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CAROLINA JAX

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Twisted SURRENDER
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Twisted Surrender

A Best Friend's Dad, Age Gap Romance

Sweet but Twisted Series

Carolina Jax



We all have souls of different ages.

-F. Scott Fitzgerald



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Chapter One



V incent

Leaning back in the chair in my office, I can smell her all around me. “Fuck, Daisy, you are gorgeous. Show me what you want.”

She circles around my desk, standing beside my chair, and spins it so I’m facing her. Her wild red hair falls around her shoulders and her dress wraps around her body, showing off every single curve I’ve fantasized about for the past month.

She grabs the arms of the chair and leans down, allowing me to get a good look at the sexy red lace she’s been hiding from me at work.

“What would you like me to do for you, Chief Hunter?”

The moment she calls me Chief, I get rock hard.

“I’ve imagined you here. In my office. On your knees, Daisy. You’re a dream come true.”

She strokes me through my pants, leaning in and nuzzling my neck as she drops to the floor in front of me. Her eyes burn with desire.

For me.

She undoes my belt, taking careful consideration and care, running her hands over my thighs and cock. A teasing

temptation is her brand, and she uses it to excellence.

“Lean back and close your eyes, Chief. Let me show you why hiring me was the best thing you could have done.”

I slouch down and lean back, my head hitting the back of the chair, lolling to the right. I exhale, waiting for her tongue to work me just right and-

Ring! Ring! Ring!

Jumping at the phone ringing on my desk, I nearly knock myself over in the chair. Glancing down at myself, I see my belt is loose, my zipper is down and my hand is wrapped around my cock.

In my office.

During the daytime.

When anyone can walk right in.

I fumble to zip my pants back up and clasp my belt while grabbing for the phone that is ringing relentlessly.

“Hello? Hello! Chief Hunter here.”

“Dad? Are you okay?”

Leaning back in the chair again, I run my hand through my hair and shut my eyes tight.

What a fucking nightmare!

“Hi honey, yes, I’m fine. The phone startled me, that’s all.”

“Oh, okay. I just wanted to say I’m coming down to the station to have lunch with Daisy and I wanted to see if you want to join us.”

I’d love to eat out Daisy.

I’d love to offer her my meat.

Clearing my throat, I push those thoughts away quickly. “I have a lot of work to do. You girls go have lunch and I’ll catch up with you for dinner this week, okay?”

“Of course, Daddy! I’ll call you tomorrow and we can set a date. Love you! Bye!”

“Bye, baby.” I hang the phone up and let out a breath. My heart is still racing. How can I be so careless? Daisy has me all sorts of tied up, and I need to relinquish the hold she has on me.

But her seductive nature calls to me.

Getting up, I pull the shades open in my office that look out onto the floor of the station. I see Cash sitting with his feet up on his desk. I see the other officers busily moving around the station.

And then I see her. Her red hair calls to me like a siren. Her big green eyes watch me with enthrallment. And those pouty lips were made to suck a dick like no other. I’m sure of it.

But it can’t happen.

Strike one? I’m the boss.

Strike two? She’s twenty-three years old.

Strike three? She’s my daughter’s best friend.

Throw me out of the game because I want her like no other.

Chapter Two



D AISY

Checking my phone, I see a text from Angelina that she's waiting outside for me. I quickly shut my computer down and grab my purse from the drawer. Standing, I wave to Cash, letting him know I'm heading to lunch.

Moving around my desk, my hair stands on end.

I'm being watched.

Turning around, I see my boss looking at me from his office window. I give a smile and a little wave before giving my hips an extra sway as I walk to the front of the station and out the door.

To meet his daughter for lunch.

Also, my best friend since we were freshmen in college.

Opening the passenger door to her jeep, I jump in. "Hey, girl!" We meet over the console, giving each other a quick kiss on the cheek. "What's going on?"

"Oh, you know. Same old shit. I hate my job. Jack is a jerk and my dad was being weird on the phone when I called."

"So, quit your job. Break up with that dirtbag. And your dad? Weird or not, he's super fucking hot."

Angelina snickers. "Life is so simple for you, isn't it?"

I shrug. “No need to waste time being miserable. Might as well dump what doesn’t work for you and go for what you want.”

“And working at the station is goals for you?”

“Your dad is goals for me.” She pulls to a red light and stares expressionless at me. I waggle my brows and we both burst into laughter.

“You and your old guys.” She drawls as the light turns green and we move, pulling into the parking lot of the local diner here in town. Dashing Thru the Diner is just another nod to this crazy town called Christmas, where every local business has a play on words. “If I didn’t think he’d be good for you, and you for him, I might think this infatuation you have going on is creepy. But, I’m well adjusted and open-minded so I say, if you want him, go for it. I’d actually really like to watch you change his mind.”

We walk into the diner together and grab a booth in the corner. The server comes right over. We placed our orders for lunch, a cheeseburger for me and a caesar salad for Angelina.

“Are you coming by later tonight? I want to show you the paint colors I picked out.” She looks up at me over her food with one raised brow. “What’s that look for?”

“I hate your neighborhood.”

Sighing, I continue eating. This has been a sore subject since I bought this house. “It’s what I could afford. And it’s not *that* bad!”

“It is. You should have told me the name of the town before you bought. My dad’s friend is a realtor in Christmas, his name is Bobby Gallagher. Why don’t you go see him?”

“I already have a house, Ang.”

“Put this one back on the market and get something closer to the station. And me.”

Her simple resolve is a nod to how I answered her problems earlier. I refuse to tell her I get the creeps every night that I’m alone there. Living with Angelina in college for four

years, I became accustomed to having someone with me. Just knowing my best friend was a room away made me feel good. We talked about renting an apartment together, but we also said we needed to try this ‘on our own thing’. It’s also a personal achievement to myself that I could buy the house and do the work. “I’d still have to live there until it sells.”

“No, stay with my dad. You guys can carpool to work.” She gives a wink with a smug grin.

“Speaking of hot dads, what were you saying earlier about me changing his mind?”

Her eyes get wide, and she sits up straight. “Change his mind about you! I see the way he’s been looking at you since taking the job there at the station. When I talked to him about giving you an interview, I don’t think he was ready for who showed up.” She laughs. “But I know my dad. He’s been alone for too long and I’m sure he’s battling his desire for you. One, because of your age. And two, because of me.”

Waving my hands around, I dismiss her comments. “Age is just a number. I never liked guys our age. Such a waste of time, both in and out of bed.”

“Daisy!”

“It’s true! They don’t have a clue how to be a grownup. They can’t work or keep a steady job and they definitely don’t understand how to fuck a woman right.”

Angelina rolls her eyes. “Listen, I know my dad and I have a very open relationship, but I definitely don’t want to know about him in *that* way.” She makes a gagging noise with a face to match. “He’s been my rock since day one. I don’t know what it would be like to have a mom. I’ve only known him and I’m happy just the way it is.”

“And *that’s* why he’s so attractive.”

“Really? Because he’s a good dad?”

“That. And he’s fuck-hot. And I wouldn’t mind calling him my daddy for a time or two.”

We both laugh together, though I'm quite serious. And my best friend knows me like the back of her hand, so she knows I'm up for the challenge.

“Girl, if you can get him to change his mind, you've got my blessing.”

Chapter Three



Vincent

Christmas is just weeks away, but around here, it's Christmas every day. When I moved to this town twenty-two years ago, I swore I wasn't putting down roots. This place was too corny, and everyone in this town took you in as if you were theirs. The gossip and busy-body nature that this place encompasses was way over the top for me.

However, once I enrolled my daughter in the Kandy Kane Kids pre-school, I was grateful for the ones who wanted to care for us. I was able to train at the academy for eight weeks and once I was back home and working, the town grew on me. I quickly made rank at the station and just ten years after we moved in, I became the Police Chief of Christmas.

I had gone to boot camp at age eighteen and planned on making the military my career. But one careless night while on leave, I had a one-night stand and got the girl pregnant. She dumped the baby on me, saying she wasn't ready to care for her and have a family.

I had no other choice but to surrender to the consequences of my actions. But I wasn't mad about it. I loved that baby girl the minute I found out about her and wanted nothing more than to raise her with love and give her everything I could.

This town delivered that to me. The people here made it easy to love life around me. And once I met the Casanova Family? I knew I'd never move anywhere else. Their family are the founders of this small town and Frank and Janet Casanova became my pseudo-parents, despite only being about a decade older than me. And their children, being a decade younger than me, have been my best friends.

And now? I'm watching those friends have babies of their own. My own daughter isn't a baby anymore and I've had to learn to let her grow up. She's very independent and at times, has been the adult in our home when I just couldn't get my head straight.

And how do I repay her for always looking out for her father? For being the easiest daughter to raise? For never questioning why it was just us two or why other kids had moms at home and she didn't?

By lusting after her best friend.

When I sent my daughter off to college, I dedicated my time to working. I needed lots of shifts to fill my empty time now that she was gone. She called on weekends and told me all about her classes and the best friend she met the first week of school. From what I heard, Daisy O'Malley watched out for Angelina all four years they were away. And when Angelina came home for the summer, Daisy went back to her home and worked hard for the eight weeks of summer vacation. Then, they returned to each other and jumped right back into their studies.

I had only seen pictures of her and my daughter together and honestly, I didn't pay too much attention. I was just happy that Angelina was happy.

So when my daughter called and asked that I consider giving her friend an interview for dispatch at the station, I said yes.

And that's where it all went wrong.

Daisy O'Malley came into my life like a whirlwind. I was not prepared for the woman who showed up. Wild red hair that

hung down her back. Gorgeous green eyes that seem to glow.

And her body?

She's got a perfect one. She entered the station that day with confidence and a sense of ownership that told me she knew what she wanted. She knew how to get it, and there's no way you'd ever tell this woman no if she set her mind to do something. But when my daughter joined the interview after I sat there drooling over Daisy, I realized the woman in front of me was only twenty-three years old. And I'm forty-four.

What in the hell would I do with a twenty-three year old?

Teach her how a real man can treat his woman.

"You're hired!" flew from my mouth and for the last four weeks I've been actively avoiding being alone with Daisy O'Malley.

I have a feeling this young woman would end up teaching *me* a thing or two before the night is over.

But with my controlling nature and always in charge attitude, am I ready to learn?

Chapter Four



D AISY

I love my job. I didn't think I would ever end up working at a police station, but being on dispatch, on the other end of a call when someone calls for help, gives me a sense of purpose. I want to help everyone I come in contact with, especially those who can't help themselves.

So when they call and I'm the voice to keep them calm, it fills my heart.

My boss, though? I'd like him to fill more than my heart.

I had seen pictures of Angelina's dad from when he was my age. On her desk, she always displayed a few favorite photos of him in his uniform, holding her on his graduation day, and proudly standing next to her on her graduation day.

And he was drop dead fucking gorgeous. Tall, built without being over muscled and tan skin. His eyes, the most beautiful blue I've ever seen and sandy blonde hair. He was like a real life Ken doll, with a badge. Which only made him more tantalizing and untouchable.

I always loved a challenge.

I would picture him when using my battery operated boyfriend, and I'd make sure to let Angelina know how hot he

was every chance I got. She'd just shake her head at me, so used to my over sharing.

I loved hearing about their relationship. She was raised by a good man and when she would speak about being worried that he's lonely, it pulled at my heart.

He sacrificed the early years of his life where he should have been out partying, to instead care for his daughter. He gave up meeting anyone, gave up the chance to fall in love in order to devote all his love to Angelina. If that doesn't express what kind of man he is, nothing does.

So when I walked into the station, into the interview room and saw that silver fox sitting there waiting for me? I decided right then and there I wanted him. The Vincent Hunter who interviewed me that day was a mature man with that same hot body and same muscles that showed in those pictures strewn around our college dorm room. He still possessed the strength to toss me around the bedroom, and still had those gorgeous eyes that undressed me every time he looked my way.

I was going to have him.

I slowly began to make my move. Approaching the Chief with anything other than work-related issues, felt like I was approaching a scared puppy. He wanted to be touched and loved, but he was afraid of getting kicked for being too eager. So I began by asking him questions about the town. I'd come into his office a few times a day with different thoughts or comments. Every time he'd walk by my desk, I'd say hello, reach out and brush his arm while asking a question. Anything to get his attention. Anything to get him thinking about me. And what I could do for him with my touch.

Only when he spoke of the Casanova Family, could I really get a glimpse of his true self. And when Cash O'Brien came in, those two had a banter between them that was so refreshing.

However, when I spoke about Angelina or asked questions about her childhood, he clammed up.

Daughter is off limits. Got it.

I'm no psych major, but I'm sure reminding him I'm his daughter's best friend won't get me into his bed.

"Good morning, Daisy!" Cash O'Brien has arrived at the station for his shift and when he enters, the room lights up. Cash has a talent for putting others at ease, which makes working with him a joy. He's fun and always includes me in his conversation. We've developed a brother/sister type relationship in the few weeks I've been here. He's a good-looking guy, but my sights are set elsewhere.

And Cash is onto me.

"Where's the boss?" He winks at me, leaving no room to wonder if he knows how much I'd like to seduce our boss.

"Morning, Cash. He's in his office."

"Have *you* been in his office yet?"

I narrow my eyes at him, biting my lip to keep from smiling. "I haven't been in there *today*."

He laughs and I smile back at him. Cash loves the gossip, and I don't mind feeding him a little here and there. He's harmless and I have a feeling it doesn't really go anywhere, anyway.

"How about baby chief? Has she been here today?" He waggles his brows, referring to Angelina.

I spin in my chair and cross my arms. "Don't let her catch you calling her baby chief. Your chance will be over before you even take one!"

He chuckles and shakes his head. "Chief would have my ass before I even thought about a chance."

I smile at Cash. He asks about Angelina way too frequently to only be doing it to bother Vincent. "She's got a boyfriend, but I'm hoping he's on his way out. I can put a good word in for you, if you'd like. Maybe we can double!" I whisper those last few words, in a scandalous tone.

"You are a dangerous one, Daisy." He winks, then turns and runs straight into a brick wall. The Chief is standing there

with his hands on his hips, eyebrows raised. “Chief! We were just talking about you!”

Chief Hunter glances at me. His eyes sweep over my chest quickly, and I feel my nipples harden as if he just touched me.

This man might be out of my league, but I’m going to go down swinging.

“What about me?” He grumbles out his words, eyeing the distance between Cash and me.

“Nothing, sir. Cash was just getting in for the morning. Is there anything you need from me before the day starts?”

His eyes return to me again, and I can see his chest rise and fall. His nostrils flare and I swear his pupils dilate.

What are you thinking of asking me for, Chief?

As soon as the thought occurs, a wall goes up, pushing me away, while he disregards my question and redirects his attention to Cash.

And it sucks.

Keep trying, Daisy.

“I need to fill you in on some gang activity just across the westerly town line. Also, Tom Casanova is back today. He won’t be happy about it, but Cash, I’m pairing you with him. He needs to be reintroduced to the station and his duties. I know you’ll do the right thing by him. Don’t take it too easy on him, but know when to back off, too, got it?”

“I got it, loud and clear.”

“Daisy, when he arrives, send him to my office.” He turns to walk away, pauses and says, “Please.” Then continues on. “O’Brien. Come.”

My crestfallen expression must be evident on my face and Cash comforts me by placing his hand on my shoulder.

“Don’t get upset. The Chief is another one that needs to be handled with care.” I nod. “He’s that grumpy old man who sits on the porch chasing all the kids away. Until one kid comes along that can soften him up.”

I crack a smile. “Cash. Have you seen me? I haven’t softened a man in years.”

He barks a laugh. “Touche, Miss O’Malley. But I see where your sights are set. I won’t be a roadblock. Or should I say cockblock?”

“O’BRIEN!”

He jumps as the Chief yells his name, and I laugh at his outburst. “Jesus, Hunter! I’m coming! Keep your pants on.” He whispers in my ear as he passes, “Or don’t. Either way.” I giggle again at him and watch as he swaggers over to the Chief’s office. As Cash enters the office, and my eyes connect with my hot as hell boss, there’s a blush sweeping his neck and I notice his jaw tick.

Hmm, is that jealousy I see, Chief Hunter?

I let my tongue peek out and sweep along my bottom lip before letting my eyes drift down his front. Just like he glossed over my body when he first walked in, I know he’s feeling something.

Two can play this game, boss. *It’s on.*

Chapter Five



V INCENT

If there was ever a question that I was dead inside, the last month has proven that null and void.

My desire for Daisy has only increased daily. And my need to rid that desire has me jerking off four times a day.

Maybe if I just taste her once, that curiosity will drift away and I can move on.

Yeah, right.

I have a feeling if I ever get that little temptress in my bed, I'll never let her leave.

Cash follows me into my office and takes a seat on the couch. I round my desk, pulling up the latest info I received from the department a few towns over.

“Seems we have a turf war developing.”

He barks a laugh. “Chief, relax. I know you saw her first. I won't touch her.”

Slowly, I bring my eyes to his. His shit-eating grin and twinkling eyes make me want to jump across my desk at him.

“What did you just say?”

“New girl. She’s yours, right? I mean, the feeling is clearly mutual if you haven’t noticed...” He slows his speech and clears his throat. “Um. Turf war? You were serious about that?”

Taking a deep breath, I turn my computer screen his way. “Dead serious, O’Brien. Shit’s leaking in close to town lines and I’m not happy. Look at this report. Nine home invasions in the last three weeks. No one hurt, but there appear to be two different groups trying to knock each other off.”

He leans forward on the couch. “Where at?”

“Past Sweetstown. Seems to be west and north of us for now. I received this report late last night. You know the drill. These gangs battle each other for the most part, but this looks like they’re trying to gain ground. They’re breaking in for quick cash and items they can sell and trying to one up the other side.” I click to the second screen, bringing up an old warehouse building. “This abandoned building has been seeing a lot of activity. My guess is each is trying to run their stolen shit from inside and neither like that the other is there.”

“Okay. So we keep watch on our own town lines. Anything close, we grab and run evidence quickly. You going to put out a warning to the town?”

“Not yet. I’m not scaring them for no reason. It’s why they have us. We do our job and worry for them.

Tom Casanova catches my eyes as he enters the station and he already looks worn. When I wave him in, his eyes linger on the back of Cash’s head before he makes the walk to the office. He looks like he’s deciding whether to stay or head for the door. He’s been through hell, but I’m hoping by pairing these two up, it will force some talk to the surface.

“Be nice, O’Brien.” I warn him.

“I’ll be as nice as you were to Daisy this morning.”

“What the fuck does that mean?”

“Oh, Chief, you’re so clueless.”

Tom enters, and the tension is immediate, cutting off any further talk from Cash. After a few non pleasantries are expressed, mainly by Tom, the two head off for patrol. I've got them focused on the supposed gang for now instead of Tom's supposed hate for the new guy he doesn't even know.

While I focus on *not* focusing on the new girl.

Chapter Six



V INCENT

My focus is fucked. Ever since Cash said I'm clueless and mentioned there was a mutual feeling, I've been replaying every run in I've had with Daisy.

And it's driving me crazy.

Because I don't know if I'm imagining the events that are taking place, or if I'm trying to manifest them into happening.

All I know is when she walks by my office, she always gives a little 'tap, tap' on the window. She won't look in, but she's letting me know she's there.

When she stands at her desk, she switches her stance from left foot to right foot, making her ass pop with every step.

And when she works the night shifts, I've suddenly found myself at my desk well over midnight, as well.

Its inappropriate behavior at its finest, even if I haven't touched her.

I want to.

And that in itself is wrong.

She has to know what she's doing to me. Wanting this woman has completely disrupted my entire routine.

Knock, knock.

“Come in.”

“Hey, Chief. I’m heading out for the night.” Tom clips out his words and his face is pulled tight.

“Wait. Come here for a minute.” I stand and meet him halfway in the room. “You doing okay? Talk to me.”

He shakes his head as if to brush me off. “All good.”

I wait in silence. I’ve known Tom for a long time and he carries some demons. He joined the Marine Corps right out of high school and has stayed a reservist after giving them eight years. But one of his early tours changed the direction of his mindset and he’s had a difficult time coming back from it. His family has been afraid to push for too much information, and his big brother gives him shit every time he leaves on deployment. They’ve come to me time and time again, asking me to talk to him.

We do have similar paths.

Losing someone, especially on your own watch, leaves a lasting scar.

His family doesn’t understand this, though. I’m glad they don’t. No one should have to carry around what we do. So, I remain a solid force with an open door for Tom to come to when he’s ready.

But throwing Cash into the mix has certainly jumbled things for him. I expected there to be some bumps, but I’m hoping it will all come together.

“Tom?”

He sighs, rolling his eyes. “New guy is annoying as fuck, alright?” I chuckle at his reference to Cash, but he keeps going. “The guy is always in my face. He’s always at the coffee shop. He’s always with my family. Like, what the fuck? Are they trying to replace me?”

“They’re not replac-”

“And if I hear Farrah’s name come from his mouth one more time, Chief, I can’t be held responsible for what I may do.”

Bingo. The real reason he hates Cash. The girl. It’s always about a girl, right?

Placing my hand on his shoulder, I shake him a little. “You don’t have to worry about him replacing you in your family or here, and especially not with Farrah. I’ve watched you two dance around each other for years. She loves you and you love her. Get your shit together and go get her.”

He gives me a somber look. “You think I haven’t been trying?”

I return his same look. “No, I don’t think you’ve been trying. I think you’ve been taking and expecting, but not giving anything back.”

His face is void of emotion. The only way I know I hit a mark is that his left eye gives a twitch.

“And you know all about relationships, right? I’ve never seen you with a woman the whole time I’ve known you.”

I shrug. He’s right, though. I haven’t dated anyone because I can’t. I don’t deserve it. Just like Tom feels he doesn’t deserve it.

“You’re right. But the difference between you and me is that you have someone waiting for you, waiting to accept all the flaws. And you’re choosing to push it away.”

“Whatever. I didn’t come here for a lecture, just letting you know I’m clocking out. See you tomorrow.” He leaves my office, making quick work, winding around the desks and heading for the front door.

“Tom, you’ve got to let someone in! You’ve got to talk about what you’ve gone through. You know I get it. You know I’m here!” I call after him, but he doesn’t respond. I didn’t do nearly the time Tom did in the service, but I’ve seen my share of tragedies in the police force.

Plus, I revisit my own nightmare daily.

Returning to my desk, I try to concentrate on the report in front of me, but it's futile. I'm hungry, tired, and horny.

Time to go home, Vincent.

Grabbing my keys, I make my way to the parking lot.

“Goodnight, boss!” Her voice is an instant jolt to my body. Like that first cup of coffee in the morning, or the first sip of whiskey on a Friday night. It races through me, yet calms me all at once.

I glance to my left and see Daisy coming out of the station. She stops for a minute, digging around in her purse before she begins walking to the other side of the lot.

Just keep moving, Vincent. She's going the other way.

“Good night, Daisy.” I call back, then force my feet to move me to my truck. Convincing myself to not look back, I get in and start the engine. I sit for a moment, engine idling, thinking of Daisy sitting next to me in my truck. And all the ways I could take her for a ride in said truck. Or let her ride me.

I bang on the steering wheel. “Jesus, Vincent. Get a grip. You're not a teenage boy, for fuck's sake.”

Pulling out of the lot, I turn onto Main Street and head towards my home. A flash of red captures my eye and I see Daisy walking on the sidewalk. I check the time. It's almost seven at night. Though Christmas is a safe town, with the recent activity being on the outskirts, a young woman shouldn't be out walking alone at night. Anywhere. Not only are people dangerous, the roads are dangerous, too. I know this firsthand.

My heart beats quickly in my chest, as I bring my truck to the side of the road slowly and roll the window down. “Daisy! Are you okay? Where's your car?”

She approaches the window, her perfume wafting inside. “It's in the shop.”

Furrowing my brows. “How have you been getting to work?”

“I have two legs. I’m more than capable of using them, boss.”

This fucking woman. Gripping the wheel tightly, I growl out the words, “Get in.” She watches me for a moment, that smirk beginning to appear, and when she opens her mouth, no doubt to tease me once again, I beat her to it. “Don’t talk back, Miss O’Malley. Just get your ass in the truck.” Leaning across the cab, I pull the handle with force and push the door open. She climbs in with a satisfied grin on her face. While I, on the other hand, sit with a racing heart wanting to lecture her about safety.

Closing my eyes, I take a deep breath. “Put your seatbelt on.”

“Yes, boss.”

Letting that breath out that I was holding, I pull away from the curb. Having her so close to me in this confined space is messing with my head. Her scent is captivating. I could just reach out, lay my hand on her thigh. I could pull her close and wrap my arm around her. Hell, she could even stretch out on the bench seat and suck me off while I-

“Chief!”

Screeeech!

I slam on the brakes, realizing I was about to run right through the stop sign.

“Looks like I was safer walking.”

I glance at her out of my peripheral vision and she’s got a big smile on her face.

Clearing my throat. “Sorry about that. Just distracted is all.”

“Oh? Anything I can do?”

You’ve done enough.

Shaking my head and checking that we’re okay to move forward, I continue driving. “Actually, yeah. What have you been seeing between O’Brien and Casanova?” I quickly put

my hand up. “This isn’t gossip. I just want to know about their working dynamic.”

She settles deeper onto the bench seat. “Cash is great. He’s like the brother I’ve never had. They’re both great, but Tom is very reserved. I feel like he’s holding something back. Or maybe burying something he doesn’t want to think about.”

Nodding in agreement, we pull up to a traffic light. “Which way?”

“Continue straight. Cash seems to want to be friends with Tom. I know you told me his family includes Cash in a lot of their time. But Tom doesn’t want to be bothered. It’s almost like he decided he hated the guy before he even met him.”

Damn, she’s hit the nail on the head. She’s even more intuitive than I thought.

“Make a left at that next stop sign. Cash keeps trying, though. I think he’ll eventually get through. Or eventually get a black eye.” She laughs and I chuckle along with her.

“Just as long as they don’t do it at the station. I don’t need extra paperwork.”

She giggles and lays her hand on my arm. “I’d take care of it for you.”

I swallow hard. Fuck, her touch sets fire to every nerve I have in my body. “Dais-”

“Make another left up here. My house is the last one on the right.”

I do as she says, but when I look around, I realize we’re not in Christmas. “I thought you lived in town?”

“No, just outside.” She snaps out quickly, and I feel her body tense at my question. Glancing around again, this is more than just outside. Lakeshore is not a friendly area. Pulling into her driveway, I take a look around. The surrounding homes are in different stages of disarray and since she’s the last house, behind her is an empty field. I’m not getting a warm and fuzzy feeling being here.

“How long have you lived here?”

“I bought it before my interview with you.” Snapping my attention to her, she continues. “If I didn’t get that job, I planned on getting another. But I knew I wanted to be in the Christmas area. Angelina always spoke so warmly about growing up here. And I want a town like that.” She grabs her bag and hops out. I follow behind her, taking note of everything in this neighborhood. Street lights are out, no fences between the yards and it’s silent. Too silent.

“You should have spoken to Bobby Gallagher. He would have found a house for you right in town.” Following her to the front door, she opens it without a key. “You don’t lock the door?”

“The locks are broken and I haven’t gotten to the hardware store yet. I was going to go on lunch the other day with Angelina, but we ran out of time.”

I grab her forearm and spin her towards me. “You need locks that work, Daisy. If it means taking an extra ten minutes at lunch, you do that.”

She looks at my hand around her arm, then back at me. I realize I’m squeezing just a bit too tight. When I let go, she pushes through the door and walks inside. She flicks one light on. It’s dim but lets me see she’s clearly working on the inside. There are paint cans and drapes hanging to the left. Half the wall is missing in the room in front of us. She’s got dust clothes and piles of lumber to the right.

“Are you doing this work yourself?”

“I am.” She has a proud tone. “I wanted a fixer upper so I could make it my own. It will take me years to complete, but it gives me a sense of satisfaction knowing I’m doing it all on my own.”

“That’s very... admirable.”

She turns with her hands on her hips. “You don’t think women can work construction?”

I throw my hands up and laugh. “No one said that! It just takes a lot of patience to do handyman work.”

“I’ve got nothing but time, boss.”

Her lips are distracting. I've been watching them every time she speaks and I know she notices when she runs her tongue along the bottom plump one. I've got to get out of here before I do something I'm going to regret. Yet, I don't want to leave her here alone.

"Are you sure you're safe here?"

She rolls her eyes and turns her back on me, walking to the kitchen. "I've been here for a few months and haven't had a problem, *Dad*."

As if realizing what she just said, she freezes in her spot and I remain silent, my blood suddenly flowing like lava through my veins. She turns to me with a smirk, that same tempting upturn of her lips that I dream about tasting. "Are you worried about me, Chief? Are you feeling like a concerned *Daddy*?"

My jaw ticks and my hands clench. I walk closer to her, grabbing her chin. "This *Daddy* should take you over my knee for talking back the way you do." Her eyes flare. The sexual chemistry building in the room is thick. If I let myself, I could easily drown in it and take her down with me. Inhaling a deep breath, I get control of myself. "But I'm your boss, not your daddy, so I'm allowing you to come in an hour late tomorrow as long as you bring me the receipt from the hardware store, showing me the new locks."

Her eyelids flutter and she nods.

"That's good, Red." I have to turn away from her, and quickly, before I throw all sense out the door with no locks. "For tonight, put a chair under the doorknob. And leave the lights on in a few rooms so people don't think this place is vacant without your car in the driveway. I'll send Cash to pick you up tomorrow morning." I pause and turn back to her, pointing a finger. "And every morning until you get your car back. If I see you walking to work again, I'll fire you."

She outright belly laughs at me. "How does that make any sense? If you fire me, I won't have money to get my car from the shop."

Narrowing my eyes, “I won’t argue with you. Just be ready in the morning.” Turning away before my anger becomes an issue, I ignore her quick retort.

“I’m always ready, boss.”

Walking out the front door and climbing into my truck, I shoot a quick text to the guys on patrol tonight, telling them to add this neighborhood to the drive around.

This woman is going to be the death of me.

Chapter Seven



D AISY

My boss was in my house. My hot as fuck, older boss. *My best friend's dad*. He yelled at me for having broken locks and he questioned the safety of the neighborhood I live in.

I should be mad. But instead, it was comforting. Having someone care and ask about my surroundings felt good. It didn't feel intrusive. I'm independent, but being used to doing everything on my own is new. I've wanted to, believe me, but my parents were...clingy, controlling ... let's settle on *overly paternal*. They meant well, but kids need a chance to try and fail on their own.

Or try and succeed.

Hence the reason I bought this home. I knew it needed work. A lot of work. But it brings me happiness to see something come together by my own hands.

I'd like for Chief and I to come together by our own hands.

When he pulled up next to me on the sidewalk, the flare of anger in his voice turned me on. No, I don't have daddy issues and I definitely don't want to be yelled at, but the concern is what got through to me. Riding in the truck with him felt like being home. I felt protected and like nothing would cause me harm as long as this man was standing next to me.

And then he called me Red.

Swoon.

When that pet name slipped out and he didn't bat an eye, I knew I was getting through to him.

Is it criminal to seduce your boss?

Only if your intentions are wrong.

And mine are so right.

Chapter Eight



V INCENT

“Dad, I’m here! And I’m hungry!”

I hear my daughter yell from the front door and I chuckle. She was never quiet. And always hungry. So I knew to order in takeout and have it ready when she got here.

“I’m out back. Come on through!”

Hearing her step through the back slider and onto the deck, I say, “Hey, baby. Hope you’re-” I pull up short when I see she’s not alone.

“Daisy.”

“Hey, boss.” She saunters through the door like she lives here.

“Hope you don’t mind, Dad. I was passing the station and saw Daisy leaving and invited her over. I knew you’d have enough food.” Her eyes go wide at the Italian spread I have laid out on the table. “You always do.” She heads straight for the table, picking up a fork and stabbing some mozzarella balls and olives.

I snap out of my trance, realizing Daisy is in my house. I wave her over, pushing aside the feeling that she belongs here. At least my doors have locks.

It's been almost a week since I was at her house. Cash didn't ask why I sent him to get her. It never crossed his mind that my intentions were anything other than pure. She works at the station, thus being part of the family, and she needed a hand. No harm, no foul. It's what we'd do for anyone.

But I slept easier knowing she wasn't walking alone and that no one could get into her house uninvited.

And isn't that some shit? I haven't slept well in years. It's concerning that my mind is eased by knowing Daisy made it home safely. I shouldn't be this invested in an employee.

Especially a younger, beautiful employee.

"No, of course I don't mind. Please. Sit. Eat." I swallow down my thirst for her as she passes by me and her flowery perfume drifts behind her, intoxicating me. "I'll grab another glass. Daisy, do you drink wine?"

Fuck. Should I be offering her alcohol?

"I do. I like red, though. Do you have something I might like, Chief?" Her innuendo isn't lost on me and I watch as Angelina snickers and elbows her.

"Your daughter only drinks white and she could never convert me." She pulls out a chair and sits next to Angelina.

"No class, this one." They tease one other and I smile at their loving nature together, but my mind races at the same time. This is exactly why I can't start anything with Daisy. My daughter would be crushed if something went wrong. And I'd never want to come between their friendship.

But how can she be so blatant right in front of Angelina?

Coming back with a bottle of red and one more glass, I place it on the table. My daughter has already poured the white, so I pour myself and Daisy a glass of red. Handing it to her, she tilts her head and holds the glass out, expectantly waiting for me to tap it with mine.

"Cheers." I nod and we both sip, her eyes never leaving mine.

Fire races up my spine. And it's not just the red wine racing through my blood.

“So, how's your love life?”

I choke on my swallow, using my napkin to cover my mouth.

“She's talking to me, Dad.” Angelina rolls her eyes and I shake my head.

“I know. It just went down the wrong pipe.” Reaching for some food, I pass it around the table to the girls first. “How is jerk? I mean, Jack, anyway?” I smirk and Daisy laughs out loud.

“Oh, Chief, you have no idea how glad I am to hear you say that.”

“Oh great, are you both going to gang up on me now?” Angelina whines and continues shoveling food into her mouth.

“I mean, whatever it takes to get you to dump that loser I'm in for.” Daisy winks at me, and I grin.

“Same. I don't know why you're wasting your time. I met the idiot once, and that's all it took for me to know you can do so much better. Dating a goat would be light years ahead of this guy.”

Angelina sighs, loudly. “Then you'll both be happy to know that I dumped him last night.”

Daisy throws her hands up in the air, head back, laughing and cheering. It's the most glorious sight I've ever seen. Her shirt rises, flashing a piercing in her belly button that I'd love to play with, *with my tongue*, and her tits bounce with each shake of her hands and laugh she lets out. Her smile is wide and when she leans over and hugs my daughter, her ass in those jeans is out of this world.

I have to adjust myself and grab my napkin to place on my lap. Never have I responded to a woman like this.

Is age really just a number? Could I do this?

No.

I'm not good enough for Daisy. I don't deserve to have such a fun loving woman. She deserves more than an old, closed off police officer. But if anyone could make me surrender to this lust coursing through my body, I bet it'd be her.

* * *

We had dessert, cleaned up the table and now I'm packing leftovers for Angelina to take home. As the night went on, I realized there was so much more to Daisy than just her looks. Her mind is amazing. Her intuition is spot on, which I already knew from our brief car ride the other day. But she feels like an old soul. For being young, she's got depth to her and when she explained how she loves this dispatch job, I realized she's not looking to run like I was at that age. She's looking to put down roots. I just wish those roots weren't in a death trap of a house. If I was to bring it up again, I have a feeling she'd fight me on that tooth and nail, though.

But those thoughts scare me. I haven't even touched this woman yet and I'm imagining all kinds of scenarios with her.

"Thanks, Dad, this was great. Make sure you save enough to take with you to the station tomorrow."

"I've already packed him some right here." Daisy shakes the tupperware container she's holding and sticks it in the fridge.

"Thank you, Daisy."

"You're welcome, boss. Can't have you hungry at the station. You're already grumpy enough when Cash and Tom start their shit."

"Ooh, Cash!" Angelina does a little dance. "He's my favorite cop down at the station!"

I pull up short. "What? What do you mean your favorite cop? What am I?"

Angelina kisses my cheek and grabs her bag from the counter. "You're my favorite chief!" She laughs. "I hate to run,

but I need to go over my reports before tomorrows rounds. I'll talk to you later, Dad!" She tries to run from me, but I grab her arm.

"Hey. Remember what I told you."

She rolls her eyes. "I know, dad. I have my mace. I'm fine. Stop worrying."

"Never."

She quickly runs and hugs Daisy. They whisper and giggle for a quick moment, and then she's out the door.

And I'm left standing in my home with Daisy.

Alone.

It's a fantasy come true. I've had one more glass than I usually do, so I'm feeling kind of brave.

And stupid.

"Would you like another glass of wine?" I can't help myself. I don't want her to go.

"I'd love one." She walks around the island to stand beside me, then hoists herself up onto the counter. Her thigh brushes my hand and I bump the glass and spill a bit of the red wine on it.

"Oh, I'm sorry, boss." She takes my hand, lifts it to her mouth and takes my finger in her mouth, sucking the tip as she pulls it out, eyes never leaving mine. "All clean."

Feeling like I was just burned with a blowtorch, I know I won't ever forget this feeling. I'm doing my best to remain calm when all I want to do is rip this chick from the counter, throw her to the ground and have my way with her.

You're in charge, Vincent. Stay there.

"Daisy." I croak out, feeling myself slowly breaking apart. I'm not going to be able to stay away from her at all. And for someone who always has control over myself, this is a new feeling.

She gives me a sugary sweet smile. "Yes, boss?"

Time to surrender, Vincent.

I step closer, placing my hands on her thighs, widening them as I wedge myself between her legs. “Call me boss again, and you’re going to find out just how bossy I can be.”

Her eyes flare. I’ve just issued a dare to this feisty red head that I know she won’t let me win. She wraps her legs around my waist, pulling me close against her, holding me hostage. I can feel her hot pussy pressed against my cock that’s straining to escape my pants. I push back against her and she rubs herself on me again.

“We shouldn’t do this.”

“Do what, boss?”

Her faux innocent tone sets me into motion. I cradle her face and pull her towards me. We connect and her lips jumpstart my heart. She tastes incredible. Like the sweet red wine we’ve been drinking and every sinful fantasy I’ve been dreaming of.

I run my thumbs across her cheeks, taking in her soft skin. I trace the cupid’s bow of her pink full lips, wanting to taste them once more. I trail my fingers along her jawline, lifting her neck as I let my tongue wander her skin. Teasing and tasting, I drag my tongue from the hollow of her throat, and back up to her bottom lip, nipping it as I take her mouth once more. Her whimpers only stir me more.

“You’re fucking beautiful, Daisy. This throat? Absolutely perfect.” I kiss it once more, stroking it with my fingertips. “I’ve dreamt about it, you know? I’ve dreamt about you on your knees while my cock slides down this gorgeous, wet throat. Do you think you can take all of me?”

She nods and swallows. “Yes.”

“Yes, what?”

“Yes, boss.”

All common sense has left me. Every reason I’ve had for not chasing this woman has disappeared from my mind.

I'll deal with the fallout tomorrow, but tonight? I'm going to enjoy every bit of sinful wrong that comes along with fucking my daughter's best friend.

I'm surrendering. It's a twisted surrender, but I'm all in.

Smiling against her, I nuzzle her ear and kiss her neck. "Do you want to try?"

She encircles her arms around my back, consuming my kiss. With her legs already wrapped around me, she lifts herself onto me. My hands slide instinctively under her ass as I knead and grab at her. Walking her out of the kitchen and into my living room, I turn and fall back onto the couch, with her straddling me.

And just like I knew she would, she takes control. She shamelessly rubs herself on me, dry humping me on the couch and it makes me feel like a teenager. Daisy makes me feel young and alive. She grabs the bottom of her shirt, pulling it straight over her head, that long firey hair blinding red against her pale skin. The lights from the Christmas tree my daughter and I set up last week flicker in the corner and dance around the room like a strobe light.

Daisy takes my hands and places them on her breasts. I grab and flick her nipples through her bra. She tosses her head back in bliss.

"Chief! Yes!"

My thoughts have been anything but decent since meeting this woman, and her writhing on my lap only intensifies all the dirty things I want to do to her.

"Daisy. I'm warning you now, if we do this, I can't be easy. I'm far from gentle. It's been too long and you are too fucking tempting."

"I can take it, boss. I can take anything you give out."

I scoot forward on the couch, still holding her as I look up into her eyes. "Listen carefully, Red. I'm the boss at the station and I'm the boss in the bedroom. I see you trying to tease and tantalize me. You're trying to hypnotize me with this ass and these tits." I squeeze them, pulling her bra down and leaning

forward to nibble on her nipple. It only increases her grinding on my lap. “You can try, and I may let you take the lead once in a while, but make no mistake. I’m in charge, Daisy. I’m *always* in charge.”

Her eyes dance with excitement. “I knew this was inside of you. I want it. Tell me what to do! Teach me what you like! Show me how a real man needs to be loved.” She leans forward and bites behind my ear. “Show me how a real man needs to be fucked, Chief Hunter.”

That’s all it takes. Hearing those words, I snap and completely lose control. I’ve flipped her to the ground, ordering her out of her jeans while I rip at mine and slide my boxers down. Both our pants are around our ankles and I’m inside her before my next breath. I’m rutting her like a wild animal, taking and taking, pushing her limits. With every strike, her tits bounce, and it only makes me go harder. Leaning back on my thighs, my cock is so fucking hard inside her, I gently free her leg from her jeans and lay it straight against my chest, turning my head and nipping her ankle. She takes her foot and places it flat against my chest. I tilt my head down and suck her big toe into my mouth. Her pussy clenches me tightly with every pull I make on her toe and every pump inside her.

“What the-Oh my, God!” She yells out and laughs, moans, and laughs again, all while pulling at her own nipples. “Keep doing that. Jesus!” She pants. “It’s like”, panting, “a direct line”, one low moan, “to my clit. Fuck! Boss!”

She’s wild, moaning and writhing under me.

I chortle along with her, a satisfied sound bubbles from my throat. “Like that, do you?” I nip the pad of her big toe while reaching down and flicking her clit. My thrusts get harder and deeper. She cries out as I rub her clit once more and she breaks. I follow immediately with my own release because her pussy is just too good. *She* feels too fucking good, and I can’t hold out for one more thrust.

She continues to work her hips, using my chest as leverage with her feet to ride me. I’m about to collapse on her. I can’t

hold myself up any longer.

“Chief Hunter.” She smirks as I pull out and fall back against the couch, kicking out completely of my jeans. “I had no idea it could be like this.” She prowls over to me, on all fours and I feel my cock harden again. She climbs onto my lap, wrapping her body around mine. My arms automatically entwine around her. A feeling of protectiveness washes over me. It’s not how I feel about my daughter, though. Yes, they’re the same age, but no, this feeling of protection, of being a watchman or her security, is overpowering. I don’t want to control her, I don’t even want to guard her, because I have a feeling she can hold her own. But wanting to stand next to her, let others know she’s mine?

I want that.

Slow it down, Vincent. Get a fucking grip, Vincent. You’re a forty-four-year-old man. What the fuck would she want with you?

Chapter Nine



V INCENT

Waking the next morning, without Daisy by my side, had me all sorts of messed up. I shouldn't want her. I *can't* want her. She's twenty years my junior. I could be her dad.

Fuck. What would her own parents think?

Scrubbing my hands over my face, I groan. "What did I do?" I lay in bed and stare at the ceiling. I can't get her face out of my mind. I forever burned the look of satisfaction she had when she was straddling me into my brain.

And her body.

My hands grip the sheets. I can still feel how soft her skin was, how hot and on fire she was for me. How wet she was, just waiting for me to take everything she was giving out.

Sex with her was not just incredible, but fun. She laughed and let her heart and body lead. She didn't get wrapped up in her head.

Not like how I am right now. Maybe that's how sex is for young adults now. Maybe it's all about a good time. No feelings. Not tied down to anything.

Maybe I just need to chalk it up to a one-night stand.

With my daughter's best friend.

Fuck.

A guy my age should gloat about bagging a younger chick. I don't talk like that to my friends, though.

Besides, bragging isn't my thing.

And I definitely wouldn't demean Daisy that way.

She means more than just a one-night stand.

Sitting up, I swing my legs to the floor and cradle my head in my hands. I can't think that way. I can't think of having more with Daisy. It's wrong. What would people say? What would Angelina say? Or, worse, the station.

Did I take advantage of her last night? We were drinking. She was in my house. Jesus, I'm a cop. I know better than this.

Checking the clock, I take a quick shower and get myself ready for work.

The short ride from my house to the station has me battling with myself.

It was one night.

But you want more.

She's so young.

But she was into you.

She was the best fuck I've ever had.

And I want more.

Entering the station, it's quiet this morning. I grab a cup of coffee and head to my office. While walking past her desk, even though she's not there yet, I swear I can smell her. I can still feel her wrapped around me. I hated showering her scent off of me this morning. A shiver runs through me and I shut the door to my office. Taking the seat behind my desk, thoughts of Daisy consume me.

"This is bad, Vincent. Get it together. Damn, a bit of good pussy and you're whipped already."

Shaking my head, I fire up the computer and begin checking emails. I see movement through the window as my

officers filter in for the work day.

I'm trying to concentrate on the reports in front of me. There's not much intel yet about these gangs associated with the home invasions, but it's extremely unsettling. Over the years, we've had a few small hits here and there, but I've learned to never underestimate the silence between events and the desperation of a criminal.

Speaking of desperation, my thoughts keep drifting back to last night. I'm searching for any and every moment that reminds me of her.

The way she kept calling me Chief Hunter had me envisioning all new scenarios with her. I'm a take-charge guy. It's my personality as I quickly became Chief of Police here in town. I like to be in control. I *have* to be in control and I want to take care of those under me. I'm a born leader. I take initiative and anything I need or want, I get. Her calling out my title and surname only increased the power I already feel. She was bowing to me, yet holding her own *with* me. It was an incredible push and pull that we fell into naturally.

I got a taste of her and realized I've been starving for years. I've never needed a woman like I feel I need her right now. That sense of an absolute 'I have to have her' washed over me the minute she walked in for the interview. Daisy carries herself in such a way that it enticed me instantly.

And scared me.

I've denied myself Daisy for a month. And when she showed up in my house last night, my willpower ran out the front door the minute she walked through it.

The feeling that shot through me when she sucked my finger was the same feeling she got when I sucked her toe. I don't know if she's ready for what I'm going to bring her. But I want to give her more. I have to give her more.

"What the fuck is that on your face?"

Jumping in my chair, I slam my hand down on the desk. "You don't fucking knock?" I yell out at Cash as he stands there with a stupid grin on his face.

“I knocked. Three times.” He’s still got that grin that makes me want to fire him on the spot.

“Can I help you with something?” I bite out the words and stare him down, trying to be intimidating. There’s no intimidating Cash, though. This guy moves through his day as if it’s always sunny in Texas.

I know better, though.

“I came to tell you that your favorite Casanova has anger issues and you need to look into it.” He raises a brow, crosses his arms and leans against the doorjamb. “But I’d much rather discuss that smile on your face and twinkle in your eye.” I roll my eyes as Cash steps into the room, closing the door behind him. He comes to the front of my desk and leans on it with his hands, studying me and then bursts into a laugh. “You got laid!” He slaps the desk and stands at his full height. “Damn, Chief! It’s about time! Who is she? Tell me all the details!”

He moves papers aside and leans his thigh on my desk, his rapt attention falling on me. I feel like a perp, sitting in the interrogation room with a spotlight on me.

“Is this how you get your criminals to talk?” I turn away from him and stare at the report on my computer screen, not seeing one word.

“Good cop, bad cop, right? We all know Tom’s attitude automatically makes him the bad guy, so I’m assuming my role. Now, tell me.” He grabs the back of my chair and spins me to face him. At the same time, I catch red hair and a body that I now know way too well, passing by the window of my office. I’m transfixed by the way her hips swing as she walks. The way her ass is shaped in those jeans. The way it felt in my hand, and against my cock as she straddled me and drove me crazy riding me, teasing me.

As if she knows I’m watching her, she slows her gait and looks over her shoulder. Our eyes connect and every touch, every caress, every thrust comes barreling to the forefront of my mind. I want to run from my office, grab her, and wrap her up in my arms. I want to take her to my home, give her

everything she could want. Show her how I could love her right. Let her teach me to be loved back.

As if she can hear my thoughts, the slightest smirk appears, and she winks before continuing to her desk.

“No. Fucking. Way.”

Cash’s voice pulls me from my Tarzan attitude. Glancing back at him, he’s staring at me with a look of amazement.

My heart races.

He knows.

Deny. Deny. Deny.

“Whatever you’re thinking, you’re wrong.”

He tap dances around my office, giddy with excitement. “I’m not wrong. Oh my God! I’m not wrong! You nailed Daisy!”

Jumping from my chair, I have Cash’s arm twisted up behind him, with my left hand around his neck, his back pulled tight against my front before he can say another word. “Don’t talk about her like that.” I growl out into his ear.

His chest bounces with laughter, and it only enrages me more. When his body goes lax, I release him, giving him a shove away from me. He turns, straightening his uniform and has a shit-eating grin drawn across his face.

“Chief, I’m impressed. First, that you can still move that fast.” He shakes out his arm. “Damn, I’d hate to come across you in a dark alley. And second, I mean, you’re a good-looking guy and all, but I didn’t realize you had it like *that*.” He whistles. “Pulling a younger woman? Whew, that’s some shit. What do they call male cougars? Oh! Are you her Daddy?” He busts out laughing and claps his hands like a little kid. “Chief Daddy? Or the dirty boss? Oh my God! Do you role-”

“Cash! Shut the fuck up!” I snap at him and quickly pull the shades, realizing anyone could have just seen me jack him up. “Just keep quiet. Don’t say anything to her. Don’t say anything to Tom. Just don’t say anything.”

He puts his hands up in defense. “Bro, I told you something was up. I’m all for this. You were smiling today. Sm-il-ing.” He claps at each new consonant, drawing out the word.

I was pretty happy.

Shaking my head. “Cash. It’s not right. I’m her boss. She’s my daughter’s best friend. And need I remind you I’m old enough to be her father, for Christ’s sake!”

“You like her.”

“Of course I like-”

“No, you *like* like her. It explains why you wanted me to pick her up when she didn’t have her car. And take care of the locks at her house. Bro, what’s she doing living on the other side of town, anyway?”

“Don’t get me started,” I grumble. “But you know with these strings of break-ins, I’m dying a slow death knowing she’s alone at night.” I take a breath and drop my head. “And it doesn’t matter if I like her. It was a minor indiscretion that can’t happen again. It won’t happen again.”

There’s a knock on the door. I nod my head and give him the okay to open it. On the other side of the door is the woman I can’t stop dreaming about. And she’s about to cross that proverbial dotted line into my world of twisted danger.

“You sure about that?” He asks quietly, then clears his throat. “I’m going to grab another cup of coffee before the illustrious Casanova makes an appearance.” He claps me on the shoulder, acknowledges Daisy and walks out the door, shutting it behind him.

The click makes me jump, making me realize I’m alone with her again. Last time that led to a dangerous game.

But I want to play again.

Chapter Ten



D AISY

Waking up to a dozen text messages, all from Angelina, my body is sore, but in all the good ways. Recalling the way Vincent handled me last night has me hot all over again. The way his hands skimmed lightly, then grabbed hold of me, was incredible. He changed up every touch, and I never knew what was coming. I don't know what I was expecting from him, but I knew whatever he gave out was going to be good. It had to be. Just watching him swagger around the office, stand tall with his hands on his hips, even making coffee, he shows power. The way he delicately fiddles with the buttons on the coffeemaker and then grips his coffee mug with large hands. I knew he'd be an expert in the touch department.

I quickly showered and got dressed. I grabbed a banana as I ran out the door and ignored the garbage cans that were overturned in my driveway.

Again.

Damn raccoons, I thought to myself as I jumped into the car and called Angelina while I drove to work.

“Okay, I can't believe I'm asking this, but,” she takes a deep breath, “did you bag my dad last night?” I get the giggles instantly. “Oh, Jesus Christ, you *did!* I can't believe it only took a month for you to break him!”

We're both giggling across the line. "So, without giving too many details and completely grossing out my future step mom," Angelina squeals across the phone, "I'm kidding! I'm kidding!"

"Girl. This is crazy. You know, I almost thought something had already happened before last night because he's been different. A little more easygoing, less in his head about work all the time, you know?"

"He's been battling being alone with me. But the night he drove me home, it was like a safety measure was unlocked!"

"What! You didn't tell me he drove you home! When?"

"It was last week when my car was in the shop. He was mad I was walking home and-"

"Wait. You were walking home alone? I'm fricking mad, too! Why didn't you call me?"

"Because you have your own job and I think you worked that night, anyway. But it's fine, I'm fine."

"Girl. It's not fine."

"Okay, now I see where you get your mothering nature from. He's very overprotective."

"Yeah, no shit."

"But it felt different. It didn't feel like he was chastising me. Yes, he raised his voice, but it made me feel good."

"He yelled at you?"

"No, he didn't yell at me, Mom!" Angelina cracks up again, but I continue. "I'm not explaining it right, but it was like he was my shield. I felt confident in his concern. Not suffocated."

"That's my dad. He'll take care of you, Daisy. He takes care of everyone. And I don't mean that in a coddled way."

"I know. I can see that. But I'm afraid of what I'm going to walk into today. Last night was fun, especially with a little bit of wine, but today, the coffee is going to make this a reality. And I'm not sure he's ready."

“So, you get him ready.”

We’re both quiet on the line and the events fall into place. This is my best friend’s dad. *What am I doing?*

“Get out of your head, Daisy. I’m happy about this. I think he needs someone with a heart like yours.”

Tears prick my eyes. “You’re the best friend ever, Ang. Seriously.”

“You both deserve so much happiness. And if the two people I love the most find it together, then I’m all for it.”

* * *

Walking into the station today, I had a feeling I’d find Vincent locked in his office. After last night, I knew he would be feeling a certain way today. It’s just who he is. He’s caring and compassionate, but he beats himself up over every decision he makes. Even the ones that make him feel good.

He also needs to be in control and finally giving in to me will make him feel like he gave that up, too. He’s going to work on gaining that dominance back.

And I’m here for it.

But when I walked in and saw him in his office with Cash, I knew he was spiraling. And when the shades were drawn, I knew something was up. The longer they stayed locked in, I knew I had to get in there before either Cash or Vincent talked himself out of whatever we’ve got going on.

Because I like him. And not just in a hot boss way. He didn’t treat me like a kid. He treated me like a woman he couldn’t get enough of. Vincent treated me like an equal. Age was non-existent between us last night. The only thing between us was passion. Unbridled, undeniable passion. There’s nothing like it, and getting to really know him lately, his heart showed through every move. I loved the way he let loose on me and didn’t hold back. The way he gave me everything I’ve been looking for, making sure I was taken care of, in all possible ways. He felt safe without being oppressive.

He needs me. And I don't mean that to sound conceited. He has a high-profile job and needs an outlet. He has so much stress and nowhere to relieve it. He's tied so tight and with his daughter growing up and having her own life, he's left to fumble his alone.

I don't want him to be alone. I'm sure to others, we look like an odd couple. But isn't that the point? Finding someone opposite to bring out the best in each other?

The Casanovas include him as if he's family. And I see the relationship between him and Cash, him and Tom, is strong. But he needs someone to call his own. A woman to be soft with.

I'm going to remind him I can be that one.

When Cash let me in after I knocked, then slowly closed the door behind him, I walked back to it and gently flipped the lock, then leaned my back against the door.

"Good morning, Chief."

His nose flares as I address him, and I push off the door and walk closer.

Got him.

His breathing picks up as I come to a stop right in front of him, his hands on his hips. "Did you sleep well?" I ask.

He huffs a laugh. "Daisy."

"Yes, boss?"

His eyes wander over my body as he scrubs his chin with his hand. "Fuck. You're making this so hard."

"I'm hoping to."

His eyes flick back to mine. His want for me is on proud display.

"Boss, it's okay to feel what you're feeling. You're a man." I run my hand up his arm, squeezing his bicep. "You're a good man who deserves to let go once in a while."

He takes a breath, his chest rising. “Daisy, I’m in a position of authority and I used it irresponsibly last night. It was inappropriate, and I apologize for what we did.”

“You didn’t enjoy it?”

Again, with the quick exhale, “I more than enjoyed it. But it can’t happen again. I’m your boss. And you’re,” he visibly swallows, “young and impressionable and I don’t want to take advantage being that I’m your boss-”

“You didn’t take advantage of me! I mean, if we’re being honest, I think I took advantage of you.”

“You do, do you? How so?”

I take his hand, holding it between us, and trace his fingers. Then I get closer still and trace my lips with his finger. He lets me direct his hand as I let it linger on my collarbone. “I seduced you.”

He stills his hand and smooths his fingertips over my skin. “You seduced me? So, I was innocent in it all?”

I nod furiously. “You were! You have nothing to be worried about. It should be me apologizing to you.”

He’s quiet for a moment. I can see the battle waging war in his mind. The *should I* or *shouldn’t I*? The Devil and the Angel each battling for their own win. “In that case, I’ll let you apologize tonight. I’ll pick you up at seven.”

“Okay.” He stills at my immediate response.

“Okay, what?”

“Okay, boss.”

He smiles a dirty little smile. I find he responds to me easier when we play this teasing game together. I’m showing him it’s okay to have fun. It’s okay to let your guard down at times. And with the right people? It makes it that much better.

“Get back to work, Miss O’Malley.”

“Yes, Chief Hunter.” I turn on my heel, but when I get to the door, he commands me to wait.

I pause, but don't turn around. In the blink of an eye, he's pushed up against me, his front to my back. One hand lands on the door by my head, and the other to my left hip. His hot breath in my ear has me dripping instantly for him.

"There's going to be a punishment for this."

"For what?" I breathe out.

He tilts his hips into my ass and I can feel just how much he wants me. "For teasing your boss, Red." He gives me one good spank and I squeal, slapping my hand over my mouth quickly.

"Yes, Chief Hunter."

He steps back from me as I open the door. I'm met with a look of smugness by Cash and surprise by Tom.

"Everyone, get back to work!" Vincent barks out. The station scurries around and I sit at my desk, trying my best to not think about the punishment I'll get later.

Chapter Eleven



V INCENT

The work day dragged on. And when Daisy clocked out, I counted my own minutes until I could leave. I can't get to her fast enough. One, because I just want her. But two, I need to make sure she's okay. Her living outside of town makes me uneasy. And I didn't realize how much it did until I saw where she lived.

Christmas is great, but just outside of it lies a rough neighborhood. Lakeshore used to be a quaint, small town back in the day, but when Christmas began to boom, people flocked to it. The name alone was a draw, and a lot of business owners used it for branding. Lakeshore ended up a ghost town, so to speak, leaving owners scrambling to make ends meet. And with failed businesses, comes abandoned homes that squatters take over. Nothing is cared for and it shows.

And Daisy lies on the cusp. On Sycamore Road, the house she bought is old. The fucking locks didn't even work. So if that's the smallest of it, I can imagine the worst of it. Wiring that needs updating, a roof that could collapse. I could strangle this woman for buying this place.

But I didn't know her then, so I couldn't stop her.

I know her now, though. And I know a reliable construction company. One call to the Casanovas and they'll

come through for me. And I'll foot the bill for it all.

It's also the one way to ensure I'll never get in her bed again. I may not have had a relationship for years, but I know stepping on someone's independence is a sure way to push them away. I can't help myself, though.

Driving to her home, I battle with myself the whole way. I shouldn't be coming here. I try to rationalize my reasons for being here. I'm a nice guy, she's my employee. I'd do it for anyone.

Check the locks, Vincent.

Check the windows, Vincent.

Check the wiring, Vincent.

Then move her out of there and into your home.

No, I wouldn't move anyone into my home. But I recognize my need for her and try to rationalize that next. She's the only one who's grabbed my attention in a long while. I've been on a date or two, but it's very hard to meet someone when all you do is work. And for so long, I've been just fine with that.

I'll take care of everyone else, since I couldn't save the one who was taking care of me.

I miss my sister every damn day. I was fourteen years old, and Violet was eighteen, when she was killed by a hit-and-run driver. They never found the driver, and I feel the police and detectives gave up way too fast. They deemed it *wrong place, wrong time*.

And that infuriated me. I promised myself then and there I would do everything in my power to work for families that went through the same trauma. I wouldn't give up on them, like the police gave up on my family.

That's my rationalization, anyway. I just want to make sure Daisy is safe.

I pull into her driveway, glancing around at the broken down homes. There's no sign of life around here, yet I still feel as if I'm being watched, which has my senses tingling. I know

these homes are inhabited, but where is everyone during the day? They slowly come awake when the sun sets. Those are the worst types of neighbors to have.

Shaking my head, I get out of my truck and walk up to her door. I try the knob and it's locked.

Good.

I knock, step back, and watch the windows. I can hear her coming down the hall and when she opens it, she's gorgeous in a fitted wrap dress, hunter green that makes her red hair pop even more. And the way the dress brings out the emerald light in her eyes? It's like they can see right into my soul.

I'm on fire for her.

I rush her, grabbing her by the waist, kicking the door shut behind me and throwing her arms above her head, pinning her with my body to the wall.

Growling, I nip at her neck. She pushes back against me, grinding her hips on me.

"You didn't look out the window before opening the door, Miss O'Malley."

"A criminal isn't going to knock, Chief Hunter."

I huff out a laugh, rolling my hips into hers. "What am I going to do with you?"

"Anything you want."

I cup her face, letting her arms fall to my shoulders and kiss her softly. All I want to do is ravage her, and every time I'm near her, I can't get close enough. But I have to control myself. I can't keep ripping her clothes off every time I see her.

But our attraction can't be denied.

And it feels more than just a fling.

For me, anyway.

And I have no idea how I let myself get here so quickly with her, without knowing if she wants to meet me in this

same place.

“I’ve thought about you all day.”

“Yeah? What did you think about?” She plays with the hair on my neck and a shiver runs through me.

“How much I couldn’t wait to get over here and be with you. Do you want to go eat? I thought we could go to that Italian place on Main.”

“Are you asking me on a date, Mr. Hunter?”

I step back from her, taking her hand in mine. “I’m Mr. Hunter now? No more Chief, or boss? Jesus, Daisy, call me Vincent.”

She pauses. Then with a smirk. “Anything you want, Vince.”

I huff a laugh at her defiance. I love that she pushes the limit every single time. She makes it fun. She keeps me guessing. I’ve never felt so alive.

* * *

“How did you know Italian food is my favorite?”

“Lucky guess. When you and Angelina came home for dinner, I saw the way you devoured everything I had out.”

“Hmm.” She hums around her fork and drags it from her mouth. She began teasing me the minute we sat down. And if her toes brush my leg one more time, I’ll drop to the floor and have her for dessert. “I can’t wait to devour something else later.” She gives a wink and I drop my head, shaking it. “You’re cute when you blush, Vince.”

Rolling my eyes, I take a sip from my wine glass. She makes me forget a lot of the difficult things and makes life fun. So much so, that it never dawned on me that us being out together, clearly on a date, would spread like wildfire through the town. Especially since we ate at a restaurant right in the middle of Christmas.

We received a bunch of head turns when we walked in together. And when we were seated and I moved my chair closer to hers, we got looks from the servers.

They addressed us both politely. Everyone knows everyone in this town. But I know we'll be the gossip around the water cooler tomorrow morning, if we're not already right now.

"Guess we're doing this, huh?"

"What are we doing?"

My eyes burn into hers. "What are we doing, Daisy?"

"I love when you say my name, Vince."

My lips turn in. "Stop trying to avoid the topic."

She smiles. "I'm not avoiding anything. I know what I want. What do *you* want?"

The question of all questions. Do I do this? Do I do this for myself? Do I give us a chance? I don't have a clue how to be a good boyfriend. Is that what I am? A forty-four-year-old boyfriend?

"Considering we're out together, sitting close together at a romantic restaurant, I don't think it matters what we're doing. The town is going to call this one."

"Now who's avoiding, Vince?"

I sit back in my chair, watching her with a smile. She lays her hand on my thigh and I cover it with mine. "I don't know how to date. I've never had to learn."

"Then let me teach you, Chief Hunter."

"Just like that, huh? God, Daisy, your confidence amazes me." My eyes linger on hers and our fingers thread together. "How did we get here?"

"When I see something great, I go for it."

"Are you sure you want to go for it with an old man?"

She chuckles. "From what I saw the other night, there's nothing old about you."

“There’s more to life than just sex.”

“Great sex.”

“Great sex. But I’m being serious, Daisy. My life is hard, my job is hard. You know I can be a bossy asshole who’s only happy when I get my way.”

“I like things my way, too, Vince. But sometimes life brings you someone to help even things out. We can learn how to share the top spot together.” Her words run through me, exhilarating me. “Sometimes, I don’t mind bowing down.” She squeezes my thigh, a teasing look across her face, and I’m just about out of patience.

Leaning close to her, I whisper into her ear, my tone coming out a bit more gruffly than expected. “If I’m not inside you in the next ten minutes, I just might die.” I pull out my wallet and throw a few bills on the table. It’s more than enough to cover. “Let’s go.”

Chapter Twelve



D AISY

This. This is what I want. Vince is in charge every day. For the last how many years, he's taken care of everyone. He accepted the top role at the station and is in charge of keeping his officers and town safe. He stood next to his daughter every step of the way through high school, college and now. He's helped the Casanova Family when their sons were hurting.

And the fact he just admitted to me he doesn't know how to date tells me everything I already knew.

This man needs love. This man needs a safety zone to be in. And I'm going to give it to him.

We make quick steps to his truck and within minutes, we're racing down the street to his house. He hasn't said a word and the tension inside the cab of his truck feels like he's about to break. We pass red and green lights along the way. I'd make a comment about it always being Christmas, but he's not hearing me right now.

We pull into his driveway and he cuts the engine.

"Wait."

He jumps out and comes around to my door, opens it, helps me out and all about drags me up the walk.

“Vince! Slow down!”

He stops, turns and bends at the waist, catching me under mine and throwing me into a fireman’s carry. Laughing, I exclaim, “what are you doing?” I smack his ass as I hang over his shoulder, but he doesn’t stop.

He fumbles with the key in the door, but we’re inside within moments. “Clock is ticking, Daisy. I told you I had to be inside you in ten minutes. I think right now we’re at seven minutes.”

I slide down out of his hold and instead of remaining steady on my feet, I let my knees hit the floor right here in the hall and begin working to undo his belt.

“Oh, fuck.”

“Inside is inside, right?” He’s watching me with complete awe right now and I feel on top of the world. This is it. I want to take care of him, take care of someone who adores me. I see it in his eyes. He doesn’t think he deserves anything good and I don’t know why.

I want to be his good.

I unlatch his belt, pop his button, and pull his zipper down. I work his pants over his thick thighs and reach for the band of his boxer briefs. He’s already hard and when I pull them down, his thick cock springs to attention. I lean in and lick from the base to the tip.

“Nine minutes, Daisy.”

Chuckling to myself, I continue to tease him, licking and gently biting his tip. He threads his fingers through my hair and tingles run down my spine.

“Do that again.” His voice is gravely.

He likes the nibbles. *Noted.* I nip at his cock again and he groans. “Daisy. Holy shit, that feels incredible.”

I take him in, all the way to the back of my throat, and slowly pull out with suction. I repeat the action, starting a slow bobbing rhythm. My hands grip his thighs as I deep throat him once again.

His groans of pleasure have me so incredibly turned on. But I want to please him. I want this man to feel things he's never felt before.

"My turn. I've let you have your fun." When I look up in question, he wraps my hair in his fist. "Put your hands on my thighs. Hold on and sit still." I know exactly what he's saying, so I relax my jaw and let him take over. He's so used to being in charge he doesn't know how to *not* let it happen for long.

I'll keep working on it though.

I slide my knees wider, so I sit lower on the floor and look up at him as he works his hips in and out, in and out.

"Oh, Red, I wish you could see how stunning you are right now. How gorgeous you look with those pouty, pink lips stretched around my cock. I knew you'd suck me perfectly. That first day you were in my office, I pictured this."

His words are making me hot. My hips move on their own, searching for his touch. I reach down with one hand and slide it under my dress.

A deep laugh rumbles through his chest. "Need something, Daisy? Does my girl need my cock in her pussy?"

When I whine around his dick in my mouth, he laughs again, working his hips, face fucking me at a pleasurable pace.

"Not yet. Remember that punishment I promised?" He pulls out and I run my tongue around my lips, cleaning up the spit and pre cum that lingers on my lips. He grabs my breasts, squeezing, before dipping inside the front of my dress. He pulls the tie and my dress falls open, revealing the white lace bra and panties I wore.

"The color of innocence. You're far from it, though, aren't you?"

"Only for you, Vince." I lean in again, tonguing and licking, biting at his cock. I suck all around it, holding the base and squeezing his balls.

"Jesus Christ, Daisy! Make me come, baby. Right here. I want to come all over those pretty tits of yours. Pull 'em out of

your bra. Let me see those nipples.”

His dirty talk is next level. The dumb boys I’ve been with were crude. They thought it was hot to be disgusting. It wasn’t. This is hot. Vince is hot. Praising me, telling me how much he needs to be inside me. How much he needs to come because of me?

“Do it, Daisy.”

His bark has me up on my knees, yanking my tits from my bra as he leans down and rolls my nipple. I widen my mouth and let him take over. A few pumps and he grabs the back of my head and shoves his cock down my throat. I look up at him through teary eyes and see his eyes are closed, neck strained. I breathe through my nose and swallow, gagging a bit at his size.

“Fuck!” He shouts and I feel him begin to pulse. He pulls out and I stroke him to completion, letting him come all over my chest. I run my hand through it and grip him again, sliding easily over him time and time again. His cock jerks in my hand. I keep stroking until his breathing evens out.

“Oh, my beautiful girl. It’s like you were born to suck my dick.” He caresses the side of my face and runs his thumb across my bottom lip. “These lips are always so eager and ready to take me.” He pulls me up to stand in front of him. “You did so well. You make me feel so good.” He kisses me, no doubt tasting himself, and I’m melting. Being with a man versus a frat boy makes all the difference in the world.

He runs his hand through his release on my chest, circling my nipple with it.

“Vince.” I moan out.

“What do you need, Red?”

“I need you to fuck me.”

His eyes flare, and I feel his cock pulse against my belly. “I’ll take care of you. Let me fuck you in front of the Christmas tree again. You’re the best present I’ve had in years.”

* * *

After an hour of teasing, torture, biting and sucking, Vince finally fucked me right. He hit something inside me that's never been touched and my howls of ecstasy let him know. We were nothing but a sweaty mess mixed with the smell of sex right there in front of the tree. The lights shone around the room and danced off our bodies. It was the most wondrous night I've ever had.

He moved us to the shower, where he's taking extra special care to clean us up.

"All I have is my shampoo, so I apologize that you'll be smelling like a man." He kisses my shoulder as he shampoos my hair, massaging my scalp. I've never done this before and boy, could I get used to it.

"I don't mind smelling like you." I turn to face him as he leans my head back under the water to rinse the soap away. I reach up and gather some suds in my hand. Taking his cock in my hand, I work him slowly. This time, it's not to bring him to release, it's admiration. Like how he's doing for me.

He rinses the soap completely from my hair. Then squirts more in his palm, rubbing both hands together, creating lots of bubbles and massages my shoulders, my arms. He washes around my neck and collarbone, moving to my breasts, massaging and softly touching. Down across my belly, then he slowly dips between my legs.

"Are you sore? I was rough. I'm sorry, Daisy."

I run my hands over his chest, washing away the soap on his body. "I'm okay. I loved every minute of it."

His smirk says it all. "I loved every minute of it, too." He kisses me gently, backing us under the spray, rinsing away the bubbles.

"Come on, let's get out and get in bed."

He turns off the water and reaches for a towel he laid on the counter. He wraps me in a fluffy blue one, then takes the

other and wraps it around his waist.

He guides me to his bedroom. It's the first I'm seeing of it.

“Oh!” I gasp. “I love this room, Vince.” Soft lighting shows off deep brown wood floors. A full wall of floor to ceiling windows with an enormous bed with grey bedding. “We never make it past the living room, so this is nice.” I tease him and he laughs.

He rubs my body dry with the towel, holding me close. I stand naked in front of him, unashamed, and enjoying every sweep of his eyes over my body.

I pull his towel and dry him as well.

He turns down the comforter and lets me climb in, sliding his hand over my ass as I go. He follows behind me, allowing me to find a comfortable spot. Then he wraps himself around me.

We lay together in peace and I know I'll sleep the best I ever have, wrapped tight in his protection.

Chapter Thirteen



V INCENT

“For someone who doesn’t know how to date, you’re sure doing a good job.”

“Oh yeah? Feed you dinner, then feed you my cock? Is that all it takes nowadays? Things sure have changed since I was young.”

We both giggle together and snuggle in tighter. I feel the most relaxed I’ve been in years laying here with her. Who knew all I needed was a good woman in my bed?

“A good blow job will do that to you.” She teases me, I poke her side, and she giggles again.

“I’m being serious here. I’m trying to date, remember? I’m trying to be a Prince Charming.”

She laughs. “No white horses needed. A police cruiser will do just fine.” She squeezes my arms that are wrapped around her. “This is what I want for you. I want you to come away from that job, leave the station, and actually leave it there. I want you to come home at night and have a life.”

“I can never leave the station, Daisy. I’m always on, even when I’m not. I have to be. The town depends on me. My guys depend on me.”

She runs her fingers up and down my arm. I'm silent, letting it sink in, how many people I'm responsible for. "What do you think Angelina will say?"

"You two have a great relationship, so I think no matter what you say to her, she's going to accept it."

"You've already spoken to her, haven't you?" She snickers, then rolls me to my back and spreads herself across my chest. Propping herself up with an elbow, she draws circles around my heart. It's calming and peaceful and it's making me fall deep for her.

"I might've said a thing or two." I raise an eyebrow and she continues. "She actually gave me her blessing the day of the interview. She told me if I could get you to break for me, she's all for it."

"Really! You were trying to break me?" I asked incredulously, with a bit of a shock in my tone. She just waves me off.

"Not like that, and you know it. She's just worried and doesn't want you to be lonely."

Hearing that my daughter worries about me makes me realize I haven't been doing her any good by not having a life. I'm not showing her a healthy relationship. I'm not showing her how it is to allow yourself to be loved by someone. Sure, she has a wonderful relationship with her best friend, but she needs to know how a man is supposed to treat her.

And what do I do? I set a poor example and I take that best friend. I'm zero for two right now.

"Vince, she's really okay with it, honestly. The last thing I want to do is lose my girl, and I'm sure you feel the same, but she's very well adjusted to this idea. She's had plenty of time to come to terms. I may have been fawning over you since our freshman year."

I bark a laugh. "You've been stalking me for five years?"

It's her turn to poke me in the ribs this time.

“Stalking is a crime, right? Maybe I was hoping to get arrested.” When she winks at me, I pinch her sides and she squeals. “I liked using your picture when I needed a quick fix.” She has that teasing turn to her lip again.

“Oh yeah? What exactly did you think about when you were picturing me?”

She continues to lazily circle my chest with her fingers. “I can show you if you’d like?”

I run my hand up and down her arm. “I thought you were sore?”

“It doesn’t take long.” She laughs. “And it doesn’t involve you!” She jumps from the bed.

“Hey! Where are you going?”

“Just grabbing my purse quickly. Stay right there.”

I watch her naked body run from the bedroom. I sit up with my back against the headboard and wait, thinking of all the ways this woman has lit up my life. She saunters back into the room, holding what looks like a small bullet.

“What is that?” She touches something on the bottom, and the thing vibrates with a buzzing noise and I immediately know what she’s about to do. She climbs back onto the bed and lays down next to me. I turn on my side, reaching for her nipple, circling it with my finger.

“You carry that in your purse?”

“Mm. Never know when the mood may strike.”

How did I get so lucky? A gorgeous, young, fun loving woman who wants to show me a new way of life. “What are you gonna show me, Red?” My voice is low and strained.

“You wanted to know what I thought about?” When I nod, she continues. “I would lie in my bed and I would take this and I would rub it around my nipple.” She turns it on again, the buzzing sound fills the room. “I would picture your face. I would imagine you walking into the room and I would get wet at the thought of you dropping to your knees in front of me.” She takes the bullet and drags it down her belly until she gets

to her clit. “Usually, because I just needed a quick fix, I would put it right here.” She touches her clit with it and arches her back. “I would tease a little bit, circle around but never go inside, just swipe back-and-forth imagining your head between my legs.”

I’m getting hard just listening to her soft, seductive voice and it’s going to take everything I have not to slam inside her. I won’t do that to her again, so I take my cock in my hand and stroke myself while watching her.

“You’re so gorgeous like this.” I lean forward and flick her nipple with my tongue while she lays her head back. I stroke myself along with her rhythm, back-and-forth, the buzzing intertwining with our breaths, creating a new song in the room. We watch each other, and I study the way her lips part, the way her eyelids flutter. She’s got me in a hold. I can’t look away from her eyes that dance with affection, flirty fun, and love.

“Vince. I’m close. Will you get there with me?” Her breath leaves her lips in little pants.

“Whenever you’re around, it doesn’t take much, Daisy.” She reaches for me, her hand covering mine, and we stroke together as she hits her peak and I follow right behind her.

This woman is everything.

Chapter Fourteen



V INCENT

Having Daisy in my bed last night had me seeing stars. And when I wake with her lips around me, it feels like a dream. Only this dream is quickly becoming a reality that I want for the rest of my life.

I slowly come to, reaching down, brushing her hair from my thighs. I look down at my body and see her watching me, my cock in her mouth.

“What a fucking sight you are!”

Laying my head back down on the pillow, I enjoy her tasting me. Last night felt good. I felt confident in my decision to take her out. It happened so fast, the words spilling from my lips that I’d pick her up, my actions didn’t have time to battle with my words or thoughts. I wanted to be with her, so I was. Bringing her to my bedroom felt natural. The closeness of another heart to mine is out of this world. Shutting myself off from everything for so long, I never knew it was something I was missing.

“Daisy.” Her name leaves my lips and my hips begin to move. “You’re trying to take charge again. I told you pushing that limit would get you in trouble.”

She lets my cock pop from her mouth and crawls up my body. She straddles me, slowly rotating her hips, her wet pussy sliding easily over my cock. Leaning forward, she places her hands on my chest and pushes her breasts out close to me. I throw one arm behind my head, propping myself up for a better view and reach for her with my other hand, circling her nipple and giving it a slight tug.

“You’re lucky you called my name when you woke up. Otherwise, you’d be the one in trouble.”

A low rumble leaves my chest as I watch her smirk back at me. In an instant, I’ve got her pinned face first to the bed with her arms behind her back and my cock nestled in between her ass cheeks.

“Back talk will get you in cuffs, sweetheart.”

She wiggles her ass, trying to tempt me. I spank her once.

“You’re pretty fast for an old guy.” Her body shakes as she laughs at her little joke.

I chuckle back at her. “You haven’t seen anything yet.” Still holding her hands behind her arm, I rise above her and slide a knee between her legs, widening them. I can see she’s wet and glistening, making it so easy for me to slide right inside. Intertwining both her hands with my left hand, I use my free hand to tease her folds. Collecting her wetness, I run it up to her ass, teasing her hole.

She catches her breath and her body stills. I lean down close to her ear, giving her lobe a quick nip. “Have I found something new for you, Red?”

She gives a quick nod, her eyes round. Not with fear, but in wonder. “We’ll take time getting you ready for this.” I release her hands and they fall to her sides, her body limp and pliable beneath me. I knead her ass cheeks, pulling them apart and run my finger over her puckered hole again. I massage around it, dipping into her pussy, using her wetness to tease her again. She whimpers as I barely brush her entrance. “Oh, sweetheart. The things I’m going to show you.”

Fuck. I'm hard as steel right now. I was supposed to be punishing her, leaving her wanting me all day long. And now I'm going to have to jerk off in the shower. I spank her twice and climb from her and off the bed.

"Get to work before you're late. I heard your boss is a real asshole." I smirk as she whips her head around to me, eyes wide and brows furrowed.

"You're not going to..." she trails off, eyes still wide as she glances at my hard cock.

"No. You're going to work and I have the day off."

"Vince!" She sits up quickly and when I turn my back and walk to my bathroom, she calls out again. "I'll finish the job myself. Where's my bullet?"

Laughing, as I go into the bathroom, swiping her little toy from the counter and turning it on. The buzzing sound fills the room. "You mean this?"

Her eyes get as red as her hair. "I'll just use my hand then."

I toss the bullet back on the counter and charge her on the bed, grabbing her hair and wrapping it around my fist. I pull her head back and loom over her, our lips just brushing, we're so close. "You won't touch yourself until I say so, Miss O'Malley." Her eyes flare with excitement. "Don't try me, either. I'll know if you do." I peck her on the lips. "I'm going to make it so good for you. Don't ruin it by coming early." My next kiss is longer, heavier.

Fuck. I can't leave this woman.

Letting her hair unwrap from my hand, I force myself away from her. I grab a pair of shorts from my drawer and slide them on. "Go take a shower. I'll make you coffee to take with you to work." Her look of awe will carry me through the day.

* * *

After Daisy left my house to go to the station, I jerked off. Twice. I told her she couldn't come. I never said I couldn't. If I didn't, she would have consumed my every thought today. And I have work to do.

Last week, I met Billy Casanova at Daisy's house during lunch break to measure her windows. Then I had him order brand new ones and insisted he fit me into the schedule for this week to install them. I cannot take another night knowing someone has access to her if they want to.

Every time I ask her to stay over, she gives me a look like she knows why I'm asking. And I don't want to undermine her need for independence, but I don't sleep well when she isn't with me.

Each time I drive into Lakeshore, my anxiety spikes. Today is no different. Pulling up to the curb in front of her house, I see Billy is already here with his crew. Jumping out of my truck, I meet him at her front door.

"Hey bro, how's it hanging?"

We clap hands and give a quick hug. "Good, man. Thanks so much for squeezing me in."

He shakes his head. "When the cops ask you to do work, you never put them off." That famous Casanova smirk that he and his brothers love to showcase makes an appearance. "I have to say, Chief. I'm impressed." His lips twist and I know I'm in for a bit of razzing from him. Billy, Tom's twin, is the youngest Casanova son and definitely the most wild. He lives each day without a care for tomorrow. When he was younger, he had a bit of trouble. I was there for him and his family, doing everything I could to keep him out of jail. Billy just didn't know how to say no to anything and when Tom joined the Marine Corps and wasn't there to rein Billy in, he spiraled.

He's got a heart of gold though, and would give the shirt off his back for anyone who needed it. It's why we worked, *I worked*, so hard to get him back to his family.

“Does she call you Daddy?” His dumb question pulls me from my thoughts.

“Jesus! You and Cash! You guys are awfully curious about the daddy thing. Should I be worried?”

Billy barks a laugh. “Get the fuck outta here! You know I’m asking because Adley wants the inside story.”

His girlfriend Adley is a romance writer and, being that Billy loves to live in a fictional world, my love life seems right up his alley.

“Adley has enough motivation for her next story right at home.” I punch his shoulder. “How’s the bar?”

He chuckles. “Smooth transition, Chief. It’s good. Busy. Now, back to your girl.”

Rolling my eyes, I walk to the truck where his guys are unloading the windows. “Can you get this all done today?”

“Of course. I’ve got another couple guys from the crew on Gum Drop coming around lunch time. With the extra manpower, we’ll be complete and out of here by the time she comes home from work.”

Nodding and trying to gauge how mad she’s going to be when she gets here, I debate whether I want to be here or let her come find me.

Reaching out and shaking his hand once more, I thank him profusely for getting the work done quickly. “What do you think of this neighborhood? Worth looking into trying to clean it up?”

He shrugs. “You tell me. Anything is worth it, but not sure we can shake the bad rap it’s got.” He nods to the house across the street. I glance quickly just in time to see the curtains close on a window. “They’ve been watching us work all morning, and I’ve got a feeling they’re not happy about it.”

I’ve got to get her out of here.

“Would your family be interested?”

“Adam is always interested in more business. If you’re serious, let’s sit with Bobby and see what he thinks. We can build anywhere, but he’s the one who’s gotta sell them!”

Nodding, “A’ight man, I’ll catch you later.” I head to my truck and hear Billy call out. “Hey, swing by Moose’s around six for a drink.” I throw a thumbs up in the air, already looking forward to that drink at our local bar, climb in and start my truck up.

Taking another look as the guys start work on Daisy’s house, I think to myself, ‘yep, she’s going to kill me, but it will be worth it to know she’s safe.’

Chapter Fifteen



D AISY

I sat at work all day dreaming of Vince. All I have to do is picture his beautiful face, strong jaw, blue eyes and it sets the most dirty fantasies I have into motion. There's something about remembering how his hands feel on me, what they do to me, how they make me shake. It's pure bliss. It's safety. I could just lay there and let him do whatever he wants because he knows what I need.

Being with an older man was never on my to do list. Yes, I teased my best friend about her hot dad, but I never thought I would be here. I never thought he would entertain me in that way, and if he did, that we'd actually make a go of it.

When I'm with Vince, I don't see age. I see trust, care, security. He gives reassurance that he's not looking to control me, he's just looking out for me.

Except when he talks about my house. I know he's not happy with the neighborhood. I'm not exactly happy with the neighborhood, but it was in my price range and it was a work in progress.

Like me.

I struggled throughout high school to find what I was good at. I'm very empathetic and just want to help others. That

translates to being taken advantage of quickly, once people see how eager you are to help. So I began locking myself down, doing things for me only, despite the need to still want to help at every turn.

It led to a battle within myself of wanting to make myself happy, but still having to guard my heart.

When I met Angelina in college, I knew the minute she walked through the door that she wasn't looking to take from me. She was looking to build me up, along with herself, and together we'd take on the world. We didn't know what or how we were going to. We were eighteen. No one knows what they want at that age. But I knew when I found her, I found a sister for life.

Here I am, at twenty-three, and I feel that I've found my calling at the police station. I'm the voice when people call in need. I'm the voice that can calm their panic.

And I'm the voice that can make my boss drop to his knees. Having power like that is breathtaking.

His act of dominance today has me anticipating every dirty thing he's going to do to me tonight. And I cannot wait.

I clocked out at six in the evening and drove straight home. My plan is to shower quickly, put on some cute lingerie and a trench coat. Cliche? Sure, but I know it's going to drive Vince crazy.

He's into that old school, teasing pleasure. And I love to give it to him.

Driving out of Christmas, I enter Lakeshore. Taking the first left onto Sycamore, I drive down to the end of the street and into my driveway. One of two flood lights comes on.

"Crap. Not again. I just changed that bulb." I put the car in park, still idling, and look at the front of my house. "What in the world?"

It looks different. It's still run down and in desperate need of new siding, but my windows are brand new. I can see the new wood frames surrounding them and they're crystal clear.

Not the dirty filmy ones that were there. No matter how hard I scrubbed, I couldn't get them clean.

One name comes to mind.

Vince.

“Oh, hell no.” I slam the car into reverse and head towards his house. My blood is boiling. One, he didn't ask. Two, he obviously took my key and used it to get in. Three, who the fuck paid for this?

Driving down his street, I see his driveway is empty. Backing out, I quickly race through the streets. It's not until I'm on Main Street that I notice his truck as I drive by Moose's.

“Oh, Vincent. You've been working secretly at my house and now you're out drinking.”

I park right behind him, thinking that his take charge attitude is still getting him in trouble. Walking into the bar, I scan the crowd quickly, and when I meet eyes with Cash, his grow round and mine narrow. I can read his lips as he nudges Vince and says 'you're fucked, bro.' I grin to myself because, no, Vincent, you won't be fucked.

I beeline toward their table and watch as Vince eyes me, sitting slightly taller in his seat.

“Hey, Daisy”. He addresses me nonchalantly as I pull up to the table. The guys all have their eyes on me. I can feel it without looking at them.

“Don't 'hey Daisy' me.” When I hear a snicker, I shoot Billy a death glare. His snicker immediately turns to a cough, and he actively looks everywhere but at me.

“So, funny thing.” I pop a hip and cross my arms. “After work, I drove home. The whole way I was planning this really sexy night for us. After the way you left me hanging this morning, I thought I needed to up the ante, you know? Really make you want it.”

I glance at the guys who are worse than women right now. They're completely captivated by the show I'm performing,

and it dawns on me that they probably didn't know about our relationship. Turning to them, I say "If you didn't already know we were fucking, now you do." I know it's mean, and I know we're doing more than that, but I'm pissed as hell right now.

"Daisy, why don't we-" Vince tries to redirect me, but I'm not having it.

"So, my plan was to go home, take a hot shower," I drop my voice and lean in, "and put on the sexiest lingerie I own." I pause for effect, running my finger down his arm, the guys still all wrapped up in my words. "Then I was going to throw on a long raincoat and drive to your house."

"That sounds like a nice idea, Red." He chokes out the words.

"It does, doesn't it?" I step closer, running my fingers through his hair, leaning down. "But when I pulled up to my house, I couldn't do that. Know why, Vincent?"

He visibly swallows. He's trying so hard to remain in charge here.

"Why?"

"Because I wasn't sure I pulled up to the right house. See, *my* house is old and needs a lot of TLC, that I cannot wait to give to it. I am *in love* with the idea that I will make my home *exactly* the way *I want it to be*. It will take time, but the feeling of pride I'll get from *doing it myself* is something that can't be bought."

"I can imagine that would be a great feeling."

"Yes, it would be. But I was robbed of that today. See, the house I pulled up to had brand new windows. All brand new molding. Every. Fucking. Window, Vince."

I wait and when he gives me nothing more, I ask, "What did you do to my house, Vincent?"

"I made it safer."

Those words shoot through my veins and I'm instantly on fire. "No! You overstepped!" He tries to stand, but I push him

back down in the chair by his shoulder. “I already said I wanted to do this on my own. You didn’t respect that. You’re so used to taking charge that you don’t know how to listen.” When he tries to cut me off, I put my hand up. “Just like now. You’re not listening. But hear this. I don’t need a *Daddy*, Chief Hunter.” I throw my hand between him and I. “That’s not what this is. *This*”, I point between us again, “should be respect and compatibility. Standing beside me, not leading, not following, but walking together. Side by side. Until you learn that, you’ll be on the outside of each of those windows.”

When I turn to walk away, because *mic drop*, I hear the giggles of the guys and then I feel his hand grab my arm. I freeze as I feel his body rise to his full height behind me.

“Are you done with your temper tantrum?”

I spin on him. “You were wrong, Vince!”

“I’m wrong for wanting to keep my woman safe?”

Hearing him call me his, has me pausing for a split second. But then I’m reminded that he’s trying to control. Wanting to do nice things for me and doing them behind my back are two different items.

“You’re wrong for not talking to me about it. And you know it.”

“Come home with me. Let’s talk there.”

I almost fall for it. His words say one thing, but his eyes say another. He’s trying to get me in his home where he can control the surroundings. Yes, he wants me for me. And I one hundred percent believe he wants to keep me safe. But without realizing the importance of including me in decision making, he won’t succeed in this relationship or a future one.

“I have to be at work early tomorrow. My boss can be a real asshole. Good night Vincent.” I hurry away from him, before he can grab my hand, before I can second guess that I’m turning my back on the only man that has made me see a real future.

Chapter Sixteen



V INCENT

Is it wrong that Daisy's scolding turned me on? Watching her turn her back on me and walk out the door was the hardest thing to let happen. And when I sat back down with the guys at the table and they started giving me shit, it took all I had not to punch them out.

"Just tell her it's a Christmas gift. You're going steady now, so a gift is mandatory." Billy remarks in a sarcastic tone.

"Great idea, Bill. That should at least get him inside the house again. Back in her bed, though?" Cash sits back in his chair, stroking his chin like he's thinking hard. "Maybe a squeegee to go with the windows?"

Tom busts out in a joyous laugh. "Find a red one to match her hair. Chicks love the matchy matchy shit."

"I know you're all enjoying this."

"Oh, we're more than enjoying this!" Cash butts in again. "It's about time you found a woman. And the fact that you found one you *thought* would let you stay in charge? Even better. Because, man, she's going to beat you down at every turn."

I take a long pull from my beer. I didn't look for a younger woman I could run over. I wasn't looking for a woman at all. I

don't want it to be easy, though. That's always been the problem. I never found a woman that could hold their own with me. I like to be in charge. I have to be in charge, but I need a bit of a fight. I need someone who's going to push back when I need it. Give me a night off from worrying about everyone and everything around me.

Daisy does that. She has a way about her that when I'm with her, my focus turns to her. She knows how to seduce me with her body, yes, but her words. Her soft heart. Her laughter. It all helps ease my mind for a bit so I can recharge.

"This may surprise you guys, but I don't want someone I can push around. It's why I have you fools." I smirk at them. "Daisy knows when I need to be the Chief and she knows when I need a break. It's remarkable how in sync she is with me.

"Chief, if you start singing a love song, I'm out of here."

Flipping him off, I finish my beer and stand. "I'm going to her house."

Tom pulls me back down in my chair by my arm. "No, you're not. Not tonight. Let her be. You'll only make matters worse if you go there trying to strong arm her."

Collapsing into the chair, I eye him. He's right.

"Farrah finally getting through to you?"

"Nope. It was *all* me." Cash gloats. "I finally broke him, boss. Made him see what an asshole he's been for the last seven years."

Tom pushes Cash and they play fight with each other for a moment. I've noticed a change in Tom's demeanor, but I've been so wrapped up in Daisy, I didn't question it. "Yeah? Care to share?"

"Not right now." Tom's quick response means he's still not quite ready to talk. And that's fine. I know he's got his demons. We'll get to them when he's ready.

"Okay, guys. I'm heading out. To *my* home. You guys are experts at pissing women off, so if you tell me to stay away for

the night, I'll listen."

Grabbing my wallet from my pocket, I throw some money on the table. "Bill, thanks again for the windows. Guys, be safe. I'll see you both at work tomorrow."

"Chief, wait. Those two side windows that face the empty field? They were shaved down pretty good."

Narrowing my eyes at him. "Shaved down how?"

"Like someone's been working on getting in."

My fists clench and my blood races. "Recent?"

He shrugs. "Definitely not old. But the new ones are going to hold just fine. That house probably sat empty for a long time, so who knows what it's been through."

Nodding once, I walk to the front, giving a wave to Al, the co-owner of Mooses, along with Billy. Getting in my truck, I head home, desperately fighting the urge to turn my truck around and drive straight to her. I know I should have asked her to let me do the work. But I knew if I did, and she said no, I would have to honor that. This way, she's safer, even though I'm in the doghouse. I'd rather work for her forgiveness than lie awake worrying about her at night. I know I can't force her to want my help, but doesn't she see I'm doing it because I care?

Chapter Seventeen



D AISY

I'll admit, I enjoy having Vince take care of things for me. I've been over cared for my whole life that when it came time to move out and do it myself, I couldn't wait. I love being able to depend on myself, not having to answer to anyone. If I screw it up, it's on me. But speaking with Vince about the house and what I should focus on next has given me a new perspective. It's made me realize I don't have to be alone in making my decisions, but I don't have to be overrun by someone else's ideas either. I appreciate his advice and honestly? Having conversations about mundane things like home repairs has felt good. Normal. Like a proper relationship.

I don't want to be coddled and held back. So I'm still figuring out how to feel about Vince handling it. He has the same heart I do. I want to help, give, make someone feel good. And so does he. He just does it abrasively. He does it his own way, like a bull in a china shop. He thinks of something to do, and it happens. A thought crosses his mind and he doesn't analyze it. He reacts. It's what makes him a great cop, a great leader. I'm lucky to know him.

Vince has been listening to my ideas with the house and giving me good insight back about what is priority versus what is cosmetic and what can be pushed to the bottom of the list. By having these conversations, I thought I finally got through

to him I don't need someone to take care of me. I only need someone to stand beside me.

His nature to handle all things battles with my nature to handle all *my* things.

I'm pretty sure it's his age, and the fact it's just been him for so long, that makes him set in his ways. Angelina has let him do whatever he wants for her, but she's also been living on her own for five years. So though he's been helping and taking care of her, she's not living with it daily.

Suddenly Vince has someone new in his life and he feels he needs to take care of daily.

I have the weekend off and though my original plan was to spend it naked with Vince, my new plan is to remain in my home and paint. I'm still unpacking a lot of boxes, working in one room at a time. I have to live here for a while before I feel complete about where things need to be. And every time I turn around, it seems things are not in the spot they should be.

"Pizza! Am I right on time?" Angelina knocks once, then throws open the door carrying two pizza boxes and two bottles of wine. Fuck. I didn't lock it. Thank God it wasn't Vince at the door.

"You always are! Now drop the pizza and grab a paintbrush!"

"Girl. I'm not here to work. I'm here to gossip."

Smirking at her, "Yeah? Who you wanna gossip about? Caaassshhh?" I draw out his name and shimmy my hips.

"I am single now, you know!"

My eyes go wide. "Really? Oh my God! I can see it! You two would be perfect!"

"Slow your roll, sister. I'm too busy for a boyfriend, hence the reason I left Jack and his needy ways. And two? Can you imagine what my dad would do if he saw Cash and I together?" She laughs, loudly.

"He definitely wouldn't give you a hard time about the age difference."

Ruling her eyes at me. “Speaking of, what did you do to my old man?”

I turn on her so quickly I almost spill the paint can at my feet. “What did I do? Maybe it’s what he did! Did you see my house? Look at those fucking windows! You know I can’t afford them, yet here they are! All freshly installed.” I narrow my eyes as she hides a smile. “And done by those Casanovas you all love so much. Who are they? The town saviors? No family can be that perfect, I assure you.”

Marching over to her, getting more and more mad at her wide smile, I snatch the bottles from her and head to the kitchen. Using my automatic wine opener, I’ve got both bottles opened in ten seconds flat. When I turn, she’s got a smug look across her face.

“Don’t look at me like that! This and my bullet are the only two items always at one hundred percent charge in this house.”

“You’re just *hangry*. Let’s eat and drink, then you can yell all you want.”

“I don’t want to yell!” I yell and she giggles. Digging around for ice in the freezer, I grab two glasses and slam them on the counter, and continue, still, with my voice raised. “I don’t want to be mad! And I definitely don’t want to be here eating pizza with you!”

“Pour two glasses each. We’re going to need to be double fisted for this.”

Trying to hide my laugh, I open the cupboard and pull down two more and turn to her with my hand on my hip and a brow raised. “Okay smartass, double it.”

Angelina bursts into giggles and fills all four glasses. “If you don’t want to be here with me, where do you want to be?”

“In bed with your father!” My outburst has her doubling over in laughter. I can’t contain myself and I follow right behind her with the laughs. This is what a best friend is. Someone you can tell your darkest secrets to and say the most

outlandish things to and they don't shame you for it. They just pour an extra glass and let you yell about it.

"Come on, grab the pizza. We're eating it straight from the box, on the floor, just like the old days in college."

* * *

Hours later, we've killed a box of pizza and both bottles of wine. I've relented to admitting I love the windows and Angelina has convinced me to give her dad a second chance.

"I was always going to go back, Ang. I just have to make him understand he can't take over."

"He's always going to take over. That's his nature, not his age."

She pauses for a moment, and I feel like she has more to say. "What? We've never kept secrets. Tell me."

She sighs and sits back. "I should let him tell you this, but I'm not sure he'd ever bring it up. And you need to understand a bit more of where he's coming from."

I get a little nervous until she starts speaking again. "My dad had a sister, but she passed away when they were teenagers."

"Oh, Ang! I never knew that!"

"I don't ever talk about it, because it's just not a part of my life. I never knew her and dad doesn't talk much about her so I don't know how to feel about it, you know? Like, I'm sad for him, for losing someone so close to him, but I don't understand it. I can have sympathy, but he blocks it out, so I've never questioned him."

"Do you know what happened?"

"She was killed by a hit-and-run driver. The police arrested no one and let the case die. My dad was only fourteen, but from what my grandma tells me, that's what pushed him to join the police academy. She told me he couldn't understand

how someone took an oath to do right by others, yet didn't follow through."

Remembering the way he got mad at me for walking home and insisting Cash pick me up for work makes sense now. The way he watches me and always calls on nights I'm not staying at his house shows his concern. But is he only showing concern because he's trying to erase the trauma? Or does he genuinely want me?

When I'm silent for too long, Angelina speaks up. "Get out of your head right now, D. I know what you're thinking and it's not like that."

"What am I thinking?"

"You're thinking his childhood trauma is what's driving your relationship." Narrowing my eyes at her smug grin, she leans back against the couch and empties her wine glass. "See? I'm right. And you're wrong. Yes, her death has impacted the way he carries himself, but he's always been this guy. He's always wanted to handle things and be in charge. I hate to break it to you, but you're not different in that respect."

She's still got that smug look. She knows what she's doing. "But how you differ from everyone else is the way you make him smile now."

"Sex makes everyone smile."

She shakes her head at me. "Stop deflecting." She stands, gathering the empty pizza box and empty bottles. I follow with our own empty glasses. "You're good for him, and he's good for you. I don't give a shit what anyone thinks about your age gap. I don't care what anyone thinks about you being my best friend and dating my dad. You're both the happiest I've seen in years and that's all I care about. So, get your head out of your ass, get over the window debacle, and let him do what he's going to do."

"What would I do without you?"

"You'd be eating pizza alone, looking out filthy windows."

We laugh and hug. "I love you, girl. Thank you for coming over tonight. It's just what I needed."

“I know it is. Now, lock up, keep a light on, and I’ll talk to you tomorrow.”

“Yes, mom.” She sticks her tongue out at my cheeky reply and lets herself out. I watch to make sure she gets into her car safely and when she pulls away from my home, I lock the door and head upstairs, replaying last night’s events over and over again.

Leaving Vince at the bar was tough. I wanted to go home with him. I wanted to be wrapped in his arms, but I needed to take a stand as well. He can’t just dictate what goes on and he can’t make decisions without me. Especially ones that are incredibly important to me.

But hearing Angelina talk about his sister, I understand more of why he does what he does. A terrible accident like that changes a person. It could have made him bitter and nasty, not giving a shit about anyone. But instead, it made him into a strong, dependable, maybe a bit authoritative, good man.

I’ll take one of those any day.

His words about my neighborhood filled my mind, and when I finally turned off the lights and laid down in bed, the silence on the street bothered me. The lack of a beating heart and quiet breaths next to me had my body tense. I had the sudden urge to jump in my car and drive to his house, needing his warmth to soothe me. I didn’t know if it was just me missing him, or if there really was something strange about the area.

Then I swore I heard a noise outside. I lay perfectly still, heart beating so loudly in my chest that if someone was out there, they’d know exactly where to find me. I reached for my phone, holding it close, fighting the need to call Vince.

“Just relax, Daisy.” I talked myself down from a panic attack. Then talked myself into being mad at Vince again. All his chatter about this being a bad neighborhood has me feeling it now. The wind picked up and a few branches brush the side window. I turn and see shadows, assuming it’s the trees dancing in the wind.

I hear a car door slam and voices. Then a front door creaks and slams shut.

Silence.

I assume it's the house across the street, which only comes alive at night. I swiftly lower my shades to prevent any visibility into the room. Climbing back under my blankets, I steady my breathing and wait for the morning.

Chapter Eighteen



V INCENT

It's been two days. Two whole days since she's spoken to me or come over. It feels like a lifetime. How can such a short time of knowing someone turn into a slow death of missing them after just forty-eight hours?

Tom and Cash keep telling me to hang tight. I've got to let her come around on her own. If I go barging into her home, both literally and figuratively, *again*, I'll only push her away. They've reminded me time and time again I'm an asshole and I'm lucky to have a woman even take a second look at me, let alone do the things Daisy lets me get away with.

But I can't wait anymore. She's had the weekend off and I've been here at the station needing to keep myself busy. What else was I going to do? Sit and sulk at home? I can do that here. But now it's Sunday night and knowing I'm going to see her tomorrow and we haven't talked is a killer. I don't want the tension and I just know Cash or Tom will say some shit that will make me break.

And I don't need to lose my shit here in front of the Officers of Christmas.

Determined to see her regardless of her anger, I quickly close out my reports, shut down my computer, and grab my

keys. Pulling up out front of her house and seeing the new windows only gives me a slight reprieve.

I hate this block and I hate that she's here. Alone.

Knocking on her front door, praying she lets me in, I glance around at the foundation. Nothing out of the ordinary. Her side gate is open, though. I quickly step over and latch it closed, then come back to wait at her door. Hearing her walk down the hall and flip the working locks has me feeling better. She opens it and I'm met with the most gorgeous woman I've ever laid eyes on. Every time I see her, she just gets better. This relaxed look, though? Hair up, shorts and a tank? It's got to be one of my favorite looks, and I have to fight the urge to push her against the wall and take what's mine.

As if reading my thoughts, she leans against the doorjamb, arms crossed, challenging me. "Hello, Chief Hunter."

"Miss O'Malley."

We have a standoff. She refuses to talk and is making me do the work. That's fine. This is my show anyway.

"We need to talk." She nods once and steps back, allowing me to pass. I keep walking into the living room, noting the freshly painted walls.

"It looks good in here. You've been working on it?"

"Yep. All weekend."

Her clipped tone sets me on edge, but her eyes dance with mischief. She's pushing buttons on purpose and that means one thing: I haven't lost her.

We both sit on the couch, but at opposite ends.

Taking a breath, I start. "There are things you don't know about, Daisy and-"

"That's what you're leading with? No 'I miss you'? No 'I was wrong'? No apology?" She's staring intently at me, and all I can do is watch her lips move. She clears her throat and pulls me back to the present.

“I told you I’m new at this.” She watches me expectantly. “Daisy, I’m sorry-”

“What are you sorry for, Vince?”

I let out a little laugh at the audacity of this woman. “Keep interrupting and you’re going to be the one who’s sorry.”

Her lips twist, and she pulls her knees up in front of her. My eyes drift up and down her legs, focusing on her thighs that I’ve missed having wrapped around my head for the last two days.

“I won’t apologize for the windows. Especially after Billy told me the old ones had been tampered with.” Her eyes widen slightly. “And I’m not saying that to scare you, or maybe I am, but my point is that you need to know what I did was out of concern for you. And after he told me that? I’m glad I did.”

Taking a breath, I decide I’ve got to go all in. I’ve got to let her know a bit of my history and why I do the things I do. “When I was fourteen, I lost my sister. She was walking home from school and was hit by a car. Violet was in her senior year of high school and was my best friend. She never looked at me like I was the annoying little brother, probably because I stood taller than her before she even entered high school. She let me hang out with her friends and never chased me out of her room.”

“It wasn’t uncommon for her to be walking. None of her friends had cars and our parents only had one. Mom was a stay at home mom and Dad took her anywhere she needed to go.”

She watches me as I continue to talk. “I was working every odd job I could find. My plan was to buy her a car for graduation. Or at least give her every bit of money I had saved so she could add to it and get what she wanted. She wasn’t going to go away to college, but she would need a car to get back and forth to the community school on the other side of town. She said she was fine to take the bus, but my dad didn’t like that idea. I didn’t either, if I’m being honest. It’s what drove me to work for every dime I could.”

Daisy is quiet, watching me with eyes that show concern and sympathy. It doesn't feel like pity, though, which is usually the case when people find out. That's why I don't talk about it.

It's been so long now, not that I'll ever forget, but the time has eased the anger, at least.

Until Daisy. Finding her has reignited my desperate need to protect.

She turns to her knees and crawls to me on the couch, sliding onto my lap, facing me. My arms automatically wrap around her back, slide to her hips, and back up. I just need to touch her. She's comforting to me. She feels like home.

"Vince. I'm so sorry this happened to you. I'm sorry for your family and how this affected who you are today." She runs her hands through my hair, tracing my forehead and down to my chin. "But the man you are today is exceptional. Whether or not you know it, you've taken a terrible situation and turned it for good. You used it for good for yourself, and for others."

I tell her she's wrong, but she cuts me off.

"And don't tell me I'm wrong." She taps my nose and smirks. "This town is lucky to have you leading them. Your friends are lucky to have you on their side. Your daughter is lucky to have you in her corner." She swallows. I track her tongue, wetting her lips. "And I'm lucky to have you here." She takes my hand and lays it on her heart. My own beats erratically because the words I've never uttered to another woman in that sort of way are desperately trying to escape my lips.

"What you take from my body, you have to be willing to take from my heart, too. Accept what I'm freely giving you. I *want* to give you everything. You deserve to have it." She's still straddling me and bears down on me. I don't think she even knows she's doing it, but we both have this need to just be closer to one another.

“Why do you think our physicality is so good? Because that’s where we’re most relaxed. And open. To do what we do? You have to trust. But you’ve still got a wall, Vince. And I don’t know if it’s my age, the fact I’m an employee or because of Angelina, but I’m not going anywhere. And the only thing that will chase me away is if you don’t open up to me. So this is on you. Are you ready?”

She’s begging for me. For my love. “What more of me is there? I’m an older, closed off guy with a broken childhood. You’re young and so full of life. Why get wrapped up with me?”

“I don’t see that guy like you do, Vince.” She traces my face again and around my eyebrows. “I see a good man, a protective man who has surrendered his own life to give back. There’s nothing sexier than that. The way people depend on you and know they can depend on you is to be admired.”

“But the one person who needed me the most never got closure.”

“You don’t think your daughter brings a piece of your sister around you every day? You don’t think the universe gave you a girl on purpose? Not as a replacement, but as a reminder that you’re more than capable of loving and being soft. You’re more than capable of moving on, not forgetting, but not letting it hold you back, either. Angelina told me a little, but she doesn’t know anything about your sister. She should, Vince. She should know her family history. She said her grandma told her she sees your sister’s attitude in her. I’m betting her ‘give it to you straight’ attitude is a direct part of your sister.”

I smile, because she’s right. God, Daisy just gets it. I love this part of her. She’s so open and able to see clearly. She’s not jaded and gives me a new perspective on ideas that I’ve closed myself off from.

“Do you forgive me?”

“Of course I forgive you. The part I need you to understand is that I was spoon-fed for so long, I need to know I can do things on my own. My parents are good people, but

they're too over protective. It's why I went away to college. Why I've moved here. I need to be given the chance to do things on my own, Vince. I appreciate the windows, I really do, but let me learn on my own. Stand beside me for support. That's all I want. I don't need to be taken care of. I just need to know you'll accept me for who I am."

I brush her gorgeous red hair off her shoulder and run my hands down her arms. "You asked if I'm ready? I'm ready for you to show me everything you want and need from me. I want to be better for you. I'm a work in progress, Daisy, and you've invaded my thoughts every damn day since I've met you. Looks like I was just waiting for the right woman to come along."

Chapter Nineteen



V INCENT

I'm a forty-four-year-old boyfriend. I repeated this phrase over and over to myself in the mirror, while shaving this morning. Then I laughed at myself. Being with Daisy last night, talking out what we expect and what we're hoping for, was so unbelievably sexy. It never dawned on me that intimacy is what's been missing in my life. Yes, the sex is outrageous, and I missed that too, but having someone to talk to, plan with, and care for? It's what I need in my life.

Now, if I can just not be so overbearing while doing it, we'll be good.

Learning curve.

Today has been a day. I was at the station early, going through reports. These break-ins have been a thorn in my side lately, but they've all been on the western limits of Christmas. Daisy lives on the eastern town line, but I still don't like it. And I still need to approach the house subject with caution, but if she's mine? Then she needs to be in my house.

End of story.

Snickering to myself, I can only imagine how that conversion will go.

The station filled quickly and being a Monday, there was a lot of action. Cash and Tom were in and out all day together. Seeing those two develop a camaraderie is exactly what I was hoping for. I need to check in with Tom's brothers, though, and get the full scoop.

Daisy killed me all day. The moment she entered the station, she had me hard. We've gone a few too many nights not being together. And last night, our emotions were just too strong to go any further. It was intimacy at its finest. And yeah, sex would have been great, but it was more important to leave with a sense of togetherness for more than just our bodies. Our hearts need it, too.

But I'm desperate for her and seeing her beautiful face and that banging body had me tied up instantly. She teased me all day. Every time I walked onto the floor, her eyes followed me. She traced her lips while talking to me, and bit the end of the pen when I answered. And if she walked by my office, swinging those thick fucking hips one more time, I was going to break.

But it's early evening now, and my distraction has kept me here late finishing up reports. Hearing a knock on the door, I call out to have them enter. Daisy walks in and I watch as she doesn't say a word, but closes the door carefully. When she flips the lock, then closes the shades, my interest is piqued. I lean back in my chair, turning it to the side for a better view of her.

"Why are you here, Red? You want to continue to tease me?"

A small grin crosses her lips.

"I know what you were doing today. Watching me, licking those lips and walking around the station with that short skirt. I wanted nothing more than to slide my hand up it. I bet you wanted that too, didn't you?"

She shrugs. "I wouldn't have told you no."

"Is that right?"

"That's right, Chief Hunter."

I laugh low, a warning tone behind it that only makes her burn hotter. I can see it. Her body is pulling toward mine. “You’re good at making me hard.” She bites her lip and watches my hand as I rub myself through my pants. “Sit on the couch, Miss O’Malley.”

She does as she’s told, crossing her legs so her skirt rises even higher, showing off that silky smooth skin of hers.

Standing from my chair, I adjust myself as I walk toward her. She eyes my cock through my pants and then lazily drags her eyes up my body until they meet mine.

Coming to a stop in front of her, I run my hand along her cheek and down to her throat, lightly circling it. My size is a non factor to her. Anyone else and I would be imposing, but she likes when I stand above her.

With my fingers grazing her throat, I slip my thumb into her mouth. She closes those pretty pink lips around it and sucks. “I think about these lips all day.” My cock instantly gets harder. She flicks the tip of my thumb in her mouth and I hiss through my teeth.

I withdraw my finger and step back. “Take your shirt off. I want to see what you wore for me.”

She grabs the hem of her shirt and pulls it over her head, her hair falling all around her, and lets the shirt fall to the ground. I ache to touch her. I step up and push my pointer and middle finger into her mouth. I stroke her tongue and she looks up at me, eyes wide with lust, spit dripping from her lips. I catch it with my palm and wipe from her chin, encouraging her to spit into my hand.

“You listen well, Miss O’Malley.”

Being here with her, it’s been too long and I’m fucking dying to slam into her. But this is where we thrive. This trusting push and pull, she lets me be me, take charge and take what I need from her because she knows I’ll give her back more than double.

I yank the lace bra down and watch her full tits fall out. I wipe the spit all over her, tugging on her nipples. She moans at

my touch. I smack her tit, and it jiggles. Her moan makes me want to slap it again, making it red. A sense of superiority washes over me as I watch her wiggle around on the couch.

“Are you okay, Red? Is your boss making you wet?” I undo my belt and throw it to the floor.

“Yes.”

“Yes, what?” I pull my shirt from my pants and yank it over my head, then undo my button and step out of my pants, leaving me in only my boxer briefs.

“Yes, boss. You’re making me wet.”

“Stick your tongue out.” She does while looking at me with those big green eyes.

“Remind me how well you can suck my dick.”

Her mouth drops open, and she leans forward while placing her hands behind her back. I don’t even need to tell her, and she already knows what turns me on. Her tits are begging for me to grab. She brings her hands around to pull my boxers off, but I stop her.

“No hands.”

I drop my boxers to the floor, smiling at the way her eyes flare at my size. It will never get old. How she makes me feel like I’m king of the world. I step forward, right into her face, and slide my hands down her back while she takes me down her throat. I allow her to play for a moment before I take over.

The noises she makes, the spit pouring out of her mouth, all spur me on.

“Fuck, Daisy. You’re so perfect at this. Just keep taking me good.”

She bobs on me, the spit running down her face and my balls. Pulling her close to me by the back of her head, she gags but deepthroats me like a pro.

“Mm. You make me feel so fucking good, Red.”

I pull out from her mouth. I ache to finish, but the need to play with her first is strong. It’s been too many hours since

we've had each other and I need to get my fill. I urge her to lean back on the couch, pinching her nipples as she presents them to me. She moans, dropping her head back. I lean in, licking around her nipple. Biting it. Sucking it.

I pull back and slap her tit again.

"Not yet. You don't get to come yet."

I push her skirt to her waist, spread her thighs and slap the inside of them. She moans when I do it again, but then I take her mouth to quiet her.

"Stroke me." She reaches up, palming me. Her grip on me feels nothing short of an addict needing his next hit. I crave everything about her. I lick her lip and her tongue snakes out and I flick it with mine. Her touch is driving me wild and I need more. Climbing onto the couch, on my knees and urging her to slide down, I tease my dick around her lips. Her tongue is out, searching for me. I rub it through her lips. "You look so gorgeous with my cock sliding across your face."

She whimpers and I know she needs me. She needs a release. I lay her down flat now and turn on her. Placing my cock in her mouth, I suck her clit. She jumps and moves around, working her hips, trying to chase an orgasm.

"Stay still, Daisy. Let me get all that I need."

I dip my cock in her mouth again and lay above her, eating her out like a starving man. Her legs shake. I know she's close. I raise up, slapping her pussy.

"I said not yet."

I widen her legs and tease her clit. Slapping her thighs has me oh, so close. I love that she's so pliable. She trusts me and lets me do whatever I wish.

I'd never hurt her. Only push her to be what I need and what she not so secretly wants to be.

Sitting her up, I slide her panties all the way off and stand from the couch. I wrap them around my cock, grab her by the back of her head, and pull her close again. I begin to roughly face fuck her, but we've been here before. She can take it.

“You want to be mine, Daisy?”

She nods as I pull out from her hot mouth, spit dripping from her lips. Pulling the panties off my cock, I wipe around her chin with them, then hold them close to my face. “Fuck, you smell like mine. I won’t ever forget this.” Pushing her back against the couch, her eyes flare with need.

“You’re so good to your boss, and now you’ve earned his cock. Are you ready?”

She nods emphatically, moaning for more.

I slide inside her and fuck her roughly. I can’t stop. I’m like an animal unhinged. Her legs wrap around my back, and she works me just as hard as I’m thrusting into her. Throwing her hands back above her head, her body is simply perfection. “Jesus Christ! Daisy! Say you’re mine! I want you to be my girl. Only mine! Fuck, I’ve never needed someone like this before.” I continue to pound into her, wanting to push her limits and mine.

She’s calling out, we’re thumping the couch and I don’t care who hears us right now. In fact, let them fucking watch. Let them all know she’s mine. Mine to protect, to teach, to keep.

To love.

My mind thinks back to the home she’s in, with poor locks on the wrong side of town. I don’t want to change her fiery spirit, but I need to know she’s safe at night.

“Stay with me tonight.” I pant out, thrusting in and out, deeper and deeper. I pull her waist up and lift her ass at an angle that almost breaks me.

“Vince!” She screams out my name. Her face is that of pure ecstasy. Her hands grip the couch above her, her tits bounce with every strike. She’s fucking magnificent.

We hit our climax together. The sounds of sex swell in the room, and wrap us up tight. How in the world did I ever live without this feeling?

I didn’t realize what I was missing until I met her.

“Stay with me, Daisy.” I collapse onto her, chest to chest, but prop myself up with my elbows so I don’t squish her altogether.

“Again, Chief Hunter?”

I’ve already had her, but each time is different.

And better.

She makes me see in color.

Green eyes.

Red hair.

Pink lips.

Cherry nipples.

“For always, Miss O’Malley.”

Chapter Twenty



V INCENT

“Lock up anyone we know lately?” Angelina smirks at her question and I laugh.

“No, actually, it’s been kind of boring in Christmas.” I think about the break-ins that have been getting closer to town over the last week. “I do want you to be extra vigilant when you’re out at night, though, honey. Remember those string of home invasions? They’re getting closer to town lines. My precinct is on it, but nothing has turned up lately. They seem to target areas where there are no street lights and where people don’t want to talk about what they’ve seen.” *The exact type of area Daisy lives in.*

“I’ll stay vigilant, Dad. Mace, remember?” Her tone is sarcastic.

“I’m being serious, Ang! I know you think Christmas is the safest place in the world. Which is exactly why I stayed here once we moved in. I want you to have that safe space feeling in your home. I’m just saying, the world is different now than twenty years ago and you need to be careful.”

We’re enjoying dinner at the Italian place on Main street. The same place I was at with Daisy just a few short weeks ago. It’s hard to believe it’s been just shy of three months since I’ve met her. And look how things have changed so quickly.

She's enjoying chicken parmigiana, and I have a huge plate of ziti. She sips from her white wine and I have a beer.

“Speaking of twenty years ago, how are things with Daisy?”

I freeze mid chew and glance at her. A wide smile spreads across her face, and her eyes twinkle with excitement.

I was waiting for this.

“You want to talk about my dating life?”

Snickering. “I know you're doing more than dating, Dad.” She rolls her eyes and keeps eating.

We've always been very open with each other. I pushed for this from the start. Knowing she had no woman to confide in, I wanted her to understand that just because I'm her dad, doesn't mean she can't confide in me about anything and everything. I was always respectful and listened to every word, whether or not I wanted to hear it. Afterwards, I'd rage alone and say prayers over and over, but she knew she could always come to me.

And now it looks like it's my turn to go to her.

“I like her, Angelina. I like her a lot, actually.” I pause, waiting to gauge her reaction. When there's none, I press. “Are you okay with this?”

“Dad, I'm not mad about it. I want you to find someone. I've wanted that for a long time. I hated seeing you alone all these years.”

Putting my fork down, I take more of my beer. “Guess I haven't done a good job of showing you what a healthy relationship is, huh?”

“What? No way! Dad, if anything, you've shown me to be selective and not give in to someone just because they looked my way. It's why I broke up with Jack. What are you trying to talk yourself out of right now?”

“Nothing! I'm not talking myself out of anything.” I make small circles on the table with my hand. Play with the label on my bottle. “I just feel maybe my devotion-”

“Overbearance.” She cuts me off.

“*Protection.* Can we settle on that?” When she nods and laughs, I continue. “Maybe my over protectiveness of you has done a disservice in letting you knowing how to handle things yourself.”

She watches me. “You’ve spent time talking to Daisy about this.” When I nod, she goes on. “I’m glad she told you. We’ve spent a lot of time talking to each other about this.”

“How so?”

“Even though we’re similar, she was raised differently. Her parents were *protective* of her, too, but way over the top. She had strict rules at home. She wasn’t allowed to work in high school. Her parents thought they were helping her by giving her things. In most cases, it would have made her a spoiled princess, but Daisy has a fire about her, if you haven’t noticed, that makes her very independent. I think constantly being told ‘no, let me do it for you’ pushed her into being very dependent upon herself. That’s why I think you two are good for each other. You’re going to be old soon. You’re going to need someone young to help you.” She snickers.

“And what about me? What on earth can I help her with?”

“You’re going to be that guy who stands by her.”

“Yeah, well, when I tried to stand by her, she got mad.”

“Mm. I heard about the windows.”

“Not just the windows! That house she bought. It’s not safe. The area is shit. I wouldn’t want you living there alone, so I definitely don’t want her there.”

She tsks me and leans back in her chair. “Be careful how you approach that. She’s very proud that she bought that house on her own. You know, every summer she went home and worked her ass off to buy her own stuff. Her parents gave in to the idea she needed a job, but then they harassed her about working too much. It’s why she didn’t want to go back home after college. That’s why she settled here.”

“Tell me she’s got daddy issues.”

She laughs. “No, but that’s just what I said. She was sick of being told how to live and having people control her life, so she made sure she could survive on her own. If it was up to her parents, they’d still have her under their roof, washing her laundry. And if they realized what her job actually entails, they’d hate that, too.”

“What do you mean?”

“The calls she gets. Yes, she’s the voice on the other end of a desperate situation, ready to help others, but she’s also hearing the worst of humanity at times.”

Taking a breath, I never thought of it like that. God, Daisy is even more amazing with every new thing I learn about her. I’ve been on the other end of some terrible calls, and hearing the fear from someone else is possibly one of the worst feelings to have.

“She got one of those break-in calls the other night. She told me it shook her up.”

I search my memory. I remember the call, but it had already happened. The homeowner came home and found their house broken into. “The criminals weren’t there when they got home, though.”

“I know. She told me that, but she said the woman was scared to death that they’d return. She said she never wants to live with that type of fear.”

I sit with this information. I’m proud of her for taking control of her life. Breaking free from something she wasn’t happy with, but I can’t help but feel like she’s searching for a thrill to make up for the peace she had growing up. “I don’t want her there, Ang. And it makes me nervous that you go there, too.”

“I agree with you, but she won’t give in. She knows how to handle herself.”

I think of her being so young and having the balls to move to a new city. And then I picture myself with her.

“She shouldn’t have to do it alone. I want to be that guy for her.”

A big smile consumes her face. “Dad! You’re in love!”

I watch her bounce in her chair. “Angelina. I think you’re getting ahead of yourself here.”

She puts up her hand. “Okay, I’ll dial down the love issue. But I have no problem calling my best friend mom, just so you know.” She smirks and I choke on my beer.

“Oh, my sweet, sweet daughter. What would I do without you?”

“Not have a girlfriend, for one.”

“Touche.” We cheers and tap our glasses together, but now that it was spoken out loud, the “L” word dances through my mind, taunting me.

Chapter Twenty-One



D AISY

I've been invited to the Casanovas for Sunday dinner. Correction, *we* have been invited. Apparently, Sunday dinners are open doors at that house. But Janet Casanova made a special call to Vince. So, there was no getting out of it this week.

And honestly? I'm excited about going. I want to meet the people that have been a family to Vince and Angelina. If Vince and I are going to make a go of this, well, then I'm going to have to dive right in with this over the top family.

Walking in, the chaos starts immediately. Billy Casanova is his own sitcom and when all the brothers are together, it turns into a late night television show. Add in Jackson Gage, who is the Christmas Comets High School Football Coach and Bobby Gallagher, who owns Get Shacked Up Realty, and it's a damn R-rated movie.

Bobby is the one Vince told me to see about finding a home in Christmas. The thought has crossed my mind to list my home with him, try to sell it and buy closer to the station. One, I could be closer to Vince and Angelina. Two, be in the town I originally wanted. But I'm not ready to let go of my dream yet. The house needs a ton of work, but it's mine. And I want to see it through.

The wives of these crazy men grabbed my arm the moment we appeared in the backyard. Vince squeezed my hand and told me good luck because you never know what's going to come out of their mouths.

Circling around by the fire pit, the girls all gather in close like they've got a secret. I already know Farrah, who is Tom's girlfriend and Adley, who is Billy's girlfriend. They've been to the station a few times, but I've only met the other women in passing. They've all been sweet to me, but tonight feels like an interrogation.

"Stop acting like you're not interested. We all see the way you look at him." Britt Gallagher dives right in.

I throw my hands up. "And how do I look at him?"

"Like you want to take his pants off with your teeth and suck him dry," Britt retorts with a smug smile.

"Stop it!" Francesca hisses. "Jesus, Britt!" She waves towards the kids. "Careful what you say. You know JJ repeats everything. And don't talk about the Chief that way!"

Britt just laughs and shrugs. "Whatever. We all have sex. I've heard some rumors about late nights at the station."

Chelsea pours wine for everyone but herself and passes the glasses out. I grab for the bottle instead and Chelsea laughs. "Nope. One at a time, please." I just roll my eyes, down the wine in one gulp, then hold the empty glass out for her to refill with a smirk on my face.

"Oh, girl, you're going to fit in perfectly with this group." Farrah laughs and I relax at her words. It feels good to know they've already accepted me. Though I'm closer to their age than Vincent's.

"I feel like I'm being thrown to the wolves." I take another hefty sip of my drink. "Vincent warned me about you Casanovas, but this is intense."

They laugh, and Britt throws her arm around me. "Oh honey, we're not the wolves." She nods her head towards the men. "They're the wolves. And the one you brought home? Well, I heard he loves to eat little redheads."

My face blushes, I can feel my body heat.

“There’s the confirmation we need! You two are a thing!”
Britt claps her hands and has a huge smile.

I cover my face with one hand.

“Drink up, then spill the tea.”

So, I do. I tell them all the details. They especially want all the sexy time deets and I kind of enjoy talking to the girls. I know I shouldn’t be gossiping, but this doesn’t feel that way. I feel like I’m talking to my sisters, and they’re all so happy about my newfound relationship.

“Girl, where do you live? Bobby said he didn’t remember getting your application for housing.”

This house is quickly becoming a topic I want to avoid.

“I bought a home a few months back. Over in Lakeshore.”

They fall silent and it’s exactly the reaction I expected. They’re Christmas fixtures, born and raised. The Casanovas all live on the same block together. They did it on purpose when they started buying homes. I think it’s sweet and I love the closeness of the family.

I could have that, too.

“I know, I know. It’s not a good spot, but it’s what I could afford. Plus, the home is a total fixer upper and I’m super excited to do the work myself.”

I notice Adley is very quiet. “Adley, I know Billy installed the windows. It’s okay. He didn’t know Vincent didn’t ask me. We talked it out, and I don’t hold anything against Billy.”

“No, it’s not that. Girl, just be careful. I’ve heard some rumblings about home invasions lately. And I’m not saying you’re in a terrible area, but it’s not Christmas.”

“I stay with Vince most nights.”

“I bet you do. Tell me, is it different being with an older man?” Britt leans in, eyes wide and so eager for the info.

I laugh at her. “Aren’t you younger than Bobby?”

“Stop it. She’s five years younger. Your twenty has nothing on her!” Farrah exclaims.

“Twenty! Wait! How old are you?” Chelsea leans in close.

“I’m twenty three.”

“Jesus. I’d never think you’re that young. I feel like twenty-three is a kid. You’re definitely not that.”

“Well, thank you for that.” I laugh at her. “I definitely feel older than I am. Not by any kind of trauma. I’ve just always been drawn to people outside of my age range.”

“So? How’s the sex?”

“Britt! Why do you want to know so bad! I don’t want to know about the Chief that way!”

“Oh yes you do, you prude, don’t act like a princess.” Francesca sticks her tongue out at Britt’s words.

“I’ve been with guys my age, and they think they know it all. Three pumps and some colorful language and they think they’re king. Newsflash. They’re not.”

“Oh, yes, I know exactly what you mean.” Britt laughs. “I was nineteen, and Bobby was twenty-five. We definitely had some fun. He showed me things and then I got to show him things.” She waggles her brows and we giggle at her antics.

“Well, the Chief is definitely in charge everywhere he goes. I’ll say that. And his dirty talk?” I whistle. “The man knows what he is doing.”

They all fawn and flutter their lashes. This is fun. This is sweet and I wish Angelina was here with me. She’d love this interaction as much as I do.

“Well, I’ll say that I’m stoked you’re with him. We’ve known Vincent for a long time and I’ve never seen him as happy as he is now.”

Hearing them talk about the Chief as the main point of this town, a loyal man and a great friend, has me falling hard and fast for him.

I glance towards him and see him laughing with the boys, throwing his head back and then clapping Tom on the shoulder. He's the epitome of a man wanting to protect and do all he can for others. We're one and the same.

Dare I say I'm in love?

Chapter Twenty-Two



V INCENT

Being with these men is good for my soul. Having a friend you can be yourself with is nothing short of perfection. Having a whole family you can hang with, who knows your ins and outs and loves you, anyway? Yup. This is where I want to be.

The Casanovas never made me feel second rate. They never made me question all my overtime or dumping my daughter in their preschool. They just welcomed me in.

Maybe they knew I needed them.

Tom and his parents, Janet and Frank, are the only ones who know about my sister. Whether they've given this info to anyone else is beyond me, but no one has ever approached me about my loss, or walked on eggshells around me. Not even when they were close to losing Billy, when Tom was overseas, did any of my past come up. They just asked for my help.

And not that I was hiding it, but I didn't want that to be the reason someone accepted me into their home. I didn't want to be a charity case or a pity case.

It's why I never told Daisy until I had to explain why I have a need to protect her. And she understood.

She always understands.

And I love her for it.

Yup. I said it. I love her.

After having dinner with Angelina and hearing her say the words, I went home and thought long and hard. Am I in love or am I just in lust?

I've never been in love but I do know that what I'm feeling right now, I've never felt before.

Love is wanting to come home to the same person every day. Love is wanting to tell the stupid story I just heard at work. Love is wanting to take her back to the coffee shop where we had that amazing espresso just to recreate the feeling.

And love is wanting to move her in with me to wake with and fall asleep to every night.

I don't care how old she is. I don't care how taboo our age gap is. Or what the town is going to say. I care about how she takes care of me, how she loves me back, how she lets me touch her. Love is all of that mixed with the best sex I could ever dream of.

Am I getting sentimental because it's the holiday season? Christmas is around the corner and the feeling this town gives, fills your heart. You'd have to be a grinch to not want to be a part of it. And even when I was younger and had Angelina, the warmth that showed through from the parties and parades and the gifts was outstanding. I wanted to give that back to everyone.

I began an annual Christmas party at the station a few years back. We collect toys, wrap them and dispense them throughout the town. It's grown every year and now we have it at the Rec center to accommodate everyone.

It's an amazing feeling to be a Secret Santa and being the Chief and in charge of it brings me so much joy.

The fact I get to do it with my girl this year? Even better. And the party afterwards? It's always a ton of fun. I'm already thinking about the costume she can wear.

Red skirt, white lace. And her green eyes? Best Christmas present ever.

I'm drawn back to the present, with her on my lap, and all the other women on their men's laps. There's a baby announcement, because with all these couples there is never not a baby coming.

But what catches my ear is when Tom clears his throat and begins to speak.

"I need everyone to listen because I can only say this once. I'm not sure how to explain it, so I'm just going to say it." Clearing his throat yet again, I see Cash get up and move around to sit in the chair next to Tom.

And I know what's coming. These two have some kind of bond. I saw it once Cash was able to break through to him. It made me feel good to see the two of them together. Tom was finally letting someone in. And he was breaking down walls that he and Farrah had built.

"Cash and I have a person in common. His cousin and I served together years ago." I watch him intently as he keeps his eyes focused on the fire in front of him, no doubt falling back into remembering the night that changed his life. I hear a laugh bubble from Tom, and I hear Cash chuckle beside me. He speaks of Cash's cousin, JT Tomlin, who served under Tom in the US Marine Corps.

He died on Tom's watch.

I understand that pain. Of losing someone you thought you'd grow old with. Watching Tom and Cash choke back tears and sob while speaking of someone they both love has me holding my girl even tighter.

"For whatever reason," Tom says exaggeratedly and rolls his eyes, "JT thinks we need each other, so he brought Cash to me. And all of us, actually."

"Maybe we're here to give Chief Hunter a hard time. You know, I can't let him think he's the top dog around here for long." Cash barks out.

“Someone’s gotta keep an eye on him and Daisy!” Billy says.

That fucking guy.

“William! Do I need to break out the mugshot?” I raise a brow and give him a stern voice. And in true Billy fashion, he breaks out his phone, scrolls around for a second and pulls up a picture. Flashing it around the group, it’s his mugshot from years ago.

“Jesus Christ, Bill, that’s nothing to be proud of.”

He shrugs. “Not proud, just a reminder of where I came from.”

Adley leans into him and I notice everyone here does the same with their significant others.

Isn’t that something? Nothing like a reminder of the bad shit to show you how you’ve grown. And the good that’s waiting for you, if you’ll accept it.

I whisper into her ear. “Thank you for coming tonight.”

She settles into my lap and I have to be very careful of my thoughts right now. I want to play with and tease her, but this would not be the place.

And when Tom lets out that he put in his retirement papers for the military and is in love with Farrah, I feel I’ve come full circle.

It makes perfect sense that I’m here with the family who kick-started a new life for me years ago, and I’m here again now with them, ready for the next part of my life to start with my girl.

* * *

We’ve come back to my house tonight. We had some drinks each, and not that I’m far from the Casanovas house, but I’m the Chief and need to practice what I preach. I left my truck and Daisy and I walked the two blocks back to my home. The beautiful night mixed with the Christmas feeling was

everything. I'm not that guy who falls in love with a holiday, but I am that guy who's in love with being with my girl on a holiday.

We enter my house, the only light being from the Christmas tree I left lit. I pull her to the couch and we both sit close together. I need to tell her how I feel. She deserves to know and hear the words. And I need to speak it out loud, for us.

I also want her to seriously think about giving up that house.

I kiss her lightly and run my hands through her hair.

"Tonight was fun. The wives weren't too much for you, were they?"

She laughs. "Not at all. They're great. I really like them. And they're quite fond of you, too."

I close my eyes. "I hope you didn't give them any details. There are no secrets between them and their husbands. I need to know what I'm in for tomorrow at the station."

"I only told them the good stuff, Chief." She winks and strokes me through my jeans.

Groaning at her touch, the words I always speak fall from my mouth. "Stay with me."

She laughs. "You're so needy, boss. Why do you always want me here? You're going to get sick of me."

I hold her close. "I'll never get sick of you. And I want you here because I want to come home to you every night."

"So we'll split time. Come to my house and some nights we can come here."

"But this is closer to work. It makes more sense to be here."

"What are you really saying, Vince?"

Shrugging, I try to play cool and not get exasperated that she's already fighting me on this. Again. "Nothing." Stroking

her neck with my fingers. “We can stay in bed longer each morning since this is closer to the station.”

She pulls back from me. “No, what you’re really saying is that you’re trying to control me. We’ve already fought about this. Why are we here again?”

“I’m not fighting. Why won’t you just listen?”

“Why won’t *you* just listen? I don’t need protection. I need an equal.”

“But I *want* to protect you! Let me! It’s not me being controlling, it’s my job as the man. I just want to be there for you, and help you.” My heart is racing. Why can’t she understand this?

“I don’t need help, Vincent. I just told you this.”

“But if I’m not there, how can I save you?”

“Save me from what? What are you talking about?”

“People leave. People get hurt! I won’t lose you. If I’m not there, how can I stop it?”

“Stop what?”

“You getting hurt!” I fall quiet from my outburst and whisper my next words. The ones that have lived in my head every day since the day I lost Violet. “All I keep thinking is if I were there, it wouldn’t have happened.”

“Oh, Vince, no. Why wouldn’t it have happened? You weren’t going to stop that car.” Like she always does, she climbs onto my lap and wraps herself around me. She’s like a weighted blanket, holding me down and helping me stay in reality.

I shrug. She’s right, but I just can’t accept it. I was supposed to be watching out for her. “It’s why I joined the military, and why I went to the academy. I want to make it right. I have to save others.”

“You can’t save the world.” She whispers back to me in a calming voice.

“I can save *my* world.”

She stills on my lap, eyes boring into mine. “I’m your world?” Her voice breaks with her question.

“I have to keep you safe, Daisy. I don’t get another chance at this. You’re it for me. If you’re gone. So am I.”

Chapter Twenty-Three



D AISY

His words are gutting me right now and I'm doing my best not to freak out, cry and rejoice all at the same time.

Vincent is finally breaking down. He's letting his guard down and giving me the words. And I don't want to push him away or chastise him for doing so, but again, I need to remind him he has to hear *me*, not just hear what he wants.

"Vince, I love that you just said that. It's exactly what I needed to hear to know where we stand."

"How do you not know? I tell you all the time!"

"You do not! You like to order me around, not express feelings."

His face twists and contorts. "Feelings?"

I giggle again. "You're getting good at this boyfriend thing. But Vince, you have to talk to me."

"I am talking. You're not listening."

Raising an eyebrow. "I'm not listening? Did you really just say that?"

He closes his eyes, like he's trying to gain control of either himself or the situation. I patiently wait, because he's not going to steam roll me on this.

“Daisy, I want you with me all the time. I don’t feel complete until I can see you or physically hold you. It’s like a piece was missing that I didn’t even know, and until you showed up, I didn’t know who was supposed to fill it.”

“Now I understand why I couldn’t date. I understand why I was fine to go without for all those years. It’s because they weren’t you. I was waiting for you. I need *you*.” My heart is racing and I’m trying to hold on to every word he speaks. I want to remember this, for always. He wraps his arms around me and pulls me in closer still. “I think I can honestly say,” deep breath in and out, “that I’m falling in love with you.” When my tears leak out, he wipes it away. “No. I *am* in love with you. There’s no more thinking. It’s certain. It’s you.”

“Vince...” his name leaves my lips just before he consumes mine. This kiss is different. He starts out slow, like he needs to know it’s real. That what he just spoke isn’t a fleeting moment and I’m not going to run away. I think he’s felt cooped up in his life, always needing to be the one others run to, that he’s afraid of what may happen if he depends on someone else.

“You’re not going to scare me away.” I say against his lips, his nose nuzzling my cheek. “Tell me all the words. I’ll never use them against you.”

He pulls back to look me in the eye. “You want me safe? Well, I feel safest with you. And I want you to feel the same. Tell me anything, but don’t dictate.”

He shakes his head slightly, a tease forming on his lips. “I don’t know how not to dictate, Daisy. I’m the Chief for a reason.”

“At home? I’m the Chief. Your rank means nothing in this house.” He tickles my ribs and I squeal. “I’m serious, Vince!” He tickles again until I’m sliding off his lap, pushing him away. “Vincent!” He soothes my sides and falls against me, both of us lying together on the couch as he cups my breast and brushes his thumb over my nipple, instantly stilling me. I let out a sigh.

“I hear you, Daisy. Loud and clear. I do. And I’ll do my best to not be a difficult prick.” He squeezes my breast. It’s a subconscious thing, I’m sure. Like he just has to be touching me, feeling me, making me feel good, at all times. Because though his eyes hold all the passion for me, right now he’s talking lovingly, seriously, trying to understand what conclusion we can come to here that will suit us both.

He props his head on his hand, and I turn into him. He won’t let go of me and when he feels my nipple pebble, it’s like he just realized he has a hold of me. He smirks and slides his hand under my shirt.

“It’s true about teaching old dogs new tricks. It can’t be done. I’m set in my ways. I’ve been the one everyone comes to for everything and it’s only been me for years, so I didn’t have to conform to another’s wants or feelings.” He skims my skin until he snaps the clip of my bra in the back, loosening it. He pushes my shirt with the bra up, exposing me to him. “God, you’re gorgeous.”

His eyes burn my skin as he rolls my nipple softly. I can already feel myself dripping for him. “But now? I want to conform for you. I want us to blend our lives together. Make each other happy. It’s going to take time and I make no promises that you won’t be mad at me weekly for taking charge.” He scoots down a few inches, then leans in and flicks his tongue over me.

Running my hand through his hair, holding his head close, I moan. “Is this a trick?”

“Mmm?” He bites tenderly and my hips arch on their own, seeking him.

“You’re trying to blind me with your sexy ways, Mr. Hunter.”

He glances up under his lashes at me. He’s the most handsome man I’ve ever laid eyes on. And right now, with his lips pressed against my skin, I know I’ll never want another like I do at this moment.

“Say it again.” He whispers in a deep tone.

“Say what? Mr. Hunter?” His eyes flare. “Or, Daddy?” He grabs hold of me and kisses me like he’ll never get the chance again, and I start laughing against his lips.

“I’ll never say that again! That’s your one shot at hearing it. I hope you remember it!” He laughs with me, gets up on his knees and manhandles me, rolling me to my back. This type of control is what I love. He just moves me and bends me for his pleasure.

Our pleasure.

He taps his forehead. “It’s forever burned in here.” He spreads my legs around his waist and pulls at my shorts until he’s slipped them off, panties included. I sit up quickly, pulling my shirt and bra off completely now and lay back down.

The way he looks at me has me flying high. This is a real man. He’s appreciative and honors me. He knows how to treat a woman, even if he’s never had the proper chance to do it before.

Because he was waiting.

For me.

Reaching for him, I sit up and grab his shirt to pull it over his head. His chest is firm, his abs hard, his strength on display.

And he’s all mine.

Chapter Twenty-Four



V INCENT

How did I end up here? How did I fall for a woman half my age overnight? Or what seems like overnight? We haven't known each other long, but it's like I've known her my whole life.

And I want to know her for the rest of it, too.

I've got her laid out in front of me, naked and just waiting for me to have my way. And I will have her in every fucking way possible. My body is vibrating with need.

All that we said, it was perfectly done. But sitting here now, I realized I'm the only one who said the L word. Before I get in my head about it, though, I'm going to make her beg to want to say it back.

Straddling her thighs, my pants acting as a barrier to her skin, I just can't have it. Crawling off her, I stand beside the couch and undo my belt and my jeans, letting them hit the floor. "Touch yourself, Daisy."

Her eyes never leave mine as she cups her breasts, pushing them together as an offering to me. I drop to my knees by the side of the couch, running my hand up her thigh. She widens her legs and I dip my fingers inside her. She arches, still holding her tits to me, and I latch on like a baby. She's perfect,

every bit of her fitting perfectly into my world, my body, my heart.

“You’re so wet, sweetheart. Is this what I do to you?”

Her eyes roll back as I finger her roughly, yet gently bite around her breast, sucking and marking her. Little nips that will turn purple later, reminding her I’ll be the only one who gets to do this to her for the rest of her life.

“Do I get you this hot while we’re at the station?”

She nods, biting her lip. I withdraw my hand from her, circling her clit. Her mouth drops open and little mewls seep out while her hips work themselves. I slip my finger into her mouth, letting her taste herself. She immediately closes her lips around my finger, and with each suckle, she shoots a line of adrenaline straight to my dick.

Letting out a groan, I reach down and tug on my cock, pulling it from my boxers. “Miss O’Malley, you better put those lips of yours to better use.” She smiles around my finger, holding it between her teeth, scraping my skin as she pulls her head back and sits up. I rise to standing and she takes me in her mouth at once.

“Goddamn, that’s so good!” I look down at her, her red hair falling over her shoulders, her breasts brushing against my thighs with every dip that she takes from me. I feel myself hitting the back of her throat. “Red, you should see yourself.” She looks up at me, her eyes telling me everything I need to know. I cup her cheek, brushing my thumb down the angle of her face and trace her lips that are stretched around me. “These lips.” I spread my forefinger and middle finger around my base. Her tongue touches my fingers and with every suck on my dick, she has me ready to explode. Feeling the strain in my neck, I step back from her and get even fucking harder as she leans forward, still chasing me with her tongue.

Chuckling at her exuberance. “You need me that bad?” She nods, a smile spreading across her face as she comes off the couch, landing on her hands and knees. I step back again, and she crawls toward me.

“Ohh, Miss O’Malley. You have no idea what you’re doing to me right now.”

“I know what I want to do to you.”

“Yeah?” I come to a stop, rubbing my chin with my hand. My body shakes with need. “Tell me, Daisy.”

She prowls around me on all fours, nipping at the back of my thighs and running her hands everywhere but where I need them to be, before coming to a stop in front of me again. She sits back on her legs, her palms smoothing up and down the front of my legs. She eyes my cock that is sticking straight out in front of me, weeping and begging for her mouth again.

“I want to be so full of you that I feel you for days. I want to be touched so deep that when I sit at my desk at the station and you walk by, I can still feel you inside me.”

I drop to the floor and lay on my back. “Get on. Now. Daisy, put that sweet pussy around my dick and fucking hang on tight.”

My order sets her into motion and she climbs on my lap, taking me inside her so fast it makes my breath catch.

I grip her hips, my thumbs bruising her skin, but she doesn’t care. “Harder, Vincent! Make me feel you for days!”

I start pounding her from underneath. I’ve never felt this frantic before. I need this release more than my next breath right now, but I also don’t want it to end. I want to fucking die with her pussy wrapped around me, soaking me and taking every bit of life from me.

But first? I’m going to make her say it.

Slowing down my movement, she brings her eyes to me. “You didn’t tell me, Daisy.”

She leans forward, placing her hands on my chest, and begins working her hips with a circular motion that rivals professional dancers.

“Tell you what? I told you what I want to do.” She’s breathless, and I grip her tighter, slowing her movements.

“No, Red. You didn’t say the words.”

She’s lost to her looming orgasm, that it takes her a moment before she realizes what I’m asking her to say.

Then a sly look comes over her face and I know I’m in for it.

And I’m fucking here for it.

“Tell me, Miss O’Malley.” I whisper out the words, picking up the pace once again, still with my hands on her hips so I can control her pace.

She throws her arms in the air, arching her back. I’m lost in the vision of her bouncing above me. She’s incredible. I don’t know where to look first. Her head is thrown back, her long red hair swishing around, and a smile across her face. She lets out a laugh and I follow. We’re having fun, playing, enjoying each other. It’s the most sensual, intimate moment I’ve ever had.

And when she brings her eyes to mine and says, “I’m in love with you too, Vincent,” I know I’ll never be the same.

My body takes over. My innate need to dominate her comes flying to the surface.

“Move in with me.”

Her lips twist, and she grabs at her tits. “I’ll say yes if you can finish me off in the next ten seconds.”

Huffing a laugh because only this woman would put an ultimatum like that on me during sex. I loosen my grip on her hip and flick her clit with every thrust.

“Eight ... seven ... six...” She’s laughing but breathless and moaning out each countdown.

“Fuck, sweetheart, get there! I need you like this every night with me!”

We’re sweating, my back is on fire from the rug burn and if I don’t fucking get her off in the next four seconds, I just may die if she tells me no.

“Four ... three ... Vince ...”

I thrust deep, pull at her clit and cover her hand with mine on her breast. She lets out a yell and fucking explodes on me. I can feel her juices spilling on me, running down my balls, soaking us both. My orgasm comes barreling in and we're nothing but a slippery mess of the best sex I've ever had.

My heart is pounding and I can't catch my breath as she continues to soak me. She slows her movements but continues to ride me and I know she's still coming as her pussy squeezes me in pulses.

My arms drop to my sides and I'm lifeless. I'm spent yet want to do it again.

"Are you okay?" I ask as she releases me from her body, but then drapes herself across my chest.

"I'm fucking perfect."

"Yes, you are." I kiss the top of her head and wrap my arms around her. "Did I beat ten?"

Her body shakes with little laughs, her soft curves covering me. She tilts her head to look at me, resting her chin on my chest.

"You really want me to move in with you?"

"You bet your ass, I do." I squeeze her firm ass, then give it one good smack. "Now say yes, Daisy, before I have to remind you what I say goes."

Chapter Twenty-Five



V INCENT

I'm in my office, the station is buzzing today. There's a lot of commotion with the planning of the Christmas party. The surrounding towns are getting more break-ins. So it's a high and low point in the day. But nothing can shake my high from last night.

At around three in the morning, I woke to Daisy's soft snores as she laid next to me. As I glanced around, I noticed we were still on the floor by my Christmas tree, and the idea of keeping it up all year crossed my mind, making me chuckle softly. I slipped on my boxers, then bent down and lifted Daisy from the floor. I walked us up to my bedroom, placed her next to me in the bed, and covered us both with the blankets. I've never slept so well.

Cash and Tom appear in the doorway, each pushing at one another to stand slightly in front of the other.

Fucking children.

"Jesus. You two are like Will Smith and Martin Lawrence from that movie."

"That movie?" Tom drawls out. "Hunter, we were three when *that movie* came out and we can recite it word for word.

You were already in a badge, so don't try to act like you're so young."

"Not quite." I chuckle. "But now that I think about it, maybe you're more like Baker and Ponch."

"I'm Ponch." They both say in unison and I burst into laughter.

They look at each other, then back at me with eyes wide. "Where is our cranky ass boss and who's this love struck asshole sitting in his place?"

I lean back in my chair, steepling my fingers together and resting my elbows on the armrests. "Make fun all you want. There's nothing you can say to me that will take me down right now."

They both enter and shut the door. But they don't laugh or have a snappy retort, and it has me sitting straighter in my chair.

"What's going on?"

"Sweetstown was hit last night. And we've got a suspect in house."

"What! Why wasn't I called?"

"The calls only just came in. Their Chief is on the phone right now with Detective Jones. I'll assume his next stop is your office."

"Fuck." I wipe my face with my hands. Sweetstown is a quaint town just north of Christmas. Our town lines border each other, the schools play each other and businesses share references. It also means these criminals are getting closer to Lakeshore, and Christmas.

Getting closer to Daisy.

"We'll wait for official word, but right now, Cash and I are going to take a ride outside town limits." Tom adjusts his belt and I notice he's wearing his vest.

"Yeah, we're going to circle around and then come back through our own blocks. We'll double patrol around

Angelina's house, too." I nod to Cash. "And the perp is on his way to holding. He's a kid, boss, looks like an initiation event, and the dumbass got caught."

I study them. These two are my best on the force, but they're also the most dangerous. "Don't do anything stupid. And don't fucking go rogue if you find something." I stand and come around my desk, pointing my finger at them. "You see something off, you make a call and get your ass back here. I don't need you fucking up evidence."

"So, we shouldn't pick up empty shells?"

"Or smear the blood?"

"Definitely don't move the body."

"Officers! Do you see me laughing?" My blood pressure is rising with every breath they take.

Tom elbows Cash. "I told you he loves us. Don't you hear the worry in his voice?"

"You two are going to be the death of me." My phone begins to ring. "Get out of here. If you don't report back in an hour, I'm sending someone to find you."

Walking back to my desk, I pick up the phone on the third ring, watching as they fight their way through the doorway side by side. Shaking my head at their dumb antics, "Chief Hunter here."

"Chief. It's Dave."

David McIntyre is the Chief over in Sweetstown. He's been there going on twenty-five years now and has been chief for the last five. He's a great asset and I've enjoyed being at neighboring stations with him.

"Dave. What do you got? No one hurt, right?"

"Shaken up and roughed up, but no damage." I grip the phone tighter at his words. "They're getting braver, or more desperate, because not only are they breaking in, they're coming face to face with homeowners now. Demanding cash and jewelry, instead of just the usual smash and grabs like before."

“Think it’s the same two crews?”

“Absolutely. MO is the same, except for the confrontational shit now. It also looks like they’ve got specific targets in mind.”

“Who?”

“Young and old women. No in between and no family. They study who’s living alone and then go for those homes.”

His words have anger rushing through my veins. “No family, defenseless women and quiet neighborhoods.”

“Bingo.”

“We’ve got a suspect in the house. We’ll question him and see what we can get. In the meantime, I just sent O’Brien and Casanova to patrol. Let me know your crews and where they’re heading. I’m going to call over to surrounding stations and we’ll up our patrols on all sides.”

“Thanks, Vince. I appreciate your help.” He pauses. “Where’s your daughter live?”

“She’s back from college, living in a small ranch Bobby Gallagher got her. Right off Gum Drop Lane.”

“We’ll step up patrols around her block.”

“Thanks, Dave. My own guys are doing the same. I owe you.”

He laughs. “When we catch these assholes, we’ll get a drink together. Hey, when’s your Christmas soiree?”

I chuckle into the phone. “I feel like I need that drink now! But the party is this Friday. Bring your guys and come on down. I’ve already got other stations on call to cover us.”

“Sounds good, Chief. See you then.”

I hang up the phone and a weird thought crosses my mind. *How does Cash know where my daughter lives?* Before I can ponder further on it, I catch a glimpse of Daisy walking by the office, heading to her desk to sit down. It’s only been a few hours, but I’m battling with myself to let her do this house thing alone. She agreed to move in, but was that just the heat

of the moment's words? I need to remind her what she promised. I know she's young and deserves to try things on her own, but not while there is danger. And not while I have the opportunity to do something about it.

Cash and Tom say to leave her to do it on her own, that I'll only drive her away if I keep butting in. But they don't get it. I *have* to take care of her.

She turns in her chair, and we lock eyes. She gives a smile and a quick 'kiss' action with her lips. I feel mine pull into a straight line. I nod at her and her eyes get small. She's assessing me. Watching as she gets up from her desk, those soft legs that were wrapped around my ears just a few hours earlier, carry her closer to me. I meet her at the door, looking out over the station.

"Chief. I heard what's going on. Everything okay?"

I put my hands on my hips and look her in the eye. "You need to stay with me until we catch these guys."

Slam! A wall between us goes up instantly and the room swirls with tension. I don't care though. How can she be mad when I'm just doing my job?

She crosses her arms, and we have a standoff. "I said I'd move in with you Vince, but not yet. I want to finish my house. Then maybe we can rent it out and I'll move in with you then. How does that sound?"

"No."

"No?"

"Whoa! Hands off, Officer! I'll sue you for roughing me up! Go ahead, leave one mark! I dare you!" We're both drawn to the attention of the guy being walked through to the back holding cell. As his eyes meet mine, he slows. Then his eyes drag to Daisy and he smiles and stops. An eyebrow goes up and he blatantly looks her up and down. "Well, well. She can rough house me all she wants. Damn, baby, you'd look good wrapped around my face!"

"Hey!" I bark out. "Watch your mouth!"

He laughs. “Ooh, is someone jealous?” He looks closer at my face, then at the sign on my office door. “Chief? You’re Chief Hunter?”

My skin crawls and Daisy steps closer. It’s instinctual, but she’s just caught this guy’s attention even more so.

“Get him to the back!”

“No, I want you. Come talk to me, Chief.”

I hold his stare, and his smile returns before glancing at Daisy again. My officer pushes him. “Come on, move it.”

We watch him go and the station picks back up. My blood is boiling at the disrespect of this guy, but even more so at the fact my girl still wants to fight me about her lack of understanding the danger surrounding her. I’ve surrendered my feelings. Why won’t she give in to me on this?

“Do you understand now, Daisy? It’s nonnegotiable. I want you in my home tonight. When I asked you, I didn’t mean a month from now. Or five months from now. Or however long it will take for you to drag your feet on that deathtrap you bought. I want you now.”

“I’m not ready now.”

“But I am.”

She laughs and waves her hands around. “Oh, well, okay then. You’re ready now, so I have to catch up? Leave everything I’ve worked for because Daddy told me to come home?” She pops a hip and then tightens her arms across her chest once again. A glaring look that screams, ‘don’t push me.’

“I’m not your Daddy.” I growl out the words and move closer to her.

“No? You’re sure acting like it.”

“I’m acting like your boyfriend. I’m acting like I love you and need you safe. Why’s that so hard to understand?”

“Because you’re giving orders instead of asking how I feel! I’m fine where I am. Nothing is going to happen. New

locks and new windows, remember? I'm a big girl now, boss. Let me be one."

Cash and Tom's advice flits through my head. I have no choice but to not fight her on this.

"I'm not happy about this."

Her eyes take on a sexy shade and she runs her finger down the front of my shirt, stopping at my belt where she gives it a little tug. "You'll get there. In the meantime, stop telling me what to do. And maybe if you're good, I'll come over later and suck your dick. Does Daddy want me to play with his balls while I take you to the back of my throat?" She asks in a sing-song voice.

"I thought you said you'd never say it again." Her mischievous look fucking wrecks me and my breath leaves my lips on a rush.

"I only say it to push your buttons, boss." She smirks, and it takes every ounce of energy I have to keep my frustration under wraps.

"You come over tonight, suck me right, and I'm going to show you how good an orgasm feels with my dick in your ass."

"Promises, promises." She winks and turns quickly on her heels before heading back to her desk.

Standing for a moment, I'm a bit shell-shocked, I'll be honest. I only move when I hear yelling once again coming from the back cells. Remembering the suspect who was brought back, I head towards the noise.

"Yo! What's the problem?"

"Chief Hunter! What kind of circus are you running here?" The suspect is inside his cell. He's young, early twenties at the most. Clothes are black and baggy, but he's got brand new name brand sneakers on.

"Nice kicks. You steal them? Or buy them with the jewelry you stole?"

"Pfft, man. I didn't steal shit."

“Then why are you in here?”

“Wrong place, wrong time.”

That phrase runs through my body like a cold chill. The face of the cop who told my family my sister was in the wrong place at the wrong time, burns to the forefront of my mind. The kid watches me and I have to take a few breaths before I lose my shit on him for something that has nothing to do with him.

“You part of those gangs fighting over town lines?”

“You should be mindful of your own town line.”

“Oh yeah? You have information for me?”

He laughs. “I ain’t no snitch.” He leans in, threading his hands around the bars. “They wanna make you work for your title, *Chief*.”

I won’t give into his threats. I’ll bait him instead.

“I heard you guys target single females. You and your crew don’t sound so tough if you’re only beating up on women.” I laugh. “And *you* got caught, so what’s that say about you? Just another dumb criminal.”

Turning my back on him and walking away because he’s not going to give me anything useful, I pause when he calls out.

“And you’re just another dumb cop, thinking he’s untouchable.”

Chapter Twenty-Six



V INCENT

We had no choice but to let that suspect go. Everything about him made me uneasy. He was too young to be such a wiseass with the cops. It's like he was schooled prior to coming in. He knew to ask for me. And seeing Daisy stand with me, he now knows she's mine.

And it doesn't sit well with me at all.

I upped coverage on all areas surrounding Christmas, but we have no leads on anyone. The only thing that is keeping the station in good spirits is the annual Christmas Party.

But I'm not in good spirits. Besides the bullshit happening around my station and surrounding towns, Daisy has insisted on sleeping in her own home for the last four days. She's punishing me for being an overbearing dick. I could have easily told her the guy threatened me over her. I know what his untouchable comment meant. But that would have made her worry about me more, rather than be concerned for her own wellbeing.

I'll admit, she's right for giving me a hard time. I didn't mean to ask her to move in during sex, but I couldn't keep my mouth shut. I've thought about her being in my home since the first day I met her.

But I can see how she would think I was trying to leverage her into doing what I want.

It's the cop in me. And she knows it.

I'm dying without her, though. Sure, she gave me a blowjob that I can still feel before she left the station last night, but I need to hold her.

And she's not letting me do that.

It's been quiet. The break-ins have subsided since the Sweetstown hit. But I know better. After years of watching this same pattern, I know it's only a small reprieve. It's a tactic to let people think it's okay again. They let down their guard. That's when the big shit happens.

Daisy had taken the day off to help set up at the rec center, super excited to bring it all together while the town was just over the top celebrating Christmas. But the text I got was anything but sweet and had me imagining all the things I'd do to her later. She was dressed in a red dress, sleeveless and short, lined with white fur and matching black boots. It was enough to make me come on the spot. But the second text was a shot of her in a red lace bra with white bows over the nipples and red lace panties with the same white bows lining the band. She followed up that picture with a text saying 'for the after party to do as you please, but the lingerie must remain on.'

My response? I sent her a dick pic. It made me feel like a teenager and my hands shook while I took the picture, but this is the relationship we have. The teasing, playful, sexy, only for us, is the best part of being with her.

Daisy said she'd meet me here at the station before going to the center together, so I used the time to catch up on paperwork. I'm waiting not so patiently because I need a taste of her before we go. And she does, too. I know that's why she said she'd meet me here. Glancing at the clock, I realize she should have been here about forty-five minutes ago. I call her phone, but it rings out and an uneasy feeling settles like a rock in my stomach.

I hear the scanner go off, but I don't pay too much attention. My mind is focused on Daisy and that red lace lingerie she has on.

I hear the scanner resume, the night dispatch operator is online, and I listen in through the radio in my office.

And then a third call comes in.

“What the fuck is happening?” Standing and turning the volume up on the radio closest to me, I hear the reports coming in.

dispatch. neighbors report they're hearing banging and yelling. Cars racing up and down the block. Send a unit to check it out.

address?

one nineteen Fleet Road

Copy

I watch as dispatch waves over the officers on duty in house. The atmosphere has changed within two minutes and I'm still not processing. That is until I hear the next call coming in.

Christmas PD. What's your emergency?

I'm on Jenson Lane in Lakeshore. I'm hearing fireworks.

Fireworks? From which direction?

Whoa! No fireworks! Those are shots!

Sir, please remain calm. You're on Jenson, you said? Cross street is Fleet. Which direction is the noise coming from?

*Next block over. On Sycamore Avenue! Oh shit! Jill, get away from the window! *

My heart races and I grab my keys and run from my office, shouting for the address again.

“Sycamore, Chief. In Lakeshore. We've got units heading that way!”

I rack my brain trying to remember who's on tonight, but I'm interrupted when the phones start ringing on all the desks. The dispatch board is lighting up like it's the fourth of July.

"What the fuck is going on!" I roar, wanting answers right now.

"Shots fired. Sycamore Avenue. Jenson Lane. Other reports of cars street racing."

My fists clench. This fucking gang waited for tonight. They knew about the party and were waiting for everyone to be distracted.

I grab a radio and run for the front door. "Show me heading to the scene." The radio in my hand is set to all units and I hear Tom's voice come over the air. Two officers in the station go racing out beside me.

"Talk to me, Casanova."

"Chief? It's Lakeshore. We're three minutes out."

"Make it one. I'm right behind you." Jumping in and starting my patrol truck, I call Tom on the direct line.

"Casanova."

"Tom. She's not answering the phone and she should have been at the station almost an hour ago."

"Wasn't she setting up? Maybe she didn't hear the phone ring."

"No. She was coming to me first, and we were going together."

Tom lets out a curse. "O'Brien, drive faster."

I hang up the line and bang on the steering wheel. "Goddamnit, Daisy! You just couldn't listen, could you?"

Chapter Twenty-Seven



V incent

Within minutes, but what feels like hours, I'm pulling into Lakeshore. The place is lit up with red and white strobe lights. I nearly take out the officers that have the road roped off. I slam my car into park and jump out, leaving the door open. A radio in one hand and feeling for my gun at my waist, I rush past the first line, shaking off the hands that are trying to hold me back.

Another shot goes off and I drop to the ground. Quickly crawling to the nearest car, I duck behind it and radio Tom and Cash.

"Tell me."

"Where are you?"

"I'm hiding behind a fucking car like a pussy! Now tell me before I run into the open to find her myself!"

"Stay down. It's her home. We have it surrounded."

I close my eyes and wait. I know. I just know what he's going to say next.

"She's inside, boss."

My breath escapes me and I feel an immediate need to throw up.

“Chief Hunter. You there?”

“I’m here.” I croak out the words, my hand gripping the radio so tight it hurts.

“Listen to me. We’re going to get her out. Get your shit together right now and don’t you dare jeopardize her safety! You know better right now. You’ve been trained. Just because this is someone you know, doesn’t make knowing the right way to do things any different.”

He’s right. Swallowing down my fear, I watch as the spotlights seem brighter on her home. I listen to all the sounds around me. I hear the radio static and every breath of the officers behind me.

And then the bullhorn.

“We’ve got you surrounded. Surrender now. Come out with your hands up. No one gets hurt tonight, you hear me?” Cash calls out.

I stand from behind the car, making my way to the front of the scene, moving slowly, using cars as my shield until I’m standing beside Tom. We watch as Cash makes his way closer to the front yard, using a tree as his only protection right now.

I could fucking kill him if he doesn’t get shot first.

“What the fuck is he doing? Jesus! You guys know better!”

I watch as more officers circle around the back. Cash works to distract whoever is inside by spitting through the bullhorn again.

“Come on, man. Come out and talk. You can’t stay in there forever. If you’ve got someone inside, let them go. Let’s not make this worse than it is for you.”

“Fuck you!” A shout comes from the upstairs window.

Another shot.

A scream.

“Goddamnit!” I step around from the car but Tom grabs me by the waist.

“Get the fuck back! You’re going to get someone killed!”

“If he hurts her, I swear to God, Casanova!”

“You’re going to get us all hurt if you don’t fucking calm down!” He slams my chest. “You dumb fuck! You don’t even have a vest on!” He whistles and two guys from the neighboring unit nod. “Get him a vest!” The one turns and grabs from the car he’s at, tosses to the other who runs it up to us. I slip it on over my head and anxiously watch the house.

“Yo! We all heard a scream in there, so unless your partner is a woman, I suggest you send out whoever you have in there!” Cash is back on the horn. “There’s no way out for you! Come out now before you make it worse for yourself.”

A giant bang goes off and we hear yelling. A round of shots goes next and before I can think twice, I’m rushing to the house. Tom is on my heels and I beat Cash to the door, despite him having almost fifty yards on me to begin with.

“Daisy! Daisy!” I’m a danger to myself and her right now and I’ll never forgive myself if something happens, but all I can think to do is get to her.

Violet pops into my head. I see myself running to her, tripping over my own feet that couldn’t keep up with the adrenaline coursing through my body. Watching the car that hit her speed off and screaming until my lungs ran out of oxygen.

It’s happening all over again and I wonder how a guy can live if he’s lost two of the greatest loves in his life?

I race up the stairs, pulling the officers in front of me down and pushing them out of the way. I skid to a stop in the upstairs hall as I see a tall guy in all black, wearing a matching mask. His arm is wrapped around Daisy, a gun pointed outwards. The fear showing on her face is enough to make me drop to my knees. And when she sees me, she cries out in despair.

“Shut up, bitch!” He shakes her, and she yelps again.

Her lip is bleeding, and her shirt is torn, hanging loosely from her body. She’s wearing jeans, no shoes, and has red marks all over her arms as if someone scratched her.

Rage flows through me.

“You’ve got no bullets left, man. I know you don’t. I counted the shots. You better just step back right now. At least let the girl go. You know nothing good will come from it if she gets hurt, too.” An officer from my unit is facing off with him.

“Fuck you guys. I’ll let her go if you let me go.” The suspect spits out.

I hear an officer laugh quietly beside me, and I shoot him a death glare. “You know we can’t do that. But we can work with you.”

“I’m no snitch, if that’s what you want from me.”

“Even if it gets you out of trouble?” I ask.

“Fuck trouble.” He rips his mask off and his face is familiar.

Goddamnit. It’s the kid we brought in last week.

“This your initiation do-over?” I call out from the back and step forward.

His eyes are wild, but they zero in on me and a smile spreads across his face. “Chief Hunter. I’m honored you’d show up tonight.”

“You’ve made quite a scene, kid.” He looks proud, and it turns my stomach. “You’ve also got one of my employees, and that’s just not going to fly on my watch.”

He pulls Daisy tighter, dragging the back of his hand holding the gun across her cheek and down her chest. My hands are clenched so tight I’m sure my palm is bleeding from my own nails digging in.

“She’s real pretty, Chief.” He cocks his head slightly. “She’s yours, isn’t she?”

Fuck me. First thing we’re taught is to never let the bad guy think you have some kind of tie to the victim. It increases their need to create a show. But he already knows. He saw the draw we have to each other at the station.

His eyes never leave mine as he buries his nose into her neck and inhales deeply.

“She works for me, yes.” I force the words out, doing my best to keep an even tone.

The guy stills for a moment, thinking over my words. I glance at Daisy. Her eyes never leave mine, but I can't concentrate on her. It's what he wants. I want to mouth words of encouragement to her, to me, but I can't acknowledge that she means the world to me.

Not in front of this guy.

But when this fucking asshole licks her, starting from her cheek to the corner of her mouth, I see red.

“With a body like this, I bet she works real well.” Daisy whimpers and it fucking wrecks me. “She's young, chief. You break her in good?”

“Let her go!” I yell it out with more force than I'd like. I'm ready to fucking gut this guy where he stands. “Let's talk, just you and I. You wanted me here, I'm here.”

There's a split second of chaos and shouts. His eyes look scared, shocked at the sudden noise. Daisy pushes away, and he raises his gun.

Then one shot goes off.

My body jumps at the noise. The officers rush him and the guy hits the wood floor. Daisy scratches and claws at the ground and I meet her, dragging her back by her arms, falling onto the floor with her, rolling her and covering her with my body.

A scuffle ensues, but it's over quickly.

“Suspect secured! All officers, stand down.”

My body immediately sags in relief, and I roll to the side. Daisy bursts into tears, her body shaking as she crawls into my lap, closer and closer, hugging me tight, squeezing me, choking me, as I touch her all over.

“Where are you hurt? What hurts, Daisy, tell me!”

I run my hands through her hair, over her head, down her back.

“Vincent!” She says my name over and over in between sobs. “Get me out of here. Please! Take me home!”

“Shh, babe, it’s okay. It’s over. It’s over. Oh my God, I love you.”

I stand, cradling her close to me. “You’re bleeding! What happened to your arms? We need the medics to look you over first.” I look at the suspect, who’s bleeding from his shoulder. They clipped him when he raised his gun, and it was enough to secure him.

“Don’t look. Close your eyes. I’m getting you out of here.”

Chapter Twenty-Eight



Daisy

I'm shaken up.

Correction, I'm scared out of my mind.

The red and white lights are blinding as Vince carries me out of the house I worked so hard for.

It will be the last time I walk out of here. I know it. My home feels violated. I can never come back here.

I bury my face in his neck as we walk over to an ambulance, and he places me on a stretcher. The medics waste no time in checking me over, using a blood pressure cuff, bandages, and alcohol swabs.

A tall man appears, blocking out the lights. "Ma'am. How are you feeling?" I look at the nameplate that reads McIntyre. And when this man glances at Vince and back at me, I look at Vince in question.

"This is Dave McIntyre, Chief in Sweetstown."

"Hi Daisy." He smiles softly. "We've spoken on the phone a few times."

"Yes. Yes. I remember. Hi."

"I know protocol says to do this now, but can you give us a couple of minutes, Dave?"

Chief McIntyre studies Vince for a quick moment, then nods and walks away. The medics are still standing close to me and I wince as the cold compresses sting my cuts.

“Daisy, I’ll tell him to come back tomorrow, okay? We don’t have to do this now.”

“It’s okay. I want to-”

“No. You don’t. I see it on your face.”

“Vince! Stop.”

He’s standing in front of me, and hasn’t stopped touching me since he found me. Holding my hand, his hand on my leg, switching hands to turn and speak to someone on the other side of me. I know what he’s doing. He’s spiraling now as fast as I was an hour ago.

“I know what you’re going through right now. But you’re not back there. Please. Let me do what I’m supposed to do right now and then we can go home.”

“Hunter!”

We both turn toward someone calling his name and see Cash waving him over.

“Go. This is your scene. I’m fine here.” My hands shake as I tell him to go, but he needs to work.

“I’ll wrap it up quickly.” He kisses me and jogs over to Cash. The medic is still tending to my arms. There are three deep red scratches on my forearm from where the maniac gang member grabbed me. I fought like hell to break free and when I did, he took my skin with him.

All I remember is my dad always saying, *‘you fight with everything you have. Don’t ever let them move you to a different location.’*

So I fought. That’s when he grabbed my shirt and ripped it up, swinging me to the ground. When I screamed, he smacked me across the face, splitting my lip open.

My yelling, the shots fired, the cars racing up and down the street, it all brought attention to this quiet neighborhood

that they thought they could overrun.

“Hey! You can’t be here-”

Bang.

The medic bandaging my arm slumps over my lap on the stretcher. I feel warmth covering me immediately and a sharp twinge of pain, but nothing around me is registering in my mind.

Bang.

Another shot goes off and my head swims. I feel like I’m hearing from underwater. Everything is garbled. I look ahead at the crowd in front of me and there are people dropping to the ground all over.

Bang, Bang.

I look to my left as a man wearing all black walks by me, arm outstretched, firing into the crowd. I feel like I’m moving in slow motion because nothing is making sense. The medic is on top of me, lifeless, pinning me down, and there’s blood everywhere. I attempt to slide off the stretcher to the right, but my left arm isn’t working and fails to push the medic away.

More shots. More yelling. And then the gunman falls to his knees and lands face first on the pavement. A wave of officers run towards him.

“Officer down! Officer down!”

“Help me.” I croak out. “Help me!” A scream leaves my lungs at a pitch that I didn’t know existed. I’m suddenly frantic and trying to scramble away from all of this mayhem.

I fall from the stretcher and stumble forward, searching for Vince.

“O’Brien’s been hit!” Hearing his voice, I continue forward. “Fuck me! Cash! You better not fucking die on me right now!”

Those words. A sob leaves my throat as I get close and when Vince peers up and sees me covered in blood, I’ll never forget his look. His eyes widen as he tries to stand, but then

looks down at Cash. I see the indecision of whom to reach for first cross his face. The medics are pushing in closer and Tom is ripping Cash's vest and shirt open. Vince falls back on his hands in a state of disbelief.

The medics have fully taken over and push Tom back. He gathers Vince and they back up a few more feet and it's only then that Vince comes back to life, snapping his head in my direction again and charging for me.

"I'm fine! It's not my blood!" I have my hands up, trying to ease his fear.

The entire street is on lockdown, and we hear more sirens.

He sweeps his hands over me. "It is your blood! You're hit!" He pushes on my left bicep and I cry out. That heat I felt after the medic collapsed over me was a bullet. My stomach rolls and I fall weightless into his arms.

"Medic!"

"What the hell is happening?" Tom cries yells into his radio. Vincent wraps me up tight in his arms.

"Scene secured, Officer Casanova."

"They fucking said that already and got it wrong." Tom growls back over the mic.

"Confirmed, Officer Casanova."

He and Vince have a silent conversation with their eyes until the shouts begin again.

"He's going into arrest!"

"Pads! Now!" More medics push past us carrying a device. It quickly replaces the hands that were pumping his chest.

"Clear!"

Our attention is on Cash. I cry out as I see his body jump off the ground from the shock of the AED.

"Fuck!" Tom pulls at his hair and drops to his knees, head hanging low. I watch as a look of complete dismay washes over him. This can't be happening right now. I can feel my

heart pounding hard, banging like a drum in my ears and drowning out the surrounding sounds.

“We got a pulse! Move now!” We stand and watch in awe as they load Cash onto the stretcher, and put him into the back of the ambulance. The slamming of the doors jolts me and I let out a sob. Vince pulls me in close and we watch as one cop bangs twice on the door and the lights and sirens lead them out.

Immediately, a medic turns to me next. I look down at my arm and see blood running from an open wound. I had no idea that the strike of pain I felt was me being shot.

“It just grazed her skin, not a direct hit. But it needs to be cleaned and stitched.”

“Get her onto the bus!” Vince yells at the medics, then turns to Tom. “Tom! Call your sister. We’re going to be here all night and I don’t want Daisy to be alone. Ask her to pick up Angelina and have the two of them meet Daisy at the hospital. I want them both staying with Francesca and Jackson tonight.”

Tom nods and pulls out his cell, just going through the motions. The emotion and distress that was painted on him a moment ago is gone and a shell of a man is in its place. Officer Casanova has taken over and the Tom we know is gone. I understand it’s a scene, a terrible one at that, but I’m worried about how he’ll return from it.

Vince stands stoically next to him, lips in a straight line, brows furrowed low. He doesn’t say a word and never takes his eyes from me as I’m placed inside the ambulance and driven away from him.

Chapter Twenty-Nine



V INCENT

“Is she hot?”

“Bro, smoking. Like, seriously. Ask for the digits.”

Cash cracks his eyelids and we chuckle as the six foot two male nurse winks at him.

“You guys are such assholes.”

The nurse checks his fluids, makes a note on his chart, and leaves the room.

“How long have I been here?”

“Too long. You’re about to be fired if you don’t get back to the station this week.” Angelina calls out as she enters the hospital room.

“Oh baby chief, such a softie, just like your dad.”

Angelina flips him off and he chuckles, then groans. She picks up her pace and is next to his bed immediately. “You have to be easy, Cash.” She adjusts his pillow and he never takes his eyes from her. “Can I check the bandage?”

“You’re the doc, go for it.”

She twists her lips. “I’m not the doc yet. But I am going to be your worst nightmare come PT time!” She throws her head

back and laughs like Count Dracula, rubbing her hands together.

“Bring it, baby doc!”

My eyes narrow at their interaction but no one else seems to notice. Did I misinterpret the way Cash perked up the moment Angelina walked in?

It gets quiet again as Angelina begins to change his bandage. I can't believe I'm sitting in the hospital room with one of my best guys on the job, and best friends in real life, lying in the bed after being shot. Cash was extremely lucky. The bullet entered at an angle, sliding under his vest at the shoulder, nicking an artery. It was deep enough to create a hole, and he could have bled out. The shock of it was enough to stop his heart.

And stop ours, too.

He was rushed into surgery. They opened him up, retracted the bullet, and sewed him back up. He'll be out for a good eight weeks. But the good news is, with a little rehab, he'll regain full motion of his shoulder and have no lasting effects.

Twenty-four hours later, Tom and I are sitting in his room. We've been here for over an hour. I'm tense, hating that I'm sitting in this stagnant, white walled room but not wanting to leave either.

When Daisy walks in, I relax slightly until I see her arm and bicep bandaged. My heart races all over again.

“There's my girl!” Angelina turn at her voice and rushes her.

“Oh, I'm so glad to see you!” They hug tightly, neither one letting go. “With all the chaos last night, and patients coming in, I couldn't get off rotation to check on you.”

“You checked on me!”

“A text was not enough.” They're still holding each other.

“Hey! I'm the one who got shot! Where's my hug?”

The girls giggle and relinquish their hold. Daisy walks directly to me first, ignoring Cash's words completely, and gives me a sweet kiss. She says hello to Tom, then climbs onto the bed next to Cash. He groans when the bed dips slightly. Cash doesn't show weakness, so I know this is killing him.

If I didn't trust both of them completely, I'd yank him from it, wires and all.

"Cassius. My girl needed a hug first. Than my man. You're third in line no matter who was shot." She winks at me and lays her head on his shoulder. I grunt a laugh at her using his full name.

Then she lowers her voice. "You looked just fine where you were." His eyebrows go up and he snickers. "How are you feeling?"

"Like I was shot."

Tom grumbles. "You're lucky you made it. I would have killed you myself if you didn't."

"There's so much love in this room right now, I almost can't take it." Angelina snaps her folder closed and leans on the bedrail. "I'll be back in a little while to check on you, Cash." She lays her hand over top of Cash's who has Daisy's in his. Daisy and Cash are more of a brother-sister relationship. I watched their friendship blossom over the last few months. Cash has that easy way about him and she's offering comfort to him. But this trio dynamic happening right now has my mind spinning. Have I missed something along the way?

"Dad, I love you. I'll call you later. Go home and get some rest. I don't want to see you still here when I come back."

"Yes, baby, love you, too." The door closes and the silence overwhelms the room once again.

I hate hospitals.

"How was it staying with the Gages? Francesca's kids are wild."

"Kids? She only has JJ."

“He means JJ and Jackson,” Tom laughs. “My brother-in-law is a menace.”

She shrugs. “I love kids. It was great being there.”

Kids.

Holy shit.

That word just struck me like I was the one who was shot. I never thought twice about Daisy wanting kids. Jesus. Is that something she wants? I’m too old for more kids. I have my daughter already. I’m on the verge of being a grandparent, not starting over.

This complete debacle has me thinking twice about our future. She could have been robbed of everything because of me.

I watch her intently. What else am I robbing her of? Her chance at independence? Her chance at being a mom? I almost got her killed, for Christ’s sake.

I stand abruptly, suddenly in desperate need of some air.

“Where ya going, boss?” Tom asks and Daisy raises her eyes to me.

“I have to check back in at the station.” I feel her eyes on me, but I won’t look at her. She gently gets up from the bed.

“I’ll come back later, okay? Do you want me to sneak any food for you?”

“Of course I do. Get me the goods from Farrah’s bakery. Tom knows how much I like the sweets there.” He gives Tom a smirk.

Tom flips him off. “I’m letting that one slide since you’re laid up right now.”

I watch her and Cash say goodbye, and I can’t help but wonder if she’d be better suited to him. My blood boils with the thought ‘*she’s mine*’ and I’ll break anyone else’s hands that touch her.

She follows me out the door and we’re quiet as we walk side by side down the hall and out of the hospital. Quieter still

on the ride home. My mind swirls with everything I want to say but don't want to give an actual voice to.

We pull into my driveway, and I shut the engine. Neither one of us makes a move to leave the truck. Instead, we stare out the windshield at the Christmas lights strung around the garage.

“Are you going to tell me what's going on?”

Taking a deep breath. I don't know how to go about this. “Daisy. I had to choose.”

She doesn't respond to me.

“I chose my job.”

“No. You made quick decisions that saved everyone around you.”

“How can you even say that, Daisy? I chose my job first! I sent you off in an ambulance and had someone else meet you at the hospital while I stayed to work!”

She speaks calmly and evenly. “You made sure I was safe. You delegated responsibility. You looked after your man that was critically hurt. Then you chose your job.”

“No, I -”

“Why are you trying to end this right now? You wanted nothing more but to protect me. Isn't that what you've been screaming for months? You handled everyone and everything the way you should have at that scene and now I'm sitting here listening to you tell me you chose it all over me? Do you hear yourself right now?”

She erupts at me. And she calls me on everything that's flowing through my mind. “I'm not trying to end anything but-”

“You want me to be alone? You want to leave me in that house? What happened to ‘if I'm gone, you're gone’? Why are you choosing now to push me away?”

“I can't offer you anything! I'm twice your age. I should be watching over you, yet my life has brought you the worst

danger ever.” I grip the steering wheel. “You want kids. I heard you at the hospital! You’re better off with someone like Cash. And fuck me.” I growl out the words, my anger rising to the top. “That makes me want to go right back to that hospital and kill him.”

She turns to me. “Are you serious right now, Vince? Have I ever pressed you about kids? Have I ever said I felt unsafe in your world? If anything, you make my world safe just by being here.”

“Safe. Yeah, right. Look at how safe you are.” I look pointedly at the white bandages around her arm. “I failed you, Red! I should have forced you to stay at my house. I knew the gang was going to strike. I knew it was going to happen. I almost lost you once. Then, I left you alone on a stretcher after you were attacked and I almost lost you *again!* Twice, Daisy! Twice I failed to protect you when another opened fire into the crowd. I can’t even think about where I would be if something worse happ-”

She moves closer to me in the truck. “Don’t think. Don’t go there. There’s no need to torture yourself with ‘what ifs’ that didn’t happen.” She lays her hand on my thigh and makes small circles, trying to soothe my nerves. “I’m going to pretend you didn’t say you wanted to force me to stay at your house. The two of us have a lot to learn. You need to learn to give up a bit of control, and I need to learn that accepting help doesn’t make me weak.” She grabs my hand now. “You have a need to protect. I know it, and I accept that about you. I may not like the way you go about it at times, but I see you for who you are! You need to see me now! You need to see that yes, I need to do things on my own, especially things I’ve never experienced on my own, but it doesn’t mean I *want* to do them alone! I have to be better about letting you stand beside me. I’ve been saying it, but maybe I haven’t been showing it.”

“So, what? You’re okay with just giving all that other stuff up?”

“What am I giving up? Vince, I’m *choosing* you! I’m not losing anything! I’m gaining! When are you going to get over this thought that you’ve got nothing to offer? Your age means

nothing! It's just a number! I don't give a fuck if you're sixty! I love you! I love your heart, your mind, your obnoxious, overbearing ways!" I shake my head, but she won't let me get a word in. "You have no idea how it felt knowing you were in control that night. I knew you were coming for me. I *knew* it. There was no way you weren't going to show up and be my knight riding in to save me. It's the only thing that kept me from completely losing it. Because I was close. And then seeing Cash get hurt?" She slows her words and looks down. "Vince, you are the ultimate man to have in my corner. Everyone should be as lucky as I am."

Her words sink in. For being young, she's light years ahead of me. And it's what I need. What I've been missing. I'm completely in love with Daisy and I couldn't leave her if I tried.

"I'm not going anywhere unless you tell me to, Daisy. I want what you want. I want what's best for you. I'm by far the worst for you, but if you deem me good enough, I'll never tell you no. I'll never turn away from you."

She lunges for me, lips hitting lips, and I know I'll never leave her. I don't want to be morbid, but you'd have to rip my dead body from her right now.

"Take me inside, Vince. I need to be with you. I need to feel loved and safe."

"I'll give that to you every single day for the rest of my life, Daisy."

Chapter Thirty



D AISY

Three weeks later

Today is the first day I've returned to my house since the shooting. I grabbed a few of my must-have items and my clothes and jewelry. But the rest? It means nothing. I absolutely refused to even drive into Lakeshore the past couple weeks. My last vision of the first house I owned is one of destruction. I'd like to burn it down, and everything that's been tainted inside it can burn, too.

We found out some of the gang members had been watching me for weeks. All the little things that were happening, the light bulbs missing, the windows being shaved down, the garbage cans being tipped over, it was them. The two gangs warring with each other for certain areas of the surrounding towns, were trying to establish separate residences to consume more turf. There was no rhyme or reason for why they chose my home, except that it was at the end of a quiet block they thought they could take over. They were hoping to scare me away from it, so they could seize it for their use.

I refuse to be a victim and live in fear, but it doesn't mean I have to face something again to overcome it. Nothing about this house makes me feel good anymore and I don't care what a psychologist says. Confronting painful memories again will not do me any good.

Yes, I loved it here. I loved knowing I achieved something on my own. But a house is not a home without the right people in it. Home felt best when I was with Vincent. And it didn't matter what room we were in, home was just being with him. I felt at home at the station. I felt at home at the Casanova's house. My home isn't a building.

It's Vince.

For the past few weeks, I've been living with Vince and the feeling that this is where I belong has gotten stronger every day. Neither one of us has spoken a word about it. The night we left Cash in the hospital, we came here and I knew I'd never leave again. I have a feeling Vince is keeping quiet, afraid to bring up the subject for fear I'll want to leave.

We're sitting together having Chinese food, watching television. A sappy instalove Christmas movie is on and Vince is not so quietly putting up with watching it with me. He's complaining at every mushy line but I know he secretly loves it.

"I don't want to leave tonight."

He continues to shovel food into his mouth. "You're not leaving. That house is still a crime scene, Red. You can't go back yet."

"No. I don't want to go back at all. Like, ever."

He freezes mid chew and looks at me out of the corner of his eye. He swallows his food and places his plate on the table in front of us. Then he reaches over and takes my plate from me, placing it next to his, and turns to face me.

"What are you saying?"

"I'm saying that house means nothing if I don't have you." He pulls me into his lap. "Let's call Bobby in the morning. I'm sure no one will want it after what happened in it, but I want

out. Deed it back to the bank or burn it down at this point. I don't care. A home is where you belong and I belong here, with you."

He cradles my face in his hands. "You have no idea how long I've wanted to hear those words from you."

I raise a brow. "And you didn't even have to beat them out of me. Tonight anyway." I smirk and he laughs, then kisses me.

"I'll do anything you want, Daisy. We'll sell it, burn it, give it away. And you can do whatever you want here. If you want to paint, knock down walls, do it. I want you to be happy. If renovating this house to make it what you've always dreamed of will keep you in it with me, we'll start tonight."

I pull back, and feign a look of shock and laugh. "You went from controlling it all to giving me complete command? We're really flipping the script here, Vince."

He thinks for a moment. "Okay, maybe not total control. Can we negotiate? I give, you give." His face softens, and he pulls me closer, taking special care not to jumble my arm. Right here is where I want to be for always.

"Thank you for listening to me, even when you didn't want to. I know I pushed your buttons. I know my stubborn streak of doing it on my own almost had a catastrophic result."

"No. What happened was not on you. That gang was going to make a move, no matter what." He growls out the words and strokes my forearm over the bandage. "The minute that guy spotted you at the station, I knew he'd be back. And when he had his hands on you? It's something I won't ever unsee."

I play with his hair at the base of his neck, trying to soothe him. "It's over now. You don't have to think about it. I'm here. I'm safe. And I'm not going anywhere. Why would I? I have a man to stand with me. One who allows me to grow, catches me when I fall, and one who loves me just right."

"I'll be that man for always, Daisy."

THE END

Epilogue

Cash

“Baby Doc! I’m so glad to see you today!”

Angelina turns in her chair and stands to meet me as I enter the rehab facility. She’s in scrubs that shouldn’t be sexy, but they are. The color only magnifies the blue in her eyes, making them feel electric. Her hair up in a ponytail shows off her delicate neckline. Everything about Angelina screams ‘girl next door’ to me.

And boy, does it make me want to move into her neighborhood.

“Cassius.” She calls me by my real name, which I normally hate, but when she says it, I don’t mind it. “Come on back.”

I follow behind her to the open room with equipment that’s meant to torture me. The rubber band bar to strengthen my shoulder. The pull up bar meant to increase the range I can raise my shoulder again. And the full mirrored walls that give me a hard on as I imagine Angelina and I facing them.

Wrapped around each other.

Naked.

Closing my eyes and letting out a breath, she directs me to the massage table.

“Lay down. I want to check the wound first, then I’ll warm you up and we can begin.”

She’s all very professional, but I know better. She’s teasing me with every word, never letting on to anyone around her, that I’ve already seen her naked.

Glancing at the clock, I count the hours until I get to see her again.

“I’m already hot, baby doc. It happens every time I see you.” I chuckle under my breath as she raises a brow and bites her bottom lip to keep from smiling. “Don’t hide that smile from me, Lina.”

Her eyes connect with mine and she laughs, unable to contain herself.

“You’re gorgeous.”

“Cash. Stop it. I’m working. And you’re my patient.”

“Can we play doctor, later?”

She swats at my good shoulder and slides my bad one out of my tank. Her hands trail my skin as she undoes the bandage. Her soft touch the only reprieve I get from the pain. “It looks really good, Cash. You’re healing so fast.”

“Good.” I mumble out, but it’s not good. I’m in a lot of pain. And yes, it’s healing, but I think there’s deeper damage. I know I’m supposed to tell her everything I’m feeling. The weakness, the numbness, the sharp twinges I get for no reason. But if I do, I’m afraid they’ll put me out on full disability.

I can’t be that guy who sits around. I’m thirty-five. I have my whole life ahead of me.

I put in four years with the military before getting out when my cousin was killed overseas. I wouldn’t take the chance of something happening to me and putting my family through that pain again. And if I’m let go from the force, what good am I to anyone?

I’ve only just found the girl of my dreams. We’ve got an uphill battle to fight once her father, my boss, finds out we’re together.

Though once he figures it out, he'll probably fire me anyway.

She's worth it.

She cleans around my stitches and places a soft bandage back over it just to keep it tidy while I work out.

“Come on, tough guy, let's see what you got.”

I sit up on the table, glancing around noticing we're the only ones back here. Grabbing her hand, I widen my legs and pull her close in between them, letting her hand settle on my semi-hard cock. “You already know what I got, *Leeeena*.” I tease her name and she licks her lips.

“Stop pushing buttons, Officer! We're here to work and get your ass back to the station.”

“Fiiiiine. I'll behave. On one condition.”

She lets out a sigh, clearly exasperated by me. I love doing this to her.

“What is it, Cassius?”

“Tell me you're my girl.” She grins and pulls me to standing, directing me towards the first torture device. “Tell me, Lina.”

“You're my girl.” She stretches up to grab the bar and I grab her waist and tickle her. She squeals, twisting out of my hold and laughs. “You walked right into that, now stop messing around and get to work.”

“Fuck, you're hot when you're bossy.” I begin my exercises, disguising the fact I'm disappointed she won't tell me.

She won't commit and I know why.

Find out if Cash O'Brien can capture the heart of Angelina Hunter ... THE BIGGEST RISK coming soon!

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If you enjoyed this read and are looking to join my ARC team,
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About the Author

Hailing from a tiny town in New York, Carolina spends her free time with her military husband, their three sons and new daughter-in-law (welcome to this crazy family!) and her chocolate lab, Lincoln. Her avid love for reading slowly morphed into an “I want to do that, too!” attitude and a dream was born with a pen and paper.

Carolina Jax writes contemporary romances about her favorite things – football, small towns and big hearts. Her stories are based on an everyday life with amazing people finding amazing love. They have the perfect combination of love, lust and laughs, and always with a Happily Ever After.

When she’s not on the field watching her boys play football and lacrosse, she loves to drink wine with friends, watch the Philadelphia Eagles (hopefully) win, read about alpha heroes, and dream about everything Christmas.



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