



*She's lust  
and sin.*

*The* **GOOD**  
**BAD** *Girl*

*USA Today Bestselling Author*  
**ELLA GOODE**

Bjornssen

The Abbey is a neutral space in the midst of a lawless city and I stand as its steward. Anointed by the High Power and answerable only to the Bishop, I keep the peace. Sometimes people try to bribe me with gifts—property, cash...people. None of that interest me. After all, I'm a man of the cloth. I've said my vows and abide by them and I have never, ever been tempted to stray. This new gift might break me. She might make me forsake my vows. She's definitely leading me down the road to sin.

Angel

Okay, I was dumb. In my attempt to protect my friend, I got kidnapped and dropped on the doorstep of some...church like place? I don't really know. The stone mansion is surrounded by high walls and the windows are made of stained glass. There's a man here with wearing vestments and oh, I'm going to hell for the things I'm thinking about him. Truth be told, though, I need to get out of here because I'm worried if I stay, I'll never want to leave.

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# CHAPTER 1

BJORNSSON

“YOU’RE A PRIEST?” SHOUTS THE GIRL WHEN I ENTER THE SMALL antechamber where my staff has placed Kane Santino’s gift. I stop short when I see her. Jet black hair, honey complexion, eyes as dark as my soul. Her sneaker-clad feet dangle in front of her. Idly, I speculate on her age. Old enough to know better, but too young to be here, I conclude. I rein in my galloping imagination and reply, “Is there a problem?”

“No priest I know would tie a girl to a chair.” She jerks against the bonds.

I drag a finger along my white collar. If she knew, she’d probably scream in anger. She has all the hallmarks of a good girl, which means she’s off limits to someone like me. I place a hand on her head. “Careful, I don’t want you to hurt yourself.”

Unless she likes that. Unless the slight bit of pain would make her body clench with excitement and anticipation. Unless the bite of a strap or the hot drip of candle wax brought out moans of pleasure. Then she could hurt herself. Or I could do it for her. I make a careful fist with my hand, squeezing my fingers tightly until need loosens its grip on my neck.

“As if you care.” She jerks again with an angry scowl etched into her brow. Not even those lines can mar her prettiness. She probably looks like an angel when she cries. Men have laid treasures at her feet before. I’m sure of it. Where did Santino find her and what was important about her? That’s more important than anything. I don’t want to have to fight his organization. I laid down my weapons long ago. Someone in this dirty world needed to be an arbitrator, a Switzerland, and why not me? Of course, I had to snuff out a few contrarians, but no one opposes my position now. Everyone has acknowledged the necessity that is Father Bjornsson and the Chapel. In the past, people would’ve brought this girl to my doorway as a prize. No one

does that anymore since these are the types of sinful things I've rejected.

I capture her jaw in my palm and turn her face from left to right. "You look too fine to be caught up in Santino's messes. Although my advice might be too late, hmmm?"

"How about you then? Are you just the right amount of ugly to be doing business with this Santino guy?"

I burst out laughing. "Yes, of course. No one likes this face." I lightly slap my cheek. The girl flushes and averts her gaze. I've been called a lot of things in the past—heartless, amoral, ruinous—but not ugly. I'm amused. "What part of my features bothers you the most?"

"Any guy who has to ask for compliments is a guy with a small dick." She sniffs.

"A small, wicked guy would feel the need to disprove this immediately." I tilt my head to the side and catch her eyes. "I'm not here to hurt you, Angel, but there's a girl at Kane Santino's home. You have a relationship with her. Why don't you share with Father Bjornsson all the details? You can consider it your confession for the week."

Silence descends as the girl's mouth remains stubbornly closed. I could pry it open. I have my hands, the pills in my pocket, and the belt around my black wool pants, but I do nothing. I let the silence hang between us like a heavy cloud. This girl has a sweetness about her, an innocence that you can almost feel. It stirs something primitive inside of me. I'm not a man given to reckless impulses. I've built my empire on steady, thoughtful decisions. It has made me reliable to people in all walks of life. If there's a problem that you can't solve, call the Chapel.

"I'm not a bad man. Just someone who needs a small piece of information. Tell me who the girl is, and you can go free."

"Right. Like you're going to let me out of here unharmed and that's why I'm tied up? I've seen this movie before. Once you reveal your face, the person in the chair dies, and I'm the person in the chair."

"I don't care that you've seen me. Please feel free to tell others everything you have observed here at the Chapel." I walk around behind her and loosen the ropes. There are red marks where she struggled against her bindings. I cough into my fist to hide a groan. Fuck, that's sexy. I want to tie her up in a million different ways with a million different ropes. Her body would look perfect framed by a harness of silk bindings and knots, hung from the middle of my ceiling so that I could taste her any time I was hungry. I suspect my

appetite would be unquenchable.

“I take it you are going to keep your secrets?” I manage to squeeze out in a somewhat light tone.

“I’m not telling you anything, that’s for sure.” Her small chin points up to the ceiling. “You can keep me tied here for a week and I’ll still have my lips sealed.”

“I’ve untied you,” I reply.

“What?” She raises her arms, looking at both hands in surprise as if she can’t believe she’s free. When recognition sets in, she hops to her feet and runs over to rip open the door. I follow her sedately as she races down the hall. I suppose she thinks she is going to find an exit, but the Chapel is a maze of rooms, and there is only one way out. Unfortunately for her, it is well guarded.

Lars, who was standing guard at the door, peers at the girl’s back as she runs away from us. “Do I need to fetch her?”

“No.”

“Get the information that you need?”

“Yes and no.”

He nods and then after a moment, “Should I send her back to Santino?”

“Of course not. She’s mine now.”





## CHAPTER 2

ANGEL

MY HEART RACES AS I RUN DOWN THE LONG, BEAUTIFUL HALLWAY WITH stained glass windows and overdone art with frames that look like they weigh more than I do. A sadness hits me that I can't stop to appreciate their beauty, but this may be my only chance to escape.

I swear this place looks like it has been dropped out of Rome or something. Not that I've ever been. The closest I'll ever get will be Google Earth and what I've read in books. My imagination will have to suffice because I definitely don't have the means for a trip like that.

A rush of relief fills me when I hit the end of the hallway. I can either go left or right. I follow my instincts and go right. They've never failed me before, so I'm hoping that luck stays with me. I glance behind me but don't see the priest guy anywhere in sight. I pick up my pace anyway, making sure to keep ahead of him. It's not long before the end of the hallway is upon me. I choose to go right again.

I try to take in my surroundings as I continue to walk. Light pours in from the doors in front of me. I take off on a dead run again. I hold my hands out to push through them. Unable to help myself, I glance behind me as the doors fall closed but don't see anyone.

I smirk. I made it. The sun warms my face. I drop my head back to look up. Glass covers the ceiling, letting the light pour in.

"The hell." I glance around. A fountain sits in the center of a garden. Flowers overflow the giant encased room. I haven't escaped. "Fuck."

"That's no way to speak inside of a church." I spin around to see the priest that I thought let me go but obviously not. It was all a game.

"Are you even a priest or preacher?" I growl. To be honest, I don't know the difference. A few foster parents I had growing up dragged us to church

here and there. It was hard to believe when I saw the awful things they did, but still every Sunday they'd go and pray away their sins.

Bullshit. They could pray till the day they die, and I'll still remember some of the things I saw them do. They should be given no forgiveness. Jail or death would be the only suitable outcomes for them.

"I try to keep the peace."

I knew it. There is no way this guy is a real priest. He is way too handsome to be celibate. They're supposed to be celibate, right? That's how it works. They're married to their God from what I know. Actually, I think some of them can get married, but I don't see a ring on his finger.

"You're not going to let me go, are you?" I should have known when he untied me so easily. I can still feel the ropes against my skin.

The burn of them didn't hurt. In fact, I might have enjoyed it. I didn't get the feeling I was about to be tortured. I've got to stop hanging out in the library so much reading dirty books. But the library has always been my safe place. A place of solace. It's how I met Laurel.

"You have two options. Either give me the information or you stay."

"Why can't you let me go?" I plead.

"Because Santino will have you picked right back up, and who knows where he might send you next."

I swallow.

It was ballsy to storm into Kane Santino's home, but I didn't have much of a choice. Laurel was gone. I failed her. I knew her father wasn't treating her right. I noticed over time that things with him got worse and worse. She stopped coming to the library or leaving home. Her whole world was that little apartment over the dry cleaners her father owned. She'd been wilting away.

Slowly, I tried to lure her out and convince her to run with me. Then she fell into Santino's hands. One of the most feared men in the city. If I had gotten her away from her father sooner, that would have never happened.

"I'll never give you what you're asking of me. So I guess I'd better make myself comfortable." I jut my chin out.

"Then shall I show you to your room?"

"What?" My brows raise, but I try to quickly hide my surprise. That wasn't what I thought he was going to say. Honestly, I wasn't sure what his next move would be. He's clearly not the normal man of the cloth.

"You said you wanted to get comfortable."

“You’re serious?” His expression doesn’t change, answering my question without words. “So I’m a prisoner.”

“You have the key. Use it at any time.”

“You’ll have to pry it from my dead hand.” I give him my best glare.

“Dead men tell no tales.”

“Pretty sure yours does. Got a whole book or somethin’.” I stride past him, keeping my shoulders back. His mouth forms a line. I don’t know if I’ve pissed him off or he’s fighting a smile. I’ll take either as a small victory. “Got a name, or does everyone call you Father?”

“Some.”

“What about Daddy?” I wiggle my brows. I’m pushing it, and I know it, but I can’t help it. I’m frustrated, and I want someone to be angry with me.

“If you wish. What shall I call you?”

“Prisoner 69.”

“You’re blushing.” He opens the door for me. “Come on, Angel, before you bite off more than you can chew.”

“Are you sure it’s me that’s bitten off more than I can chew?” I challenge. He steps right into me, taking up all the space, his body pressing flush against mine. I should step back, but I don’t. The air in my lungs freezes when I feel the outline of his cock against my stomach.

“Don’t tempt me, Angel.” He leans down. His warm breath tickles across my lips. “I will bite.”

Okay, maybe it is me that has bitten off more than I can chew.



# CHAPTER 3

BJORNSSON

“YOU PUT HER IN THE MARY ROOM AND ARE FEEDING HER GOURMET MEALS?”  
Lars frowns. “Should I beat her after dinner?”

“I’d prefer you did not. I like you, Lars, and if you were to hurt her, I would have to cut your throat.” I carve a piece of meat off for myself and shove a bloody piece of wagyu into my mouth.

“What do you plan to do with her? She’s not talking, and Santino will call us.”

“Santino has his own pigeon from which to squeeze his information. He doesn’t need this girl, and at some point, when his dick isn’t dominating his thought process, he’ll realize it.” I eat the last piece of meat and then finish my glass of burgundy. A light chime sounds in the room, signaling an arrival. “Is it that time already?” I glance at my watch. It’s seven, which means Abbott Emerson has arrived. I wipe my mouth and push back my chair.

Lars immediately moves toward the door. My bodyguard takes his job seriously. Abbott Emerson is waiting in the reception room. His slight body is shrouded in his black robes. When his eyes fall on my collar, a small smile touches the corners of his eyes. He holds out his hands. “I see you are keeping the faith.”

I take those old, liver-spotted hands in mine and bend deeply until my forehead hovers just above the backs of them. “As always.”

He removes one hand and places it at the back of my head. “You’re doing well, disciple.” He presses in a downward motion. I take the hint and kneel and raise my cupped palms upward. A small object, a wafer, is placed in them. Abbott Emerson says a blessing. When he is finished, I bring the cupped hands to my mouth and inhale the wafer. Closing my eyes, I give thanks for having caught my very own angel. Lars steps to my side and

places a check in Abbott Emerson's palm. "For the Church, from the Chapel."

The older man peeks at the amount. Once his curiosity is satisfied, he pockets the offering and takes a seat in the middle of the upholstered sofa. I fill a crystal glass nearly to the brim with thirty-year-old whiskey and hand it to him before taking my own seat.

He savors the first deep gulp before saying, "Whenever I visit, I think it will be my last. How can someone with so many temptations remain pure?"

"I take it you have heard that Kane Santino sent me a gift."

"A gift? More like a siren." Abbott Emerson leans forward. "Son, you have made it to thirty without a blemish in your history. You've maintained the Chapel like a monastery. Your gifts to the Church are generous. Do not allow your soul to be tainted."

I rub a finger across my lower lip. The Church does not care if I steal or murder, but lie with a woman and I will be excommunicated.

"My soul remains pure, Abbott, but thank you for watching over me." I lift my hand, and Lars steps forward with another check. "Please accept this additional gift as penance for any sins I may have overlooked."

Abbot discreetly clocks the amount before tucking the check away. Since he doesn't make any remarks, whatever amount Lars put there must cover the amount of sinning Abbott presumes I've done.

"Let's put aside this topic and talk about something else," Abbott suggests. For the remainder of the visit, he touches on a number of topics from how the current mayor displeases him to his future trip to the motherland. Before he leaves, he blesses the Chapel. "You're doing well here, Father Bjornsson. Please take good care of yourself as I don't want to lose even a single member of my flock."

"That sounds like a threat," Lars says after closing the door behind the swishing black robes of the Abbott.

"Institutions with international ties always feel that they are more important than local chapters." I dump the whiskey into the trash and then, after a moment of consideration, toss the glass in there as well.

"They never know what's happening in their backyards," Lars complains.

"That's a good thing." The less the Church knows about my organization, the better. If they knew the scope of my holdings, it would present a problem, and they would send people in to remove some of my possessions, to try to prove their power over me.

“How much was in the second check?” I ask.

“A couple of zeros,” Lars replies. “I didn’t think you had sinned too badly, but maybe next visit, it will be three zeros.”

“You have no faith in me?” I hadn’t realized my reaction to Angel was that obvious.

“Every man has a weakness.”

“Speaking of, how is the angel doing?”

“She didn’t eat much,” Lars says.

“Have the red velvet tart delivered. No one can resist that.”

“You think you should be visiting her at this hour?” Lars sounds concerned.

“We can always send a bigger offering if you think my behavior warrants it.”

When I arrive at the Mary suite, a member of the kitchen staff pulls up with a tray.

“I’ll take this off your hands,” I say.

“Yes, Father.” The young boy nods diffidently.

I’ve seen this one only once or twice. There’s something odd about him that I can’t quite put my finger on, but it’s not something I care enough about to explore. There are many who have secrets at the Chapel. As long as I can count on their loyalty, they are free to keep their demons to themselves.

I knock once and let myself in. Angel is lying on the bed enveloped in a big white robe with a towel wrapped around her head. My body tightens at the thought of her naked and wet, her body slick with soap. The tray almost slips out of my hands. Angel lets out a yelp and throws a cover over her lower half.

“Do you think it’s right for you to just barge in like that?” she says in a hostile tone.

“Yes,” I say, setting the tray on the table that’s situated in front of the balcony doors. “Are you enjoying your accommodations?”

“You know it’s illegal to keep people locked up.”

I tug the curtains aside so that the fading sun casts golden beams into the room. “Yes.”

“How can you be a man of God and do illegal things? That doesn’t make sense.”

I take a seat and gesture for her to come join me. “Come here, and I’ll answer every question you have of me.”



She sits up and pins me with a narrow, suspicious stare. “Every question?”

“Every single one.”



## CHAPTER 4

ANGEL

I'M NOT SURE WHERE I WANT TO BEGIN. I HAVE SO MANY QUESTIONS FOR THIS man, but I almost don't want to give him the satisfaction of asking them. For all I know, he could feed me lies while manipulating me to share my own identity.

Then again, what he is feeding me now is the best food I've ever eaten in my life. I'm not so sure how quickly I want to escape anymore. I had a hot shower for the first time in months.

I know my curiosity will get the best of me in the end because I want to know more about this handsome, mysterious man. He also might know what is happening to Laurel. Right now, he's my best source of information on her.

I'm really in no rush to go anywhere now. While I might be here against my will, the accommodations are way more bougie than I'm used to. This place sure beats jumping from shelter to shelter every other week. You're only allowed to stay for so long at each. I now thankfully have them on a rotation system that I set up to hop from one to another.

"What kind of dessert is this?" I ask, deciding I should start small, break down some of his walls so he might relax and trust me more. I'm sure he is trying to do the same. Will he get me to confess all my sins? Isn't that what he's supposed to do?

I watch as a small smirk crosses his handsome face. I mean, I can't help but notice how the man looks. I'm pretty sure that's gotta be some sort of sin, but luckily for me, I'm not a believer of those types of things.

How could I be with the life I've been dealt? Parents who didn't want me, shuffled from foster home to foster home until I was old enough to get out. Then again, I've been one of the lucky ones compared to others in the system. I got away without any real harm getting to me. Then I go and let

myself jump right into a giant pile of it.

“I said come here and I’ll answer your questions.” I shuffle to the side of the bed. It makes my robe ride up. I catch his eyes lingering there for a moment before he makes himself look away. I pull the towel from my hair, giving it one last dry before I toss it back onto the bed and go to him. “It’s a red velvet tart,” he says when I sit down on the bench in front of the window. The sun slowly disappears. In my experience, I know that’s when darkness always comes out to play.

“You drugged it? Then you can have your way with me.” His mouth forms a line. I notice he does that when he wants to mask whatever emotion might try to show on his face.

“Is that why you barely ate your dinner?”

“No,” I answer honestly.

He picks up a fork and cuts off a piece himself. I watch him chew and swallow it.

“Perfectly safe.” He goes to cut off another bite. “Why didn’t you eat the other food then?”

“It’s hard to eat when your stomach is in knots.”

“I’m not going to harm you.” He brings the bite to my mouth. My worry isn’t about me. I’m in a fluffy robe in a room fit for a queen. It’s my friend I worry for.

“Because you’re a man of the cloth? It would be breaking the rules.” I lean in and take the bite. A small moan leaves me when the sweetness explodes over my tongue. He sucks in a deep breath at the sounds I’m making.

“No, that is not why I wouldn’t hurt you.” He answers my question.

“But—”

“We both can read the same words or see the same event unfold in front of us, but our experience is unlike the others. Everyone interprets things differently.”

Why have I never thought of it that way before? He’s right.

“We both can stand and watch a man die. Some might cheer in justice while others might weep in sorrow.”

“Who are you?” I don’t understand this man. He pulls at his collar.

“I merely keep the peace.” A gatekeeper of sorts? Maybe a reaper at times?

“At what cost?”

“All costs.” He brings another bite to my mouth.

“Could the cost be Laurel?”

“I think your friend is a bigger threat than Santino at the moment.” How could that be?

“To who?” My mind races with ideas. Why would Santino take her? There is no reason. He got her father’s shop. The only thing that makes sense is that Santino wants her for himself.

“Everyone. Now open for me.” I part my lips and take the bite. His words only confirm what I was speculating. “What is your name?”

“I thought I was the one asking the questions.” I peek over at him. His eyes never leave me. He watches me so closely. I find that I like his attention on me, which is absolutely insane. “I don’t know. They never could figure out where I came from, so I guess I got a state name. Even had to guess my birthdate. Doesn’t matter.” I shrug. “Call me whatever.” I stare out the window, the sun almost gone. It’s not as though anyone is going to come looking for me.

In this world, I’m really nobody. It hurts to know that. I didn’t want Laurel to feel the same. It’s why I came. I wanted her to know she wouldn’t fall through the cracks.

A fate I always knew would be my own.



# CHAPTER 5

BJORNSSON

NO NAME? I HIDE MY SHOCK BY CUTTING UP HER UNEATEN STEAK. “HERE.”

She opens her mouth obediently. I continue to feed her. When she waves her hand to indicate she’s done, I pour myself a full glass of Scotch and her a small snifter of brandy. “It’s sweet,” I promise, but her face curls at the first sip.

She sets it aside. “Your definition of sweet is different than mine. The tart was sweet. This is...” She sticks out her tongue like a tiny cat.

The urge to lift her up and pet her makes my fingers tremble. I fist my hands and remind myself of my calling, my position.

“Maybe so. I like sweet with a little bite,” I admit. “What did your friend call you? The one that Santino is keeping.”

“Laurel? I told her my name was Charlotte after the Queen in the Netflix show. She called me Charlie for short.”

“I haven’t seen it.”

“I wouldn’t expect you to.”

“That seems like an unintended insult. I’ll watch it tonight so that I can have a proper conversation with you tomorrow. Charlotte it is.”

“It wasn’t an insult. It just doesn’t seem like a show a man would like. I read that most dramas are watched by women anyway.” She toys with the small dessert fork before picking it up and digging into the tart.

“Why did you call me Angel?” she asks between bites.

“Because you look like one.”

“I have dark hair.” She points the fork toward her heavy locks.

“Angels can’t have dark hair?”

“They always are blond in the paintings.”

I wonder what paintings she has seen. Has she gone to the museum to

study them? Seen them on the Internet? Looked at some old illustrated Bible? Probably the latter. The foster families had time to read to her from the scriptures but not name her. “Mary was painted with dark hair in the pre-Renaissance era. The Bible has no description of the angel’s hair, only that they wore white robes or were clothed with light.” I run a hand over my own short brown hair. “I don’t think He would have made us with dark hair if that was a determining factor in our entrance into heaven or hell.”

“Okay, I’m convinced.” She scrapes the bottom of the plate and looks surprised to see that she’s eaten all the tart.

“Here, have another.” I push the second piece toward her.

“Aren’t you supposed to be keeping me away from gluttony? Isn’t it like one of the seven deadly sins?”

“Two pieces of cake hardly makes a person gluttonous.”

“How many?” she asks as she slides the plate in front of her.

“Probably three.”

“Three? I thought you’d say six or something to make me feel better about eating two.”

“Three whole cakes,” I clarify. She’s fun, this Charlotte. Fun, smart, beautiful, protective. Exactly as an angel should be.

“You’re making that up.”

“It’s not like there are guidelines in the Bible about how many desserts one should limit themselves to.”

“Have you ever eaten three full cakes?” She points her fork at me. “Be honest.”

“I’m never anything but honest. It’s part of the job.” I rub a thumb across my collar. “And no. When I was a boy, I did eat half a cake. My mom whipped me good for that—not because I’d eaten half the cake but because it was for Easter dinner and she didn’t have time to make another one. Father Robertson was coming over, too. My mom played the organ at the church,” I explain.

“So what happened?”

“She served half the cake, and I stood during dinner. My bottom was too sore to sit. Father Robertson ate the cake with a smile and then locked me out of the house while he boned my mother.”

Angel’s jaw drops. “I did not expect that.”

“His vows weren’t serious.” I pluck the fork from her hand and feed myself a large bite.



“Unlike you?”

“Unlike me,” I confirm. I get to my feet. “When I make a promise, I keep it. People all over the world trust me to do that. Here is my promise to you. So long as you stay here at The Chapel, no harm will come to you. You will eat as many cakes as you want, sleep for as many hours as you like, swim, go for walks, read books, watch movies. Whatever you want to do, you may. The moment you leave The Chapel, the protection no longer exists.”

“So I’m some kind of prisoner?” She scrunches her nose. “For how long?”

“For as long as I like.” I dip my head and then leave. She’ll never know how difficult it is for me to walk away, but moving forward is like dragging my feet through hardening cement. I want to stay in the Mary room, bantering with her about how many cakes is considered a sin and whether angels can have brown hair, but it’s too dangerous. The sounds she makes while she eats, the pure smiles as she runs her hands across the soft velvet fabric of her chair, the wonderment in her eyes as she looked out of the windows. I like it all. Too much.

I’ve never been tempted before, not really. There have been women that have come and gone from The Chapel. It’s unfortunate, but women and children are still used as collateral, so there has been opportunity. And not just inside these walls. Outside of them, at dinner parties and social events, there are always those women who think that they can be the one to break your vows. It’s been easy to say no thank you, but for Angel, the easy thing would be to cave, to give in to the desire that is riding me hard. I nod to Lars as I leave. “In the morning, make sure that the tart is served with breakfast.”

“Yessir.”

“And don’t let anyone else in her room.”

“No, sir.”

“Not even me.”



## CHAPTER 6

ANGEL

IS HE GOOD OR IS HE BAD IS THE QUESTION THAT KEEPS RUNNING THROUGH MY mind as I watch him leave. I mean, he hasn't really mistreated me in any way besides the whole kidnapping thing. I can't bring myself to hate the man. In fact, I'm finding I feel the complete opposite.

A tingle went through my body when he said he was going to keep me for 'as long as he liked.' I know it's messed up, but no one has ever wanted me. I can't help but love the fact that he doesn't want to let me go. I know I'm not being rational. I haven't been since I thought I could go toe to toe with Santino.

Suddenly, feeling exhausted, I crawl into the giant bed, pulling the fluffy blanket over me. Sleep pulls me under quickly. I'm jolted awake when I hear a heated exchange. My eyes go to the window, the curtains still open. The sun appears to be setting, but that has to be wrong. I rub my eyes. It has to be rising. If not, then I slept for an eternity.

I slip from the bed, heading toward the door to see what the commotion is.

"You said no one was to go into the room, not even you."

"Move," a familiar voice rumbles, only this time, it makes me stand up straighter. A cold warning is laced through that one word.

Still, for some reason, having no fear of the man on the other side of the door, I open it. They both turn my way.

"What are you two love birds bickering about? A girl's trying to get her beauty sleep." Lars, I think I heard him called, steps back, where Bjornsson steps forward.

His hand comes out. His fingers graze my shoulder, making my breath hitch. He pulls my robe back up into place. I hadn't realized it had fallen.

“You haven’t left your room or answered any knocks for food.” Bjornsson’s finger lingers on my collar bone.

“What time is it?” I’ve been trying to get my bearings since I woke up a few minutes ago.

“Seven.” Lars’ answer reminds us he’s here. Bjornsson jerks his head around to give Lars a look that has him turning to leave.

“Seven at like night?” Bjornsson drops his hand from me. That might be why my bladder feels like it’s going to explode.

“Yes.” He clears his throat.

“Damn, can you, ah, give me a second?” I don’t wait for him to respond. I leave the door open, rushing to the bathroom.

“Are you okay?” Bjornsson comes to a full stop when he steps into the bathroom. My panties are already around my ankles. He stands there for a second, not taking his eyes off me.

“Can you not watch? I can’t pee if you watch.” I swear Bjornsson’s cheeks start to turn pink before he leaves the bathroom. He makes sure to close the door.

I can’t help but giggle. Who knew it would be so easy to make the big, bad, mysterious man blush? My laughter dies quickly when I go to wash my hands and get a good look at myself in the mirror.

My hair is a wild mess. I hadn’t brushed it after I showered and went to bed with it wet. Have I really slept a whole day away? I haven’t slept more than four or five hours in forever. Nor have I ever had such a peaceful sleep.

When you grow up the way that I did, you basically sleep with one eye open because the environment around you is unpredictable. You never feel safe enough to go into a deep sleep, fearing that something bad might happen. None of this makes sense. Why is it that I feel safe here with him?

I quickly fix my hair the best I can and wash my hands before I head out of the bathroom. Bjornsson is pacing back and forth in front of the bed. He stops when he sees me.

“Do I need to call a doctor?”

“Why?”

“You slept for almost twenty hours.” He comes over to me, putting the back of his hand to my forehead.

“I’m not sick. I guess I was exhausted, and I crashed.” He lets his hand slip gently down the side of my face, caressing my cheek.

“Why don’t we go down to the kitchen and get something to eat?”

“You cook?”

“I do, but there will be things already prepared.”

I glance around to see where I put my clothes from the other day. “I’ll need to get dressed. Do you know where my backpack is?” I lost it sometime between Santino’s and here. They took it from me.

“I’ll see to finding it, but I had some things brought over.” He goes back to the bedroom door, grabbing a few boxes sitting outside. “I suppose you slept through the knocks.” He places the boxes on the bench at the end of the bed before opening one. “Maybe I should leave you to it.” He closes the box back.

“What?” I open it back up and see panties right on top. “Why do I get the feeling you could kill a man but not touch panties?” I pick up the silky material. “Oh God. They’re so soft.” I reach under my robe and pull mine off before slipping them on. Bjornsson turns to give me his back. He wouldn’t have seen anything. I’d made sure the robe kept me covered, but now I’m not going to be able to help myself.

I’m not some sexy seductress. In fact, for the most part, I stay clear of the opposite sex and do whatever I can to go unnoticed by them. Even when I was a young girl, I kept my hair short. It wasn’t until the last few years I let it grow out finally.

In the box, I find some jeans, stretchy black pants, and sweats. I go for the black pants and fish out one of the sweaters from another box. There are even soft, fluffy socks. I had no idea clothes could feel this good against your skin.

“Okay, it’s fine now. I’m no longer indecent,” I tease him. Bjornsson slowly turns back around, his eyes roaming down my body and then back up until they meet mine.

“I’m not so sure that’s true, angel.”

He’s probably right. Now all I can think about is doing indecent things to get a reaction out of Father Bjornsson.



# CHAPTER 7

BJORNSSON

IT'S AS IF MY ENEMIES HAD PEELED MY SKIN BACK, CRACKED OPEN MY HEAD, and taken every fantasy they could find to create this woman. Dressed in tight pants and a loose sweater, there's hardly an inch of bare skin to be seen, but that doesn't stop my blood from heating up. The Abbott was right all along. If I allow it, I could be led astray.

"This way." I gesture for her to follow me. Getting out of her room is the first step to survival here. Distance would be the second step, but why be hasty? Maybe I can handle myself. Lars falls in behind me. If I don't behave, there's always my trusty bodyguards to haul me away from danger.

"Where is the kitchen? The last time I was running around, I didn't see one."

Her hand swings close to mine, like an invitation or a lure. I ignore it, or try to. "When you were trying to escape?"

"You told me I could leave. Were you lying?"

"I never lie."

She stops short. "Never? Not even a small white lie like telling Lars he looks nice when he doesn't?"

Behind us, I hear a grunt of disapproval. I swipe the back of my hand across my mouth to hide a grin. When I have myself under control, I say, "When has Lars ever not looked nice?"

"I don't know. Don't we all have bad days?"

"Lying is not permitted at the Chapel." I think back to the days when I was a boy under the Abbott's tutelage. The whistle of the whip slicing through the air is as crystal clear in my memory as when the Abbott was disciplining us. No lying. No coveting. No lusting. I'm breaking that last tenet every moment I spend with Angel.

She purses her lips together and studies me for a moment. I wonder what she sees or what conclusion she's come to, but she doesn't share her thoughts. Instead, she starts walking again. "What kind of religion are you? Catholic?"

"I would say we are less of a religion and more of an order. A group of people with a common purpose."

"So you just made up a religion? What are the rules? What are considered the sins?"

"Rather than a listing of wrongdoings, the Chapel encourages"—*mandates*—"fidelity, fraternity, fairness."

"That sounds like—" She breaks off. I follow her gaze to see that she's staring at the front doors. The two twenty-foot-high iron structures loom at the entrance. The light that illuminates the entry is from the massive chandelier and wall sconces. No sunlight can be seen. She walks forward until her outstretched palm rubs against the metal. Her hands skim down the flat panels. "Why is there no doorknob, or do I need to say a secret passcode first and they pop out?"

"Secret passcode," I affirm. "They operate on hydraulics. No individual can open them."

"I see." She steps back. "This is a prison then?"

"No."

"Can I leave?" Her chin juts out in a challenge.

No, I answer silently. Out loud, I say, "Where do you want to go?"

"Who knows? Maybe a park. Maybe the mall. Maybe the library. Maybe to see my friend Laurel."

"Laurel is otherwise occupied, but if you had details you wanted to share about her, Santino would bring her to see you."

Angel's soft face hardens at my mention of Santino. I shouldn't have brought him up. "That asshole," she says. "Sure, call him and tell him I have all kinds of details."

"Why do I think those details include stabbing him with a pencil?"

"Oh, I'm not going to limit myself to a pencil. You've got a kitchen, right? I'm sure I can find a knife or five there. Plus, there's candlesticks, chairs, books. Everything is a weapon if you know what you're doing."

My eyebrows shoot up. "Do you know what you're doing?"

Her chin goes higher. "Wouldn't you like to know."

"I would."



She shrugs. “That’s for me to know and you to wonder about.” Angel sniffs and moves toward the hallway we came from. I quietly direct her toward the correct path, hiding a smile.

“What else would you do outside?” I can’t help myself. I want to know more. “What is interesting at the mall?”

“It’s fun to window shop. Go into different stores, dream a little.”

“What stores?”

“Laurel and I liked H&M. Stuff there is cute and cheap.”

“And if you didn’t have to worry about money?”

“There’s never been a time I didn’t worry about money.”

“But if you were to dream a bit?”

“I’m not a dreamer, Father Bjornsson. I’m a realist. Like I’m real about why you’re being nice to me. You think that I’ll let my guard down and then spill all of Laurel’s secrets so that you can sell those to Santino. I’m not going to help you with that.” She stops again. “Why are there so many doors in this place? Why is it so big? Are we in a school?”

She’s making me smile again, and it kind of hurts my face. I’m not used to using those kinds of muscles. “Close. It was an old seminary for Jesuits, but the chapter lost its funding and had to sell it a few decades ago. The Order bought it, and now it’s mine. It’s a cloister built around four gardens. They’re very nice. Even Lars likes them. Tomorrow we’ll eat in the herb garden.”

“And if I don’t want to, will you beat me?” Her words are saucy, but I can see the interest in her eyes.

“Only if you want me to.” I’m playing a dangerous game here, but the words come out before I can stop them.

“You say that like I might enjoy it, but I think you’re the one who likes to hurt people,” she says.

I don’t reply because I can’t lie in the Chapel. The truth hangs between us, heavy and erotic.



## CHAPTER 8

ANGEL

“TELL ME, FATHER. DO WE ALL GET WHAT WE DESERVE IN THE END?” I SUCK the spaghetti up. There is no way to eat it gracefully. Not that I was trying. When Bjornsson dropped the giant plate of pasta in front of me, there was no holding back.

At most shelters, the spaghetti isn't great. To be honest, that goes for most of the food there. It's filling and gets the job done, but here, everything I've tasted has been magical. Who knew that tucked away right in the center of the city is a small world of its own? The outside makes the world think the inside is filled with prayers and redemption.

Then again, maybe it is. It's just not the kind people want to believe in. No, that's too much to bear for them. The same way they rush past the shelters, not making eye contact with any of us while we all hope there are enough beds for the night. People only want to see the pretty things. It doesn't matter what lies behind the walls if they don't have to face it.

“Not enough do.” Bjornsson barely touches his food.

I hold all of his attention. Is it because he thinks I'm going to do something or because he simply enjoys watching me? I kind of hope it's both. That I can make this man unsure of what is to come. That I'm unpredictable. But I have a sense he merely wants to stare at me. For some reason, I've caught his attention. I'm not sure if that's bad or good yet. Probably a bit of both.

“Do *you* give people what they deserve?” I lick my lips, sweeping up any sauce I left behind. His words from earlier replay in my mind, and I remember the look in his eyes when he said them.

“I try to keep out of most things.” He butters my bread for me. The act is small. It shouldn't mean anything, but it does. I can't help but love the way

he cares for me.

“But you know all things?” I lift a brow, teasing him.

“In this city, I know everyone sins.”

“What happens when you can’t keep out of it?”

“Then I do what needs to be done.” His answers are always vague but honest.

I believe him when he says he won’t lie to me, but Bjornsson uses each of his words with precision. The only time I’ve heard a hint of his tone changing was when he was going back and forth with Lars outside my door.

“Make me understand. You don’t have to confess to me but maybe a little.” I peek over at him through my lashes. I want to know more about this man. Something has drawn me to him. It doesn’t make sense, but I can’t help myself.

“There will always be evil in this world. You can’t stop that, but you can balance the scales. Even in the dark, a little light can shine.”

“Are you the light?”

“I’m not the light of a savior, Angel. I’m the last light they will ever see.”

I reach out to touch him. His hand snaps out fast, grabbing me by the wrist, making the sleeves of his robe fall down a few inches. I get a peek of a tattoo. Something I was not expecting. He keeps getting more interesting by the second.

“What needs to be done with me?” I lean toward him. His fingers lock around my wrist. My body lights up, my stomach tightening. Bjornsson’s hold is hard with a snap of sting. It should hurt, might even leave a mark, but my body only hums one thing.

Desire.

In fact, I wouldn’t mind if he tightened his hold more on me. Then I’d know for sure I’d see his mark on my wrist later when his hand is long gone.

Too bad it’s not one of desire for him. He merely doesn’t want me to touch him. I only wanted to run my fingers across the white collar. My fingers have been itching to touch it.

“Please?” I don’t know why I say it, but I do. The word is like a key. As fast as his hand locked around my wrist, he released it. This time, he doesn’t stop me when I go for his collar. I run my finger along it, letting it stray deep inside so I can feel his skin too. He visibly swallows.

“It’s Mary,” I tell him. He’s given me something now. I’ll do the same. “What the state named me.”

“You’re teasing me.”

“Not this time.” I let my hand fall away but let it graze against his chest, feeling nothing but hardness. Bjornsson is a very disciplined man. He lives by a code of right and wrong. One that is of his own, but I think he makes sure to always keep his emotions in check. “Virgin Mary and all.” I wink at him before taking a giant bite of the piece of bread he gave me.

The glass in his hand shatters. “What the hell?” I jump up, almost choking on my bread.

Lars comes out of freaking nowhere. I’m starting to think he’s a ghost that haunts this place that can appear anywhere at any time.

Drops of blood hit the table, mixing with the spilled wine and the shattered glass.

“Are you okay?” I try to reach for his hand, but he jerks back away from me. I hold my hands up. “Sorry.”

“I’m fine.” Bjornsson stands up. “Make sure you answer your door in the morning for breakfast.” He doesn’t wait for an answer from me. He leaves without another word or glance in my direction, Lars following right behind him.

I sit there for a second, not understanding why I’m so hurt by his reaction. He didn’t want me to touch him. It’s confusing. One second, I think he’s trying to keep me, and the next, he doesn’t want to be near me.

If anything, I should be used to that. Always thinking the next foster home might be better. At first they are. Then you’re not what they wanted. You didn’t fit. Maybe I’m feeling this way because I thought I was past that in my life.

But here it is once again, Bjornsson shining that light of his on me.

Will it really be the last thing I see?



# CHAPTER 9

BJORNSSON

“WE SHOULD SEND HER BACK TO SANTINO.” LARS HANDS ME A BANDAGE.

“No.” I wrap the gauze around my wrist more tightly than is necessary. The pain feels good, and I need a distraction from the other, more tempting, item that sits in the kitchen with her noodles, red wine, and spilled blood. I didn’t mean to break the glass, but the mention of her virginity sparked something inside of me, something feral and dark and mean. She’s untouched, untutored. She has known the touch of no man. I curl my fingers into my palm and revel in the sting that the action brings as the wound separates and pulls at the edges.

“She’s dangerous.”

He doesn’t elaborate to whom, but I suppose if I asked, he would say everyone because a danger to me is a danger to the entire organization, maybe even the entire city.

“When have we ever been afraid of trouble, Lars? Isn’t our role to embrace the chaos and make order out of it?” I rip the gauze with my teeth and slap a piece of tape on the bandage to keep it closed.

“Our role is to assist in maintaining order, and since you are the Father here...” He trails off, allowing me to fill in the blanks.

I lift my bandaged hand. “I’ve bled plenty to keep the order here. I’ve always done my duty, and currently my obligations are to keep this girl safe until Santino is able to accomplish his task. Since I left her with a broken wine glass and a half-eaten meal, I’m returning to make sure I execute my obligations properly.”

Lars keeps his mouth shut as I walk toward the door. At the entry, a thought pops into my head. “Lars, get an H&M set up here tomorrow.”

He nods, but I hear him ask the empty room, “What’s an H&M?” after I

leave.

The kitchen table is empty when I arrive. The plate is gone, and so are any traces of broken glass or blood. A few questions of the staff later, I find out she's in the gardens. My feet take me to the closest set of exterior doors. It takes me a bit, but I find her in one of the far gardens, with her hands clasped behind her back as she stares into the base of a fountain.

"There's a naked boy peeing into the water. That doesn't seem very godly to me," she says as I approach.

"How did you know it was me?" She hadn't even cast an eye in my direction.

"It was you or Lars. You haven't really allowed anyone else near me, and so I figured I had a fifty-fifty chance of getting it right."

"And you picked me why?"

"Because Lars isn't going to come looking for me. At least not without your orders."

She has that right. I forget how savvy street kids are, although she didn't grow up on the street. From what she's shared, she's been shuttled between foster homes. Sometimes foster parents are good and decent, but a lot of times, the parents are just in it for the state check, and in bad situations, they're doing it because it's easy prey. Angel has some hard edges to her. She's not anyone's prey—at least not an easy target.

"It's good reasoning. Stick to that. No one looks for you, no one tells you what to do, no one touches you."

Her head tilts in my direction, and the naughty smile she wore at the kitchen table appears. "No one touches me?" she repeats. "No one at all or no one else?"

My blood grows hot. The Abbott's visit is a distant memory. Lars' warnings have faded. The vows I took, the ones I repeated just moments ago, have shriveled on my tongue. Instead, my head is full of her—her beauty, her spice, her strength. I want to eat her up in one gulp, tie her down, drive into her, and pierce that virgin veil. I could so easily pull those soft pants down over her ass and bend her over the edge of the stone fountain. I'd spank her ass cheeks until they were pink to match her pussy and then I'd spread her legs and take her hard. She'd scream loud enough to send the birds flying and my team of bodyguards running. Then I'd have to take the gun at my ankle and kill them.

A bell rings in the distance. "Lars says I should return you to Santino.



Would you want that?" I ask instead of answering her question.

The naughty smile disappears. "No, when have I ever indicated I want to go back to him? I want my friend here, not Kane Santino."

"That's not a possibility. She's his now, and he won't allow anyone near her." His angry phone call to me confirmed what I'd heard from other sources. He's very attached to this girl. Going to his place and taking her would be tantamount to declaring war.

Angel's face falls. "I'm worried about her. Can I at least talk to her?"

"Maybe. When she's ready." Or when Santino feels safe enough to allow her to have contact with the outside world. That may not be for years, but I don't share that with Angel. Her unhappy face disturbs me. "The peeing boy is Cupid," I find myself saying.

"Him?" She jerks a finger toward the statue. "I thought Cupids had bows and arrows, not a"—she pulses her hands in the air as if she's holding something between her hands—"wagon wheel."

"It's based off the Titian painting called 'Cupid with the Wheel of Time.' Cupid tries to stop the inevitable roll toward death with the power of love or something like that."

"Do you believe that? That death can be stopped by love?" She gazes up at me with her glowing, hopeful eyes, and this time the stirring isn't in my pants, but my chest.



# CHAPTER 10

ANGEL

BJORNSSON IS QUIET FOR A LONG MOMENT, THINKING OVER MY QUESTION. I too am curious what his answer might be. Then again, I'm always wondering what he might do or say next. I can't get a read on the man.

One thing I know for sure is that he's a deadly man. Even dressed as a priest. You can see it in his dark gaze that cuts straight to your soul. Thing is, Bjornsson is having a tough time seeing mine. It's probably why he has a fascination with me. What other reason could there be?

"Neither can be stopped," he finally answers. He's right. We all have to die. That's the way of life.

"I think you're wrong."

"Wrong?" He says the word as though it's foreign to him.

"Partly." A small laugh leaves me. "Not used to that?" I smirk up at him. "You're right. Death is inevitable, but love goes on. For example, Laurel. She's the only person I can say that I've ever really loved. If she died, she might be gone, but my love for her would live on. I don't think either can be stopped."

"Some never love."

"I pity them because I know what it's like to have never loved a person." Unfortunately, growing up the way I did, I experienced that lonely feeling for far too long. But Laurel changed all that for me.

"Your love for your friend may have led you to your own death." I turn to face Bjornsson fully. The man really is taking in every word I utter and contemplating them.

"Maybe." I force a smile. "But the world has been cold. Do you feel it, Bjornsson? Deep in your bones. This holiness that's filled with that coldness. You don't know how much it makes you ache and hurt. Until someone starts

to replace the cold with warmth. It's strange never knowing you needed something so badly until it was there in front of you."

"And there lies your problem. You let someone get close enough to affect you. Without her, you'd still be unaware of that deep ache you hadn't known was there."

"Is that what you do, Bjornsson? You make sure no one can get close enough to make you long for more." I take a step toward him. It's almost comical when he retreats a step back from little me. This man that could kill me so easily, retreating in fear of me. Really? His reaction spurs me on further.

"Lust is the undoing of many of men. It's wise to not let the temptation close."

"Temptation?" I lick my lips. "Am I a temptation to you?" The thought of me being his undoing stirs something inside of me.

"You are many things, Angel." He gives me one of his non-answers.

"Bjornsson, are you telling me that you've never partaken in lust?" He pulls at his collar like it's suddenly too tight around his neck.

"I've been good to you, Angel. Have I not?"

"I suppose if I was going to be kidnapped, this place isn't so bad." His face remains serious.

"I find my idea of lust is quite different from others'. It's best you not play that game with me. I can already see the wheels in your mind plotting it."

"Me?" I put my hand to my chest, feigning innocence. "I'm a virgin. Not a seductress."

"You've only proven my point more. Men want to claim. They enjoy ownership. You being a virgin makes you even more of a temptation."

"I'm not so sure about that, Bjornsson. Is there some projection there? Some men want their women to be very well trained. Not a girl that would give an untrained sloppy blow job."

"You enjoy testing me." Somehow his eyes grow darker.

"I think you like me testing you. Why else are you always seeking me out?" I scoot over on the bench I sat down on. An unspoken welcome to him to take the seat next to me. To prove me right. He does. I actually thought he would once again bark an order of some kind and stomp away from the garden.

He doesn't say anything. Only sits. I scoot closer so we are touching. The

man tenses even more. It's terrible how much I enjoy teasing him. If that's what I'm doing, I turn to get on my knees to face him. He keeps looking out into the garden.

"Is it okay?" I reach for his hand. He doesn't stop me. I can't tell how bad the cut might be with the gauze wrapped around it.

"It was what I needed." His response baffles me. "I would want to train her myself." His confession is whispered. So low I barely hear it myself. I press my thighs together. A dull throb formed there. My desire for him is strange but unstoppable. Our attraction to one another can't be denied.

I lean in. My chest rubs against his shoulder. "So that she would be only yours?"

"Careful, Angel," he warns. "Every man succumbs to temptation at some point in his life." His warning falls on deaf ears. Especially to a girl that has never been claimed by anyone. There isn't anyone out in the world searching for me. No one knows that I'm gone.

"But you haven't, have you? Not even once?" He turns his head to face me.

"Never."

"Not even a kiss?" My eyes drop to his mouth.

"I'm not a tender man. You don't know what you're trying to get yourself into."

"You might be right. In fact, if you give me something, I'll stop," I offer. I'm not sure it's much of an offer because he's the one always coming after me.

"You have nowhere to go. You don't need to leave."

"I wasn't going to ask to leave, but we don't have to make a deal." I pretend I'm about to get up, but he stops me. His arm comes out and pushes me back, so I stay put. I can see it all over his face. He relishes the control he just took over me.

So do I. If this were anyone else, I'd be freaking out, but Bjornsson's darkness doesn't scare me. I think a part of that darkness is what lures me in. Do I want tender? Yes, but I also want to be owned. I can still feel where he grabbed my wrist, or maybe I'm fantasizing about it. The redness has already faded.

"What is it?"

"I want a kiss." His eyes actually widen.

My heart races as I wait for a response, terrified either way. Will he push

me away or give me something neither he nor I have ever given anyone else before?



# CHAPTER 11

BJORNSSON

UNDER MY THUMB, HER HEARTBEAT RACES. I COULD TAKE HER HERE IN THE garden and no one would know. It's far from the main house. There are no cameras in the interior gardens of the property.

There's nothing in this garden but the plants, the birds, and the sound of trickling water from Cupid into the pool below. There are no traces of the punishments that have taken place here. The stone pavers don't reveal the number of men who have kneeled before the fountain or the blood that has been washed away.

None of that shows, but I still see it. Angel does not belong here. She is too good for this life, this world. If I was truly a decent person, I would send her away. Not to Santino, but far away from this world with enough funds that she could create a new life. I've done that for others, but I know I won't do it for her.

My thumb presses into that throbbing vein. She releases a small gasp, a hiccup of sound. Need, hot and fiery, washes over me. Her lips find mine. I don't know who made the first move, but the divine hand could not separate me from her at this moment. Electricity courses through me. I'm a light from within, illuminated by desire that I've never felt before. All the promises I previously made to hold myself apart from this world are rendered to dust.

My hands find her waist and pull her until she's on my lap, her legs wrapped around my waist and her arms around my neck. I angle her head to drive my tongue deeper. Her hips begin to move, a slow undulation designed to drive me crazy. It's working.

I slide my hands over the curve of her ass until my fingers meet her hot center. Even through the cloth I can feel the pulse and clench of her sex. I know this is forbidden. I know it, but I don't care.



I make a million bargains in my head. We'll keep our clothes on. I won't use anything but my tongue and hand. Images skip in front of my face of all the ways my tongue and hands could be put to use. My fingers squeezing her tits. My tongue between her legs. My face buried in her ass.

Just this once then. Just this one time.

I move my fingers in a slow pattern, a circle and a sweep, forward and back, in rhythm with the thrusts of her hips. The back of my fingers rub against my erection. I open my mouth wider, wanting more of her.

The fabric beneath my fingers dampens. Her breath in my ear quickens.

"Bjornsson, Bjornsson," she says, her voice high, choked as if the pathway for air in her throat has shrunk.

"Tell me what you want," I urge.

"I—you—my—" The short words tumble out of her. It's not clear if she's afraid to ask or she doesn't know. She grasps my face in her hands and kisses me as if she can impart her desires through action rather than words. I taste the desperation on her tongue.

A man of the cloth does not leave a parishioner's need unmet. It's my duty to help her, ease her suffering. I drag my hands up over the sweet curve of her ass and slide between the soft fabric and her softer skin.

She makes a small sound and scoots closer. The motion drags her damp pussy over my erection, and my vision blacks out for a half second. My fingers find the heat of her, the slick fire of her core. I bracket the softest flesh between two of my callused fingers and stroke her slowly.

"Oh, yes..." she pants. "There. Right there."

Her own fingers find my collar, and she begins to trace the top of the stiff white fabric, her movements matching the pace of mine.

"More?" I ask with the tips of my fingers at the opening of her sex.

She drops her head so that her forehead rests against mine. "More."

I slip my index finger inside of her, feeling the piercing of that whisper-thin veil of maidenhood. Virgin no more. The pain stills her for a moment and then she moves. I thrust another digit into her pussy. She rides my hand, rubbing against me like a cat desperate for attention. I add another finger. I know why this is forbidden. This—she—is addicting. Her whimpers and moans are a chorus I want to hear every minute of the day. The wetness of her cunt, the press of her tits, the taste of her tongue are sensations that I'll never have enough of.

I want to look at her for hours, in this garden of punishment, in this prison

of my own making. I am burning with need for her. My fingers inside of her pussy is not enough. I want my cock enveloped inside that sheath. I want her riding my erection and not my hand. I want those sounds coming from her throat and mouth to be because of my shaft, not just my fingers.

I want to feel the wet erotic suck of her and then the flood of cum on my thighs as she reaches her pinnacle.

I want. I want. I want. All of her.

“This is not the end,” I whisper fiercely before taking her mouth. I don’t know if she understands. I don’t know that I comprehend the vow I just made. My world has shrunk to her. Only her.

I thrust harder inside of her with fingers in her pussy and tongue in her mouth. I force her to take more until she bursts apart in my grip, crying out as she shakes and shudders from the force of the sensations. When the wave passes over her, when she finally calms and looks me in the eyes, her gaze is full of wonder.

She licks her lips. “I ... want more.”

“Yes. And you’ll have it.” I claim her mouth once again.

If this is sin, then maybe I’m more suited for hell than heaven.



## CHAPTER 12

ANGEL

I CLING TO BJORNSSON. MY ORGASM IS STILL COURSING THROUGH MY BODY. His mouth stays on mine as he thrusts two fingers in and out of me. Bjornsson's hand is down the back of my pants. I rock my hips to press down on his erection.

I was on the verge of coming the second I felt it. It had taken me by surprise for some strange reason. The mere thought of me being the one to tempt this man to cross lines he never had before. I've never had someone do that for me. To pick me over anything else.

Bjornsson shifts, his fingers leaving me as he pulls his hand from out of my pants. I whimper in protest against his mouth. He turns us, laying me down on the bench.

"You wanted more," he reminds me, pulling my pants along with my panties down my body. "The top," he all but grunts. His eyes roam all over me, the same way they always do. "Off." Bjornsson smacks my sex. I gasp. "Take it off or you'll get another."

In a bit of shock, I do as I'm told. The slap went straight to my clit, making it throb harder. I'm not even sure how that's possible. But the ache is almost unbearable now as though I hadn't just orgasmed moments ago. Bjornsson stands over me. I'm completely naked, laid out in his garden. Anyone could walk up to us right now.

Bjornsson's eyes roam up and down my body. I lie back down fully on the bench, my legs spread. He pulls at his collar. When he does, a smear of blood marks the white cloth. For a second, I thought his palm might be bleeding, but I realize the blood came from his fingers. When he took my virginity. The barrier of it, at least.

The sharp pain was sudden when he'd done it. It quickly faded and only

turned me on more. Why do I keep enjoying these small bites of pain he gives me? Then it dawns on me.

It's because they're all possessive. That's exactly why. Him grabbing my wrist and taking my virginity for his own. Now my virgin blood is smeared across his white collar. I wonder if he knows he did it or if he will get that small surprise later.

"Are you just going to stare or..." I trail off, not sure what to say. I'm laid out completely naked while he's still covered everywhere.

"I'll do as I like." He gives my sex another smack. I moan, the sensation rippling through my whole body. "You're not supposed to enjoy that, Angel." I swear it feels like my clit is on fire. I grip the sides of the bench.

"Sorry, Father." His jaw tightens, and I'm not sure if I've made him mad or pleased him. Either way, he starts to spank my sex again. I don't know how many times he does it, but I go off. My back arches as the orgasm hits me. It stings between my thighs, but I love the sensation.

When I come down from my orgasm high, I open my eyes to see Bjornsson's. His hand is cupping my mound.

"You've been running around the city with a needy pussy. It's a miracle no one got to it. If they'd only known." He licks his lips. "Now I'm not sure I can ever let you go. Too much temptation for others."

He leans down over me. His mouth wraps around my nipple. Bjornsson swirls his tongue around it before he nips it. I bite down on my bottom lip, trying not to moan. He switches to my other breast, giving it the same attention.

I want to pull him down on top of me. Have my naked body pressed against him with his weight holding me down. I grip the side of the bench harder so that I don't. As much as I want to, I'm also enjoying watching him play with my body.

"Does it hurt?" He pulls back. His fingers open the folds of my sex.

"It's fine," I breathe out.

"It's red and swollen." He pulls back more. No, he's going to leave. Panic starts to rise in me. I press my lips together firmly so that I don't beg him to stay. All the while he keeps on inspecting me. "I'll make it better," he says before his mouth descends onto me.

Bjornsson's tongue goes for my clit. He still has me spread open with his fingers. I've never experienced anything like this before. I'm not sure how much more I can take. My hips start to buck. How can I be about to come

again? Bjornsson keeps his attention focused on my clit. When he gives it a small bite, that's the last straw. I'm done for.

I cry out his name as the orgasm lights up my body. What is this man doing to me? My legs shake, black spots dancing in my eyes. Who knew an orgasm could be so good? I'm ruined. I've never been able to do that, and it's my body.

"Stop!" Bjornsson's growled words pull me back to the moment. My orgasm is fading, but my whole body is still sensitive. My eyes fly open, and I start to sit up. Bjornsson is standing in front of me. If there is someone close, I can't see them from this angle, and Bjornsson is blocking my line of sight.

He turns around a second later. Whoever it was didn't say a word, but if I had to guess, I would say it was Lars. I scramble to put my clothes on and suddenly feel extremely vulnerable.

"Angel." Bjornsson says my name softly. I glance over to him after I get my top back on. "No one saw you." He's treating me like a spooked animal that's about to run. And that's exactly what I'm trying to do.

"I know." I finish dressing. "I should go."

"You're not leaving." Now it's me that's getting growled at.

"I just want to go to my room. I'm tired." Not really. What I am is freaking out. So many emotions are flooding me. It's all so intense. I don't know why fear is at the top of the list.

Bjornsson audibly swallows but steps aside to let me by. I can't meet his eyes, but I do get one last look at the blood on his collar before I quickly make my departure out of the garden and then past Lars. I keep my head down. I'm sure I'm cherry red.

It's not until my bedroom that I take a full breath. What is wrong with me? I wanted that. Hell, I need more, but when the desire was swept away by reality, fear took its place.

Not that Bjornsson would physically hurt me, but I know he can never be mine. Our time together would eventually end. And that could end me too.



# CHAPTER 13

BJORNSSON

“THE BISHOP IS HERE,” LARS SAYS AFTER ANGEL DISAPPEARS FROM OUR view. It irks me that he saw her at all in this state, but I can’t kill Lars for doing his job. He falls in step beside me as I walk toward the main house.

“Did I miss a notice?” I’d been distracted by Angel, but I didn’t think I had been that lost.

“No.”

At the entry of the arched walkway that runs along all four sides of the courtyard, an attendant comes forward with a basin of warm water. A soft white towel is draped over his arm. Another reason why I can’t kill Lars for looking at Angel. He’s too efficient. I dip my hands in the water and rinse off Angel’s scent. After I wipe my hands, the attendant turns to leave. I stop him and lift the bowl out of his hands and fling the water into the nearby bushes. The attendant’s eyes widen, but he’s too well-trained to question me.

Lars steps forward and takes the towel from the attendant. “I’ll burn this.”

He understands. She belongs to me, in every way, and nothing that touches her skin should be allowed to exist beyond my reach.

“There’s blood on your collar. Should I dispose of that too?” He reaches out a hand. I stop him before he can make contact.

“No. I’ll take care of it.”

“The Bishop may be concerned if he sees it.”

I arch an eyebrow. “The Bishop is spending a lot of time in my territory, telling me what to do. I don’t think I like that. Do you, Lars?”

His jaw tightens. “I don’t, but the Church is powerful.”

“Even Rome fell.” I remove the stained collar and tuck it carefully in my pocket. “Let’s go see what the Bishop has to say.”

The old man scowls when I arrive in the receiving room. In his hand is a



nearly empty Baccarat crystal glass. Only a fingerful of whiskey remains.

“You’ve kept me waiting too long, Bjornsson, and why are your vestments out of order?”

“I wasn’t aware we had an appointment.” I stride over to the liquor cart and retrieve the Macallan whiskey. I refill the old man’s glass and then settle into one of the leather chairs. He remains standing, drinking, staring at the Rothko painting in deep shades of red dominating the far wall. I know he hates it. He thinks he hates it because it is devoid of people, but I think he hates it for the same reasons I love it. The deep reds remind him of violence he’s wielded through people like me to keep the peace. He likes to believe he’s above the fray, that he’s a holy man with an honorable mission, but the Church is nothing more than a vessel of power, and to hold power, you shed blood. Some of that red is from innocents.

He forces his eyes away from the painting to look over my shoulder. “There’s an issue with Santino. You’ll need to take care of it.”

I will myself to show no reaction. He wants me to take down Kane Santino and Santino’s gang? “What’s the issue?”

“He plans to kill someone who was under protection.”

“Plans to?”

“Our work isn’t cleaning up after people. It’s prevention.”

That’s debatable. “Whose protection?”

Bishop slams his glass down on the table. Thousand-dollar whisky sloshes over the sides. “You don’t need to know. The only thing for you to do is act. Take him out and make an example of him.”

“I’m not a machine, Bishop. You don’t get to point me in a direction and fire me off like a cannon. If you don’t feel comfortable sharing the details of why Kane Santino needs to be disciplined by the Church, I don’t feel comfortable executing your orders.”

The Bishop rears back, his face red and mottled. “How dare you question me!” His jawline quivers in indignation. “I’m the Bishop. I control here. You can have this all taken away in a heartbeat.”

I grind the back of my teeth together and strive for an even tone. “I’ve kept the peace in this territory for a long time. I know the players. Kane Santino is an important part of the balance. If we remove him, other factions who aren’t as scrupulous—”it’s ironic that I’m using this word for Santino. I know he’d laugh if he heard me—“would cause chaos, so before I turn this city upside down, I’d like to know what sin Santino committed—and murder

is not sufficient. People are killed every day.” I tip my head toward the painting.

The Bishop’s nostrils flare. He doesn’t like his authority being questioned. “Fine. You want details? He stole a girl from her father. The father had planned on sending the girl to David Marks, but Santino plans to keep her, which violates the contract that Santino has to marry the Soritz girl.”

“Kane Santino wouldn’t marry that girl. She’s sleeping with a member of his team.” And why Santino hasn’t gotten rid of that team member, I don’t know. Seems like a dumb move, but I’m not about to interfere. If Santino has problems within his ranks, then he’ll have to mete out the discipline. “As for the girl, I don’t think the Church should be facilitating sending young women to a man named Butcher Marks who thinks Hannibal is an inspiration and once stated that true enlightenment is only seen through a dying person’s eyes.”

“He paid quite a bit of money for her.”

Of which the Bishop got a good cut, and if the goods aren’t delivered, he will have to return the money.

“I’ll talk with Santino. He still has the girl. I’ll see what can be done. It’s not like Marks bought the father.”

“Marks believes the girl has been sullied. He wanted a pure one. He said he paid for two girls, and one of them is missing.”

I grow still. Two girls?

“You’re to find the other girl, retrieve the one from Santino, punish him, and deliver both girls to Marks. After you’ve finished your duty, you can come and give me your confession.” He waves a hand at my bare neck. “You are obviously engaged in sinful behavior that will need to be sanctified.”

Silently, I get to my feet and show Bishop the door. Lars makes eye contact with me over the old man’s head. He’s heard everything and is wondering if we’re going to war. I signal back that we are but not the one that the Bishop thinks is going to take place.



# CHAPTER 14

ANGEL

I THINK I'M LOSING MY MIND. BECAUSE I SWEAR THE OTHER SIDE OF MY BED looks like someone had been sleeping there. I grab the pillow and smell it. I'm not crazy. It's Bjornsson. Then again, I might be telling myself that so I feel better.

I haven't seen the man in days. Why would he sneak into my bed? When he up and disappeared after what happened in the garden? Before that, I couldn't get the man to leave me alone, and now I can't find him anywhere. And believe me, I've looked.

I go in search of him every day, pretending to explore the massive church or whatever you want to call this place, trying to find him without asking. No one stops me, but some doors are locked. A few don't have handles at all to open them.

Annoyed by the pillow, I throw it across the room before I crawl out of bed. I use the bathroom to make myself halfway presentable. I'm not bothering to change out of my pajamas. The first few days, I changed my clothes a few times.

Boxes of clothes from my favorite store and others arrived. He'd remembered what I said. It warmed me at first. I'd found them after I came back from lunch to my room. The closet was filled to the brim. But after a few days, I figured there was no point.

People move around this place like ghosts. The clothes quickly became nothing more than that. Clothes. Not sure why I need them. I don't go anywhere. Bjornsson isn't even around for me to show them off to or tease.

It hurts that he hasn't come around. Which is ridiculous on my part because I'd been the one to run from him. Now I'm pissed he's not bothering me. I want to leave, but maybe that's the plan. To slowly drive me insane so

I'll tell them everything I know about Laurel. I hope they have a Plan B because there's no way in hell that's happening. I need to find a way to escape, but I'm not sure that's possible.

Now that I think about it, it might be time I start driving everyone around here insane. I ponder what I can do as I make my way toward the kitchen. I don't want to annoy other people. I want to annoy Bjornsson.

I'll feel bad if I start causing mayhem and destroying anything I can get my hands on. Someone else would have to clean that up, but they do work for him. I'm sure everyone knows that I'm not allowed to leave. I've been kidnapped. They allow it, so maybe I shouldn't care who has to fix any destruction I cause.

When I walk past a pretty statue sitting on a table, my fingers itch to pick it up and toss it. I can't do it. It's a mom holding her child close to her. I need a male statue or something. I'll explore after I've had my breakfast. I might not be so grumpy then and more rational.

"Morning," I chirp when I pass a man I've seen many times. Normally he gives me a nod, but today, he quickly turns his eyes away from me. The hell.

I haven't even done anything yet. Now people won't acknowledge my existence. I can't help but wonder if it's some kind of a new order Bjornsson gave them. Another way of him trying to isolate me so that I give up the information he wants.

"Asshole," I mutter under my breath.

The man takes my virginity and poof, he's gone. I hate men. They're all a bunch of jerks. I pick up my pace, renewed determination coursing through my veins. I'll show these people what I'm made of. But first I need something to eat. I mean if I'm gonna cause chaos, I'll need my energy.

I freeze when I hear the sound of a familiar voice. My heart starts to pound. Slowly I follow it but stop when I get to the end of the hallway. I press my back against the wall and try to listen.

"The girl's father wasn't dead, but he is now." It's him.

"Santino didn't kill him. That might be enough. It's why the Bishop wanted Santino dead," Lars responds. I'm so quiet I stop breathing.

"Santino ordered the killing of the girl's father. Soritz did it thinking he was going to be getting something out of the deal. All it got was him killed too." Bjornsson's words are laced with anger.

Are they talking about Laurel's father? They have to be. I smirk, enjoying the news that the man is dead. His control over Laurel got crazier over time. I

thought he was losing it. I know Laurel was trying to hide how bad her father was getting, but I'd seen the marks on her arms.

The last three times I'd gone to see her, he told me she was busy. Then poof and they disappeared. The building was even gone. Blown to pieces by Kane Santino after he bought it. If you can call it buying. What kind of shit was Laurel's father into? I can't even imagine the depths that that man would sink to.

"Santino did us all a favor by killing Soritz. It was only a matter of time before we would have had to step in. He's been out of control for a while."

"That may be true, but I wanted to kill the father myself." They both grow quiet for a long moment. I wonder if they left.

"He'll still want the two girls." Lars finally speaks, breaking the silence.

"Santino will never allow that." Wait, someone else is after Laurel?

"It's only a matter of time before they realize who and where the other girl is. But you sullied her."

Who is the other girl? Sullied?

Then it hits me. Oh, crap. I'm the other girl.



# CHAPTER 15

BJORNSSON

“THEY’RE COMING AFTER YOU,” SANTINO TELLS ME. HIS LONG LEGS ARE stretched out in front of him, and he appears at ease. He should be. We’re in an empty restaurant known to be Santino’s favorite place. I’m sure there are guns all over the place. A barrel is probably pointed at my head. Behind him are two guards, neither of whom look familiar. The henchman who was sleeping with the Soritz girl is nowhere to be seen. Santino must’ve cleaned house when he took out Soritz. On the table is a red steak and a glass of red wine. Singular because Santino never eats with the enemy. I’d say it’s against his religion, but I’m fairly sure he’s agnostic.

“Are you trying to turn me against the Church, Santino?” I ask. “What could be your motive?”

“For your own good, of course. My motives are completely pure, of course, and not filled with self-interest.” The corner of his mouth tilts up in part smirk and part wry amusement.

“Is that what you told Soritz before you killed him? That it was for his own good?”

“Fuck no. I told him I’d see him in hell. He tried to take my girl.”

“My understanding is that the girl had already been sold to Butcher Marks. Soritz was retrieving property for a friend.”

“Laurel is not property,” Santino growls. “And Marks won’t lay a hand on her while I’m still breathing.”

“Yes, we know that.” The Bishop’s orders were to dispose of Santino and return balance.

The other man grinds the back of his teeth together. “I’m not gonna sit here and say that I’m gonna beat you. I know you have a small army at the Abbey and that there are several factions in the city that hate me and would



support you out of spite rather than loyalty to the Church, but I will take a lot of you down with me. With you maimed and me out of the picture, the whole territory will be thrown into chaos. I know you don't want that, Bjornsson. You care too much about people here, so I suggest you find another alternative."

"Why do I believe that the alternative you want me to discover is killing the Bishop?" Because that's the only way Santino lives.

He shrugs. "If I had good options for you, I'd have laid them on the table when we first sat down."

"Why don't I just slit my throat at the Bishop's doorstep and save this city from a visit from the High Power?" The Bishop is only one cog in the worldwide machine that controls these territories. Santino and I are ants comparatively.

"Maybe you only get excommunicated or maybe a higher power sees you as the rightful leader of the city given that you took the Bishop out."

"We both know that's not how it works. Without the Church, this place and others like it would fall. If I'm allowed to step out of line, then Father in the next city over will get ideas. High Power maintains its control through strict discipline. Possibly one way to appease the Church is through an offering. Give up the girl, take a lesser sentence for thievery, and everything is resolved with little bloodshed." Since Santino killed Soritz, the High Power will want a blood exchange, but we can negotiate that it is something less than death. Maybe thirty days of beatings.

"No." His response is immediate and angry.

Angel's friend must mean a lot to Santino, enough that he's willing to challenge the Church to a hopeless fight. The High Power will come in and crush him—and me.

"Maybe you should think about a long vacation." If he disappears, perhaps that would be enough.

"I know why you don't want to give up your position," he says, "because the High Power allows you to walk into an establishment like this where everyone is armed to the teeth while you have nothing more than your phone and a wallet and your collar. You fear nothing because if even the slightest scratch is inflicted, the High Power will point its laser cannons at us and wipe us out. We all live under this cloud, but none of us like it, not even you who benefits because in return you have to obey them without question. I know you don't like that. If you want me to disappear, you'll have to give me the

girl back. Laurel misses her.”

“What girl?” I force out with as much nonchalance as I can muster. Inside, my heart is racing. Angel cannot be put in danger.

Santino releases a sharp laugh and leans forward. “See? We have a common goal. We want to protect the ones that we love. Let’s take out the High Power. You and me.”

“There’s very little likelihood of success. I’ll be going now.” I rise to my feet.

“You know where to find me if you change your mind,” Santino calls after me.

Once I’m in the car, Lars, asks me where to.

“The Bishop.”

He said I should report to him after I’ve made an assessment of the situation. I could lie and tell him that all is good and then spend the next how many years putting out fires for Santino to make it seem like there’s still balance between the factions. He would grow in power, which isn’t good for the city either.

“We’re here,” Lars announces.

I stare at the high rise that houses the Bishop. Santino is right that the High Power gives me confidence that I can walk anywhere in the city and no one will touch me. It’s the same for the Bishop. He lives with only one manservant in a penthouse apartment with weak, easily bypassed security. He believes he is invulnerable, but it would be so simple to slip inside, slice his throat, and leave.

“Will you be going in for confession?” prompts Lars again.

I rub my hand across my knee. It’s been a while since I saw my girl, been a while since I touched her. I hear reports of her every day, but it’s not enough.

I’ve left my little angel unattended for too long. “No,” I reply. “I need to do some real sinning first.”



## CHAPTER 16

ANGEL

I CHECK THE TIME AGAIN. IF THERE IS ONE THING I'M GOOD AT, IT'S understanding my surroundings. It's something you learn quickly when you're young bouncing from one house to another. You adjust and learn who to avoid. How the home works. Your mind teaches you to do it without you even knowing it. The ways to protect yourself become ingrained in you.

I wish I could pack a bag, but that would draw too much attention. I've already spent the last few days dressing down in shirts, black leggings, and sneakers. I pull my hair into a ponytail, then wrap it around to make a tight bun against my head.

Leaning down, I stretch. It's been two days since I've seen Bjornsson. Well, heard him. I haven't seen him in almost ten days, I think. Time is starting to blur together. I don't even smell him on my pillow anymore. I doubt that he was ever there to begin with.

I was so sure I felt something between us, but the more time ticks by, the more I question it all. Especially after what I heard him say. What if he was only keeping me here because I'm to be handed over to some other person? At least I know Laurel won't be meeting that fate. I don't think I'm going to be so lucky. It does, however, make me wonder what would happen if I showed up at Santino's again.

It's funny how the one man I wanted to beat the hell out of is now the one I think I need to run to. I check the time again.

"Go time." I let out a breath, trying to shake off the anxiety. There is only going to be one chance for me to get this right.

Once they know I spotted this small window of time, they'll fix it. I grab the book off my bed and flip it open, pretending to read it as I leave my room, keeping my head down as I go. If anyone is paying attention, they'll likely

think I'm heading to one of the gardens to read like every other day.

That's not my plan today, though. I make my way down the long hallways, not glancing toward the main church doors. My destination is the kitchen. I slow my pace as I grow closer. I peek inside and see the sunlight pouring in from the side.

When I see a shadow block the light, I pull back and wait a second before looking again. My eyes lock on the back of a man carrying a giant bag through the kitchen and toward the massive pantry. This is it. I creep through the kitchen, not wanting to draw his attention. This is my only chance, I remind myself. I can't afford to make any mistakes.

The second my feet hit concrete, I take off, not knowing where I'm going. I just run, the sun slightly blinding me. I hear someone shout after me, but it only makes me run faster. My legs burn and my chest aches, but I keep going.

"Fuck," I breathe when I see a giant metal back gate ahead of me. I don't know if it's a miracle, but the gates start to slide open.

I burst through the small opening as it grows bigger. I almost run right into a black car. My hands land on the hood. Lars' eyes lock with mine. I glance up to see a figure sitting in the back passenger seat. My guess is Bjornsson.

I dart to the right, knowing Lars is going to open the door to try and stop me, but I hold my hands out and shove it as hard as I can on him. I'm surprised when it actually clicks shut. Not for long, though. I hear it open behind me, but I don't turn to look. I keep running.

"Watch it."

"The fuck."

People snap at me as I push my way through them, not caring who I bump into. A horn sounds when I run across a street. The sound of tires screeching to not hit me. Still I keep moving. My heart leaps when I see a bus ahead. There really might be a God.

"Wait!" I scream.

The bus driver actually stops closing the door, letting me jump on. "Go please," I tell them the second I'm inside.

"All right." The woman driving takes off without question. I drop my head trying to catch my breath. "Why don't you sit down," she offers.

"I don't have a pass." Worry fills me for a second that everything I did to get away will be for nothing.

“Have a seat, honey.”

“Thank you.” I drop down into the first seat. A few people are giving me curious stares, but I ignore everyone. I did it. Holy shit. I should be happy, but my heart is still heavy.

“You need me to call anyone?” the bus driver asks after a handful of stops. The question makes my stomach clench. There is no one to call. I shake my head.

“How far south do you go?”

“17th.”

I glance at the street sign. “That’s the next?”

“Yeah.”

“Thank you,” I tell her again when the bus stops.

“You sure you don’t want me to call someone? You don’t have to get off.”

“I’m good, but thank you.” I give her a warm smile, stepping off the bus. It’s only a three-block walk to Santino’s building.

I pray I’m not wrong about Santino now. He sounds very protective of Laurel. He’ll either give me back to Bjornsson or let me in. I debate for a second standing outside of his building. Maybe I should run. I could leave the city. Then what? I don’t have my bag. The only things I have are the clothes on my back.

I never get the chance to make my decision. A hand comes down over my mouth, an arm around my waist. My feet leave the ground. A second later, I’m pulled into the back of a car, the door slamming closed behind me.

“Someone has been a naughty girl.” Bjornsson’s words ignite my anger and something else I’m not willing to admit.

“Fuck you!” I scream against his hand, trying to break free of his hold. It’s pointless.

“Sorry, Angel, but you belong to me.”



# CHAPTER 17

BJORNSSON

LARS BARELY HAS THE CAR STOPPED WHEN I'M OUT THE DOOR, ANGEL clasped tight to my chest. I go through the entry, and the big, heavy doors close behind me as soon as I clear the threshold.

"Don't open those for anything. Double guards at all the exits. If Angel gets out, the guards where she escaped die."

"What? No!" Angel shrieks, kicking and pounding her fists against my back.

The guard salutes me and runs off to spread the message. I take the stairs three at a time.

Inside my room, I throw her on the bed. She scrambles halfway across the mattress before I catch her foot and drag her back.

"Where the hell do you think you're going?" I untie the rope belt around my waist with one hand and quickly wrap it around one ankle and then the other.

She flails in my grip, all sharp heels and toes. I take a couple blows to my arms, but they feel like nothing. "Let me go. You can't keep me here. This is America! Eagles! Flags! Fireworks!"

I pause in the process of tying her ankles together. "Fireworks?"

She blows a column of air toward a hank of hair that's fallen over her forehead. "Fourth of July things. Freedom, you know?" She flicks her bound ankles upward. "Opposite of this."

I bite down to prevent myself from laughing. I'm pissed and horny, not amused. "I gave you freedom, and you shoved it back in my face. Now you're getting caged in the tower."

"This is the second floor," she snips.

"I see that after I tie your wrists behind your back, I'm going to have to



gag you.”

“Better not,” she growls through bared teeth.

Energy races through me at the fight she’s putting up. Someone like Angel, someone with fire in her veins, makes the ultimate capitulation all the sweeter. My dick throbs under my vestments.

“Fight me, Angel. Fight me all you want, but you’re still *my* captive.”

“Until you tire of me.”

I affix the end of the rope around the post of my bed frame and then cross over to a dresser. The top drawer has two more similar ropes. I grab them and return. Angel is busy trying to untie my knots. She’s not having any success. I capture one wrist and bring it to my lips. “That will be a cold day in hell.”

She hisses and tries to wrench out of my grip. “I guess it’s snowing there right now because you are obviously done playing your games with me. Just let me go. Santino will take me in. Laurel wouldn’t turn me away.”

I clasp both wrists in one fist and jerk her upright until her nose is rubbing mine. Softly, menacingly, I say, “I’ll burn Santino and your Laurel to the ground. You belong to me, do you hear me? You’re mine. Not Santino nor the Bishop nor the High Power can take you from me.”

“I don’t know who any of those people are, and I don’t care.” She won’t stop resisting. “What was it? Some bet about how fast you could take my virginity?”

I grab her with both hands so she can’t hurt herself. “You’re still an innocent, Angel. You’ve not even had a taste of what I can do to you, what I will do to you, and when I’m done, you will not leave me.”

I whip the rope around her wrists and then loop the end around the top of the four posts of the bed so that she’s required to rise on her knees. Her chest heaves and her cheeks are red. She’s angry and aroused. I can smell her wet heat. I know if I touched her between her legs, she’d be soaked. She enjoys the fight. I step back and start removing my robes.

She gasps when my chest comes into view. “Why do you have so many scars?”

I run a hand over the welts left from whips and knife wounds. There’s a puckered bullet hole in my shoulder and one in my right hip. My back is even worse. I’ve lived with these marks for so long I’d forgotten about them or, at least, I hadn’t anticipated there would be a reaction to them. All of the men here come from the same background, the same violent experiences. Scars are nothing but signs of survival.

“These are my battle scars, Angel. Proof of my allegiance to the church.”

“What kind of church is this?” Her anger seems to have evaporated, replaced by confusion. “Are you even a priest?”

“In this territory, my Abbey serves as a place that keeps the balance. Kane Santino is on one side, and people like Soritz and Butcher Marks are on the other. If you don’t have one faction, the other group gains too much power, and the entire territory can collapse upon itself. People respect the Abbey because of these.” I run my hand over the scars on my chest. “In order to belong to the Abbey, you have to take a vow of celibacy. It’s called the Church because we follow the High Power and because we pledge our lives to carry out its orders.”

I walk back to the bed in my boxers and unloop the rope, pushing her down onto the white comforter.

“And keeping me is part of your orders?” She stares up at me through her long lashes, looking particularly vulnerable. My heart squeezes. This one small woman is going to be the end of me. I can see the dark hand extending its grip over my territory. Before, I never feared death. It is because of that that I am so formidable, but now...now I want nothing more than to live.

“No, keeping you is against the orders, against the Church, against the High Power. To keep you, I will have to abandon my vows, fight the Church, bring down the High Power.”



## CHAPTER 18

ANGEL

“BJORNSSON.” ALL THE ANGER I’D BEEN BUILDING UP INSIDE QUICKLY washes away. “You mean that?” My nose burns as I fight back the tears.

I don’t want him to have to give up anything for me. To have to fight for us to be together and cause more scars and pain than he already has. No one has ever given up anything for me.

“I don’t lie, Angel.”

“You used to not do a lot of things.” To my surprise, a slowly sexy grin slides across his lip. I’m not sure why it’s a surprise. When it comes to this man, I never know what I might get.

“For you, I’d do anything,” he agrees.

I have to stop myself from outwardly letting out a dreamy sigh. Never has anyone said something so sweet to me. I mean, the man may have kidnapped me, twice, but how can I stay angry when he says such sweet things?

“I’m sorry I ran. I was—”

“Scared?” I nod. “You’re not scared of me hurting you.” He leans down and sinks his teeth into my neck, making me gasp. My nipples harden even more. Then he sucks, soothing the spot. “I think you enjoy a bit of pain.” He’s not wrong. I’ve noticed that I actually do but only with him. The small instances of pain he unleashes on me come with a possessiveness to them. Even when he tied me up. I’d been so pissed but so turned on too. I was helpless under his control. And for some unknown reason, I like that feeling when it comes to him. “Is that what you made yourself believe? That I’d harm you?” Bjornsson lifts his head so his eyes can meet mine. “Throw you out?”

“I, ah—” He cups my cheek with his hand, his thumbs caressing me. Bjornsson can be sweet and rough too. I’ve noticed I’m the only one that

truly gets the sweet side of him. “Yes,” I admit. I was looking for any reason to run. I’ve never experienced the emotions that he makes me feel. I don’t know how to process them. The more I want him, the more I’m scared to lose him.

“You don’t want me to hurt you here.” Bjornsson suddenly rips my shirt open like it’s a sheet of paper. He kisses me in the center of my chest.

“Are you saying I don’t want you to hurt my heart or are you making up a reason to bury your face in my tits?” I laugh.

“I don’t need to make up a reason for that.” He pulls my bra off next.

“You do scare me but not for the same reason everyone else fears you.”

“I wish I could make you understand that I’m not going to disappear or be done with you.” His words comfort me in a way that I didn’t even know I needed. Him leaving affected me more than I’m willing to admit.

“You did disappear,” I whisper. That had burned.

“I did,” he agrees. “I knew I had to handle what was to come. To protect you. If I got close to you, I’d never do what needed to be done. We would have been locked in this room for days.”

“But you did come. I swore I could smell you when I woke up that first week but then—”

“I lay beside you while you slept. I couldn’t stay away. But my control over myself was slowly stripping away each night.”

“You barely know me, but you’re going to give up so much for me?” I cut right to the chase because I need to know if his feelings for me are as deep as mine are for him.

“I knew the second you entered this church. There are things you simply know without question. I could have let you go. Santino did try and get you back. I wouldn’t let him have you. No one can but me.” Bjornsson goes for my pants, pulling them down along with my panties, leaving me naked in his bed with him looming over me.

“And don’t tell me you didn’t know either. You haven’t feared me from the start. If anything, you tried to provoke me.” I lick my lips. Oh, I had.

“Provoking you is my favorite thing to do.” I smirk up at him.

It wasn’t anger I was trying to provoke from him, it was desire. The second I saw it in his eyes for me, I was done. I knew I wanted more of it. That I would almost do anything to get it.

To prove my point, I wrap my legs around him, my sex pressing against his bare chest.

“No more running. I’ll tie you to the bed if I have to.”

“I didn’t mind you tying me up. I rather enjoyed it even when I wanted to smack you.” I run my fingers down his back, feeling his scars. He pretends to be a priest, but the man is a warrior. With his robe gone, that’s easy to see.

“Next time.” He closes his eyes for a long moment. “I enjoy your touch.”

My touches don’t come with pain. They come from a place of love and... did I just think love? Holy crap. “I need to be inside of you.”

“Then be inside me.” I rub myself against him, wanting a closer connection with him almost more than I want my next breath.

“Angel. *My Angel.*” He says my name like a prayer. He gave me a name. Someone who cares about me. Not one I made up or the state did. The connection I have to this man can’t be denied.

I reach down between us and push down his boxers. His cock springs free, pressing against me. I can feel how big he is. I try to wrap my hand around him, but he stops me, grabbing both my hands and pinning them over my head.

“What?” I huff.

“You can play all you want, but right now I need you. I need this.” He guides the head of his cock to my opening. “Why are you so wet, Angel?”

“The ropes.” I lick my lips. “Maybe the kidnapping too.” He growls something under his breath, but I don’t catch it. A sharp pain grips my body, Bjornsson sliding all the way inside of me. A mixture of pain and pleasure swirl together. I love it. He’s all around me.

“Only I will ever have you.” He pulls out and thrusts back in, making me moan. “Only you’ll ever have me.”

“Bjornsson,” I whimper, loving that. We’re both giving each other something that no one else can ever have. Both physically and emotionally.

“You’re tight.” He thrusts faster. I marvel at watching him move over me. My hands are still pinned over my head with him taking all the control. I don’t think that control is going to last long. I’m not either.

He shifts his hips, pushing deeper inside of me. “Oh God,” I moan. My whole body is on fire. I’m so close.

“Not God, Angel, only me,” he grits out. The man is so damn possessive. I’ll never get enough of it.

“You, only you,” I agree.

He thrusts harder, making the bed creak under us. When Bjornsson’s fingers find my clit, I’m done for. I scream out his name. The pleasure bursts

through my whole body.

He lets out a loud grunt before I feel warmth bloom deep inside of me. Bjornsson keeps himself planted deep inside of me, not moving.

“You’ll never leave me.” A dark glint flashes in his eyes, his hold on my wrists tightening.

“Never,” I agree. They’re not words of love, but for now, I’ll take it.





# CHAPTER 19

BJORNSSON

AN EXPLOSION WAKES ME UP. I JERK UPRIGHT AND LIFT ANGEL IN MY ARMS, bedding and all. She blinks groggily at first, and then a small smile lights up her beautiful face. “Bjornsson.” She raises her chin to kiss me but I draw back.

“Not now, Angel. You need to go to the safe room.” I run into the master closet with her and stomp on the pressure pad next to the full-length mirror at the end. The mirror swings open. I place Angel on her feet and throw a sweatsuit toward her. “Dress, Angel.”

She obeys without question. While she shoves her feet into socks and shoes, I gear up as well, which includes two guns in a shoulder holster and knives around my ankles. I pick up a Kevlar vest and drape it around her. “I know it’s heavy, but wear it for me, okay?”

“Yes, of course.”

I clasp her hand and start down the stairs just beyond the mirrored door. Halfway down, a wave of heat washes over me. I pause and listen. The sibilant sound of fire and smoke whispers in the air. “Fuck! Up! Up!” I yell, turning and pushing her toward the top of the stairs. The heat rushes toward me. When we reach the mirrored door, I don’t bother to shut it, instead directing her toward the attached bathroom. I haul her into the tiled shower and turn on the cold water full blast. Barely a moment later, a fireball rips through the closet, licking up the plaster walls, eating all the flammables in its path. Outside the shower, there are smaller explosions as cologne bottles and hairspray burst under the heat. I hold Angel close and whisper in her ear.

“They are burning our escape routes. We’re going to have to go out the front. The Abbey is a big square with the outer walls made of brick and iron fencing with lasers filling the gaps. Underneath is a warren of tunnels and

panic rooms. The Bishop must've instructed his men to burn the tunnels first to cut us off."

"Why is the Bishop coming after you?"

"Because I've sinned and plan to continue sinning."

"Sinned? You mean—" She gestures toward the bedroom.

A grin crosses my lips. "That but also because I wouldn't kill Kane Santino. Disobedience is a sin. Fornication is a sin. Anything you do that the High Power doesn't want you to do is a sin. I've had enough of it. Besides, I didn't think you'd be very happy if I took out Santino."

"I mean, I'm generally not in favor of killing people, but I don't know Santino at all other than he's got my friend Laurel."

A brief chuckle escapes me. "So Santino can go down?"

Angel's face hardens. "You can't keep me if you aren't alive, can you?"

It's not a question. "You're absolutely right. We're going to get out of here, Angel. Don't you worry."

"I'm not." It's an emphatic declaration without even an ounce of uncertainty.

My Angel. She didn't grow up in an ordinary world with ordinary parents, and so this one with its violence, strange people, and unusual circumstances doesn't faze her. I give her a hard kiss on her forehead and then push her behind me. "I'll make sure to live up to your confidence."

"Emphasis on the live," she chirps, and while her tone is bright, her fingers twist the back of my shirt tight.

"Exactly." The fire is almost out in the bathroom and I'm tempted to leave her here, but with the tunnel system blown to bits and no guards at my side, it's too risky. We go together. "Stay behind me."

The closet is still burning. I douse two big towels in cold water and drape one over Angel's head and another around mine. We sprint through to the bedroom. Things are smoldering, but the walls are brick behind the drywall and plaster, so it's not the inferno it could be. The hallway is more smoke, but the only people we find are bodies on the ground. I kneel down and check the pulses. Dead. I give Angel a shake of my head. She grimaces but holds it together. I hear a shoe scrape against the floor and whirl around, flinging my arm out. It makes contact with a jaw. There's a grunt as the man absorbs the blow. "Down," I order.

Angel understands it's for her and drops immediately. I shoot the dark-clad figure in front of me. He falls, but two more figures rush out of the

smoke. I take those two down. The bullets attract attention because multiple boots are hitting the floor. I crouch and take a gun out of one of the fallen and slide it on the floor toward Angel. “Anything that comes toward you, point and pull the trigger. It will recoil, so you need to brace yourself,” I instruct in a low voice.

She gives me a thumbs-up. The floor is getting hot. We need to reach the stairs before the boards beneath us collapse and trap us up here. I wait until the bodies break through the smoke before shooting. I don’t want any of mine getting caught in friendly fire. I take down the first row before my clip is empty. Five more bodies down. How many did the Bishop send? The High Power could send in an army if they wanted. A man descends on me before I can switch out my clip. I plow the butt of the gun into his forehead and grab his pistol hand, pulling the slide entirely off. He pushes me with his free hand. I absorb the blow with a grunt and then head butt him. He staggers back. I feel a poke in my back and see the barrel of the gun I gave to Angel at my elbow. I take it, shoot the man, and then hand it back.

“We’re a good team. Let’s move before the stairs are gone.”

“Yessir.” She even gives me a salute.

Her spirits are high even in the midst of a fire and a shoot-out. I couldn’t have asked for a better partner. She’s never looked sexier in my eyes even with her hair matted around her face, wearing grey sweats and two towels draped around her body. The urge to devour her is high, but we have bad guys to defeat and a burning building to escape.

Staying close to the wall, we move down toward the stairs, stepping over the bodies of the fallen. There are twelve dead by my count. There can’t be many more. Maybe another dozen, twenty at the most. I’ve got enough ammunition to take them all down if I’m careful and precise.

At the landing, I pause and motion for Angel to get down. We peek down the stairs. More than a dozen men mill about the entrance dressed in black combat gear with assault rifles in their arms. They are all wearing earpieces. One of them appears to be the leader. He has a tablet in his hand, and he’s gesturing toward the stairs.

“What’s happening?” Angel whispers.

“They’re regrouping and trying to figure out the best way to attack.” I don’t spot any of my men on the ground, but there are streaks of copper on the floor which indicate someone bled and then was dragged across the marble tile. Lars is nowhere to be found, which likely means he’s dead. I

push that out of my head. I can't be thinking about losses now. My focus has to be on getting us out of here.

"There's a stone terrace off the guest wing. We can jump down from there into the kitchens. There's a delivery entrance not far from there. I'm sure there will be guards there, but it's likely fewer than what's downstairs."

"You lead, I'll follow."

This time I do give Angel a quick, hard kiss more for my own benefit than anything. She smiles under my mouth and squeezes my biceps in encouragement. I draw the towels off of her since the danger of the fire is minimum out here. She'll need to be quick when we cross the hall. I drop to my stomach and begin to army crawl forward. She catches on quick, and I let her pass me. The biggest danger will be the men coming up the stairs, and I don't want her to be the first target.

Angel is quick, and we are past the open balcony overlooking the first floor in no time. We jump and race to the other end of the building. Behind me, I hear shouts. "Keep going," I yell and drop to one knee. Gun out, I start shooting. One down, two, three and more. I keep shooting until my clip's empty. Bodies litter the space we just crawled across, but more men pour up the stairs. The Bishop called up a whole damned army. I notice the tattoo on the back of the neck of one of the fallen. It's a knife crossing a scythe—the Butcher's mark. I grab my knives from my ankles and fight. The first two are easy, but the last two are nimble. They duck and whirl faster than I can move. One of them lodges a blade in my shoulder and another in my thigh. I take several blows to the face and gut. My side aches. My leg is on fire. I shut out the pain and remember what I'm fighting for—who I'm fighting for. When the last two are finally disabled, I hobble toward the room at the end. I just need to make it there. Just a few feet more.

With the last burst of energy, I stumble through the door and see Angel in the hands of the Butcher. The terrace doors are open. A slight breeze is blowing the curtains against the back of the Butcher's legs. At five ten, the Butcher isn't a large man, but the knife that he's holding at Angel's throat is big enough to take her down in one swift action. He knows how to wield the blade. I drop mine to the floor and raise my hands. "Whatever you want, take it. Just let the girl go."

"She was supposed to be mine. The Bishop promised this to me." He jerks her head to the side and runs his tongue across her cheek. Angel gags and averts her chin, but the action causes the knife to bite into her skin. Blood

trickles beneath the sharp steel. The Butcher jerks her upright and spits on the floor. “She tastes like you. Rotten and used.”

Fury races through me, erasing the pain of my wounds. “Then let her go.”

“I can still sell her,” he taunts.

“Over my dead body.”

“That’s the idea.” He whips his knife hand toward me, but before he can release the weapon, a shot goes off. He screams and grabs for his hand, but a bullet in his forehead ends him before the motion is completed. I whirl around to find Kane Santino behind me with his handgun still pointed at the empty space where the Butcher once stood.

“Heard the Church named you enemy number one for not coming after me,” he drawls.

Relief almost buckles my knees. I turn back to gather Angel in my arms, or rather, she does the gathering, slipping her weight underneath my shoulder. “Why didn’t you come sooner?” She scowls at Santino.

“The information came late,” he replies.

“Better late than never.” I try to pacify my avenging angel.

“Humph” is all she will say.

“Built out of the same mold as my Laurel,” he says with a laugh.

“Any of my men alive?” I ask as the two help me limp out of the bedroom.

“Quite a few,” Santino tells me. “I think the Butcher had big plans to sell them off.”

“Idiot.” Those men would come back and kill him in his sleep.

“He isn’t—wasn’t”—Santino corrects himself—“known for his brightness. Just his savagery. What will you do with all this?” He motions to the charred walls and the bodies on the floor.

“Clean up.”

“And the Church?”

The High Power will have to be dealt with. “I’ll deal with it.”

“If you need help with the Bishop, let me know,” Santino offers.

“I can manage that by myself.”

“Not until you heal up,” Angel declares. “And if I have to tie you to the bed, I will.”

“I don’t see how that’s a punishment.” I grin.

“You will when you get nothing from me but chicken soup and bandages.” She sticks her nose in the air.

“Not even a sponge bath? You’re too cruel.”

“On that note, I’m off. You two lovebirds stay safe. I’ve posted some guards. Try to make sure they return to me unharmed.” Santino gives us a wave and trots down the stone stairs.

“Where to?” Angel asks, looking around in dismay.

“There’s a small house behind the fountains. We’ll go there. You can order me around while I heal.”

“You’re not getting any,” she warns.

“We’ll see about that.”



# **EPILOGUE**



ANGEL

“HOW DID WE GET HERE?” I GLANCE OVER TO LAUREL AT HER QUESTION. She’s smiling as the sun shines down on us. We’re sitting out of the balcony. This is as much outside as we can get.

“Do you mean locked up in a castle like a queen or being in the middle of a war?” I snort a laugh because it’s crazy, but it’s our reality.

I went from living in a chapel to being locked away inside of a castle. I don’t even know where the hell we are. When you look out any of the windows, all you see are rolling hills and a giant pond. I know one thing for sure: We’re not in the States. Our men insisted that it was better we didn’t know our location. I’m guessing it has something to do with our safety.

Laurel only shrugged when they told us that. She didn’t mind. I thought we should know, but Bjornsson gave me a look that told me he wasn’t budging on it. I let it go because I’m pretty sure I’m a part of why the chapel is in partial ruins. I know it sounds a bit crazy, but I miss it. It was beautiful there. But more than anything, I miss Bjornsson.

We’d come here for Bjornsson to heal, but the second he was better, I knew he would have to leave. That there were other matters that he’d need to take care of before we could rest easy. When Santino showed up here with Laurel, I knew it was time for those things to be dealt with.

One good thing that did happen was Bishop had been killed before they both even took off. Not only that, his body was tossed right in front of the chapel. Bjornsson told me it was likely an offering of some kind of peace from the Church as he always called it. The higher-ups needed to be dealt with, and they knew he’d be coming. They tried to make peace with him fearing his wrath.

I lay my book down to roll over onto my side to face Laurel. I’ve never

seen her smile so much. All of my worrying about trying to save her from Santino is now laughable. The one thing Santino cares about more than anything is keeping his wife safe.

It's crazy how much your life can change in such a short time. I should be used to it. I lived in the foster system. At any moment, your whole life could be uprooted. You could go from an okay home to a really shitty one in the blink of an eye. It was always a roll of the dice.

"Do you think they'll be back soon?" I peek through the open doors that lead in from the balcony to see Lars standing there. That man is my shadow.

He is one of the *many* men here with us. Of course, Lars didn't want to stay. He wanted to go with Bjornsson and Santino. But Bjornsson told Lars the same thing he pretty much told me, that he had to know I was safe so he could go and do what needed to be done. And that Lars was the only one that could give him that peace of mind.

"I hope so." Laurel rests her hand on her stomach. She's pregnant. When she first told me, I felt a pang of jealousy. I know it's ridiculous. It was only for a split second and then I came to my senses.

I've always wanted a family. To have something to truly call my own. In that moment, I knew I wanted that with Bjornsson. He too had much of his childhood taken from him. A fresh start was something that both of us could use.

"It's been a week," I say, doing the same, putting my hand on my stomach. When Bjornsson was healing, it didn't stop us from still doing a few things. I couldn't resist him.

Laurel thinks I'm already pregnant. We didn't ask for someone to go out and get us a pregnancy test. There have been more than a few clues that I am. But I haven't gotten to tell Bjornsson yet. What if I never get to tell him? I try not to panic. *He's coming back*, I remind myself.

"This is one of the safest places I've ever stayed, but every night, I'm filled with fear," I admit. Not knowing is slowly driving me insane.

"Santino and I don't talk about a lot when it comes to the things he does for work, but I know my husband is a very feared man." She turns to face me now. "He told me Bjornsson isn't a man to be crossed. Especially now that he has something he was fighting for. We don't make our men weaker. We make them more deadly."

Before I get a chance to respond, I hear the sound of a helicopter. We both jump up.

“Lars?” My heart races. I’m trying not to get my hopes up.

“It’s them or I would be shooting it out of the air.”

“Right.” ‘Cause that’s a thing in my life now.

“Don’t run,” he calls after us. We ignore him. We race down the stairs and toward the front doors. Two men are standing there blocking them.

“You can open them now!” I shout, unable to help myself. We haven’t been allowed to step back through those doors since we each entered them. The men step back, but they don’t have to open them. They are already being pushed open.

My eyes land on Bjornsson. I run and jump into his arms. He catches me. I kiss him all over his face before he grips my hair to hold me in place. His mouth takes mine in a deep kiss. No words are necessary at this moment. I pour all of my emotions into the kiss.

I was so lost in seeing him again that I didn’t even feel him move. When Bjornsson starts to pull at my clothes, my eyes flutter open. Somehow we’re in my room.

“Miss me?” I tease him. He only grunts, destroying my panties in the process. I lean up and go for the belt on his pants.

“Want to taste you.”

“In me. I need to feel you in me,” I plead with him. He groans but gives me what I want.

Bjornsson thrusts inside without removing any of his clothes. We’re both out of control. I wrap myself around him as we both fall over the edge into orgasm. It has been too long.

“I think I’m pregnant,” I whisper. Bjornsson lifts his head to stare down at me.

“I’d hoped.” A smile breaks out across my face. Bjornsson returns one, making my chest bloom with warmth.

“Everything is handled?”

“Yes” is his only response, not giving me more. I don’t need it. I only need him.

“Does that mean we get to go home?”

“I’m already home.” He kisses me. “I love you, my Angel.”

“I love you too, Bjornsson.”

I was never a girl that believed in destiny, but there is no doubt in my mind that Bjornsson was always meant to be mine. My path in life led me right to him, and I wouldn’t change a thing.

Bjornsson's right. We're both finally home.

MY LOVES!

In case you didn't already know, Santino and Laurel's [book is here!](#)

It's been a while, hasn't it? I've missed you. The days are getting longer and the temperature is slowly declining. My air conditioner hasn't had to work quite so hard these last couple of weeks. I'm getting my boots and sweaters out. Fall is one of my favorite seasons. What's yours?

xoxo Ella

**ALSO BY**  
**Ella Goode**

The Good Bad Man

Pick Love

Rocked by Love

Marked with Love

Chasing Series

Chasing You

Chasing Us

Swiped for His Taking

Claiming His Bride

Heiress

Knocked Up by Love

Justice Series

Socialite and the Cowboy

Heiress and the Cowboy

Princess and the Cowboy

Billionaire and the Cowgirl

Secretary and the Cowboy

Insta Holiday

Connected to Forever Mine

Making Her Mine

Protecting What's Mine

Friends to Lovers

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[She's All Mine](#)

Pretty Prize

The Wolf's Mail Order Bride

Beauty in Summer

My Secret Valentine Baby

Wrap With Love

(a collection of past holiday stories)

Christmas Stalking

Three of Us (Twins #1) and Belong Together (Twins #2)

I wrote a few motorcycle romances when I first started out.

Their Private Need (Michigan, Easy and Annie)

His Bold Heart (Chelsea & Wrecker)

Her Secret Pleasure

Captive Ride

My one and only LGBTQ romance.

She's the One & My Only One

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