. “Seems the elder Carlaw is about the same size as me. I found some clothes.”

She laughs. “You’re going to wear dad clothes. Fun.”

Grimacing, I take it in my stride. “They’re not the most stylish, but if we are cooped up in this cabin without a change of clothes, they’ll do.”

“True. I’m glad Jacob went for my case. I owe him one.”

“You don’t owe him anything. We should have brought it with us when we left the scene.”

“I forgot all about it in the scuffle.”

“Understandable.”

Raven looks up at me with those eyes that I only just noticed now are a cloudy blue and so pretty. Something deep inside, in that dark place that rarely sees the light of day, has sprouted. I understand her in that moment. I empathise with her predicament. She is desperately worried about her parents and her friend. It has fired up my protective side like it has never been before. It’s a strange feeling, but one that I could definitely get used to.

“Don’t worry,” I murmur. “We will make sure you are safe and protected.”

“Thanks,” she says quietly. “I feel like such a burden.”

“Why?”

“Because now you’ve been lumbered with me and you’re also stuck here. Not to mention the danger that Jacob, Sawyer and Richard are in out there in this weather. All because of me.”

“You didn’t know you were going to break down and that Mick and his guys would come along. It was bad luck. Nothing you could’ve done anything about.”

She shrugs. “Maybe.”

“Fun fact, my grandfather was Chief Justice many moons ago.”

“Really? That is so cool. I’m hoping to go into the law myself when I can find someone to take me on next year.”

“You have your degree?”

She nods enthusiastically. “I got it over the summer. I studied part time.”

“Congratulations. That’s no small achievement.”

Raven gives me a big grin. “Thanks. What do you do?”

“I work private security.” That’s all she needs to know. It’s not a big deal, but some of my clients are famous, infamous and global stars, who insist on their privacy as expected.

“Okay, that sounds mysterious.”

“Not really, just...private.”

She laughs again and turns back to carry on preparing food. “I hear you. But that makes me wildly curious who your clients are. No, I don’t expect you to tell me, but I can fantasise about who you know.”

I want to reply with how I will fantasise about her, but that sounds a bit forward. It is how I feel, though. She is sweet and perfect, and I feel that this might have been destiny knocking. She was meant to end up with us, and I know for a fact that none of us are going to waste this opportunity to get to know her better.

RAVEN

Having liked my talk with Quentin, I decide to make the best of a bad situation and try to enjoy my time here. I at least know I will see Richard again later, which is a huge plus. That thought excites me. He is just the right amount of sweet mixed in with the bad boy. His vulnerability is sexy, and it brings out the mother hen in me.

Could I have unwittingly landed in the middle of something here?

How does that work?

Fate?

Destiny?

Some fucked up luck?

“Or maybe it’s just you projecting and trying to make this situation less shite, you dumb fuck,” I mutter to myself.

But I’m glad that I’m here. Anyone else would probably think I’m crazy to be happy snowed in with a bunch of strangers, but they are so laidback and easy to get on with, I don’t find it odd to be glad at all.

But time will tell, I suppose.

And Christ knows, that’s all I’ve got right now.

Glaring out of the window at the snow coming down, I can’t even see where Jacob’s car is anymore. It just blends into the background.

Time to get to know them better, time to figure this shit out and hope to hell that I'm not wrong in my assessment of these guys.

On that note, as I finish up in the kitchen, now just waiting for the travellers to return to the inn, instead of heading back upstairs, I walk down the hallway to the front room with the TV in. I march straight up to Connor and Quentin, sitting side by side on the big, squishy couch, and flop down in between them. Grabbing the game controller from Connor, I proceed to kick the shit out of Quentin's avatar, to their utter shock.

Yeah, that's right, bitchachos. Hot Girl's got game.

Glancing at the clock above the roaring fire, I see that time is ticking away, and I'm getting worried about Jacob, Sawyer and Richard. They should've been back by now, surely? Quentin sees me looking anxious and tries to reassure me.

"Don't worry, Raven. They'll be here soon, and then we can eat."

"Yeah, I guess."

"Do we even have to wait for them?" Connor asks, grinning at me. "I'm fucking starving."

"Yeah, me too," I murmur, but I can't help the twisted knot in my stomach. What if Mick and his guys found them again and this time it's worse?

Sighing, trying to push the growing fear for these three men that I don't even know aside, I turn back around again and continue to play the video game with Connor and Quentin, managing to lose spectacularly despite my initial triumph.

Distracted doesn't even cover it right about now.

My mind is spinning.

Visions of Mick's face float across my mind's eye, taunting me, the animosity of the encounter running through my thoughts again and again. They definitely knew Richard and were happy for the opportunity to kick his arse. I was just there.

“Let’s eat,” Quentin suggests after I’ve fidgeted myself right off the couch and back over to the window to stare out at the snow.

“Yes, please,” Connor agrees.

“It’s so dark out now,” I murmur. “This isn’t good.”

“They probably got held up at the doctor’s, filling out forms and such,” Connor says as Quentin disappears into the kitchen.

Smiling, I turn back to him. “Yeah, you’re probably right.”

Quentin returns with some of the sandwiches I’d made and places them on the table.

Connor moves closer, wrapping his arm around my shoulder and pulling me in to him for a hug. “I’m always right,” he says to me, before he laughs and lets me go. Can’t say I’m not disappointed. It felt good to be comforted and in his arms.

“Thanks. I appreciate you trying to make me feel better.”

Looking up into Quentin’s eyes, he stares back at me with compassion before holding out a hand to lead me over to the table. Taking it gratefully, I stand in front of him and lean into him for more reassurance, surprised at just how easy he is to be around. Quentin hesitates and wraps his arms around my waist briefly before letting me go.

“Hungry?” he asks.

I nod. “Always hungry.”

He smiles and hands me a can of pop, which I crack open, relieved to be getting some regular sustenance, but now worrying about Andy at the Inn. He is going to go spare, ring my parents, and they will have the choppers out before anyone knows what hit them.

Not great for anyone involved, especially me.

SAWYER

“We have to tell her,” I say as Jacob and I drive to this sketchy doctor in the middle of the countryside.

“That would ruin the illusion that we’re actually the good guys,” Jacob says with a sigh. “She is starting to trust us, and if she knew we’d kind of stalked her, what would that do?”

I sigh. For some strange reason, I seem calm and composed around her. Even with her back at the cabin, the need for aggression is lessened. It is very weird. I’m not used to being so chilled.

“Kind of stalked. Fuck, that sounds so bad now that you say it out loud.”

“It *is* bad,” Jacob exclaims. “I mean, okay, technically, we saw her, and she drove off, and then we planned to go back to stalk her until we found her, but same fucking difference.”

“I know, and believe me, I don’t want to build up any walls that have started to crumble. She’s been through hell today, and yet she is still standing. Somehow. I’ve never known anyone quite like her before.”

“You and me both.”

“Too bad she’s more interested in your twin than us.”

“Jesus,” he snaps. “Do you mind?”

“Just saying...we want him with us so bad, use her to get to him.”

“You what?” he blurts out.

“Okay, that came out worse than how it sounded in my head. I meant, use her presence here to draw him into the fold.” Jacob and I exchange a stare that speaks volumes.

“Maybe,” he mutters. “Isn’t it just more deception? We are supposed to be caring for her, not the exact opposite of that.”

“We are and we will, *but*...there are two birds here, and we have one stone. Why not knock them both down at the same time?”

“Humph,” he mutters rudely.

“I have a point, and you know it,” I venture, firmly on the side of not deceiving Raven any more than we have to. I like her. A lot. She has fire and is gorgeous and sweet and obviously loyal to a fault. From what it looks like, Richard was there when the fight started, but he tried to save her at a cost to himself. It could be that when it comes to him, she has a slight case of Knight in Shining Armour or whatever, but I think it’s more than that. She connected with Richard in the way that we want her to connect with us. Somehow, through fate or whatever this is, we know she is our *one*.

We are whipped by a short, curvy sassy lady with bouncy, light brown hair, eyes the colour of a rainstorm, tits big enough that you can drive your cock in between the pushed-up mounds, and a fortitude that would put many men to shame.

In a word, she is everything.

To tell her all of this, would definitely ruin the small amount of trust she has in us, but not telling her is wrong.

I fix Jacob with a defiant stare. “We need to tell her that you and I spotted her outside the doctor’s office earlier and wanted to find her. Christ knows, maybe she’ll be flattered.”

He snorts with what comes across as angry mirth, if there was ever such a thing. “I think you are living in a fantasyland there, Spence. But we have lost sight of the bigger picture here.”

He is staring straight ahead, but I know exactly what he’s thinking. I’ve known all along how hard this would be for him since we first decided to find Richard and bring him home.

But there is no going back now. We know where he is, and as much as we can tell ourselves it's gross to use Raven to bring him to us, it will work. And on the flip side... bringing Richard home will keep Raven with us as well. There is no downside to this, except the deception. It will have to be something that we come clean about soon or it will eat my insides away until there is nothing left but a ball of anxiety and tension.

“Jay?” I prompt him when he doesn't answer.

“Agreed,” he says eventually. “We will tell her after Richard is here. Let's try and secure that before we go about ruining the best thing that has happened to us.”

“You feel that strongly about her?” I ask, trying to get him to say it so I don't feel so alone in this weird, well, fantasy, that has landed in our laps.

“Don't you?” he asks.

“Yeah. It's fucking weird, but yeah.”

Jacob snickers, despite knowing I'm right.

I nod and lean my head on the window to try to cool down. My nerves are pinging about all of this shit, and I'm exhausted from this day already, and it's far from over. If anything, it's only just beginning.

RICHARD

My eyes snap open.

I take in the unfamiliar ceiling and blink.

I try to sit up and then groan. “Eurgh.” Slapping a hand to my side, I proceed to prod gingerly and remember the events from earlier.

One of Mick’s idiots stamped on my ribs, cracking a couple of them. Fucking clown. Raven is safe, though. That’s all that matters to me. I really hope that someone called the police and Mick has gone down for possession of illegal weapons, along with all the other crimes he has committed. Doubt it though. The fight was in the middle of nowhere.

“Fucker.” I wish I’d never got involved with the Jets, but I was in a dark place, alone with a lot of pent-up aggression to let loose. It was the obvious fit. Now, I regret every single second of my time with them. Seeing Raven that night in Lakesview has fundamentally changed me. It’s bizarre. There is no other word for it. I lived my life with an unyielding pressure until I walked out and became the exact opposite of what was expected of me. All I want now is to be good enough for the woman who crashed into my life and turned it upside down. The woman who has made me feel things, I didn’t think was possible.

But I’m not good enough.

She deserves to find happiness with a man who can love her, adore her, treat her like a princess and worship her body like she deserves. I can do none of that.

Jacob, on the other hand, can give her everything.

Gritting my teeth, I make a decision. I know my twin. He is a relentless prick, and he will be back here soon. It's dark and snowy out. I can disappear again and make sure this time he doesn't find me.

Struggling to sit up from the too-comfy bed, I swing my legs over the side and hoist myself up. The carpet sinks under my feet and for one brief, gut-punching moment, I miss my old home. Shaking my head and taking a step forward, I ignore the head-spin and slight nausea that rises up as I reach for my jacket.

"Where do you think you're going?" The light, cultured voice of Doctor-I-don't-think-I-got-his-name rings out, as he appears like an apparition in the doorway. "You should be resting."

"Places to be, people to *not* see. You get my drift?"

He nods his light blonde head and takes a sip of his tea. "He cares about you. He will be back."

"All you have to do is tell him I slipped out, and you didn't see me."

"You sure you have somewhere to go? You're a bit battered."

"I can take care of myself," I grunt when I take a step forward, but push past the Doc. "Thanks," I mutter as I head down the hallway and out of the door.

He doesn't try to stop me, for which I'm grateful. I'd hate to have to kick the arse of the man who patched me up and ruin all the hard work he did.

Reaching the front door, I wonder how the hell I'm supposed to get back to my cabin. It's not much, but my stuff is there and maybe even Raven is still there. The possibility of the others being there is also high. They wouldn't leave Raven there on her own, I don't think, but I'm going to have to suck it. Sighing, I know this. I'll be safe from Mick, and I can collapse there while I heal up and maybe get to know the only woman I've ever been attracted to. Knowing it runs so much

deeper than that hurts too much to think about. All I want to do is forget. But I can't push the feel of her body pressed against mine away. Her delectable, creamy skin that makes me want to run my rough hands over, just to feel the silky smoothness before I kiss and lick every inch of her.

Closing my eyes briefly, I open the door and stifle the whimper that is bubbling up. The cold is making this pain so much worse than it should be.

My guts are telling me to go back and wait for Jacob to inevitably rock up so I can return back to the cabin with him, but fuck knows when that will be. Knowing him, he will purposely leave me until tomorrow, even though he took *my* car and stranded me here.

"Douche," I mutter and then wince when a pair of headlights nearly blinds me. Groaning when the car comes to a stop, and the window slides down to show me my younger brother's face, I look down, wondering if I can make a run for it.

"Don't be an idiot," Sawyer says with a laugh. "You won't make it ten yards."

"Fuck you."

"Get in, idiot. Even if you weren't all bust up, there is no way we are leaving you to walk back to the cabin in this."

"You shouldn't even be driving in this," I point out.

"We know." Jacob clenched jaw, while not visible, is clear from his tone. "So get the fuck in, so we can get back to the cabin and out of this shitshow."

Debating it for a few seconds, I know I'm being a prick. Heading out on foot in the pitch dark with no idea where I am, probably no signal on my phone and injured, I'll be out here all night, longer if I really get my arse lost.

"Fine," I grumble and open the back door, sliding in and slamming it closed.

Crossing my arms, I glower straight ahead, expecting Jacob to start lecturing me all the way home, but to my

surprise, no one says a word.

It's even worse.

I'd rather he yelled or something and got it all out of the way so he can move on with his life. But no, he's sitting there steaming but not saying a word.

Well, two can play at that game.

I slump further into the seat and look out of the window, dying to ask about Raven, but not having the courage to do it.

JACOB

“**S**he’s worried about you,” I blurt out suddenly, needing to say something, anything to break this godawful silence.

Nothing.

“How do you two know each other?”

“Is she okay?”

“How the fuck should I know? We’ve been chasing around after you all bloody afternoon.”

“A simple, ‘I don’t know’ would’ve sufficed,” he grouses.

Feeling chastised by my big brother, who is only a few minutes older than me, I slump into the seat and grip the steering wheel tighter.

“I saw her a few months ago in a small village called Lakesview as I was passing through, trying to lie low from Mick and his idiots. She captivated me. I’ve never spoken to her except for today when she was suddenly there on the side of the road.”

“So that’s why you were spotted there,” I murmur. Makes sense now. “Sawyer and I went up there yesterday to find you and found her. She captivated us as well.”

“Well, why does that not surprise me?”

“Con and Quen, too,” Sawyer pipes up with the only thing he has contributed to this conversation thus far.

Richard grunts a response and closes his eyes.

“Fuck,” I mutter and put the windscreen wipers on full blast. “I can’t see a fucking thing.”

“If you hadn’t left me there earlier, we wouldn’t be in this predicament now, would we?”

“Fuck off,” I growl, but I know he’s not wrong. “Dammit, where is this turning?”

“There,” Richard says and taps on the side window.

As we sail past the turning to the cabin, I curse some more. “Sooner would’ve been preferable.” I slam on the brakes, and we skid to the side slightly, but I throw it into reverse and back up. I doubt I’m going to come across anyone coming up behind me. Everyone will be tucked up in their cosy homes.

Sliding all over the road, I grip the steering wheel and clench my jaw so tight that I give myself a headache as I manoeuvre the wayward car up the narrow lane.

“Fuck!”

Sawyer’s yell startles the shit out of me, and I swerve the car, sliding on an ice patch and skidding off the road where we hit a hedge, which once again dumps its snowy load onto the car.

After a few seconds of silence, I turn to Sawyer. “What. The. Fuck?”

He gives me a sheepish smile. “Thought I saw a deer.”

“You thought you saw a deer?” I repeat in disbelief. “In the middle of this blizzard?”

“Hey, you never know. Better safe than sorry, right?”

“Right.” Shifting into neutral to restart the stalled engine, I shift into drive and step on the accelerator, but go nowhere. Gritting my teeth, I press down harder, and the car jerks forward, but we remain stuck in the hedge. “You have got to be fucking kidding me!” Smashing my fists on the steering wheel, I glare at Sawyer. “We are stuck.”

“No shit,” he murmurs.

“Get out,” I growl, “and tell me how bad.”

Choosing not to argue with me, he opens the door to let in a flurry of snow as he climbs out. Leaving the door open just to piss me off further, I’m sure, he comes back after a few moments and leans in. “Ditch. Gonna have to push.”

“A ditch. A fucking ditch. Seriously?”

“Seriously.”

“Jesus!” Clambering over the central console because my door is currently wedged against the hedge, I get out and pull my beanie further down as I glare at the ditch with disgust. “Right. Of course. Of course, this happens now of all times in my life,” I grumble.

With a face full of snow, I open the back door and give Richard a filthy look. “You are going to have to give it the gas while Sawyer and I push. Okay?”

“With my bust ribs?” he complains.

“Oh, yes. With your bust ribs, so I suggest you take off your belt and chomp down on it hard while you help get us out of this mess you caused.”

“Sawyer was the one who yelled,” he whines.

“Okay then, you help me push, and Sawyer can give the juice. That better?”

“Fuck off. Do you want me dead?”

Straightening up, I don’t answer that question. I’m too angry. Stomping to the back of the car again while Richard, painfully, judging by his muttered curses, inserts himself into the driver’s seat, I take one end while Sawyer takes the other. Hunkering down, making sure to get purchase with my boots, I press my hands to the freezing cold, slippery wet metal and brace myself.

“Okay, go!” I yell.

I heave as Richard puts his foot down.

“Ack!” I yell and stumble back as I get a face full of muddy snow that has sprayed up from the epic wheel spin,

drenching me and covering me in filth. “You dick! You did that on purpose!”

Sawyer lets out a loud guffaw as Richard slides the window down and gives me the finger.

Glaring down at myself, I’m covered in mud and soaked to the skin. My coat is ruined, and I’m about to kick someone’s arse from here to the middle of next week.

Sawyer is still howling like a hyena at me, slapping his thigh as he laughs so hard, his beanie falls off.

But then it’s my turn to let out a snicker when he slips and lands on his arse in a pile of snow.

“Yeah, not so funny now, is it?”

“This day blows,” he grits out.

“Tell me something I don’t know,” I mutter and hold my hand out for him. Realising my mistake a second too late, he hauls me down into the snow next to him as Richard impatiently blasts the horn at us.

“Stop fucking about, you pair of dicks. We need to get back on the road.”

Taking a moment to build an epic snowball before I stand up, I chuck it at Sawyer’s face with a smug smile.

He glowers and rises, sliding again, but this time, regaining his balance quickly.

“On the count of three...” Bracing myself again against the Range Rover, which weighs a fucking ton, twice as much. Literally.

Feeling the car shift a fraction, I push harder. “Come on! Nearly there!”

Sawyer and I give it all we’ve got as, eventually, the Range Rover slides out of the ditch.

“Drive away and find out,” I mutter, clenching my fists, but luckily for Sawyer and me, Richard is either in too much pain to try, or he genuinely doesn’t want to leave us out here.

He slides out of the driver's side and crawls into the back as I resume my place behind the wheel. "Please drive carefully the rest of the way," he groans, clutching his side. "I'm dying."

Grimacing at him in the rearview mirror, I have to reluctantly admit that he doesn't look good. He is pale and looks like he is about to throw up.

"Hold onto your lunch, brother, or I swear to God, I will chuck you out."

"Trying," he rasps, and it's all the encouragement I need to put my foot down and drive somewhat safely, but most definitely hastily, back to the cabin, sighing in relief when we finally see the light at the end of the tunnel.

"Thank fuck," I mutter.

"Home sweet home," Sawyer says.

"Gurrnnn," Richard mutters, but this time I smile.

We made it in one piece, and hopefully there will be whiskey and mince pies waiting for us inside.

Oh, and painkillers and water for the patient, of course.

RAVEN

After what seems like forever, we finally hear a car pull up outside, and I rush to the window to see a pair of headlights briefly before they turn off and car doors slam as I race to the front door, flinging it open to see the wayward travellers, return safe and sound. Or, in this case, battered and bruised, soaking and muddy.

“Raven.”

“Richard,” I breathe out when I see his poor battered face.

Reaching out for him, I remember his ‘stay away from me’ vibes, and I stop to just look up at him with a smile, hugging him with my eyes, if that’s even a thing.

It must be, because his tormented face collapses into a smile, and he opens his arms carefully before crushing me to him with a pained grunt.

“You’re here, safe and perfect,” he murmurs, tangling his fingers into my hair. “I was so worried about you.”

“You don’t even know me.”

“I do, Raven. I do.”

Wondering what he means, I wrap my arms around him, clinging to him as I inhale deeply, filling my lungs with his musky scent, all earthy and feral. I shiver as the lust descends on me suddenly and forcefully. Running my hands up his chest without thinking and gaze into his deep blue eyes. My lips part, but then he pulls back, making me stumble awkwardly forward.

“How are you?” I ask lamely, trying to cover up the hurt of his rejection.

“I’ve been better,” he mutters.

“Same,” I murmur, even though he didn’t ask.

“Are you okay?” His earnest expression relieves some of the tension that has been building.

I shrug. “Yep.”

“And we are just dandy as well, thank you for asking,” Jacob says, sarcasm dripping from every word as he shoves Richard aside to enter the cabin.

I grab his hand, and he stops, his face softening as he looks at me. “Thank you.”

He nods, and after a second, where he looks like he wants to move in for a hug or a kiss, he steps away. “Got any food?”

“Yeah...we made enough to feed us for the next two days.”

“That’s good,” Sawyer says, bringing up the rear and shutting the door behind him as he stamps his feet on the rug. “Because we are lucky to be back here and not stuck out there in a snowdrift for you all to find our frozen corpses a few weeks from now.”

“That bad?” I ask with a guilty twist of my lips.

“No, it’s fine,” Richard answers for him.

He hobbles past me, leaving me standing by myself as Sawyer and Jacob head straight to the kitchen where Connor and Quentin were cleaning up after our bite to eat earlier. With Richard taking the stairs painfully and slowly, I debate if I should help him or not.

In the end, I go to him and hold my arm out for him.

He stops in the middle of the staircase and turns to look at me. “You understand?”

His softly spoken question hurts my heart. “Yeah, I think I do. You have this aura about you that screams for people to

stay away from you. It's why I never approached you the times I saw you in Lakesview."

He frowns. "You saw me?"

Giggling shyly, I nod. "Yeah. You caught my attention a while back. I'm not much into pubbing every night, but I had to keep going back to see if you were there. Even though I never spoke to you, just seeing you made my night."

"Same," he murmurs, searching my eyes. "I—I have never been attracted to anyone before I saw you. I had to keep going back just to see you, just to see if these feelings inside me were real."

"Never," I murmur, unable to believe that, until I stare back into those gorgeous blue depths and fully understand the weight of what this means for him.

"Never."

"Richard..." I don't know what to say. I don't know what he is thinking, which unnerves me. I don't want to fuck this up, so I just stand there, staring at him as he does with me.

Eventually, I break the silence. "You look like you could do with lying down."

"That I do," he agrees and, with only a moment's hesitation, clamps his hand on my forearm as he leans heavily on me to help him up the remaining stairs. "You really noticed me?"

"Have you seen you?"

Snorting, he gives me a half-smile that sends my heart into a tailspin. "Unfortunately, yes."

"Okay, you aren't the prettiest right now..." I bite my lip as he gives me a wide-eyed glare. "But still hot, in a rugged, manly kind of way." I can't help the giggle that erupts from sheer nerves. He is killing me here. He is all man. I've never met anyone like him, except maybe his brothers and friends. This is where I've been going wrong for years, chasing the wrong age bracket.

“Well, I’ll take that and hold it close to my heart,” he says as we reach the top step, and he lets me go. “I can take it from here. You’ve had a harrowing day, Raven. You should get some rest.”

Nodding slowly, I bite my tongue but then say anyway, “I needed to see that you were okay. What you did for me earlier was nothing short of heroic. I owe you my life.”

“No, you don’t.”

Grabbing his hand, seeing the flash of pain in his eyes, I grip it even tighter. He has shown me he can touch me, and right now, I need him to. “Don’t do that. Don’t downplay what you did.”

“Any decent man...”

“Don’t give me that bull. You went above and beyond to protect me.”

He nods slowly, but I know he is only humouring me. “Good night, Raven.”

He hobbles down the hallway, and I stare after him, hoping he comes back, but he doesn’t. He goes into a room and shuts the door quietly.

Feeling despondent and alone, I disappear into the pastel room I was in earlier and where Connor kindly brought up my bags a little while ago.

Glaring out of the window, I check my phone for the millionth time, pulling it out of my back pocket. Still nothing and about to run out of charge.

Sighing, I reach into the bag, searching for my charger, when I hear Richard’s voice behind me. “Raven.”

Straightening up, I suddenly feel the warmth of his body pressed up against mine.

My breath hitches.

I straighten up, clutching the phone, I turn around. His chest comes into view, and I tilt my head back to look him in the face.

“Richard,” I murmur, his closeness driving me to the point where I’m about to pounce on him, injuries be damned. He is doing things to my body and soul that I didn’t even know were possible before now.

He reaches out and cups my face, a look of sheer amazement on his. His fingers tangle in my hair, and he tugs gently before he drops his mouth to mine.

I drop the phone on the floor and fist my hands in his black t-shirt, wanting to claw it off him so I can touch his skin. His kiss bruises me, tearing at the wounds on his lips to bleed again. I taste it when I flick my tongue out and let out a soft moan, which makes him growl into my mouth as his tongue twists around mine in a kiss so deep, so full of pent-up emotion, I want to cry and cling to him forever.

His hands reach for the hem of my t-shirt, and he pulls it up. We break apart long enough for him to yank it over my head. His eyes drop to my breasts, encased in a lacy bra.

“Are you sure you want to do this?” I ask in a small voice, knowing how big of a deal this is for him. I don’t know if he is using me for a test run or if he really feels like he can do this.

“I have never been more sure of anything in my life,” he replies before he kisses me again, drawing in my taste at the same time so he sucks the breath out of me. I pant, gasping for air as his mouth devours mine. I tentatively reach for the button on his sexy black jeans and flick it open, ready to stop the second he tells me to.

But he doesn’t.

He removes his own t-shirt instead, with a one-handed reach over, which is sexy as fuck, but makes him grunt in agony.

“Richard.”

He shakes his head, effectively shutting me up.

Taking in his hard, tanned body, I mewl like a kitten, kissing his chest and sliding my tongue over the rough flesh.

Skating my fingers over the side where he got hurt, I slide down the zip on his jeans and then shove them down to expose his hardening cock.

“Christ,” he murmurs when I pull away. “I never knew it could feel like this, Raven. I knew you were the one...”

Taking the weight of his words deadly serious, I smile as a shiver of delight skitters over my skin.

Dropping to my knees in front of him, I take his weighty cock in my hand. I let out a moan of pure, unadulterated lust when I see his reverse Prince Albert piercing.

“Oh, fuck,” I gasp and close my mouth over his tip.

He groans, shoving his hand forcefully into my hair.

I suck him off, wrapping my tongue around his shaft, unable to resist the urge to flick the ring piercing his cock. My deep “mmm” sound makes him groan and gently pulse his hips. I let him fuck my mouth, knowing he won’t be rough with me. He can’t if nothing else. Running my tongue up and down his length and over the tip, I enjoy this immensely.

So is he, if the noises he’s making are anything to go by.

“Fuck, Raven.”

Suddenly, he withdraws his cock from my mouth and pulls me gently to my feet before tracing his finger over my wet lips. “If you keep that up, I’ll come in your mouth, and that will be such a waste.”

“Fuck, yeah, it will,” I murmur, trying for a sassy smile.

He brings my wrist to his mouth. He places his lips over my pulse. “I need you, Raven. This has been a day...”

“From hell?”

He chuckles. “That, but so much more. Seeing you on the side of the road is fate kicking me in the arse to speak to you, kiss you.”

“It could be so much more.”

To my surprise, he whimpers, his eyes closed. He lowers me to the bed, looming over me. “So much more.”

He leans over with a grunt and quickly undoes my jeans, pulling them down my legs and dropping them on the floor. He does the same with my g-string, leaving me only in my bra.

He drags me gently down the bed until his cock is in line with my pussy. With a wicked smile, he takes his cock in his hand and rubs the pierced tip over my clit.

I arch my back and cry out as the pleasure that built up during our kiss shoots straight to my pussy. Soaking his cock when he drives it inside me, a wild growl on his lips.

“Raven.”

He pounds into me, slamming his cock in and out of my drenched pussy, bringing my climax closer and closer.

It doesn't even occur to me until now that he isn't wearing a condom, but I guess in his case, it doesn't matter. As for me, I'm usually always safe, but his cock feels gorgeous sliding in and out of me, hot and hard, uncovered and real. Every inch of him is filling me up, and I can feel his cock pressing against my G-spot.

My climax hits me suddenly, fiercely, like a bolt out of the blue. Fireworks explode around me as I orgasm intensely, clutching his cock possessively, never wanting to let him go.

“Fuck, Raven,” he groans. “This is...” He chokes back a whimper.

Coming down from my orgasm, I look up at him. His face is a mask of pain, but the physical kind. He is overexerting himself and is going to end up in worse shape than he already is.

Wiggling away from him, I sit up, reaching behind to unclip my bra. My heavy breasts tumble free, drawing him to me instantly.

“You are so beautiful. The way I feel about you...”

“Shh,” I murmur and push him gently back to the bed.

Straddling him, I treat myself to some more pleasure from the Prince Albert. Trembling with my need, I slip him inside me and ride him slowly, lovingly.

Rotating my hips slowly, he grasps them. He lets out a soft groan as I bring him to the brink of the best orgasm he will ever have had.

I know it.

He knows it.

And he doesn't disappoint me.

Digging his fingers into my hips, he starts to thrust quickly, deeply, filling me up in ways that no man has ever managed to do before. He has taken over my soul, and I know that there is no way I can let him go after this.

No one, not even he, is going to stop me from claiming him.

He grunts loudly, and with one long, hard thrust, he detonates inside me, mingling his cum with mine to form a delicious nectar that I want to lick off his cock.

"Raven," he pants. "Fuck, Raven." He gathers me to him, pulling me down onto his chest, his cock still buried deep inside me. "Don't move. Let me savour this."

I kiss his chest and rest my cheek over his hammering heart.

For the longest time, we lay wrapped around each other until I hear his breathing go heavy.

He's fallen asleep.

Smiling, I look up and gently disentangle myself from his embrace, feeling his cock slide out of me and mourn its loss. Having him that close to me was like finding my other half that I didn't know was missing. It's lame and clichéd, but I guess it's that way for a reason.

Richard turns towards me in his sleep and wraps his arms around me. I lie back with a smile and close my eyes.

This was sudden and perfect, and I will not lose it or him.

JACOB

“So, you’re just going to sleep with her and then leave?” I ask Richard, who I’ve caught just about to sneak out of the front door.

“Fuck off,” he growls, not even turning back to face me. “You don’t know anything.”

“I know you’re a selfish dick that is going to leave her heartbroken.”

He spins around, anger etched into his face. “She knows how I feel.”

“And how is that, then?”

“Leave it alone, Jay,” he snarls. “It’s nothing to do with you!”

“Oh, but it is. You see, Sawyer and I saw her yesterday, and we were interested in finding out more about her. We were on a dual hunt for both her and you when we came across the pair of you on the side of the road in an all-out fight with that idiot, Mick. There is a lot of stuff you don’t know about because you haven’t been here. Stuff you *need* to know so you don’t fuck this up. Are you staying or fucking off?”

“So you’re saying you’re interested in her?” His face goes dark, and he clenches his fists.

“Do it,” I taunt him, knowing he is dying to throw the first punch. “Christ knows I’ve been dying to kick your arse since you walked out and left me here to be the oldest brother, and you *know* what that means to Dad.”

With a loud growl, he lunges. I let his fist connect with my face, so I have the excuse to retaliate. I draw back, and feeling only slightly bad about it, I hit him so hard in the face that he goes down.

That's a first.

But he is already damaged.

Regardless, I take the victory, but it's too soon. He swipes out with his feet, knocking me off mine to land flat on my back on the hardwood floor.

"You fucker," he roars, launching his battered body at me. "You don't know shit!"

I roll over and shove him forward so he falls face first to the floor. I push him over and straddle him, bunching my fist in his shirt.

"You're the fucker," I shout, punching him again and not holding back this time. "You fucking abandoned me. You were my big brother, and you just left without a fucking word, leaving me here to deal with all of this shit that should've been your responsibility. This wasn't my destiny, arsewipe. It was yours!"

"Why do you think I fucking left?" he thunders. "I didn't want any of this! Cursed by positioning to be the one born first by three minutes. Three minutes that ruined my life forever."

I growl loudly, ready to hit him again, but he shoves us over and then rolls off me to sit up, panting and feeling his bruised face.

"You don't know what it's been like for me all these years, Jay. I'm no leader, and being groomed to take over the family business made me miserable. Everything that goes with it was a weight, heavy on my shoulders."

"How do you think it's been for me?" I spit. "Do you think it's been easy stepping up when you bailed? It's been hell. Dad has ridden me so fucking hard because I've been playing catch up."

“I’m sorry,” he whispers. “I really am, Jay, but you don’t understand. I’m a man that can’t bear to be touched. The thought of having to have the perfect family because that’s what he wanted for me made me physically sick. How could I live with that hanging over me every hour of every day?”

His words have floored me. Okay, I was already on the floor, but now I’m even lower. “What?” I pant, catching my breath when the adrenaline of the fight wears off.

“I’m asexual, Jacob. I don’t feel a sexual desire to anyone at all.”

I blink, at a complete loss for words.

“I never told anyone,” he whispers. “I didn’t know *how* to form the words or even know what it all meant. I thought I was broken, but when I looked into it years later, I found out who I am. I knew then that there was no way I could come back, even if I missed your fucking face and Sawyer’s dumb arse. I’m not the man Dad wants me to be, Jay. All those years of having the ‘right’ woman shoved on me and the pressure to marry and have kids to pass on his legacy. His fucking title. I needed to leave. I needed you to take the reins and do what he wanted. Take this birthright and make it strong and powerful. You did. You’re the best damn Viscount a guy could be.”

“The fuck? He never gave me the title. He’s been waiting for you to come back. It all looks so perfect and complete from the outside, but no, I’m not the son he wants for that. This is why it’s been such a fucking burden for me. Knowing I’m doing all of this to please someone who doesn’t want me.”

I’m so confused, I shake my head. I ignore the praise he’s doling out and focus on the most important thing he’s said.

“I know you just had sex with Raven. Christ, this house isn’t that big. We all heard you. What you’re saying doesn’t make sense unless you just what? Gave her what she wanted?”

“No,” he croaks out. “No, I would never do that. I couldn’t. It’s not a choice, Jay. It’s a fundamental part of who I am. But with Raven...she makes me feel all the things that I never could before. I’m scared to stay in case it goes away,

and I have to reject her. I guess there must be another term for what I am. I don't know. I'll look it up when I get over the hurt walking away from the only woman I've ever been able to be with is causing me."

"The only woman?" I murmur, all of my anger washing away at this shocking piece of information and his utterly defeated attitude. "Why didn't you just tell me? We could have worked something out, but you just left. You left *me*. It hurt, still does. I'm hurt you didn't think you could trust me to help you."

"I didn't want help, Jacob. I wanted out."

"Surely we can work this out. You can't leave."

He hauls himself to his feet and staggers towards the door. "Take care of her for me. She deserves everything you can offer her."

"Get your arse back here," I growl, standing up. "You aren't going anywhere."

"I have to."

"How can you just walk away from her, from *us*?"

His sudden sob as he reaches the door takes me aback. "It's what's best for her. Tell her I'm sorry."

"Rich," I call out, but he's gone. I can't force him to stay as much as I want him to. I really thought Raven would be enough to make him stay, but he's throwing himself on the sword to protect her.

"Fucking prick," I mutter and then spin abruptly when I hear her voice filtering down the stairs.

"So he really left?"

Our gazes meet, hers cloudy and sad, mine furious and confused.

"I'll get him back," I state. "He doesn't get to walk out a second time."

She nods slowly, a tear falling down her face. She runs down the stairs, dressed only in a white fluffy towel. "Please,"

she begs.

“I’ll get him back,” I say again.

She blinks, the tears that were pooled spilling over and onto her cheeks. I’m frozen in place as our gazes lock.

Shaking my head, I turn away before I ravage her, forcing her onto my dick that I can feel throbbing in my pants at the sight of her half-naked body. She has just thrown me into a whirlwind of emotions when I was already raw.

Grabbing my still-soaking wet coat from the rack, I throw it on and follow Richard out of the door and into the full-on blizzard, cursing the day he was born.

RAVEN

Mortified that Richard just left, feeling utterly humiliated, I turn and run up the stairs, my hand over my mouth. What was I thinking, throwing myself at him?

Racing to my room, I snatch up an injection from the bathroom and quickly jab myself, ensuring that the dose is well and truly correct for today before I dispose of the needle.

Whisking off my towel, I dive into the shower and clean up. I have business to take care of. I am determined and taking this bull by the horns before things spin completely out of my control. I will not cower in this house, blizzard or not, while the man I've been waiting for waltzes out of my life, never to be seen again.

Big girl knickers time.

Getting dry and dressed a few minutes later, I carefully choose my outfit from the sparse collection I brought with me. I go for my skin tight black jeans, black boots, a black long-sleeve top, my Christmas jumper with the reindeer on with the fluffy red pom-pom nose and my black coat. Stuffing my hat on and grabbing my scarf and gloves.

Gritting my teeth as I approach the front door, I come to a screeching halt as Sawyer dives in front of it.

“Going somewhere?” he asks.

“Out.” I tap my foot impatiently. “Move.”

“You can’t go out there, Raven,” he starts, but my mocking retching noise forces him to trail off.

“Raven,” Quentin’s voice barks at me from the left. “Where are you going?”

“To sort this mess out,” I spit. “Now, you either let me go, or I swear to God, I’m going to go back upstairs, grab my bag and start swinging, and in case you weren’t aware, it’s got a strong strap and is full to the brim with junk. Ask Mick *and* your brother how much it fucking hurts when it smashes into the side of your head.”

“Whoa!” Sawyer says, holding his hand up. “No need to get violent there, Muffins. We’re just looking out for you.”

“Well, I don’t need it. I know what I want, and I’m going to get it. Now, out of my way, or you will regret it.”

“Let her go,” Connor says between bouts of laughter as both Quentin and Sawyer think that over. “Jacob is already out there, but I think it will take Raven to bring him back.”

Shooting Connor a grateful smile, Sawyer finally moves away from the door.

“Fine, but if you get lost, don’t expect us to come looking,” he huffs.

“No one asked you to,” I spit back.

“He’s lying. We’d come,” Quentin says gently. “We can’t stop you, but know it’s bad out there, princess.”

Shivering slightly at the endearment, I gaze up at him, his dark eyes filling with a desire that makes me blink rapidly and not shy away from. I’ve just had sex with Richard, the man I’ve been mooning after for ages, and now, suddenly, the thought of this gentle giant wrapping his arms around me to give me some much-needed comfort seems like the best idea in the world.

But I can’t lose Richard.

“We aren’t letting you go alone,” Sawyer states.

I shrug. “Whatever, follow me if you must, but I’m going, and I’m going now.” I march forward and, giving him a grim glare, I yank the front door open and then come to a complete halt. The snow has got worse. It’s now about five inches, it’s pitch black, and I can’t see jack.

“Fuck,” I mutter as the guys get their coats on behind me. “This is just stupid.”

“Couldn’t agree more.”

“Richard and Jacob are out there.”

“So we have to go regardless.”

“Yep.”

“Fuck.”

It’s a sentiment that radiates around all of us, and with a collective sigh, we head out.

Luckily for us, just as Quentin shuts the front door behind us, Jacob and Richard come back.

“Thank fuck,” Sawyer mutters. “You guys have seriously epic timing.”

Grunting, Jacob hauls Richard towards the door and practically shoves it off its hinges as he leads his errant brother inside. We troop in, the tense atmosphere building as Connor closes the door, and we all stand around in our snowy coats and boots, waiting for someone to make the first move, to say the first word.

In the end, it’s me.

“I think we should all just take our coats off, get warm and have something to eat and drink, and we can sort this out. No one is going anywhere in this weather. We have no communications, the TV is going in and out of static. We have each other for company, and that’s pretty much it. We need to be adults about this and talk about whatever is going on here. I know I don’t know any of you all that well, but I firmly believe in making the best of a bad situation, so let’s just take it one step at a time, okay? Coats, warm, food and drink and talking. Can we do that?”

I receive five sullen nods from the grown-ass men around me and hide my smile. This is going to be entertaining, if nothing else, but when I look at Richard, and he gives me a sad stare before looking away, my heart lurches.

If there was anything that was going to convince my heart that I need him and I won't settle for anyone else, it was that.

Turning from them all, I remove my outdoor clothes and push past them to the kitchen, busying myself with heating up a couple of frozen pizzas and boiling the kettle for hot drinks. Whatever is going on between Richard and Jacob, they need to sort it out, so that I can talk to Richard on my own and find out if he is really going to run, or if he will stay and fight for us, because I *know* there is an us. We proved it earlier.

RICHARD

“Can we talk?” Leaning against the door frame, which is more for propping me up than to look cool and casual, I stare at her as she moves deliberately around the kitchen. She has made herself familiar with it all, and it makes me feel warm inside. She looks good in my kitchen. In my cabin. Can’t say it’s my home, it’s not. I haven’t had a home since I left the multi-million-pound townhouse in Chelsea where Jacob, Sawyer, Quentin and Connor now live.

“You just left?” Her tone is downright frosty.

“I deserve the chill factor, but we need to talk.”

“Humph,” she mutters but doesn’t stop what she is doing.

“Raven, I’m sorry I left. It seems to be my move these days. Things get hard, and I leave. I’m a dick; I know that. I should’ve stayed and talked to you about how I was feeling. When we...you know...” *Christ, man. You can’t even say the words.*

“Had sex?” she snaps.

“Yes,” I reply calmly. “It was...”

“What?”

“My first time.”

She freezes.

“I’ve shocked you.” When she turns, I give her a small smile.

“Uhm...” Her face creases, and she gives me a searching look. “Okay, I kind of wish you’d mentioned that before.”

“Was it not clear?”

“Well, I mean...I guess...I figured you’d done it, and that’s when you realised...fuck, I’m messing this all up. I’m sorry. I’ve never deflowered anyone before.”

Snickering into my hand, I cross over to her, taking her shaking hand to kiss her knuckles, revelling in the delight I feel to have my lips on her skin. “You are adorable.”

She nods slowly. “Okay, so where does that leave us?”

Us. I’m more confused now than ever. When I walked out of here, I had hoped to see her again, kiss her one last time and try to tell her how I feel. This has surpassed that. Raven has exceeded every expectation I had of her and this... relationship.

“If you want to see if there really is an ‘us’ to get to know one another on a deeper level, I won’t leave. I’m here, Raven.”

“Is that what you really want?” Her murmured words squeeze my heart.

“More than you know. But I’m still a bit confused. I won’t lie to you about that.”

“I understand. It must be very chaotic in your mind right now.”

“Will you give me a chance?” My heart has nearly stopped beating as I wait for her reply.

“I know how I feel about you.” Her voice has gone low and husky.

“And how is that?”

“My soul aches without you. A part of my heart feels empty without you. I know that sounds intense, and we’ve only really just found each other despite some two-way stalking.” She smiles, and it lights up my life to see it.

“It is intense. But I feel the same. You have touched a part of me, Raven, that I didn’t know was there. I don’t think

anyone will ever be able to bring this out in me ever again. Now that I have it, I want it. I don't want to lose this feeling. I don't want to lose *you*."

"You won't. I'm glad you opened up to me. I thought I understood, but without the full story, I guess I was making assumptions, which was wrong of me, but also, you should've said."

"What? That I was a virgin? When would've been a good time to say that? When you were flicking my cock ring with your tongue?"

She snorts loudly, clapping her hand over her mouth as I give her a wicked smile.

"You like that, don't you?"

"Fuck, yeah. It's hot as fuck." She gives me a bright smile, but I can see the strain under the happiness.

"What's wrong?" I ask quietly.

"Nothing. The last few hours, God, has it only been hours, have been exhausting, and I'm diabetic, so I have to take extra care with my routine."

"Diabetic?" I murmur, worry coursing through me. "Do you have everything you need if we are trapped here?"

She nods. "I do. Jacob got my suitcase from the Merc and also found my other medication, which fell out of my bag when we were fighting Mick."

"Mick," I sneer.

"How do you know him?" Her tone is innocent, but the question is anything but.

"I've not been the best citizen for a while now. Fell in with Mick's gang just to stop myself from overthinking everything. Trouble is, once you're in, you're in."

"Oh, so he will keep coming for you?"

"After you kicked his arse? Doubt it."

She giggles, but then goes serious. "I'm worried."

“Don’t be. I think Jacob wants me back, so if Mick wants to come for me, he’ll have more than just me to deal with.”

“Jacob will have your back. He’s a good guy.”

“He is.” She has given me the perfect opportunity to mention this, and I can’t bypass it. “He fancies you. They all do.”

She nods slowly. “It’s weird.”

“Weird?”

“I don’t feel unsafe being here with them,” she ventures carefully.

“You’re saying you fancy them?”

“I don’t know. How does that make you feel?”

“Not jealous, if that’s what you mean.”

“Hmm.” She turns back to the oven to check on the pizza. “Dinner will be ready soon if you want to tell the others.”

“Sure.” She has dismissed me after my answer, which I don’t think has pleased her much. But what else can I say? The thought of her being with my brothers and their friends doesn’t make me feel jealous. Now, if anyone else were to come along and lay a claim to her, I’d fight to the death to protect her, but how do I say that without sounding weirder than I already have? I think I’ve just fucked this up unintentionally, as she still has her back to me. But I know now I will fight for her.

If she weren’t here, then I would wither away. This bone-deep, *soul*-deep connection I have with her is mind-blowing, and I want to keep exploring it. I didn’t think I would ever have a chance to feel something like this.

Leaving her, I go back to the guys, knowing that the talking isn’t over for tonight. Jacob and I need to have a proper conversation about me, Raven and a multitude of other things. Clutching my side as I flop down on the comfy armchair, I mutter, “Grubs up,” and watch as four grown men, scabble with each other to get through the kitchen door first.

RAVEN

The kitchen fills with laughter and chatter as the guys help me serve up the food and drinks. We take the laden down plates back into the living room and sit down, staring at the roaring fire as we stuff our faces.

Sawyer gets up halfway through to lock the front door, also sliding the bolt across and putting the chain on.

“Is that all necessary?” I murmur.

“Rather safe than sorry,” Jacob mutters. “Rich. We didn’t solve anything earlier. Are you back or what?”

“Back,” he replies. “If you’ll have me.”

Beaming down at him from the arm of the chair where he is painfully slumped, he reaches out to squeeze my thigh, leaving his hand to rest there in a gesture which thrills me and makes Jacob stare at for the longest time.

“We want you,” Jacob says. “But there’s a lot to talk about. The first thing being, I’m fucking exhausted, and there are only four rooms here and six of us.”

“Oh,” I murmur, my cheeks going warm. “I’m the odd one out. I can sleep on the couch.”

“Absolutely not,” Sawyer insists, giving Richard the stink-eye for some reason.

“No,” Richard agrees. “You keep the room. Jacob can bunk with me. Sawyer can take the couch.”

“Oh, fucking nice,” Jacob groans. “Talk about regression.”

Giggling at his expression, I rise to get more tea.

“Thank you,” Richard says before I’ve gone two steps. “For what you did with Mick. It should be me looking out for you. You are amazing and brave, and all the things that make me *feel* something. Sorry, I’m not very good at this.”

I turn to see he is looking down, almost embarrassed by his words. “That was perfect.”

He looks up and grins.

I return it and continue on my way, making sure to give a sexy sway to my hips as I can feel all of their eyes on my arse. Something is definitely feeling cosier here than I’d first thought. Richard’s comment about them fancying me and that he wasn’t jealous about that gave me pause. Is he not jealous because he doesn’t think I will take it further with any of them? Or is he not jealous because he thinks I will, and he doesn’t mind?

Either way, this day was not what I was expecting. Feeling a pang for Andy, who by now will know I’m not coming to the Inn and will be getting dead air when he tries to ring me, I wonder what he is doing. Has he called my parents yet? Have they called the police? Have they found the car? Will they find us?

All these thoughts are swimming around my tired and foggy brain, making me feel even more exhausted. Realising that I need to go to bed, I abandon the tea and tell the guys I’m heading up to bed.

They all jump up to wish me good night, but I’m feeling really low now and just want to have a hot shower, crawl into my pit and hope things look better in the morning.

Once in my room, I close the door and rip my clothes off, flinging them onto the small armchair in the corner.

Disappearing into the small ensuite that consists of a toilet, a basin and a shower, I turn the taps on and let the water steam up nicely before stepping under. It is bliss. The hot water caresses my skin like a lover’s embrace, and I linger for longer than I probably should’ve. Who knows how much hot water

there is in this place, but maybe the tanks or pipes will freeze over during the night, and we'll be without in the morning. The thought of a freezing cold shower does not fill me with joy.

Hoping that Richard manages to get some decent rest after his own eventful day, I smile as I think back to what he said about me being the only woman he has been with. It's an ego stroke, for sure, but also, I'm honoured that he felt he could be with me in that way.

Finding my pjs, I put them on and crawl into my bed. With a heavenly sigh, I curl up. Closing my eyes, I fall straight to sleep, glad that this day will finally end.

QUENTIN

I t's mid-morning, but the clouds overhead are dark. The snow has stopped for a bit, but I doubt it will stay away. It looks like it's about to start falling again any minute now. Sitting in the armchair near the window in the study at the back of the cabin, I focus on the book in front of me. It's a useless distraction. Raven is pretty much occupying all of my thoughts. The desire for her is overwhelming, almost to the point of not being able to focus on anything else. She is beautiful, smart and sweet. She is everything I thought I wanted. This situation has happened fast. Things have moved forward quickly, but it's the *right* situation to judge if this is real, if she is real. Her reactions so far have been genuine and not at all selfish or nasty. She has taken being snowed in with a bunch of guys she barely knows in her stride, and I definitely feel that true colours would be shown either way. So far, she is proving to be a lovely companion that I can't wait to get to know better.

We haven't seen her since we spoke earlier. Connor popped his head in on her a while ago, but she was fast asleep in her bed, so we left her. She will wake up and find us when she's ready.

Almost as if thinking about her makes her appear, I see her walking past the open door on the way to the kitchen, yawning and stretching her arms.

"Oh, hey," she says, stopping in the doorway. "Where's everyone else?"

“TV came back, so they’re watching some Christmas film.” My gaze quickly flickers over her bare arm in her white tee. “Aren’t you cold?”

“Nah, not yet,” she giggles. “I guess the heating is on a timer? It’s raging full blast right now.”

“Hmm, we should probably turn that down and try to use the log fire until we’re desperate. Are you hungry?” I ask, motioning to stand up, but she shakes her head.

“Don’t get up. I’ll grab something and try to find the timer.”

“I want to,” I insist, but stop midway to rising when she takes a step into the room. I freeze, my blood pounding in my ears at her nearness.

“What are you reading?” she asks, her voice low and husky.

“Shakespeare,” I say, sitting back down so I don’t loom over her and scare her away. She is tiny. Fragile like a China doll. I don’t want to break her.

“Wow, heavy stuff for mid-morning. Or any time of day, really.”

I shrug. “I actually don’t mind it.” I’m not coming clean about studying English Literature at Oxford. She’ll think I’m a total nerd. For some reason, I want her to think I’m manly and capable of protecting her. Shakespearean Sonnets don’t exactly scream that.

“Me either,” she says, dropping her tone even lower as she approaches me, standing directly in front of me. Her breasts are full and perfect from what I can see, even though I’m trying not to look at them.

I clear my throat and glare into her eyes.

She bites her lips and steps back. “Sorry, am I too close?”

“Not close enough,” I growl.

Her eyes hood with desire, and I throw caution to the wind. My cock is aching, and she is tempting me in ways that were

previously unheard of. I reach out and take her hand, drawing her closer.

“Is this okay?” I ask.

“More than,” she breathes. “Ever since I first landed here, I’ve wanted you to wrap your arms around me and hold me.”

It’s more than I can bear. I drag her onto my lap, settling her close enough so her hand rests lightly on my chest. “How’s this?”

“Perfect,” she says with a soft sigh. “You provide an insane amount of comfort, just like I knew you would.”

“You feel safe with me?”

“So safe.”

Smiling as I lean my head back on the chair, she wiggles on my lap. I don’t know if she knows what she’s doing to my cock, but it’s just got a huge wake-up call.

She looks up, her gaze boring into mine. Cupping the back of her head, drawing her mouth to mine in a soft kiss that leaves me breathless. She wraps her tongue around mine, rotating her hips and riling me up to the point where I don’t think I can stop.

“You’re a good kisser,” she murmurs against my lips.

“So are you.”

“Can we do it again sometime?”

“Any time you want.”

She smiles and climbs off my lap, making me feel the chill as her warm body leaves mine. “If you still want to help with food, we can make some for everyone.”

“Sure. What can I do?”

She turns and walks into the kitchen. Watching her through the doorway as she pulls open a few cupboards and bends from side to side to see into each one.

“How about you fire up the hob, and we can have some soup and bread?” She pulls three tins from the cupboard and

roots around to find the can opener.

Nodding, I pull some pans out of the cupboard and set them ready for her to pour the contents into as I switch on the rings. Placing them carefully down, I turn to the fridge to grab the butter while she grabs slices of bread. It's all very cute and domestic, and it makes my heart feel warm and safe with her. She is precious.

"So, which sector of the law do you plan on working in?" I ask, hoping to use this time to get to know her.

"Oh, criminal, for sure."

"Like father, like daughter."

"Something like that. I just need someone to give me a chance to apprentice. It's not that easy when you've studied part time. They think you're a part-timer, you know." Her face creases with a frown, and I can see that this really bothers her.

"Can your dad help?"

"No, he says I have to make my own way. I mean, I guess he's right, but he could open so many doors for me." She sighs. "It's something I'll have to sort out in the New Year."

"You'll figure it out. You strike me as a glass-half-full kind of girl."

Snickering, she replies, "Mostly. I guess that's why I've taken to all this so easily. I like to see the positives about everything, even though I'm worried about my friend and my parents, I'm also a realist. There is nothing I can do about it."

"Well, I can't argue with that. Have you checked for a signal? With the TV back, maybe the mobile signal is too."

"I did, but still nothing. The weather must've taken out the tower."

Our conversation is interrupted as the soup starts to bubble, so we occupy our time with dishing up for everyone and setting it down to eat at the kitchen island, where we squash in, laughing and elbowing each other as we eat soup and bread and feel the Christmas spirit.

It's perfect.

RAVEN

Checking the time, it's nearing mid-afternoon. Everyone has scattered since the snow started again, and the TV went back on strike. Wanting to find Richard, I knock lightly on his bedroom door and wait for an answer. When he doesn't reply, I debate if I should just leave, but then reach out and turn the handle, pushing the door open gently and poking my head around.

"Richard?" I whisper into the darkened room.

The curtains are pulled, and I can't see for shit after being out in the bright hallway. I squint and open the door further.

My breath catches in my throat when the sight before me is one to behold. All thoughts scatter off in a million different directions when I see Jacob and Richard on the king-size bed, fast asleep, on either side, like two peas in a pod. It's so super cute, I want to get closer to them.

My socked feet tingle, and I move forward, climbing onto the bed and lying down in between them. Neither one of them budges.

I lie flat on my back and sigh. This is nice.

The calmness is ruined when Richard suddenly wakes up and leaps out of bed, his fists ready to pummel...something. Not me, because he drops them when he sees me.

"What the fuck?" he mutters. "Raven?"

"Sorry," I murmur, waking Jacob up.

He flips over and then leaps up as well when he finds an extra person in his bed.

“I couldn’t resist,” I state boldly. “You looked so cute together.”

They both let out a protesting groan about being called cute, and it brings me back to why I’m in their room in the first place.

“Can we spend some time together?” I ask Richard.

“Yeah, of course.” He smiles shyly.

“I’ll leave you two alone,” Jacob says.

“I’ll come and find you later,” I murmur.

He also gives me a shy smile.

“Do you need me to check your ribs?”

He looks down at it and shrugs. “Do you know what to look for?”

“Nope, but it was an excuse to touch you.”

“You don’t need an excuse, Raven. I want you to touch me.”

I don’t want to push him yet, so I leave it.

He takes my hand and laces our fingers together. “You spark an excitement in me I’ve never felt. Touching you thrills me, makes me want to cry and hold you, keep you close.”

My lips part with the weight of his words. “I’m scared,” I admit eventually.

“Me too,” he admits softly.

“Will you tell me if it ever goes away? Will you tell me and not touch me feeling nothing?”

“Christ,” he says, rubbing his face with his hand. “Raven.” The desperation in his tone adds to my fear. “I don’t want this feeling to go away. I don’t think it will. You are my soulmate. I know that. I feel it here.” He thumps his chest. “That’s the difference between you and everyone else.”

“You haven’t answered me.” My voice is so soft I’m not sure he heard me.

“Yes, I will tell you,” he says just as quietly.

I nod and take his hand, kissing his knuckles. “Thank you. I’m sorry I woke you, but I wanted to be near you. I hope that’s okay.”

“Always. Lie with me?”

Nodding, we fall back to the bed, and he wraps his arms around me. We lie in silence for a while, and just as I’m about to say something to break it, I hear him snore softly. Smiling gently, I kiss his forehead, knowing he has to get some much-needed rest. He looks worn out.

Leaving him, wishing we had a chance to talk some more, I slip back into my bedroom and decide that now is as good a time as any to do some laundry. I grab the basket, throw the towel and my dirty clothes in and head downstairs to the kitchen and through to the utility room at the back of the cabin, where the washer, dryer and ironing stuff are located.

Shoving my whites into the washer, I search for the detergent. Finding it, I pour out a capful into the drawer and set it on a cotton wash.

“Need any help?” Sawyer says from behind me.

“Nah, got it sorted, thanks. Do you need a wash putting on after?”

“Not yet. Jacob probably does after he got soaked with muddy snow yesterday.”

“I’ll mention it.”

I brush past him to enter the kitchen and glare out of the window.

“You’re worried about your parents?”

“Yeah.”

“We should’ve taken you back home instead of coming here.”

“Maybe. But then we wouldn’t all be here together.”

“True.”

“I really calm you?”

“Yes. It’s weird. Your presence is like a warm hug.”

“That’s nice. I feel that way about Quentin.”

“Okay, ouch.” He gives me a sassy smile.

“I didn’t mean it as an insult to you. Just as a compliment to him. With you, I feel...”

“Feel what?”

Turning to face him fully, I lean back on the counter. “A bit wicked.”

“Jesus,” he mutters. “Are you looking for shag or something? I’m mean, I’m happy to oblige.”

“Not that kind of wicked!” I exclaim, slapping him lightly. “More playful, like we can have fun together.”

“We can definitely have fun together.”

“Your mind is in the gutter,” I huff.

“But it’s so much fun in there.”

“Hmm, well, we’ll see.”

“Is that a promise?”

“Maybe. So, I heard that Richard is a Viscount, or Jacob is? One of them...I wasn’t too clear when I accidentally eavesdropped. What does that make you?”

“A nobody, thank fuck.”

“You don’t want to be nobility?” I’m surprised. I figured everyone would if they had the chance.

“Nope, not for me. I’ll take the ‘Honourable’ and leave the rest.”

“So, what do you do for a living, then?”

He sighs and looks a bit miserable. “Mostly run around after Jacob.” He shrugs. “I guess I’m the go-between for him

and our dad.”

“That doesn’t sound fun.”

“It’s not, so we can talk about something else. What about you?”

“Also, not fun, moving on.”

“That bad?”

“Not really, just sick of thinking about it.”

“Between jobs?” He asks with a raised eyebrow, which makes me smile.

“That’s exactly what I am.” Glancing at the clock, I press my lips together. “I should take my insulin.”

He nods and lets me go, strolling to the living room while I go upstairs.

RAVEN

“Raven?” Connor’s voice through the door is soft.

Disposing of the insulin needle, I open the door.
“Hi. Everything okay?”

“That’s what I’m supposed to be asking you,” he says with a smile.

“I’m good.”

“Can I come in?”

“Sure.” I step back and let him pass. “Sit.”

He lowers himself to the bed, and I join him. He bounces up and down a bit with a sexy smile. “Nice.”

Giggling, I shake my head. “Not yet.”

“Didn’t ask.”

“True. Just putting it out there.” However, I take his hand and lace our fingers together. Out of all of them, I feel a kinship with the preppy puppy. He is closest to my age, much younger than the other four, and we think the same. We love a laugh and will go to any lengths to do so.

He stares at our hands for a moment before lifting them to his mouth. He kisses it softly and lowers it again. “What do you want for your birthday?”

His question comes out of the blue, surprising me. “Oh,” I say, blinking. “Uhm, I hadn’t really thought about it. You don’t have to get me anything.”

“It’s your twenty-fifth!” he exclaims. “You must want something.”

I shrug, feeling an overwhelming sadness suddenly drop over me. I was supposed to be celebrating with Andy right about now. He must be in an absolute panic.

“My parents were going to surprise me. I’m sure it was going to be extravagant and distracting.”

He narrows his eyes. “You don’t sound happy about it.”

“I guess I always imagined having my twenty-fifth and having a job. That hasn’t happened.”

“How come?”

“I took a gap year, and then studied part-time,” I say, not really wanting to go into the reasons *why*, yet again.

“What did you study?”

“Law, like my dad,” I say, the smile forming as I think about it despite the sadness still draped over me.

“Ah, yes, that makes sense, and I can see you being all lawful and in a sexy suit.”

I snicker, cheering up. “Maybe one day. I have my immediate future in front of me, and it involves being snowed in with you idiots.”

“That will end soon, and you can move on.” The seriousness of his statement drives my curiosity.

“You think I’ll move on?” I ask carefully.

He shrugs. “I guess I’m not holding onto high expectations.”

“Ouch,” I mutter.

“It’s not you. It’s me. I have never committed to anyone before because of this weird part of me that fears being hurt. I guess that’s why I jumped in with both feet when Jacob suggested the group thing. With four of us, now five, there are more reasons for you to stay.”

“I would stay for all of you. If I didn’t feel it, I wouldn’t pretend.”

“I’m not sure if that makes me feel better or worse.”

“I didn’t come out how I meant.” I blush, knowing that sounded awful out loud.

He smiles and squeezes my hand. “No, I know. I’m joking. I appreciate the honesty, we all do. We just want you to be happy, Raven.”

“Thanks.”

“So, you’re a smart girl, huh?”

“Well, I don’t know about that...”

“Take it from someone who didn’t get into university. If you got in, you’re smart.”

“How come you didn’t get in?”

He doesn’t take offence at my question as there was none intended. “Well, I’m mostly a pretty face,” he chuckles. “But I also don’t do well with standardised testing. I suck at them.”

“Oh. What do you do now?” I’m wildly curious. I’m getting to know these guys bit by bit, so this question is a necessity.

“I’m a model,” he says with a sexy smirk.

I snort and clap my hand over my mouth. “Sorry, sorry. That’s admirable work.”

He lets out a loud laugh. “Hey, it pays the bills!”

“I bet it does with that face,” I comment and rake my gaze over his hot bod, clearly shown off by his tight black tee. “And that body.”

“Anyway, don’t change the subject,” he murmurs darkly, staring into my eyes. “Back to your birthday...thoughts on gifts? You know, *after* we get out of here.”

“Surprise me,” I murmur, which lights up his eyes.

“Oh, that leaves the gate wide open, princess. You might regret saying that.”

“I doubt it. Something tells me it will be perfect.”

He beams at me and then gives me a quick kiss on the forehead before he stands up. “I’d better go back to helping Jacob with his laundry before he throws a shitfit.”

Laughing, as I can only imagine Viscount Carlaw trying to work a washer, I waggle my fingers at him and curl up on the bed, closing my eyes and thinking about what he said. Something about this cosy place with no mobile or TV just makes me want to sleep all the time. It’s refreshing in a weird way, and part of me is glad for the timeout, even though the other side is still worried about everyone at home.

RAVEN

The house is eerily quiet when I open my eyes sometime later. It's still dark out, not surprising in the middle of winter in England, but it's something else.

Shivering when I climb out of bed, cursing for not bringing a dressing gown, I pull on my coat instead. Peering through the curtains, I can't see much but darkness, so I let them fall back into place and creep out of my room and downstairs, past the pull-out couch, which is a pile of blankets and into the kitchen, glancing at the clock to see it is only 6 AM and seeing Sawyer.

My heart beats a little bit quicker when I see him staring into the open fridge, dressed only in joggers.

"Morning," I murmur.

"Hey," he says, turning to face me. "You hungry?"

"Yes," I say quickly. "I can make you something. What've you got in there that you fancy?"

He steps back with a carton of eggs.

"Scrambled, okay?"

"Definitely," he replies with a smile and sits at the kitchen island. "Any food someone else makes is my favourite."

"Oh, tell me about it. But I don't mind cooking. My mum taught me. Uhm, you make the tea?"

"Deal," he says, standing up and going to the kettle while I sort out a mixing bowl and whisk, a frying pan and wooden

spoon, a knife for the butter and some plates.

He sits back down and watches me. I feel like he wants to say something, and to be honest, I'm starting to feel a bit awkward with his eyes on me, so I ask, "Something wrong?"

He shakes his head, his green eyes clouding over. "Actually, yes, there is."

I stop whisking, my hands going cold. I stare at the half-whisked eggs. "Have I done something wrong?"

"What?" he says. "No, no, it's not you. Raven. Look, there's something I need to tell you, don't say anything until I've finished, okay? Jacob and I..." he barrels on, not giving me a chance to say anything. "...we saw you the other day outside a doctor's office in the village of Lakesview. We watched you go into the chemist and caught you eating a blueberry muffin, and we fell for you like dumbfucks. Then Jones rang Jacob to say he'd spotted Richard back in London after he'd sent us up to Lakesview in the first bloody place, and we lost you. I mean, you left the chemist and drove off, and that was that. We were on the road trying to track you down back in Lakesview as well as trying to find Richard, and low and behold, we find you together, like fate or something." He gives me a worried smile. "Fuck. Does this make any sense? Are you mad? We should've told you right away, but there kind of wasn't the right time, and you were shaken up, understandably..." He trails off as I just stare at him.

What the fuck?

"Uhm," I say, scrunching up my face and pushing the eggs away. "What? You saw me the other day?"

"Yep," he groans, dropping his head into his hands. "Please don't be mad. Well, be mad. We fucked up. Big time, we know this, and right now, everything has gone to hell in a handbasket."

I lick my lips as he rambles on, not quite sure what to think. "What were you going to do if you'd found me in Lakesview?"

“Not abduct you, if that’s what you’re thinking. As much as we wanted you and were not prepared to give up on finding you that easily, we would have given you a choice, obviously.”

“You and Jacob were there?”

He nods.

“Not Quentin or Connor?”

He shakes his head.

“So you two just decided?”

“Jacob decided, and I followed pretty quickly. If they’d been there, they would’ve followed too. They have now. They want you. Shit. Fuck. I didn’t mean...”

“Stop talking,” I say, shaking my head. “This is...UGH!” I give him a furious glare and pick up the bowl of raw eggs. I march over to him and dump the contents over his head. “This is unbelievable!” I roar, trying not to laugh as he wipes eggs from his eyes.

“I know. I’m sorry.”

Inside, I’m shaking, but not with anger. I’m not angry, not at all. I only did that to get him to shut up. I’m not scared that they’re big stalkers or psychotic lunatics.

No.

I’m relieved because now I *know* I wasn’t wrong about these guys and that maybe it is *fate*.

Richard’s words make sense to me now. He knew how they felt. It wasn’t a case of them fancying me when they found me on the side of the road with Richard, they’d seen me before. Like I did with Richard, like he did with me. This is nuts.

There is absolutely no way on God’s green earth that this story could be anything except destiny. It’s too fucking crazy, too much of a coincidence.

But never let it be said that Raven Harlow didn’t enjoy a good grovel from some sexy men.

“You’re all bellends. Utter bellends.”

“I know,” Sawyer says as Connor joins us in the kitchen, taking in this scene with more than a slice of suspicion covering up the deeper need to laugh.

“And now we have no eggs.”

“I know,” Sawyer wails. “Do you forgive us?”

“Humph,” I mutter and turn my back with a smile as I open the fridge to find something else to make for breakfast.

CONNOR

Startled and a little bit turned on by the sexual tension pinging through the air, it stops me dead in my tracks at the sight in front of me.

I let out a loud laugh, which Sawyer does not appreciate. While Raven searches a bit too fervently through the fridge, Sawyer is over at the sink, cleaning his face and hair under the tap.

“Wow, you seriously pissed her off,” I comment.

“No shit, Sherlock,” he grumbles.

“What did you do?” I try to straighten my face, but it’s difficult under the circumstances.

“I told her the truth.” Sawyer grabs a fresh tea towel out of the drawer and wipes his face with it as he gives Raven an open stare.

I pause, my blood going slightly cooler. “You did what?”

He fixes me with a glare of epic proportions. “I told her the truth. All of it. To say she is annoyed is a slight understatement.”

“What did she say?”

“She is standing right here,” she growls, slamming the fridge door and marching out, pushing past me and hissing like an affronted cat. I can’t tell if she is really pissed off we practically stalked her or if she is playing it up.

“Not much,” Sawyer says with a sigh. “It was me who had the verbal diarrhoea.”

I make a fake retching noise, which he rolls his eyes at. “So, what do we do now?”

“For starters, we need to tell Jacob she knows, and then find Quentin and tell him. After that, we owe her sincere apologies with gifts and, I’m guessing, food, seeing as she didn’t get to finish making her breakfast.” He gestures to the empty bowl of eggs.

I start to snicker again, but I’m saved from his wrath by Quentin’s voice.

I turn to the door when he says, “Food is more of a must than anything else. We can’t let her go hungry with her diabetes. And why is she sitting in the living room silently giggling to herself? What did you do?”

He is so quiet for a large, burly man, I didn’t even hear him come in.

“Sawyer told her that he and Jacob saw her the other day and went back to find her, and instead, we ended up finding both her and Richard. Wait? She thinks it’s funny.”

“She thinks the fact that Sawyer is panicking about it is funny,” Raven says, rejoining us. “Honestly, guys, it’s no big deal. I kept going back to the pub where I first saw Richard, hoping to see him again. If anything, I’m flattered.”

“So why did you dump raw eggs on my head?” Sawyer grits out.

“To get you to shut up. Anyone ever tell you, you babble like a nervous nelly?”

Chuckling, I nod. She has called it.

“Well, I’m still hungry,” Sawyer says. “I will make breakfast this time to save myself from being assaulted again. Con, dig through the pantry, see what you can find in the way of biscuits and then go to Jacob and get him up.”

“Yes, sir,” I drawl, giving him a mock salute. He can be such a douche sometimes.

Giving me a fierce glare, he points emphatically to the empty bowl. I look at it again and start laughing.

“I wish I had been here to see it.”

“I can help, you know,” Raven says.

“No, we owe you for being less than honest at the start. You go and get dressed, and we’ll have this all sorted when you come back down.”

She nods, accepting that.

Turning from him, I sober up slightly as I open the huge walk-in pantry, I flick on the light and scan the shelves in the dim food cupboard. Moving over to the big plastic tub on the middle shelf, I pop the lid off and root through. Coming up with a multi-pack of two-finger KitKats, I cry out in jubilation.

“Yes!” Who doesn’t love a KitKat? Also, the whole ‘have a break’ aspect has a nice chill vibe to it.

I replace the lid on the tub and then think what else Raven might like. I’ve never been big on casual gifts for women. It seems too trite for the creatures that fascinate me. And none more so than our curvy little brunette upstairs, who clearly has a fiery temper and a sense of showmanship in how that is displayed.

Poor Sawyer.

I can’t help but chuckle again, glad I wasn’t on the receiving end of what will forever be known as the Humpty-Dumpty incident.

Leaving the chocolate biscuits on the island as Sawyer and Quentin move about making food, I head out to find Jacob. I see him coming down the stairs.

“There you are.”

“Yeah, what is it?”

I hesitate.

His tone is pissed off. Why me? Why do I have to be the one to tell him his brother went and told Raven what we were doing?

“Sawyer told Raven about you two seeing her the other day. It didn’t go down so well. Well, maybe it did...I don’t know. It’s undecided.”

“What?” He gives me a confused look.

“Yeah, I don’t know. I was sent to tell you, and I have.”

“Okay...where is Raven now?”

“Having a shower. She dumped eggs all over Sawyer.”

“Huh?”

I shake my head. “Look, I’m as confused as you. I thought she’d be angrier, but she seems to be fine.”

“Probably because she understands. Apparently, she and Richard have been playing the same game for a while now.”

Nodding, I understand a bit better now why she isn’t mad at us.

“But why did she dump eggs on Sawyer?”

“She said he talks too much.”

Jacob stifles his snicker. “Well, she’s not wrong. Look, we still have no signal, and I’m a bit worried about opening that door. It snowed all night.”

Glancing at the door, I give him a look. “Okay, well, sooner rather than later.”

He nods, and we both step towards the front door. He slides the bolt across as I slip the chain, and then he unlocks it.

Taking a deep breath, I turn the handle and pull the door in. Not really knowing what to expect, but I can tell you it wasn’t a snowbank dropping into the living room and freezing my bare feet.

“Oh, dear,” I murmur as Jacob’s eyes go wide.

“Fuck. We are not going anywhere anytime soon.”

“No shit, Sherlock,” I mutter, trying to close the door against the piles of snow letting in the freezing winter air. “Guess we’d better tell everyone to go easy on supplies. We are here for the long haul.”

“Good luck,” Jacob says with an innocent smile as he rushes back upstairs.

“Oh, fuck you,” I grouse. Seriously, what is this? “Arseholes. You’re all a bunch of arseholes.” Muttering away to myself I cross over to the kitchen to give the bad news to the guys, who immediately stop what they’re doing to peer out of the window.

“Shit,” Quentin mutters, holding his face up to the dark glass. “Shit. This is not good.”

“Nope, so you gotta ration the supplies.”

“Dammit,” Sawyer mutters. “I’m starving.”

“Yeah? What else is new? Tell your stomach we are on a limited menu. The last thing we want is to run out.”

“Agreed,” Quentin says and starts to put some of the uncooked food away. “We need to be smart about this.”

“How did Jacob take the news?” Sawyer asks.

“He was fine. I think you’re making this a bigger deal than it really is.”

He gives me a death stare. “Easy for you to say.”

Smiling and giving him the middle finger, I back out, wanting a hot shower myself and maybe a quick masturbate because I’m still sporting a semi after the sexy dream I had of Raven, which woke me up and thus entered me into this shitshow. “Byeeee,” I call as I duck out and head upstairs for some alone time with me and a bar of soap.

RAVEN

Bewildered by the events that occurred in the kitchen earlier, I'm starting to feel cold. Too cold. It's like someone turned the heating off. Hoping it was someone and not the pipes freezing over, I cross over to the window, staring out over the countryside. A cold draught drifts through the window, and I shiver. I want to see where I am. Winter is in full swing, with grey skies and snow still falling. I've never seen anything like this, and I live in the countryside myself. However, we are near a village with civilisation. Here we are in the middle of buttfuck, and there is nothing even in the vicinity of a village or a neighbour. Taking the opportunity to take a quick hot shower and change, I disappear into the ensuite and strip off. Stepping under the rainfall of water, I sigh in bliss as the soft splats hit my cold skin, warming it up.

“That's better.”

I know why I'm feeling so off. The lack of regularly timed injections over the last two days is taking its toll. My blood sugars are going haywire.

Squeezing my eyes tightly shut and trying not to think about it too much, I clean up, enjoying the water running through my hair as I wash it.

Several minutes later, I turn off the water and reach for a couple of towels. I wrap one around my hair and then another around my body. I dry off and slip back into my bedroom, heading straight for my case to pull out some underwear, a fresh bra, some white joggers and a white t-shirt. Unpacking

and placing everything else in the dresser, I figure I might as well make myself at home. Even if I wanted to leave, I can't. I'm well and truly stuck.

I towel dry my hair and brush it out, cursing that I didn't bring my blow-dryer, but figured I'd just use one at the Inn.

There is a knock at the door, which startles me.

My heart jumps. I wasn't expecting anyone to bother me. Not that I mind. I'm really starting to enjoy the company of these five, very different men. They saved me as much as Richard did.

"Raven? Are you in there?" Jacob's voice comes through the door.

"Yes," I say.

I hover in the middle of the room as all of them file in.

"Food, gifts, and sincere apologies," Jacob says, a sheepish expression on his handsome face.

"Food first," I say with a broad grin to show them I'm not mad.

Sawyer places a tray with all the fixings of a Continental breakfast on the bed. I can't help the snicker. "Run out of eggs?" I ask archly.

He snorts, fortunately amused and not angry with me for dumping several raw eggs on his head. "Let's just say I'm traumatised."

"I am sorry."

"No, you're right. I talk too much sometimes."

The giggle that bursts out of my mouth downplays the seriousness of this situation, but I can't help it. After a few seconds, I clear my throat and slide my gaze over to the breakfast tray, and my stomach growls.

"I have something I want to say," Richard murmurs, drawing everyone's attention. Whatever it is, the other guys weren't expecting it.

“Okay,” I prompt when he doesn’t say anything else.

“Uhm... this may sound a bit weird, but you know how I feel about you, Raven. I know that we are going to try to build something here, but I also know that these guys wouldn’t have tried to track you down and taken you in as they have if they also didn’t want the opportunity to know you.”

I gulp. I’m not sure where he is going with this, at all.

“Jacob has mentioned to me that the four of them had a plan to find someone to be with all together. It’s why they were all on board with the hunt to find you. How do you feel about what I’m saying so far?”

“A bit confused.”

“Understandable, but you’re following me?”

“As far as English goes, I understand your words.”

He snickers. “That’ll do for now.”

“Now we are all here together with nowhere to go and nothing to do, I think we need to establish that everyone is feeling right about now. I am happy for you to be with them as well as me, because I know I’m slightly deficient, and they can give you the things that I can’t right now.”

“Richard, you’re not deficient...”

“Look, for all intents and purposes, I lack some of the things that you need. It is going to take me some time, and I will work on it because I don’t want to lose you.”

“Okay, but what about after?”

“After what?”

“After you have worked on it.”

“It’s your call, at the end of the day. Would I be happy for you to be with all of us? Yes. I’ve already answered that. They have already expressed their interest in you as a group. You are the only one whose mind we don’t know yet.”

Wow. Talk about being put on the spot. My cheeks heat up, and I turn from them, going to the draughty window to cool

down a bit. “I know that I want to be with you, Richard,” I say after a weighty pause in which you could hear a pin drop. “We’ve already spoken about that. The rest is surprising, and I’m not even sure how that would work?”

“We would figure it out as we go,” Quentin says quietly. “None of us have ever been in this situation before.”

“So why now?”

“Jacob thought it would be a good idea, and we agreed,” Connor says. “I’m totally in. It’s like a big old love puddle.”

Giggling, I turn back to them. “This is all a bit much.”

“We know,” Jacob says. “But this is what we want. It’s now up to you to decide what you want. If you only want Richard or none of us, then we will accept that and still keep you safe until you can return to your home. We will take it as it comes. Is that okay with you?”

“In all honesty,” Sawyer says. “We saw you and fell like idiots for you. We had no idea who you were or what you were like, but sometimes it’s instant, you know. Fate.”

“What if you discover I’m a horrible bitch and you don’t want me after all? What then?”

“Doubtful,” Richard says. “I’ve seen your heart, Raven. Your empathy and understanding. You’re sweet and kind, and we will be lucky to have you.”

“This is all very sudden.” Flustered, I turn away again and start fiddling with the hairbrush.

“You affect us in ways that we can’t even explain. You being here has made us feel complete. We know you are the one we’ve been looking for.”

“You calm me,” Sawyer says. “Before you came here, I was a loose cannon. Always looking for a fight. Now,” he shrugs. “I’ve never been so chilled and happy before. It’s all down to you because you belong here with me, with us. Christ, Quentin actually speaks in full sentences since you arrived, if that’s anything to go by, you know how he feels too.”

I press my lips together and smile, but don't turn around, not yet. "Do you feel what they feel?" I ask quietly.

His answer is simple. "Yes."

"And Connor?"

"I do."

"Why do I sense a 'but'?"

"I just don't want to get hurt."

"Me either."

"We'll leave you to eat and rest, and think about what we've said," Jacob murmurs, and they back out.

"Well," I say, picking up a muffin and shoving it into my mouth with less grace than my mum would care for. "I'm impressed, guys. Very impressed indeed. But what now?"

I wish I had an answer to that. I suppose it's a case of just seeing what happens, letting the cards fall where they may, hand it over to fate, and all that. One thing is for sure: none of us are going anywhere right now, so all we've got is time to figure this out.

RICHARD

Jacob is waiting for me when I hobble out of the bathroom. The pain of these cracked ribs seems to be getting worse, probably because I'm not resting.

I take him in, sitting on the edge of the bed, leant forward, his elbows on his knees, thoughtfully staring at nothing.

“What’s this about?” I ask, having a small inkling, but wanting him to say it first.

“You and this family,” he states, sitting up. “What are your intentions?”

I bite the inside of my lip before answering. “What would you like them to be?”

“Fuck off with that evasive question instead of answering bullshit. What are you planning to do now you’re back?”

“I hadn’t thought about it.” I ignore his hiss of annoyance as I stagger to the bed, clutching my side. What I need to do, is get in bed and stay as still as possible until this heals.

Jacob gets up and grabs me under my elbow to help me back into bed. He settles me and then steps back. “You’re not getting away with not answering because you’re playing infirm,” he informs me.

“Who’s playing?” I grunt as I move around to make myself more comfortable, and then freeze as a sharp pain shoots through me. It’s a reminder to keep still. I definitely caused more damage to myself by being with her the other day, but there was no way I wasn’t diving in at the deep end. For two

reasons. One, I needed to see if I *could*, and two, the need for her was overwhelming. I just couldn't help it. The pain disappeared in the moment, and all I could feel was happiness and love for her, and a feeling of being complete. Whole. Like I wasn't broken. I just needed the right person to bring it out in me. But in the usual way of the universe, it's making me pay for it today.

"This is your legacy, Rich. Are you taking it back now you're here?" Jacob asks me bluntly.

He's done pussyfooting around and is demanding something of me that I can't give. "I don't know. Do you want me to?"

"Jesus Christ," he groans, dropping his head into his hands. "Stop thinking about me for just one second and answer the fucking question. Do you want the title now you're back? Gut instinct, first reaction. Go!"

"No," I say straight away. "But if you want me to, I will do it."

"Okay, you totally ruined that. I appreciate you taking me into consideration, but I don't care one way or the other."

"Liar," I say, closing my eyes and resting my weary head on the soft, down pillow. "You care. I just don't know which way. This is *your* legacy, Jay, not mine. You've built it for the last eight years. I wasn't even here. What right do I have to take what you've built and probably fuck it up?"

"It's your birth right," he says quietly.

"Ugh!" I scoff, opening my eyes and glaring at him. "You, of all people, don't get to throw that at me."

"Okay, you want me to ring Dad? I'm sure he'll have a lot to say when he learns you're back."

I hear the bitterness in his voice and feel the weight of the guilt that I've been trying to push away for eight years descend on me in one fell swoop. "Please don't tell him. Not yet."

"He's going to find out."

“I know. Just not yet. Please, just let me heal and make sure that Raven is all in.”

“You don’t think she is?” He gives me an inquisitive stare.

“She has been thrown into a situation that has forced a few things to move forward very quickly. She is young. She has her life in front of her. Does she really want to lumber herself with all of us? Would she even consider it if we were out in the real world? This is a fantasy, and I need to know she is being clear about what we are offering her, that it’s real and that she wants it, or not.”

“You really feel a lot for her.”

“I do. She took my virginity, for fuck’s sake. She is a fucking goddess, and what she can do with that mouth...” I groan loudly as I remember.

“I really don’t need the graphic details,” he interrupts sharply.

“I’m not telling you to make you jealous, just to make you understand that I was drowning in emotions that were new and confusing. There was no thought in it, just action. Instinct.”

“I know.”

“But it wasn’t wrong.”

“I know, but you’re deflecting. If you’re not planning on taking the title, then you need to tell me right now so I can figure out a way to sort this with Dad.”

“I understand why you’re reluctant to trust me, but I’m also aware that we both know if Raven weren’t here, I wouldn’t be here. She is the neat little bow that will tie me to this family again, so you win. Here I am.”

“You’re a fucking bastard,” he hisses. “She is not a tie. You either are here one hundred per cent, or you can leave, and I’ll help her get over your loss. She deserves more than that.”

“That’s what I’ve been saying.” Finally, he seems to get it.

He grimaces and turns away. I know he's going to make the decision for me, and that's what I was hoping for. He will never accept it from me. He needs to *take* it.

Facing me again, he gives me a glare that I'm proud of. "I'm staying as *the* Viscount Stevens. You can't run from the title, assuming Dad even agrees to this. There's protocol, rules, ancient hierarchical bullshit. But you can fit into our lives, not the other way around, and if you *ever* hurt Raven, I will kick your arse so badly, you will feel it for the rest of your life."

"Deal," I murmur, thankful this has been sorted. I know that I will never hurt Raven or leave her. Maybe she will decide one day that I'm not who she thinks I am and leave me, but I'm not going anywhere. I just needed Jacob to get angry enough with me to declare his own intentions. This isn't my place. It never was and never will be. I don't want it, and I'm happy to slot in wherever. Even if it means sharing a bed with his-prickly-nibs forever. Hopefully Raven will take pity on me and allow me to share her bed indefinitely very soon. It looked way cosier and inviting than this bed, especially with her in it.

"Fine," Jacob states. "I will let Dad and Sawyer know we've talked, and we can all move on. Once we get a fucking signal, that is."

"Good idea."

He leaves with a huff, and I relax, glad to be able to shut my eyes, knowing I don't have to sleep with one eye open and can finally rest.

QUENTIN

“How is she?” I ask quietly when Connor comes back downstairs.

“She’s fine. Resting,” he replies.

“Good.”

I turn away to head into the kitchen for a bottle of water but turn back when Jacob storms down the stairs and declares loudly for everyone to hear, although I think he was only talking to Sawyer, “Richard will not be taking his title back. He is staying, but that’s it.”

Connor and I exchange a wary look. I know I had my concerns about what this would mean for Jacob, but I wasn’t aware that any of the others did. Although, I suppose Connor is the only other one who would. Sawyer and Jacob want their brother back, and that’s fair enough. I’m glad that Jacob is taking everything he has worked for and keeping it. Assuming he can. It’s a grey area, I think. Not too clear on that, but I guess Richard needs to abdicate his position officially, or something along those lines. If Kings can do it, so can Viscounts.

“How come you haven’t spent much time with her?” I ask the burning question I’m sure is on everyone’s minds.

He sighs. “I’ve been trying to let you guys get to know her first. I already know I want her. I knew it the second I laid eyes on her. Like twin, like twin, I guess. You needed to play catch up.”

“Fair enough, but you need to step up now.”

“I know.”

We lock gazes, and I see his truth. He is desperate to take her and ravage her, but this is her lead, her show. We will sit and wait it out as long as it takes.

“Guys!” Raven calls from the top of the stairs moments later. “I know all we seem to do is eat and sleep, but I’m starving. Can we make dinner?”

Lightening the mood considerably, we all agree.

“Definitely,” I say and lead the way to the kitchen, where I was headed anyway. As Raven and I root around for things we can eat, I’m getting worried that supplies are getting a bit low. There are six of us here eating somewhat constantly, and we’ve only just started this sojourn. We don’t know how much longer until we have to dig ourselves out and trudge through a blizzard to the nearest shop. Which, I’m guessing, is not that close.

“How about pizza again?” Raven asks with her head stuck in the freezer.

“Bit sick of pizza.”

“Right?” she says, coming up for air. “Does Richard not eat anything else?”

We snicker together and then go back to foraging. After deciding on frozen chips and fish fingers, which have probably been in there since the boys were little, unless Richard has a thing for fish finger sarnies, we make our way back to the others in the living room to find that Richard has come down.

Raven goes to him and gazes up at him while he gazes down at her in a moment fit for Hallmark. It’s cute. I hope one day she looks at me that way. Although, I’ll take the heated desire she threw my way earlier.

“While we wait,” Raven says. “How about a game of Truth or Dare?”

“Oh, this’ll be good,” Sawyer says. “I’ll get the wine.”

He disappears and comes back with a bottle of red.

“Just a small one for me,” Raven says as the rest of us accept a glass, and soon, another bottle is being opened.

“So, who’s first?” I ask.

“Jacob,” Raven says wickedly. “We haven’t had much chance to get to know each other. So, which is it? Truth or dare?”

We all sit forward, knowing whatever this is, it’s going to be big.

RAVEN

“**T**ruth,” he says, sitting back with a smirk, almost as if he knows what I’m about to ask.

“Is your cock pierced as well?” I take a small sip of my red wine as his gaze bores into mine.

Beep. Beep. Beep. Beep...

We all jump up at the sudden cacophony of noise.

“A signal!” I yell, diving over the back of the couch to get my phone from the table near the window as everyone else’s lights up the room.

As soon as I reach it, the shrill ring from mine resounds, and I snatch it up, answering quickly. “Andy!”

“Raven! Oh, thank fuck. Oh my god, oh my god, are you okay?”

“I’m fine. Listen up. I broke down, I was rescued and taken in by Richard, his brothers and friends, but we’ve had no signal, and we’re snowed in.”

“Richard?”

I turn my back and murmur, “You know, the *guy*.”

“Huh?”

“From the pub.”

“Ohhhh! That guy! Brooding and sexy?”

“That’s the one.”

“So, you’re not dead in a ditch somewhere?”

“Obviously not, idiot.”

“Thank fuck. When you didn’t show, I rang your parents and, well, sorry, but man, they have been going ballistic.”

“Yeah, figured. Did they find Mum’s car, yet?”

“Yeah, but no sign of you.”

“I’m a few miles from it.”

“Hilcot!” Richard shouts out.

“What?”

Static hits the line.

“Hilcot...” I’m talking to the end tone. “Fuck.”

The signal has dropped back out, but at least I feel the worry lift from my shoulders now. Andy will tell my parents I’m fine and they can stop panicking and so can I. Now, I can actually enjoy myself.

Placing the phone back on the table, I turn back to the guys. “He didn’t get it.”

“But at least he knows you’re alive and okay,” Jacob says, coming over and giving my arm a light squeeze. “That must be a relief for you.”

“Yeah, it really is. But don’t think you’re getting off the hook that lightly,” I murmur. “I want an answer to my question.”

Our stare intensifies, and suddenly, the entire atmosphere in the room changes. We all know exactly what is about to happen, and we all want it.

“I’ll go and turn the oven off,” Quentin mutters.

“I guess you’ll have to come over here and find out,” Jacob murmurs, grabbing my hand and leading me back to the group settled in front of the roaring fire.

My heart skips a beat. This is nerve-wracking, but exciting. I also feel it was inevitable, and that just makes it even sweeter.

He leans in and brushes his lips over mine. “Are you sure you want this?”

“Yes.”

That one word is all he needs.

He slides his hands up my loose tee, pulling it up over my head.

Dropping the top on the floor, he cups both of my breasts, pushing them up into a delectable mound before he squeezes my nipples through the white lace of my bra. Moaning, I throw my head back and push my chest out. His hand drops lightly in between us and dips into the waistband of my white joggers. I tug at the hem of his black t-shirt, and he lets me pull the t-shirt off.

“Oh, yes,” I whisper and lean forward to kiss his chest.

Then, I step back and strip off completely, slowly, taking my time as Quentin returns, his eyes fixed on my every move as he sits back in the armchair.

“You are perfect,” Jacob murmurs. “Do you feel how we belong together, Raven?”

Nodding, I know he’s right. This isn’t just a fantasy of being thrown together and snowed in. It’s real, and it *is* perfect.

“Do you want us? All of us?” he asks again, and I adore him for it.

“Yes. I want this more than anything. I’m safe.”

He lifts his eyebrow in response, but then he gets it and nods. “So are we. We’ve had regular testing since we decided to find someone as a group, but I don’t think anyone has been with anyone in a few months?”

He looks over at the group to noises of agreement.

“Well, then...” I murmur and lick my lips, waiting for the next move.

JACOB

The things I want to do to her, but she has other ideas. She takes one of my hands and moves it between her legs. I slide my hand up the inside of her thigh to her pussy and groan in response to the wetness between her legs. Thrusting a finger inside her, hearing her moan of pleasure, I finger-fuck her, my gaze locked onto hers. She soaks up my fingers, a sweet scent filling the air as I arouse her.

I need more.

Pulling her down onto my lap as I fall into the armchair behind me, she cries out in surprise.

Her hands go to my joggers, and she dips her hand in, pulling them down a bit so my cock can spring free. She gasps when she sees the piercing.

I chuckle, slightly embarrassed. "It was a dare."

"Perfect!"

"Like what you see?" I murmur, my hand cupping her cheek.

"Oh, yes. Do you?"

"You are a goddess."

She leans forward and kisses me again, turning my cock to iron in her hand. She rises up and teases her clit with the ring pierced through the tip, gasping and moaning as she uses my body to please her.

"Fuck, this is good."

I nearly weep with relief when I feel her push me inside her pussy, encasing my length. Slowly, Raven takes me deep, her breathing becoming a soft pant. She settles with my cock buried inside her and brings my hand to her clit. I tease her, rubbing it gently and circling my thumb over it. She starts to ride me, taking my breath away. Letting out a cry of feral lust, it puts the other men into motion who had so far just been watching this show.

Cum gushes out of her, covering my cock and balls so that we make a slurping sound as she fucks me deliciously slowly, rotating her hips one way, then another until I'm ready to burst.

Her pants are ragged, so I speed up the teasing of her clit. She cries out suddenly, convulsing on top of me, coming wildly, inviting me to pinch her nipples again as she shoves them in my face. I do one better. I lean forward and take one in my mouth. Grazing my teeth over the peak, I nip her gently.

"Christ, yes!" she cries, shuddering in my arms again as I claim her in a possessive way that she is here for, all the way.

"Fuck."

I look up to see Sawyer, ready to pounce. Quentin and Connor join him, ready for action. Richard is happy with watching for now. But he has already had her. This is our turn now.

It's more than enough for me to grab her hips and thrust upwards, deep, forcefully, splitting her apart as my cock pulses inside her, a low, fierce grunt escaping my lips.

She rasps when she feels me come, my cock jerking inside her, spurting out my cum to fill her up.

Then I'm surrounded by the other men, their hands reaching for her, ready to tear her apart.

"Yes!" she cries out, her arms pulled out to the sides by Sawyer and Connor.

Sawyer leans over her to graze her shoulder, at the same time that Con kisses her wrist, moving slowly upwards until she is begging for more.

And we give it to her.

RAVEN

The men are tearing at my body. It is hedonistic and erotic, and so far from what I've ever experienced before.

Vanilla sex.

It's the only way to describe it.

Vanilla sex with men who don't even deserve that title.

What was I thinking when there were men like this out there? Where were they a few years ago?

They kiss me softly everywhere.

I rock forward on Jacob's dick, trying to force another climax. He is *very* good at getting my body to respond to him, and that piercing is to die for. I'm taking full advantage of it.

He chuckles and cups my face. "Eager, aren't you, sweetheart."

"Mmm."

I grab the nearest hand to mine, Quentin's, and place it over my pussy. He wastes no time in working my clit into a state of sheer pleasure. It pulsates under his fingertips, his low growl adding to the decadence.

Knowing he's pleased me, he leans forward and kisses me, this time taking full advantage of me.

"Are you ready for us, Raven? All of us?" he asks.

“Yes.” Wow, this consent thing is sexy as fuck, but enough. I want to be savaged by these men until I’m aching, battered and bruised.

His soft whimper tears at my heartstrings. They have all been so protective and so sweet, and I’m falling like crazy for all of them.

They can use my body for as long as they need, and I will revel in the debauchery of it until I can’t take them anymore.

Turning my head to kiss Sawyer, I gasp when his fingers pinch my nipple roughly.

“Beautiful girl,” he murmurs. “Let me hear you squeal.” He tugs on the nipple, and I cry out as a gentle pain slices through me, but it’s not unpleasant. It’s a need.

“Quentin, take me.”

He doesn’t need asking twice. He whips me off Jacob’s cock and cradles me, carrying me up to my bedroom in his massive arms, and lays me down on the bed.

I smile up at him for being sweet enough to bring me here.

“This okay?”

“Yes,” I whisper and watch him strip off, my mouth watering when I see his body that is almost like it’s carved out of marble. “Oh, fuck, yes.”

Richard joins in with the rest of the men now, stripping off and showing me his pierced peen again, stiff and gorgeous. Relief floods me that he still wants this. Wants *me*.

Quentin ducks his head between my spread legs and licks my pussy, flicking my clit with his tongue, driving me into a state of ecstasy.

“I can’t wait a second longer,” Quentin pants a few moments later. “I need you, Raven.”

“Take me,” I rasp. “Ride my pussy like a bareback stallion until you come inside me. Use me to find your relief. Fuck me until your cum fills me up...”

“Jesus,” he exclaims and falls on top of me, ramming his ginormous cock inside me as deep as it will go, making me scream as he stretches me. “Jesus, Raven. You are so fucking hot, so sexy. I need you. I need you. Ride my cock, baby girl. That’s it, oh yes, perfect. Perfect. You are perfect.”

Fucking hell!

His words are arousing me even more deeply than his cock riding me. I wrap my legs around him, lifting my hips up to meet his thrusts full on, taking his length and trying to claw at him to go deeper. My pussy clutches him, holding on as thrust after thrust, he takes my body to a height from which I will freefall when my climax hits me.

Seconds later, I’m drenching his cock in even more cum as his gorgeous cock penetrates me harder and faster.

“Quentin!” I cry out, clenching around him, making him growl in response.

“Jesus, Raven. That feels so good. Don’t ever let me go.” He kisses me wildly, his tongue as rampant as his cock, until he groans into my mouth, fucking me with his cock that makes me want to weep with joy. He shoots his load, mixing his cum with mine and Jacob’s. I cling to him, his heart beating next to mine as we rock together, locked in this moment.

“I’m yours, Raven. You are the one we’ve been waiting for.”

SAWYER

Having watched my older brother rail the woman I'm wildly attracted to, was somewhat of a revelation. There is no jealousy, only a heightened arousal that is now off the charts with this passion in full swing.

Quentin leans his forehead on hers, panting as he holds her. Her delight in this is apparent and is making my cock ache. I will fight Connor for her attention next, if I have to. There is no way I'm not getting in there as soon as Quentin lets her go.

With their breathing easing, I watch and wait until I can get my hands on her.

To my amazement, she makes me groan when she rolls them over and beckons me to her. I go in an instant. Wild horses couldn't stop me. I attach my mouth to her nipple, rosy red and inviting. I suck the peak into my mouth, swiping my tongue over it and enjoying the noise of pleasure she makes. Raven runs her hand into my hair, fisting it tightly to hold me close. I can taste the sweat on her skin, and it arouses me further.

"Raven," I murmur, nipping her gently.

Quentin lifts her off his cock when I lower my hand to her clit and flick it.

Connor leans over and laps at her pussy, without a care in the world.

She trembles in our arms, treating us to another orgasm that we definitely appreciate.

“Ah!” she cries out and wiggles restlessly.

That’s when I leap into action because I know Con is desperate to do the same. I flatten her to the bed and bury my face between her thighs. My fingers slide inside her as I nip her clit, tugging gently as she writhes around on the soft duvet soaked with all the juices. She tastes like heaven. I can’t get enough of her. Slipping a second and then a third finger inside her, I fuck her slowly, enticingly, until a fourth finger goes inside.

“Jesus,” she pants. “Sawyer!”

“That’s it, princess. Scream my name while I fist you.”

“Ah!” she screams when I insert my whole fist into her pussy, knowing she can take it. She shudders, coming for me, making my cock hard as iron for her.

“Good girl,” I growl, my feral side rearing its head. “Take my fist and ride it like a cowgirl.”

I hold still while she jerks her hips, giving me what I asked for.

“Oh, you’re a dirty princess, aren’t you? So precious, so sweet, so lovely, but underneath, so *diiiiirrrty*.”

“Sawyer!” she roars and clutches at my fist and wrist rammed up her pussy, her orgasm thundering over her, soaking my skin.

When she’s finished, I pull out and place my tongue at the base of my wrist, licking all the way up to my fingertips while she watches, sweating and feverish with desire.

“You taste like honey.”

She purrs, and I pounce, ramming my cock inside her without another second to waste. My dick is aching to be inside her. I know it’s going to be hard and fast. In a frenzy, I ride her pussy. She’s coating my cock with so much cum until I’m ready to burst my banks, wanting to come deep into her as her walls clutch me tightly. My dick responds to her climax,

coming quickly, causing her to cry out in ecstasy when she feels me pumping inside her, unloading into her cream-filled pussy with a low grunt.

“Mine,” I rasp in her ear with my arms wrapped tightly around her.

“Yes!” she exclaims loudly.

I nuzzle her neck, kissing her. She is right where she wants to be, stuck on my dick for the next few seconds until Connor takes her body and makes it his, and Richard after that.

And if she will have us all again from the top, this will make the most spectacular night of my life even better.

I cast a glance over at Jacob. He is watching this intently, as interested in seeing her with me as I was in seeing her with him. We have never shared a woman before. I suddenly have the urge to see her railed by both of my brothers, one in her pussy, one in her arse, impaling her on their cocks.

I groan softly and tear my eyes away from him. Will he think that’s weird? Will Richard? It has nothing to do with *them*, but her. I want to see *her*.

“Have you ever had anal?” I whisper.

Her eyes go wide at the question, but I think she knows we are beyond personal now. She has come all over my dick, and intimate is where we are at.

“Once,” she says. “It was awful.”

“Would you try again? With us?”

She nods quickly, her eyes going a deeper shade of blue. “Yes, but I didn’t...it wasn’t good.”

“We will make it more enjoyable for you,” I murmur. “I want to see them make you a twin sandwich.”

Raven’s lips part with lust. Jacob’s sharp intake of breath is mimicked by Richard. It’s all they can think about now.

Her pheromones are pinging all over the room, filling up my senses as I withdraw slowly, wishing I had a magic cock that could pound her constantly and never go down.

“Yes,” she purrs. “I want that.”

I roll over and let Connor have his way with her. My heart is still hammering in my chest, my cock going hard again. I want another go, but I will have to wait my turn for now. Soon, she will accept us together, maybe more than two at a time. We can make it work. But for now, I will have to please myself by watching her with Connor.

CONNOR

“**L**ast but not least,” I say with a waggle of my eyebrows.

“Definitely not least,” she giggles, her eyes on my stiff cock.

“Turn around,” I murmur and watch her roll over onto her stomach.

I straddle her, pushing her hair over her shoulder so I can kiss the nape of her neck. It gives her goosebumps, which thrills me. I drag my tongue down a few centimetres, massaging her with it as I taste her skin. The sheen of sweat gives her a sweet taste, a salty edge to it. It is magnificent.

I run my hands down her body, over the side mounds of her tits, which are squashed against the duvet. Down over her ribs and her waist, over her peachy arse and then in between her legs. I finger her clit gently, hearing her happy sigh. She opens her legs more for me, and I can’t resist leaning over to bite her bum. She squeals and laughs, enjoying the sharp pain before I kiss and lick it, easing the bruise.

“Pretty and sweet,” I murmur, thrusting my finger inside her, crooking it and feeling her g-spot under the pad of my fingertip. I rotate slowly until she gasps and shudders underneath me, her orgasm rippling over her slowly and steadily. She soaks my finger with her cum. I need to taste it.

I withdraw and lick it clean. “Sawyer’s right. Honey,” I confirm.

She giggles again and wriggles on the duvet, letting me know she's ready for me. I want her to suck me off first, but I'm so ready, I'm fairly sure I'll come in her mouth, so I give her what she wants. There'll be time enough for blow jobs later.

Pressing my body over hers, I guide my cock into her from behind.

She moans softly as the change of angle from what she's used to gets to her. I brace myself on my hands and pump my hips slowly, rotating once and then thrusting, repeating this until she starts to pant.

"Harder?" I rasp.

"Yes!" she cries out. "Fuck me hard."

I ram into her, burying my cock as deep as it will go, filling her soaked pussy with my stiff dick.

"I want to see you give me a creampie," I breathe, withdrawing from her, my cock coated with her and the other men's cum.

She turns over onto her back and bends her legs. I part the lips of her pussy, pressing down on her clit as she gushes the product of several orgasms out of her full pussy.

"Jesus," I groan. "Fuck, that's hot."

Sawyer whimpers next to me, his eyes riveted to the scene of our woman creaming all over the duvet.

I grab my cock and shove it back inside her quickly before he gets any ideas. But I have one of my own. I roll us over, away from the wet spot, so she is on top. I grab her arse and pull her cheeks apart.

"Lube her up," I murmur to whoever is quick enough to get there first.

It surprises me that it's Richard. He shoves Sawyer out of the way as Quentin watches this intently from his position. Richard positions himself between my open legs and lifts Raven up off my cock. He sticks his hand in between us and

then up her pussy to scoop up a dollop of leftover cum before I grab my cock and guide it back inside her.

He sets about lubing up her rear hole, his heavy breathing the only sound as everyone else watches intently.

“Are you ready for that?” Jacob asks carefully.

“Might as well go all in,” Richard murmurs back.

Concentrating on her pussy, holding her hips in place as I thrust deep into her. When I hear her sharp intake of breath, I pause and let Richard sink his cock into her backside.

“Fuck,” she moans. “Oh, fuck that feels good.”

When he’s settled inside her, I start to move again, my thumb going to her clit to give her the maximum amount of pleasure.

“How’s that?” I pant. “Good?”

“Fuck, yes!” she cries. “Christ, ah, ah, ahhhh...” She shudders and comes between us, which is more than I can take.

At the same moment that Quentin squashes into position and inserts his ginormous cock into her open mouth, I shoot my load with a loud grunt followed up by my body tensing and a feral noise ripping from my throat almost painfully.

“So hot,” I rasp. “Fuck, Raven, fuck.”

She can’t answer me with her mouth full of Quentin’s cock.

She rocks forward as Richard fucks her harder from behind, gripping her hips tightly as he pants raggedly.

Raven removes her mouth from Quen’s cock just long enough to ask, “How does that feel? Do you feel it?”

“Yes,” Richard pants. “Fuck, I love your body, Raven. You do things to me. You make me feel hot and sweaty. You’re gorgeous. Fuck, you’re gorgeous. Jesus. I love you. Fuck, I love you.” His low growl turns to a grunt when he comes inside her arse. Her nipples peak even more, turning to hard pebbles on her sumptuous, creamy mounds.

The silence that falls is broken only by her soft pant.
“Again.”

RAVEN

S ometime, much, much later, I awake from a deep sleep, naked, aching and thirsty. My stomach growls, letting me know I'm also hungry. I can smell food and need it.

"Fuck," I murmur and open my eyes.

I'm alone in the room, with a fresh duvet and pillows that the men must've brought in for me. I can't remember when. It's all hazy right now.

Smiling, I roll over and wince as both my pussy and my arse complain vigorously at the movement. "Ouch."

I'm not used to so many dicks in either of my holes. Hopefully, this will ease as time goes on.

Getting to my knees painfully, I groan, climbing off the bed. Wincing as I take a step forward, also cringing from the hallway light shining into my gritty, sleep-deprived eyes.

As much fun as I had, I'm glad they left me alone to sleep. If they hadn't, we would never have stopped, I don't think. Staggering to the shower, I climb in, blasting out hot water, and only belatedly remember that it takes about five minutes to warm up. Squealing at the arctic blast that rains down me, I curl my back and wait, not even having the wherewithal to get back out. Eventually, after what seems like forever, it warms up, and I let the water hit the aches and pains before I turn around and make the water hotter. After a few minutes, knowing this bod ain't gonna wash itself, I pick up the sponge and soap and get to work, grateful that Quentin gave me a bit of a spruce up after we were finished fucking our brains out.

He is so sweet and caring for such a giant man. Richard's actions were surprising, but maybe he realised one woman, five guys at some point, we were going to have to double up and rather sooner than later. He's amazing, and his words were... thought-provoking. I think I love him too, crazy as that sounds. I don't really know. I've never been in love before, but I know I have a deep connection to him that is wild and crazy. Everyone was happy and content with the way things went last night. I'm not sure I can do round two anytime soon, but I guess you never know. This is all so new and exciting, but very intense at the same time. What is everyone going to say when I tell them I'm involved with five guys? My parents are going to throw a shitfit the likes of which this country isn't ready for.

Deciding that is a problem for a later date, after a few more minutes of the hot water soothing my battered body, I turn the water off and get out, reaching for a towel.

I hear the door open a crack, and I squeal in surprise.

"Hi," Quentin says softly. "I thought you might still be asleep. You okay?"

"Yeah, just tired."

"I'm sorry. We got a bit carried away earlier."

"Oh, it's not a complaint."

He chuckles. "Thought you might be hungry."

"Famished. Any fish fingers left over?"

"You're joking, right? Sorry, love, some soup, bread and tinned fruit."

"Oh, nice. You didn't leave me any real food?" I'm only joking. I didn't expect to get much to begin with in a houseful full of grown men.

He smiles. "Actually, consider yourself lucky. It was disgusting. All dried up and burned."

Stifling my giggle, I nod. "Okay, yeah, that figures."

He walks towards me slowly and then takes me in his arms and kisses me tenderly. “You were amazing last night, Raven. Thank you for everything you did for us. We all feel so complete knowing what we wanted has happened now, but I guess we need to know where your head is at.”

“Is that why they sent you?”

“Sawyer wanted to come, but I wanted to be the one to ask.”

“Okay, well, there’s nothing to ask, really. If anything, I’m more invested now, of course I am. You are all so perfect and attentive and caring. Our time together was spectacular. I’ve never felt so alive, so in tune with anyone before. It was truly perfect.”

“What Quentin should be asking is if you want to be with us when all of this is over,” Jacob says, coming into the room.

Smiling, I go to him and take his hand. “Of course, I do. Have you got a minute, though, to talk?”

He nods, and Quentins backs out, leaving us alone. Taking my hand back, I tug on the towel and sit on the bed.

“Everything okay?”

“Yes, I just wanted to thank you.”

“What for?”

“Taking Richard back. I don’t know much, but I know he needs you.”

Jacob sighs and sits on the bed next to me. “I need him too. Twin thing, I guess. I hate that he left me, but he’s back now, and there’s no point holding a grudge when we need to be moving forward, with you especially.”

“What does it mean? Him being back?”

“Not sure yet when it comes to the title. Richard needs to officially resign from his position, and it needs to be passed to me. It’s a lot, and Dad doesn’t even know yet.”

“Is your dad going to be pissed?”

“That’s hard to say. He kind of got used to Rich not being there and me taking over. I guess he expected it, or he wouldn’t have wanted me to do it. Why put me through all of that if he wanted Rich to come home and start from scratch?” He shrugs, and I can see the weight of this on his shoulders.

“I’m sorry you’re dealing with this. If there’s anything I can do…”

“Thanks,” he says, taking my hand and kissing it. “Hopefully, the weirdness will be pushed aside when we tell him there are six of us in this relationship.”

He waggles his eyebrows at me, and I giggle. “Yeah, no shit. My parents are going to freak the fuck out.”

“But,” he says, squeezing my hand tightly. “None of that matters.”

“Agreed. I’m happy.”

“Good, but if you feel differently when we get out of here, I need you to be honest.”

“I will, but I don’t think anything will change. This was fate.”

He smiles. “I believe that too.”

He tilts my chin up and kisses me softly. “Do you want food or more sleep?”

“Food,” I say immediately.

He grins. “Come on then. Get dressed, and we will feed you like the goddess you are.”

“How can I refuse that?” Standing up, I quickly pull on my pjs, figuring why bother getting dressed at all now? This snowed-in situation has made me feel lazy and content, like a happy cat.

Jacob takes my hand again and leads me down the stairs, where the guys have dug out a bunch of Christmas decorations and put them up.

“Oh, this is amazing!” I gaze at the twinkling coloured lights and ancient tinsel strewn about the room as Christmas

songs play on the TV, which appears to be working again for now. Wondering, I check my phone, which is still on the table near the window.

Three bars.

Smiling to myself, I turn from it, not wanting anything, not even the fifty or more messages I can only imagine are stacked up, interfering with this precious holiday night that I will look back in years to come as being absolutely perfect.

SAWYER

It's early. It's not even light out on this freezing December morning. But I can't stay away from her a second longer. Naked and silent, I poke my head around her door and catch sight of her asleep on the bed, the covers wrapped tight around her.

"Raven," I call out softly. "Can I come in?"

She grunts and gives me the finger. "No, fuck off."

My heart slams against my chest. "Oh, erm, okay, sorry..."

She sits up suddenly and grins at me. "I'm kidding, you twat. Get in here."

Relief floods me, and I return her smile. "Oh, thank fuck. I was about to curl up and die in a corner somewhere."

She giggles. "Like I'd leave you to suffer."

"How are you this morning?" I ask, approaching her slowly, warily, almost in case she suddenly *does* decide to kick me out.

"I'm good." She stretches and yawns. "You?"

Crawling into bed with her when she flings the covers back, I nestle against her warm body, placing my freezing cold feet on hers. She squeaks loudly and pulls them away, making me laugh. "I'm better now. We don't have to shag. We can just lie here like this if that's okay?"

She snorts. "Oh, don't we now? Presumptuous much."

Chuckling, I say, “That’s not what I meant.”

“I know, but now you’re here, it would seem a waste of having a sexy naked man in my bed, don’t you think?” She turns into me, pressing her voluptuous tits against my chest.

“Fuck, yeah, it’s a waste. Who doesn’t want to hit this?”

“Me or you?” she asks with a raised eyebrow.

“Me, of course, but you too, I guess.”

“Gee, thanks.” She rolls her eyes and moves away from me.

“Okay, you as well,” I concede.

“Teeth,” she says and disappears into the bathroom.

Waiting for her, I expect her to return to me naked and gorgeous.

She doesn’t disappoint me.

When she climbs back into bed, I pull her close and press my mouth against hers, and she giggles. “Hot for me?”

“Fuck, yes.”

“Then what are you waiting for?”

I glance over my shoulder, wondering if I should wait for the other men. Luckily for me, they decide to arrive, clearly having the same thoughts and feelings I was after our cheery Christmas party last night. We all knew the mobile signal came back, and Raven, like us, ignored the outside world and just spent time in our little snowy bubble, and it was beautiful.

Turning back to her when I see Rich appear, I smile and drop my mouth to hers again, sweeping my tongue over hers.

“How much foreplay do you require?” I murmur, “Because my cock is so fucking hard right now, I might come all over myself if I’m not inside you soon.”

“Oh, my God!” she squeals, laughing madly and sitting up. “That would be a massive waste now, but I don’t need anything except your dick inside my pussy.”

“You are a fucking goddess,” I murmur, flattening her to the bed.

When I see the glistening on her engorged clit and pooling around her entrance, all other thoughts scatter to the four corners of the globe. Lowering my head to her pussy, I lick her anyway, tasting the sweet nectar she has just for me. Well, and these other four losers, but me right now. I will be the first to take her for once, and it will take a natural disaster to tear me from her now.

“Sawyer!” she cries out, fisting her hands in my hair as she pushes her pussy closer to my face. “Fuck, yes!”

I insert a couple of fingers deep inside her, twisting and thrusting until she orgasms like the dirty princess she is.

“That’s it, lovely. Show me how much you need me finger-fucking you. Show me how you can’t live without it.”

She writhes on the bed, squirming closer to my hand.

I remove it to tease her, which ignites the fire of fury in her soul.

She growls and wiggles closer to me.

Suddenly, the rush of emotion that crashes over me is hard to deny. Lifting my head from between her legs to kiss her sweet mouth, I murmur, “I love you. Fuck, I love you.”

She doesn’t respond with words but deepens the kiss, wrapping her tongue around mine in an erotic way that makes my cock twitch eagerly.

I grab it and guide it inside her soaking-wet pussy with a low groan.

“Fuck, you feel amazing,” I groan. “Fuck, Raven, you are perfect.”

I start to thrust rampantly, slamming my hips against hers.

She meets the thrusts head on, lifting her hips and wrapping her legs around me with a cry of elation.

“Sawyer!” she screams, drawing the other men to her in an instant.

They were holding back, giving me space to be with her, but now all bets are off.

Unselfishly, only because I'm buried in her tight, wet pussy, I roll us over so her body is accessible to the other men.

Grunts of various pitch and intensity fill the room as they fall on her, their teeth scraping against her skin, their fingers nipping at her, pinching her nipples, twisting, and tugging. Tongues lapping at her in a frenzy.

Quentin's fingers find her clit and tease her until she shudders on top of me, squirting all over his hand and my stomach.

"Christ on a bike," I groan, feeling the juice splat warmly on my skin. "Fuck, Raven."

With a harsh grunt, I thrust up one more time and then stiffen when my balls tighten. I shoot my load deep inside her, feeling my soul join with hers.

"Sawyer!" she moans, throwing her head back. "You feel so good. I need this. I need you. All of you. Fuck, I love you."

"Use my dick to ease your need, princess," I whisper, feeling like a god as she says the words we are all desperate to hear, even though it's so soon, we don't care. We know, and that's all that matters.

She whimpers, rotating her hips. It turns into a low purr when she leans forward, her hands on my damp chest, and she scrapes her sharp nails over my hot skin.

"My love," she murmurs, the orgasm still thrumming through her body. "Mine. Your cock is covered in *my* cum. It's mine, as are you."

I fist my hand into her loose hair and pull her head to the side. I lick her skin, and she lets out a mewl and soaks my dick even more. My hand tightens in her hair as I lick all the way to her mouth and plunge my tongue practically down her throat.

She trembles in my arms as I draw back, my mouth full of her taste and meet Richard's eyes. They are hooded and difficult to read.

Things have been, not tense, per se, between us since he returned, but we haven't had a chance to really talk about him leaving and how that affected me. Neither one of us wants to bring it up. But as an almost peace offering, I hand our woman over to him when her pussy lets my cock go.

He takes her with a grateful smile and kisses her, accepting the olive branch in the form of Raven, the gorgeous woman who has brought him back to us.

RICHARD

Resisting the urge to kiss my idiot younger brother for handing me our woman to love next, I smile at him.

Things have been weird since I came back, but I think we just, without words, cleared the air between us. He felt let down by me, and I get that. But he has built up a solid, great relationship with Jacob, and I'm thankful that they turned to each other when I left.

"I need to pee," Raven says loudly, drawing my attention back to the goddess in my arms.

I chuckle and release my hold on her. She stands up and stumbles over to the bathroom as I slap her peachy arse lightly.

"Don't be long," I order.

She sticks two fingers up at me, and I know now she will deliberately take forever to come back and see to my aching cock. I deserve it. No one tells her what to do. She is a force to be reckoned with. Her strength is the *only* thing that has seen me through the return to the fold and finding my place in it, with everyone watching my every move, probably expecting me to leave again. But there is no chance. I couldn't now even if I wanted to, and I don't.

When we hear the shower running after the toilet flushes, I laugh out loud and shake my head. "She's a firecracker."

"We good?" I ask Sawyer, needing to clear the air right now with all of us before Raven comes back.

He frowns and sits up straighter. “Yeah. I’ve seen that your leaving wasn’t really a choice. It was a necessity. I wish you’d spoken to us about it, but what’s done is done.”

I nod, thankful he didn’t make a bigger deal out of it. They all know my reasons for leaving now. I gave Jacob permission to tell them. It was the only way to make them see that I wasn’t trying to be a selfish cunt.

I cast my gaze over to Quentin and Connor. “I’m not going to ruin the dynamics of this group. Jacob is clearly the one who brings us all together. That is not going to change. I know we’ve known each other for years on a superficial level, but he was the one who brought you into the group. You are his friends that he’s known for ages. He is the one who knows you. But he is my brother, and I belong here. I hope one day you will feel more at ease with me being here.”

“We do,” Connor says quickly. “But thanks for saying that.”

Quentin grunts, which I’ve come to learn is his way of acknowledging words. The only one he really talks to is Raven. But that’s fine. I don’t take it personally.

When we hear the shower turning off, we wait for Raven to come back to us, which she does a few minutes later, dried but still naked.

“Making us wait is mean,” I murmur, giving her a pout that makes her laugh.

“Sorry,” she giggles and drops into my lap. “I was sweaty and hot.”

“I don’t mind sweaty and hot,” I point out, giving her a soft kiss. “It turns me on.”

“Well, you will have to make do with clean and cool now.” She returns my kiss, twisting her tongue around mine.

I love kissing her. She makes it erotic and sexy, and full of love. Before, it was painful and awkward and something I avoided at all costs. Now, I could kiss her forever.

Fortunately for my cock, she has other ideas. She shuffles back and takes it in her mouth, flicking her tongue over the piercing. I smile. She can't resist it. She loves it. I dared Jacob to get it done about ten years ago after a drunken night out when the woman he was with went on and on about the last man she was with had a Prince Albert. He agreed if I went with him.

I *never* expected him to go through with it.

But seeing how much Raven loves it, I know it was the best thing I've ever done. *We've* ever done.

She takes the ring between her teeth and tugs it gently, making me groan. "Fucking hell, love," I rasp, shoving my hand into her hair.

She smiles and lets it go before she sucks me deep into her mouth. She pops her mouth off and looks up at me with those stormy blue-grey eyes that made me fall for her the moment I saw her in that pub. I thought she was gorgeous and sexy, but it was the sheer force of her presence and how she affected me deep down that made me *know* we were connected somehow. I never knew I would get so lucky as to have found a soulmate, and one that I adore more than anything in this world.

"I love you," I whisper.

She gives me a secretive smile and climbs into my lap. She takes my cock and rubs the tip against her clit, grinding against the metal ring. "I love you."

She shoves it inside her roughly, wanting to feel the piercing rubbing inside her pussy. She clasps her hands around my neck and rides me, working her hips vigorously to bring both of us to the brink of ecstasy in as short a time as possible.

Her cum is covering my cock, thick and sweet, filling the room with the sinfully delicious aroma that is driving us all wild. Quentin is at her back within seconds, his massive hands clamped over her bouncing tits, pinching her nipples until she cries out and floods me with cum, drenching us both. I can't hold back any longer. I grab her hips and thrust deeply, my cock jerking inside her as jet after jet of cum streams out,

filling her wet pussy. My dick jerks, causing her to gasp and skewer herself further onto it. She grips my shoulders and nuzzles my neck, grazing her teeth over my skin before she sucks my skin into her mouth gently.

I groan, feeling it in every cell of my body.

“Yes, Raven. I’m yours.”

She shudders, creaming me, loving me, taking me.

“Mine,” I growl when she moans deeply.

“Yours,” she rasps, leaving me elated and complete.

RAVEN

The softest whimper escapes Richard's lips as we sit, locked together by his arms. He is feeling all sorts of emotions right now, I'm sure. Well, we all are, but I think his are deeper than most.

Connor edges over and kisses me, tangling his fingers in my hair. "I didn't know what love was until you walked into my life," he murmurs after a moment. "I thought I did, and I was crushed by it. But I guess young and foolish, really is a thing when it comes to affairs of the heart."

I cup his face. "I'm sorry you were hurt in the past. No one deserves that. But you can trust me with this." I place my hand over his heart and tap my hand in sync with his heartbeat. "I will treasure it, cherish it and hold it close to my own for all time."

"Christ," he murmurs, a twinkle in his eye. "Sappy, much, princess?"

I giggle, knowing he uses humour to cover up his pain. But I can see the relief in his eyes that I've given him the reassurance he does not need to be afraid of me, or of us.

He kisses me again, licking my lips and sucking on my tongue until he heats up my blood, and I wiggle on Richard's dick, desperate for another rocking orgasm.

To my dismay, our time is up, and it slips out, but I'm not left disappointed for long when Connor flattens me to the soft bed, covered in blankets, and pushes my legs apart.

“Someone around here needs to flick your clit until you come,” he declares and proceeds to do exactly that, with an expertise that I thank God for.

He tugs on it and sucks it into his mouth, groaning with desire when he slips two fingers inside me.

I arch my back, inviting anyone near me to suck on my nipples, which they do. Jacob and Quentin take one each and concentrate their efforts on, in a spectacular fashion, which has my lust-fogged brain melting into a pool of goo.

I try to remember my name, but I come up a blank as rockets of lust shoot through my body. An orgasm erupts beautifully, gushing my cum into Con’s mouth, which he appreciates with a low, possessive growl, which sends goosebumps skittering across my skin.

“Take me,” I pant. “I need to feel your huge dick pounding my pussy until I beg you for mercy.”

“Fuck, woman,” he rasps, driving into me without a second thought.

He stretches me wide, filling me up, sliding into my juices along with Sawyer’s and Richard’s cum.

He braces himself over me, forcing the other two men to abandon their posts and gives me what I asked for: a trip to poundtown that I will never forget as long as I live.

“Fuck! Fuck!” I scream, opening my legs wider, trying to drive him deeper. “More! Harder! Faster!”

“Uhn,” he grunts, using all of his incredible strength to roger me good and proper.

“Ah!” I scream, the next orgasm ripping through me, tearing my cells apart before they shoot back together.

“Ooooooh,” Con groans and shudders on top of me, his eyes closed, a look of bliss on his face. He grunts, shooting his load into me, relieving my lust and making it recede slightly.

I’m exhausted already, and I’m not even finished with them yet.

He kisses the tip of my nose, seeing my weariness. “Sorry, princess. You aren’t going anywhere yet.” He rests his forehead against mine, panting furiously.

My eyes meet his gaze. I slide my hand up to the back of his head and tighten my fist in his hair. Tilting his head, I draw him even closer.

“Mine,” I purr into his ear.

“Yours,” he replies, releasing me and wrapping his arms tightly around me. He has a needy side that I adore, and I want to hold him close, comforting him.

I stifle my yawn, and Quentin snickers. “Sleep now,” he murmurs, stroking my hair.

“You are a prince among men,” I mutter and promptly fall asleep in his big, strong arms, feeling safer than I ever have.

RAVEN

Disappointingly, I wake up alone.

I've enjoyed sex in the past, but with these men, it's been amazing. It's like a fundamental need to survive right now. If I don't get it, I will die. It's as simple as that. My stomach is rebelling with hunger pangs that I wish would fuck right off because my pussy is throbbing with the need for a dick.

"Quentin," I moan, looking around for him.

"Here," he says, swimming into view a moment later on the other side of me. "Sorry, I wanted to leave you to rest."

"Shut up and fuck me."

I hope he doesn't take my rudeness personally. I'm a needy, sweaty mess with a pussy full of cum that requires his dick to relieve the ache deep inside me for him.

Luckily for me, Quentin is a big, strong man, and he can take a few harsh words, along with picking up my body like a rag doll and positioning me on his cock without another word needing to be said.

He is a god.

As soon as he enters me, I come alive again and rotate my hips, before bouncing on his dick like a bunny, at the same time, I take his face in my hands and kiss him deeply, showing him with actions instead of words, how grateful I am to him and his enormous cock.

“Hold still,” he murmurs, a slow, wicked smile on his lips. I slow down to a stop, and he grabs my hips tightly.

Lifting me up and down, riding me in the most delicious way imaginable, I feel the orgasm start at my toes and work its way up my body to my heart before that organ pushes all of my blood to my pussy. I clench around his cock with a soft cry, clinging to the pleasure before it flutters away.

“Raven,” he growls, pumping me harder.

I lean into him, my hands on his bulging pecs. I nuzzle his neck while he rams me down onto his cock as far as I’ll go. He comes inside me, a feral noise tearing from his throat.

I cry out when he comes and slump against him. My whole body is one big nerve-ending right now, and sitting on Quentin’s dick is making it even more intense.

“Fuck, Quen,” I moan. “I love you and your gigantic dick.”

He snorts before he kisses me. “Well, that’s good because I love you too and your soft, wet pussy.”

“Oh, this makes me hot.”

I look up as Connor joins us. “I don’t think you need any help in that department,” I murmur. “Where were you?”

“Making food,” he says.

I sit up and look around. “Food? Gimme.”

Jacob and the other guys return, and I climb off Quentin’s dick to take the sandwich Jacob hands me, stuffed with turkey and ham. I bite into it with a loud moan of appreciation.



AFTER STUFFING MY FACE WITH MORE FOOD THAN I should’ve, I feel too full.

Jacob murmurs soft words to me that make my fingers tingle, as I lie in his arms, just enjoying being with him.

“I love you,” I mutter, turning my face to his.

He leans over to kiss me, his lips hot and soft.

“I love you, baby girl,” he whispers. “I can’t even explain why, if that makes sense. It’s just right.”

“You have spent every day here making sure everyone is happy. I want you to know how I feel about you.”

“You are so precious. I adore you.”

I smile. I hope that once Jacob has come in my pussy, Richard will fuck my arse, and I’ll have both of them inside me at the same time.

I want that.

It makes my heart pound and my brain clear slightly as I crawl into Jacob’s lap, smiling at him and cupping his face. I grab his cock and tease my clit with his tip, enjoying each rotation more and more as the ring presses against me firmly.

“So beautiful,” he murmurs, pushing my hair over my shoulder.

With a soft moan, I slide down his length, taking him up to the hilt with one motion.

“You feel so good,” he whispers. “So hot, so wet. Fuck me, my love. Show your man what this pussy can do to him.”

“Ah!” I cry out, gripping his shoulders and riding him hard, working my hips to give him the maximum amount of pleasure. “Good?” I pant.

“Oh, yes.” His blue eyes are full of a scorching desire that sends my blood rushing to my clit. It pulsates wildly, making me convulse on top of him.

“That’s it, baby girl. Fuck my cock like a good girl.”

“Mmm.”

“Fuck, yes,” he groans, throwing his head back. “Tell me you love me.”

“I love you, Jacob Carlaw. I want to make you mine and be yours forever.”

Pleasure and love and an orgasm that rocks our bodies, I soak his cock with a loud cry.

“Richard,” I pant. “If you are up for a round of anal, now would be a good time.”

“Fuck, yes,” Sawyer breathes out. “I want to see this.”

Without words, Con lubes up my rear hole with cum that is pooling out of my pussy.

Stroking his cock into a raging hard-on, Richard kisses me sweetly before he positions himself behind me. I lean forward and inhale deeply as he presses his tip to my rear entrance. He slides in effortlessly, thanks to Con’s expert lube job, and I breathe out.

“I love you, Raven,” he murmurs, making me a twin sandwich that thrills and delights their younger brother.

So much so, that he kneels next to me and presses his cock to my lips. I open up and have all three brothers inside me, pounding and fucking my holes. Quentin and Connor lay their hands on me, and I come again, my eyes closed in absolute, blissful perfection.

RAVEN

I don't even know what fucking day it is or how long we've been here. The snow has stopped this morning, and the sky is a bright blue with a low sun that is glaring at us like it was our fault the snow clouds covered it up for so long.

"So, what's the plan?" I ask Jacob as we sit across from each other at the kitchen island, sipping the last of the tea. We have coffee left, a loaf of bread that we found in the big freezer in the utility room, some butter and jam, and that's pretty much it. Oh, and some top-shelf booze that belongs to Earl Carlaw and that we daren't touch unless it's our very last bit of liquid left in this cabin.

"Check the pipes first, and then we will make a plan," he replies with a frown.

Nodding, I get up and tentatively turn the tap. Nothing. It's been this way since we woke up an hour ago. It's not good. If the hot water pipe bursts, we are done for.

"Great," Jacob says and rubs his face with his hand. "Right, we are going to have to dig ourselves out of here and check the pipe that leads to the boiler, make sure it's not completely bust."

"Sounds like fun. Shall we get the others?"

He grins. "Let's make it just the two of us."

"Not that I don't love spending time with you, but shouldn't more than two of us attempt this daring pipe check?"

He snickers. “No, I think we can manage. Get your boots on, princess. It’s pipe time.”

“That sounds dirtier than it is, and yet it is so boring.”

He grabs my hand as he rises and crosses over to me. He kisses it lightly. “You are insatiable.”

“I guess that’s what happens when you find the right guy...ssss.”

“Definitely what happens when you find the right girl.”

“Are you really worried about what your dad will say about us?”

“No, are you?”

“Kind of. My dad is...”

“I know. But we are all adults here.”

“I know, but I still live with my parents.”

“Maybe we can change that?” His matter-of-fact tone makes me freeze.

“What?”

“You heard me.”

“It’s too soon,” I fluster, my cheeks going hot despite the cold.

“Is it?” His inquiring stare unnerves me. He is deadly serious about me moving in with them when we get out of here. I mean, okay, I’m living with them *now*, but this is temporary. It’s different.

How is it?

Okay, fair point, brain. But shut the fuck up. I’m trying to be rational.

“Think about it, at least,” he says when I remain tight-lipped.

“Sure,” I mutter and duck out to grab my coat, boots, scarf, hat and gloves, knowing this is going to be a cold state of affairs once we open the door.

Jacob comes up behind me, dressed like he is about to head out on an arctic excursion with one of those hats that have ear flaps down the sides, along with a scarf wrapped around his lower face.

Laughing loudly, he shrugs. “It’s cold out there.”

“Yeah, no shit, Sherlock. It’s full of snow.”

“I don’t like being cold.”

“Well, come here then, and I’ll warm you up.” I give him a suggestive look.

“Hah, you can’t tempt me, woman. Not now, anyway. I’ve just put all of this on. I’m not taking it off until we’ve gone out there and surveyed the scene.”

“Boo to you, then,” I murmur and turn to the door.

Jacob reaches out to turn the handle, and a pile of snow falls into the cabin when he opens it. It comes up to my thighs, which is not good news. We really are going to have to dig ourselves out.

“I’ve never known anything like this,” I complain as Jacob hands me a saucepan. “What is this for?”

“We have no shovels inside, so start digging.”

“You are kidding me!”

“Nope. And I think this has been swept up against the cabin by the wind.”

“Well, no fucking surprise that the pipe froze over then if it’s under a mountain of snow.”

“Yep. And why it is imperative to get to it before it bursts. Chop chop.”

Glaring at him as he gets to work with his own smaller pan, which makes me love him even more, I get stuck in as well, shovelling my way out quicker than slow poke, fully encouraged by the fact that the faster this is over with, the quicker I can hopefully climb into a hot shower.

Soon, we are wading through knee-high snow drifts around the back of the cabin, and I pause, drawing in a deep breath of freezing fresh air. “This is insane.”

“Fate wanted us here and needed to keep us here,” he says. “I’m not surprised.”

“I wouldn’t have pegged you as believing in that stuff. Destiny and whatnot.”

“Says you, lawyer-girl.”

“Is that my superhero name?”

“It works.”

Grabbing my hand, he helps me trudge around to the kitchen window, where we set about looking for the outside pipe that leads to the boiler. When we find it a few minutes later, we stare at it.

“What now?” I ask.

“Start rubbing it.”

“Excuse me?”

“You’re good at warming pipes up.” He gives me a sassy smile.

“Oh, fuck off,” I growl, but run my gloved hand up and down the frozen pipe.

A banging on the window makes me jump, and with my heart hammering, I glare at the asshole who startled me.

Con gives us a wave, looking all warm and cosy while we are freezing our nips off out here. Sticking my middle finger up at him, he chuckles while Jacob makes a motion with his hand.

“Huh?” Con moths, shrugging.

“Turn the hot water tap!” Jacob bellows in my ear.

Con nods and tries it. He shakes his head but then nods and gives us the thumbs up.

“See, you’ve got the magic touch,” Jacob says, joining in with the rubbing so we don’t have to come back out here

again.

“Luckily, it’s obviously not that frozen,” I grouse. Something tells me we didn’t need to be out here rubbing pipes to get them to work. But seeing as neither of us is a plumber, who the fuck knows? We have hot water, and that’s all I’m bothered about.

“So, about the supplies,” I say as we head back towards the front door and fight our way inside after Con shut it on us and making our way to the burning fire to warm up.

“Now that we’ve burrowed a way out, some of us are going to have to find a shop that’s open,” he replies.

“Not it!” I yell. “Not fucking it!”

“Wow, you’re quick on the draw, princess,” Con says, joining us and wrapping a blanket around him while the heating warms up.

“I think my nipples have fallen off,” I grit out. “I’m not going back out there unless this cabin is on fire. And even then, that’s a push.”

Jacob chuckles and pulls me to him, wrapping his arms around me. “You don’t have to go. You have to stay here and keep the bed warm for when we return.”

Smiling up at him, I kiss him and smack his arm lightly. “Now that I can do, champ.”

“I don’t want to go,” Connor sulks. “Send Quentin. He’s big and manly.”

“God, you’re a pussy,” Quentin says, coming down the stairs dressed in a Christmas jumper with tinsel on the front. “Where are we going?”

“Shop,” Jacob says. “We need at least three of us to help carry all the stuff back.”

Quentin nods and agrees to go. “Guess it’s Sawyer as well, then. Richard will be no good with his ribs.”

Jacob nods. “You tell him.”

Quentin rolls his eyes and heads off as I giggle silently.

In the next second, the front door is kicked in, sending snow and splinters flying all over the show as several men forge a path through the snow into the living room, headed up by none other than my doting dad.

RAVEN

“Dad!”

Weirdly, it’s not just me saying that.

Jacob and I glare at each other as my dad barrels over to me, literally jumping over the sofa to reach me.

He grabs me and crushes me. “Are you okay? Did these arseholes hurt you in any way?”

“No! Dad, seriously, I’m fine...didn’t Andy tell you?” Peering around my dad to see a huge man marching over to Jacob, dressed like Quentin, it’s not a leap to figure out who he is.

“What is going on here?” Earl Carlaw barks.

“Your sons abducted my daughter!” Dad turns to the Earl, clearly not giving a shit who he is talking to.

“Preposterous!” Earl Carlaw expostulates. “My two sons would never...”

“*Three* sons, Dad.”

Well, time nearly stands still as Richard takes the stairs slowly, all eyes on him, which I know will be making him as anxious as fuck. He is backed up by Sawyer and Quentin, but he is still very much on his own here.

“Well, well, well, if it isn’t the prodigal son.” Earl Carlaw turns back to my dad. “Can’t vouch for him.”

Ouch.

“Dad!” Jacob snarls. “That’s unfair.”

“We both know he’s been up to no good.”

“Enough!” Dad bellows, his face so red he looks like he’s about to have an apoplexy.

“Wait! Wait!” I shout, getting in on the yelling. “Everybody, just stop!”

To my surprise, everyone shuts up and turns to look at me. Feeling my cheeks flush, I clear my throat. “Dad,” I say, looking at him. “Honestly, I’m fine. The car broke down and Richard stopped to help me. We know each other from Lakesview. Then his brothers and friends stopped when they were coming to see Richard, here at the cabin, and we ended up here because of the blizzard and no mobile signal.”

“Then why does he look like he has been ten rounds with a snow plough?”

Pressing my lips together, I share a look with Richard, who nods. “Well, for that I would like to report a crime.”

“A crime?” he asks. “I knew it!” He rounds on the men again, his fists clenched.

“Not them. And not here. This is an official statement.”

“Who then?” Dad grits out.

“Not here,” I say. “I assume you have managed to get a car somewhere near here? We can go to the station and sort it out there.”

I turn around and march upstairs, pushing past three of my guys, feeling their anxiousness. Dad follows me and grabs my arm.

“Raven,” he growls. “What is going on here?”

“A lot. But I want to make something very clear. These guys haven’t hurt me, in fact the opposite. They have treated me like a queen, and I will not have you, or anyone...” I glare at Earl Carlaw before looking back at Dad, “Accuse them of something they haven’t done.”

“I’ll be the judge of that,” Dad states, and follows me when I keep walking upstairs to pack up my meagre belongings to get out of here. I should be ecstatic, but really, I’m sad. The last few days have been amazing, and I don’t want them to end. I don’t want to say it out loud, but I’m scared of that is going to happen once we get back to the real world. Our bubble is well and truly burst now and it upsets me.

Silently, I pack and make sure I have my injections safely in my bag. Dad doesn’t say a word, he just watches and waits. He knows what he’s doing. He isn’t going to go that ballistic on my arse until he has had time to think about things.

Deciding it’s probably best not to give the guys a kiss each as I head out the front door with my dad and his three men, I wonder how Richard is going to fare with the Earl. In all honesty, he looks jovial and pleasant. But I know the guys think otherwise, so I will reserve judgment until I know more.



THE DRIVE BACK TO THE CITY IS LONG, BORING, AND GIVES ME a knot in my stomach the size of the Earth.

“Your mother was worried sick,” Dad says eventually, as his massive Land Rover eats up the miles once we get back onto ploughed and gritted roads.

“Well, what was I supposed to do? Walk back to Lakesview to let you know I was okay?”

That shuts him up, and we resume the edgy silence that is grating on my last nerve.

“They’re good guys,” I murmur after another half an hour of this shit. “They saved me.”

“From who? Who are you accusing of a crime?”

“I’ll tell you when I get there. I don’t want to have to go through it twice.”

“I’m going to ask you one last time. Are you, or have you in the last few days been hurt?”

“No.”

There isn’t much else he can say to that. I want to tell him that I’m happy and with the guys, but something tells me now isn’t the time for that.

Eventually, we arrive at the station, and I follow Dad inside.

“Get your official statement taking guy, and we can do this,” I say.

I gulp when he gives me a glare that is so hard, and so fearsome, I nearly back out. But it’s too late for that. Plus, I really need to do this for everyone I care about. Richard is not safe from Mick and his pack of wild dogs. They need caging for a very long time.

Dad leads me to an empty room with an uncomfortable looking chair and a bare table, gesturing to someone on the way. I sit down and cross my legs and arms, keeping my bag close by. They are not taking this as evidence. No way.

A man strolls in, notebook in hand, and fixes me with a glare that lets me know he isn’t pleased to be in here this close to Christmas.

He will be as soon as I start talking, though.

Jason, Dad tells me is his name, closes the door and sits down opposite me, while Dad stands in the corner, his arms folded.

“What is this about, Raven?” Dad barks out.

“I wish to report a crime,” I say again. “After my mother’s car broke down the other day, and after Richard Carlaw had stopped to help me, a gang of guys also stopped and started attacking Richard and tried to abduct me. Mick somebody. Nasty piece of work.”

“WHAT?” Dad roars, his arms dropping to his sides as he marches forward, his face furious and red.

“I’m fine,” I say to calm him down, but there is no chance of that. He blusters and expostulates, swearing and carrying on as a dad would do, not the Chief Justice.

“I’m fine!” I shout over his yelling. “Look, all good.” I stand up and make a show of how fine I am. “But I wouldn’t have been if it hadn’t been for Richard and the other guys. They saved me. Richard risked his own life to get me out of the situation and I thank God he did, because if it wasn’t for him, I would be taken by a gang of nasty dickheads to do fuck knows what with.”

That stops my father’s tirade dead.

I continue into the silence as Jason hastily starts writing all of this down, now that things have proven worthy of his time.

“Richard Carlaw saved my life and fought bravely while his brothers and his friends, got me to safety. We had no mobile signal and then got snowed in.”

I inhale deeply and then sit down, my hands on the table, shaking from the confrontation and the reliving of what happened to me, what *could* have happened to me if Richard hadn’t been there.

“Richard Carlaw is not a good man,” Dad growls, that seemingly the only thing he has taken in.

“He is in my book,” I state firmly.

In the next second, he lunges towards me, hauling me to my feet and throwing his arms around me. “My baby girl,” he whispers. “What did they do to you?”

“Nothing,” I choke out as he squeezes too tightly. “Because of Richard and the other guys. They have been lovely and welcoming. They have *protected* me, and we are together now. All of us.”

I bite the inside of my lip. I hadn’t meant to reveal all of that yet.

“You are all together now?” he bellows as Jason takes the opportunity to slip out, so he isn’t a party to this family brawl. Doesn’t matter. He has what he needs to arrest Mick.

“Yes, we are,” I growl. “They are my future, and I will not sit here and have you rip that away from me. I’ve given you everything you need to arrest this Mick dick and his men and leave Richard the hell alone. He is coming back to his home and to me. End of story.”

“Raven, you are walking on thin ice here, my girl. You don’t tell me how it is. I tell you.”

“I don’t think so. I will be moving in with all of them *including* Richard, and there isn’t a damn thing you can do about it. I know Mum will agree with me when I tell her everything as soon as I leave here.”

“Over my dead body!” he roars.

“You always said you admired my loyalty, well, admire this. You go after Richard, and you go after me. If you never want to see me again, then be my guest and go after the wrong guy but know that I will fight to the death for him. For all of them. They have given me something so special in the little time I’ve known them, and I’m not giving up on any of them. They need me as much as I need them. You can take what I’ve given you about Mick, and I know it’s more than enough because I know you know exactly who he is. I will sit here and discuss the ins and outs of it with you like adults, so you have everything you need to send him down. But you leave Richard alone. I’m not saying it again, so nod your head if you understand me.”

My heart is pounding as I talk to my father in a way that I would never have dreamed of before this moment.

“You’re choosing him over your own family?” he scoffs.

“He *is* my family,” I counter.

“I will see them all burned to the ground,” he hisses, beyond furious with me.

“Why?” I ask, confounding him into stepping back. “What is the point of this?”

“To protect you,” he replies calmly, even though his eyes are still stormy. “You are my daughter, Raven and you deserve better than to be shackled up with a...I can’t even say it!”

“A group of men who care deeply about me and who I care about? Why is that embarrassing for you?”

He doesn't answer me. He can't. I've pushed him into a corner, and I feel good about it. I've fought my first and the worst battle there is to defend the relationship I have with these men. I'm no longer afraid that reality will bitch slap us into the middle of next week. The bubble has burst, but we are all in this together, for good.

There is nothing he can say that will convince me otherwise, and I think he realises that now.

“Raven,” Dad says quietly. “Don't do this.”

“Do what? Fall in love? Too late for that. Take what I've given you about Mick, but you don't get a say in my life and who I fall in love with.” Unsteadily, I get up and walk out of the stifling room, approaching the lift quickly. The doors slide open and there are the men I've just fought valiantly for.

They take one look at the tears in my eyes, and they gather around me, giving me the reassurance and love that I need right now.

It gives me the strength I need to say the next words. “We're going back to the cabin until after Christmas. Everyone okay with that?”

I'm not at all surprised that everyone agrees.

RAVEN

Jacob gathers me to him, embracing me and giving me the comfort I so desperately need. My dad and I have never had such a huge disagreement before and it hurts like hell, but I have to stay strong and fight for this as I try not to sob into his chest. Snuggling into him, it immediately soothes my ravaged soul. I turn my face and press my cheek over his heart. Listening to it beating steadily, I pull myself together as the lift dings to open.

“Let’s go,” Sawyer murmurs, placing his hand on my back.

“Raven, wait!” my dad’s voice rings out over the bullpen.

Jacob lets go of me and steps in front, barricading me from my dad. “I think we’re done here,” he says, folding his arms over his chest and planting his feet.

“Move,” Daddy says in a tone that can only be described as frightening.

“No.” Jacob’s tone mimics my dad’s, and I can see this going tits up in the middle of the station.

“Raven,” Daddy says calmly. “Let’s talk about this.”

“There is nothing to talk about, unless you want to carry on asking me questions about Mick and his men in order to arrest him.”

“Yes.”

I blink in confusion.

“Yes, what?” I ask, peering out from behind Jacob’s muscular bod.

“We will talk about it,” he grits out. “I am not having you walking out over this. Clearly, you have strong feelings about it, so we will talk more.” He turns on his heel and marches back into his office.

“You don’t have to follow him,” Jacob states.

“Yeah, I do,” I say with a sigh. “He’s my dad for a start, but secondly, he needs all I can give him to get Mick and his dicks off the street.”

“Are you sure?”

I nod and give him a brave smile even though my insides are withering away over the previous confrontation. I don’t think I have it in my soul to have a round two. I said my piece, and I walked away. Going back in now might destroy me completely. If that’s Dad’s plan, then I will officially cut him out of my life for using what he knows against me.

Most of me tells me that he won’t, but there is that tiny part of me that isn’t sure, and I don’t like it. A few days ago, I would never have even thought my father would be so manipulative. But that’s because we never had a confrontation like this one before.

My mouth is dry as dust, but I force myself to move forward. The guys follow me closely, and my brave smile strengthens. They have my back.

Quentin quietly removes the cap from a bottle of water and hands it to me. Gratefully, I take it and gulp down a couple of mouthfuls.

“Thanks,” I mutter and hand it back to him.

Reaching my father’s office, I pause and turn to give them each a smile. “You don’t have to wait. I’ll be okay.”

“We’re not leaving,” Richard says.

“Don’t worry about anything, except what you came here to do,” Sawyer adds.

“What about your dad?”

“He is waiting for us in the car. He is not impressed with any of us.”

“Would it help if I spoke to him?” I venture, not wanting to step on any toes.

“We’ll talk about that later. Go fix things with your dad and then we can focus on ours,” Sawyer says with a small smile. He leans forward to kiss the top of my head, and I lean into him with a warm heart.

Richard grabs my hand and squeezes it, while Quentin and Connor reach out to touch me gently, boosting me and my confidence in both myself, and us.

I nod stoically and enter the office, closing the door quietly and turning to face my dad.

He is sitting in his chair, his head in his hands. “How did it come to this?” he asks quietly.

“You won’t listen to me.”

“I’m listening now.”

I gulp. Now I don’t have anything left to say. The adrenaline I was riding has run out and left me drained. I flop down in one of the chairs and remember the guys outside.

“I know it seems strange,” I start. “That these men have taken over my life. But they have. They are sweet and kind and thoughtful. They have been perfect gentlemen and even helped me find my injections, which I lost in the fight with Mick.”

“Fight,” he croaks.

I bite my lip and hold up my trusty bag. “You always said I carry too much junk around, well, it saved me the other day.”

Dad’s gaze focuses on the bag, and he snorts in amusement. “Bet that gave him a headache.”

We exchange a smile.

The clock on the desk ticks away.

Eventually, he sighs.

“They really mean that much to you that you would walk out on me to be with them?”

“That’s not fair,” I croak.

“No, I don’t mean it as a nasty thing. I’m asking you outright. You would choose them over me?”

“I don’t want to...”

“Raven,” he says, exasperated.

“Okay, yes. I would. But I don’t want to. I don’t see *why* I should.”

“You don’t have to. I was thinking only about the small, immediate picture. You have a depth to it that I couldn’t see until you walked away from me and to them. I’m not losing you over something so ridiculous, Raven. You deserve someone who will love you and take care of you. If that equates to five men, then who am I to stand in your way? Clearly, they are enamoured with you that they followed you here to make sure you were okay.”

“I know,” I point out, gaining some of my sass back, because he’s acting like my dad again, sort of, and not the Chief Justice.

“But Richard Carlaw...he may be trying to change, or has changed, or whatever, but the people he has been associating with are dangerous criminals, Raven. Can *you* understand where I’m coming from? My job as your father is to protect you at all costs.”

“I do understand. I also know that Richard would never put me in harm’s way. None of them would.”

“Not intentionally, maybe.”

“But that’s why I’m here, Daddy. To give you my statement so you have the information you need to make arrests.”

He nods slowly.

“I see that now. He, *they*, are your future. Anyone with eyes can see that. Even your old dad.”

We exchange another smile.

“Give the rest of your statement. As many details as you can about who, how many, where, and we will use that to take these bastard criminals down and clean up our streets.”

With tears in my eyes, I jump up and dart around to give him a hug. “Thank you, Daddy.”

“Are you sure they didn’t hurt you?” he whispers, pulling back. “I need to know, Ray-ray.”

“No, they didn’t. Apart from a couple of bruises, I’m fine.”

“And Richard saved you from them? The truth will come out if you aren’t being entirely honest about that.” His stern tone doesn’t scare me one bit.

“He fought like the gentleman he is supposed to be. He would have died if it meant getting me to safety. His brothers will corroborate all of the details.”

Dad nods. “I’m still concerned about his past, but I know Jacob and Sawyer are remarkable, stand-up men, and Richard Carlaw is an old acquaintance. The elder one. I contacted him as soon as I knew where you were.”

I snicker and think that makes Richard the junior of the two. He will love that.

“Connor and Quentin are pretty remarkable as well,” I say with a smile.

“I will make it a priority to get to know them better. All of them.”

“Thank you,” I say again. I cross over to pick up my bag. “Where do you want to do this?”

“Back in the interrogation room. I’ll call Jason back.” His world-weary sigh makes me smile and I follow him out, giving my men two thumbs up and an excited smile behind his back.

My men. I like the way that sounds.

They chuckle and follow us to the small, stuffy interrogation room.

I sit down, while they surround me, not leaving my side for a second.

RAVEN

Staring at Jason across the table as he makes his little notes, I give him everything I can think of starting from the car, stopping immediately after I broke down, to them driving off and then Richard arriving.

“Can you describe what this Mick looked like?”

“He has a face like a box of frogs,” I state.

“Uhm, what?” Jason asks as Connor laughs so loudly, my dad gives him a fierce look that threatens to kick his arse if he doesn’t shut it.

“A box of frogs,” I enunciate clearly. “You know, fugly.”

“Fugly...” he murmurs. “Anything specific?”

“A broken nose, I think? It was a bit skew-whiff. Seriously, he looked like a bag of spanners.”

“Jesus!” Connor howls. “You are slaying me! Do you talk about us that way?”

I give him a sassy smile and shake my head. “Nah, none of you have faces like boxes of frogs. Pretty spring baskets of easter chocolate, maybe.”

“Eggs, you mean?” He shoots a wicked smile at me.

“Fuck off with that,” Sawyer growls, earning a throat-clearing from my dad.

“Raven. You need to be more specific. Hair colour, how tall, distinguishing features, eye colour even. Anything you

can give us will help us identify the right people connected to your attack.”

“I’m trying! Box of frogs is accurate.”

After Connor finally quietens down, Jason fixes me with a piercing stare. “So you say this was Mick Savoy in the car? Did you know who he was at the time?”

“No, I only found out his first name later. Richard said it. Oh, wait. Bryan. One of them was also called Bryan. Don’t know who, though.”

Jason and Dad exchange a look. “Bryan Thoroughgood.”

“Thoroughbad, more like,” I mutter.

I take a sip from the bottle of water Quentin placed in front of me when I sat down and then I tell them everything else that happened, including how my bag saved my life.

Dad peers at it, parked next to my feet. “I’ll get you another one,” he murmurs.

“No need, this is like an old friend now. And now I guess you need to speak to these five.”

I take another sip of water as Jason questions the guys, feeling content and happy. I also feel the strong urge to go home, well, to the cabin in the Cotswolds and curl up in front of a roaring fire while we listen to Christmas carols and snuggle. I wonder if the guys would consider relocating there indefinitely. It’s a bit out in the sticks, but I love it and I don’t want to live anywhere else.

“Do you feel okay?” Jacob asks, interrupting himself to check on me.

“Yep,” I squeak, avoiding his eyes. I can’t give away the fact that I’m thinking about a really long future with these guys where we have kids running around. They’ll think I’m nuts.

“Perhaps a bit of fresh air,” I stammer and stand up, not even stopping to pick up my bag. I hightail it out of the room.

Hearing voices, I turn and see them all leaving the room with Jason and my dad. “Thanks,” I murmur and head over to them, feeling a bit more in control of my lustful thoughts. Until Connor hands me my bag and our fingers touch. Our intense gaze lights up the room and I know everyone can see it. It makes me proud.

“If you can wait a few minutes, Raven, I’ll finish up here and take you home.”

“No,” I say, shaking my head. “I’m going back with them.”

He chews his lip, but eventually he sees that we will get into another argument over it if he presses the issue, so he nods. “You’re staying for Christmas?”

Looking back at the guys, they nod, and I smile. “Yeah. I’ll see you in the New Year. Maybe.”

He nods slowly, but then he ruins the illusion of being adult about it when he grabs Jacob by his shirt front and growls, “You hurt her in even the most miniscule way, I will eat you for breakfast with the rest of these idiots for dessert. Got it?”

“Got it,” Jacob says quickly, knowing a rabid Dad when he sees one. “But you don’t have to worry, Sir. We all only have Raven’s best interest at heart. She is our everything.”

He smiles at me, and I return it, tears pricking my eyes again. Stupid emotions. Where has all of this come from?

Grabbing Richard’s hand, I kiss it. “One dad down, one to go.”

He grimaces, having been extremely silent throughout this whole ordeal only speaking when asked direct questions by my dad and Jason.

He wraps his arm around me and leads me to the lift. “Ready for round two?”

“Pretty sure I can handle Richard senior.”

He glares at me. “Who told you?”

“Dad.”

He snickers. “Don’t even think about it.”

“Wouldn’t dream of it.”

Laughing as we all pile into the lift to head back to the Earl, I don’t even care if this *is* round two. We are ready for it.

RICHARD

Dad is waiting impatiently for us when we arrive back at the car. He slides the window down and glares at me. “Meet me back at the house.”

He drives off, leaving us to all pile into the Range Rover that Quentin and Sawyer dug out of the snow before we followed Raven back to the city.

The short drive from the station to my parent’s big townhouse in Chelsea where Jacob and the guys live, and now me as well, I guess, is a tense one. No one says a word.

Eventually, we pull up and I climb out, taking the steps up the imposing double front doors and pause with the rest of the guys behind me.

“Wait here. I think I need to do this alone.”

“You sure?” Jacob asks.

“Yeah.”

Walking into the grand foyer, the sound of my footsteps echoing across the marble floor. I can feel the tension building inside me, knowing what I’m about to face as I make my way through the winding halls, searching for Dad.

Drawn to the library, I find him seated in his favourite armchair, a glass of scotch in hand. He doesn’t look up as I enter.

He sets down his glass, finally meeting my gaze. “Do you have any idea what kind of trouble you’ve caused?”

I nod silently. “Yeah, but I had good reasons. I don’t want the life you were forcing on me.” There, I’ve said it.

“You embarrassed me in front of everyone,” he continues, ignoring me. “Do you know how that makes me look? I won’t tolerate this kind of behaviour,” he says firmly. “You’re a reflection of this family, this legacy. We’ve worked too hard for you to throw it all away.”

“You aren’t listening to me.” No surprise there, then.

“What is it you want to say so badly?”

“I’ve already said it, but you have ignored it now, just as you have every other time I’ve said it. I don’t want this life you are trying to force on me. Jacob does. He wants it, he has worked for it. I am resigning as a working member of the nobility, and you can like it or not. I don’t care anymore. This is Jacob’s legacy. I am here to be with Raven and to be with my brothers and friends. Nothing more. I will not be subjected to you and your demands a second longer. It’s not how I want to live my life. Have I made myself clear?”

Dad stares at me in disbelief, his mouth slightly agape. For a moment, he says nothing, his eyes boring into mine with a sense of fury. I can tell he wants to say something, to object or argue, but he remains quiet.

“You don’t understand the gravity of what you’re saying,” he finally responds through gritted teeth. “You’re throwing away everything we’ve worked for. The family reputation, our legacy. And for what?”

“It’s about being happy. Living life on my own terms, not yours. I want to find my own stability and security.”

Dad shakes his head and takes a step towards me. “You’ll regret this decision. Mark my words.”

“No, I don’t think I will. For me, I walked out on this eight years ago. You think just because I’m back, I’m going to pick up where I left off? Not a fucking chance.”

He stares at me for the longest time. When he doesn’t say anything, I’m convinced he is about to walk out on me and never speak to me ever again.

But then he surprises me and nods slowly. “You really mean it.”

“Of course I do.”

“I wish you’d had this conviction years ago instead of just disappearing.”

“I tried.”

“No, you moaned and complained and then left.”

“Same difference,” I grumble.

“Not really. You were a young man, and I had no idea if you were rebelling because it was a thing, or if you really just wanted out of this family.”

“I don’t want out of the family. I just don’t want my portrait up on the wall next to yours in years to come. No offense, but it’s not my scene.”

“So, then you resign and let your brother take what is his anyway.”

“Simple as that? What’s the catch?” There has to be. Dad doesn’t roll over this easily for anything, especially the family name.

“No catch,” he says, surprising me once again. “I just want you to be happy, Richard, you’re my son. And if this is what it takes, then so be it. She seems nice.”

I stand there stunned as he comes over to me. For a moment, I wonder if he’s going to embrace me or something, but instead he just places a hand on my shoulder and gives it a firm squeeze. “She is. She is perfect. You and Mum will love her.”

He nods. “I’m proud of you for finally telling me the truth in a way where I know you mean it,” he says, almost gruffly. “I may not have understood your reasons before, but I do now. You’re a good man, and I’m lucky to have you as my son.”

It’s the most emotional I’ve ever seen him, and for a moment I feel like we might actually be able to connect on

some level. But just as quickly as it came, the moment passes, and he withdraws his hand from my shoulder.

“Now if you’ll excuse me,” he says, grabbing his scotch glass. “I have some things to attend to.”

And with that, he turns and walks out of the library without another word.

I stand there for a few moments longer, trying to process everything that’s just happened. It’s better than I could have ever imagined. At least now I know where I stand with my father, and he with me.

Walking out of the library and into the entrance, where Jacob and the others are waiting for me, I smile.

“Well?” Jacob asks eagerly.

“It went better than expected,” I say with a smile. “I’m officially resigning from noble duties.”

“That’s it? He accepted it?”

“Yeah.”

“Weird... what’s got into him?”

“Fuck knows,” I say with a shrug. “But let’s not hang around to find out.”

Raven steps forward and takes my hand. “Yeah, I’ll meet him officially after Christmas. Cabin?”

“Fuck, yes. I want to pick up exactly where we were, although maybe not left without food or drink for the next few days. Supermarket and then...home.”

“Home. After we’ve swung by my house to get more meds.” She grins, and we can all feel the excitement as we head back to the car and drive out of the city to find a supermarket where we can stock up, seeing all the Christmas lights strung up and the cheerful songs on the radio, I feel for the first time in my life, that I belong.

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Eve is a British novelist with a specialty for delicious romance, with strong female leads, causing her to develop a Reverse Harem Fantasy series, several years ago: The Forever Series.

She lives in the UK, with her husband and five kids, so finding the time to write is short, but definitely sweet. She currently has over fifty books in her catalogue. Eve hopes to release some new and exciting projects in the next couple of years, so stay tuned!

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