



*the*  
**DARKEST**  
*Kink*

BESTSELLING AUTHOR

**WS GREER**

# contents

Author's Note

SIERRA

Chapter 1

Chapter 2

Chapter 3

JOURNEY

Chapter 4

Chapter 5

Chapter 6

Chapter 7

Chapter 8

Chapter 9

Chapter 10

Chapter 11

Chapter 12

THE BEAST

Chapter 13

Chapter 14

Chapter 15

Chapter 16

Chapter 17

Chapter 18

WINTER

Chapter 19

Chapter 20

Chapter 21

Chapter 22

Chapter 23

Chapter 24

Chapter 25

Chapter 26

[CORPSES](#)

[Chapter 27](#)

[Chapter 28](#)

[Chapter 29](#)

[Chapter 30](#)

[Chapter 31](#)

[Epilogue](#)

[EPILOGUE II](#)

[~ Journey ~](#)

[Acknowledgments](#)

[About the Author](#)

[More From Ws Greer](#)

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First edition published by Kindle Direct Publishing 2023

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Cover design by Robin Harper/Wicked by Design

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Interior Design and Formatting by Book Money Inc.

## author's note

Welcome to *The Darkest Kink*. While I have written and published books that have been deemed “dark” by readers, I have never intentionally written a dark book ... until now. While the title is a dead giveaway, it's important that I give a fair warning for what you're about to be consumed by. This is my darkest book to date. It's my kinkiest book to date. It's my most morbid book to date. It's macabre, deranged, and grows more and more psychotic the further you read. This story is from the darkest part of my mind, which is my favorite part.

*The Darkest Kink* is a dark BDSM romance—not to be mistaken for erotica. There is a strong plot, and it's about to knock your fucking panties off. While all characters and situations are completely fictional, some scenes may imitate reality and be harmful to those who have experienced violence or assault. This novel contains depictions of gun play, bondage, impact play, breath play (choking/strangulation), stalking, murder, and gruesome thoughts. This novel is intended for mature audiences only.

Now turn the page ... and embrace your kinks.

sierra

# chapter **one**

“EVAN GODRIC.”

The large man holding a tablet in his oversized hands types my name into it and waits, stealing glances at me until something happens on the screen that I can't see. He nods as he reaches down for the black rope blocking off the entrance to the club.

“You're good to go, Evan. Welcome back,” he says as he places a red paper bracelet on my wrist.

I nod my reply and step forward toward the large black doors. The doorman reattaches the rope behind me and continues scanning people at the front of the line. It can be a long process, but it's a necessary one. This club is exclusive, and unless you've been accepted, you're not getting in. In my case, the doorman already knew who I was when I reached the front of the line. Typing in my name was just protocol. I've been a VIP member of The Black Collar for a while now.

As usual, the place is packed. Music bounces from wall to wall, rocking the sheetrock with each thump of bass as sexy R&B keeps the mood where it should be. A song about sex goes off, and it's followed by a rock song about sex—the perfect combination of music for a place like this.

The walls are painted black, but flashing lights of all colors strobe on and off, making the entire place feel like you're



walking into a dream—a dark, raunchy, erotic dream you’ll never tire of. As I enter, I’m not gawked at or asked what I’m doing here. No one looks at me like I’m out of place. I blend in, becoming one with the large crowd of bodies flowing down the hall toward the dance floor and bar at the end. But before I can make it that far, I pass a room on my right where a number of people are bound to chains that are secured to the wall. Next to them are three pillories holding more people captive while their partners stalk over them, affectionately caressing their skin. This is the bondage room, and while it’s as beautiful of a scene as one could imagine, it’s not why I’m here. I only pause a moment to look inside before moving on.

I peek into the next room, admiring the handful of small cages housing naked prisoners, and for the first time tonight, my cock twitches with life. Seeing the men and women caged like animals does something to me internally. I feel it like a rush of hot adrenaline scorching my veins from the inside, and my mouth drops open a bit.

This is why I come here nearly every night. The Black Collar feels like returning home after too much time has passed. I’m more comfortable here than I am anywhere else. The unsuspecting, unassuming, non-judgmental strangers here make me feel better than the people I spend most of my time with at work. They are my closest friends, and I don’t even know them. This is the only place I can be myself, and it feels so good to just sink into the things I enjoy. This is my nirvana.

Continuing down the hall, I turn the corner and step into a room filled with the sounds of pain-filled bliss. Upon entering, I don’t even look around at first. I simply stand next to the door with closed eyes and listen to the impact of riding crops slapping skin. I revel in the sound of paddles smacking bare flesh, and delight in the high-pitched squeals of pleasure. This

is the impact room, and it has become my favorite. I'm not partnered with anyone here, so I do not have consent to touch anyone. I'm a spectator, but that's good enough for me right now. I love watching the couples play with each other, causing one another so much agony. Each time someone lets out a yelp, it stiffens my cock. I'm aroused in no time, looking around the room with a devilish grin as I take it all in. It's so beautiful. I could live in this room. I could wake to these sounds and use them to fall asleep at the end of each day. This lifestyle is my haven, and before too long I crave even more. I *need* to see more, and my desire to participate grows with each blink of my eyes.

It takes concentration to pull myself out of the impact room, but I manage to step back into the hall and slowly make my way through the crowd to the expansive dance and bar area of the club. The dance floor is brimming with clubbers who are high on life. They flow together like water as they move to the seductive music, grinding together and swaying in unison. Couples of all sexualities and genders kiss and show their love for one another without the slightest hint of fear. Here, all forms of love are welcome and applauded. Joy wafts into the air like smoke from a cigar, consuming me as I make my way to the bar and stand in line. I eventually order a whiskey and coke from a good-looking Black man whose bald head mirrors the flashing lights above us. I take it without a word before moving to the back of the bar where the VIP area of The Black Collar awaits.

Curtains cover the door openings of each room, and they're guarded by muscular men in black outfits. All of them eye me as I walk past their respective door until I reach the last one. This is the main stage, and I have to show the bouncer my red VIP bracelet to be let in. He nods and pulls the curtain

over just long enough for me to walk past it before dropping it behind me.

There are rows of seats starting just behind the curtain, leading to an elevated stage at the front of the room. The chairs are already filled with people with their eyes glued to the show being put on up front, where a woman is bound to a Saint Andrew's Cross, and a man whips her over and over again with a black flogger. She moans loudly, her skin jumping with each kiss of the leather tails, and the hardness in my pants forces me to sit down before one of the spectators notices my erection.

I take a seat in the back row and watch. The couple on stage shows the audience what impact play is all about. The man is clearly the woman's Dominant, and he knows his way around that flogger. He sends the falls crashing against the woman's back with a simple flick of his wrist before doing it again without missing a beat. He hits her four times in a row, each whip leaving a new streak of red on her skin, and I come unglued. My cock stiffens to the point of being unhidable, and I don't even bother trying anymore. I reach down and gently rub my erection with my thumb, trying to be discreet but also knowing I'm not the only person secretly touching themselves. This isn't an orgy room, and trying to make it one would certainly get me thrown out, but everyone in here is turned on. All of us like what we're seeing, otherwise we wouldn't be here. Watching the stage makes us all weak with lust, especially when the man positions himself behind the woman and begins to pummel her from the back.

Everyone in the audience watches as he fucks her, both of them moaning loudly, wanting to be heard by everyone in attendance. It's a beautiful scene, and I touch my cock just enough to feel it through my pants. It's so erotic I could

implode. My face heats up and my breathing becomes labored as my feeling of arousal turns to pure lust. I feel ready to tear someone apart ... and that's when I notice the eyes on me.

I yank my hand back and tuck it under my leg, but it's too late. A woman seated in the adjacent row is watching me, and from the look on her face, I can tell she has been enjoying my show more than the one on the stage. The lights are low, but I can still see the look in her eyes, and it's not the look of someone who is disgusted. Her expression is one of interest. Her eyes glow and her mouth is turned up into a smirk as she looks back and forth between my eyes and the bulge I can't hide.

When I realize she's smiling instead of summoning security, I smile back before returning my attention to the stage. I try to keep it there, but I can feel her staring at me. My face is warm from it, and I look over again to confirm it. She's still there, still watching, still smiling. This time, she nods at me, saying hello without words. I nod back, and apparently it's the cue she was waiting for because she gets up and begins to quietly make her way over to me.

My heart could detonate. It pounds with the force of a sledgehammer as she saunters over with her eyes never leaving mine. The closer she gets, the more I see how beautiful she is. She's like a devil in a tight, white dress—a devil playing the part of an angel. Her eyes are green and her hair is blonde. Her cheekbones are pronounced and the pout of her lips makes me want to tear her out of that dress right here in front of everyone. When she sits down, a fragrant perfume slithers into my nose and unlocks the cage of the beast I keep hidden away. She has no idea that she's not the only devil playing a part.

“Hi,” she says, speaking first as if she has done it a million times.

“Hi,” I reply, angling my body toward her. “I’m Evan.”

“It’s nice to meet you,” she says, extending her hand for me to shake. “My name’s Sierra. Are you here with anyone, Evan?”

“No,” I reply.

“Me either. So we both came here alone. What are the chances that we leave together?”

The beast in me smiles as it growls in my ear.

“I think the chances are pretty good. What do you think?”

Sierra’s smile widens. “I agree.”

“Now?”

She stands up and looks down on me lasciviously. “Yeah. Right now.”

# chapter two

“TELL me what you want me to do.”

“What?” I ask, pulling my truck out of the parking lot and onto the road to the highway. My new companion, Sierra, is on her knees in my passenger seat as she looks at me, seatbelt unbuckled, clearly unaware or unafraid of danger.

“I can tell from the way you look that you’re a Dominant. Those big, round shoulders. That masculine, strong jaw covered in hair. I see it in those piercing blue eyes,” she says as she slowly tugs on her dress. It rises up her legs inch by inch before stopping just below her panties. “So, tell me what you want me to do, Sir.”

I flinch, because as much as what she just said about me being a Dominant is true, I live by the rules of the lifestyle. I have done nothing to earn being called Sir. Sierra doesn’t know me and has no reason to trust me, and the way she bypasses the rules of the lifestyle are more of a turn off than a turn on. But the look in her eyes has a stranglehold on me. The expression on her face grips me by the balls and urges me to ignore the rules.

*Break them. Break her.*

I look at her as she awaits my command, her eyes alight with whatever high she gets from meeting strangers and

behaving recklessly. I've seen it before. Some people get off on the idea of having sex with someone they don't know. It's like a rush to an adrenaline junkie. She doesn't want to learn anything about me. She doesn't want to actually be my submissive. She simply wants this moment. She wants to escape whatever drama is in her daily life and live in the dark. She wants to feel good and forget before the sun comes up and forces her to remember something I'll never have any knowledge of. Fine. If she wants a rush, I'll give her one.

I lick my lips and set my gaze on her. "Open your mouth," I command.

She smiles and starts to lean forward, instantly ready to suck me off while we cruise the highway, but I put a hand up and stop her.

"No," I say. Her smile vanishes. "If you're going to call me Sir, even if only for tonight, then you need to listen much more carefully. I didn't say suck my cock. I said open your mouth. Now do it."

A grin slowly emerges on her lips.

"I knew I was right about you," she says, before adding, "Yes, Sir."

She opens her mouth, keeping her eyes on me.

"Wider," I demand, and she obeys. "Good. Now stick out your tongue."

I pull my eyes off of her only long enough to make sure we're not about to die in a fiery crash before looking at her again. She sticks her tongue out with her mouth agape, and my cock responds. Blood rushes through my body, making me instantly erect as I look at the wetness of her mouth. I imagine what it's going to feel like to fuck that mouth, to stretch it with

every thick inch in my pants. Does she know what it's like to have her throat stretched to its capacity?

My eyes glance back over on the road and find the exit to Strawberry Mansion. I take it and brake for a stop sign at the bottom of the ramp.

“Pull that dress up some more,” I say, staying at the stop sign much longer than necessary.

“Yes, Sir,” Sierra replies, doing as she's told and revealing black, lace panties veiling her pussy.

“Good. Pull those panties to the side so I can see you.”

With a devilish smile, she obeys.

“Now rub your clit and keep your tongue hanging out of your mouth. I don't care if you drool all over my seat. Keep your tongue out.”

“Oh my god. Yes, Sir,” she answers.

Sierra uses one hand to move her panties over while she rubs her clit with the other. Her eyes stay on me while she does it, and I hear the growl of my beast interlaced with the moans from her mouth. I want to do so much more than command her in this way, but watching her obey me coaxes the beast forward. I step on the gas and quickly close the gap between us and my home while Sierra continues to rub herself. Her moans fill the truck as I drive, and I steal glances at her as often as I can without crashing or blowing a stoplight.

When we finally reach my house, the beast in me is foaming at the mouth, ready to pounce. It is so tired of being held back every day, locked in a cage while I take crap from all directions. I only allow it freedom every few nights because it scares me. If I uncage it for too long, I won't be able to put it back inside. I'll end up being the one in the cage, watching as



the beast wreaks havoc on my life. Tonight, I'll let it out enough to appease its hunger ... and it is starving.

"You can close your mouth," I say to Sierra as I pull into my dirt driveway and shut off the engine, a car driving past us and turning on an adjacent street as we prepare to get out. "But keep your dress pulled up while we walk inside."

She smiles, totally turned on by my commands as we get out of the truck and head for the door of my place. While I unlock it, she stands behind me, her dress pulled up to her waist with her panties on full display. She raises an eyebrow when I look back at her, her body teeming with excitement. I don't know how anybody could do what she's doing right now—trusting a stranger and traveling to their house all alone—but I'm glad she's doing it. We're both going to get what we want tonight.

The second we're inside, Sierra slams her mouth onto my lips. Her tongue probes into my mouth, colliding with mine and forcing it to dance with hers. I taste alcohol on her breath as her hands furiously rub all over my body, pulling at my clothes as she tries to feel my cock through my pants.

I grab her wrists and stop her. "No," I snip. "You're not in control. I am."

She stops and grins at me.

"Oh. Yes, control me then, Sir."

We lock eyes and I feel it happening. The beast steps to the door of its cage and waits there, drooling and panting as I unlock its prison. The gate swings open and it emerges, stalking to the forefront of my mind as I take a step back and let it have control. My body temperature rises and all of my

senses heighten as I succumb to my darkest and deepest desires.

“Get down on your fucking knees right now,” I say, my voice barely sounding like my own.

Sierra’s grin melts into a sultry look of submission. She pauses for a moment, and I see the wonder in her eyes as she searches for recognition in mine. She scans my face trying to find the man she chose to drive here with, but she will find nothing.

He’s gone.

Slowly, she lowers to her knees, looking up at me from her spot on the floor in front of my door. Her dress scrunches even higher on her waist as she kneels, revealing her pussy to me and making my mouth water. I drop into a crouching position in front of her and look her in the eye, my face blank of all emotion and my mind twisting itself into knots with thoughts of what I want to do to her.

“You like adventure?” I ask.

“Yes, Sir,” she replies.

“You like an adrenaline rush?”

“Yes, Sir.”

“You like taking risks and fucking men you don’t know?”

She hesitates a beat, then answers. “Yes, Sir.”

I shake my head. “I haven’t earned the right, yet you call me Sir and submit to me without knowing anything about me. That’s a dangerous game. Here you are now, locked behind my door, trapped in my cage with a dripping wet pussy and no idea how you’d escape if I was a psycho. Maybe that’s your thing. You like not knowing if the person you seduce at the

club is insane or not, as long as the encounter ends peacefully with cum on your face or in your pussy. Isn't that right?"

Sierra doesn't answer this time, and I can see the wheels spinning behind her eyes. She glances at the door, surely wondering if she could get to it in an emergency.

"Here's what's going to happen," I begin again. "You've chosen me. You've chosen to submit to me. You already assigned our roles before knowing if I was worthy of mine. Luckily for you, I am. So I'm going to control you. I'm going to own you tonight. I'm going to fuck you senseless like the whore you are, then I'm going to kick you out of my home. How you get back to where you came from is not my concern. Tonight, you belong to me. Do you understand?"

She nods reluctantly, her eyes showing new signs of worry as they struggle to maintain eye contact.

I stand up. "Stay here." Risking the possibility of her darting out, I leave Sierra by the door and walk into my den. I leave the lights off because I don't know Sierra. I don't want her getting a look at anything in my place, so I keep it hidden as I walk to a drawer and grab a pair of scissors. As I approach her with them, panic comes to life in her eyes but she doesn't move, held in place by fear.

"Relax," I tell her as I crouch again. "Luckily for you, I'm not a murderer. Now, start nodding your head."

She frowns at me. "What?"

"Start nodding your head, and don't stop until you hear a kink that's a hard limit. Understand?"

She breathes a sigh of relief as she starts to nod slowly.

"Good," I say as I reach between Sierra's legs and cut one strap of her panties. "Bondage. Impact play. Breath play.

Degradation. Blood play.”

Sierra stops nodding.

“Good girl,” I say before cutting the other side of her panties and pulling them off completely. I rub my finger over her clit and dip it inside of her, feeling how wet she is. I was right. She gets off on the adrenaline. “Nod again.”

She begins nodding again, and I continue my list. “Forced orgasm. Foot fetish. Shibari. Water sports.” She stops nodding again and I smile. “Figures. Bodily fluids freak people out.” While she eyes me, I rub my wet finger over her slit a second time and she shudders. “Your safe word is *stranger*, since that’s what we are to each other. Do you understand?” She nods. “Good girl. Now lick your lips and open that wet fucking mouth of yours.”

“Yes, Sir.”

Sierra does exactly as she’s told, licking her lips enthusiastically before popping her mouth open.

I stand up and begin undoing my pants. “Stick out your tongue like you did in the car.”

She sticks her tongue out just as I push my pants down and reveal my rock hard cock, swollen in all its glory with a thick vein running up the side. Her eyes widen when she sees it, but I waste not a single second. I step forward, grab her by the back of the head, and shove myself inside her mouth. I do it gently at first, gripping the sides of her head with both hands as I stroke in and out, wetting my thickness with her saliva until each stroke is smooth and slick.

“Keep your eyes on me,” I demand, looking down at her as I fuck her mouth. The beast roars to life and my grip on her head tightens. She tries to pull back but I push myself in

further, fucking her face harder and letting out a roar. “Your mouth is so good. Fuck yeah. Open up for me and rub your pussy while I fuck your throat. Rub it.”

She’s timid at first, but after a few seconds I sense her getting over her fear. She moans as her fingers find her clit and begin rubbing circles on it, picking up speed as I fuck her mouth relentlessly. Spit and drool fall off of her lips in long strings that land on her stomach and thighs, but we keep going. We’re not here for nice and slow. The beast is feeding, and it’s not afraid of a little mess.

As the urge to explode in her mouth starts to make itself known in my balls, I pull my cock out and drop into a crouching position. Sierra’s face is a mess of tears, streaked eye-liner, and smeared drool that coats her entire bottom jaw. She pants as I kiss her, my tongue being the aggressor this time while my hands find her throat and squeeze.

“Fuck yeah,” she moans into my mouth, making me pause.

“Yeah? You like being choked?” I inquire.

“I fucking love it. Nothing makes me come faster,” she answers proudly.

I use one hand to squeeze her throat while I slide two fingers in her soaking pussy. She tries to moan but the sound can barely squeeze past my grip.

“Yeah, you do like it. You’re a soaking mess for me, aren’t you?” I ask, rubbing her clit faster and squeezing her throat harder. The skin on her neck turns white beneath my fingers as her face begins to turn blue. I hear her wheezing, struggling to get air as I rub her clit. Her face tightens as she fists the bottom of her dress, tensing all of her muscles. “You gonna come for me? Huh, slut? You gonna come?” She nods her

head and I don't relent. "Come all over my fucking hand right now."

On command, Sierra's face melts into orgasmic bliss as she lets out a guttural scream. I try to keep choking her and rubbing her clit, but her body goes into convulsions and I lose my grip as she slumps forward. She moans as her muscles spasm, and it's a beautiful show to watch. It's so much more fun to be a part of the show than to simply watch it from a chair in the audience. Nothing could beat the sight of a woman convulsing on my living room floor because I touched her in all the right ways and places. What could be better than having this effect on someone?

Sierra stays slumped forward on the floor, panting like a deep sea diver coming up for air. I fucking love it, and the excitement of knowing how wet she is makes me so hard I can barely stand it. I have to know what that wetness feels like on my cock. I leave Sierra a breathless, pathetic mess as I stand and walk back into my den where I grab a condom and make my way back to her.

I kneel on the floor in front of her and pull my belt out of the loops on my pants before pushing them down. "You like being choked, huh? Tell me how that orgasm felt."

"So ... so fucking good. Your fingers are magic," she pants.

"Wait until you feel my cock. Turn the fuck around."

I grab Sierra by the hair and use it to force her body into position. I spin her around and push her onto her stomach before climbing on top, snatching the dress up high onto her waist so that I have access to her pussy from the back. I sheathe my cock with the condom before looping my belt through its buckle and dropping it over Sierra's head. She

moans her approval as I grip the loose end of the belt for leverage and push my cock into her pussy.

“Yes,” she moans as I begin fucking her. “Choke me hard and fuck me, Evan. Be a fucking monster for me.”

“You want a monster?” I ask, tightening my grip on the belt. “You want to be fucked by a monster? Is that what you want? I’ll show you a fucking monster.”

I pull the belt until the muscles in my arm bulge so hard it hurts, and I pound in and out of Sierra’s pussy with no regard for her safety. I slam my cock into her with powerful, monstrous strokes that rock both of our bodies and send her wetness splashing like a lawn sprinkler. Over and over again I pummel her. Our skin slamming together echoes through the house like gunfire, and I lose myself in the moment. The beast screams to life, roaring as I feed it what it craves. It takes control and fucks Sierra without thinking about her at all. It is heartless and implacable, pulling the belt so hard I think it might snap.

I fuck her with everything I’ve got. All of the stress I feel about my job and the people I have to work with comes out through my cock. My frustration with my life and the terror and heartbreak of my childhood swirl into an angry concoction that sends me into a blind rage. I lose all sense of my surroundings. I don’t even know where I am anymore. I only care about letting it all out on her.

I destroy Sierra’s pussy until an orgasm tears through me like a bolt of lightning striking a tree. It rips me limb from limb, zapping me of all my strength at once and I collapse onto her back like a sack of potatoes, completely spent.

I breathe heavily, seeing stars as sweat trickles down my face and lands on Sierra’s back. My body has no strength left

in it, and I have to take a few minutes to catch my breath before I can even attempt getting up.

Sierra lays beneath me, her own energy having been fucked out of her. She doesn't move at all, which makes me proud because it means I did my job. She wanted to fuck a stranger and indulge on the adrenaline rush of it all, and I'm glad to have given her an experience she'll never forget. No matter how many times she goes out to find another stranger to fuck, she'll always think about the night she met me. I'll haunt her memories like a ghost and I fucking love it.

Once I'm finally able to breathe regularly, I close my eyes and force the beast back inside its cage. Now that it has been fed, it calmly walks back into its prison cell and allows me to close the door. After the meal it had tonight, it won't have to feed again for a long while.

I suck in a breath and peel my face off of Sierra's sweaty back, finally sitting up straight and pulling my cock out of her. I remove the condom and carefully place it on the floor next to us before reaching up to grab the belt still tight around her neck.

"That was unbelievable," I say, leaning forward. "I totally got lost in that. It was unreal. You good?"

Sierra doesn't answer.

"Hey, you okay?" I ask as I move up and notice her head lying flat on the floor, her eyes open but unblinking.

"Hey," I say again, clamoring to remove the belt from her neck, but when I get it off, I notice the marks resembling broken blood vessels. There's even a little bit of blood from where the belt dug into her skin and tore it open.



“Hey, hey, hey,” I yell, grabbing her by the shoulders and turning her body over so I can see her face. Once she’s on her back, I wish I would’ve left her face down.

She doesn’t move a muscle. Her chest does not rise and fall with each breath, because she clearly isn’t breathing. She doesn’t blink. Her body is completely loose. Lifeless.

“What the fuck?” I whisper to myself, but that doesn’t change what I know to be true.

I killed her.

Sierra is dead.

# chapter

## three

MY HEART POUNDS so hard I can barely see straight as Sierra's body lies on the floor in front of me. No movement. No breathing. No life. She's dead. She's actually dead. How could I have let this happen? The ligature marks on her neck tell me all I need to know, and I stare at them, frozen in place as the memory of the belt around her neck plays back in my mind.

I can see myself thrusting into her while using it as leverage. She asked to be choked. She wanted it, and I gave it to her better than she'd ever had. Before I fucked her, she'd had an explosive orgasm that splashed all over my hand like I'd tried to catch a water balloon. She was alive, panting as she tried to recover from the last time I choked her, and she *wanted* me to keep doing it. She *begged* me to do it hard and to become a monster for her. She egged me on and the beast in me responded the only way it knows how, but I never thought my beast could do such damage.

Staring at her body, I try to get my emotions in check. I didn't mean for this to happen. It was never my intention to go to The Black Collar and pick up a woman to murder. I'm not a killer. While I do have certain desires and fantasies, murder isn't one of them. I'm a Dominant and a sadist, and I only craved inflicting pain on her because she wanted me to. I gave her what she consented to. It just went too far.

In my shock, a flashback of my childhood rewinds and plays in my mind. I picture my abusive mother screaming at me for breaking a vase in the living room. While she'd been out doing God knows what with God knows who, I was playing with an old football in the only room that afforded me enough space to move around. In my head, I was pretending to be Peyton Manning, screaming "Omaha" before taking a three-step drop and hurling the ball into the air. If it landed squarely on the couch it was a touchdown, if it bounced off or landed anywhere else it was incomplete.

On this particular day, my aim was way off and I hit Mom's vase, knocking it off the coffee table and breaking it into pieces as it hit the floor. I admitted my mistake when she got home, and as usual, she beat the living crap out of me for it. She even broke one of my fingers on my throwing hand so I wouldn't be able to throw the football for a while without pain. It was terrible, but I did learn my lesson that day—don't ever tell Mom the truth about a mistake again. Admitting fault in our house was akin to having a death wish, so I learned to keep secrets to avoid consequences. I got pretty good at it, too.

I scoot back, sliding my butt on the floor until I reach the wall behind me, and I sit there. I stare at Sierra's body, hoping she'll wake up and this will all have been a prank. I'd be livid about being tricked, but at least I wouldn't have to worry about going to prison. But after twenty minutes she still doesn't move, and I'm forced to think about my options.

Option one. I call the police and tell them that I accidentally strangled Sierra to death with my belt while we had sex on my floor. It's not uncommon for people to engage in breath play and choking while having sex, and I'm sure the cops have seen much worse. It was an accident, and accidents happen, right?

Option two. I pack up my life and run away, leaving Sierra's lifeless body to be found at a later date. People at my job will eventually start to ask questions about why I'm not showing up, and they'd probably send someone to my house to see what's going on after I don't answer their calls. It'd be one of them who discovers Sierra's body. Either that or the smell of her decaying corpse would draw suspicion to the house and the cops would be called to investigate.

Or perhaps I was seen on video walking out of The Black Collar with Sierra tonight. Does the club have security cameras? If it does and the police ask for the footage, they'd see me leaving with her and wonder where we went. All they would have to do is get my information from my VIP membership with the club, and they'd know where I live and even have my credit card number. They'd have access to a treasure chest of private information about me, which would certainly draw suspicion from vanilla-minded people, and they'd be at my doorstep with guns drawn. I'd become a fugitive, living the rest of my life ducking and hiding from the ensuing manhunt. I'm twenty-eight years old and have no desire to spend the rest of my life running.

No, no, no. I'll have to go with option three—get rid of the body and go on with my life as if this never happened. Killing Sierra was not a part of my plan to go out tonight, and I shouldn't have to ruin my life over an accident. It's true that I have a beast inside me that's capable of going too far. Clearly. But I'm not a serial killer. I don't spend my time hunting women down, stalking them so I can slit their throats and toss the bodies somewhere. I'm just a construction worker with an appetite for BDSM—a Dominant sadist with a fetish for inflicting pain. I admit to having strong, kinky desires, but I'm not a killer.

Option three it is. I spring into action, jumping to my feet and standing over Sierra's body as I look around the room. My brain moves a million miles per hour trying to figure out exactly what I need to do to cover up this accident. How do I hide the broken vase from my mother? I can't store the body in the house because it's going to decay, and the smell would make the place inhabitable and wander out into the streets. It would probably take a while, but eventually someone would notice. So, I'll have to keep it outside.

The backyard.

I dart toward my back door, nearly tripping over an old ottoman because the house is still dark. I reach the door and snatch it open. While it's unlit and covered in shadows, I can see my backyard is nearly one hundred percent dirt, just like my front yard. This means no one will notice if I dig back here as long as I flatten it out correctly. If it were grass, it'd be clear that I ruined my yard by digging a hole in it. For the first time ever, I feel fortunate for living in a neighborhood where almost none of the yards have grass.

I take a moment to look around, making sure no neighbors are sitting on their back porch or peering through their blinds. A lone car is parked on an adjacent street, but it's pitch black inside with no movement in sight. I'm all alone.

Perfect.

I spin around and walk back inside the house. I contemplate turning on a light, but I've been home for a while now and the lights have been off the entire time. Turning them on would alert my neighbors that I'm up, which they could remember if questioned. It's nearly two in the morning, but I don't know who's awake or who could be watching. So I keep the lights out, thankful that human eyes are capable of

adjusting to the darkness. I go back to the front door and look down on Sierra one more time. Yep, definitely dead. My life absolutely will be changed forever, and it could change for much worse if I don't act fast.

Grabbing her by the wrists, I drag her body across the floor to the back door. If there's one good thing about strangulation, it's that it's bloodless. I grab a handful of large, black trash bags from my pantry and take my time slipping them over her body—one bag for her torso, and another for her lower half, then I repeat the process three times for a total of six bags. I use duct tape to pack her tightly and place her body in an old, thirty-eight-inch footlocker I used to store tools in back when I was a freelance repairman and secure it with two padlocks. Once she's locked away, I step outside and grab a spade shovel from a rusty collection of tools and miscellaneous items out back and pick a spot as far away from the house as I can.

There, in the pitch black of night, I start digging.

journey

# chapter **four**

THERE IS a dead body buried in my backyard.

As much as I try not to think about Sierra's corpse stuffed inside a footlocker and buried beneath a few feet of dirt, the thought attaches itself to my mind like a parasite. I can't focus on anything else as I get ready for work this morning. I brush my teeth; I see Sierra's body in the fetal position in the footlocker. I eat breakfast; I remember pulling the footlocker into position as quietly as I could in the middle of night. I drive to work; I see the shovel in my hands and hear the soft crunch of dirt as I dig it into the ground for the first time like a groundbreaking ceremony. Flashes of what happened intrude on every thought I have, every move I make. No matter what happens, Sierra is with me.

When I pull up to my job, I sit in my truck for a moment, staring off into space. What went down this weekend is the craziest thing that has ever happened to me and weighs a ton. Carrying it around all day is going to be a challenge, so I take a minute to steady myself. I need to be centered with a clear mind because my work environment doesn't exactly leave a lot of leeway for distractions. I have to focus and do my job correctly or it could cost Lane Contracting tons of money and slow down the project. The last thing I want to do is be the



reason anything gets delayed. I have enough crap on my plate and don't wish to add anything more.

Before I can pop open my door, I'm startled by three hard raps on my window. I nearly jump out of my skin before looking over to find a tall, burly man standing next to my door with the same scowl on his face he always has.

"Hey!" he yells, glaring at me with icy blue eyes that I swear can see into my soul. "What the fuck, man? Let's go."

I raise a hand and nod. "Sorry, Cain. Yeah, I'm coming."

Cain Adams, the project manager for the new construction in Kensington, taps on his watch aggressively to let me know I'm almost late. We have a meeting in five minutes, and even though I'm already here, Cain has to act like he's worried I won't make it in time. Even when I'm not doing anything wrong, Cain always finds a reason to mess with me. All I can do is sigh as he walks away and I open my door.

I join the crowd at the front of the building that's going to be a new Popeye's, and listen as Cain goes over the same safety briefing we've had for the past week since the project started. He goes over everything from eyeglasses to steel-toed boots to hardhats before moving to the details of where we are in this phase of construction. No one here is new, so it doesn't take long to address each specific craft lead before dismissing the group so we can get started for the day.

The small crowd disperses and I make my way over to the compound miter saw. It sits next to a stack of banded lumber that will need to be cut into fire blocks all morning before I switch gears and start cutting headers for the door openings this afternoon. My only job right now is to make sure I don't undercut anything. The cost of this project is fixed, so the need to buy anything new pushes us closer to our budget which is

labeled as NTE—not to exceed. This is why it’s so important that I keep my head clear. There is no room for mistakes, but as I approach the stack of lumber, a soft voice whispers in my ear.

“Be a fucking monster for me, Evan,” Sierra says from behind me.

I whirl around with wide eyes and a pounding heart, but it’s not Sierra that I find.

“Goddamn, Evan. You good?” Trey says, leaning away from me like my dramatic response might be contagious.

I stare at him a moment, blinking fast as I try to get my bearings.

“Yeah,” I reply, but I certainly don’t feel good. “I’m fine. Sorry about that. Did you say something?”

Trey raises his eyebrows as I stand up straight and try to move past the embarrassment I feel in my chest.

“I asked if you were ready to start the fire blocks for me,” he answers. “We need all two hundred cut before we break for lunch.”

“Right,” I say. “Yeah, all two hundred. They’ll be done.”

Trey rubs his hairy chin and nods.

“All right, big dog. I’m gonna go start nailing the studs to the top and bottom plates, we’ll install the fire blocks later, then we can lift and anchor all of the walls. Nice and easy today. Cool?”

I smile, grateful that the carpentry craft lead is always so kind. “Cool. I’m on it.”

Trey nods again as he turns on his heel and walks away, his sights set on the concrete foundation a few feet away with the large stack of two-by-fours next to it. He and a small group of people start pulling studs from the pile and placing them on the concrete approximately sixteen inches apart, before grabbing ten-foot pieces and putting them above and below the studs. The crew works quickly, which means I need to have these fire blocks finished by the time they're done building wall skeletons. I shake my head to knock the distractions away and turn around to face the saw. I've got work to do, so let's get to it.

I spend the next couple of hours slicing through two-by-fours to be used as fire blocks in the wall, and time goes by quickly when you're busy. Thoughts of what's beneath the dirt in my backyard try to sneak in while I work, but I feel like I do a good job of keeping them at bay. The blade on the saw spins too loudly for me to hear anymore whispers in my ears, and I keep my eyes glued to the lines on the wood that I placed on all two hundred pieces at the start of the day. Before I know it, I'm finished, and Trey sends one of his guys over to start grabbing the blocks to be installed.

I pat myself on the back for getting finished in time before moving over to another stack of lumber. Instead of two-by-fours, I'll be making door headers out of two-by-sixes and plywood. I cut the band on the lumber and start using a tape measure and triangle to lay out where I want the cuts to be on each two-by-six. At the exact moment I reach my tenth piece of wood, I hear a shout from the crew working on the foundation.

“What the fuck?” someone barks.

I spin around to find someone handing Trey one of the fire blocks with a very angry look on his face. My heart picks up speed as Trey pulls a tape measure from his belt and measures the wood. He lets out an exasperated sigh as the other guy throws his hands up, furious. Trey turns to me and starts walking over, frustration and anger written all over his face. As he steps off the concrete, he's approached by Cain. I watch the two of them have an animated conversation about the piece of wood in Trey's hand before Cain takes the fire block and stomps toward me.

"Goddamn it, Evan," he snaps, pointing the wood so close to my face I have to back up. "What the fuck are you doing over here?"

"What's the problem?" I ask, taking another step back as Cain points the wood at me. My butt bumps up against the table, making it wobble.

"What's the problem?" Cain asks. "You, Evan. You're the problem."

I glare at him as memories of my mother chastising me about the broken vase come to mind.

"Do you mind explaining to me why every single one of these fire blocks is a quarter-inch short?" Cain barks, his deep voice drawing the attention of everyone on the site.

I swallow hard, glancing over at Trey who just pinches his lips together and looks down at the dirt beneath his feet.

"Don't look at Trey," Cain snips.

My eyes shift back to Cain, but I suddenly feel the beast inside me wake out of its slumber.

"Answer me, Evan!" Cain exclaims. "You know we have a budget, and while it did allow for ten percent of waste, this

isn't the kind of shit we can waste. This is a simple fire block. A child can cut a piece of wood down to a few inches, but not you, because you're over here not paying attention to what you're doing. The last time we had an issue, it was because you didn't cut the goddamn forms right at first. You even cut the template wrong. If you don't get your shit together, and I mean fast, I'm going to kick your weird ass off my project. Do you understand? This is unacceptable and I will not allow another mistake. You just cut two hundred useless pieces of wood. Do you know how much money you've just wasted? Of course you don't because you're a jackass."

I try to lean back to put distance between us, but Cain keeps stepping forward. He puts his finger on my chest, pointing at me in front of everyone like I'm a child as I grip the legs of the miter saw tightly.

*Grab him by the throat and slam his head down beneath the saw as you turn it on. Would his head still talk if it was detached from his body?*

"What are you just standing there staring off into space for?" Cain continues, becoming even more aggressive. "What's the matter with you? Don't you have anything to say? What the fuck?"

I grip the saw's legs tighter, ready to do exactly as the beast in me wants.

"I'm ... I'm sorry," I mumble. "I didn't mean to. It won't happen again."

"Oh please," Cain says. "Yeah, you better hope it doesn't, or your ass will be looking for another job."

"All right, Cain. I'll take care of it," Trey chimes in, tapping Cain on his side to get his attention. Trey frowns as he

looks at the project manager who has clearly let his anger get the best of him again.

Cain, realizing that his outburst has brought production to a halt, finally steps back and hands the too short fire block back to Trey.

“This guy is slowing your crew down, Trey,” Cain says. “You’re the lead, so get him in order. We can’t have shit like this.”

“I understand,” Trey replies. “I’ll handle it.”

Cain looks at me one last time, hoping I’ll die from his gaze before walking away.

Once he’s gone, Trey looks at me and I can see the disappointment on his skin. He wants to tell me to get my crap together, but after Cain went off and snatched everyone’s attention away from their work, he’s ready to move on from it. Trey has always been this way. He’s not the type of guy to pile it on someone or kick a horse when it’s already down. There isn’t a person on this job site that would choose to work for any other lead.

“What happened, Evan?” he asks, handing me the fire block. “I thought you said you were on it.”

I take the wood, look it over as if I can make it grow, and toss it behind the saw in defeat.

“I’m sorry, Trey,” I start. “I had a long weekend and I’m feeling distracted. I shouldn’t be letting it get to me.”

“Is it anything you wanna talk about? Anything I can help with?”

The image of Sierra’s body lying in the footlocker just before I shut the door flashes in my mind, making my heart

race as I shake my head.

“No. I appreciate you asking, but I’ll be fine,” I reply. “I just need to concentrate and get my crap together. Thanks for your concern, though. I don’t mean to have Cain all in your face.”

Trey laughs. “I can handle Cain, but I don’t want him to have opportunities to give shit to anybody on my crew. So, let’s not give him a reason to, okay?” I nod, and Trey reaches up to place a hand on my shoulder. “Are you sure you’re okay, man? You look stressed out.”

I’m shocked by another image of being on Sierra’s back, the beast in me totally unleashed and pulling the belt around her neck with enough force to make her eyes bulge as she is strangled to death.

“I’m good,” I lie.

“Look, I can tell you’re stressed, man,” Trey says. “I don’t want it affecting your work, giving Cain a reason to come down on you. So how about we go out for drinks? I have plans the next couple of days, but I’m free the day after tomorrow. We can hit a bar and just unwind a bit. You down?”

I nod. “Yeah, sure. That sounds fun.”

“Cool,” Trey says. “Until then, I’m gonna work with you to fix this fuck up and cut the fire blocks as quickly as we can. We’ll cut them and hand them over to Steven so he can install them as soon as they’re cut. We’ll be caught up in no time.”

“Sounds good.”

“All right, let’s get to work.”

“Okay. Thanks, Trey.”

“It’s all good, bro. Let’s just get it done so nobody has shit to say at the end of the day. And don’t worry about Cain. He’s a dick, but karma catches up to everybody eventually.”

I nod and smile, turning to face the uncut stack of lumber next to the saw so we can lay out the fire blocks.

“You got that right,” I say more to myself than Trey. “One day, he’ll get what’s coming to him.”



# chapter **five**

THE NEXT DAY at work is better than the last one ... for the most part. On one hand, I don't make any mistakes. I manage to cut every piece of wood perfectly by measuring twice and cutting once, and I didn't have to hear anything from Cain's thin lips. Trey smiles a lot and tells me I did a great job, and we confirmed that we'll be hitting a bar after work tomorrow night. We all leave the job site for the day with no complaints and all of the walls of the facility erected and ready for truss installation. We're rolling now.

On the other hand, visions of Sierra's body have not stopped flashing across my vision. Her voice has not stopped haunting me, and what's worse is that memories of pulling the belt around her neck with all my might does something to me that it shouldn't. Remembering how it felt to strangle her while I ravaged her makes the beast in me happy. It puts a smile on its evil face and makes its mouth water for more. It's not supposed to feel that way because I didn't do it on purpose. Yes, I let the beast out so it could feed before going back into its cage, but killing Sierra wasn't intentional. So why is it starting to feel like it was?

I return home after my day at work and leave my shoes at the door as usual, kicking them off as I enter before going into the kitchen to see what I have in the fridge to eat. I spent most

of my last check on my VIP membership at The Black Collar, and pay day is still a few days away, but I need to make a trip to the grocery store sooner rather than later. When I open the door, my suspicions are confirmed. There isn't much food staring back at me, but there is a six pack of beer. I grab a can with the intention of heating up some noodles after I drink one or two and establish a tiny buzz, then I head back into the living room to sit down. Turning on the TV, I quickly switch from cable to Netflix and start scanning shows, hoping to find something I can binge all night. But before I can choose, there's a knock at my door.

I frown as I get up, bringing my can with me as I walk to the door and take another sip. I turn the knob and pull it open, and the second I see them my heart drops into my feet.

They don't have badges, but they don't have to. I know cops when I see them, and the people standing outside my front door are definitely cops. Detectives probably, and they're here to talk to me about Sierra.

There are two of them, a man and a woman. The man stares daggers into me with an obvious furrow in his brow. He's maybe five-nine, a hundred eighty-five pounds with a full head of hair that he combs back, and a scruffy beard. His face looks weather worn, like it's made of leather and frustration, with a permanent scowl across his thick eyebrows. He's the perfect example of an old, disgruntled cop, the one who plays the bad guy when they do "good cop, bad cop." He looks seasoned, like he has been doing this for a long time and is either really good at it or absolutely horrible. I guess we'll find out which.

His partner is different. She's shorter than him—maybe five-six, with long black hair cascading past her shoulders. She

has a chin dimple that's barely there, which is actually kind of cute, and the glare in her brown eyes is intense. With one glance into them, I feel like I can see an abundance of pain that has culminated into fire. There's something about her that traps my eyes, but it's her partner that speaks first.

"Good evening," he begins, his voice husky and already fed up with this conversation. "Are you Evan Godric?"

I nod, letting the hand holding my beer dangle at my side. "Yes, I am."

"I'm Detective Sam Winter," he says before gesturing to the woman next to him. "This is my partner, Detective Journey Monroe."

He stops there, letting silence hang in the air and make the scene more intense.

"Okay," I say, nodding. "And how can I help you?"

"If you've got a minute, we'd like to ask you a few questions. Do you mind stepping outside?"

I take another big gulp of my beer before setting it down on the floor and joining the detectives on the porch. They eye me carefully, the man scowling while the woman's expression is blank. She still hasn't spoken. She just stares and makes me feel uneasy, stirring something inside of me that I try to ignore. Maybe she's the one who plays the bad cop.

I close the door and lean against it, arms crossed. "So how can I help you?"

"Sir, have you ever heard of The Black Collar? It's a ... club ... of sorts, in Center City."

This is it. They're going to question me about Sierra. It's really happening. Oh god.

*Keep it cool. Don't panic or freak out. Breathe deeply and take your time. If you don't give them anything, they won't have anything. They're casting a reel and hoping to catch something. Don't fucking bite.*

Listening to the voice in my head, I clear my throat and stand up straight. Detective Monroe watches me closely, her eyes never leaving my face.

“Yeah, I’ve been to The Black Collar,” I answer honestly because I know they already have that information. Lying about it would only confirm any suspicions they have. “I go there often actually. Why?”

“Were you there this past weekend?” Detective Winter asks.

I nod nonchalantly. “Yeah. Like I said, I go there often.”

“Because you’re a VIP member, right?” Winter asks, but there’s something in his voice that I don’t like. Something accusatory and disgusted.

“That’s right,” I answer, doing my best not to glare at him the way I want to. It’s clear they’ve looked into the club, so I have to play this right or it could go very badly.

“While you were at the club this weekend,” Winter continues, “were you with a woman by the name of Sierra Cross?”

“Not exactly,” I reply.

Winter’s eyes widen like he just caught me slipping. “Oh really?”

“Well, we didn’t show up together, but we did leave together. I didn’t know her before that night.” Winter’s eyes go back to their annoying, narrow state. “Why do you ask?”

He lets out a sigh and rolls his shoulders back, sticking out his chest. “I’ll cut to the chase, Mr. Godric. We got a call last night about a missing person. Sierra Cross’s family put in that call and told us they were worried something had happened to her. They also told us that she’s a bit of a wild child who likes to spend her time frequenting a new club in the city ... a BDSM club that has a reputation and rumors of pretty interesting things happening behind their doors. My partner and I visited the establishment this morning and spoke to Nolan Carter, the owner. Nice guy, clearly into some freaky shit, but still nice. He was kind enough to show us surveillance footage of the night Sierra’s family says she went to the club but never came home. Upon viewing the footage, we found Sierra in the VIP section, and we saw that she left with someone. We checked with the doorman and double crossed his information with the registry on his tablet and found the name and address of the man seen leaving with Sierra. That’s you. Evan Godric. So as of right now, you’re the last person confirmed to have seen Sierra Cross alive. Can you believe that?”

He’s becoming arrogant now, watching how I’ll react to this news. Will I be shocked? Will I be terrified? Will I be nonchalant? How does a guilty man look when he learns that the cops are hot on his trail? I have four eyes staring into the depths of my soul, searching for the answers to all of those questions.

*Don’t panic. Admit to what they already know and deny anything they don’t. Don’t admit to anything they don’t have evidence for.*

I nod, agreeing with my inner voice before looking both shocked and confused. “Wow. That’s insane. I mean, I did leave the club with Sierra, and I can admit that we left with the

intention of coming back here to have sex. However, we never made it back here.”

“Is that right?” Winter asks with a voice intentionally designed to let me know he thinks I’m full of it.

“Yes, it is,” I reply. “I don’t really want to get into it with someone who clearly doesn’t like what happens at The Black Collar, but on our way here we started talking. When Sierra first approached me, I think she was a little intoxicated, but she sobered up on the drive here. We started talking about our roles and came to the conclusion that we needed to do more vetting before going forward with any scenes.”

Suddenly, Detective Monroe clears her throat and finally speaks. “You needed to do more *vetting*?”

I turn to her, surprised that she has decided to enter the chat. Her lips are beautifully full, her voice is smooth and soft, the polar opposite of Detective Winter. I don’t know why I expected her to sound as abrasive as he does, but I was wrong. She’s the night to his day. A voice like that could never play the bad cop.

“Yes,” I reply. “In the BDSM lifestyle, it’s important that we vet each other thoroughly. There are a lot of different interests out there, and anyone who has been in the lifestyle for a while knows how crucial it is to vet and make sure you’re dealing with good, trustworthy people. What Sierra and I experienced was lust at first sight, and we concluded that our experiences together would be better if we learned about each other more before engaging in a scene.”

Detective Monroe looks at me with unmoving eyes that are focused on me like I’m the only one standing with her. She scans me, looking at me from head to toe and back.

“Which of you decided there needed to be more vetting?” she asks, suddenly intensely interested in the details.

“We both did. So she either texted a friend or ordered an Uber while we were still driving,” I continue to lie confidently. “We did some minor vetting on the way, and her ride arrived just a minute or two after we did.”

“Was it a friend or an Uber?” Winter asks.

“I’m not sure. All I know is that she secured a ride.”

“Why not just turn around and take her back to the sex club?” he asks with a growing attitude.

Detective Monroe cuts her eyes over to her partner, seemingly triggered by the wording of the question the same way I am.

“We were already over halfway here when the decision was made,” I answer. “I offered to take her back myself, but she made up her mind that she’d made the wrong decision by leaving the club with me and wanted to do what was quicker. We got here around the same time as her ride, and she got out of my car and into that one.”

“Did you exchange numbers?” Winter asks.

“No. We just planned to meet at the club again at a later date.”

“And what date was that?” he goes on, prodding further, looking for holes in my story.

“This Friday,” I lie again. “We’d see each other at the club and sit down amongst other people in the lifestyle and take our time vetting. If things went well, we’d slip into one of the VIP rooms and go from there.”

Detective Winter plasters on a fake smile. “How convenient. You didn’t exchange numbers and she never stepped foot in the house.”

“It’s not convenient. It’s the truth,” I respond.

A tense moment of silence passes between the three of us before Detective Monroe asks, “How long have you been a VIP member of the club?”

“A little over a year now,” I answer truthfully because the information is verifiable.

“Have you ever seen Sierra Cross there before?” Monroe asks.

“No, but the place is fairly large and people come and go. You could frequent the club as often as I do and never notice certain people. So if she was there, I never saw her.”

The two detectives glance at each other, performing some unspoken communication that I wish I could read. Am I a suspect now? No matter what story I weave, I’m still the last person to see Sierra alive as far as they know, and I don’t know if they can verify that she actually did or didn’t call an Uber. I gave myself some leeway by saying she may have had a friend come pick her up just in case the Uber story doesn’t hold up. But even with all of that, do they still have enough to be suspicious of me? Time will tell.

“Okay, Mr. Godric,” Detective Winter says after a breath. He hands me a card with his information on it. “If you remember anything else, be sure to give me a call. We’ll come right out. In the meantime, do us a favor and don’t go far. Something tells me we’re going to be seeing each other again.”



I take the card and nod. “That’s fine with me, Detective. I have nothing to hide.”

He glares at me. “Okay.” Then he’s down the steps and walking toward their car.

“Have a good night, Evan,” Detective Monroe says as she follows her partner.

Her eyes linger longer than what’s necessary, but not in the same way Winter’s did. Monroe’s eyes aren’t suspicious. They’re curious. About what, I don’t know. But as I watch her drop into the passenger seat, the beast in me stirs.

She’s not the only one who’s curious.

## chapter **six**

“LET me get a Hennessy and Coke. Make it a double,” Trey says as he sits down at the bar at Larry’s Tavern. The blonde bartender smiles at him and nods before silently turning to me.

“I’ll take a Bud Light,” I tell her.

The lights in the place are dim, and music hums quietly like background noise of the bar. It’s a fairly small spot but it’s popular. The dance floor is its featured piece with the bar coming in a close second, with its black and purple lights illuminating the bartender. Opposite the bar are a few scattered tables where people can sit and eat delicious food from the menu, and every table is occupied tonight. It’s mostly men, as usual, but there are a few women here and there, soaking up tons of eye contact from the guys in the place who are here for a hookup of some sort with whoever is willing to give them the time of day. Trey and I make ourselves comfortable in the last two seats at the bar, and nod as a song comes on that we both recognize.

The bartender flashes a polite smile at me and scurries off to grab our drinks. When she brings them back, Trey pays for both with cash, telling her to keep the change. As she walks to the other side of the bar, I watch her go. The night is just beginning, and the beast in me is already waking up. It hasn’t been that long since the night with Sierra, but it has never

taken much time for the beast to become hungry again, which puts me in a really tough spot. The cops were just at my door last night, so this isn't the time for the beast to start growling in my ear. It will just have to wait until all of this blows over. I can make it wait. I can.

*I can't—*

“Today was another good day at the site, Evan,” Trey says, cutting off my thoughts at just the right time. “I’ve been watching you lately, bro, and you’ve turned it around since the incident with the fire blocks.”

“Yeah? Thanks for noticing,” I reply, lifting my beer to my lips. “I’ll do whatever it takes to keep Cain off my back.”

Trey sips his cocktail. “I feel you. Out of all the people they could’ve promoted to project manager, it just had to be the biggest asshole at the company. Lane Contracting is a trip. Not to toot my own horn, but that job should’ve been mine. We’d be ahead of schedule right now, I’ll tell you that.”

“I’m sure you’re right,” I answer. “Cain spends so much time trying to talk to people that he doesn’t realize he’s slowing down his project.”

“But if *you* get caught doing anything other than your *exact* job he’s ready to blow a gasket. It’s hypocritical as hell.”

“Reminds me of my mom,” I say.

My eyes drop down to the cold glass of beer in my hands as I remember my mother getting onto me about something I can’t even remember doing. All I remember is how she went from talking to me to punching me in my chest for not responding fast enough.

“Yeah? That sucks, man. Unfortunately, I had a tough mom, too. She seemed to have a problem with the fact that my

brother and I were suddenly taller than her when we became teenagers. It was like it scared her and she needed to make sure we never thought about using our size against her, which is fucking ridiculous because we're her sons. We would've never thought to raise a hand to her, but she imagined that we would and used that imaginary thing as justification for hitting us. I really caught the brunt of it when my brother moved out of the house. Something about his departure did something to her and she just started taking it up a notch. Parents don't realize that kids don't ever forget that kind of shit. Not ever."

I nod along, agreeing with everything Trey is saying. It sucks to relate to someone in this way, but I do. I remember the day I realized I had something dark inside of me. It was after my mother had punched me in the face over and over again because I'd turned down her offer of McDonald's. I guess she thought I should've accepted or something, but we were already close to being home and I didn't want her to have to turn the truck around just to go to the restaurant. She managed to take offense, and before I could have a second thought, I felt the back of her fist slamming into my chest. She started screaming at me about having an attitude, and I ran into the house the second the car was parked to get away from her, but she followed me into my room and landed a straight right to my jaw that made my knees buckle. She kept swinging, and all I could do was cover up until it finally ended.

After she tired herself out, I watched her walk away, panting from the exercise she'd just given herself. As she turned to leave, I started to imagine how satisfying it would be to retaliate and watch her bleed the way she'd just made me bleed. I thought of punching her and watching her skin bruise before my eyes. I thought of choking her, witnessing her face change colors until she stopped moving altogether, and a voice

was born inside of me that told me to do it. It told me how much it wanted to hurt her, and it took every ounce of my strength to ignore that voice. Over time, and after I ran away from my mother's house of horrors, that voice developed into sadism and led me down the path of BDSM. If I didn't hate my mother so much, I would thank her, because the voice is the beast in me. Although it scares me sometimes and takes things too far, I love it.

"Earth to Evan," Trey says, slicing through my thoughts. "You good, man?"

"Oh, yeah I'm good. Sorry. I get trapped in my own thoughts sometimes."

"You're an interesting dude, Evan," he says. "I don't think I know enough about you. Tell me a little about yourself. What do you like to do for fun?"

*Tie submissives up and do whatever it takes to make their skin change colors.*

"Umm, nothing too crazy," I reply, ignoring the beast. "I'm a homebody. Usually pretty introverted. I like movies and good shows. Music. I like to read books sometimes—mostly Nasir Booker, Pepper Winters, Sierra Simone, or Isabel Lucero. I'm pretty quiet. I guess you can blame my mother for that."

Trey nods, taking another swig of his drink. "Okay, so you're probably smarter than most of the people we work with. You dating anybody?"

I press my lips into a thin line, shaking my head. "Nah, not at the moment."

"For real? Why not? You're a good looking dude. I caught two women looking at you as soon as we walked in here. If

you went out more I bet you'd clean up. In fact, there's a woman sitting at that table behind you that has been staring since we walked in."

"Is that right?" I chuckle as I turn around to find who Trey is referring to.

I scan a few tables that are filled with men before finding one that has two women. One is a blonde who has her back to me, and the other is a brunette with full lips and hair past her shoulders. She has a dimple in her chin and a starry gaze in her eyes as she stares right at me with one eyebrow raised. Her hair cascades down the left side of her chest as she leans back in her seat, all confidence. We make eye contact and my breath catches in my throat. I spin back around, but a trap door opens beneath my barstool and I feel myself falling through the floor in terror.

"Don't be so obvious, bro," Trey says, but his voice sounds distant. I can barely hear him through the sound of blood rushing through my ears. "Man, she's been staring *so* hard. She's probably just waiting for me to go to the bathroom or something so she can come over here and talk to you. Hell, she's *still* watching you. Damn ... Evan, you good?"

I swallow hard, trying my best not to make it obvious that I'm freaking out.

"Yeah, yeah I'm fine. I'm good—could probably use another drink." I flag down the bartender and order another beer, gulping down half of it the second it hits my hands.

"Cool, well luckily for you, I actually do have to take a piss," Trey says.

My head snaps over to him. "What? No. Don't leave right now."

Trey smiles, taking my panic for innocent anxiety. “Relax, bro. Let’s just see if she comes to talk to you. You’ve gotta let your guard down, Evan. Have a little fun. Enjoy life. I’ll go and come right back. If she comes to talk to you, I’ll fall back and let you do your thing. If not, I’ll sit back down and we’ll have a couple more drinks before we call it a night. Nothing to it. Cool?”

I shake my head, my eyes wide. “I don’t know, man. Maybe we should just go.”

“Wow, you are wound tight as fuck. Look, if you wanna leave, we can. But I gotta go pee first. So just chill here for a second and I’ll be right back.”

“Trey,” I whisper, but he’s out of his seat and patting me on the back as he walks behind me on his way to find the bathroom.

I don’t turn around. I don’t want to make eye contact with her again, and most definitely don’t want her coming over here to talk to me. Maybe I should just leave right now. Trey and I drove in separate cars, so it’s not like I’d be leaving him without a ride. I could explain when we’re back at work tomorrow. I could say I had a stomach bug or something. He’d understand. Yeah, that’s it. I’m going to go while he’s in the bathroom and deal with the rest later. I’m going. I chug the rest of my beer and start to get out of my seat.

“You’re not leaving, are you?” a soft, sultry voice asks from behind me.

I freeze, my skin suddenly rigid as the hair on my neck stands and my heart pumps with fear and adrenaline. It takes a moment for my brain to remember how to tell my body to move again, and when I manage to turn around, I’m greeted with a beautiful grinning face.

“Nice to see you again, Mr. Godric,” she says, something wicked in her gaze.

“Yeah?” I reply. “I’m not sure how I feel seeing you again, Detective Monroe.”

Her smile reaches her eyes as she takes Trey’s seat.

“I’m not here for work, Evan,” she says. “So just call me Journey.”



## chapter **seven**

THERE'S no way this is a coincidence. The same detective that was just at my door last night is now at the exact bar Trey and I decided to go to on a whim after work today. The only way this is possible is if I'm being followed. The cops must be monitoring my house or something, and I now have every reason in the world to be paranoid. What the hell did I let the beast get me into, and how am I going to get myself out of it?

“So I'm being followed now?” I ask as Detective Monroe—Journey—makes herself comfortable in Trey's seat.

She lifts his almost finished cocktail and smells it before putting it back down. “No one is following you,” she answers. “Believe it or not, I just so happened to be here when you and your friend walked in. It was pure happenstance.”

She shifts on the barstool and I get a whiff of her fragrant perfume. The smell of it makes the beast in me stir, running to the front of its cage to see exactly what's going on. I feel it and have to swallow hard to steady myself.

“I doubt that,” I say, remaining focused. “There's not that much coincidence in the world, Detective.”

“Journey,” she says before stabbing the air with her finger to get the bartender's attention. “Long Island Iced Tea, please.” The blonde behind the bar nods and gets to work on

the order. “I could understand why you wouldn’t believe me, but I’m telling you the truth. Plus, there’s no way I’d be following a suspect without my partner.”

“So I *am* a suspect?”

“Not that I want to get into it, but the fact that we showed up at your front door should tell you that you are. But if your story from last night is true, you’re innocent. You never even made it inside your house with Sierra. She hailed someone to come pick her up and no one has seen her since. It’s all just bad luck for you, right?”

Hearing her say it out loud makes me realize how unbelievable my story sounds. At first, I felt like I was saying all the right things. It felt like I was coming up with the perfect fairytale to keep the cops off my back, but it’s clear it didn’t work and I have *plenty* to worry about. But if that’s true and the cops are onto me, why is she talking to me right now? This has to be against some sort of protocol.

“Aren’t there rules against you talking about an open investigation?” I ask, looking over my shoulder to see if Trey is coming so we can get the heck out of here.

“Of course, which is why I don’t want to talk about it,” she answers as the bartender places her drink down.

Journey immediately sticks the straw in her mouth and sucks down a quarter of the liquid. Her confidence is through the roof, and she doesn’t seem anything like the version of her that stood on my porch. Before, she was rigid and seemed uncomfortable. Now she’s loose and ... flirty?

“Well, if it’s not to talk about the missing girl, then why did you come over here?” I ask out of true curiosity.

Journey uses her hand to swipe her thick hair over her shoulder, sending it careening down her back and giving me a clear shot of her profile. I was too terrified to notice it yesterday, but she's truly beautiful—gorgeous, even. There's an intensity about her that draws me in, something in her demeanor that makes the beast in me growl with desire. I can practically hear snarling in my head as I look at her, ready to devour her the first chance I get. I can't put my finger on it, but something in her calls to the thing in me. It's like a song playing low in the background that makes me want to stop and listen because I think I might like it. I want to turn it up and enjoy it fully.

She turns to look at me and her gaze makes me stop breathing. Nothing in my body works except for my eyes. The bar fades into blackness and she's all I see. I stare at her and the beast rams its cage, ready to break free and feed again.

"Nothing in particular," she says. "I just thought I'd get to know you better."

I frown. "Yeah, I bet."

"So you're a Dom," she says, nearly sending me reeling.

I furrow my brow, unsure of how to answer because this is a detail that shouldn't have any bearing on her investigation about Sierra. Is she messing with me?

After pausing to narrow my eyes and think, I decide to answer. "I am."

She nods. "For how long?"

"A while."

"A real one or a fake one?"

"What do you mean?"

She chuckles. “You don’t know? Come on, Evan, I thought you said you were a Dom. Surely you know there are tons of guys out there that claim to be Doms but are actually just faking it to put themselves in a position to abuse women. You’ve never heard the term fake Dom before?”

I nod my head but I feel totally knocked off center. Where is all of this going?

“Of course I have,” I reply. “I’m not a fake Dom. I’m as real as it gets.”

“Oh?” she says as she turns to look at me with an eyebrow raised, an expression that is quickly growing on me. “What are your kinks?”

My eyes bulge. “Are you kidding?”

“No. Why would I be?” she answers nonchalantly, as if this line of questioning isn’t completely inappropriate.

“You’re a cop,” I remind her. “And you’re investigating me. What the heck is going on? What does any of this have to do with anything?”

Journey turns her body until she’s facing me. She bites her lip before licking it, sending the beast in me into a frenzy.

“I’m not asking you questions because of the investigation, Evan,” she says, looking me directly in the eyes. “I’m asking you questions because I want to know the answers. For myself.”

I take a second to let her words sink in before I lean back to put some distance between our faces, then I laugh.

“Are you trying to act like you’re into me? Is that what’s going on here?” I ask between chuckles. When Journey doesn’t laugh with me or even move, I keep going. “Is this

some sort of police tactic? You're messing with my head, right? Talking to me about things that I have genuine interest in so that I'll get comfortable and make a mistake you can pounce on. Come on, Detective. Surely you can do better than this."

Detective Monroe's mouth slowly lifts into a beautiful smile that nearly knocks me off my seat. She glances down at the floor, clearly in her head about something, before looking up at me again.

"You know, Evan," she begins. "When my partner and I showed up at The Black Collar to go through the security footage, I knew you looked familiar the second I saw you."

I instantly stop laughing. "Familiar?"

"Yeah, I knew I'd seen you before. Multiple times actually."

The room suddenly feels like we're descending into the ocean with no gear on. I'm both drowning and being crushed from the pressure.

"What are you talking about? Where have you seen me before?" I ask.

The smile slowly melts away, but it's replaced with a look of desire.

"At The Black Collar," she answers with her eyes locked on mine.

I tilt my head in confusion as my heart hammers. "You've seen me ... you go to The Black Collar?"

"Mm-hmm," she says. "All the time."

"For what?" I blurt out, shocked by this revelation.

“What do you think?” she shoots back quickly.

My world starts to spin, because there is no way this is real. Detective Journey Monroe goes to The Black Collar? When I think about the way she presented herself to me yesterday, I can’t imagine her going to a place like that except if she was there to arrest someone. Seeing her now ... could she really have been there at the same time as me? Which room did she see me in, and what was she doing there? Watching? Participating? Who was she there with? Is she a Domme, submissive, or switch? This can’t be real, right?

As my mind twirls into a cyclone of confusion, I see Trey in my peripheral vision. He’s walking over to us, returning from his trip to the bathroom, and the second he looks up he pauses. A smile stretches across his face as he looks at Journey sitting next to me, but I widen my eyes to let him know that everything is not what it seems. He frowns and lifts his hands as if asking what I’m talking about, but Journey catches my wandering gaze and turns around. Trey drops his hands quickly, but she has already seen him and starts to stand up.

“I see your friend is coming back,” she says, getting to her feet. “I’ll let you boys have your guy time, but when’s the next time you plan on going to The Black Collar?”

I shake my head enthusiastically. “I’m *not* planning on it. Not after you and your partner showed up on my doorstep and accused me of having something to do with a missing girl.”

Journey shrugs as she giggles and turns on her heel. “Hmm. I wouldn’t let that stop me.” She gestures toward the friend she’d left at the table, and the two of them walk out of the bar as Trey comes back and reclaims his seat.

“I couldn’t understand whatever you were trying to tell me. I can’t believe she actually came over,” he says with a

proud smile. “So how did it go?”

I watch the door shut as Journey walks out of it, and I’m filled from head to toe with confusion. A million questions take flight in my mind like a flock of birds, and I can barely see straight. What just happened?

“Honestly, man,” I say to Trey. “I don’t even know.”

# chapter eight

WHAT AM I DOING? This is a terrible idea.

It doesn't matter that I've had a hard week on the job site. I shouldn't let the fact that Cain is a mean, arrogant, prick be the reason that I do something this stupid. The fact that Detective Monroe acted as though the investigation isn't a big deal shouldn't have any bearing on my decision. There are no excuses. I should not be doing what I'm about to do ... yet here I am.

I stand in front of the mirror in my bathroom staring at myself, wondering how I look in my black pants and matching blazer. My hair is combed and I used electric trimmers to line up my beard and trim it down a bit so that it looks neater. I'm dressed and ready to impress at the club that has never failed to satisfy the darkest part of me, but I shouldn't be. I should know better, but the beast is clawing at its prison door and I'm having a hard time keeping it closed. What the hell has gotten into me lately?

There's no way this isn't a setup. In what world would a detective also be a submissive who's interested in the man she's investigating? This isn't some fantasy. This is real life, and when the cops are hot on your trail like this, you move with more caution, not less. This is a trap. Journey ... Detective Monroe is tricking me, and I'd be an idiot to allow



myself to fall for it when I already see it for what it is. She's luring me in, weaving a web so that I can save them some investigative trouble by ensnaring myself. They want me to place my own foot in the bear trap. Well I'm not going to do it. If they want to catch me, they're going to have to do it on their own.

I let out a long exhale as I snatch off my blazer and toss it onto the bed. I'm not going to the club. There are probably already ten detectives out there scoping the place out for their little sting operation, and I wish I could see the look on their faces when I don't show up to give them what they want. I bet they're going to feel like idiots. The joke is on you, Detective Monroe. Nice try.

I sit down on my couch with a cold beer and chug over half it, doing my best to destress. The tension in my body is almost painful and my mind feels clouded. It's not until I'm two beers in that I realize how important it is for me to let off steam, because sitting in this house all alone feels like torture. The room tilts from the beer buzz, and the beast in me is manic. It wants out. It needs it. I need it, because letting it out isn't something I do because I want to. I have to give it freedom every now and then or I'll explode. The pressure can become too much and I don't know what the result would be, but I feel like it'd be very bad—something violent. Sadistic. Brutal.

*Beautiful.*

The voice in my head is clearer than normal. On most days, it's in the distance like a train whistle you can hear from miles away. I can easily ignore it as I go throughout my days. Now it's up close and personal like a conversation with my reflection in the mirror. Impossible to ignore.

*Let's go play.*

No, I won't listen. It's too dangerous. My life is at stake. How could I feed my desires if I'm locked in a prison?

*She wants me. She needs me to guide her. She's the submissive I've always wanted. She wants me to show her who I really am. She wants my caressing touch and brutal strength. She wants all the bad parts because she's a bad girl. That's why she was asking about my kinks.*

No, she was asking about my kinks because she's tricking me. It's a trap.

*That's not true and I know it. No detective would risk her career this way. What cop would willingly go to a BDSM club regularly?*

Exactly. A normal cop wouldn't do that, which is how I know this is a setup.

*All I really know is that there are a bunch of questions that I'll never have the answers to unless I go find out. She's probably there right now, patiently waiting for me to show up. She wants to be used. She desires abuse. She was vetting me at the bar. She wants to learn about me and allow me to be her Dominant. I could smell the hunger for it wafting off of her. It's the truth and denying it will only make things worse. My needs can't be caged forever. Time is running out. Stop holding back. Let's go play!*

“Shut up!” I scream to myself, suddenly happy that I'm alone. “I can't give in. I'll never forget what happened last time.”

*That's the best part. It was unforgettable. It will live in my memory forever as a highlight. The feeling of being deep inside of her while tugging on the belt, feeling it dig into her*

*flesh while I burrowed myself inside of her. I bet she came as she died. My god. It was the ultimate rush—the greatest high I could ever achieve. I want it again.*

“No. What is this? I’m not a murderer.”

*Of course not. I just want to take control. I want a submissive who is so committed that she’s willing to let me do anything I desire. I want to turn her skin red, black and blue and purple. I want her to depend on me for air. I want her to breathe when I say, move when I say, cry when I say, come when I say. I want a submissive who belongs to me in every way, and I want it to be her.*

She’s a cop.

*And I want her. Go to the club.*

No.

*Go to the club.*

“No.”

*Go to the fucking club!*

---

“EVAN GODRIC.”

The doorman at The Black Collar looks at me with suspicion, narrowing his eyes before going to his tablet. I know he’s thinking about the fact that two detectives were here looking at this exact tablet, searching for my name and information to use in their investigation. They may not have told him exactly why they needed my info, but two cops asking questions never looks good.

The doorman nods, pursing his lips as he moves the black rope to let me pass. I flash a brief smile as I step past him and enter the building that is blaring music as usual. The lights flash with each beat of the bass, and I'm well aware of the bodies floating down the hall, moving from room to room in search of their greatest pleasures. I, on the other hand, am only looking for Detective Monroe. Is she really here? Which room in this club would an undercover detective plant herself in while waiting for a suspect to arrive? Which area of The Black Collar is the trap set in?

I can't believe I'm here. I tried as hard as I could to ignore the voice in my head screaming for me to come, but it was just too loud. I should've known better than to drink. Alcohol turns up the volume in my mind and all I hear is dark, kinky thoughts that become overbearing before too long. I tried to unwind and ended up doing the exact thing I should've avoided. I guess it doesn't matter now. I'm here, and who knows what's about to happen?

When I approached the building from outside, I scoped out the area like a sniper setting up camp. I stayed quiet and low to the ground, looking absolutely ridiculous as people walked past me to get in line, but I didn't care. I needed to see if there was a conspicuous looking van parked anywhere near the club. I searched for people with earpieces standing on corners while talking into their sleeves or coat lapels. Of course I saw none of that because this isn't a spy movie from the eighties, but the point is that I was on the lookout. Unfortunately, I didn't see anything, which means the trap is in here with me now.

The beers I drank before I left the house swish around in my belly and make me feel both strong and weak at the same time. Liquid courage pushes me down the hall with confidence I'm not sure is real, while fear and anxiety course through my

veins like they've been injected into me. My world vibrates with each drum beat as my heart races, the beast inside me waiting quietly for the moment I see her.

“Hey there,” a beautiful redhead says in a lustful, husky voice as I enter the impact room. Her blue eyes peer up at me, telling me that she's curious whether I'm here alone. I could have her tied to my bed tonight if I wanted to. Usually, the thought alone would send blood rushing to my cock, making it twitch with excitement. But tonight is different.

“Hey,” I reply before quickly looking past her so she knows I'm not interested. I feel her gaze linger on me as I keep walking, but I don't look back.

I keep going until I've looked inside every room before reaching the bar and dance floor. To say it's jam-packed would be a huge understatement. Bodies bounce back and forth against each other like waves crashing against the shore, and I do my best to scoot past people on my way to the bar. I find myself tangled in a group of people all trying to dance with one another—probably a polyamorous group having a good time together—and have to push through it. It's like walking through a forest before I reach the clearing and have a view of the bar. Once I have a clear line of sight, she sticks out like an angel shrouded in brilliant white light inside a room of darkness. The only problem is that this angel's halo isn't real and struggles to hide the horns beneath it. I see them and they call to the beast in me.

Detective Monroe sits at the end of the bar wearing white on white. Even seated, I can tell her pleated white tennis skirt is made to seduce. The split on the side parts, climbing up her leg and showing her upper thigh in all its glory. Journey's legs are not made of skin and bones. They're thick and luscious,

making my mouth water even from a distance. I can already picture myself biting down on her inner thigh before licking a trail to her clit. The thought alone makes me shiver.

Her top is tight, long-sleeved leather with a collar that climbs up her neck, making it look long and delectable. Her dark hair falls down her back, leaving the view of her flawless face unobstructed. She's a picture of confidence, beauty, and intimidation sitting on that barstool, which is why she's not being approached by any of the men I see gawking at her from afar. They'll look and like what they see, but she isn't what a man would expect a submissive to look like. Journey looks like a Domme, so the only men who are going out of their way to keep eye contact with her are the submissive ones or the switches. But every time her gaze meets one of theirs, she pauses a moment to read them before rolling her eyes and looking away.

The rest of them don't see it the way I do. There is nothing typical about her. She doesn't fit into any stereotypical description, but I see it. Journey is an alpha sub. Her submission is the hardest to earn because she takes no shit from anyone. She's more likely to crucify a man attempting to be her Dom before giving her consent. She doesn't play around or give anyone the impression that she's interested when she's not. She's sarcastic and probably has a sword for a tongue, sharpened to slice a man in half if he approaches her with some BS. Plus, she's a cop.

*Fuck me. I've never wanted someone more.*

I can't let this distract me. No matter what, I have to remember who she is and what she's here for. I don't even know how much of it is real. Is it possible she could be putting on an act? How could she possibly know how to give off alpha

sub vibes? This isn't something you can learn at any police academy. It has to be genuine. Right? My curiosity has reached its summit, and my feet make their way toward her without me having to think about it, because I can barely stand another second of not knowing.

When she sees me, she freezes, her gaze staying on me unlike the others. She looks me up and down, interrogating me with her eyes before meeting my gaze as I approach. My heartbeat is psychotic and I'm more nervous than ever, but I keep going, driven by pure desire to learn everything about who she really is—what she's *really* doing. She's going to try to hide it from me, but I'm going to find out what she truly wants from me.

I know she's out to get me, but when I look at her I almost don't care. I want her so much it causes physical pain. But if she's going to use BDSM to lure me into her trap, I can do the same. I can play her the same way she's trying to play me. I'll find out just how far she's willing to go. How much pain is she willing to take to haul me in? How long can she survive the beast in me before she admits what she's up to? I'll use her to feed the beast and we'll see who breaks first.

If this is all a ruse to get what she wants out of me, that's fine.

Two can play that game.

## chapter **nine**

“EXCUSE ME, ARE YOU SITTING HERE?” I ask a man who’s standing directly next to Journey. I can’t tell if he’s ordering a drink or just hanging out in this spot, but he’s not sitting on the stool, just standing so close to it that no one can sit in it. He doesn’t answer me, and I feel a rumble in my stomach.

“Hey, you sitting here?” I ask again, suddenly feeling the intense gaze of Detective Monroe as she watches me with an entertained look on her face. Something about knowing she’s watching makes me uneasy. I feel tighter, like a rubber band being pulled too far. I try to ignore it, but the pressure is building quickly. “Sir? Can I get this seat behind you?”

The man glances in my direction before sipping his drink and shifting his eyes to the dance floor, ignoring me.

*I cannot, under any circumstances, allow this motherfucker to make me look bad in front of her. He doesn't know what this moment means. He doesn't know who I am and has no idea how unimportant he is. He is an obstacle that must be moved. Nothing more. Either I act now, or I lose her respect forever.*

“Hey!” I bark, finally grabbing and keeping his attention. “What the fuck is wrong with you? You didn’t hear me trying to be polite? Are you fucking deaf? I asked you three times if I could sit here and you looked right at me but didn’t move.



Now I'm telling you. Move out of the fucking way so I can sit down."

I stare daggers into the unknown imbecile in my way, and for the briefest of moments, it looks like he might say something nasty in response. He eyes me, contemplating whether or not he wants to try his luck, but I'm six-foot-two with broad shoulders that are double the size of his. He's five-foot-eight at best, and looks like he just learned how to shave a few weeks ago and hasn't mastered it yet. In my eyes, he must see something he doesn't like because he can't maintain eye contact. He looks down at the floor before nodding.

"It's all yours, bro," he says, sliding out of the spot and meandering away.

The second he vacates the area, I sit down next to a smiling Detective Monroe.

"Somebody has an angry side," she says with a wicked grin that tells me she likes it. She's into what just happened.

"I wouldn't call it an angry side," I reply, my voice sounding much more like the beast that usually lives in my head.

"Oh? What would you call it?" she asks.

The beast and I grapple back and forth for control, and while I want to let it out I'm concerned I might say the wrong thing. There is a secret that must be kept at all costs, so I can't go too far too fast. I have to maintain some semblance of control.

"I'm not sure," I answer, sounding like myself again. "All I know is that I wanted this seat next to you."

She smiles and nods. "Well I'm glad you took it. That guy was getting on my nerves standing that close anyway. He

bumped me with his knee earlier and didn't bother to apologize."

*He was wearing a red button-up with black pants a size too small. He bumped her without an apology. I should find him later and break his fucking kneecap for touching her.*

I clear my throat, trying not to show the shock I feel at the violent thought over a woman I don't know. "Well he's gone now and it's just me and you. Evan and Journey. Or should I say Detective Monroe?"

She grins. "If you think I'm in this club, wearing *this* skirt on official police business, then you're clearly not paying attention."

I look down at her luscious thigh peeking through the slit in her skirt, and I speak before I can filter myself. "I'm *definitely* paying attention."

When our eyes meet, she has one eyebrow raised. "To what, exactly?"

I hesitate. She's testing me. Journey is a beautiful woman who I'm sure is hit on all the time, either in person or in her DMs, and if I'm right about her being an alpha sub, she can't stand when men make it obvious they're hitting on her. She wants someone who knows the right things to say—someone with confidence who doesn't sexualize her every move. A real Dominant can look at a woman wearing a tennis skirt and keep his composure. He can see the slit opening up, revealing more and more skin without struggling to keep his eyes away, or stealing glances down when he thinks she's not looking. A real Dom has control over himself at all times. I may have a beast in me that is darker than the blackest night, but I am nothing if not a real Dominant.

I keep my eyes fixed on hers. “To you,” I answer. “I see you, sitting here with that intense look in your eyes, scaring away any man in here who’s thinking about whether they should come over and talk to you. I see the look of a woman who doesn’t just give herself away. I see a woman who wants to be earned ... but I also see a detective, and it makes me wonder what you’re doing here.”

She grins, fighting to keep it from becoming a full smile before wiping it away completely. “Hmm. Maybe you are paying attention. As for what I’m doing here, I’m here looking for the same thing I always am—someone dominant enough to earn me.”

“Ah. Is that why you invited me?”

“I thought you were paying attention.” She makes a playful sad face before shrugging and lifting what looks to be a Long Island Iced Tea to her lips.

*My little alpha sub has a favorite drink.*

I have to remember that this is probably a game to her. She’s doing her job as a detective—whatever it takes to catch me slipping and give up information about the missing girl. It’s a game. We’re at war, and winning requires staying focused on the task at hand. Don’t break.

“So which of the rooms is your favorite?” I ask.

Journey puts her drink down and raises her eyebrows. “That’s a slick way to start vetting.” I grin and shrug. She continues. “Well, I think I love them all almost equally. Most people find themselves wandering into the impact room and finding out exciting new things about themselves in there. The bondage room certainly has its perks, too. But maybe the place could use the addition of ... a breath play room. Or perhaps a

forced orgasm room. Or maybe something a little more sinister for when people are feeling *extra* dark and kinky. Something like a torture room, where all of the kinks can be explored—a room only for the experienced members of the lifestyle. A place where people can dive into the darkest depths of their masochism and sadism, with pinwheels, nipple clamps, clothes pins, and maybe even a little electroshock. Personally, I think The Black Collar could benefit from a room like that. How about you?”

*Such a sly little devil, telling me what she's into without saying it.*

I don't try to fight back my grin. “It's funny you should say that,” I reply “Because I think the club would benefit from those additions as well. Especially the room for the most experienced members of the lifestyle. Some masochists are very dark. Some sadists are even darker. The typical kinks being put on display here are fine—a good starting point for people just entering the lifestyle. If it were my club, I'd put a dungeon beneath it all. The VIP fees for inclusion in the dungeon would be twice as much as the original fees. It would be soundproof so the clubbers up here couldn't hear a thing. Every crevice here would be filled with music, while every dark corner down there would be filled with pained screams and orgasmic agony that would give a normal person fucking nightmares.”

Journey sits back in her seat and eyes me suspiciously, her face blank. What did I just say? Usually, I allow the beast to have control, but somewhere in the middle of my response it came out all on its own. Now Journey is at a loss for words. She probably got exactly what she wanted out of me with that little spiel. While what I said sounded like the mind of a

sadistic Dominant, it also sounded a lot like the mind of a killer.

Is this it? Is this the moment she speaks into the collar clawing up her neck and tells the waiting officers that they can come get me because I gave them confirmation that I'm the rightful suspect? Will they burst through the door like the SWAT team or come in quietly, speaking in my ear so they don't disturb anyone else's night? I wait for the moment someone taps me on the shoulder and swiftly places my wrists in cuffs, but it doesn't come. Journey just stares at me, a sinful smile slowly forming on her lips.

"Well that sounds fun," she finally says. "You and I are a lot alike, Evan."

With my heart still hammering, I breathe a silent sigh of relief. "We are?"

"We are," she says before getting to her feet. "And if it wasn't so late, I'd stick around and learn a little more about you. But you took so long to get here that our time together will have to be cut short. I've got work in the morning."

"I almost didn't come at all," I admit.

"Why?"

"You know why."

She flashes a grin. "Hmm. Well, are you glad you came?"

"I am. Are *you* glad I came?"

Another grin. "I am. Even in this brief encounter, you are everything I hoped for when I met you at your door."

"Is that so? What exactly did you hope for when you met me?"

“Nothing that has a name,” she says. “But when you mentioned that consent was important enough for you that you changed your mind about the girl coming to your house while you were already on your way, I saw something in you. Something real. Something important to me. My partner didn’t see it because he doesn’t live this lifestyle. He didn’t go through the things I went through that made me the way I am. He doesn’t understand how different he and I really are. I can’t blame him. We only became partners when I was promoted to detective less than a month ago. There’s a lot he and I don’t know about each other, so he didn’t recognize the moment my interest became more about you than the case itself. Tonight was simply confirmation that I was right about you.”

If my heart were to beat any faster I would pass out. What is she talking about? Where is she going with this? Did she just admit that she doesn’t care about the investigation?

“I don’t understand,” I say. “What were you right about?”

Journey leans forward and places a hand on my thigh as she whispers in my ear.

“The darkness that lives inside of you,” she says. “I see it. It’s the same darkness that lives in me.”

I jolt back so I can see the look on her face, but her expression doesn’t give away whatever she’s thinking. She simply looks me in the eye and raises an eyebrow. I want to respond but my mouth can’t form any words. I’m too shocked to think straight. Even the beast is stunned into silence.

“Have a good night, Evan,” Journey says as she steps away from the bar and sets her sights on the hall leading to the exit. “I’ll see you soon.”

Before I can understand what just happened, she's gone. My brain can hardly make sense of it, but there's one thing I know for sure. Journey has my full attention.

The beast in me craves more of her. It's salivating at the thought of her, and I think it's time I let it have what it wants.

# chapter ten

I SHOULDN'T BE HERE. This is a terrible idea.

*This is exactly where I should be because this is where she is.*

Tucked in the back corner of an adjacent parking lot, I look down at the card in my hands. Detective Sam Winter, Seventh Precinct, Philadelphia Police Department. It even has his phone number on it. If I called it, I wonder if she'd be the one to answer. I decide against it. Watching the building from across the street is good enough.

I didn't want this to happen. Killing Sierra wasn't supposed to cause this ripple effect, bringing Journey into my life while I was still reeling from having accidentally strangled someone. I was supposed to be low key, quietly going about my job and life while avoiding any unnecessary attention. Trips to The Black Collar have always been enough to keep the beast fed and calm. But there's just something about Journey that makes me insane. She has forced my hand by baiting the beast, and there are some wild things that shouldn't be teased.

*"The darkness that lives inside of you, I see it. It's the same darkness that lives in me."*



The image of her sitting in front of me at the bar plays over and over in my mind like my favorite memory—dressed in all white, a devil masquerading as an angel, blending into the crowd as if she's not completely different from everyone in the room. I saw the look in her eyes when she said she recognized the darkness in me. She was serious, and I can't help but wonder if that's why I'm so drawn to her. Is it her darkness beckoning my beast? Not knowing the answer is no longer an option.

I contemplated moving Sierra's body before coming here. All of this is insane and happening so quickly that I thought it might be a good idea to get rid of the corpse before Journey and her partner come busting down my door and digging her up themselves. The only things that kept me from doing it was the insane risk of being caught and my desire to learn more about Journey. I have to know what makes her tick, because once I get her figured out, making a decision regarding Sierra will be much easier.

I sit in my truck with my eyes glued to the front doors of the Seventh Precinct, going over the chain of events that led us here. Journey and her partner come to my door with questions about the missing girl I strangled to death in my living room, and in the middle of the interview, Detective Monroe begins to show a strange sense of interest when I comment on the lifestyle and the importance of consent. She eyes me a little too closely as she steps off the porch and gets in the passenger seat of their cruiser. Next, she just happens to be at the same bar Trey and I choose to hang at, sitting behind us, watching me talk until Trey goes to the bathroom. Then she flirts and tells me I should go back to the club where I met the woman I strangled, where she sits at the bar and waits for me to arrive

before telling me she sees something dark in me—a darkness that's also in her.

She dragged me to this point against my will. She chose this, and if it's just an act, she deserves an award for it because the performance has convinced the beast in me that we're kindred spirits. Nobody acts that well. Tonight, I'm going to find out if all of this is a front.

The doors to the building have been opening and closing all night with a plethora of different people, but I haven't seen Journey or her partner go in or out. Just as I start to think I could be doing all of this for nothing, the door swings open and I recognize Detective Winter immediately. I see the angry glare and perpetually disgruntled facial expression as he steps out into the night, followed by a woman wearing black slacks and a white button-up. Her hair flows down her back, and I'm taken aback by the beauty of her smile, even from here. It's her.

I sit up in my seat and lean closer to the windshield to get a better view, watching as the two of them engage in conversation with smiles on their faces. I see the way she's dressed and it annoys me that she's not able to be herself while she's at work. Her attire is typical of what I'd expect from a detective, and I can tell her makeup is subdued—much different than the woman I saw at the club last night. I want more for her. She should be able to express herself freely, without fear of what other people may think. She deserves better.

I'm not insane. I know Journey doesn't belong to me. She's not my submissive and I'm not her Dom, but if she were mine, she wouldn't have to worry about being judged for what she likes to wear. She could be herself and she would never

have to wonder if someone was talking about her. It wouldn't matter if she belonged to me, which is exactly why she should.

*The only clue she'd have that someone whispered negatively about her would be the unconscious body on the floor that she'd have to step over.*

If only I could trust that she wasn't trying to clamp metal bracelets around my wrists.

The two detectives chuckle together, and I see the moment Detective Winter reaches out and playfully jabs her arm. She takes a step back, not wanting to be touched without consent, and I realize what's going on here. Winter likes his partner. Journey told me she'd only been promoted to detective less than a month ago, so the two of them are just getting to know each other, and it looks like Sam likes what he sees.

He says something else that he thinks is funny, laughing at his own joke as Journey takes another step back. I wonder what they're talking about. Were they digging into my background today? I bet he's leading the charge when it comes to collecting evidence against me.

*If he tries to touch her again, I'll cut his goddamn hands off and leave them on his desk for the other cops in the precinct to find in the morning.*

I do my best to shake away the intrusive thoughts telling me to blow my cover and attack Detective Winter while Journey is watching, and sit motionless as the two of them say their goodbyes and walk in separate directions. Winter's silhouette fades into the black up the road where the street lights are scarce, while Journey walks toward a half-full parking lot. She gets into a black Nissan and starts it up, and I follow her when she pulls out of the lot.

Even if it has been less than a month, I'm sure Journey is a good detective, which means she probably has an eye for cars hovering in her rearview mirror. So I don't get too close, making sure to keep at least two cars between us at all times. On the highway, two more cars slip between us and I almost miss the moment she takes the Elmwood exit. I have to slam on the brakes and swerve in front of a semi to keep up, but I manage to stay on her tail just far enough away to not be noticed.

We cruise slowly through the neighborhood until Journey makes a right into the paved driveway of a house on the corner. I park three houses down and watch as she walks up the driveway, peering over her shoulder in my direction before going inside. It's official. I know where she lives now. Should I leave? Have I seen enough to satisfy the craving that tugs the leash of my beast?

*Fuck no. I want to see more. Get closer.*

I pop open the door and make sure I'm as quiet as possible as I walk down the street. I shove my hands in my pockets and don't look left or right to avoid my face being seen by any neighbors who might feel the need to glance out the window. I keep going until I reach her driveway, looking closely to make sure she's actually in the house before approaching.

My heart races as I see the lights in the house coming on in sequence. First is the room in front, which I assume is the living room, followed by a room on the side and another next to it. I sneakily make my way between Journey's house and her neighbors', hoping neither of them is feeling paranoid. The window at the end is closed but one of the blinds is raised at the bottom, giving me a tiny sliver to look through, and I press my face against the glass to see inside.

Journey stands at the foot of a bed, her head down and her hands on her belt as she removes her gun and holster. I watch as she bends over and pushes her pants until they're down by her ankles. It makes no difference that I just saw her legs in that tennis skirt last night at The Black Collar. Seeing them bare makes my breath shudder.

*What I wouldn't give to roll a pinwheel down her flesh, creating a line of red dots, each one sprouting the tiniest droplet of blood. Her thighs would look so good with her hands resting on top of them as she kneels for me, awaiting my commands.*

Journey slips out of her pants one foot at a time, leaving nothing but black panties covering the part of her that my mouth waters for. She moves so goddamn sexy it's like she's doing it on purpose, like she knows I'm watching. I lick my lips, feeling like I can taste her already and wishing I could break the glass keeping us apart. Would that be too much too soon? My cock throbs and stiffens at the thought of climbing through the square opening as Journey's eyes find me. I imagine her watching me with a smirk on her lips as I step closer to her and take her by the throat. I already know she likes breath play from our conversation last night.

*Oh the things I would do with one hand around her throat and one between her legs.*

As I watch her moving to remove her shirt, the window frame shifts beneath my weight and lets out a resounding pop. Journey's head snaps over at the exact moment that I step backward.

"Crap," I say reactively as I realize what's happening. I'm about to get caught looking into a detective's window.

There's shuffling on the other side of the glass and I quickly try to dart out of the narrow passageway before Journey can raise the blinds and see me. Panic detonates in my chest and makes my limbs feel wobbly as I speed walk away, trying to stay quiet as I make my escape. Just as I reach the front of the house and emerge from the dark, something hard and cold taps the side of my head.

“Don't fucking move!” Journey barks.

I think to turn away from her, but the sound of the hammer being pulled back on the gun against my head makes me freeze. Instinctively, I raise my hands to show that I'm unarmed just as Journey slowly steps in front of me, her black nine millimeter pointed at my nose. When she sees my face, her eyes double in size.

“Evan?”

# chapter eleven

“WHAT THE FUCK are you doing here?”

Journey’s face is twisted into a confused scowl—her brow furrowed, eyes narrowed, and her mouth curled into a snarl. Who knew such a beautiful face could contort into something so terrifying? She keeps her gorgeous brown eyes locked onto me, gun drawn with no care for the cars that drive past us. She’s wearing shorts now, apparently having jumped into them before grabbing her gun from the holster and running through the house to catch me before I could even make it to the front yard. I didn’t realize I was moving so slowly.

I can’t believe this is happening. How do I get out of this? What is it going to take? I’ve believed that Journey was out to trick me this entire time, and I’ve just placed my own leg in her bear trap. How could I have been so stupid?

I don’t know what to say. There is no right answer so I utter the only words I can think of. They happen to be the truth, but the truth won’t set me free here. They’ll probably do the opposite.

“I wanted to see you,” I admit.

Journey is unmoved. “Are you fucking kidding me? You wanted to see me so you found out where I live and snuck

down the side of my house to peep into my bedroom window? Please tell me you're joking, or I might shoot you right now."

With my hands still raised, I shake my head. "I know it sounds insane, and I'm sure it looks even worse, but that's the truth. I just wanted to see you, and the desire was so strong that I couldn't stop myself."

"How do you know where I live?" she inquires.

I pinch my eyes shut because the question causes real pain. This is going from bad to worse.

I let out a defeated sigh. "I waited outside the Seventh Precinct and followed you here. I'm sorry."

Somehow, her eyes manage to grow wider. "You're sorry? Are you fucking kidding me? God, this is what I get for listening to the voice in my head. It's always getting me into trouble, and now I'm wondering if you really did have something to do with that missing girl, because this is not normal behavior. When I told you to come to The Black Collar, it was so I could vet you, not to give the greenlight for you to start acting weird and become a peeping Tom." She pauses, shaking her head to herself before saying, "Why can't I turn you off?"

Who is she talking to? Is she having a conversation with her own dark voice in her head right now? I understand that more than she knows, but I'm not sure if now is a good time to say it. We're the same, but I'm afraid another word could result in a muzzle flash that ends in instant darkness.

"What was that?" I force myself to ask.

"What?" she says, her brow furrowing even more.

"Who were you talking to just now when you asked that question? Why can't you turn *what* off?"



She stares at me, twisting her mouth as if she's trying to keep the words from coming out against her will.

"None of your business," she snips. "It's nothing you'd understand."

We stand in silence a moment before I make myself say, "I know how it feels. It's the reason I'm here."

She tightens her grip on the handle of the pistol. "What are you talking about? You know how *what* feels?"

"It's what you were talking about last night before you left the club," I say. "The darkness that's in you is also in me. It's like a voice in my head that I can't turn off. I'm honestly not sure if I want to. Actually, no ... I *don't* want to. The voice is my beast, and it's who I really am. It's the darkest part of me that not many people get to see because it's mean and violent. So I keep it buried while I hide behind a polite mask so that society thinks I'm just like the rest of them. But I'm not ... and I don't think you are either. I felt it when I first saw you on my porch, and I knew it for sure last night. I see you the same way you see me. You can try to turn it off but it won't work because that voice is yours. It's the real you."

She glares at me, completely unaffected by my words at first, and I wonder if she's contemplating pulling the trigger. Maybe the voice in her head is telling her to shoot me in the face. If her darkness is anything like my beast, I wouldn't be surprised.

She presses her lips together before biting her lower lip. "I don't know if what you just said was legit, but I know I can't keep you at gunpoint out here all night. Keep your hands where I can see them and get in the house. Walk slowly."

Nodding, I do as she commands, shuffling my feet from side to side until I'm in front of her door, then I backpedal over the threshold.

The inside of Journey's ranch-style home is nice and neat. Transparent white curtains hang from silver curtain rods over every window, and I can tell the kitchen is just as tidy. From here, I can make out all black appliances and cabinet doors to match. She looks very well put together, but I'll have to focus more on that later. For now, I'm trying to make sure this place doesn't become my well-kept coffin.

Journey closes the door, locking the deadbolt before turning to face me, her gun still raised and threatening. She twists her lips, glaring at me with confusion seeping from her pores. I'd give anything to know what's going through her mind. I'd cut myself open if it gave me access to her thoughts right now. Instead, I'm only allowed to look at her, wondering what her next move will be and how it'll affect me.

She nods her head, finally set on a course of action.

"I'm going to ask you some questions," she says in true cop form. "And your answers better be one hundred percent the truth or I'll say you broke in and I had to shoot you right here in my living room. Got it?"

I swallow hard to keep my heart from coming up my throat as I nod.

"Where is Sierra Cross?" she asks.

An image of blonde hair covering closed eyes at the bottom of a footlocker flashes in my mind. "I have no idea."

"Did you kill her?"

"No." I answer so confidently I almost believe it myself.

“If I find out otherwise, I won’t hesitate to throw you in jail.”

“That’s understandable. Good thing I don’t have to worry about it.”

Journey nods her head and I hope she’s convincing herself to believe me, then she asks, “What are you really doing here, Evan?”

The question motivates the beast in me, urging it to come forward because it’s the thing that led me here. The darkness in me is drawn to the black in her. I want to see it in all its glory. I want to know exactly how dark it is. I know what my beast means for me. What does hers mean for her? Just how bad is it? I must know, and the only way to find out is to let my guard down and be the beast that I am.

“I told you I wanted to see you, but that’s only partly the truth,” I start, letting the pitch black engulf me. “I wanted to see you because I’m dying to know who you really are. Not the show you put on for your friends and your partner. I’m talking about the dark part of you that you’re ashamed to show anyone. I want to know the Journey that goes to The Black Collar and sees what she likes. I want to learn about you and earn your trust. I want to be worthy of your approval. I want you to be mine. I want your consent, and with your consent I will ruin you.”

Journey looks at me without blinking, her brow still furrowed as she looks down the barrel of her service pistol with her finger on the trigger. My heart thuds in my chest as I await her reaction, and I breathe a sigh of relief when she finally relents. The muscles in her arms and shoulders relax and she lowers her weapon, holding it at her side as her eyes move from me to the floor. Her face morphs through five

different facial expressions before she looks at me again, and I see resolve in her gaze.

“There’s something different about you,” she says. “Something that draws me to you, and I want to know what it is. But I need you to know that I’m not a normal girl, Evan. You need to understand that. My past is dark.”

“So is mine,” I reply. “My past is pitch black, which is why my present is as dark as my future will be.”

She nods again, taking in my words. “Okay. Then tell me what you want me to do.”

I exhale, both in relief and because I can finally let the beast completely out of its cage. In my mind I remove the lock and the door explodes open, breaking its hinges as the beast comes roaring out to take full control. No more masks. No more holding back. No more being what society wants. This is the real me. A fucking monster.

“Are you into gun play?”

# chapter twelve

THE CORNER of Journey's mouth curls into a smirk she tries to keep me from seeing but she's too slow.

"I don't know," she answers. "I've never done it before. It could be interesting. What'd you have in mind?"

"A trust building exercise," I reply, ready to pounce. I want to get that gun out of her hands for more reasons than one. "I need to know if I have your consent right now. We've done some vetting, stating what we like in our own little way, but now the moment is real. We don't really know or trust each other, and we both have reasons not to. But now is our chance to dive into it. I know I crossed the line by following you here and you have every right to wonder what the fuck is wrong with me, but you feel our connection the same way I do. So this is it. Right here, right now, I need your consent. Let me earn your trust, Journey. Let me guide you. Submit to me and I'll show you why you were always meant to."

The smirk on her face can no longer be hidden. There, in the depths of her smile, I see the thing that calls to me. I see the kinky side of her that she hides. I see her desires. I see how the idea of gunplay doesn't scare her. It turns her on. And that's how I know that what's about to happen is more than just a casual scene. This is fate.

“Alright, Evan,” she says, her body suddenly more loose. “Here’s your chance to prove yourself. You want my consent? You’ve got it. How may I please you, Sir?”

A beehive of kinky thoughts explodes in my mind and it takes everything in me not to run over to her and start wreaking havoc. This is our first scene together, and I need to make sure it’s the most perfect scene she has ever experienced. I have to engrave myself in her mind. I have to brand her so she knows there isn’t anything out there better than what I give her here. So I take a calming breath and move slowly, one foot in front of the other until I’m standing directly in front of her.

“Give me the gun,” I demand as I slowly reach for it. “Do you trust me?”

Hesitantly, she nods. “Yes, Sir.”

I smile. “Good.”

I take the gun from Journey and check to see if it’s loaded, ejecting the clip and finding that it’s full before shoving it back in. I make sure there’s a round in the chamber and that the safety is off. The only way to build trust is through true danger. The gun’s safety feature is not her haven. It’s not her sanctuary. I am.

She watches me take off the safety but doesn’t say anything. Journey dives into her submissive role silently, watching me with intent eyes that tell me she’s waiting for the slightest slip up. She’s an alpha sub to the fullest. Her respect and consent will be earned through blood, and I’m willing to shed it for her.

Once I’m happy with the state of the weapon, I make a decision in my mind that will guide the rest of our scene. I no longer have fingers on my right hand. There is only the gun.

“Now, do yourself a favor and don’t move. Keep your eyes on mine,” I command as I slide the barrel of the weapon across her neck before dragging it downward until it reaches the top button of her shirt. I use my left hand to unfasten each button, slowly dragging the cold metal down until each button is undone, then I use the barrel to open her shirt completely.

Journey listens well, not moving a muscle while keeping her eyes glued to mine. Shuddering breaths escape her mouth when the metal touches a new spot on her body and it makes me want to do more. I love the sound of nervous pleasure coming from her lips. Tonight is not about pain. I have no plans for impact play or anything else that will hurt her. I simply want to feed on her fear, consuming it all until there’s nothing left but trust.

I put my finger on the trigger and slide the gun’s barrel beneath the waistband on her shorts, then slip my hand down between her legs. She sucks in a breath as I tease her bellybutton with the side of the cold pistol.

“How does it feel?” I ask, looking her in the eyes and finding nothing but lust there.

“Cold,” she admits. “Dangerous.”

I smile as I rub her clit with my index finger. “Not the gun. This. How does this feel?”

She licks her lips. “Good. Very good.”

“Does the gun make you nervous?”

“A little.”

I shake my head. “That means you don’t trust me yet. It’s understandable but still disappointing. I need you to listen closely. We’re going to establish a safe word. You’ve been in the lifestyle for a while now so I shouldn’t have to explain

what a safe word is to you. Your word for me to stop is ... arrest. It's fitting considering how we met. If you say this word, everything stops immediately with absolutely no shame or judgment. I may be a beast on the inside, but I believe in the tenets of BDSM and would never betray what it means to be a Dominant. Now what's the safe word, Journey?"

Fighting back a smile, she answers, "Arrest."

"Good girl," I praise with a nod and smile. "Now don't forget it, because who knows how far I'd be willing to go."

"The real question, Evan, is how far am I willing to go?"

We lock eyes as her words turn to fog and engulf us both. I find myself both turned on and terrified by the statement because I don't know what she means. Is she talking about BDSM or the investigation into Sierra Cross? The unknown keeps me on the edge of my seat and prods me forward, filling my stomach with a craving I've never known before. I want to tear this woman apart and I fucking intend to.

"We'll find out, won't we?" I ask rhetorically, to which Journey only smiles like the devil herself. I smile back, but it doesn't linger. "I want you down on your fucking knees. Right now ... Detective."

She flashes another grin before licking her lips. "Mmm. Yes, Sir."

Journey slowly lowers herself to her knees and looks up at me, her brown, doe eyes making my cock throb in my pants. She's so beautiful it's almost distracting. Her mouth is so gorgeous I can't resist it, and she knows it. Journey isn't naive. She's a woman, which means she's both brilliant and cunning. She knows the things she does have an effect, so when she gazes up at me with that pouty mouth and those deceptively



innocent eyes, she knows my cock aches for her. She knows it makes me a madman and that's the true test of a Dominant. Giving in to that look doesn't make this sexier, it ruins the moment. She wants to look that way, she wants me to see it, and she wants me to react the way a Dominant is supposed to —with poise, control, and ruthlessness.

“God, you're so fucking stunning,” I admit aloud because I can't help it any longer. The words tumble out of my mouth on their own. “Your mouth is flawless, the shape of your face is a work of art, the look in your eyes is breathtaking, and those lips steal my sense of composure ... but my god would you look unreal with my cock in your mouth. Open it for me. Let me see.”

Journey's breath hitches before she answers, “Yes, Sir,” and lets her mouth drop open. A string of saliva hangs from the top of her mouth to the bottom, teasing me, inviting me in.

“Fuck,” I exclaim as quietly as I can manage. “Keep it open.”

She nods as I step closer and drop my pants down to my ankles, stepping out and kicking them and my shoes to the side as her eyes find my thickness and stay there. I see the look of joy on her face knowing what I'm about to give her is thick, long, and hard. It's going to stretch her mouth and pussy before this night is done, and I see her salivating with anticipation. My little demon loves a thick cock. Perfect.

I let my dick hover in front of her mouth because she's not the only one who can tease. I offer it only inches away from her lips, but she's forced to stay put and obey the rules of submission just as much as I must obey the rules of Dominance. Just like me, Journey doesn't give in either. Her

face fills with longing that she doesn't allow herself to succumb to, which is why I reward her with what she wants.

“Open wide, little devil,” I tell her.

She smiles and obeys, granting me access to her perfect mouth. I place my left hand on the back of her head and use the gun beneath her chin to keep her in place while I fuck her mouth. I use long strokes—all the way in, all the way out—and each one pulls a moan from my throat. She feels better than I imagined she would, which is really saying something. I knew she'd be incredible, but Journey is miles beyond that. I moan without meaning to and find myself thrusting into her mouth like it's a pussy. I fuck her face, slamming into her as drool falls to the floor and strings into her lap, but she never wavers. Journey proves herself by staying put with her mouth open, moaning between gags, pleasantly taking my dick and embracing her role as my personal sex toy. If I wasn't desperate to fuck her pussy I would explode all over her face and force her to sit in the corner until the cum on her face dried. I'll save that for another day. Today, my plans can't be changed.

In one motion, I push myself as deep as Journey's gag reflex will allow me to go before pulling all the way out. She gags one last time before gasping for air beneath me, her eyes watering and her shorts covered in her own spit.

“God, look at you,” I say, scanning her face in awe. “You're a filthy, beautiful, disgusting mess ... so perfect I can barely stand it.”

She smiles, basking in the praise-degradation hybrid. “Thank you, Sir. How else may I please you?”

Oh my fucking god. In all my years spent performing in scenes and using submissives, I've never had someone ask me

how they can please me. It may just be the hottest question I've ever heard. Where the fuck has this woman been all my life? Hiding away in some police department? She has been hunting down criminals when she should've been running from me, allowing me to hunt her down like the animal I am.

“Fuck. You want to please me, little devil? Get over here,” I reach down and grab Journey by the throat, lifting her to her feet and guiding her over to the couch. I lift the gun and press the barrel against the side of her face, forcing her head to turn before the rest of her body follows. “Put your knees on the couch and bend over. I'll show you how you please me.”

Journey does as she is commanded, bending over on the couch and automatically poking her ass out toward me, arching her back so much I have to bite my lip not to exclaim my astonishment. Once she's settled, she looks back at me.

“Like this, Sir?” she asks, the usual commanding presence in her voice suddenly replaced by an airy innocence I want nothing more than to shatter.

“Just like that, little devil. You make me so proud. Do you want my cock inside of you?” I ask before placing the gun down in the middle of her back, where it wobbles back and forth but doesn't fall off.

“Do you have a condom?” she asks.

“Yes. Do you want me to use it?”

She hesitates for a beat. “You're clean, right?”

“Yes. One hundred percent. And you?”

“One hundred percent.”

“Even though we're both clean, I'll still wear one if you ask me to.”

She pauses again, then says, “I want to feel you, Evan. All of you. Can I please have your cock inside of me?” she begs.

Jesus fucking Christ.

“Say it again,” I demand, needing to hear her beg me more.

“Please, Sir. I’m desperate. Can I *please* have your dick deep inside of me?”

“Fuck,” I say in a growl before lifting my shirt off over my head and sliding myself as far inside of Journey’s pussy as humanly possible.

Both of us let out loud moans that rise to the ceiling and slither away as I begin fucking her pussy the same way I fucked her mouth. Long, thunderous strokes pound in and out, shaking the gun so much I’m sure it will drop to the floor and go off. I don’t even care. Danger makes the sex better. All that matters is how I fuck Journey.

A memory of pulling on the belt wrapped around Sierra’s neck flashes behind my eyes, but I push it away. I let the beast do as it pleases, fisting Journey’s hair and yanking her head back as I fuck her without caring for her safety. I fuck her hard, growling with each stroke as her screams threaten to blow the roof off the house. I fuck until my knees wobble and my arms burn from pulling her hair so hard, until my breath is labored and I see stars at the edge of my vision. I fuck Journey with everything I’ve got, determined to be at the forefront of her memory forever, and just when I feel myself on the verge of an orgasm, I stop.

Panting, I lift the gun off Journey’s back and force it into her quivering hand.

“Take it,” I tell her. “I want you to press the cold metal against your clit and keep it there while I fuck you. Rub yourself with it, but be sure to keep your finger off the trigger, little devil. You don’t want to have an accident. Do it now.”

She swallows hard, looking at the gun in a new way. She has handled this pistol a thousand times, but never like this. Good. I like being her first.

“Do it,” I say again, repositioning myself behind her.

“Yes, Sir,” she replies.

I watch her spin the gun around until she’s gripping just the handle before bending over and sliding it between her legs. As soon as the weapon is in place, I start fucking her again.

I take my time at first, giving Journey a minute to get used to the hard metal being in a place it shouldn’t be. Once her body relaxes and her muscles unclench, I turn up the volume. I don’t pound into her the same way, but I keep my strokes long, deep, and in rhythm.

“Rub your clit with it,” I tell her.

With hesitance, she does as she’s told. She starts slowly, but it doesn’t take long before I feel her picking up the pace. She presses the barrel against herself harder as I keep pace with her motions. I listen to her breathing for the clue that she’s reaching the destination I want her to, and I don’t dare stop. The muscles in her legs tighten and her toes curl as her breaths become deep and drawn out.

“That’s it, my little devil,” I say, knowing what’s coming. “Give in to it.”

“Oh god, I’m actually going to ... Sir, can I please come?” she begs, her voice ragged. I know she’s already on the edge

and probably in the process of tumbling into orgasmic bliss, so I don't deny her. Plus, I want it just as much as she does.

"Give it to me, baby. Come all over my cock. Soak me," I say as I keep my pace even and my strokes deep.

Journey collapses into an orgasm that folds her in half. Her back rounds out as she goes into beautiful convulsions with her toes clenched. The moan she lets out is so sexy that it sends me over the edge without warning.

"Oh fuck," I bark in total shock.

It hits me like a bullet I never saw coming and I have to act fast. I snatch the gun out of Journey's hand and place it on her ass just as I pull out and fist my cock. It explodes with thick strands of cum that shoot out and land both on her ass and the side of the gun, coating the handle and barrel.

My orgasm takes everything out of me, and I slide down onto the floor as Journey does the same. I carefully set the gun on the floor, and we end up next to each other, both of us out of breath and exhausted—exactly the way it should be. A moment later, once we've caught our breath, Journey looks over at me and smiles.

"I guess I was right about you," she says proudly.

"Mmm. Is that right?" I question.

"Oh, yeah. As much as I've been trying to turn off the masochistic voice in my head, I know it was right when it said you were the one. I felt it in my gut, and from the moment I met you I haven't been able to ignore that voice. It was right. You're just like me. Not just sadistic and kinky, but dark and twisted—wanting things that would scare regular people. Normal people aren't into gun play. Not even normal Doms like to go *that* far—fucking with a gun off safety when the

wrong move could result in someone being shot. It's incredibly dangerous ... and incomparably hot. Only someone as dark as me would recognize that. It makes me anxious to learn more about you."

I grin, feeling like I've won the evening when it started so badly.

"I guess that means you forgive me for following you," I joke before breathing a sigh of relief when she giggles.

"That wasn't normal either, which is probably why it makes sense to me. Yes, Sir, you've earned your forgiveness."

"Good. Speaking of the gun, don't wipe it off," I say seriously.

"What?"

"Let my cum dry on it and take it work. I like the idea of my cum being with you all day."

Journey's smile could light up the dark side of the moon. "Yes, Sir. So, does this mean we're together? Now that you're officially my Dom?"

I shake my head as I slide down until I can rest the back of my head against the couch cushion.

"I'm definitely your Dom and you're my submissive little devil," I say, looking over at her. "But this is just the beginning."

"What do you mean?"

"This was a great way to kick things off," I say. "But there's more in store. I'm not done earning you yet."

Her smile doesn't fade away, and when her eyes meet mine and linger there, I know I've got her right where I want her.

the beast



# chapter **thirteen**

MY PHONE VIBRATES in my pocket and I remove my finger from the trigger of the reciprocating saw in my hands. It shuts off, the loud whirring noise giving way to the rhythmic beat of hammers coming from the growing building in front of me. I set the saw down on top of a stack of plywood and pull my phone from my pocket. When I see the text, a sneaky smile forms on my mouth because this is the first time I've ever gotten a text from Journey.

After the incredible scene we had at her place last night, we exchanged numbers before I left and promised to communicate today even though both of us had to work. Admittedly, I wanted to reach out to her first thing this morning when I woke up. My body was still exhilarated from what we did in her living room, and my dick was hard from just thinking about her, but I forced myself not to be the one to reach out first. I didn't want to interrupt her morning process, plus I had my own crap to get together as I walked through the house ignoring the anxious feeling in my gut that keeps telling me to move Sierra's body from my property. I had to stay focused and get out of there, so I put my energy into making sure I made it to work on time. I showed up, endured Cain's overly aggressive bitch session that doubled as a safety briefing, and made my way to my station to work on today's list of interior construction for this project. It looks like

Journey thinks it has been long enough since we last spoke, and I agree.

**JOURNEY:** *Good morning, Sir. I have something I'd like to show you. Is it okay?*

JUST SEEING the way she stays in her role as my submissive makes my mouth smirk and my cock twitch. What could possibly beat being called Sir even when we're not in an intimate setting? While we still have rules we need to go over to lay out exactly how our particular D/s dynamic will be carried out, it's clear that Journey wants it to be twenty-four-seven. Some people in the lifestyle are only interested in immersing themselves into their roles in the bedroom. They don't want to be treated like a submissive around their friends or in front of their children, so they're only submissive behind closed doors. To each their own, because there certainly isn't one way to live the lifestyle, but I love it when my partner wants to be full-on.

**ME:** *Good morning, my little devil. I thought about you so much this morning. How did you sleep?*

AS THE TINY, gray bubbles pop up on the bottom of our text thread, I take a seat on the stack of plywood and focus solely on my phone, paying no attention to the construction going on around me. My entire world zooms in on the screen like tunnel vision.

**JOURNEY:** *I slept well, Sir. Great, actually. Especially after our scene. I was exhausted. Thank you for asking. So can I send you a picture?*

**Me:** *Of course you can.*

I STAY PLANTED in my spot on top of the plywood while I wait anxiously for the picture to come through, giddiness floating through my body like I'm a kid again.

After everything went down last, I wasn't sure how I would feel. At the end of the day, Journey is still one of the detectives investigating Sierra Cross's disappearance. She's still one of the cops who showed up on my doorstep to question me, and when she goes to work with her partner, I have no idea if they still are looking into me as a suspect. I have no idea how this will turn out, but last night moved me a giant step closer to finding out. I'm earning her trust, and hopefully it will lead to us being together at the same time it leads to my name being removed as a suspect. Either that, or ... who knows what could end up happening to my little devil.

A minute later, my phone chimes again and I receive a photo. I smile as I open the preview and see the full image of Journey's gun resting peacefully in its holster with flaky streaks of a white substance all over it. The beast in me wakes up and threatens to burst through the doors of its cage.

*That's my cum all over her gun. Oh my god. Such a good fucking girl for doing as she was told. She deserves a reward for being obedient to her Sir.*

I smile so much my cheeks burn.

**ME:** *I fucking love it. Somebody knows how to be a good girl and listen when told what to do. I'm so proud of you.*

**Journey:** *Thank you, Sir. I thought I saw my partner staring at it earlier and I got nervous, but he never said anything. I love having you with me as I go about my day. So kinky. I've never had a Dom who could think to do this before. It's hot.*

**Me:** *It makes me feel closer to you. I can't get enough.*

**Journey:** *I'm glad. I like knowing it's making you happy, but I can't help but think about the next time we have a scene. There's a part of me that's anxious to see what happens. I already used a gun to come. What will you do next?*

**Me:** *Is my little devil ready for pain already?*

**Journey:** *Mmm, yes Sir! Tear me apart.*

GOD, she's so perfect. I never thought it was possible that I would find someone who thinks things the same way I do. I've admitted to having the beast inside of me, and I know the way it thinks. I know how vulgar and violent it is, and I never would've thought there was another person out there who had the same thoughts.

**ME:** *Gladly. You have no idea. I will rip you to shreds, Journey. Just wait until I get my claws into you.*

**Journey:** *Claws digging into me sounds nice.*

**Me:** *You better be careful. You're playing with fire, baby girl. I know you said you're not a normal girl, and I love that, but I'm very fucking far from no*

“ARE you fucking kidding me right now, Evan?”

Cain’s deep voice cuts through my thoughts just as I’m about to type the rest of the word, and I end up accidentally hitting send before I’ve completed my sentence. When I look up and see him standing directly over me with a clear view of my phone, my blood immediately comes to a boil.

I don’t say anything. All of the words I would usually say have gotten stuck in my throat because they’re lodged against the words of the beast. Talking to Journey has allowed it to pry its cage open and stick its head out. My heart pounds and I feel conflicted. I need this job, but Cain just interrupted my conversation with Journey and I’m feeling much more offended than usual.

“Well, are you gonna say anything or just sit there looking stupid?” Cain spits, glaring at me with his palms up. “We’ve got fucking work to do and you’re sitting here on top of a stack of plywood sending dirty text messages. Tell me why I keep putting up with this bullshit. I should fire your ass and get another carpenter out here—someone who can focus for more than five seconds and help us make progress on projects. This is unacceptable, Evan. I’ve had it with your bullshit.”

My face sinks into a twisted scowl that makes Cain frown. He looks shocked by my unusual aggression and it makes me happy to know that all I have to do is look at him and he’ll pause. He’s the kind of guy who likes having people to walk all over. When someone even hints at standing up to him, he freezes like the coward he is.

I stand up so that we’re eye to eye and he takes a step back. He’s not so imposing when faced with the beast. What a

pleasant surprise. Is this how everyone would be if I let the beast out more often?

“Hey, I don’t know what you think you’re doing,” he says, his voice much less hostile now. “But you need to get back to work. Stop fucking around. Send texts on your own time.”

“Were you standing over me and reading my texts?” I ask. When I hear the words, I know they aren’t the masked ones I usually say. These are the words of the beast. The real me. The one very few people should see.

Cain swallows hard. “Well, you’re on my site. I can do—”

“Don’t ever invade my privacy like that again,” I snip, cutting him off. “I don’t care where we are. You want me to get back to work? Fine. But don’t ever read my fucking texts again.”

Cain takes another step back like my words are weapons he needs distance from. His brow furrows and his head tilts, and I see the anxiety creep up his neck and make its presence known in his face and body language before he pushes it away and puts on his own mask of superiority.

“Oh, somebody’s in a bad mood today,” he says, chuckling as if he’s unaffected. “I hear what you’re trying to say, Evan, but don’t forget who you’re talking to. I’m the project manager, so don’t get too testy or you’ll find yourself off my project and stuck at home without a paycheck. Now drop the attitude, pick up the saw, and get back to work. Got it.”

*The only thing I’ve got is half a mind to pick up a nearby piece of lumber and swing it at your fucking temple. How much blood would spill out if I hit the spot perfectly? What color red would it be? Deep and dark, or light? Would you die*

*instantly? We should find out. Where's the closest piece of wood I could swing?*

I glance down and find a four-foot piece of lumber directly next to the plywood. It's the perfect size, and all it would take is one swing.

My phone chimes in my hand and I already know it's Journey. She's probably wondering why I cut my last sentence off like that, but with Cain in my face I can't respond and it makes me even more furious.

"Just get back to work," Cain says one last time before turning on his heel and meandering away. I watch him go, my eyes glued to the back of his head.

*It would be such an easy target. I'm going to do it.*

Without thinking, I lean down and pick up the wood I eyed earlier. It doesn't weigh much. I know I could swing it with enough force to crack his skull open, and everybody on the site would be rid of this asshole forever. We'd get a new project manager and the site would actually operate faster and more efficiently. I'd solve so many problems with one swing. I should do it. I should fucking do it.

*Do it. Hit him. Hit him! Hit! Him!*

"Yo, Evan you good?" a voice says from beside me, snapping me back to reality.

I look over to find Trey standing right next to me. I don't even know when he got here, but the look on his face tells me he has been watching me for a while—long enough to see me with this lumber in my hand, and to know what I'm thinking as I stare at the back of Cain's head.

*Fuck. Opportunity lost.*

I toss the lumber onto a waste pile as if I was planning to do it all along before sitting back down on the plywood and picking up the saw.

“Yeah, I’m good, Trey,” I say.

He eyes me for another moment before saying, “Right. Okay, man.”

He walks away, and I steal a quick glance at my phone and see the message from Journey telling me she’s going into a meeting with her captain and that she’ll be in touch when she can. I reply with a quick, “Okay,” before pocketing my phone and getting back to work.

I told Trey that I was good, but as I force the beast back into its cage and try to get back to normal, I’m honestly not sure if I am. Something is different since being with Journey and talking to her this morning. The beast is locked away, but the lock doesn’t feel as secure as it used to.



## chapter **fourteen**

I HAVEN'T HEARD from Journey since she told me she was going into a meeting with her captain. After my little run-in with Cain, I went back to work and knocked out everything he asked the carpenter crew to do. We weren't behind on a single thing and the project made progress, but when I left work and tried to contact Journey, I was met with radio silence.

Usually I wouldn't latch onto something like this and make it a big deal. I've been in D/s dynamics where my submissive wasn't available to me until she got off work, and I knew I wouldn't hear from her. No rules were broken. In other relationships, it was completely against the rules to not communicate with me in some way while we were at our respective jobs. The point is that the rules vary from dynamic to dynamic. In this case, Journey and I haven't established rules pertaining to almost anything. I shouldn't be upset or worried about it, but when you're forming a new connection with someone who happens to be a detective, and that detective happens to be investigating a situation directly involving you, you tend to become anxious about what might be happening when you're not around.

Now that I'm home, I keep staring at my phone, wondering if she's going to call or text. Every minute that clicks by makes me think that she's not calling because she's

on her way over here with her partner to slap cuffs on me. What was the meeting with her captain about? Were they talking about me? Were they working their way toward a warrant and now she can't communicate because the jig is up. She's not trying to be my submissive anymore because her job comes first, and it's time to be a cop who makes an arrest and solves a case.

*Arrest. Our safe word. Fuck. I wonder how much it would take to get her to say it.*

"Fuck," I snap from my seat on the end of my bed. I don't have time to think about her in that way right now. For all I know, we'll never perform another scene together because she was just trying to get my defenses down so she can move in for the kill. If she was on her way over here right now, I'd be defenseless. I'm not prepared to put up a fight about this because the evidence is still buried in my backyard.

*I have to get rid of the fucking body, especially now that Sierra is an intrusion on my new dynamic with Journey. I don't need to feel close to her anymore when I have the detective. And who knows? If things don't work out between us, I can always use the footlocker again.*

I glance out the window and see that it's dark outside. The streetlights are on in the front as usual, but the backyard is probably shrouded in darkness unless one of the nearby houses has their back porch light on. That's almost never the case, so maybe now is a good time to do this. I'd feel much less stressed if I knew the smoking gun wasn't right next to me.

I stand up with fearful determination in my chest. I'm anxious to get rid of the body, but the process is so dangerous. All it would take is one of my neighbors being nosy or curious about a noise I unintentionally make. It's a huge risk, but it has

to be done, so I start toward the back door. My heart thumps in my chest as I walk through the house, visualizing what's about to happen and how I can do it as quietly as possible. No matter what, I can't do anything to draw attention to the backyard. Sweat beads on my forehead as I reach the back door and place my hand on the knob. I twist it, and a knock at the front door makes me freeze.

“What the hell?” I whisper to myself, my heart going into a frenzy.

Nobody comes to my house. In all the years I've lived in Strawberry Mansion, I've never been one to have people over. Growing up, on the rare occasion that I was allowed to go play with any of the kids from the neighborhood, I went to their house because I never wanted anyone at mine. I tried to keep my mother as hidden as possible, and even though she no longer lives in this house with me, the habit of keeping her and this place hidden from my neighbors is still a priority. So who the hell could possibly be at my door?

Would the police knock if they were coming to arrest me? Is this the moment everything comes collapsing down around me because I wasn't smart enough to move the body earlier, and because I had the nerve to think I could make a detective my submissive and keep myself out of prison? How could I have been so stupid?

I feel lightheaded as I walk to the front door, but I find solace in the fact that I don't see flashing red and blue lights shining through my blinds. I place my hand on the knob and prepare myself to go out swinging if I have to, because I'd rather die in the same house my mother took her last breaths than go to prison for the rest of my days. If this is the end, so be it. I twist the knob and pull the door in.

“Good evening, Sir,” Journey says. She leans against my door frame in a black button-up and dark gray pants, looking every bit the detective. Her hair is pulled into a tight ponytail, and even in the shadows of the night I can make out the cuffs on the left side of her belt and the gun on the right.

I place my hand on my chest and take a breath. “You scared the heck out of me.”

“I did? Oh, I apologize,” she says, suddenly serious and genuine in her concern for me. “Did I come at a bad time?”

“No, no, it’s fine,” I lie.

“I should’ve called first,” she says in an apologetic tone. “I just thought it’d be fun to surprise you. That’s what I get for listening to that voice in my head. I can come back another time.”

“No, absolutely not,” I reply. “You’re here now, and of course it’s a pleasant surprise to see you.”

*A pleasant surprise, but showing up here without approval is not okay. She almost caught me moving the body. Establish a fucking boundary already.*

Listening to the voice in my head, I clear my throat and let the beast have a moment.

“On the other hand,” I say. “Showing up to my house unannounced is against my rules, little devil. I’ll always want you here, but on my terms, not yours. Because when it comes to us ... which one of us is in charge of the other?”

Journey lowers her head like she’s being chastised by the principal, but she can’t keep the tiniest flash of a smirk from lifting the side of her mouth. She wipes it away, but it’s too late. I see what she’s doing. This is bratty behavior. My little

devil is testing her boundaries and forcing me to react. Fine. Everything is a test with this woman.

She keeps her head down and looks at the floor. “I apologize, Sir.”

“I didn’t ask you to apologize, little one. I asked you which of us is in charge of the other.”

“You are, Sir,” she says, meekly.

“I am what?”

“In charge.”

“I’m in charge of who?”

The corner of her mouth lifts again. Little devil indeed.

“You’re in charge of me, Sir,” she says in nearly a whisper before looking up at me. In her eyes, I see nothing meek or shy. I see confidence and steel. Journey allows herself to be submissive because she truly enjoys it, but a blind man could see the fire in her soul, which is why I don’t take my job as a Dominant lightly. She wants to be earned, and I will do just that. I will be the fuel to her fire.

“Exactly,” I reply as I place my hand gently on her throat and use it to guide her over the threshold. “Now come inside and learn your lesson.”

“Yes, Sir.”

I close the front door and immediately push Journey against it, tightening my grip on her throat to make sure she doesn’t smirk. If there’s one thing I’ve learned about women, especially women in the lifestyle, it’s that they will laugh if the man trying to be their Dominant is unbelievable. If the Dominant doesn’t embody true Dom traits, a submissive will see right through it. They will know it’s a fake, and that’s

when they giggle and don't take it seriously. Being a Dominant is not an act. It's a lifestyle. It's a character trait that not everyone has. When a submissive is in the presence of a true Dominant personality, they know it. It emanates off the Dom like an aura the submissive can see, and it shows itself in everything the Dom does. Their presence is Dominant. There is no giggling with me. There's no struggle to take the situation seriously because this is who I truly am. I'm the real thing—a beast to my very core. So when I squeeze Journey's throat and slide one hand between her legs, she sucks in a breath and pinches her lips together, her submission being activated without the slightest hint of humor.

“I'm glad to see you, little one,” I say as I move my face within inches of hers, breathing in the flowery scent of her perfume and the smell of fruity conditioner in her hair. “But I'm even more glad to establish a new rule with you. Tonight, you will learn all about permission. Now put your hands behind your back and drop to your knees.”

“Yes, Sir,” she says, doing as she's commanded.

Mentally, I allow the beast to maintain full control of my actions. I let my inhibitions fall to the floor and shatter beneath me, giving way to everything dark and demented. My true nature steps forward and covers my thoughts in obsidian shadows, blocking out the light of normalcy. I stand in front of Journey and remove my belt in front of her. Once it's off, I hold it in both hands and remember what happened the last time I used it. This belt has taken the life of a submissive, but instead of feeling saddened by it or regretful, I am empowered. Of all the toys I've used in my life, this belt has become my new favorite because no other has done what this belt has. Sierra just wasn't strong enough to withstand its power, and I

see no better time than now to test whether or not Journey is more capable.

“What’s your safe word, Journey?” I ask as I crouch down in front of her and place the belt on the floor. I start to unbutton her shirt while staring in her eyes.

“Arrest, Sir,” she replies.

“Good girl.” I remove the final button and push her shirt and bra off her shoulders and arms, tossing them to the floor right next to where Sierra died. “If you get to a point where you can’t speak, you tap me repeatedly. You don’t stop tapping until I get the point. Do you understand?”

She nods. “Yes, Sir.”

“Good. Now lift your chin for me.” Journey complies while I grab the belt from the floor and place it around her neck, effectively replacing memories of Sierra with new ones. My cock stiffens in my pants as I loop the belt through its buckle and grab ahold of the loose end, forming a choke chain. My fist wraps tightly around the leather and I feel power shoot up my arm as if the belt is enchanted.

I use the belt to guide Journey to her feet, pushing her back against the door. “Don’t move.”

With Journey standing in front of me, I drop to my knees and unfasten her pants. The holsters for her handcuffs and gun make her belt sag and nearly fall off, but I secure them and drop her pants to her ankles. When Journey attempts to lift her leg to step out of them, I squeeze her ankle and cut my eyes up at her.

“Do you have my permission to move?” I ask in a low, angry growl.

She freezes, her eyes back to looking innocent. “No, Sir.”

“Then why are you?”

“I’m sorry.”

“God, I fucking hate apologies,” I mumble to myself as I stand up. In a flash, I grab the belt and tug the loose end, cinching it tightly around her throat. Her skin turns pink as I pull the belt and slap her across her bare breast. She lets out a muffled squeal through clenched lips that makes my cock jump. “When I said don’t move, I fucking meant it. Do. Not. Move. Do you understand me?”

She nods, her face turning red and her eyes glued to mine. “Yes, Sir.”

I pull the belt a second longer before letting it go. Journey takes a breath as I drop to my knees again and grab her ankle. I kiss her on her clit before looking up at her.

“Now lift your left leg.” She lifts it and I remove her pants, panties, and shoes. “Now the right.” I form a pile of her belongings by the front door before standing and grabbing the belt again. “Follow me.”

I guide Journey down the hall and into my bedroom, where I push her to the edge of the bed and force her to lay down on her stomach with her legs dangling off the bed so that she’s half on half off. I spin the belt around until the loose end dangles behind her back, and I pull it gently.

“Now, repeat after me, baby girl,” I say. “Rule number one.”

I tug the belt and Journey comes to life. “Rule number one.”

Pulling the belt harder, I smack Journey across the ass, leaving a faint handprint. “Do not show up to Sir’s house uninvited.”



I smack her again. She squeals before repeating, “Do not show up to Sir’s house uninvited.”

“Good girl. Say it again,” I demand, smacking her ass a second time.

“Do not show up to Sir’s house uninvited.”

“Good. Because you need my what?”

Another smack.

“Permission,” she says after a chirp of pain and pleasure.

“My *what?*”

Another smack and tug on the belt.

“Your permission. I need my Sir’s permission.”

“And don’t ever fucking forget it.”

I smack her again and her entire body jumps. I suck in a breath to steady myself so I don’t give into the onslaught of thoughts telling me to fuck her senseless right now. I have to maintain control even when I don’t want to. Instead of acting with my cock, I reach between Journey leg’s and rub my middle and pointer fingers between the beautiful lips of her pussy. She’s so wet it makes me gasp.

“Fuck. That pussy is soaked, baby girl,” I tell her as if she doesn’t already know. “You fucking like being controlled. Now repeat after me. Rule number two.”

“Rule number two,” she says, obeying my commands like a good little slut while I remove every fabric of my clothing and position my cock at her entrance with one hand on the belt.

“When in a scene, do not move a fucking muscle without Sir’s permission.”

Journey takes a breath and begins. “When in a scene,” she starts just before I push my cock all the way inside of her. “Oh, fuck,” she exclaims, completely surprised by my thickness filling her up.

“Wrong,” I snip, yanking the belt as I mount her. “When in a scene, do not move a fucking muscle without Sir’s permission.”

Journey takes a deep breath to repeat the rule, but I start stroking in and out of her, and this cock puts her on mute. I fuck her slowly at first before going harder, my body slamming against hers with strokes that sound like thunder from a nearby storm. I use the belt as leverage with both hands and pull it hard, yanking her head back just like Sierra’s and I don’t care a fucking bit.

“Sir,” Journey croaks. “I can’t breathe.”

I don’t hesitate, pause, or slow down in the slightest. “I can’t breathe,” isn’t the safe word. If Journey really couldn’t breathe, she’d have to resort to tapping me, but she’s still able to speak, even if the words sound strained. It’s another test from her, and I do not fail. I tighten my grip on the belt and pull harder while pounding Journey’s pussy into oblivion.

“When in a scene,” I yell, fucking her like an animal. “Do not move a fucking muscle without Sir’s permission. Say it, Journey.”

“When in a—” she tries to start, but the combination of my cock pounding her and the belt cutting off her air supply makes the words stick in her throat. Instead of speaking, she moans before she chokes, struggling to get air. Her breaths become wheezy and strained, but I don’t relent. Wheezing is not the safe word either.

“Say it,” I demand again as the sensation of an orgasm begins to bubble in my stomach like lava getting ready to erupt. “Say the rule and don’t you dare fucking forget it. Say it, Journey.”

“Oh my god,” she croaks, her head pulled back so far I think I’m going to watch her neck snap. “I’m coming. Sir, can ... please ... I’m.”

“You can come when you say the fucking rule, my little devil,” I say, but I’m not stupid. I know she’ll explode all over me if I don’t at least ease up a bit. A belt around the neck has a history of pulling orgasms out of people. So I slow my strokes down while keeping the belt tight. “Do as you’re told and say it. What’s the rule?”

“Oh, god. Please. Sir, please,” she wheezes.

“What’s the fucking rule?” I bellow, my biceps bulging as I pull the belt.

“When in a scene,” she begins again, and I speed up my strokes, working her back up to her orgasm. “Do not move a fucking muscle without Sir’s permission.”

“Good fucking girl,” I praise before letting completely loose with violent, aggressive, vicious strokes. “Now come all over my fucking cock.”

“Oh, fuck! Thank you, Sir!” she screams. “I’m com—”

Journey’s words are cut completely off as I try to tear the belt in two, pulling it as hard as I can as I fuck her. I slam into her pussy over and over, battering her until my orgasm roars to life and erupts from me. I let out a predatory growl with my head tilted back as I pull out and fist my cock, thick streaks of cum splatter all over Journey’s body as she goes completely limp and starts to slide off the bed. I keep stroking my dick

with my hand until I'm totally spent and can't support my own weight on my weak knees. I fall to the side as Journey crumbles to the floor next to me, but I'm so drained I can't catch her.

Both of us go limp, and I'm completely satisfied until I realize that I'm the only one panting. When I look over at Journey, her eyes are closed and her face looks a light shade of blue.

*Oops.*

"Oh fuck!" I yell as my adrenaline instantly kicks in and I summon the strength to get up.

I dive forward, my hands clamoring to loosen the belt, but it feels like it's taking forever. My heart nearly rips itself to shreds from beating so fast and hard. Please tell me I didn't go too far again. I liked Journey. I'd hate to have to bury her, too.

*And I'd really hate the extra heat it would bring from the police.*

I get the belt off and throw it to the far end of the room. "Journey!" I yell, tapping the side of her face over and over, my entire body dripping with panic. "Journey, wake up! Goddammit, Journey. Wake up!"

My eyes bulge to three times their size as Journey opens her eyes with a massive gasping breath. The color in her face slowly returns to normal as she begins to cough, a thick line of broken blood vessels forming around her neck that she won't be able to hide.

"Oh, my god. That's the second time you've scared me today," I say, placing a hand on her back to help her sit up. "Are you okay?"

Journey sits straight and leans her back against the bed, still breathing hard.

“I’m lightheaded,” she replies. “But I’m okay.”

We position ourselves side by side.

“Damn. Why didn’t you use the safe word?” I ask, my heart still pounding as the terror of thinking I may have killed a second person slowly melts away.

Journey, on the other hand, smiles as she turns her head to look at me.

“Why would I do that?” she asks. “That was the best orgasm I’ve ever had in my life.”

My smile gives way to a laugh as my awe of this woman continues to grow. She was really willing to die to achieve an amazing orgasm. Now that is a whole new level of dedication to the lifestyle, and I’ve never been more impressed.

“You are out of this world,” I say, shaking my head.

“It was incredible, but you want to know something else?” she asks. I tilt my head. “Tonight, I’m definitely going to be in need of some serious aftercare.”

We laugh together as I raise my arm and drop it over her shoulder, pulling her closer to me.

“I’ve got you covered, my little daredevil with a death wish,” I say. “I’ve got you covered.”

# chapter **fifteen**

“GOD THIS IS GOOD. What’s it called again?”

“This is port wine by Taylor,” I reply, lifting my own glass to my lips before adding, “It doesn’t cost much but it will knock you on your butt, that’s for sure. It has been a go-to of mine for about six months now. I saw someone talking about it on TikTok and I’ve been stuck ever since.”

Journey giggles as she takes another sip—ligature marks slowly turning a deep red around the entire perimeter of her neck like the equator on a map. After she swallows the wine, she positions her back against the headboard and slides down more so she can lift her leg higher for me. I set my glass down on the nightstand so I can use both hands to massage her raised foot, and move down to the end of the bed.

Aftercare following an intense BDSM scene is more important than most people know. It’s easily neglected when you find yourself dealing with the wrong Dom, but it’s something I take very seriously, strangled woman notwithstanding. After I practically brought Journey back from the dead, we got ourselves cleaned up with a shower together. I washed my cum off her back and struggled to bat away the beast’s voice as I rinsed her off and she used my loofah on my entire body. We dried each other off before climbing into bed, where I asked Journey what she likes for aftercare. She gave

the beast in me everything it wanted and nearly died for it, so the least I can do is absolutely anything she wants. She has earned the right to be pampered and cared for.

The smile on Journey's face when I asked what she liked nearly floored me. It was wide and reached her beautiful eyes. It was like she hadn't ever been asked the question before, and she actually had to take a moment to think about her answer. All I could think while she contemplated was how many people out there have claimed the title of Dom and have no idea what it means. They neglect the most important parts of the identity, and it ends up with submissives being hurt and taken advantage of. It infuriates me. When she finally thought it up, Journey's answer was simple.

"I would love to have my feet rubbed while I sip red wine," she answered.

I grinned. "Too easy, little one," I replied before helping her into bed. I told her to wait for me while I ran to the kitchen and grabbed two wine glasses and a full bottle of port, pouring hers first and handing it to her before pouring my own and setting it on the nightstand. I've been massaging her ever since and have no intention of stopping until she tells me she's satisfied. After this, I'm ready to move to whatever else she says she wants or needs. I'm here for her, at her beck and call until she feels completely comforted.

As I rub the sole of her left foot, I look up and find myself admiring how stunning she is. I shake my head, totally taken aback by her beauty until she looks over and catches me.

"What?" she asks, her wine glass adorably cupped between both hands.

"You amaze me," I admit. "I don't know how I got so lucky that you just waltzed into my life like you did."

*All it took was murdering a random woman with the same belt I almost killed you with. How lucky.*

Journey laughs quietly. “Well, there’s a reason but I guess I shouldn’t say it.”

“No, say it,” I reply. “I’m learning more and more that it’s okay to listen to the voice in your head.”

Journey glances at me, apprehension on her face before giving in.

“I was just thinking that we can thank Sierra Cross for bringing us together,” she says, and my mouth nearly drops open.

*My little devil thinks the same way I do.*

“I guess we do,” I say, smirking before moving away from the topic of the woman in my backyard. “Can I ask you a question?”

“Of course.”

“How long has that voice in your head been there?”

Journey’s demeanor hardens and I immediately sense her apprehension. Her eyes drop to the bed and stay there as memories I have no access to play in her mind. I wasn’t supposed to be this interested in her. She was just the cop I was getting close to to save my own ass, but with every passing second I want her more. I want access to her feelings just as much as her body. I want her company as much as her submission. I want her light as much as her darkness, but I’m not sure she’s ready to give it to me.

“A long time,” she finally replies, surprising me. “My mom died when I was really little, leaving me stuck at home with my father, who was an alcoholic and a monster. When



he'd get drunk, he'd always find a way to take it out on me, and the fact that he was a cop made it to where he'd always get away with it. I had nobody to call, and after a while I started hearing this voice in my head. It sounded a lot like my own except everything it said was violent and unfiltered. That voice wanted revenge on the whole world, and it was also immune to pain. It took everything that hurt me and decided that instead of crying and breaking down over it, I would rise up and accept it. Listening to the voice made it to where no one could ever hurt me again.

“Even though I hated my father until the day he died, all I knew was to follow in his footsteps and become a police officer. I ended up in law enforcement while my thoughts told me to break the law all the time. Quite the conundrum, but the one thing I know for sure is that the voice is real. It's not some apparition telling me what to do. I'm not possessed by some outside force. The voice is me. It's what I *really* want. Any time I'm blunt, it's me letting the voice win. When we're in our scenes, everything I say is what the real me wants.”

“I understand that completely,” I reply. “The voice in my head is who I am naturally. The person I present to strangers is just the mask I wear because if I listened to the voice, I don't know what would happen. I'm not sure I could function normally in society.”

Journey looks me in the eye and I can see the question written across her face. If the voice in my head is that bad, is it the reason Sierra is missing? I hold my breath as I await her response.

“As crazy as it may sound,” she starts, making my heart hammer. “I can totally relate to that.”

“You can?” I ask with a puzzled look on my face.

“Most definitely,” she answers. “I never could’ve been a cop if I listened to that voice. I’m only doing what I do because of where I’m from and who my father was.”

“So you didn’t actually want to be a cop?”

“Not really, but Elmwood doesn’t offer many options, and I had to do *something*, so I followed in my father’s footsteps. But that doesn’t mean I don’t struggle with the voice in my head that wants to feel pain. The voice that makes me want things and do things that most people don’t consider normal. But like I said before, I’m not a normal girl. Not by a longshot. The voice in me craves pain while simultaneously wanting to lash out at anyone who offends me.”

My hands continue to squeeze Journey’s foot, but my mind is elsewhere. All I can do is shake my head as I think about it.

“We’re so alike,” I tell her, almost feeling emotional over it. “My mother was my abuser, and when that voice clicked on for me it never shut off, but I thought I was alone. I’ve gone my entire life thinking that there wasn’t anybody in the world who had a voice in their head that was as menacing as mine. I knew there were other sadists out there and other Doms, but they didn’t have the beast like I did. Like I do. I just ... you’re like me, Journey, and it feels like a really big deal.”

Journey smiles as she nods her head. “I agree. I think it’s a big deal, too. It feels like I’ve been searching for you for a long time, and now that we’ve found each other, I feel safer.”

“Like it’s okay to listen to the voice,” I say, completing her thought. “It feels like it’s okay to be who I am on the inside because there’s finally somebody who understands. Somebody who won’t judge me for having a dark side.”

“Exactly,” she agrees. “Even though this thing between us is young and just beginning, I’ve never been this comfortable being myself. I can’t explain how important that is to me. It means everything.”

The two of us engage in a short staring contest that ends with both of us breaking into wide smiles that force us to look away like lovesick children. I chuckle to myself before looking into Journey’s eyes again.

“Yeah,” I say. “It means everything.”

I go back to massaging her left foot before moving to her right as we continue talking and sipping wine together. After a while, I forget that she once stood at my doorstep with her partner to question me about a missing woman. I forget that I was supposed to be using her as much as she was using me, and I come to the realization that I was wrong.

I thought Journey could’ve been putting on an act about being a sub at first. I thought she was casting a reel to pull me in inch by inch until she had what she needed to arrest me. I thought all of this was a ruse, but I see now that’s not possible. She really is a submissive, and she really is just like me. She’s the only person I’ve ever met who is just like me, and now it is all different.

I don’t know what’s next. I don’t know what’s going on with the investigation into Sierra’s disappearance. All I know is that there has been a seismic shift, and nothing will be the same after tonight.

## chapter **sixteen**

“GOOD EVENING. Welcome to Volvér. My name is Dawna. Can I start you off with something to drink?”

I can sense Journey smiling at me as I look up at the waiter and order two glasses of Merlot. I think to place an appetizer order for crab turnovers, but then I remember who I’m here with. This is Journey, the best submissive I’ve ever had. I may not know absolutely everything about her, but I do know that she doesn’t need me to be fancy or show off. She’s not impressed with haughty things. She doesn’t need me to splurge on her in order to feel validated, or for me to flaunt some supposed wealth. All she wants is for me to be myself so she can feel safe in being who she really is. She’s from Elmwood, I’m from Strawberry Mansion. Neither of us is fancy, contrary to the atmosphere of this restaurant. We just are who we are, and both of us are leaning into that.

“That’ll be all for now,” I tell Dawna, sending her scurrying around multiple circular tables in order to get our drinks ready.

“Thank you for ordering for me, Sir,” Journey says, looking radiant in a skintight brown dress with a halter neck that covers the bruising embedded in her skin from last night. Her arms are totally exposed, and my eyes keep gravitating to them, the beast in me salivating at the view of her bare skin.

“My pleasure, little one. I know you enjoy red wine,” I reply. “And for the record, you look magnificent in that dress. Clearly you could wear anything and still floor me, but that dress on you is dazzling.”

She looks at me with the devil in her smile. “Thank you, Sir. I’m glad you like it,” she says before narrowing her eyes and adding, “Tell me what you’re *really* thinking about it.”

I take a breath in and hold it. After our conversation from last night, Journey and I both are aware of the voices each of us has roaming the halls of our minds. Although I never expected anything of the sort, she is now the only person in the world who knows about the beast in me. She knows about the real me—for the most part—and I know about her. We have a bond that can’t be broken now, and although my heart pounds from the anxiety of showing that part of myself to anybody, I love that she knows, and I’ll never get over the fact that she accepts me.

I lick my lips, cutting my eyes up at her as I let down my guard and allow the beast to come forward. I’ve never done this in public, but for Journey, I feel nothing but excitement about it.

I clear my throat. “What I’m really thinking is that I want to tear that fucking dress off you right here in front of everyone. I want to bend you over this table and spank your bare back and ass until you’re red all over, your skin spotted with my handprints before I fuck you into unconsciousness. That’s what I’m really thinking.”

Journey keeps her eyes fixed on me, never turning away. She twists her lips together as her own wicked thoughts come to life behind those gorgeous brown eyes, and I can tell from the way she squirms in her seat that my words have had a

physical effect on her. Body language never lies, and I understand hers completely.

“Your turn,” I say, reaching up to unfasten the top button of my shirt due to the heat between us.

The corner of Journey’s mouth lifts before she says, “I’m thinking that I’d much rather be lying on my stomach, tied to your bed with this dress still on instead of being here.”

“Why would you want the dress on?” I inquire, wondering where she’s about to take me with this.

“Because instead of you tearing it off,” she answers. “I want each whip of a flogger to shred the dress off. That’s how hard I want you to flog me—hard enough to tear the fabric of this dress to get to my skin. Hit me, and don’t stop until I bleed for you. Are you willing to make me bleed, Sir?”

Oh my fucking god, this woman!

“Little devil,” I say, smiling hard. “Nothing would bring me more joy than to make you bleed for me.”

The look in Journey’s eyes sends warmth crawling up my entire body. I can barely keep myself seated as I look at her, and I think to just get up and kiss her right here. Who gives a fuck if neighboring tables see us? What are they going to do? None of them have any idea that I would gladly butcher them all to protect Journey and keep her comfortable. When she gives in to the sadistic thoughts in her head and tells me what she’s thinking, it’s the sexiest thing in the world and it drives me wild.

“Here are your drinks.” Dawna’s voice cuts in, severing my thoughts and pulling me back into reality.

Journey and I sip from our glasses before choosing entrees. She orders grilled sea bass while I go with the Philly style filet

mignon. As soon as the server jots down our choices, she saunters away, leaving us alone again. I feel Journey's foot find my leg under the table as she pins me to the seat with her gaze.

"As soon as we're done eating, I want to go," she says. "I don't want to waste a second, Sir."

"We don't even have to eat," I shoot back quickly. "I'll leave the food on the fucking table for you."

"That's not a bad idea either," she replies.

I lick my lips, thinking this dinner date is about to come to an end before it really begins. But before I can say another word, I feel a hand slap down onto my shoulder with far more force than necessary. I jerk my head up, my brow furrowed, and find Cain standing above me.

Fucking Cain.

"Evan? I thought that was you," he says. He smiles at me like we're friends before darting his eyes over to Journey, which instantly makes me hot all over. "And who's your lucky date? Hi, I'm Cain."

Before I say a word, he steps over to her side of the table and extends his hand. The sight of his skin touching Journey's when she shakes it makes my world ignite, even though Journey doesn't verbally reply. Hot coals bristle beneath my skin as he looks at me again with that shit-eating grin plastered to his face.

"So, is this the lovely lady you were sexting the other day when you were supposed to be working?" he asks.

Journey looks at me and I see rage building in her. Her eyes widen as they bounce from me to Cain and back again.

“I’m sorry,” she cuts in before I formulate an answer.  
“*Who* are you?”

“Me?” Cain replies, placing a hand on his chest. “I just told you. I’m Cain Adams. Evan’s boss.”

“You’re not my boss,” I finally speak up. “You’re the project manager for the *current* job we’re working. Trey is my supervisor, not you.”

“Project manager equals boss, kiddo,” Cain says, making me frown at the sense of arrogance he’s displaying today. It’s like he’s trying to belittle me while making himself look bigger and more important. Is he doing this because we’re in front of Journey? Who the hell is he even here with? Doesn’t he have his own date to annoy?

I turn in my chair to look over my shoulder and find a group of assholes dressed just like Cain standing by the hostess at the entrance of the restaurant. They’re all in jeans and dirty flannels, and I can tell from here that they’re hitting on the clearly-underage-hostess. I look up at Cain and see him running his hand through his hair as he eyes Journey, and when I look down at her, I find her scowling.

I was right. This dick is here with his boys like they’re a fucking fraternity, and he’s trying to show off in front of Journey. *My* Journey. He called me kiddo in front of her. He mentioned his goofy fucking eyes invading our privacy and reading our texts, and he has the nerve to flirt with his eyes. Journey looks at me with expectation and I lose it. The fire beneath my skin seeps through my pores and I can’t hold it in anymore. Not in front of Journey.

I stand up so fast my chair slides back and slams into the man seated behind me, but he doesn’t say anything as Cain and I stand face to face in front of the entire restaurant.



“Don’t ever fucking call me kiddo,” I snap. “And keep your eyes off my date before I pluck them out of your fucking skull. Do you understand me?”

Cain takes a step back, his head tilted to the side in shock.

“Wow,” he says. “I see you’re still trying to be a badass. You must really like her if you’re willing to risk your job over her.”

“When it comes to her, I don’t give a fuck about you or that job,” I hiss. “You disrespect her again and your life will change forever. I promise you that.” Cain glances over at his friends but I keep going. “I don’t give a fuck about you being here with your little minions. You’re trying to embarrass me in front of the only person in the world I actually care about, and if you do it again, it will take *fifty* of your ugly ass friends to get me off of you. I’m done taking your shit. Now get the fuck away from my table before I get myself sent to prison for acting on what I’m thinking about doing to you.”

Cain’s eyebrows rise so far I think they might float away. He teeters between anger, shock, and fear as he takes two steps back and pinches his lips together. Nodding, he looks at Journey again.

“Be careful with this one,” he says to her. “Looks like he’s a little off his rocker.”

Journey stares daggers into Cain as he backs away.

“I think it’s you who better be careful,” she replies.

Cain chuckles nervously before turning on his heel and walking away. When he reaches his friends, all of them look over at us, but I don’t budge. I stay standing and glare at them until they’re out the door.

“I’m sorry about that,” I say to Journey as I adjust my seat and sit. “Cain is a fucking asshole.”

“Clearly,” she replies. “But I loved watching you handle yourself. I think some of those dark thoughts slipped out.”

“I think so, too,” I reply. We both laugh. “That has been happening more lately. I think it has something to do with the comfort I feel from being with you. As much as it might get me into trouble, I like it because you like it.”

“I *love* it,” she says. “I love that you stood in front of everyone and defended me, even risking your job. You were both aggressive and calm at the same time. You’re a true Dom if there ever was one, Evan.”

I smile as our eyes meet again. “For you. *Your* true Dom, Journey. Yours.”

She nods with an accepting smile. “Mine.”

“That’s right,” I reply. “And your Dom is going to pay for the food and have the server prep it to go so that we can get out of here. I have plans to ruin that dress before I tear it off of you.”

# chapter **seventeen**

THE DOOR BURSTS open and slams against the wall as Journey and I come crashing into the house, our mouths suffocating one another. Our limbs entangle as we try to tear each other apart, hands roaming all over the place, pulling at clothes while our bodies stumble down the hallway until we reach the bedroom. I place a hand on Journey's neck and squeeze, pushing her mouth off of mine until she takes a step back, panting with the purest lust in her eyes.

“Stop,” I tell her, and the wanton look in her gaze makes me want to ravage her. I will, but not like this. This is unadulterated lust, and while it makes my cock hard, it's nothing compared to what it could be when mixed with BDSM. The combination of the two is more combustible than a nuclear weapon, and I am determined to make Journey explode all over this room.

“Fucking stop,” I say again as Journey's hands reach for me. “Put your hands at your sides and wait for my instruction. I want to fucking tear you to pieces but I'm going to do it my way. Don't reach for me again. Do you understand?”

Breathing hard, Journey nods. “Yes, Sir.”

“That's my girl. Now sit down on the bed.”

She sits, but I can see the tension in her limbs. She's desperate to be touched, craving my cock and completely insatiable, which is why I'm going to make her wait. By the time I fuck her, her pussy will be a waterfall for me. The beast has full control and there isn't a man in this world that can compete with me in Dom Space.

Other men—lesser men—would jump at this chance. They'd see how badly she wants to be fucked and use it as an excuse to dive right in. They have no idea that there is another level past desire. There's a plateau beyond just being horny, and it takes time and attention to reach it. It takes self-control and the abandonment of selfishness for a Dom to focus solely on the submissive's needs. She can't get there on her own. She needs me to guide her, and I proudly accept the honor.

Journey sits down on the edge of the bed and keeps her eyes on me, waiting impatiently as I walk into my closet and remove a Cat O Nine Tails. Each leather fall is thick and knotted with a broad, two-inch strip of leather at the end. This is not for amateurs, and when Journey sees it her eyes widen with excitement and anxiety. I let the flogger hang at my side, the falls dragging along the floor as I walk over to Journey and crouch in front of her.

“What's your safe word, little devil?” I ask, my left hand slowly climbing up her leg and pushing her dress up.

“Arrest,” she replies with a shuddering breath.

“Good girl. Don't forget it.”

“Yes, Sir.”

The corner of my mouth lifts only for an instant.

“Turn around and lay on your stomach, then reach for both sides of the bed with your hands and spread your legs.”

She nods. “Yes, Sir.”

With her dress still on, Journey turns and climbs on her knees to the far side of the bed. I stand behind her, biting my lip as she crawls, her ass swaying from side to side and making my cock spasm with anticipation as she lies down and completes the rest of my demands.

I lay the Tails between her spread legs and walk to each side of the bed, pulling a black strap from underneath the frame with a small loop on the end. I place Journey’s hand into the loop and pull it tight before doing the same with her feet. When I’m finished, my submissive little monster is tied to the bed, her arms and legs spread wide for me to use how I wish ... and I wish to fucking ruin her.

Before I pick up the Tails, I remove my shirt and stand only in my pants, my belt unfastened and dangling in front of me. I stalk around Journey’s body, forcing her to wait even longer while I survey what will become my canvas. My thoughts and desires become wildly vivid, no longer in the recesses of my mind like before. I don’t know where I end and the beast begins. It’s a frightening thought that exhilarates me. I feel more alive now than I ever have, and when I finally lift the Cat O Nine Tails I become a god.

“The bond we form tonight will never be broken, little one,” I say as I position myself on the side of the bed, where I can reach every inch of her. “Ask me to begin.”

Journey pauses for a moment. Her head turns toward me and we lock eyes. Fiery lust emanates from her when she looks at me. I bite my lip, totally and completely enthralled by her beauty and fearlessness. I think we both know that tonight is an important step for us. We can feel that whatever we do now will cement what we are. Sierra will be erased forever.

Detective Monroe won't matter. There will only be Journey and Evan. Dominant and submissive. King and queen. God and goddess.

"Sir," she says, her eyes fixed on me and unmoving. "Please begin. Make me yours."

"It's going to be my honor, little one. You belong to me. Forever."

The first splash of the Tails across her back cracks like fireworks. The sound erupts in the room and echoes down the hall. Journey's body jumps at the impact before it relaxes, settling in for me. It seems like a small gesture but it's a big deal. Her relaxation means she trusts me. I'm not just a suspect to her. Not anymore.

The second whip of the long flogger kisses her back, forming wrinkles in her otherwise flawless dress, and this time it's my cock that reacts with a twitch of its own. Even with the dress on, her body is flawless. The way it moves when I hit her drives me insane. She is perfect—every pound, every fucking square inch is made for me. I'm obsessed with all of her.

I hit her again and she moans, sinking further into subspace while I elevate higher into Dom space.

I hit her again, harder than each time before, and we both let out moans for our own reasons.

"Fuck, you drive me fucking insane, my little devil," I admit with my cock pressing hard against the inside of my pants. "Look at you. You're flawless. Even after I mark you, you'll still be perfect."

I flog her again, followed by another whip in quick succession.

“Yes,” Journey says. “Thank you, Sir. Please do it again. I’m here to please you.”

I oblige her with three hits back-to-back-to-back, and a fourth that is so hard it nearly cramps my arm. Journey lets out moans of both pleasure and pain, and the urge to fuck her becomes beyond intense. My cock is so hard I’m desperate for a release, but this is bigger than me. I hit her again and again, aiming for the wrinkled spots on her dress that are looking thinner and thinner with each swing.

With my next blow, I lose myself. My mind ascends to Dom space as my body is filled with a warm sensation that makes me feel like a deity. I can do no wrong. I am as impeccable as the submissive beneath me, and everything I do is perfect. I whip the Cat O Nine Tails again and again, my cock throbbing and my limbs blissfully burning from the work.

I swing again, grunting with the strike as I give it my all, nearly coming from the sheer ecstasy of it, and when I finally manage to focus on Journey, the back of her dress is shredded with two rips in it. The skin on her back is red and damaged with a single slice seared into it. Blood doesn’t trickle out, but it pools in the long wound as she pants on the bed, her face buried in the pillow instead of turned to the side.

“Oh my fucking god,” I say through ragged breaths. “You’re so goddamn immaculate. Jesus Christ, Journey, how is it possible that you exist? This fucked up world isn’t worthy of you. Fuck, I can’t stand it anymore.”

“Thank you, Sir,” she replies in a wobbling voice. “I’m all yours.”

“You got that fucking right,” I say as I toss the Tails on the floor without a care and place my knees on the bed next to her

quivering body. I don't even think when I reach down and force a hand inside each tear in the dress and pull hard. The fabric rips easily, and I keep pulling until her back is completely open to me. "Goddamn it, I can never get enough of you," I say, inspecting her entire backside and marveling at its beauty, the welts and bruises of my artistry only making things even more elegant.

"Who do you belong to, Journey?" I ask as I get up from the bed and reach into my nightstand, pulling out a condom before dropping my pants entirely.

"I belong to you, Sir," she answers, finally able to look over at me with beautiful tears in the corners of her eyes.

"Say it again," I command as I sheathe my cock right in front of her, making her watch.

"I belong to you," she repeats.

I climb on the bed and snatch her panties, ripping them off and leaving red streaks on her legs from the fabric biting into her skin. She lets out a pained squeal, but I'm too far gone to care. I don't even know who the fuck I am anymore.

"I marked you," I say in her ear as I position my cock at her entrance, the tip of it teasing her pussy. "Now I'm going to own you, my little devil. I'm not stopping until we come together. This is how we seal our bond. There is no more me and no more you. There's only us. Are you ready for me?"

"God yes," she replies, and I can see that her soul is bared right now. She is completely engulfed in subspace, as weak as can be and stronger than ever, but reliant upon me. This is my moment to be everything she needs. One mistake will ruin it all and she'll never forget it. But I have her now. She's mine to protect and own, and I will not let my baby girl down.



I push myself into Journey, keeping my chest firmly pressed against her back as I fuck her with long, relentless strokes. The blood from the tear in her skin smears against me, sealing our bond even further. She wanted to bleed for me and now she has.

I keep fucking her, building up a rhythm as she moans beneath me and I breathe into the nape of her neck, my eyes finding the luscious skin there and making me ravenous. Fuck. What's happening to me? Evan is gone and only the beast remains, and it feels like the roles will never switch again. I'm the monster Journey needs me to be at all times, and no longer care what the world thinks about it. My beast and her devil belong together, untamed and out of control in our union.

"Sir," Journey cries below me, her eyes cinched tight. "Please. I'm getting so close. I need it. I need to come. Sir, please."

I keep going, tightening every muscle in my body to build my own orgasm closer and closer with each stroke, and just before it hits, I answer.

"You have my permission," I say. "Give yourself to me right now. I want all of you drenching all of me. Fuck. I'm about to come. Come with me right now."

"Oh ... I'm coming," she screams.

"Yes!" I bellow, staring down at the bare spot on her neck again, and I don't hold back. I lean my head down, open my mouth, and bite into her flesh.

"God, yes!" Journey yells. "Bite me. Fucking rip me apart!"

My teeth sink into her skin as both of us orgasm at the same time. I fill the condom to its entirety and come so hard

that I see stars at the corners of my vision. Our bodies erupt into seizures, convulsing so hard the entire bed shakes. Journey pulls at her restraints and I think they'll snap, but they hold her in place until we finally come down.

I pull my mouth off of her and back away, my heart racing at the sight of my bite mark etched in her skin like a stone carving. I've marked her again and it's so fucking beautiful. I'll have time to marvel at it, but now is not about me. Journey needs me.

Running on fumes, I force myself off of her back, snatching off the condom and tossing it into the trash by the door before slipping back into my pants and hurrying to free Journey from her restraints. As I release each arm, I hear her sniffle. I don't stop, but I watch her put her face into the pillow again just before I hear the sound that breaks my heart and fills me with pride. Journey begins to sob into the pillow.

It's nothing I haven't heard before, but I've never been this invested in anyone so it means more now. I know BDSM brings out emotions others have no idea about. I know that subspace isn't a joke and I understand the importance of aftercare. To put her through what I just did and leave her to console herself would be criminal, and I would never do that to her. I nearly break into a sweat trying to release the constraints as fast as I can, and the second I get the last one off I climb into bed and throw my arms around her, turning her over and cradling her body like a baby.

"I'm here, Journey," I tell her as she puts her head into my chest and lets go, completely free.

"Thank you, Sir," she says, still crying but safe in my arms.

“I’m here,” I repeat, pulling her in as close as possible.  
“I’ve got you. I’m your monster. I’m your captor. I’m your savior. You’re my everything, and I’ve got you.”

# chapter **eighteen**

“HOW ARE YOU FEELING?”

Journey smiles as I press harder on the heel of her foot, rubbing circles in her skin with my thumb.

“I’m good,” she answers.

Her eyes linger on me as I keep rubbing, putting an unexpected grin on my face.

“What?” I inquire.

“You’re incredible, you know that?” she says. When I smile and don’t answer, she continues. “I’ve been looking for a Dom like you my whole life. I may not have known that’s what I was looking for, but I was in search of this ... of you ... the entire time. The way you carry out our scenes, shattering me into a million thoughtless pieces before you put me back together, is more than I ever knew I could ask for. I’m just a broken girl from a shitty part of town, but I feel like so much more with you.”

“You’re not broken,” I interject. “Don’t ever say that about yourself. You’ve survived more than most people ever could, just like I have, and that makes you stronger. You may be covered in callouses, but that only means you’re tougher than those who’ve never been through anything. Neither of us is

broken. So I don't want to hear you say that about yourself ever again. Do you understand?"

She grins, trying her best to keep it from taking over her face. "Yes, Sir."

We spend the next ten minutes in silence as I continue rubbing Journey's feet. We sip wine until we're both feeling it, our muscles relaxing as our inhibitions lower. Maybe that's why the thought of the investigation comes back to me in our vulnerable moment. I want all of this to be real so badly that I've lost track of how it started. I was supposed to be using Journey, but I don't even know how anymore. I can't remember the goal from the beginning because all I care about is what we have in the present. Nothing else matters, but the thing that brought us together stays with me, lingering around corners like the ghost of a child playing hide-n-seek.

Blame the alcohol or blame the fact that I just can't hold it in anymore. Either way, the words come out of my mouth all the same.

"Whatever happened with the missing girl you were looking for?"

The question barely registers on Journey's face as she keeps looking at me like I'm the best thing that has ever happened to her.

"Nothing much," she says, shrugging nonchalantly. "Leads went cold not too long after Winter and I showed up at your house."

My heart thuds with glee that I can't show and I end up biting my lips together to keep from smiling too obviously.

"Oh. That's too bad. I hope she turns up," I say calmly, but fireworks ignite in my stomach.

“Yeah. That whole thing about twenty-four hours missing is pretty true,” Journey says. “Sierra has been gone a while, so she may not ever be found.”

Good. So fucking good.

“I have a question for you now,” she continues, her face suddenly losing all of the allure it had a moment ago, trading it out for quiet irritation.

“What’s up?” I set her foot down and position myself with my back against the headboard next to her.

“Who was that guy at the restaurant?” she asks.

“Oh,” I respond. “Cain Adams. He’s the project manager at my job. He’s nobody. Just an asshole who still thinks he’s a high school bully.”

“And he tries to bully *you*?” she asks, and when I look over at her, I’m stunned at the gaze in her eyes. I was about to chuckle at the question, but Journey is dead serious. She’s fuming.

“I wouldn’t say that,” I answer. “I mean, he clearly doesn’t like me, but that’s fine because the feeling is mutual. He’s just in the position of power so he can wield it against me.”

“And does he?” she asks.

“Does he what?”

“Wield his power against you?”

Now I chuckle. “Well yeah, but it’s no big deal. Cain is just ... what are you doing?”

“I had a thought—a craving to do something,” she says as she scans the floor on her side of the bed, “and I’m going to run with it.”

“What is that supposed to mean?”

Journey quickly climbs out of bed and grabs her phone from the floor. Without answering me, she scrolls briefly and pushes a button before placing the phone to her ear. She doesn't even look at me as someone on the other end picks up and they begin talking.

“Hey, Jane, it's Journey,” she starts, and I watch in confused astonishment. “I need you to run a check on someone for me. The name is Cain Adams. He works at ...” Journey suddenly looks to me for the rest of the sentence.

With wide eyes I answer, “Lane Contracting.”

“Lane Contracting,” she finishes, then she waits while someone named Jane gives information I can't hear. Journey takes the phone from her ear and begins typing in whatever she was just told. “You're the best, Jane. Thank you so much. I'll see you later. Okay. Bye.”

She places the cell on the nightstand, knocks back the rest of her wine, and crawls back into bed with a devilish grin on her face.

“What did you just do?” I ask, my face twisted into a baffled grimace.

“So, how do you feel about this Cain Adams?” she asks instead of answering me.

I chuckle again. “I can't stand him. Why? Who was that on the phone?”

“That was Jane. She's the clerk at my precinct.”

My heart rate doubles.

“And what did Jane have to say? What'd you do, Journey?”

“I just got Cain Adams’ license plate number and address,” she replies, smiling diabolically. “Let’s go give this fucker a taste of his own medicine.”

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WHAT THE FUCK am I doing here? This is a terrible idea.

Journey and I sit on the side of the road just a handful of houses away from Cain’s place, waiting for him to arrive. I don’t know what came over her, but Journey was determined to use the information she acquired from the clerk at her job to stalk Cain. I should’ve known from the look in her eyes at the restaurant that she wasn’t going to let it go. She was clearly irked by the way Cain was acting. I just thought I’d handled it enough, but apparently Journey’s darkness is a deeper tunnel than I realized.

If we were staking out anybody else’s place, I’d have no problem with it. But I technically work for Cain right now, so if anything goes down tonight it affects my job. When I asked Journey what she was planning on doing, she said I wouldn’t have to worry about risking my job because she’s the one who is going to put Cain in his place. I didn’t know what that meant, but now that we’re here I know she’s serious.

“Asshole stays out late, doesn’t he?” she asks, staring out the windshield at Cain’s ranch-style house from the driver’s seat of my car.

“What exactly is your idea?” I ask as nervousness makes my heart beat rapid fire.

She keeps her eyes on the house. “I’m not sure, really. All I know is that I didn’t like the way he talked to you or the way



he looked at me at the restaurant. I'm just curious how he'll respond when questioned by the police."

Journey is dressed in my sweatpants, a long t-shirt from the bottom of my drawer, and a jacket that swallows her whole because it's about five sizes too big. Not exactly cop attire.

"Listen," I say, trying to remain calm in this strange situation that came from out of nowhere. "I know what you're doing. You're trying to take care of me the way you feel I take care of you. I get it, and I appreciate you being willing to use your authority as a detective to help me deal with this pain in the ass. But no matter what happens here tonight, I have to deal with Cain tomorrow. He'll still be the project manager at the job site. So my problem won't go away. It may change, but it won't go away. I appreciate you so much for trying to help, but I can handle Cain. As soon as he's not my project manager anymore, I can talk to him however I want. But until then, I just have to roll with the punches. He's not going to do anything anyway. He's just an asshole."

"I'm sure he is," Journey agrees. "But you're my Dom and he disrespected you. I don't like that. I tried to let it go, but after tonight ... it's like you said; our bond can't be broken. We sealed it in so many ways this evening and that changes things. You wouldn't let anyone disrespect me, right?"

"I'd kill them where they stood," I snip, the words leaving my mouth before I can think straight.

Journey finally turns to look at me. "I know you would, which is why I can't let him disrespect you."

"Baby girl, you have to listen to me," I plead. "I can and will handle Cain. I understand exactly how you feel, but we're risking my job, my livelihood, and I don't like that. So we need to go. Do you understand?"

Hearing the tone in my voice, her demeanor softens, but I see the fury bristling just beneath the surface. Her leg bounces below the steering wheel, her need to comply with the voice in her head making her anxious.

“Yes, Sir,” she replies. She starts the engine and pulls away.

I breathe a sigh of relief, but as we turn the corner out of the housing development, I see Journey do a double take. Her head turns around, then the truck follows.

“What the hell?” I snip, but she keeps going.

Journey steps on the gas, making the engine roar as we barrel down the road to catch up to a pickup truck that I immediately recognize from the job site. It’s Cain, and Journey flashes the headlights over and over again as we catch up to him.

“Journey, what are you doing?” I ask, my anger mixing with worry.

“That’s the license plate Jane gave me. That’s him,” she says, her eyes glued to the pickup as she keeps flashing the lights. Cain pulls over, his head tilted as he looks in the rearview mirror, watching as Journey stops behind him and turns on the high beams. “Just stay here,” she says, unbuckling her seatbelt.

“Journey, don’t do this,” I bark, but it’s too late. She’s out the door and walking toward the pickup truck. “Fuck,” I say to myself as I roll down my window so I can hear what’s being said. All I can do now is listen and hope Cain doesn’t remember her from the restaurant.

“Good evening,” I hear Journey say like she’s making a routing traffic stop instead of some wine-induced, half-cocked

idea that came to her out of the blue.

“What the hell, lady?” Cain blurts out. ”Where’s the fucking fire?”

“Oh, there’s no fire,” Journey says. “My name’s Detective Monroe and I’m just looking into suspicious activity in this area. Your shitty fucking pickup fits the description of a vehicle that has been driving aggressively in the neighborhood. Care to explain your stupid fucking self?”

My hand immediately flies to my face. Is she serious right now? Clearly she’s letting her thoughts control her actions right now. That is not how a cop would talk to someone they pulled over for questioning. Journey’s words are fueled by the wine she consumed, and they’re slurred by it, too. I lean to my right and stick my head out the window to hear what else is being said, and it’s clear I’m not the only one who’s suspicious of Journey.

“Lady, have you been drinking?” Cain asks. I can’t see his face from here, but I’m sure he’s doing that signature asshole frown of his.

Journey scoffs as she reaches into the pocket of my sweatpants and pulls out her badge.

“You may wanna think twice before you talk, dickhead,” she says, flashing the badge in his face before putting it back in her pocket.

There’s silence between them for a second, and the quiet drives me insane. My heart panics as I watch them, my blood ready to boil because we’re here. Everything was going so well tonight. How did it come to this? What possessed Journey to track down Cain’s information, and why did I let her drive

when she asked? Getting here is the culmination of a series of very bad decisions. Now it's too late to turn back.

“Wait a minute,” Cain says, and my eyes widen as my heart stops. “I know you. You're the girl who was with Evan tonight at Volvér.”

Shit. I told her this was a dumb idea. There was no way he was going to forget her face that fast.

“Let me see that badge again,” Cain goes on. “You're a detective? Or are you impersonating an officer?”

“I'm not impersonating anything,” Journey fires back. “Of course it's a real badge, you dumb bitch.”

“Get the fuck away from me before I call the *real* cops and have your crazy ass thrown in jail,” Cain barks, pointing at Journey.

My eyes zoom in on his finger like I'm wearing binoculars and I suddenly feel heat coming to life in my chest. I let out an exhale as my temper immediately starts to flare.

“Fuck you,” Journey shouts. “I saw the way you disrespected Evan, and if you ever talk to him like that again, I'll be on your doorstep with my gun drawn, you piece of shit.”

“What are you, his fucking bodyguard?” Cain says with a chuckle. “Wow, Evan is such a pussy that he needs his bitch to come fight his battles for him? Incredible. Just wait until I see that little prick at work tomorrow. You just made his life a living hell, you dumb cunt.”

Everything freezes. I no longer feel the breeze coming through the open window. The comfort of my seat disintegrates as pinpricks scatter all over my body, and a blinding rage ignites my insides, putting everything on mute.

A fury I've never known before consumes me and I can no longer remain seated. I can take Cain talking shit about me. I can handle insults being hurled my way, but hearing him insult Journey breaks something in me.

My mind shatters, giving way to fire and hell. All the locks break. Every hinge crumbles. All the bars bend, and the beast explodes out into the open. My hand hits the door handle and I know as soon as my foot steps out onto the concrete that I will never be able to put it back in the cage again. The mask I wear in front of the world permanently melts away.

Quick, angry footsteps carry me to Journey's side, and before Cain has a chance to register what's happening, my fist slams into the side of his face through the open window. His head snaps back as blood splatters up my arm, and I think I hear Journey say something but her words sound muffled. All I hear is the rush of my own blood in my ears as I snatch open Cain's door and hit him again before gripping his shirt and pulling him out of the car.

His body hits the concrete with a thud. The second he's down, my feet form a mind of their own. I kick him in the ribs. I stomp his head into the ground. I kick him in the nuts. I step on his chest before straddling him and pounding his face with brutal punches. When I'm done, I don't see Cain anymore. I see wreckage covered in blood and loose skin.

He lays on the ground below me as I stand up and feel Journey's arm brush against mine, reminding me that she's still here. It isn't until I take a step back that my vision clears and the sound of life around me comes roaring back, and the first thing I hear is Journey laughing.

I look over at her and see a huge smile on her face as she crouches down and speaks to Cain.

“I told you to be careful,” she says, amusement coating her words. “Now look at you. Let me be clear now that you have no choice but to listen. Although I doubt you’ll try, if I ever hear that you’re disrespecting Evan again, this shitty little house of yours will suddenly be under investigation for terrorist threats. I’ll have SWAT peeking into your windows through the scopes of their rifles, just waiting for you to walk by so they can take a shot. So after you heal, I truly hope you learn how to treat people.”

Journey stands up and places a hand on my arm.

“Let’s go,” she says, giving me a tug.

I don’t budge. My eyes stay on Cain, watching him writhe on the ground, slipping in and out of consciousness. I’ve wanted to see him this way for so long and I can’t explain the joy I feel at the moment having finally arrived. No one is more worthy of pain and suffering than this fucking piece of dog shit beneath me ... beneath me, just as he should be.

“Hey,” Journey says, pulling me again. “He’s finished and we don’t want to be seen here. Let’s go.”

I nod without looking at her, but before I walk away I kneel on the ground, making sure to avoid the pooling blood. I place my face next to Cain’s ear and speak in a full, confident voice that sounds brand new.

“One more thing before we go,” I say, my chest filling with an excitement I’ve never felt before. “If you tell anyone the truth about what happened here tonight, we’ll be back ... and you’ll die slow.”

Journey giggles as I stand and take her hand in mine, and without looking back we get in my truck and casually drive away.

winter

# chapter **nineteen**

“HEY, good morning, everybody. Let’s go ahead and get started. We’ve got something important to discuss.”

Trey stands between two stacks of plywood with the bands still on them as the crew files in and forms a circle in the same place we do every morning. I take my usual spot, leaning against the tire of a forklift with my arms crossed over my chest and a subtle grin on my face. Usually, it’s Cain who stands where Trey is, spewing his daily vitriol to begin our mornings. But he’s gone now, and I’m the only one who knows what Trey is going to say before he says it.

“So I don’t know if anyone has heard anything,” he goes on, a fake, somber expression on his face. “But the bosses at Lane got a call in the middle of the night from Cain, explaining that he won’t be in for a while because he’s in the hospital.” Murmurs begin quietly on opposite sides of the room as Trey continues. “Cain is in the hospital because he was attacked last night.”

The beat of my heart becomes a hammer hitting an anvil as the murmurs grow to shock and awe that spreads to everyone. I stay against the forklift, watching as everyone wonders aloud about the rest of the details Trey is trying to give them if they would just shut the fuck up.



Trey raises his hands, trying to wrangle the animals in again. “Listen up, listen up. The details are vague, but here’s what the bosses at Lane passed on to me last night. Cain was attacked in front of his house by two unknown assailants who got away. His injuries are not life-threatening, but he’s pretty beat up and has some serious fear for his life. There are going to be plenty of tests done at the hospital, but it looks like he might have a broken jaw or some other facial fracture, and possibly a broken rib.”

“Damn, somebody finally beat the shit out of him, huh?” one of the heavy equipment operators says with a chuckle that two other people mirror.

“Now hold on,” Trey says, gesturing with his hands. “I know Cain can be a pain in the ass. We all know, however, he’s still one of us. He works his ass off and we don’t want to see anybody get hurt. So at some point, I’m going to pass a card around for everyone to sign with well-wishes, and I’ll take it up to him once we get everyone’s signature. I don’t know if the police are involved or whatever, but I’m sure there will be more to come on this. In the meantime, I’ll be replacing Cain as the project manager.”

The crew erupts into cheers like Trey just won an award, everyone clapping with smiles on their faces as he tries his best to not grin too hard. I smile, too, knowing I’m the one who gave everybody this gift they clearly had been waiting for. They may be clapping for Trey, but they’re thanking me. Even if Cain were to heal like Wolverine, I highly doubt he’ll show his face on this job site again knowing I’m here. Good fucking riddance.

Trey goes on to say more things—things that are actually appropriate for a morning meeting instead of the bullshit Cain

used to say, and the crew breaks off into its usual groups. With Cain out of commission, I can do my job how I want to do it. I never needed anyone looking over my shoulder any fucking way.

As I make my way toward the carpentry equipment, I pull my phone from my pocket and call the best thing that ever happened to me. She answers on the second ring and the sound of her voice fills me with comfort.

“Good morning, Sir,” she says.

Blood begins to rush to my cock from just her words. “Good morning, my little devil. How are you?”

“I’m good. Just getting to work. Any news?”

I sit down in a rickety chair next to the chop saw. “Yes and no. Cain has notified the superiors at Lane Contracting that he was attacked. He’s in the hospital for who knows how long, but he seems to have told our employer that his attackers got away and that he doesn’t know who they were. So, news, but no news, which is good for us ... and him.”

“Good. That’s good,” Journey replies, and I can picture her flashing that gorgeous smirk. “As long as he does the smart thing we won’t have any more problems. It’s nice knowing you can be at work without having to deal with that piece of shit.”

“Got that right,” I reply. “I guess listening to your intrusive thoughts actually was a good idea.”

Journey laughs. “Yep. I told you. You know what’s funny? The voice doesn’t feel very intrusive these days.”

I nod. “I know exactly what you mean. In fact, when it comes to my own beast, I don’t hear anything anymore. It’s like ... it’s just me now.”

“Good. I like you just as you are.”

“Great, because there’s no putting this genie back in the bottle.” Journey giggles before I continue. “So that about sums up my work. How is your morning at the precinct?”

“Fine,” she answers. “Something interesting did happen when I first walked in, though. My partner seemed to notice the bite mark on my neck. I tried to cover it with makeup this morning like I did with the ligature marks, but there’s still sort of an imprint that can’t be covered.”

“Interesting. Did he say anything?”

“No, I just kept noticing him looking without trying to be caught. It was a little weird, that’s all. Nothing to worry about.”

“Yeah, I’m sure it’s nothing. If anything, he should do himself a favor and recognize that you’ve been marked by someone. Even if he doesn’t know who it is, he should use it as a big, flashing warning sign. Because you belong to me, Journey, and I wouldn’t have any problem choking the life out of a cop with my bare hands.”

“You can choke the life out of me with your bare hands,” she replies with a playful laugh. “Sounds like a good time to me.”

“Me, too,” I admit, remembering each and every time I’ve used my belt on someone, including Sierra. The thought makes me swallow hard. “Anyway, I didn’t want to disrupt your morning. Just thought you should know that Cain is being a good little boy and keeping his mouth shut.”

“You can interrupt my day all you want. You’re my Sir,” she answers.

My smile is as wide as it is devious. “And you’re my submissive little devil that I can’t wait to get my hands on again. Have a good day at work, little one.”

“You, too. Bye.”

“Bye.”

With a smile still tugging at the sides of my mouth, I pocket my phone and get to work feeling freer than ever. Life has never felt this fucking good.

# chapter **twenty**

“FUCK, WHAT TOOK YOU SO LONG?” I ask, swinging the door open wearing nothing but black pants with the belt unsecured and dangling.

Journey eyes me closely, her pupils nearly dilating at the site of me as she steps over the threshold.

“My Uber took forever, but I didn’t want to risk my car being seen here,” she says as I close the door behind her.

I shake my head, taking in the way she looks in tight black pants and a white halter top that looks so good against her skin it should be illegal.

“I understand that, but my god, you’re fucking breathtaking. I almost went insane waiting for you. Get over here.”

“Yes, Sir.”

I take a giant step toward Journey, pinning her against the door with my body against hers.

“Stick out your tongue,” I demand.

“Yes, Sir.”

I lick my bottom lip as Journey’s mouth slowly drops open, a string of spit connecting the top of her mouth to the bottom until she sticks out her tongue, breaking it.

“Fuck,” I whisper. “What a disgusting, filthy, nasty, perfect little slut you are.”

Unable to contain myself a second longer, I lean forward and suck her tongue into my mouth. She moans, and I feel her breath hitting my face, warming me up and stiffening my cock to a nearly painful degree. The things this woman does to me need to be studied in a fucking lab, because she makes me ravenous with desire. I suck her tongue while licking it with my own, and even with her tongue in my mouth, it’s not close enough.

“Being apart from you is torture,” I say after I pull back. “Keep that mouth open.”

Journey gapes her mouth, and I spit in the hole. She lets out a whispery moan that sends me reeling as she swallows our spit. How is it possible for a woman to make a man feel weak in the knees and fortified in the spine at the same time? She’s my weak spot and my reason to be stronger than ever, and I never knew a submissive could make me feel this way.

No. Scratch that. Journey is more than a submissive. She’s more than just the right side of the slash. Somehow, over the span of our unanticipated relationship she has become so much more. She has become everything. I’m not the same man I was before we met. I used to seesaw back and forth between wearing a mask and giving into my truest desires, but I’m off the ride now. There is only me, and I’m not just a beast. I’m *her* beast.

“On your knees,” I demand. Journey lowers herself and I wrap her hair around my fist. “Now crawl to the bedroom, little devil.”

“Yes, Sir,” she says before starting her journey, her gorgeous ass swaying back and forth beneath me as I guide

her.

Once we're in the bedroom, I position my little one in front of the bed on her knees while I go to the closet to select my weapon of choice. The first thing I grab is a riding crop with a studded leather whip on the tip. Journey's gaze bounces from the toy to my eyes as I walk back over to her, sticking the whip beneath her chin to raise her head to face me.

"Nothing else matters now that we're here, baby girl," I say. "Don't think about anything other than what we're about to do. Give me all of your troubles. All your worries. All of your anxiety. All your fear. Give it all to me. Let me wash it away. I am your sanctity, and I will make you pure. Do you trust me?"

"With my life," she answers.

My grin is uncontrollable. "That's my good girl. Now what's your safe word?"

"Arrest," she replies.

And then there's a knock at the door.

Everything stops. I frown. Journey glowers. We look at each other with furrows in our brows because if we're both here, who the fuck would be at the door?

"You expecting someone?" Journey asks.

I squint in my confusion, tilting my head as I try to think. "No. Never. The only person I can think of who might ... maybe Trey, but ... does he even know where I live?"

Another knock, this one louder than the first time. The sound goes from the rap of knuckles to the pounding of a fist.

My anger comes to a boil at how loud it is and I storm off down the hall. Journey gets up and walks quietly behind me

until we reach the living room. She cautiously lifts one of the blinds just as I twist the knob and snatch open the door, and we both gasp at the same time.

Detective Winter glares at me, his silence meeting my own and making the air between us thicker. My brain fires off a million thoughts simultaneously and I can't pick one to speak. There are so many questions that make my heart gallop and I feel lightheaded. Does he fucking know that Journey is here? I can feel the tension rising off of her as she drops the blinds and crouches down as if Winter can see through the door that's actually blocking his view, but I don't blame her. If he knows she's here, all hell will break loose. Even if I'm not a suspect in Sierra's disappearance anymore, this is a bad look for Journey. The thought of everything being out in the open makes my mouth dry, and after far too long sitting in silence, I still can't find words. So Detective Winter speaks first.

"Evan Godric," he says, his voice rough and full of confidence. His hair is combed back and his beard is growing to the point of looking unprofessional for a detective, but the arrogant demeanor floats off of him.

"Detective Winter," I force myself to answer. "What are you doing here?"

He scoffs. "You don't seem surprised to see me."

"I am," I answer, remembering the fake disposition I had when I stood at the door last time he knocked. I was wearing my mask back then, but it's gone now, and I don't know how to act in front of him. It doesn't help that I don't care anymore.

Another moment of silence elapses before he says, "You never called about that missing girl."



“I never had a reason to,” I shoot back quickly. Maybe a little too fast.

Winter tilts his head, his eyes dropping to my bare chest before rising again.

“You seem different,” he points out. “More confident. It looks good on you.”

“You hitting on me, Detective?”

“Of course not,” he says. “But I guess I do understand.”

“You understand what?”

He hesitates, shaking his head at his own thoughts. “Never mind. I just wanted to come by and see if you had seen or heard anything else about Sierra Cross. At the end of the day, you were the only suspect in that case. Isn’t that strange?”

I let out a rush of air as my impatience manifests on my face. “Look, Detective. I’m shirtless with my pants unbuttoned. Clearly, you’ve caught me at a bad time. So if you have something you’d like to say to me, please say it so I can go about my business.”

He shakes his head again, looking me up and down in a way that makes me want to grab him by his fucking throat and rip his esophagus out.

“It’s fine. I didn’t mean to interrupt whatever you have going on behind these closed doors,” he says. “Just wanted to check in. So you haven’t heard from Sierra since the day you two traveled back here? You know, the day she disappeared?”

“No, I have not,” I snip. “I still have your card and if I hear from her—not that I’d have a reason to—I’ll be sure to contact you. Thanks for dropping by.”

Winter flashes the most duplicitous smile I've ever seen. "No, Evan. Thank *you*. I appreciate your cooperation. I'll see you soon."

I frown. "Why would you see me soon?"

"Have a good rest of your night," Winter replies before spinning on his heels and walking down the stairs. He doesn't turn around until he reaches his car and opens the door, grinning at me before dropping inside and driving away.

I slam my door and turn to Journey who's standing behind me with a dreadful look on her face.

"What the fuck?" she exclaims, her words panic-filled, our sensual moment gone up in smoke.

I shake my head. "I have no idea, but that wasn't normal."

"Definitely not. Sam is too calculated to just show up for no reason. He hasn't mentioned a single word to me about the Sierra Cross case, so why the hell would he show up here talking about that?"

I frown as I sit down on the couch. "I don't know but something's up, Journey, and we need to find out what."

## chapter **twenty-one**

TREY GLARES at me from across the job site, watching with intense, narrowed eyes as I press the name Little Devil in my phone and put it to my ear. I don't care that he's watching me get on the phone instead of getting to work. He doesn't know that Journey and I spent all of last night racking our brains trying to think of what motivated Detective Winter to show up at my house unannounced. Trey doesn't know the panic we felt, and he has no idea that the alarm is still ringing this morning. We are the reason Cain isn't here, and I am the reason Sierra isn't either. So when it comes to priorities, making sure I don't spend the rest of my life in jail is number one, and if Trey wants to act like Cain because I'm on the phone with Journey, maybe he can suffer the same fate.

“Good morning, Sir,” Journey answers.

Her voice is almost completely drowned out by the loud whirring of saws, but I pinch my other ear closed and focus. Our conversations are too important to be misinterpreted or unheard. There's no time for miscommunication.

“My little devil,” I reply, wanting to smile but feeling held back by worry. “Talk to me. How are things there?”

Journey lets out a huff and I wish I was there to comfort her. I wish I could wrap my arms around her and whisper that

no matter what happens now, she and I will survive, even if no one else does.

“I’m not sure,” she replies. “I can’t put my finger on it, but something isn’t right. Here’s how this morning went down. I arrived at the precinct at the same time I always do and our captain called Sam and I into his office because he wanted to assign us to another case. The captain handed Sam a folder with information regarding a robbery in the heart of Center City, and told us that we were to pursue it diligently. I nodded and expected Sam to do the same thing as he took the folder, but instead he immediately handed the folder to me.”

“Hmm,” I say, frowning as Trey’s eyes linger on me before moving to one of the other workers by him.

“You have to understand, Evan, that Sam is the superior here,” Journey continues. “I’ve been a detective for less than two months while Sam has been one for years. When the captain hands us new cases, Sam always takes them because he’s the lead detective.”

“What did your captain say when Winter handed you the folder instead of keeping it?” I inquire, my curiosity piqued.

“The captain didn’t say anything, but Sam said he had something else he was working on that he couldn’t put down.”

My eyes widen and stare off into space as my heart beats itself into a frenzy.

“Shit,” I whisper before speaking up. “What’s the other thing he’s working on?”

“That’s what’s weird. I don’t know,” Journey replies, and I let out a sigh of disappointment. “When the captain furrowed his brow, Sam said something came across his desk the other day that he needed to button up. He said it was nothing serious

and that he'd be on the robbery case soon. I didn't know what to take from it, but when we left the office I asked what he had going on and he wouldn't answer. He just told me to focus on the robbery and that he'd be back. Then he left."

"He left?" I say, raising my voice.

"Yeah. He said he'd be back and walked out."

Fear clamps me in its jaws. What the fuck is this asshole doing and why isn't he telling Journey? Does this have something to do with Cain or is it because of Sierra? If it's Sierra, I still don't understand why he wouldn't tell his partner. None of it makes sense, and while I can't put my finger on it, there's one thing that I know for sure.

I stand up just as I see Trey walking toward me. "Journey, I have to go."

"Okay. Is everything alright?"

"Umm ... I don't ... yeah, everything's fine, little one. I just need to get to work. Trey is walking over here and I'm sure he's about to complain about me being on the phone. I want to keep him on my good side. You know?"

"I understand. But what should I do about Sam?"

"There's nothing you can do," I answer, hating that it's true. "All you can do is keep your eyes open and try to gather as much information from him as you can. Otherwise, just stay patient and calm. Everything will be fine." Now I hate not knowing if the last sentence is true.

"Okay. I guess I'll dive into this robbery case then. Talk to you soon?"

"Absolutely. Bye, baby girl."

"Bye."

We end the call and I pull the phone away from my ear just as Trey reaches me. He stops a few feet away and purses his lips before speaking.

“What’s up, Evan? You okay?”

“Actually, Trey, I’m not,” I reply, shoving my phone into my pocket.

Trey frowns. “What’s the matter? You were on the phone for a while.”

“Yeah, I was. I have an emergency and I have to go.”

“Right now?” he asks with raised brows. He tries to hide the annoyed surprise in his voice but it’s as clear as day.

“Yeah, right now,” I reply.

“Evan, the day is just getting started and I need you working on those soffit vents.”

“Somebody else is going to have to get them started or it can wait until I get back. I’m sorry, Trey, but this is a matter of life and death. I’ll be back as soon as I can. Dock me the hours if you want, but I have to go right now.”

“Evan,” Trey calls to me, but I’m already walking away.

I don’t bother looking over my shoulder because it doesn’t matter if Trey is unhappy with me right now. I wasn’t lying when I said I have an emergency that’s a matter of life and death. I have no fucking idea where Detective Winter is right now and neither does Journey, but I have a sickening feeling in my gut about all of this. Journey herself said that Winter is too calculated to just show up out of the blue, which means he’s trying to sniff something out. This fucker clearly has his sights set on me, and I’ll be damned if I allow myself to be a sitting duck.

I know it's a terrible time. I know the sun is shining brightly this morning, putting everything everyone does outside on full display for anyone with working vision. I know I'm losing money at work and pissing off Trey, the only person I've gotten along with at this job. I know the risk I'm taking by making this decision right now, but it's time to stop putting it off. Time has not healed this wound, and it's beginning to fester right in my backyard, putting my entire life on the line. So this is it. I'm going.

It's time to move Sierra's body.

## chapter **twenty-two**

I FLY HOME, feeling like I'm shrouded in luck because every light I approach is green so I can keep going. My mind moves at the same high speed as my truck, revving up like my engine and splintering in a million different directions as I try to think about what I'm going to do. I need to have a plan before I get home so I can execute it.

I know that when I dig up the footlocker, if anyone is watching, they may wonder why it was buried in the first place. But nosiness won't provide anyone with answers, so that's not a problem. Secondly, as long as I don't open it outside, no one will be aware of its contents. I'll simply pull it from the ground and drag it inside before filling the hole again. All of that is step one.

I pull up to the house and hop out the second the engine stops running. I jog inside, choosing to leave my work clothes on because if they get dirty it's no big deal. I'm always dirty when I come home from work. So instead of choosing new clothes, I think about where I'm going to take the body once I have it again. There are a couple of spots close to the Popeye's site that could work. A dumpster at the end of an alley a few streets over might do the trick. I've never seen anyone go down there. I could put the footlocker in the bed of the truck, back into the alley, and simply push it into the dumpster. I'd be



down there no more than sixty seconds then I'd be gone quicker than I came.

I could also remove the body from the footlocker, wrap it in plastic, and bury it beneath the ground where we're going to pour concrete for HVAC systems in a few days. The only problem there is that I would have to re-compact the ground, otherwise someone will notice. You can't pour concrete on loose dirt, and if I don't compact it enough the crew would dig it all up again to compact it themselves and the body would be found.

Fuck.

The dumpster in the alley. It's going to have to be the dumpster in the alley. Fuck it.

I grab gloves from a drawer in my kitchen and open the door to the backyard, my heart in a full sprint as nervousness wreaks havoc. It won't stop me this time. It has to happen and it has to be now. On my way to the burial plot, I grab the same shovel I used to dig the first time and step out into the yard. I do a full three-sixty check, making sure none of my neighbors are sitting outside, because today would be the day something random like that would happen. Luckily, it's a normal day and the coast is clear. I take a deep breath, grip the shovel, place the tip on the ground and position my foot on the end to help me push. With a grunt, I force the shovel into the dirt just as a car door closes nearby.

Too nearby.

When you live in a particular place for a long time, you become very familiar with the sounds in the area. You can tell the difference between a door closing at a neighbors place and one closing in your driveway. You know when someone is on your property if they make a single sound, and that's why I

freeze. The blade of the shovel is planted halfway in the ground, but I stop moving when I hear the car door.

Someone is here.

Leaving the shovel in place, I pull my phone from my pocket and check it. Journey hasn't called or texted, and she would have no reason to come here because she thinks I'm still at work. But if it's not Journey ... Trey? Did he come to check on me after I left with my fake emergency? That would be ridiculous. Plus, he has never been over to my house before. I still don't think he knows where I live. But if it's not him and it's not Journey, there is only one other answer.

I pull the shovel from the ground and carry it with me as I round the side of my house on my way to the front. My brow is furrowed in both anger and worry as I reach the halfway point, but my world hits a brick wall as I turn the corner and nearly slam face-first into Detective Winter.

## chapter **twenty-three**

“WHAT THE FUCK?” I snap without even thinking, my sense of self-control completely destroyed by the shock of Winter’s presence. “What the fuck are you doing here? And why are you coming to my backyard?”

Winter, dressed in all-black like he’s my personal grim reaper, looks just as shocked as I feel. His eyes are wide as he takes a step back, placing a hand on his hip right next to his gun. I can tell from the look on his face that he’s ready to pull the trigger first and claim he feared for his life later. He has a gun and I’m holding a shovel, but a jury will believe he was at a disadvantage and was justified in shooting me with what I know will be multiple bullets.

I can’t say that my life flashes before my eyes, but everything does come to a stop. My breath catches in my throat as I await his next move, wondering if he’s going to pull the weapon, but he doesn’t. Winter keeps his hand in place but doesn’t pull the gun. He glares at me, narrowing his eyes before releasing a breath.

“I knocked on the front door,” he says, his hand still ready to grip the pistol. “But you didn’t answer so I came around back.”

“For fucking what?” I blurt out.

“I wanted to look around,” he answers, standing up straight and finally putting both arms at his sides.

“And you were going to do that without my permission?” I snap.

“I don’t need permission to look around outside,” he answers smugly.

I grip the shovel tighter, because I would love nothing more than to bash his fucking head in. I could stuff his body in the footlocker on top of Sierra and take them both to the dumpster. I’d probably have to break his legs and arms to make him fit, but I have no problem with that. In fact, it’d bring me joy to hear his bones snap.

“You want to tell me what you’re doing with that shovel, Evan?” Winter asks, glancing down at my hands for a second before looking up at me.

“None of your fucking business,” I respond.

My anger bubbles in my stomach and forms waves that crash against the shore of my mind. I’ve been caught holding the tool I used to bury Sierra, and the only way I can think to react is with outrage. If I don’t get myself under control, there’s no way this detective won’t catch on.

“I came here to talk to you about something else,” Winter says. “But I’ve got to be honest with you, Evan, you look pretty suspicious coming from the backyard while wielding a shovel. As far as I can see, unless you’ve got a garden back there, you were either coming to beat someone’s brains in for coming to your house unannounced, or you were digging back there. I feel pretty confident that it’s the latter, seeing as how half the shovel is covered with fresh dirt.”

I glance down at the shovel and release a disappointed breath. Why the fuck am I even carrying this? Why didn't I put it down before walking around the house? What a stupid move.

"Now, you can either eliminate my suspicions by showing me what you were doing in the backyard," Winter continues. "Or I can come back here with a warrant and find out for myself."

"A warrant?" My heart drums chaotically as my breathing weakens. What the fuck is happening right now?

"Let's not act like you weren't the *only* suspect I had for the disappearance of that girl from the BDSM club," Winter explains. "We never found that girl, now here you are digging in your backyard. There isn't a judge in the world that would deny a warrant with that level of probable cause. So are you going to show me or not? How we go about this is up to you, but I'm giving you a chance to prove me wrong right now."

I don't know what to say. He can't see what I was doing but he also can't come back here with a warrant. No matter how I swing it, my life is over unless I do something drastic.

I have to kill him.

Right here. Right now. I have to kill him. But I can't do it out here. I need to get him inside and figure out how to do it silently.

"Okay," I say on a shaky breath. "Come inside and I'll tell you everything you want to know."

Winter takes a step back and places his hand on his hip again. "I can't do that, Evan. You're holding a shovel, and I've just threatened to come back with a warrant. I'm not going

anywhere with you. Either show me what you were doing or I'm going to get a warrant. Choose. Now."

My fists tighten around the shovel. I'm going to do it. I have to. He has given me no choice but to hit him before he can pull that fucking gun from its holster. I know he can hear how panicked I'm breathing, and he can see the sweat on my brow. He knows he's got me, and I'm going to go to prison if I don't fucking do something right now.

My eyes dart around, making sure no one will see when I attack him. It looks like we're alone until a woman with a tiny dog on a leash rounds the corner and walks directly in front of my house. Her stupid fucking dog spots us and immediately begins to bark, drawing her attention over to us. My fingers loosen their grip as the woman waves with a kind smile on her face. I wave back, but Winter doesn't even turn around. He keeps his hand on his gun and starts taking steps backward toward the front of the house.

"What ... where are you going?" I ask, following him as he cautiously backs away.

"You made your choice, Evan," he answers. The man doesn't take his eyes off me for a single second as he backpedals all the way to his car that still has the engine running. He even fumbles to find the latch for the door because he won't look away. Eventually, he pops it open and gets in, and without another word he drives away.

I watch him go, my gut filling with dread as the realization that my world is crumbling beneath my feet hits me like a ton of bricks. I could fucking cry from the weight of it all. I fucked up. I made the wrong decision by leaving work and coming here, because if I wasn't here, Winter wouldn't have had any

reason to suspect the backyard. I handed it to him on a silver fucking platter and now I'm stuck.

I have no idea how long it takes to get a warrant. Will he be back in an hour? Tomorrow? A couple of days? I'm completely in the dark and now realize that I can't make another logical move on my own. It's impossible to make a plan without all of the information, but there's only one place I can get the info I need to avoid catastrophe.

My jaw drops open as it hits me—the realization that I have no cards of my own left to play except one. No matter what, the life I knew before I met Sierra is over. Nothing will be the same, but I don't have a choice. It's either play this final card or spend the rest of my life behind bars, regretting not at least *trying* to play it. Like I said before, my life is over unless I do something drastic. So I'm going to do something drastic.

I'm going to tell Journey the truth.

## chapter **twenty-four**

ANXIETY TAKES over my body for the entire day. My phone rings with calls from Trey. I never answer. I'm too nervous to pick up and try to create a lie to excuse my absence from work. I can't think straight enough so I just let my voicemail fill with his messages.

Detective Winter never returns with his warrant, but that doesn't mean he won't. It just means that I have no idea how long the process takes, because there isn't a bone in my body that thinks he was bluffing. I know he's coming back, it's just a matter of when, which is why my nerves are on fire as I wait for Journey to arrive.

I've thought about it time and time again, trying my best to shift angles in my mind to get a better perspective on the potential results of my plan, and I can't come up with anything. I have no idea how Journey is going to react to me telling her about Sierra. I could lose her forever. She could arrest me. Or she could be supportive because of everything we've been through since we started seeing each other. Journey and I have been each other's dream come true. Our bond is thicker than the fact that we both enjoy the BDSM lifestyle. I know who she is on the inside and she knows me. There isn't another person on this Earth that could understand what it's like to have a violent voice in your head, but Journey



does because she has the same thing. That's no small matter. It's huge. It's monumental, and not something you just give up without a fight. At least that's what I'm hoping she will think.

I hear when her Uber arrives and have to focus on breathing properly so I don't pass out. Journey is the only person I've ever given a fuck about. If the rest of the world died all at once, I'd be fine as long as she survived. She's the only person I've ever felt like I needed. Beating the shit out of my nemesis sealed the deal for me, and I can barely stand the idea that this might be the end of it.

I open the door before she can knock, biting my lip at the sight of her. She looks incredible with something as simple as black pants and a white button-up with the top three buttons unfastened. Her cleavage is barely visible but enough to draw me in, and her hair is tied into a ponytail that plunges down her back. Simple. Stunning. Perfect.

"Hey, are you okay?" she asks as soon as she sees me, because she cares about me the same way I care about her. The thought wrenches my heart.

"No," I reply honestly. There's no use in lying now. "Thanks for coming so quickly. A lot has happened and we need to talk."

"Okay," she answers, her brow furrowed as she crosses the threshold.

Instead of going to the bedroom, I guide Journey over to the couch and have her sit down, while I take the ottoman in front of her so we can look each other in the eye. My heart pounds so hard I can barely see straight as a hornet's nest of emotions buzz in my mind. I'm all over the place and have to give all of my energy to remain focused.

“Before I say anything,” I start. “I need to know how your day at work went. Did you get any more information about your partner?”

Journey takes off her watch and places it on the end table. “No. I actually never saw Sam after we left the captain’s office this morning. I have no idea where he went or what he’s doing. Evan, you look really tense. What’s going on?”

I take a deep breath. The moment has arrived and it makes me shake with fear. I have been pulled into Journey’s orbit. She is my gravity, so losing her means my world would drop into the nothingness of space. I suddenly feel like I’ll be lost in the dark without her and I’m terrified.

“Journey,” I say on a breath, barely able to keep eye contact with her. “Your partner ... Winter was here today. He came to my house this morning. That’s where he went when he left the office after your meeting with the captain. I know because I came here after I got off the phone with you. I left work and rushed here. I needed to ... do something.”

The lines in Journey’s brow are canyons as she stares at me, unease making her face tight. “What did you need to do?”

“Umm ... after we got off the phone, I rushed home because your partner was acting so strange. He showed up at my house last night out of the blue, and then he just left the precinct without you, and I just had a feeling he was on to me, so I rushed back here to get rid of the evidence.”

“Evan,” Journey says. She reaches out and takes both of my hands in hers. “You’re scaring me. You’re talking fast and don’t have your composure, which isn’t like you. Take a breath and slow down. Talk to me. Tell me what’s going on.”

The sincerity in her eyes makes me feel weak. I want her so much. I need Journey in my life and I'm afraid of what I might do if she leaves. Fuck, I never meant for any of this to happen. I never meant to fall for her.

"I needed to get rid of the evidence, Journey," I say again, completely lost in my emotions.

"*What* evidence?"

"The evidence proving that I killed Sierra Cross."

The world goes silent—no cars on the street, no wind in the air, no breath in my lungs. Journey stares at me with wide eyes, and I feel a sudden need to fill the silence with an explanation before she forms her own conclusion.

"I did it," I go on, letting the flood gates open. "I killed her, Journey, but I swear on my life that I didn't mean to. I met Sierra by chance at The Black Collar. She approached me, we watched a little of the show on the main stage and decided to leave together. On our way here, she did *not* get cold feet. We came inside. We engaged in a scene—an intense one with breath play using my belt. While I was choking her from behind, I lost control. I went all out, fucking her and pulling the belt at the same time, and by the time I was finished, she was dead. I didn't realize it until I removed the belt. I'd strangled her to death by accident. In my panic, I went on a mission to get rid of the body. I ended up choosing to put her in a footlocker I used to use to store tools ... then I buried her in my backyard ... which is where she still is."

Journey's hands slip away from mine.

I keep going, trying my best to get all of the information out before she can speak. "When I got here this morning, I planned to move the body. I'd been wanting to get rid of it

ever since you first showed up with Detective Winter the first time, but the timing was never right. So I figured today was my best chance, but right as I was about to dig, Winter showed up. He caught me with the shovel in my hand and was immediately suspicious. He asked me to show him what I was doing in the backyard, and when I refused he said he was going to get a warrant. He never came back, but I believe him. I don't know how long it takes to get a warrant, but I have until then to move and dispose of the body in a way that doesn't leave evidence behind.

“I know you're in shock right now. I know you're pissed off and probably want nothing to do with me, but I need your help. At a minimum, I need to know how long it takes to get a warrant. At a maximum, I need to know the best way to get rid of the body so I don't spend the rest of my life in prison.

“I'm sorry to drop this on you, little devil. I never meant for it to happen, but somehow I ended up falling for you and I couldn't let you go. I'm sorry, Journey.”

She gets up from the couch and begins to pace. Her eyes never land on anything in particular as she walks in a circle by the front door. My heart pounds as I watch her, unsure of what will happen next. Hopefully she doesn't fucking shoot me. Better yet, maybe she should. Maybe it'd be a better ending than ending up in prison without her as the center of my universe.

“Journey, please say something,” I plead.

She stops walking, her eyes glued to the floor as tears fill the corners. When she finally looks at me, I see nothing but hurt.

“You killed her,” she states. “After all this time, it really was you. You murdered her.”

“It was an *accident*,” I exclaim, trying my best not to sound mad.

“Was it?”

“Yes! I never meant for any of this to happen. Please believe me.”

“I’ve believed you this entire time,” she counters. “But you were lying to me. The only reason you told me the truth just now is because Sam came here and caught you. If he hadn’t, you would’ve moved the body and I would’ve never known that you strangled that girl to death in the same house you’ve been fucking me in.

“How fucking dare you, Evan. How dare you be everything I’ve ever wanted. How dare you make me fall for you and then drop this on me. You know how fucked up I am, and you do this shit to me? I’m a goddamn detective! It’s bad enough I was fucking a suspect, but now I’m actually in love with the killer! Fuck you!”

She snaps. In a move so fast I don’t see it coming, Journey darts toward me, tackling me off the ottoman and knocking us both to the floor. I land on my back and before I can blink she’s on top of me, gun drawn, the barrel pressed to the side of my head.

“You fucking sonofabitch! I should kill you right now. I should fucking kill you,” she screams in my face with her finger on the trigger.

I know she means it and I deserve it. Lying to everyone else is fine, but not Journey. She is the only one who deserves the truth from me and I should’ve given it to her, but fear makes you do crazy things like lie to the ones you love most.

I don't try to take the gun away. I don't even move my head over. I let her do it. I embrace the cold feel of the metal against my temple because her tears falling on me breaks my heart, and it hurts worse than any bullet ever could.

"I understand," I whisper, looking Journey in her tear-filled eyes. "I understand and I'm sorry. It's okay if you do it. Tell them I attacked you when you confronted me about Sierra. You deserve better than what I've given you, and I'm sorrier than I've ever been in my entire life about absolutely anything. It's okay, little devil. It's okay to pull the trigger."

Journey's tears continue to fall as she leans forward, her face only inches from mine with the gun still pressed to my temple. She shakes her head, her face twisted into an angry grimace.

"You dumb fuck," she says, leaning in closer. "Haven't you learned? There is nothing better for me than what you've given."

Journey's mouth slams against mine. I taste her salty tears and the sweetness of her tongue, and it fuels my passion for her. We kiss harder than we ever have as she drops the gun and her hands attack my body. She pulls her mouth away and tears at my clothes, ripping buttons off my shirt to get to my stomach before moving down to my belt. When she realizes what she's doing, she freezes.

"What?" I say, panting from the overload of adrenaline. "What's the matter?"

"Is this what you used?" she asks, pulling my belt buckle. "Is this the belt you killed her with?"

I let out a breath. "Yes."

She pauses, her eyes dropping down to the belt and staying there, and to my utter surprise, she holds the belt with one hand and uses the other to rub her clit through her pants. I watch her in amazement. My cock stiffens to fucking concrete at the delicious sight of her, so lustful, so perfect. But I don't move. I wait until I have her permission because I'm the one who fucked up. I won't push this on her or attempt to force her to get over the bomb I just dropped on her emotions. I wait patiently for her to move forward.

"Tell me," she says quietly at first. Then she speaks up, more confident. "Tell me how it happened."

"Tell you how it happened?" I ask, completely sideswiped.

She frowns. "Don't make me ask again."

Journey gets off me and goes back to her seat on the couch. I watch with wide eyes as she unbuttons her pants and slides them off along with her panties. She looks at me, knowing I'm drooling over her, desperate to get my hands on her gorgeous skin so I can make it my perfect imperfection.

"Don't fucking come near me," she snaps. "Not until I say so. You don't have the right to Dom over me unless I give it to you. Now tell me exactly how it happened."

I lick my lips before pinching them together, my cock throbbing with desperation.

"I made her kneel," I begin, watching as Journey rubs her pussy in front of me. "Then I forced her to open her mouth for me, and while I fucked it, I made her rub her clit while she drooled all over herself."

Journey lets out a soft moan that tightens my gut. She sounds so fucking good. I'm dying to touch her, to be inside

her, to hold her, to hurt her, to own her. But watching her get off to my murder scene makes my heart take flight.

“She was timid at first,” I continue, loving how deep she’s into it. I can tell from here that her pussy is already a river. “But then I began choking her and she liked it. She loved the feeling of my hand around her throat. She told me that nothing makes her come faster than breath play, so I choked her until she was gasping while I played with her pussy. She nearly came, but I wouldn’t let her.”

She moans again as her eyes close and she immerses herself in the story, picking up the pace of the circles she’s rubbing on her clit.

“Then, after teasing her, I allowed her to come all over my hand while I fingered her. She was a soaking, pitiful mess who could barely support herself when I was done. My cock was hard and I didn’t want to wait anymore, so I made her turn around and lay on her stomach in front of the door.”

Her eyes fly open, her head turning to the front door. “Right there?”

“Yes, right there,” I reply. “She laid right there while I looped my belt around her neck and began to pull. She asked me to fuck her hard and become a monster for her, so that’s what I did. I put on a condom, tightened my grip on the end of the belt, and fucked her like a madman while I pulled with every fiber of my being.”

“Yes,” Journey moans, her eyes stuck on the bare spot in front of the door where Sierra took her last breath.

“My arms nearly cramped from pulling so hard, and when I came, it was like dynamite.”



“Oh my god,” she whispers, her skin turning red before my eyes as her body heats up, surging toward an orgasm.

“I exploded inside of her,” I go on, just as into it as Journey is. “I nearly toppled over from the effort I’d put in. Once I caught my breath, I leaned forward to remove the belt. I immediately noticed the deep, red, ligature marks on her neck, and when I managed to get it off, her head fell forward onto the floor. She was gone, strangled to death right there in front of my door with my cock still buried inside of her.”

“Oh god, I’m fucking coming,” she announces just before her body tightens into convulsions that rock her back and forth. All I can do is bite my lip and watch as she detonates before me, denying me the pleasure of making her come myself.

Once Journey comes down, her eyes finally find me again. She pants, licking the sweet cum off her fingers while staring at me. I’ve never been so taken aback, so disgusted, so turned on, so fucking in love.

“Did you like watching that?” she asks.

I nod, biting my lip. “Yes.”

“Do you think I should let you come?”

It takes everything in me not to explode. I’m a Dom. No one lets me do anything. But for her ... for her I’ll submit.

“Yes,” I answer.

“Take off the belt,” she commands.

I do as I’m told, removing the belt and holding it in front of me.

“Now go kneel in front of the door.”

Silently, I obey. I kneel in front of the door and wait for Journey, who slowly walks over and squats in front of me with her back to my chest.

“Now put that belt around my neck,” she says. “And fuck me exactly the way you fucked her. Don’t stop until you come all over me. You do not belong to her. You are not *her* monster, Evan. You are *mine*. Now prove it. Reclaim me. Make me yours. Convince me that I’m the only one for you. Make me believe it right now or you’ll never see me again.”

I don’t hesitate for a single second. My body goes into auto pilot and my hand is around Journey’s throat as quick as a lightning strike. I squeeze from behind her, finding so much pleasure in hearing her wheeze beneath the grip of my hand before I push her down onto the floor. I tear myself out of my pants and underwear before wrapping the belt around Journey’s neck and cinching it tight. She doesn’t even try to get away. She doesn’t claw at the leather or look at me with wide eyes like she has made a mistake now that she can’t breathe. Good, because I wouldn’t stop either way. We’ve come too far and she’s right, I am her monster. I am fucking vicious for her. I’m an animal, a hunter, and she is my prey. Forget Winter. Forget Sierra’s lifeless body stuffed inside the footlocker beneath the dirt outside. Nothing else matters, and if it all ends tonight—if I end up in handcuffs after this moment, it’ll be worth it. She will be worth it.

With a beastly growl, I plunge myself into Journey’s pussy. She’s so fucking wet it makes my jaw drop, and I don’t start slowly. I fuck her hard, losing control in an instant, using the belt as leverage. I pull it and fuck her hard, knowing she can’t breathe, knowing this much tension could kill her, but also knowing I can’t reclaim her without going all out. She will

accept nothing less, and I won't stop until I can give nothing more.

My body slams against Journey's with each powerful stroke. I've never fucked this hard in my entire life, and my orgasm builds in a hurry. I keep going, understanding that she'll die if I don't come soon but needing just another few strokes before I unravel.

"Holy shit," I yell at the top of my lungs. "I'm fucking coming!"

I thrust into her one more time before pulling out and fisting my cock over her back and ass. Cum explodes out the tip of my dick, showering Journey until her backside is covered and my vision blurs.

I want nothing more than to fall over and stay there until I can catch my breath, but Journey isn't moving. Flashbacks of the moment I realized I'd killed Sierra come back to me as my fingers fumble to get between the leather and her skin. It takes too long, and once the belt is free Journey's eyes are closed and she's not moving.

"Journey!" I scream as I turn her over. Her beautiful head flops back, her neck loose and succumbing to the weight of her skull. "Oh god. Journey, no!"

I lose my mind. Fear, pain, agony, and sadness all sweep into the room and blanket me, threatening to consume me entirely. But I can't just let them take me. I can't just sit here and watch as she lies lifeless in my arms. I'd rather die than be without her. The world can burn if she's not in it.

In a last ditch effort, I place Journey flat on her back and begin CPR. I've never been to a CPR class in my life, but I get the gist. I place both hands on her chest and pump over and

over again before pinching her nose closed and giving her two breaths, watching her chest rise and fall each time. I go back to chest compressions until my arms tire, then another two breaths. Feeling like I'm going to explode from the agony, I keep going, and just when I think I've lost her for good, she begins to cough.

"Oh fuck. My baby," I say as I wrap her in my arms and lift her body to me. I cradle her, watching her face to make sure she's okay. "You were dead. I killed you, Journey. I killed you and had to fight to bring you back."

Journey coughs again, struggling to suck in air with me squeezing her, but I don't let her go. I can't. If flashing lights pulled into my driveway right now, they'd have to kick the door down and pry me off of her.

"I'm okay," Journey says. "You did it. You saved me, baby."

"I fucking can't live without you, Journey," I tell her. "I'm so sorry. I can't believe I killed you."

She throws her arms around me and we curl into a ball on the floor, both of us panting as emotion takes over.

"All that matters is that you brought me back," she says in my ear, and I can tell she's crying. "You saved me, Evan, and I'm going to save you. We're in this together. You and me."

"Against the world," I reply.

Journey nods her head. "Against the world."

## chapter **twenty-five**

OUR GLASSES and a bottle of port wine sit empty on the nightstand, and the euphoria I feel is a combination of being wine drunk and high on the fact that Journey is here with me. Alive.

She's on her stomach with her hands tucked under her face while I straddle her back, massaging her skin with warm oil. After coming back from being choked to death, she deserves so much more than what I'm able to give her, but all she wanted was a massage and I gladly obliged. Obviously, I've never experienced anything like what happened tonight, and to say that I feel closer to Journey than ever would be an understatement.

"How are you feeling?" I ask as my thumbs dig into the back of her shoulders.

"I'm okay," she answers quietly.

I'm desperate to know what she's thinking. Journey hasn't said much about my admission of guilt. She has been quiet since coming back from the dead, but time isn't on our side. While I don't want to rush the time she needs to process the information, her partner is still out there.

"Would it be bad for me to ask what you're thinking?" I inquire, trying to step lightly while still probing for

information.

“I’m thinking about a lot,” she answers.

“Care to share with the class? Not to be a pest, but there’s a lot going on right now.”

She scoffs. “Understatement of the year.”

I keep massaging her, trying to ease the tension I can already feel building back up.

“I know I’ve been quiet,” she says. “But that’s because I’m thinking. It’s not everyday you find out the person you love has killed someone.”

My heart sinks at the sound of her voice but holds onto the fact that she just said she loves me. I thought I heard her say it earlier but wasn’t sure. Fuck. Somebody actually loves me.

“I’m sorry I dropped that on you without any warning,” I say. “I was in a bit of a panic about what happened this morning. I didn’t mean to crush you like that.”

“You didn’t crush me,” she interjects. “Just caught me by surprise. But it’s like I told you a long time ago, I’m not a normal girl, Evan.”

“Normal is overrated,” I say, smiling when she giggles.

“Agreed. And if there’s one thing I’ve learned since being with you, it’s that it’s okay to be myself. It used to bother me that I had the thoughts that ran through my mind all day. I embrace it now and lean into the fact that I don’t fit the societal standard. Some people would call me crazy, and that’s fine. Crazy is more fun. And even though it’s corny, I’m crazy about you, Evan. The last thing I want is to lose what we have because I know for a fact that I won’t find it anywhere else,

and now that I've had it, I can't live without it. I can't live without you."

I chuckle. "It's funny. That's the exact thought I've been having about you."

"Good. It's great knowing that I'm not the only one invested in this."

"You're definitely not."

Journey shifts her body, causing me to move to the side so she can turn over. Once we're face to face, she looks me in the eye with a serious expression.

"Do you love me, Evan?" she asks.

I've never told anyone that I love them, and our relationship isn't years old. But what I feel when I'm with Journey isn't something to take lightly. I'm miserable without her and in heaven when we're together. She's all I think about, all I want, and the only thing I need. Not to mention the fact that I would gladly slit someone's throat for her. All she would have to do is ask, and I can't say that for anybody else on this planet. If that isn't love, then I don't know what is.

"I'm not the kind of person who says things like that," I reply, but my heart makes me say the rest. "But for the first time in my life, I want to say it. Just like you, I'm not normal either, so the way things get twisted in my head may make it seem strange or overly dramatic. But I know that in my own way, I do love you, Journey. I think I love you more than I've ever loved anything, and as much as that fucks with my mind, I know it's true."

Tears immediately fill Journey's eyes before she moves in to kiss me. The taste of her lips sends me reeling as usual, and

when she pulls away, I miss the warmth of her mouth in an instant.

“I love you, too,” she says. “Which is why we’re going to make sure you don’t end up in prison. I don’t care what it takes. You mean too much to me, and I don’t care what I have to do in order to keep us together. So I’m going to go to the precinct tomorrow and find out what Sam is up to. I don’t know how I’m going to do it, but I am. I’ll find out if he has something new on the Sierra Cross case or not, and I’ll check in on whether or not he actually went to a judge for a warrant. If he did, I should be able to find out when we can expect the judge to grant it. Once I know what we need to know, I’ll contact you. If everything goes right, I’m going to come over here after I’m off, and we’re going to move the body. Together.”

I lick my lips, doing my best to keep from grinning like a child.

“Together?” I ask, my entire body filling with pride.

“Of course,” she replies, smiling. “And if we have to handle Cain or anybody else, we’ll do that together, too. Because we love each other. Right?”

I wrap my fingers around her throat and pull her face over to mine. “Fucking right, my little devil.”

We kiss, our arms entangling as we fall to the bed in a lustful state of bliss. Everything may change tomorrow, but all we’re thinking about is this moment. Nothing else matters but us and the twisted love we share. Maybe we’re not normal, but who needs normal when you have this? Love worth dying for. Love worth living for. Love worth killing for.



## chapter **twenty-six**

**ME:** *Hey, have you heard anything? Is he there?*

**Journey:** *No to both questions. Haven't seen him and I'm not sure where he is. We have a morning briefing in ten minutes. After that, I'll see if I can talk to the captain about his whereabouts. If I get nothing there, I'll see if I can find anything on his desk. Don't worry, Sir. I'm going to let you know the minute I learn something.*

**Me:** *Okay. Thank you, little one. Hope to hear from you soon.*

I PUSH my phone back into my pocket, but I'm anything but unworried. In fact, this might be the tensest I've ever been. Journey is at her precinct being a detective who's looking for information about her own partner, while I'm back at work after lying through my teeth to Trey about an emergency involving a neighborhood friend. If only he knew I don't have any friends—except Journey, of course. Regardless, I'm back at the Popeye's construction site acting as if my life isn't being slowly twisted upside down while I try to keep it right-side-up.

The sound of nail guns firing into wood combines with the roar of generators, giving me a headache and making me feel like I'm going insane. It's hard enough to think straight when

I'm occupied by what might be happening at the precinct, and the noise isn't helping. I feel like I'm on the verge of snapping. The duality of Journey admitting that she loves me last night while also worrying that Winter already has a warrant and is digging in my backyard as we speak has me reeling. How the hell am I supposed to focus on cutting soffit vents with all of this going on?

Nevertheless, I manage. There's nothing I can do about Detective Winter. If he is making a move right now, I can't stop him. Hell, I wouldn't even know. In all honesty, the fact that he didn't return immediately with the warrant is starting to make me feel better about it. He was so arrogant when he said a judge would grant him a warrant with the probable cause he claimed he had, but if that were true, why didn't he come back last night? Over twenty-four hours have passed and he's still MIA. Maybe he didn't have as much evidence as he thought he did. Good. Go find somebody else's life to fuck with.

An hour flies by when you're bent over saw horses measuring and cutting wood over and over again. I cut enough vents to fill an entire side of the building without hearing anything from Journey. While I was working, I didn't allow myself to think about what was happening at the precinct. I knew that if I thought about it once, I wouldn't get any work done, and since I like Trey, I felt like I needed to make up for lying to him. So I kept my head down and knocked them out. But once I finished enough vents for one side, my mind wandered.

Why haven't I heard from her yet? This doesn't make any sense. At a minimum, Detective Winter should have at least shown up to the precinct by now. I should've gotten a text from Journey saying ... *something*. Surely we haven't gone this long with complete radio silence.

I reach for my phone, but as my fingers graze it in my pocket, Trey catches my attention. I see him walking toward me and I drop the phone, removing my hand from my pocket just as he reaches me.

“Hey man,” he says. “I just wanted to let you know that the vents came out great. I know you’re probably stressing about your friend, but I appreciate you coming through when it counts. How are you feeling?”

“Umm, what?” I reply. Then I realize he’s referring to my lie. “Oh, yeah my friend. Right. Yeah, I’m doing okay. I’m good. Definitely still worried, but I’m good. I appreciate you asking.”

“Sure thing,” Trey says, patting me on the shoulder. “Let me know if you need anything, okay. Keep it up, man. You’re doing great.”

Trey walks away, and instead of going for my phone again, I decide to get back to work. I need something to keep me distracted anyway, so I grab my tools and begin to lay out the next set of vents. Then I fire up my saw and start cutting.

An hour later, my phone rings in my pocket. I don’t hear it because of the saw making so much noise, but the buzz grabs my attention and I nearly chop my fucking leg off trying to answer it so quickly. The second I hear her voice, I know my universe has begun to cave in on itself.

“Evan,” Journey says, followed by a gust of wind distorting the call.

“Hey, what’s going on? Are you running?”

“Yes,” she replies, panting. “Go home, right now.”

I stand up straight, my heart suddenly thundering. “What? Why? What’s going on?”

“Just get home now!”

“Journey, what happened?” I ask as I start speed walking toward my car.

“Winter knows everything,” she replies, breathing hard. “He knows about us.”

“What the fuck?”

“He knows what we did to Cain. He knows about us being together, and he got the fucking warrant to search your house from the judge this morning.”

My eyes widen and my body freezes. I stop walking and stand there as shock makes my legs weak.

“I’ll explain more later,” she goes on, slamming the door to her car loud enough for me to hear. “But you need to drop everything, get back to your house and start digging. We have to get that body out of there right now. I’ll meet you there. Go, Evan. Now!”

Journey hangs up the phone, but I keep it pressed to my ear. My thoughts explode like fireworks as dismay and hysteria flood my system. I can’t fucking believe it.

Winter wasn’t bluffing.

Cain has talked.

My brain gathers the information and sounds the alarms, my legs taking off in a full sprint across the site. I hear Trey calling for me but I don’t stop until I reach my truck. In a blind frenzy, I snatch open the door, jump in, and try to push the pedal through the floor.

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WHEN I MAKE IT HOME, I nearly drive into my own front door from speeding into the driveway. I slam on the brakes, shut off the engine, and leave the door open as I run inside. At first, my brain misfires, unsure of what to do first. Then it hits me that nothing else matters. If Winter has a warrant, that means he could be on his way here at this very moment, so the only thing I need to be thinking about is getting the body out of my backyard.

From the front door, I sprint through the house, jumping over the ottoman in my living room and crashing into the back door. I twist the knob and bolt outside, grabbing my shovel as I go, and I don't pause when my feet hit the dirt. The second I'm over Sierra's grave, I bury the shovel into the ground and pull out a mound of dirt.

I keep going, sweat beading on my forehead before dripping off my face and melting into the ground as I dig with the knowledge that my life depends on it. I grunt with each press of the shovel, giving it everything I have until the spade hits something hard.

The footlocker.

Just as I drop to my knees inside the shallow hole, Journey comes darting out of the house dressed in gray pants and a gray button-up that she completely disregards. She doesn't even greet me. She comes to a sliding stop next to the hole and drops to her knees to help, using her hands to pull dirt off the footlocker.

"That motherfucker," she says, talking while still pulling dirt from the top of the box. "I asked the captain what the hell was going on with Sam, and he told me Sam had been acting funny since he got a call from somebody named Cain the other day."

I keep digging, breathing loud and hard as I move and listen at the same time.

“I couldn’t believe it,” Journey goes on. “Cain called the precinct and asked for me. I guess he’d remembered my name and wanted to talk to me or blackmail me or fucking *something*. I don’t know because I wasn’t there at the time, so Sam took the call for me. I can only assume that once Sam found out I was with you during the attack on Cain, he got suspicious. He showed up at your house to see if I was there because he has always had this weird little crush on me. After whatever happened with you guys yesterday, he went back to the captain and told him how he caught you with that fucking shovel. He went to see the judge right after that, and the captain told me the judge approved the warrant this morning.”

I don’t even respond. There’s no point. The wheels are already in motion and my only choice is to move. Without another word, we keep digging with our hands until the handles on the side of the footlocker become clear enough for us to grab. We take positions on each side of the box and lift it out of the ground, neighbors be damned. Journey stares down at it but doesn’t say anything or ask questions. Instead, we grab our respective handle and lift.

“Fucking drop it!” a voice screams from my open back door.

Journey and I turn at the same time, and when we see Detective Winter standing in the doorway with his gun drawn, we set the footlocker down and I put my hands in the air.

Game over.

corpses

## chapter **twenty-seven**

MY JAW DROPS open as I breathe through my mouth, my lungs working overtime from the stress. The worst has happened. Detective Winter has caught us and has his gun pointed right at us. Journey's career is over. She'll be a cop who goes to jail, and no one wants to be a cop who goes to jail. As we stand here staring at each other, I'm too shocked to move. I can't think. All I have is disbelief, my heart drumming so fast my vision blurs.

Journey stands next to me but her hands aren't raised like mine. She stares at her partner with a straight face, almost defiant. These two have known each other less than two months, so maybe there's no love lost between them. I have no idea what their relationship has been like since they became partners, but the look on Journey's face doesn't emanate love. She looks the same now as she did the night we let her inner voice lead us to Cain's driveway. She's angry, plotting, and scheming in her head on how to deal with Winter, and I love her for it.

Winter is frozen. His disheveled look is turned up a notch from the added pressure of catching his partner carrying a dead girl in a footlocker. I can't put my finger on it, but it looks like he doesn't want to do this. He resembles a man being forced to carry out his job even though it's the last thing



he wants to do. His eyes bounce between the two of us, but every time he looks at Journey his face shifts to sadness. He's anxious and miserable, his finger quivering on the trigger of his black nine-millimeter.

"Goddammit," he says in a quaking voice. "I didn't want it to be true. I even kept my conversations with him to myself because I wanted it all to be a lie. Every bone in my body wanted that little shit, Cain, to be lying about what happened to him, but here you are. With *him*. Goddamn you, Journey."

"Just put the gun down, Sam," Journey says in a tone much more soothing than her facial expression. "You and I are friends, and we don't have to do it this way. Just put the gun down so we can go inside and talk."

Winter scoffs, shaking his head. "You and I are friends? We could've been more than that, but I guess you were too busy fucking our only suspect in the Sierra Cross case. God, how could I have not seen it this entire time? I'm such a fucking idiot. You've been fucking him, and we thought the case went cold because we had no leads. You were *covering* for the lead."

"That's not what I was doing," Journey says, still calm. "We didn't have any evidence pointing to Evan. What he and I have was never about the case."

"Never? Then what's in that box you're helping him unbury and carry out of the backyard? Oh yeah, the same backyard I caught him about to dig in just yesterday."

I look down at the box and can only imagine the state of Sierra's body. The last thing I want to do is open it and let the smell get out. The entire neighborhood will know what's going on over here.

“Look, let’s just go inside and we can talk about this,” I interject with my hands still in the air.

Winter snaps.

“You shut the fuck up,” he barks, taking two steps closer to me and aiming the gun at my face. “You are the cause of all this. I know you killed that girl, then you went and corrupted my partner and had her doing God knows what. You think I didn’t notice the marks on her neck? I’m not fucking blind, you sicko. You’re just some sex club freak construction worker. Not to mention a murderer who fucked my partner. No, you don’t get to speak. All you get to do is go to jail. Let’s go.”

Winter walks to his right and positions himself in front of my only escape route on the side of the house. He nods his head toward the open back door.

“Leave the box,” he says. “I already know what’s in it and I don’t want my evidence being tainted, because there is no way I’m letting you get away with this on some technicality. You’re going to make a B-line straight to my car in the front yard. Go through the house and keep your hands in the air or I swear I’ll put a bullet in the back of your head. Go now.”

Journey and I look at each other, trying our best to read each other’s thoughts as I start walking. I don’t know what she’s thinking. Does she have a plan or is she expecting me to make one? I can’t think fast enough with that gun aimed at my head while also following Winter’s fucking commands. I just need a moment to slow down, but I’m all out of moments.

“Walk!” Winter bellows, and I start moving faster, Journey close on my heels.

Once we're inside the house I stop in the kitchen, keeping my hands raised. This is my only chance. Now that we're not outside, if I don't create a way out of thin air we're both going to prison for the rest of our lives.

"What the fuck are you doing? I told you to keep going," Winter snips.

I take a deep breath, thinking of a hundred different ways I can try to turn this situation around. I think about everything I know about Winter in the span of just a few seconds, and a memory pops into my mind that stands out. I remember the night I watched Journey and Winter come out of the precinct together. From across the street I could tell he was into her. Everything about the way he smiled and moved and touched her told me that he wanted her, but she didn't want him back. Even now as he points his gun at us he can't help but show remorse toward her. He's more hurt that she was with me than he is about catching her moving the footlocker.

That's it.

"Is this about me and Sierra Cross, or is it about the fact that I fucked Journey when you couldn't?" I blurt out.

When I turn to look at Winter, his face is beet red. His jaw tight, his eyes narrowed as he stares at me, and I can see his desire to kill me circling in his eyes like water in a drain. I hit the bullseye. He licks his lips, his jaw so tight he can barely get his tongue out.

"What did you just say?" he asks as he moves past Journey and places the gun against the back of my head. "Say that again, you piece of shit."

"Cut the bullshit," I snap, going all-out because I have nothing left to save me. "You don't give a fuck about what's in

that footlocker outside. All you care about is the fact that I've been fucking Journey. You want to lock me away because you know I've had my mouth on her."

I feel the gun shaking against my skin as Winter struggles to compose himself, but I keep going. This is my last hoorah, my final opportunity to turn this all around.

"You're pissed because you know I've made her kneel for me. You know I've made her beg for my cock. I've made her crawl through this house, down that hallway to the bedroom. You know I've had her bent over in front of me, her pussy dripping wet from both my touch and my words. And the worst part? You know she has loved every minute of it. She loved it when I bit into her skin and put those teeth marks on her neck—the ones you noticed and undoubtedly wondered where they came from. They came from me. How does that make you feel?"

Winter lets out breath. "How does it make me feel? How does *this* feel?"

My vision instantly goes blurry as I'm struck in the back of the head with Winter's gun. Journey lets out a scream as I fall down, and I hear chaos erupting behind me. I hear the two of them struggling before the gun hits the ground somewhere nearby, and while I think Journey is attacking Winter, I'm not sure. There's more fighting back and forth before the unmistakable sound of flesh hitting flesh invades my ears, but I still can't turn over. My limbs are weak as my nervous system short circuits. I hear Journey grunting before there's a loud crash, and it takes maximum effort to turn myself over and view what's happening. Once I see it clearly, my heart sinks into my stomach.

Journey's feet are only inches from mine. She's on her back, her legs kicking as Winter straddles her with his back to me. He's reaching down with both hands around her neck and squeezing with all of his might. Journey thrashes to get free but it's no use. He's a man in a rage—a man who has been denied by a woman just like countless other men who've been denied and became violent. His feelings have been hurt and he doesn't know how to process it, so now Journey has to pay. He could've shot her if he wanted her dead, but he wants to watch the life drain from her eyes as he strangles her, and he's a cop so he'll probably get away with it.

I refuse to let that fucking happen.

While Journey's legs continue to kick, I focus on my breathing. I take big breaths and steady myself as I lift off the floor until I'm seated, watching the horror show playing out in front of me. He's still going, and I know Journey doesn't have much time left. With no other options available and no weapons close by, I pull my belt from the loops on my pants and jump onto Winter's back. I wrap it around his throat and throw my bodyweight backwards until I'm on my back with him on top of me.

“Fucking with me is a mistake,” I say as I wrap the belt around both of my knuckles and yank it back. “But putting your motherfucking hands on my woman is a death wish. You should've never come here alone. Now my ceiling will be the last thing you see. Die, motherfucker. Say goodnight.”

He tries to get away, but the only thing more terrifying than an emotional man who has just been denied by a woman is a rageful man in love. Nothing is more powerful than passion combined with protection. Adrenaline floods my veins as I pull the belt with all my might, grunting and growling as I

strangle the life out of Detective Winter. Just as he takes his final breath, Journey lifts herself off the floor and stands over us with a bloody nose, watching with devious joy in her eyes as her partner succumbs to my belt just like Sierra did.

His body stops moving. His hands fall down to his sides as his head goes limp, and I let his body fall off of me. He lands on the floor with a thud, staying on his side with his arms stretched in front of his dead body, his eyes bloodshot and bulging. As I sit up, I look at him to make sure he's gone, and I can see the belt partially embedded in his skin from how hard I pulled.

"He's gone?" Journey asks, looking down without an ounce of sadness in her beautiful eyes.

I stand up next to her and take her hand in mine, both of us looking down at the corpse.

"Yeah," I reply. "He's gone."

Journey lets out a sigh as she nods and wipes the trickling blood from her nose. "Good."

# chapter

## **twenty-eight**

“WHAT NOW?”

The knocking of my heart finally starts to recede as I look down on Winter’s lifeless corpse, my chest still heaving from the exertion. He’s on his side, eyes still open. It’s a gruesome scene. His eyes look like they would’ve popped out if I had pulled the belt a few seconds longer, and I feel no sense of remorse. It’s what he gets for trying to kill Journey. I have half a mind to scoop his eyeballs out with a spoon to keep as trophies—something I could show anyone thinking of wronging my little devil.

Now that Winter has come and gone, our next moves are all about the details. He and Cain set a lot of wheels in motion by doing their dirty work behind the scenes, and it’s up to Journey and me to break those wheels.

“You tell me, Detective,” I reply, my eyes staying on the corpse. “Unfortunately, killing him doesn’t erase the memories of Cain or your captain. We need a story and a course of action that makes sense and falls in line with what Winter has already done. But first, come here.”

I turn to face Journey as she steps over to me and I run my fingers down her face. She has slight bruising on one cheek and her nose is still bleeding, but it’s not too bad.

“Are you okay?” I ask, feeling fire sparking to life in my belly just looking at her wounds. I could strangle Winter all over again. “He hit you.”

“Yeah,” she replies. “After he hit you with the gun, I lost it. I attacked him from behind and managed to knock the gun away, but he eventually got the upperhand when he punched me in the face and I fell down. The bastard climbed on top of me and started choking me. Just as the lights were going out, you pulled him off. I’m starting to lose count of how many times you’ve saved me.”

I rub her cheek with my thumbs. “That’s what I’m here for, little one. To protect you. I’m sorry I wasn’t able to keep him from hitting you. I’m supposed to keep you safe and I shouldn’t have let that happen.”

“You don’t have to be sorry. He hit you in the back of the head with a gun. That type of thing has knocked plenty of people unconscious, but you got up and not only pulled him off me, you killed him. For me.”

“It absolutely was for you,” I tell her. “I’ll never let anyone disrespect you, Journey. I’m your shield and sentry. No one touches you without having to answer to me.”

“That’s why I love you,” she says, pulling me into a hug. “There’s nothing better than knowing I can put all of my trust in you to take care of me. I can relax and let the world melt away and I know you won’t take advantage of me like so many in the past. I watched you pummel Cain for disrespecting me, and now you’ve killed a man for me. What more could a submissive ask for?”

“Whatever else you could think to ask for, I would provide it or die trying. You’re my everything, Journey. My entire world from here on out.”



She lays her head on my chest and sighs. “I love you, Sir.”

“I love you, too, little devil. Now, let’s figure out our next move so I don’t have to plan how to break us both out of prison.”

Journey chuckles as we separate and look down at the corpse again.

“Alright, now tell me about him. He have a family?” I ask.

“Divorced with two kids who no longer speak to him because he was abusive to their mother,” she answers. “The way he explained it was that he had a few drunken nights where things got out of hand. She ended up with a broken wrist one time and damaged vocal cords another. After she left him, the kids stopped talking to him because of what he did to her.”

“How long ago was the divorce?”

“Finalized two years ago.”

“Two years,” I say, thinking out loud. “That’s enough time for a man to dwell on the past and his lost relationships and decide to do something drastic.”

Journey nods, picking up what I’m putting down.

“Yeah, like commit suicide,” she states.

“By hanging himself.”

“Which would explain the damage to his neck.”

I look at her and smile. “Exactly.”

“Okay, but where? Surely he wouldn’t commit suicide at the suspect’s house where he was serving a warrant.”

“No, he wouldn’t. He’d do it at his house after he and his partner served the warrant and didn’t find any evidence.”

Journey smiles wide. “That’s exactly what he’d do after pushing for a warrant and ending up dead wrong about what he thought he’d find. Coming up short at Evan Godric’s home clearly sent him over the edge. It’s so tragic. He was my partner and I’m just so broken up about it.”

“Oh, you poor, poor partner-widow. Will you ever be able to move on from the loss?”

“I’m not sure. Sam and I were besties.”

Journey fakes a frown and we both laugh.

“Okay, so that’s one piece to the puzzle,” she says, still giggling. “What about the footlocker?”

I shrug. “I don’t know. What do you think?”

She pauses for a moment, her head tilted in thought.

“I say we put it back,” she answers. When I frown she explains. “No one knew it was here, and we can move it at a later date if need be. But there’s no sense in moving two dead bodies at once. We put her back in her grave, take Sam to his house, and let me kill the search warrant with the story we just conjured. If I tell the captain we searched here and didn’t find anything, that wipes both you and your house off the suspect list. Sierra’s case will go cold and we’ll be in the clear.”

The smile on my face is a mile wide. “Oh, you’re just downright diabolical, aren’t you? A little evil genius.”

She giggles and makes my heartbeat triple. “Anything for you, Sir. How else may I please you?”

“Oh, my god,” I say playfully, my hand quickly brushing across her neck, wishing I could squeeze it. “Don’t get me started or we’ll never get them out of here.”

I move toward the backyard where I intend to re-bury the footlocker before we wait until nightfall to move Winter's body.

"Wait," Journey interjects. "What about the *other* piece of the puzzle?"

"Who?" I ask.

"Cain."

I lick my lips as wild, vengeful thoughts are born.

"Patience, little one," I reply. "Let's handle this first, then I'll put all of my energy into dealing with Cain."

## chapter **twenty-nine**

AFTER NIGHTFALL, we drive past Winter's house multiple times before pulling the car under the carport on the side. Journey parks her partner's car in the spot we assume it's always in when he returns from work, while I turn off my headlights early and park my truck around the corner and walk to the house with a loose hoodie on. We have one chance to get this right, so it all has to be done as tightly as possible.

Using the keys that were still dangling from the ignition in Winter's car, Journey unlocks the front door while I wait in the dark next to the car. From the inside, she opens the door on the side of the house that opens to the carport. She keeps the inside lights turned off as we lift Winter's lifeless body in tandem and carry him inside. Once we're settled by the side door, Journey and I don gloves for our hands and plastic bags to cover our feet before moving anywhere inside. Like I said, we have no room for error or all of this will blow back into our faces. Journey means too much to me and we've come too far for that.

After our hands and feet are covered, I drag Winter's body into the living room, spotting a large ceiling fan in the center. Journey comes in and stands next to me.

"You think it can hold him?" she asks.

I shrug. “If we tie it to the base and not the fan itself, maybe. Got the rope?”

Journey lifts a hand holding an old rope that had been sitting with tools in my backyard. It was out in the elements for so long I know there won’t be anything on it that could link it to me. I drag a chair from Winter’s kitchen table to the living room, positioning it directly beneath the fan. I climb onto the chair and unscrew the base plate to view the bolts going into the ceiling. Given the fact that construction is my expertise, I can tell that the bolts are too thick to just be mounted in the drywall. Bolts of this size have to be secured into something much stronger so they’ll hold, which means a ceiling joist or wood piece is above the spot where the fan is mounted.

“It’ll hold,” I say to Journey, who’s watching intently beneath me.

“Good. Let’s hang him up there so we can get out of here.”

“I got it,” I say, taking the rope from Journey and wrapping it three times around the base before weaving it through two of the fan blades twice. I tie a simple loop into the end and let it hang, ready for Winter’s head to slip through. I tug on the rope a few times before hanging my full body weight from it. The ceiling groans a bit, but it doesn’t bend or buckle.

“Alright, it’s ready,” I say as I jump down.

Journey and I drag Winter’s body next to the chair, but before we lift him up, I stand up straight and clear my throat.

“Here lies Detective Sam Winter,” I say, trying to keep from smiling. “He was an abusive asshole whose family left him all alone because of the hell he put them through. As a result, he threw himself into his work and got lost in it before meeting newly minted detective, Journey Monroe, who he

swiftly fell for. Unbeknownst to Detective Winter, Journey belonged to Evan Godric, and poor Sam didn't learn his lesson before it was too late. He met his demise at the hands of Journey's owner, and he will forever rot in hell for his transgressions."

"May he rest in piss," Journey finishes for me, and the two of us laugh as I reach down and force Winter's bulging eyes closed with a swipe of my gloved hand.

In what looks like an imitation of the teamwork I see on the construction site every day, Journey and I team lift Winter's body up, using the chair for support while I struggle to get the rope over his big head. Once the rope is around his neck, we gently lower him until his full weight is being supported by the rope, then we kick the chair over and he dangles freely. The corpse sways a little and spins, but the rope holds and we know he's not going anywhere.

The two of us take a step back and watch Winter hanging, his hands dangling by his sides, his head tilted in that break-neck way that looks so painful. We know his death is a huge weight off our shoulders, and while we're not in the clear yet, the sky is a lot less cloudy than it was this morning.

"Can I make a confession?" Journey asks, moving closer to the body and placing a hand on his foot.

"Of course," I reply.

"Today has been insane," she says. "I went from work, to rushing to your place, to pulling the footlocker out of the ground, to my partner showing up with his gun drawn, to being punched in the face and strangled, to being saved by you, to hanging a dead man in his own living room to protect us. That's a fucking whirlwind if there ever was one."

I chuckle. “That’s a fact. How are you feeling after all of that?”

“Like I have so much adrenaline and emotion inside of me that I’ll explode if I don’t let it out,” she replies. She turns to face me and I can tell from the look in her eyes what she wants. “Sir, I can’t understate how much it means to me that you saved me from Sam tonight. He was going to kill me, but instead you killed him. Now he’s hanging here like a vine from a tree all because you protected me.”

I step toward Journey and take her hand.

“I’d do anything for you, Journey. I meant it when I said I’m your protector from now until eternity.”

“I know you meant it,” she says. “Can I ask you to do something else for me?”

“Anything.”

“I’m so fucking hot for you right now, Sir,” she says. When I smile, she explains. “I know it may seem like an inappropriate time to say something like that, but you and I have been honest with each other about the thoughts running through our heads. We’ve leaned into listening to those voices, and if I’m being honest, all I can think about right now is having your cock inside of me. I want to fuck you right here, right now, beneath my ex-partner’s body. So I guess what I’m asking is that you let me fuck you.”

I flash a devilish grin. “Good lord, you’re so fucking incredible. You’ve been through a lot, and I can tell you want a release. You want me to let you ride my cock right here?”

She bites her lip. “Yes, Sir.”

“Do you want to come all over me right here on the floor?”

“Yes, Sir. Please. I need it.”

“You want to fuck beneath a dead body?”

“God yes. Please, Sir. I’m begging.”

“Pull your pants down.”

In a frenzy, Journey rushes to unbutton her pants and push them down to her ankles. I remove my gloves and rub my fingers through her slick folds and am agasp at how wet she is.

“Fuck,” I mumble, rubbing my middle finger through her wetness. “You’re a dripping mess already. My little devil is a morbid, macabre, little whore, isn’t she?”

“Yes, Sir. Only for you.”

“That’s my girl.” I rub her sensitive clit and make her suck in a breath. God I love the sound. “Are you ready, little one?”

“Yes, Sir.”

“Okay. We need to get out of here ASAP, so get down here and show me how fast you can come.”

With my cock already as stiff as lumber, I push down my pants and lie on my back underneath Winter’s body. Journey kicks off her pants like she hates the feel of them on her skin, then she lowers herself onto me, gasping as my thickness stretches her pussy.

“Oh, fuck,” she whispers.

I look up at her from the floor and marvel at how perfect she is. I’m totally in awe of this woman and I don’t know how I went my entire life without her. Her darkness matches my own and when I’m next to her, I’m ten times stronger than when we’re apart. She’s a beautiful black hole, pulling me in until I’m completely consumed, and I want nothing more than



to be consumed by her. Have all of me, little devil. Feast on me until I have nothing left.

“Fuck me, Journey,” I demand, placing my hands on her hips. “Show me how much you want it. Own it. Own this fucking cock.”

“Yes, Sir,” she says, panting as she rocks her hips back and forth. She fucks me hard and fast, completely losing control. She closes her eyes as she sits back, placing both hands on my chest as she rides me with everything she’s got.

“That’s it, baby girl. Give it to me. Give me that fucking cum.”

“Yes ... Sir,” she says, stammering as her breathing becomes erratic.

Her moans become shrieks that I worry will burst through the windows and enter the street, but I don’t stop her. Instead, I prod her on. I smack her ass before I reach up and slap her across the face, reddening her cheek.

“Yes!” she yells. “Thank you, Sir.”

I slap her again before grabbing her by the neck and yanking her head down toward me.

“Give me that fucking cum. I want it all. Let it rain on me, Journey. Drown me in it.”

“Oh, fuck,” she says as I push her back until she’s sitting upright again, her head right next to Winter’s floating foot.

“Open your eyes,” I demand. “Open those beautiful eyes and look at what’s next to you. Look what we did together.”

Journey does as she’s told and opens her eyes. The second her head turns and she sees how close Winter’s foot is to her, her mouth drops open and I know euphoria has come for her.

“Oh my fucking god!” she screams. “Sir, I’m coming. Oh fuck!”

She squeezes her eyes closed as all of her muscles clench. Her cheeks and neck redden as a guttural scream climbs out of her mouth and pins me to the floor. She screams so loud that I have to slam my hand over her mouth while I continue to swirl my hips, elongating her orgasm. Her pussy squeezes my cock and I nearly come myself, but I bite my lip and focus as her orgasm subsides.

“Wow,” she says, nearly drooling on me as she tries to regain her composure.

“Wow is right,” I reply, smiling at her. “You feel so fucking good, baby.”

“Thank you, Sir.”

“You feel better now?”

Journey giggles. “Yes, I do. Thank you for letting me come.”

“Trust me, my little devil. It’s my fucking pleasure. Now let’s get out of here.”

The two of us laugh together before she finally lifts herself off of me. Once I’m up with my pants resecured around my waist, I inspect the floor beneath Winter’s body to make sure we didn’t leave it too wet. Luckily, all of Journey’s wetness stayed on me and didn’t run down.

After she gets her pants in place, I take her hand and lead her out of the living room. We exit through the side door and sneakily make our way around the house and back to my truck. We get in quietly and drive away with the lights off until we’re two streets over. I reach over and place my hand on her

thigh, she sets a hand on top of mine, and we ride in silence with the windows down, smiling the entire drive.

# chapter **thirty**

DETECTIVE WINTER'S body was found this morning ... by Journey.

I can't express the hilarity of the fact that Journey went into the precinct the way she does every morning, knowing full-well that Winter would not show up. Per our plan from last night, she waited at the precinct in plain sight, wondering aloud where her partner was. She made sure to call him from her cell phone in front of her captain's office and scoffed loudly when there was no answer. She expressed concern about Winter after telling her leadership that he didn't seem to handle it well when they executed the search warrant but left my house without finding anything. Winter thought he had the Sierra Cross case all figured out but came up with nothing. He'd taken it hard. As a result of this information, Journey's captain sent her to Winter's house to check on him. She had to break a window to get inside, only to find him hanging from his ceiling—an apparent suicide.

That is hilarious, and only makes me love Journey even more. I wish I could've seen her standing in the precinct putting on the show of a lifetime, an Oscar-worthy performance that puts me in the clear for the Sierra disappearance. She went in there and did it for me, blackening her badge for the sake of my freedom and our relationship. I

already appreciated her, but this takes it to an entirely new level. She has risked everything for me and I will continue to do the exact same for her. We have one more loose end to tie up, and I'll do whatever it takes to cinch it so tight that it cuts off oxygen to his brain.

While Journey is at Winter's house with the rest of her department dealing with his suicide, I spend my morning at work. The Popeye's is coming along great, and while I'm focused on completing my portion of the project, I'm not really here for the work or the camaraderie. My mind has wandered far from studs, fire blocks, soffit vents, and interior trim. The only thing I'm thinking about is Cain. I'm here to gather intelligence in whatever way I can, from whoever I can glean it from. After spending the first half of the day working diligently on baseboards, I spot Trey standing next to a group of electricians bending conduit in the corner. When he looks up at me, I wave him over.

"Hey, Evan. What's up, man?" he says, holding a clipboard that he uses to check progress from each craft.

"Nothing much," I reply. "I've just been wondering about Cain."

Trey's eyebrows raise. "Really? You?"

"Yeah, I know we've had our differences, but when I heard that he had been attacked it kind of threw me off because it could've been any of us. It just really made me think about how short life could be if you get caught off guard. I just wanted to make sure he was okay. Have you heard anything else about his condition or anything?"

"Wow, that's really kind of you, Evan," Trey says, and I have to bite my lip to keep from laughing. "I actually went to go see Cain a couple of days ago."

My interest piques as I focus in. “Oh, that’s great. How’s he doing?”

Trey crosses his arms over his chest. “Okay, I guess. He was acting a little strange. I think he’s paranoid after what happened, which makes perfect sense if you ask me. I asked if he’d learned anything about the people who attacked him, and he seemed flustered by the question. It was like he didn’t want to answer, but he did tell me that he’s working with a detective to bring the perpetrators down.”

I nod. “Ah, a detective. Well, that’s good news. I’m sure the detective will do his due diligence and find the attackers. He just needs to hang in there ... Did he say anything else?”

“Not really,” he answers, shaking his head. “It was pretty obvious to me that there was some stuff going on behind the scenes that he didn’t want to discuss with me for whatever reason. I’m sure it had something to do with an ongoing investigation, or whatever jargon cops use in this type of situation. He seemed to be healing physically pretty well though, and was supposed to be released from the hospital at some point today.”

My eyes widen. “Oh. That’s *fantastic* news.”

“Yeah, it’s great. Looks like he got lucky and won’t have any long term effects—well, once he gets over the paranoia of being jumped in front of his own house.”

“Yeah, I’m sure the fear of that will last a while,” I say, trying my best to sound like a normal person who *isn’t* thinking about watching the life drain from Cain’s eyes as soon as possible. “But it’s great that he’s doing okay. I feel a lot better knowing he’s healing well and will be back at home soon.”

“Me, too,” Trey says. “You know, maybe you should go see him after he gets out of the hospital. I think it’d be good for him to know that you were thinking about him and that there’s no hard feelings.”

I nod and smile as Trey turns to leave. “That’s not a bad idea, Trey. Maybe I will.”

As soon as Trey walks away, I pull my phone from my pocket and call Journey, who answers on the third ring.

“Not a good time,” she says immediately.

“Still at Winter’s house?” I ask.

“Yeah. Seems like the entire department is here so you have to make it quick.”

“Okay. I’ve got information on Cain,” I say in a rush. “He’s getting out of the hospital at some point today. I don’t know when, but we have to get to him before he realizes Winter is dead. If he finds out about that, he’ll definitely tell someone else as quickly as he can. I say we meet at his house as soon as possible. Maybe you’ll become overwhelmed at the loss of your partner and need a little time off to grieve.”

“Yeah, I think I feel a breakdown coming on any moment now,” Journey says, and I can tell she’s grinning.

“Good girl,” I reply. “I’ll let you know when I’m off work and we can meet there.”

“Sounds good. Okay, I’ve gotta go. Too many eyes. I love you, Sir.”

“I love you, my little devil. See you soon.”

We hang up and I get back to work as if nothing has happened. I focus on the baseboards, measuring and cutting with precision, and nobody knows that they’ll never see Cain

again. When he gets out of the hospital, death will be waiting for him.



## chapter **thirty-one**

I DON'T KNOW what time Cain was released from the hospital, but by the time I arrived in my truck he was already outside cutting his grass. I had to turn my head the opposite direction as I drove past and park two streets over in a community center parking lot to avoid detection. I stayed in my truck until nightfall, which is when Journey was finally able to meet me. Since she arrived, we've done nothing but wait patiently for time to tick by.

The evening has turned to late night. Cain's neighbors have all flicked off their lights. The streets are empty and quiet. Cain is the last threat to our freedom and safety, and it's finally time to get rid of him for good.

"Are you ready?" I ask Journey, who slides her hands into the same gloves we used at Winter's house.

"To kill the man who has been your tormentor for far too long? Yes, Sir," she answers with a wicked grin.

My baby girl is so vengeful for me. I could put the entire night on pause and fuck her mouth right here and now if this matter wasn't so pressing. Nonetheless, I push my desires to the back of my mind for later and put on my own gloves. I start up my truck and drive to Cain's street, turning off the headlights before I round the corner and stop two houses away. Like everyone else's, Cain's house is lightless and silent.

Perfect. We open our doors and take a moment to slip shoe covers over our feet so we don't track prints inside, then we make our way toward the front door, looking over our shoulders the entire way but there's no one to be found. This moment is designed by the universe for Cain to meet his end.

Journey, being the detective, moves like a sly cat slithering from the front door to each window, peeking through whatever crack she can find. She gently twists the doorknob and finds it locked, as expected, then she pulls out a small, black, nylon case and sets it on the ground in front of the door.

"What is that?" I ask curiously as she unzips it.

"It's a lock pick set," she replies, pulling out a thin tool with an orange handle. She uses the end of it in the lock and presses another tool against it to tinker around inside the doorknob. I watch in amazement as she wiggles the tools until the knob turns and the door opens.

"You're just full of surprises, aren't you?" I ask playfully.

Journey returns the tools to the small case and slips it into her back pocket before standing. "I'm not a normal girl, remember?"

"How could I forget?" I say, pulling her in for a peck on the lips before we slip inside and close the door.

Cain's living room is covered in darkness and shadows. Furniture juts out from the walls but there's enough illumination coming in from the street lights outside that we'll be able to move through the room without bumping into anything. Before we begin our hunt for Cain, I turn to Journey and take her hand, pulling her in for another kiss in the dark.

"I love you so much, little devil," I tell her. "There isn't another person in this world I'd rather be here with. This is for

us.”

She kisses me twice, smiling as she says, “For us.”

Excitement fills my veins and it feels like we’re going skydiving together instead of committing murder. It’s all the same to me as long as I get to do it with Journey. I give her hand a final squeeze before we start walking, making sure to avoid touching anything. We stay low, crouching down so the light peeking through the blinds doesn’t cast our shadows as we move toward the hallway leading to three rooms with the doors closed. Cain is in one of those rooms but we don’t know which, so finding him quietly is going to be a challenge.

As we reach the hall, I bend my knees and get as low as I can, listening for signs of Cain being asleep. I don’t hear snoring or a body shuffling around in a bed. There’s nothing but fear-inducing silence. Journey squats down behind me, angling her head over mine so she can see each door, all of which are pulled closed except for the one at the end of the hall.

Journey’s head tilts and I can see the concern on her face.

“What’s wrong,” I whisper in her ear.

“He lives alone, right?” she asks.

“Yeah, I’m pretty sure. Why?”

“Why are all of the doors closed except the last one?”

I turn my head to investigate and realize she’s right to be worried. Usually, people sleep with their bedroom door closed, and if I know anything about construction and the way buildings are designed, the last room at the end of a hallway is almost always the biggest bedroom. This isn’t a large house and there’s only three doors. It’s a sure bet that one of these rooms is a bathroom, and the other two are bedrooms. There’s

no way Cain is sleeping behind the closed door that's closest to us because it's not the biggest room in the house. What man is sleeping in the smaller room instead of the biggest in his own place? As the realization hits me, my heart begins to pound. I look at the small crack in the door at the end of the hall, and realize I see movement behind it.

"Fuck," I whisper.

"What is it?" Journey asks.

"He knew we were coming. He's watching us."

"What?"

The second the word spills from her mouth, the door at the end of the hall flies open. Cain comes running at us like a madman wielding a baseball bat. Journey and I both fall to the floor as he swings it, barely dodging the impact of the bat that leaves a crater in the drywall next to where my face used to be.

We scramble to get up as Cain swings the bat again, hitting me in the back of the leg and knocking me down. I let out a grunt as I fall, and Cain lunges on top of me, using the bat to press down on my neck and choke me. My air supply is cut off in an instant but I manage to get my hands on the ends of the bat and push up as Cain presses his full body weight down. He weighs too much and jumped on me too quickly, and terror consumes me as I realize he's winning this battle. I can't breathe and don't have enough leverage in this position to push him off of me. My vision starts to blur as black shadows form in the corners of my eyes and threaten to take over completely. I start to slip into unconsciousness just as Cain's head suddenly snaps to the side.

Journey, standing over both of us, kicks Cain in the head twice before he finally falls down on top of me. I gasp for air

once the bat is no longer pressed against my windpipe and manage to push his body off as Journey kicks him again.

The second I'm able to stand, I join Journey in kicking the shit out of Cain while he's down, hitting him three times in the ribs before snatching up the bat and handing it to Journey as she hands me the handcuffs from her pocket. I force Cain's hands behind his back and secure the cuffs, then use the zip ties from my back pocket to bind his legs together. Once he's unable to move, I stand up and put my hands on my hips, breathing heavily as I rub my throat.

"Sneaky little asshole," Journey says, kicking him one more time for good measure.

"Fucker had been watching us the entire time," I say. I clear my throat trying to get my voice to sound normal. "I bet he was watching us through the window as we approached the house."

"If that's the case, we don't know who he may have called," Journey says. "We need to finish this quickly and get out of here."

"You're right, little devil. Let's get him to the bedroom."

I grab Cain's ankle and drag him down the hall to the door he bursted out of, and Journey helps lift him up and get him centered on the bed. He has two pillows. I throw one of them on the floor and set the other on his chest. When he's finally settled, I sit on one side of the bed while Journey sits on the other.

"Let me fucking go," Cain screams.

"Don't do that, Cain," I say, reaching across his body to take the bat from Journey. "If you yell again, I'll think you're trying to alert your neighbors and be forced to bash your

fucking brains in with your own bat. We didn't intend for you to die like that so don't make me have to change our plans."

Cain goes quiet, staring at me with wide eyes.

"Good. Now, like my beloved little one over there said earlier," I begin. "We don't have a lot of time so we need to make this quick. As you can see, you're not gagged, which means I want you to talk to me, Cain. Can you do that without getting yourself hurt?"

"What the fuck, Evan? What is this, man?" Cain asks. "I know we didn't get along but this is crazy. You already fucking beat me up and sent me to the hospital. What more do you want?"

"Not much," I answer with a shrug. "I just want to know why you called Journey's precinct and talked to her partner when I specifically told you not to tell anyone what happened the last time we met. Why would you do that, Cain?"

"What did you expect?" he blurts out, trying to remain defiant while teetering on terrified. "You came to my house with a woman flashing a badge. I wanted to see if she was really a cop or not so I could decide what to do next. But her partner came to the phone, so I said fuck it. I told him what happened and he didn't believe me, so he came to the hospital to get my story in person. When I told him, it was like I had kicked his dog or something. He got all sad and told me to be patient while he found out the truth. This is what I get for listening to him. I haven't even heard from that motherfucker in, like, two or three days."

I press my lips together and shake my head. "That's really unfortunate, Cain. You told Detective Winter what happened and he went into full detective mode. You had him showing up to my house and getting warrants to search my place, when all

you had to do was take the ass whooping like a man and keep your mouth shut. But no, you just had to spill the beans to Winter and now he's dead. You and your big mouth got him killed."

"Well, officially, he killed himself," Journey chimes in, smiling.

"Oops, my bad. You're right," I correct with a chuckle. "Yeah, you made Detective Winter kill himself, Cain. How could you?"

Cain struggles against his restraints as the realization kicks in. He knows he's fucked now, but he should've known that before he opened his mouth to Winter.

"All of that wiggling won't do you any good, man," I tell him, placing a hand on his shoulder until he stops moving. "Now, all we need to know is who else you spoke to about this. Did you tell Trey anything? Any other law enforcement?"

He looks at me with wide, sincere eyes. "No. I swear to God I didn't tell anyone else, Evan. I swear it. You can trust me, man. I haven't told anyone and I never will. Just let me go and we can forget that any of this even happened. I know your girl is a real cop now, so I couldn't call the police if I wanted to. I get it now, Evan. I do. Let's just move on and act like this didn't happen."

I look at Journey, whose face is unmoved.

"Are you begging for your life right now?" I ask.

Cain enthusiastically nods his head. "Yes. I'm not too proud. I understand that I was wrong for messing with you the way I did, and I'm sorry. Okay? I'm sorry and I'm begging you to let me go. Please don't kill me, Evan. You win, alright? You're the man and I'm not shit. Is that what you want to

hear? You got it, bro. I'm begging you not to kill me, Evan. Please."

My smile is painfully wide. "Wow. I never thought I'd see the day that big bad Cain would beg and cry like a bitch. I've got to be honest with you here, buddy, it's making my cock hard. Yeah, I love the sound of you begging me for mercy. Damn. I didn't think I'd like it as much as I do, but the sound is actually beautiful."

Cain's eyes drop down to my crotch, watching in horror as I rub my growing erection through my pants.

"I think you may have just activated a new kink," I tell him. Then I grab the pillow from his chest. "But it won't be enough to save you. I told you not to tell anyone and you didn't listen."

"Evan, no. Please don't," he begs again, but it's too late.

"Journey?" I say.

"How may I please you, Sir?" she asks, stiffening my cock even more.

"I'd love it if we did this together," I say.

Journey climbs onto the bed just as I do, grabbing the other side of the pillow.

"What the fuck," Cain exclaims, trying to wiggle his body off the bed. "You two are fucking crazy. You know that? You're both psychopaths. Let me fucking go. Oh, god!"

Journey and I don't respond with words. Instead, we place the pillow over Cain's face and press down. He writhes beneath our weight, his legs kicking but hitting nothing thanks to the plastic ties. He rocks his shoulders back and forth, making us wobble a bit, but not doing enough to save himself.



While he fights, Journey and I look at each other as we sway back and forth with his movement. I smile at her, and she smiles back before we lean into each other and kiss. Our tongues dance together while we smother Cain, and we stay connected until he finally stops moving beneath us.

We check to make sure he's dead, then remove Journey's cuffs and cut away the plastic ties before putting the pillows back in their place beneath Cain's head. We straighten out anything that was knocked crooked from the struggle earlier and make sure to bring the bat with us as we leave, slipping into the night and away from the scene.

Who knows when Cain's body will be found? When it is, there won't be any evidence linking Journey or I to the scene. There's no evidence linking us anywhere, and that's all we've wanted. We're free now, finally able to move on from all of this and be happy together as we were meant to be. That's what Journey and I are—meant to be. Dominant and submissive. King and queen. God and goddess.

Untouchable.

# epilogue

I WATCH from across the street as Journey walks into a diner, her new partner close on her heels as they go to lunch together. She's in her usual detective attire—a navy blue button-up with black pants, while her partner is in all-black. She doesn't see me when she goes in, but she knows I'm watching, and I can tell from the way her mouth twitches up on the side when she walks in that it excites her the same way it does me.

The door to the diner closes and I look at my clock, counting the minutes before I go in. I love these moments between us. Our relationship has evolved over the past four months since we had to permanently silence a couple of people, and I'm so excited about where we are now. But it's not just our relationship that has developed and grown. My life has changed as well.

When one of Cain's friends found him dead in his bed two days after he was released from the hospital, the news hit the construction crew hard. Well, sort of. Mostly, people were just shocked because it's not everyday someone is murdered in their home around here. The fact that the police didn't have any leads or suspects didn't make anyone feel better, but after a while, everybody assumed Cain had rubbed the wrong people the wrong way and met his demise at their hands. It has

been over a hundred and twenty days since his death and the cops still can't identify a suspect. That's too bad. Poor Cain.

As for Journey's old partner, his death was ruled a suicide and there has been no further investigation. According to Journey, the way Winter handled the information he received from Cain only made his death more believable. His own captain admitted that he'd been acting weird in the days leading up to his suicide, so when Journey connected the dots with our story about coming up empty while executing the search warrant, her captain took the bait. A day after Winter was found, his case was closed. Such a tragic loss.

As for me, clearing Cain out of the way left room for me to move up in the world of Lane Contracting. Trey was promoted to project manager permanently, while I was bumped up to craft lead for the duration of the Popeye's project. I ended up doing so well on that job that I was made a craft lead full-time, taking Trey's vacant job. Quite the positive turn of events if I do say so myself.

While I didn't mean for this chain of events to happen, I'm not mad about the outcome. Meeting Sierra and accidentally killing her brought Journey into my life, and she taught me that it was okay to listen to my darkest thoughts, and that it doesn't make me crazy. She made me feel comfortable with myself. She gave me confidence and made me the best man and Dom I could be. Journey helped me conquer the daily obstacle of dealing with Cain, which made the entire job site happier. Trey was promoted to the position he rightfully deserved and so was I. Everything has been made better, so I appreciate Sierra's sacrifice and I have no regrets. I wouldn't change a thing, not even the corpses.

I look at my clock again. Five minutes have passed and that's more time than I intended to wait. I climb out of my truck and walk across the street, going through the diner's entrance and spotting Journey at a table across from her partner. The partner—an older man with a five o'clock shadow and his lack of patience written in his gaze—looks at me when I come in, but his eyes don't linger. They drop back down to his menu before looking up at the woman waiting to take his order. He gives it as I walk by and make my way into the bathroom without stopping to take a seat. I go into one of two stalls, lower the lid on the toilet and sit.

I wait patiently, my foot tapping as that patience leaks out quickly. The restroom door opens and someone uses a urinal before washing their hands and walking out again, but another two minutes goes by before my patience is rewarded. The door opens and footsteps walk up to the other side of the stall door. There's a knock, and I open it.

Journey flashes a smile so gorgeous that it breaks me completely, the last reserves of my patience spilling onto the floor as my cock hardens. She closes the stall door behind her and lowers herself to her knees, looking up at me with doe eyes.

“How may I please you, Sir?”

Blood rushes to my cock so fast I think I may spontaneously combust, and it takes every ounce of strength to even formulate words. I lock eyes with her and tell her in the most honest, blunt way possible.

“I want to use your fucking mouth, little devil.”

“Yes. Please use me like the little slut I am for you, Sir,” Journey replies.

I can't wait another second. I snatch my belt buckle loose and push my pants down to my knees before grabbing Journey by the sides of her head and shoving myself inside. I drag out long, slow strokes that coat every inch of my erection with her saliva, then I pick up speed.

"Put your fucking hands behind your back," I command.

She obeys, filling me with even more desire.

My cock reaches maximum capacity as I keep going, holding the sides of her face while I fuck her mouth, not caring a bit if the door opens and someone walks in to hear my moaning. I keep going until an orgasm lathers up inside me and threatens to erupt.

"I'm going to come down your fucking throat, baby girl. Don't you dare spill a single drop. You ready? Take it, baby. I'm fucking coming."

I squeeze my eyes shut and completely unload into Journey's mouth. My dick twitches over and over again, draining itself until there is nothing left to drain, and Journey swallows every last drop of cum, gulping it down with watery eyes like my perfect little whore.

When it's all done, she sits up straight with her hands still clasped behind her back and looks up at me, a seductive smile still on her lips.

"Thank you, Sir," she says, panting. "How else may I please you?"

I clasp her face in my hands and lean down. "God, I could fuck your face all over again. You're so unbelievably perfect, little one. That mouth of yours just pleased me enough, but don't worry, your body will please me again when you're off

from work. Come straight to my house afterward. Do you understand?”

She nods, smiling big. “Yes, Sir.”

I sit down on the toilet and watch Journey stand up, swipe away dust from her knees, and walk out of the stall. The bathroom door opens and closes, and she’s gone.

With my balls completely drained, I pull my pants back up to my waist and resecure my belt, pausing to look at it. This belt killed Sierra and saved Journey by killing Detective Winter. Out of everything I own, it might just be my most cherished possession. When I have it buckled up, I smile before opening the stall door and stepping out.

When I exit the bathroom, I walk past Journey and her partner without looking at either of them. I don’t order anything from the diner or acknowledge the staff as they look at me funny for using their bathroom and leaving. I make my way through the exit and walk back across the street to my truck. I have to go back to work, but this was one hell of a lunch break, and I grin with the knowledge that it never would’ve happened if it wasn’t for everything that occurred a few months ago.

I don’t know what it was about Journey that got its hooks in me so quickly. I can’t explain why I fell for her so fast, how she managed to be everything I ever wanted, or why I was ready to kill for her almost immediately. It doesn’t matter, though. It’s clear that we were meant for each other, and I’m not interested in convincing anyone of that fact.

Some people need the light to be happy, but when it comes to Journey and me, we find our comfort in the dark and kinky. I’ve never been happier, and there isn’t a thing in this world

that I would ever let stop what we've started. We don't need the light.

The future is dark.

epilogue ii



## ~ journey ~

“Alright. Have a good night, Detective Monroe.”

I turn away from my new partner and head to the parking lot next to the precinct, glancing at the empty lot across the street as I go. The moment I’m in my car, I feel my heart start to race just from the thought of seeing Evan soon. Everything about that man makes my heart soar, and when I press the gas to drive away, I wish I could floor it to get to him faster.

If I had to name one thing about him that has me in such a chokehold, I’d be stuck because there are so many things to name. Evan has an aura that he gives off—the demeanor of a true Dominant that shines through even when he’s trying to hide it. I can’t even count the number of men I’ve gone through trying to find in them what Evan naturally has. He’s perfect and always has been.

Even before we met.

Growing up, I always knew the voice in my head was a problem. Not to me, of course, but to those around me. My voice—my devil, as my beloved Sir calls it, has been with me a long time, and while I’ve put up plenty of fights to ignore it, I have to admit that I’ve given in to it more often than not. I listened to it when it told me to hurt myself with a lighter when I was a kid, giving birth to all of my desires for pain. I

listened again when it told me to put antifreeze in my father's bottle of whiskey, making his death a mystery because I didn't know if it was the alcohol or my special ingredient that slowly killed him. I've given in to my devil more times than I could count, but the time I cherish most is when it told me that Evan was the most beautiful man I'd ever seen, and that I should follow him to his house from The Black Collar almost two years ago.

I don't know how Evan would feel if he knew, but nothing brought me more joy than watching him from afar. The first time I saw him in that club, he didn't even notice me. Hell, he *never* noticed me there because he always had some desperate bitch on his arm. His looks and aura worked like pheromones, drawing in every submissive in the building. All he had to do was look their way and they came flocking, but he never looked my way.

I was fine with following him to his house every weekend, watching him go inside with some lucky cunt while I stayed on the street adjacent to his, masturbating to what I imagined them doing inside. It never really bothered me, and I was prepared to do it again the night he left The Black Collar with Sierra Cross. I didn't know her name at the time, but I knew she was a regular in the club just like Evan and me. They walked out of there and sped away, and I was on their tail, driving right past them as they exited his car to go inside. Usually, I saw the little bitches leave after tasting what I knew was meant to be mine. But I never saw Sierra come out after she went in. The only thing I saw was Evan dragging a footlocker out of his house and dropping it into a hole he'd dug in his backyard.

When the call came in about a missing girl, I jumped at it, making sure Sam and I responded before anyone else could.

This was my chance to meet the love of my life, the man of my dreams, and when he opened the door and looked at me, I could've passed out from the excitement. I could barely even speak at first. The sound of his voice soothed me to sleep every night afterward, and I made sure Sam never had any evidence to truly suspect Evan. Sierra's killer would never be found, and I knew I'd make sure of it when fate put us in the same bar after we left his house. I conjured up the nerve to speak to him when his friend went to the bathroom, and I knew it was destiny when he came back to The Black Collar to meet me. What kind of man shows up at the same club that made him a suspect in a disappearance?

A man fated to be with me, that's who.

From the moment we spoke our first words to each other, I knew we were meant to be, so it was no surprise that Evan waited in the parking lot across the street from the precinct for me. I recognized his truck from the day Sam and I went to his house as soon as I came outside. It felt so good to know he was following me. I even put on a little striptease for him at my house, but I had to act surprised when he made all kinds of noise outside my window.

Putting the gun to his head was a ploy to throw him off, just like when I did it a second time after he admitted to killing Sierra. Admittedly, my reaction was a little over the top—but what else was I supposed to do? Even though we were being totally honest with each other by then, I didn't want him to know I watched him bury the footlocker. He'll never know. Some things are better left in the dark.

When I get to his house, I don't bother parking on the adjacent street. With Sam out of the way, there's no need to hide the fact that I come here every night. It's nobody's

business anyway, and if someone decides to make it their business, they'll quickly learn that I'm still the same girl that hung her partner from a ceiling fan because he meddled in my relationship with Evan. They'll understand that my love for Evan has lived longer than our relationship has, and that I will never be without him again.

He may not have known it, but Evan has belonged to me for a long time. He has been my soulmate from the moment I laid eyes on him and the voice in my head told me that he was the one. He is mine and I am his. If there is an afterlife, then he will still be mine after we're dead and gone.

What a perfect story we are. I loved him from a distance until we met on his doorstep, and then he fell for me just as hard as I'd fallen for him. There couldn't possibly be a happier ending. I've lived a dark and kinky life with a ton of vices, but Evan has been and always will be my darkest kink.

When I knock on his door, he opens it immediately and smiles the smile that has held my heart for longer than he knows. I step over the threshold as he closes the door behind me, and I kneel in the spot where I know he killed another woman—a woman who wasn't strong enough to withstand his love. She couldn't live because she wasn't meant to belong to him.

I am. For all eternity.

We lock eyes as he pulls his belt from his pants and lets it dangle at his side.

I smile. "How may I please you, Sir?"

# acknowledgments

Sometimes it's really amazing to see work being completed after such a long time. I came up with the title for *The Darkest Kink* while I was deployed last year. I think it was in June or July of 2022. The idea for the story was a bit different, but the title stuck with me until a new story developed in my head as I was writing *Interview with a Sadist*. Like an idiot, I put the story aside for a while to work on other things, but as soon as I finally started it, I knew I was onto something that could be big. Sometimes a story just hits differently right from the beginning, and you know in your gut that you're about to blow people away. So, it took some time to land this plane, but I finally did it and it feels like I've brightened my future by writing something dark. As I've been saying across my social media the past few months; the future is dark. I've definitely found a home in the abyss.

As usual, I like to keep my acknowledgments brief. Even with the brevity, I always have to thank my wife first. You're my partner in all of this, boo. We come up with so much together, and even when we're not being creative, we're both in the industry and are the perfect sounding board for each other. I'm so happy to see our hard work paying off the way it has been over the last year or so. It feels like the tide has finally turned and we're about to be way up. Our haters are miserably watching us from afar, and nothing brings me more joy than making them sick with you! I love you, baby girl.

Major shout out to the person who has helped me spread my name all over the place over the past year, and that's my

wonderful agent, Ena. You have been phenomenal since signing me, and I'm so impressed with your work ethic and ability to create a way, even when I think I've gone too far and won't get a deal from anywhere. We still have the audio market to break into, and I certainly have plans for that, but you've worked so hard and gotten me deal after deal for my books. I am forever grateful. Here's to another year of doing even more.

Where would I be with my assistant, Jasmine? I'm such a little recluse who doesn't want to run groups or build spreadsheets or manage street teams or ARC teams, and you're there as my Superwoman to do it for me. Thanks so much for taking me on and carrying the burden for me. As my popularity continues to skyrocket, so will my need for you. I appreciate everything you do. Thank you!

Thank you to Shauna and Becca of The Author Agency for all of the PR beautification. Your company has been outstanding in the lead up to this book, and I can't wait to see the final results as release day gets closer and closer. We may just have the perfect team! Thanks so much for all of your help!

I also want to thank all of the book events that have been hitting me up since Kingdom dropped and grabbed everyone's attention. Indies Invade Philly, Readers Take Denver, ApollyCon, Book Harvest, Electric City Love Con, RomantiConn, and all the others that I haven't been able to get to for one geographical reason or another. Thank you all for supporting me and letting me grow my audience with you. I intend to be ticketed at every event soon!

A huge thank you goes to Sierra Beasley for alpha reading *The Darkest Kink*. I never do alpha reading, but I was so

excited about this book that I needed someone to read it. You jumped on board and knocked it out quickly, and I was thoroughly encouraged by your enthusiasm. Thanks so much for helping to keep my confidence up during this process.

Lastly, I have to thank every fan who has discovered me on social media, especially over the last year. A year ago today, Kingdom was released and my life hasn't been the same since. I have a fast-growing, loyal fanbase that gets so excited when I release books, and I'm so grateful to you all for supporting me. I even had a video get over 1.1 million views on Facebook of all places! The BookTok community has been riding with me for a long time, and it's nice to see FB coming around since that's where it all started back in 2013. I appreciate you all so much! I try to watch every video I'm tagged in and reply to every message I get, if possible, just to show you that I'm honored by your support. This journey is really just beginning and I will not let you down.

If you loved Evan and Journey's story, just wait until you see what I have planned next! The future is dark. Embrace your kinks.

## about the author

WS (Will) Greer is the author of bestselling novels such as Claiming Carter (The Carter Series), Kingpin (An Italian Mafia Romance), The Therapist (The Therapist Series), and Kingdom. He's also a USAF veteran since 2004, and is still serving today, after 4 deployments to the middle east and countless assignments overseas.

WS prides himself on being a man who writes spicy romance with the absolute best of them, while also understanding and appreciating that he is a guest in the house of romance that women built.

WS grew up in Clovis, NM, and now resides in Delaware, where he lives with his wife—bestselling author Isabel Lucero—and 3 kids.

Find WS on social media:





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