



A
TETHERED
CHRYSALIS

THE GILDED BUTTERFLY CHRONICLES

MICCA MICHAELS

For anyone that's had to fight to do more than merely exist,

I see you.

For those that stand for those unable to stand for themselves,

I see you.

For those that think you're alone in your darkest moment,

I see you.

Don't allow your demons to control you, make them work for you.



Title: A Tethered Chrysalis

Series: The Gilded Butterfly Chronicles

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CHAPTER ONE

Brooklyn

The fact that this is a bright, sunny day with the birds chirping, seriously pisses me off. Drives with my dad are normally a fun time for us. Especially since we're not with Mom or Bianca. But today is far from a fun day. I don't want to do today, but I have no choice.

My anxiety level is so high my leg is bouncing, I'm picking at my nails and I'm biting my lip. When I was younger, I thought once someone was convicted of a crime they had to serve their sentence and that was it. Boy was I fucking wrong. It's been ten years and here I am being forced to open old wounds to deal with this shit again.

The instant I feel a hand slide onto mine, I jump and scream. I know that Dad and I are the only ones in the car, but it doesn't matter. The damage is done. "Lyn, you've got to calm down. He can't hurt you anymore. He won't even get to look at you. Plus, he won't get another parole hearing for at least ten more years after this. I know this is hard, but you've got to breathe."

“None of that makes this any easier. I started having nightmares again, and it’s been years since I’ve had to deal with them. That’s just one of the reasons Travis and I broke up. He was tired of getting a busted lip because he’d forget to duck. I’m sure a normal person would feel bad for it. I guess that’s why I don’t. I’m not normal anymore.” The look my dad gives me when he glances over lets me know I’m in for a lecture later.

Pulling up outside the courthouse, I release a low and drawn-out groan. “Well, this is it, and the sooner I get in there, the sooner this nightmare of a day will be over.” We both slide out of my dad’s cherry red Ford F250. Beautiful truck, in my opinion, I think, before realizing that I was thinking of whatever I could to distract myself from what I was about to do. I need to just get this over with.

Dad walks around the front of his truck to join me as I stand there looking at the steps of the courthouse as if they’re going to start moving or something. I feel my dad place his arm around my shoulders and I can’t help leaning into him.

The only positive thing about this bullshit is getting to see how handsome my dad is when he cleans up. Don’t get me wrong, he’s in a pair of jeans. But they’re his best pair. He’s wearing a button-down blue jean shirt with a tie. He’s also not wearing his traditional baseball cap. So everyone gets to see his dark chocolate hair.

That’s just one of the things I take after my dad with. My hair is also dark chocolate. The other obvious trait is his

heterochromia iridum, one brown eye and one blue eye. A tug on my shoulders breaks me from my inner thoughts.

Walking up the courthouse steps, we're joined by my long-time attorney, Mr. Kyle. Technically, he could handle this and read my statement, but I'll be damned if that man ever thinks he's beaten me. Having him beside me, along with my dad, makes me feel even stronger. He knows everything that happened to me and made that son-of-a-bitch's ass pay for it.

Walking in through the door a police officer was holding open, my attorney leads us straight to where we need to be. Mr. Kyle makes sure I sit in a certain chair, while he and my dad act as a human wall, just in case Max is led in through the side entrance.

At the original trial, Mr. Kyle placed his suit jacket over my head to shield my entire upper body from anyone that may try to photograph me. I'll never forget the way everyone was protective of me and made sure I was comfortable. Well, as comfortable as possible anyway.

"Alright, Brooklyn, I know you can do this. He can't win against the truth. If at any time you feel you need to step away, simply say it out loud and I'll make it happen. It's also already arranged that I can speak for you in case you're unable." Mr. Kyle has always seen to my needs and him being able to make me feel safe is amazing.

"I've got this, and thank you for covering me from prying eyes. How long do you think it'll be before they call us in and

will he be able to see me when I go in?" I hope not, but I can't control that.

"They'll call us in about ten minutes before the officers bring him in. He won't be able to see you. He'll be on one side of a partition wall, and you'll be on the other. He will not be permitted to speak to you for any reason." I feel the relief flood my body.

After another fifteen minutes, a court officer calls us into the room. Mr. Kyle walks into the room before me and Dad's right behind me. I'm very relieved to see the partition wall as we walk in. Mr. Kyle directs me to sit towards the front, with my dad at my side. Mr. Kyle takes the seat directly in front of me. Once he has his stuff situated, he turns to look at me, gives me a slight nod, and spins back around.

Within a few minutes, the parole board members walk into the room and take their seats in the front of the room at a long table. "Ladies and gentlemen, we'll begin in a few minutes. We're waiting on the transport bus to arrive. Miss. Lacey, if, at any time, you begin to feel uncomfortable, please let us know and we can halt any discussion until you've exited the room."

Looking right at him, I nod my head to acknowledge him and what he's said. We didn't have to wait long till another door opens. I could hear, not see, what sounds like a group of men walking in and the wonderful sounds of rattling chains.

As soon as the room becomes quiet, my nerves kick in. I start to bounce my leg again, but my dad's sudden reaction made me stop. He quickly presses his hand onto my knee, giving it a

reassuring pat, then a squeeze. Once I stop and take a deep breath, I am able to sit still.

The parole board members take the time to introduce themselves and read a full retelling of what he, what Max, had done to me. I swear the only female on the parole board looks as though she was either going to throw up and or faint. Then, it was my turn to speak and unload on him through the parole board.



CHAPTER TWO

Brooks

Having to watch my baby girl relive that horrific night is fucking cruel. They know he doesn't need to be let out on the streets. I don't know why they even granted him the permission to even apply for parole. The entire legal system makes no sense.

I'm so extremely proud of her for standing up for herself. There was no talking her out of coming here and letting Mr. Kyle handle this. She won't let anyone even slightly feel like they can control her or intimidate her. She'll get through this, and I'll bet anything she'll be stronger for it.

I know she's been wanting to leave town, and I know her stubborn ass has stayed for me. I also know her life is predictable here. Nothing and no one to challenge her to work on the demons she still carries around with her. After this is over, I think it's time for a father/daughter talk on the drive home. She's always talked about being a nanny and possibly traveling. She went to school for it and hasn't done anything with it.

Hearing Lyn's voice snaps me out of my inner thoughts. Focus Brooks, damn it.

"Yes, sir, I'd prefer you all to just ask me questions. I believe I will do better that way."

There ya go, strong and steady voice. He can't hurt you.

I have to close my hands into fists to stop myself from crashing through the fake barrier wall and snapping his little fucking neck as I listen to her answer questions. I hope someone in prison has made him their little bitch.

"Miss. Lacey, can you tell us how old you were when Mr. Lucien attacked you and how long you had to spend in the hospital after said attack?"

"I was fifteen years old, and Mr. Lucien was nineteen at this point. Because of the beating from Mr. Lucien, I was in the hospital for two weeks and then bed rest at home for another couple of weeks." I can tell she's taking a moment to center herself.

"Miss. Lacey, how has this attack affected your life?"

"I just don't like going back there. I deal with nightmares, normally a couple of times a week, but knowing that today was coming, they've only gotten worse."

"One more question, Miss. Lacey. Do you feel it appropriate at this time for Mr. Lucien to be granted parole?"

"Sir, there will never be a time that I feel Mr. Lucien deserves parole. He destroyed the person I was and still affects my

behaviors. I jump and scare easily and because of what he did to me, I am unable to have a meaningful relationship.”

“Miss. Lacey, we’d like to thank you for your courage in coming here today and speaking of this awful moment in your life. We have no further questions for you, so if you’d like to leave, that would be fine.”

She didn’t hesitate. Lyn was up and out of the Parole Board meeting room so fast, I almost had to jog to catch up with her. Walking outside the courthouse, I can see the flood of relief wash through her body. Her shoulders relax and her smile returns. “What do you say we grab some ice cream cones for the trip to my house so you can pick up your truck and go home?”

“Dad, that worked when I was a kid. If you think one little scoop is going to pacify me now, you’re sadly mistaken. I want three scoops in a waffle cone.” Chuckling at her, I wrap my arm around her shoulders as we walk down the courthouse steps and to my truck.

As we’re about to slide into my truck, her cell phone rings. She answers it, placing her phone to speak so I can hear. “Brooklyn, it’s Mr. Kyle. A short recess was called. I’ll be in touch to let you know what their decision is.” When she hangs up the phone, she looks at me and I give her a wink. Sliding into the truck, clicking our seatbelts, I pull out of the parking lot and head straight for the ice cream parlor a few blocks from here.

We get our ice cream cones and head straight to my house. Glancing at her while she's enjoying her ice cream, I can tell something's on her mind, and I want to know what that wrinkled crease in her forehead is for.

"Lyn, if you keep eating that ice cream as fast as you are and thinking as hard as you are, that wrinkle crease in the center of your forehead is going to stay there." Oh damn, the look she shot me was damn near scary.

"Dad, what a thing to say. You seem to be wolfing down yours too. I happen to be thinking about something and it's not the first time, but I'm closer to making a decision. Actually, I think I have made a decision. So, I'm going to tell you what it is and I want to know your thoughts." It was as if she forced those words out of her own mouth in a damn hurry.

This just went from a teasing chat to get her to talk, to not being so sure I want to hear what she has to say. After she takes a few more licks and bites of her ice cream, I finally answer. "Alright, I'll tell you what I think. Go ahead, let's hear it." Since I'm driving, I can only look ahead, eat my ice cream, pray I don't get brain-freeze and focus on the road in front of me.

"So, I've been thinking about leaving town for almost a year now. You and I both know everyone has been talking since I caught Travis fucking Bianca and broke up with him. I'm tired of all of it. Hell, I'm tired of the town. I'm trapped, and it's time for me to leave and live. I've been thinking about how I got all that education and I'm not using it. You know I've

always wanted to be a nanny. I've been looking online to see what nanny positions are available. I emailed my resume with my application to three different families. There, that's it. Tell me what you think?" Well, holy shit balls batman.

I'm beyond excited and overjoyed, but I school my expression, glance at her and do as she asked. I tell her what I think. "I think it's an awesome idea. I know how much you really love kids and all that goes with being a nanny. But how are you going to find a position worthy of you and your education? How are you supposed to meet the possible families?"

I didn't have to actually see her roll her eyes at me. A parent can hear that kind of thing. She always does this sarcastic little sigh when she rolls her eyes. "Internet, Dad. How else do you think I'd find anything? As far as I know, there's not a 1-800-nanny hotline."

I'm going to let that go because I really want her to do this. "Well, like I said, I think it's an awesome idea. You have my support a hundred and ten percent. Make sure you give me a call if you need any help packing."

This time, I saw the look she gave me. "Thanks, Dad. I need to start doing what's best for me and not worry about everyone else. Do you need a napkin? I know I do."

"Well, I'll be damned." Glancing over at her while I'm waiting for the light to change, she looks at me and I simply raise an eyebrow. "Yep, I said that, and I'll say it again if I need to. It's about damn time you put yourself first and stop worrying about everyone else. It makes me a happy dad."

Brooklyn hands me a wad of napkins, one being a wet nap so I can clean up. I think my steering wheel is stickier than I am. It's worth it, though, to see my girl smile.

Lyn's cell phone ringing interrupts my rant of excitement. As I wait to continue, the expression on her face nearly made me pull my truck over, but I listen instead. "Are you serious? Oh, my gods, is he alright? Well, what did they do to Max?"

Now I'm really curious as to what the hell happened after we left. Continuing to drive and hearing only one side of the conversation is killing me and I'm not normally a nosey body. The second she ends that call, I'm going to pounce for information.

"Oh, my god, yeah, I'll tell him. I appreciate the call. Alright, we'll talk to you later." As she hung up the phone, I didn't even get a chance to pounce before she started speaking. "Dad, you are not going to believe this shit. Give me a sec, I need to wet my throat." Giving her the side eye for making me wait, I refocus on the road.



CHAPTER THREE

Brooklyn

I take a long, steady drink before pulling the water bottle away from my mouth. Part of what I have to say is good. I'm damn near giddy. The other, I'm not sure yet. We're not that far from my parent's house, shit.

"So, apparently right after we left the room, Max went for one of the officer's gun. I mean stood up and lunged. He didn't get it, but he was able to grab one of the parole board members. You know, the guy that was asking me all the questions? Well, he let the other members leave the room, but not his lawyer, Mr. Kyle, the policemen, or that one board member."

My dad's eyes might be on the road, but they're wide with shock. "Apparently, one of the officers managed to shoot Max with his taser. When Max went down, they piled onto him to hogtie him. He was fighting them, finally managing to get a gun, Max got a shot off before one of the other officers shot him."

"Did it kill him?" I almost wish I could say yes, but I can't. Taking a deep breath, I look at my dad and finish telling him what Mr. Kyle said.

“No, he’s been rushed to the hospital and into emergency surgery. They aren’t sure if he’s going to make it or not. Mr. Kyle said that he only reacted after his parole was denied and that now, he faces new charges and won’t even be eligible for parole for at least fifty years and that’s being lenient.”

I never thought I’d ever wish for someone’s death, but I do this time. I hope he dies on the operating table and his soul sinks to the bowels of hell. “Do you know where he was shot?”

I just shrug my shoulders. “Mr. Kyle said Max was shot in the upper chest and he’d let us know if he dies or makes it.”

When Dad pulls into his driveway, I give him a kiss on the cheek and tell him I’ll call him later. We both slide out of his truck and the walk over to mine only took seconds. My dad told me a few days ago he’d be cleaning his guns, so I asked him if he would take care of mine and check the spring. Knowing that he would see me this morning, he put it in my glove box. So, when I slide into my truck, I reach into the glove box and naturally slip my gun into my hip holster and buckle my seatbelt. Honking my horn to say bye to Dad and I can finally drive home.

I’ve made it my mission to make my life completely and utterly predictable. I don’t respond kindly to surprises. Everyone in this shit show of a town knows this. How do they know? Well, after knocking out two members of the football team in high school, the guy at the gas station, two now ex-boyfriends and a nurse, people have learned, no surprising Lyn.

Driving home, the same way I do every day, I see the same people doing the same things, day in and day out. Putting my truck in park and undoing my seat belt, I just sit here for a minute. I hate memory flashbacks. Mainly because they're never of good things.

I look through the glass of my windshield, the rays of the sun striking against the glass, reminding me of that day. *Travis's bike in the driveway tells me he's already home. Looking into the front window of the house from my truck, I could tell the TV isn't on. It was odd, but I figured Travis was in the shower. Curiosity hasn't been my thing in a long time, hence not liking surprises, but I wanted to know why he was home before me.*

I slide out of my truck, closing the door, and walking onto my front porch. I stand there listening and still not hearing anything made me suspicious, because you can hear the shower running from the porch and it's not.

Walking into my house, I knew. I didn't want to know, but I didn't really have a choice. I can feel it in my gut, down to my very soul, that something's very wrong. I've always had feelings about things, ignoring them nearly lost me everything once. I won't make that mistake again.

Quietly, I walk over to the kitchen table and set my things down, keeping my phone in one hand and clenching my other hand into a fist. Something tells me my phone's about to come in handy. Allowing that gut feeling to rule my actions, I turn on my phone's camera feature, so I'll be able to take pictures or shoot video if needed.

I thought I was ready for anything. Boy, oh boy, I couldn't have been more wrong, especially with what I heard next. Slowly and quietly, I walk over to our bedroom. With every step I take, the noise seems to grow louder and louder. Opening the door to our shared bedroom and peeking in, my heart begins stuttering with each breath.

After taking a few deep breaths to focus myself, I take a series of photos and a short video, I have to blink away a few tears. They're not tears of heartbreak, they're tears of pure rage, hatred and anger. Pulling the door till it's a little more than halfway closed, I step back, trying to prepare myself. Not that it's really possible at this point. I've known something was wrong for a while, but I either didn't want to accept the truth, or I was content to keep the status quo.

Walking back to the kitchen, I carefully lay my phone down. Then, as if a switch was flipped, my temper explodes into a ball of uncontrollable fury. Just getting home from my dad's has its advantages. It might be a bit extreme, and perhaps slightly overkill, but I feel it's definitely warranted. I quietly draw my gun from my hip holster.

Once again, I walk over to our shared room, pausing to take a deep breath before I lay my hand on the door. Without warning, I slam the bedroom door open so hard I know that fucking doorknob went through the wall. Fuck it, it's fixable. Locking eyes with Travis, my boyfriend, I scream. "Oh, my fucking God! Are you serious right now?! I should kill you both! Y'all need to get the hell out of my house and fucking run!" Watching Travis jump up, tossing my baby sister's ass

off his cock and to the floor, is great, but not near enough. "Oh, hell no, don't even think of grabbing your clothes. You need to fucking run!"

Scurrying their naked asses past me, they aren't moving quick enough for me. By now, I'm shaking with anger and rage, but I won't let that overrule my common sense. I will stay in control. I'm not feeling this wild mix of emotions because he cheated or who he cheated with. It's the surprise of it all. I must be more fucked up than I thought.

Exiting the bedroom, I walk straight towards the front door. They left the damn thing wide open for me. How fucking thoughtful, morons. Stepping out of the house to make sure they're gone, I'm actually floored yet again. What the...

"Oh, fuck no! I said run, don't either of you touch that truck. It's in my name, you worthless son of a bitch." Maybe shooting the tires out will get my point across. When I fire four times, aiming for my passenger side tires, they finally believe I'm serious. Maybe it was a bit excessive, but whatever.

When I glance at my bitch of a baby sister, I see piss flowing down her leg, I completely lose it. I'm laughing so hard, I nearly pissed my own pants. Travis grabs my attention by punching my truck, asshole. "Goddamnit, Brooklyn! You almost fucking shot me. Knock off your dramatic bullshit and put the gun away before I have you arrested."

Did he? No. Tell me he didn't. He can't be that stupid. Son of a bitch, he is that stupid. What the hell was I... Nope, self-evaluate later.

“I didn’t shoot at ‘you’. I shot at ‘my’ truck tires and one ricocheted. Besides, Travis, not only did you punch my truck, you have to be forgetting what state we’re in. Dumbass, I could have shot you both for having sex in our bed! I suggest you run and run fast. Oh, and little sister, enjoy my leftovers. Just let me know how I taste when he kisses you.”

Bianca, my now former bitch of a baby sister, whirls around to face me and I’m so primed and pumped for this, I almost giggle. Some people cry when they’re about to lose their shit and some giggle. I’m a giggler. Granted, it’s a sadistic sounding giggle, but a giggle, nonetheless.

“You’re such a bitch, Brooklyn. If you took care of him the way you should, he wouldn’t have needed to come to me. I can please him where you obviously can’t.” She is actually huffing and growling while she is speaking.

Oh, that little bitch. I realize murder is against the law, but I can fantasize. The idea of karma coming for your ass, little girl, pleases me intensely and I’m going to help it gain some momentum.

“Bianca, you do realize he only went to you because he knew he’d get laid. When you’re the town’s revolving door, everyone knows they’ll eventually get a spin. So don’t flatter yourself. He’s about as useful as the now flat tires on my truck.”

Since I have better things to do, I start to slowly raise my gun. I’m not going to shoot them. They aren’t worth two bullets. But I don’t see anything wrong with putting the fear of God in them. Wow, I didn’t know they could run that fast. Watching

them go is awesome and all, but I have shit to lock his ass out of.

Travis will feel the full extent of my wrath soon enough. Making a list real quick and getting all this going before he can do anything. The video I took, and the pictures, need to be sent to my attorney. Have to cover my ass in case one of them accuses me of slander or something.

I can't help bursting into laughter when I walk back into the house and into the room that Travis sure as hell won't be entering again. Travis's wallet and Bianca's purse are on my dresser. Oh dear, looks like her phone is in there too. I wonder what kind of fun I can have with that. I mean, we know all the same people, and she's supposed to be dating that guy, Maverick.

I decide to call all of my next decisions: self-therapy. Such as throwing everything of his out of my bedroom window. After completing that part of my therapy, it's Miller time!

Grabbing a cold Miller out of the fridge, my phone and my sister's phone, I plop my ass down in my favorite chair. Therapy is very important, and they say in times of distress you should reach out to friends and family. Social media is the fastest way I can think of accomplishing that. So, opening my beer, taking a nice, healthy swig, I begin making posts on all of Travis's and Bianca's social media accounts. Knowing his password is coming in handy. I mean, I'm being considerate and tagging them. I also decide to write them a short and sweet note of approval on my social media accounts, as well

as posting the pictures and video. I may have tagged everyone we know. I mean, everyone should celebrate their being together, right?

Now that I've announced their new relationship to the masses, it's time to ruin them both in every way possible. For the most part, I think revenge is best served cold, but in this case, there's no letting this fire go out. So, I call the bank and tell a longtime family friend what just happened and, well, Travis may find it very hard to get access to any money. Those damn computer errors.

My attorney, who wasn't my attorney but a friend until this phone call, was interested in everything I had to say and asked for all the pictures and the video to be sent to him right away. I won't take a chance with anyone saying we're common law married. I'll be nipping that in the ass real quick. Well, more like my attorney will.

The best part was calling dear ole Mom and Dad. Mom is apparently too embarrassed and pissed off to give me any type of support. My mom and I have never really been close, anyway. As soon as I tell my dad, well, he may shoot Travis since I missed. I can't blame him. I mean, a dick did just partially destroy this family. See, I can forgive a lot of shit. You can lie to me and if you tell me the truth, and make amends for it, all is forgiven, but not forgotten. I'm no fool, after all. Everyone, well, most everyone, deserves a second chance. It's when you devastate my world, step on my emotions, break up my family and interrupt my life that I can't forgive you for and that's when I will plan, plot and seek out your demise.

Well, my list is almost complete. The last thing I need to do is get a hold of Maverick. I hate to ruin his day but, if mine is ruined then why not share the gloom and doom of the day? They do say misery loves company. Deciding to use Bianca's phone just adds insult to injury. Maverick does pay for it, after all. I don't lie and he'll know it once he sees the blowup on the net. He can deny it all he wants, but he won't be able to for long. That's why social media comes in so handy right now.

Clicking on Maverick's number in her phone, it starts ringing. I'm sadistically giddy when he answers the phone, I almost feel bad for him, almost. "Hey, baby, why are you calling me at work? I thought we were going to get together later?"

"Maverick, it's Brooklyn. Bianca left her phone and purse here at my house. I found it on my dresser after I chased her and Travis out of my bed and house. I have pictures and a video of them together. As of now, so does my attorney and all of social media. I felt I should call you and give you and heads up that your baby, my baby sister, is fucking my boyfriend. Well, now ex-boyfriend."

"Brooklyn, this is not funny. Your sister said you were jealous of her, but this is going too far. What the fuck is your end game here? Are you trying to get me to break up with Bianca? It's not going to work." Oh my god, this guy is something else.

"No, Maverick, I'm not jealous of that two-timing, two faced bitch of a now ex-sister. You know she's the town's revolving door, so why act all shocked? You don't have to take my word for it. Look at her social media account. Go ahead, take a

look. I'll wait." I can hear him typing on his phone, boy oh boy is he in for a nasty surprise. I want to feel bad for him, but I just can't. I can hear him take a sharp intake of breath, and I already know what's coming. Here we go, mental breakdown in three, two, one...

"Are you motherfucking kidding me!? That bitch! I can't believe she would do this to me. Brooklyn, where the fuck are they? Don't protect your sister. Tell me where they are." As if I would protect either one of them. I burst out in a fit of laughter so quick I actually snort.

"Well, Maverick. The last time I saw them, they were running down the street butt ass naked. They honestly thought I would let them take their clothes. Apparently, Travis also thought I'd let him take my truck, as if I shot the tires out, though. Sad to say, one of the bullets ricocheted off one of the hubcaps, barely missing his leg. So, to answer your question, I don't fucking know where they are and don't fucking care. Bye-bye now." I am such a bitch.

Snapping out of the flashback, I swear I feel as pissed off as I did that day. Fuck Travis, fuck Bianca. That bullshit ended a long time ago, and I'm moving on and out of this godforsaken town.

I've also had enough of this house. Don't get me wrong, the house is adorable and is still in damn good shape. Especially for being almost two hundred years old. It's registered as one of the smaller plantation homes. That puts it under the Historical Society's purview. Which makes it damn near

impossible to do any type of remodeling on the outside. It has a red brick base till about three feet up and then it's yellow. I mean really yellow. Yuck.

Getting out of my truck and shaking my head to clear the nasty memories, I walk onto my porch and into the house. Walking into the kitchen, I toss my stuff on the kitchen table, and grab a Miller out of my fridge. Deciding to work in the living room, I grab my laptop off the table and plop my ass on the couch to look for job offerings.

A nanny for a military family, a traveling family or something like that sounds amazing. As long as it gets me away from here. I can live and travel with them. I'd get to see places and take care of kids. If I got a job like that, I could sell everything except my car and my personal things. My car is my baby, so she comes with me. The nanny lives with the family, so I wouldn't really need anything, except my personal stuff and car. I'll always need her.

I'll schedule some interviews. I'll put the truck and other things I don't need up for sale on Craigslist. Simplify my personal life and then disappear. I'll tell Dad where I am, but the rest of them can kiss my ass. Some may say I'm acting rashly, but I don't think so. I consider it taking control of my life.

Working with my dad saves me a lot of drama giving my two-week notice. I'll miss my dad a lot, but not this town and no one else in it. I don't have a relationship with my sister since I caught her getting fucked by Travis.

My mom and I can't stand to be near one another, and most people do everything in their power to keep us from being in the same place at the same time. We've never gotten along. Dad said from the moment they brought me home from the hospital, I've only wanted him. Well, nothing has changed there, and there is no way in hell I see it changing anytime soon. Content with my decision to move, I settle in to look for jobs.



CHAPTER FOUR

Creed

I don't normally have an issue getting her to respond to me, but her uncles are also usually in the house helping shoo her along. Whoever it was that said a daddy's girl will be an easy stream to sail, lied. Nothing about raising a girl is easy.

Walking out of my room and to the bottom of the stairs, "Lennie. Come on, kiddo. If you're late, then I'm late and that's unacceptable. Move that butt, girl. Don't make me call for you again." She's an amazing kid, but right now she's irritating me, "Lennie!"

"Dad, chill out. I'm right here." The sudden sound of her voice makes me jump. Son-of-a-bitch, she's stealthy as hell. She is the only one that can sneak up on me like that. "If you'd turn that no neck body of yours around, you'd see me. Now, come on, I don't want to be late." This kid, what am I going to do with her? Turning to face her, I can't help giving her my, 'don't mess with daddy look,' which does nothing but make her laugh. "Daddy, stop trying to be tough and come on. I'm in middle school now. No more kid stuff." She really has grown up so fast, almost too fast.

She had to have been in the kitchen, and I didn't bother looking. Once we finally walk out the front door and I lock it, it's time to fly. Well, not really, being on a military installation prevents any speeding, or at least it should. Giving her an annoyed look, with a smirk and a wink, makes her giggle.

"Would you just get in the Jeep? Please and thank you." I remember having to help her climb into the Jeep. Now she doesn't want my help. I know she still needs me, but not like she used to. A part of me misses those days. Shaking my head to rid myself of the somber mood that's setting in, I watch Lennie get in. Walking around the front of the Jeep towards the driver's side, I open my door, sliding into the seat, and make sure to latch my seatbelt.

"When did you grow up so fast? Put your seatbelt on. I need to talk to you about something." Once I see her fasten her seatbelt, I start the Jeep and maneuver around the horseshoe driveway. Pulling onto the main road of the base gives me a moment to collect myself.

Glancing at her from the corner of my eye, I can only hope she goes for this. "I want to ask you what you would think if we were to hire a live-in nanny. Someone that you could turn to... for... ya know... girl stuff." I can't believe it's finally come to this. My baby girl isn't a baby anymore. "You know your uncles and I are all retiring from the military, but we might have to travel because of our new company. I know how much you hate having to stay with Gran and PawPaw. So, I figure this way you could stay at home and not interrupt your life. What do you think?"

Mentally, I keep repeating, I really hope she goes for this. I've already had three interviews and one of those I really like and lined up a video call for us later this evening. Taking a chance, I glance at her from the corner of my eye.

“Dad, are you serious right now? I'm not a baby. You've said so yourself. It's hard enough leaving everyone I know, but now this. Wait, do I get to help pick her? I don't want some old lady. Will she travel with us when we move? I don't want to get someone, really like her, and then lose her because she can't go with us or something.” I've got to find out if her mood swings and topic jumping are normal for someone her age. The girl can give you whiplash. When she gives me those eyes, I swear it melts me like butter.

“Lennie, you don't need to worry. We'll have a phone interview tonight and make sure she can travel with us. She can either be with us full time or not at all. If our call goes well, I'll set her second for Wednesday at 1900 hours, in my office. I expect you to be there so you can meet her and ask anything you'd like.” Why do kids roll their eyes? I mean, it's not like I'm repeating myself.

The looks she gives me, makes me want to question my own sanity sometimes. I really do understand why they say kids will drive parents crazy. “Daddy, where am I normally at 1900 hours? I'm with you, in your office, doing my homework while you're doing paperwork, talking to one or sometimes all of my uncles. By the way, have you spoken to them about this? What do they think?” I can never tell if she's actually breathing when she *'word vomits'* like that.

“Take a breath, Squirt. Yes, I’ve spoken with your uncles about hiring a nanny for you. They’ll be home this evening, listening to the conversation.” So help me, they better fucking behave. I don’t really care what the woman looks like, as long as she’s a good person and will be a good influence on my daughter.

“Now, drop me off and go to work. Don’t forget, Charlie’s dad is bringing me home after dinner so Charlie and I can spend the evening together. I’m really going to miss my best friend. I love you, Daddy.” Pulling to a stop in front of her school and putting the vehicle in park, I reach over and give her hair a slight tug as she slides out of the Jeep.

“I love you too, Lennie. Have a good day.” After she closes the door, she turns around, blows me a kiss, and waves. I seriously live for those moments. I know they’ll stop one day, but I hope not too soon.

That went smoother than I thought it would. I’m so glad she agreed to the nanny thing. She’s not a little girl anymore and there are just some things a dad shouldn’t handle. I mean, I would, but I think she needs a positive female role model. I’m sure that between the four of us, excuse me, five of us, counting Lennie, we can pick a woman that will meet her needs.

Putting the Jeep in drive and pulling away from the school, it fully registers that this is the start of the last day of my military career. We had thought about keeping it a surprise, but because of her friends, we went ahead and told her. We wanted her to

make the most of the time she had left on base, especially with her friends.

Pulling into the parking lot of my office and taking a glance at my troops in formation made me smile. Till I saw him. For fuck's sake, why? Just why me? Especially on a Monday. More importantly, this particular Monday? Seeing the Post Commander or 'The Old Man' as we like to call him behind his back, tanks my mood. Why is he standing in front of my people?

Pulling into my normal parking spot and putting my Jeep in park, I barely get my door open when I hear, "Attention. Lieutenant Creed, good morning, sir." Closing my door, I quickly return the salute.

Quickly, I spot check my people. They're in uniform, check. They're in formation, check. I'm not late, check. They're not too early, check. "Commander Dexton, you didn't need to interrupt your schedule, sir. We're just finishing our paperwork and clearing out." Another perk of retiring is we don't want to have to deal with his annoying ass anymore. I just keep forcing myself to smile, I feel like that damn fish in that movie. Just keep smiling is on repeat in my head. When I hear someone clear their throat, I look to see who it is.

It's Phoenix, for the love of all that is holy, Jesus, keep Phoenix's mouth shut till the Commander leaves, please. He doesn't talk much, but when he does, he speaks his mind and has no filter. He won't lie and he won't exaggerate a situation and that's made things really awkward sometimes.

Feeling a strong pat on my upper arm draws my attention away from Phoenix. Keeping the prayer in my mind, I refocus on the Commander. “Don’t be ridiculous, LT. Of course, I wanted to stop by. I want to give you a personal send off. I know you’re not one for pomp and circumstance. So, I was just stopping by to wish you all well and thank you for all you and your team have done.”

“Thank you, sir. I feel I can still speak for my soldiers and say it’s been a pleasure serving with you and we wish you everything wonderful. Sir, would you like a ride to your office?” Please say no, no one likes you.

I’m so relieved to see him shake his head. “No, I enjoy a crisp morning walk. I’ll see you men after a while.” Once that damn man finally walks away, I could see everyone relax. They’re still in formation but visibly less tense.

Taking a deep breath while rolling my shoulders and neck gave me a moment to think. There’s just something about that man that sets everyone on edge. Snapping myself to attention “Alright ladies and gentlemen, dismissed.”

While everyone scatters to go perform their duties, I head into my office for the last time. I knew I didn’t have to say a word for Phoenix, Dakota, and Hunter to follow me. I don’t think we’ve been apart since before bootcamp. I’ve bled right alongside them and that makes them my brothers.

Once we walk into my office and Phoenix closes the door, we all collapse into chairs scattered around my office. I will not miss these plain gray walls, nor the ugly as sin gray carpet and

fake wood furniture. I might miss my chair, maybe. “Before I forget, I spoke with Lennie about the nanny idea and she likes it, but insists her uncles be there.”

“You know we’ll be there. We want a say in who will be in our home taking care of our girl.” I figured Hunter would have something to say. I thought it would be perverted, but that’ll do. “Besides that, we don’t want someone we have to look at every day and not be able to enjoy the view.” There he goes. I spoke too soon.

“I’m finished with my paperwork and turning in my shit. What about you guys?” It figures Hunter would be the first one finished. When I look at Phoenix and Dakota, both are wearing sarcastic grins.

All their smiles grew by a mile. Those dicks. They left me to exit last. When all three of them stand up and salute me, I stand to return their salute. “Lieutenant Creed, do you think we would truly say we’re done and out if you weren’t the same?” I’m caught off guard by this. When I look up at Dakota, he just laughs at me. “The paper you signed last night was the last signature they required from you, and we turned in your shit before we arrived here this morning. We’re here to help you clear out your office. I suggest we get going. The day isn’t getting any younger.”

I don’t know if Lennie truly understands the love these men have for her. She sees them as uncles and very protective, but they’re more like additional dads. I, for one, am grateful. I know I never have to worry about her safety with them.

“Alright, let’s pack up the last of my office. First Sergeant Waldrop will be picking Lennie up when he picks up Charlie from school today. After she has dinner, they’ll bring her home. So we need to make sure we’re at the house before she’s dropped off.”

Spending a few hours packing up the rest of my office, I find all kinds of shit. It doesn’t seem to matter whether it’s at work or at home, when you clean something out, you find shit you never knew you’d lost or things you don’t remember having to begin with.

Taking the last load out to my Jeep, I realize my Jeep is the only vehicle in the parking lot. Sneaky fuckers. It’s no small feat squeezing the boxes and four men standing no shorter than six feet tall in my Jeep, but we rise to the challenge, and head for the house.



CHAPTER FIVE

Brooklyn

Sitting in my favorite chair talking to my dad is a nightly tradition. This evening, though, it's a bit different. "Lyn, I want you to know how proud I am of you. I know you're going to be an amazing nanny, and maybe you'll find love while doing what you love." I love my dad, but it hurts hearing his emotions in his voice.

I'm so glad we're on the phone. I don't know how I'm supposed to feel about leaving the town I was born in and have lived in ever since. I know it's a dead end shit town. I'm finally looking out for myself, and I can say I'm proud of myself.

"Dad, I have my second interview tonight with a widowed, retired military guy, Lieutenant Creed. He has an eleven-year-old daughter. He's looking for someone that can travel with them should it be needed, and also be a positive influence on his daughter. I'm that person. Dad, you're the only person that matters to me, and I really appreciate your support."

I can hear him take a relaxing breath. "Lyn, I'll always support you in everything you want to do or try. Just keep me posted

on what's going on. Where is he stationed right now? Do you know?" So protective.

"Yes, he's currently stationed at Fort Bliss in El Paso, Texas. In our first interview, he let me know they'd be relocating within the week, and he retired from the military this past Monday. I promise if I get the job, I'll tell you everything. You'll always know where I am."

"I need to go and finish getting ready. I want to make sure I'm properly prepared for when they call. I don't want any interruptions or distractions. I love you, but go away. I'll call you later." Please get off the phone, Dad. I need to make sure everything is ready to go.

"Alright, good luck Lyn and I love you too." I'll always be thankful for my dad.

I need my list. I'm literally spinning in a circle to look around the room for it. Where did I put my list? Oh, for fuck's sake. 'Make a list Lyn and you'll never forget anything.' Yeah, well, what about forgetting where I put the fucking thing to begin with? Damn it, I'm not normally so... Bingo, there it is. If I would have simply looked on my coffee table, I would have found it right away.

Reading my checklist, I realize I may have a problem because I really did check off the things I had gotten done. Shower, check. Get dressed, really Lyn, check. Style hair, check. Very light makeup, check. Alright, so I'm ready. My tv is prepped to accept the call, and the door is locked. House is spotless, of course. So I plop on my couch to patiently wait.

I almost jump out of my seat the second I switch on the screen, and the damn thing announces an incoming call. Damn, he is prompt, but then he is military, so I guess that should be expected.

Come on Lyn, smile and answer the damn video call. “Hi, I’m Brooklyn Lacey. It’s nice to meet...oh there are a lot of you. Umm, who’s Lieutenant Creed?” There are four men and a little girl.

“Hi, Miss Brooklyn, I’m Lennon Marie Creed.” The young girl stated, showing her personality and taking over the conversation. “Everyone calls me Lennie. Do you have a nickname? Although I love your name. It’s really cool. How old are you? Your hair is so pretty. Can you teach me how to make a ponytail like that?”

Oh my god, she is adorable. I can’t help but chuckle. I mean, she’s sitting, but her feet are just dangling there. Her hair is simply stunning. It’s milk chocolate with honey tone highlights. That’s the only way I can describe it, and she has amber eyes.

“Hey Lennie, I actually do have a nickname. My close friends and family call me Lyn. You can call me Lyn also, if you’d like. I’m twenty-seven years old. I can and will teach you all the hair tricks I know. Whether or not I get to be your nanny. Every girl should be able to do their own hair.” Her smile lights up her entire face as she listens to me.

“Well, Brooklyn, this big guy sitting to my right is my dad, Lieutenant Axel Brian Creed. Everyone calls him LT or

Creed.” She is not shy and very take charge. Creed looks like he has to be well over six feet tall. He has a high and tight hairstyle, but I can tell his hair is brown. Damn, his eyes are stunning. They look amber. I guess I know where Lennie got her eye coloring from. His muscles make that black t-shirt he’s wearing strain at the seams. I wish I could see how well those black cargo pants fit.

“So, anyway. Do you have any questions for my dad or my uncles behind us?” Shit, if she has been talking this entire time, I am so screwed because I didn’t hear a fucking word. Pay attention Lyn. What the hell?

I’m relieved when Creed takes the lead. “Lennie, why don’t you let your uncles and I speak with Miss Lacey by ourselves for a little bit? As long as everything goes well, I’m sure you’ll be meeting her face to face soon enough.” When she rolls her eyes, I want to giggle.

“Fine, but Brooklyn, don’t let them scare you away. I promise they’re all really nice guys, even my dad. I like you and want you to be my nanny. Oh, and before I forget, you’re gorgeous.” I can feel my cheeks warming at her compliment.

“You’re so sweet, thank you. You know, you’re very beautiful yourself. Now go on so your dad and uncles can grill me and ask all the boring questions that would put you to sleep. I hope to see you soon, Lennie.” I really hope I get hired. She is so adorable and I can handle seeing these men every day. I watch Lennie leave the room and now I know the movement I thought I saw is real. I thought I was seeing a reflection of

someone before, but when it would get closer to me, it'd disappear. Now, I know who it is. Just play it cool and roll with it.

Once Lennie is out of the room and one of the guys I have yet to meet shuts the door on their end, my nerves all of a sudden kick up a notch. "So, what did you want to speak with me about? Please feel free to ask me anything. I have no secrets." There you go Lyn, good job, just relax and smile.

"Lyn, my name is Dakota. We'll all meet more formally in a moment. Do you have bluetooth capability?" Yes please, may I have some of that? He's a tall glass of water, standing over 6' for sure, maybe 6'2". Wow, jet black hair and hazel eyes. He's wearing a tight tan t-shirt and cargo pants oh so well. Shit, pay attention. "Lyn, did you hear me?"

What an odd question. "Oh, sorry, yeah, I do, but could..."

"Lyn, I need you to trust me and put it on right now. I'll explain more after you put it on." This is really fucking weird. Why in the hell does it matter if I'm on Bluetooth or not?

Movement in the shadows of the TV gave me yet another glimpse of who I thought I had already seen. It's Travis's reflection I saw just a bit ago, but I wasn't willing to turn around for a better look. Travis knows sneaking up on me never ends well. He knows I want nothing to do with him, and he shouldn't be in my house. Now I understand what Dakota was trying to do. Dakota was going to warn me that someone's behind me, but I already knew and won't be needing the bluetooth. Well, this will show them I can handle myself and

protect Lennie, or at least I hope it does. Preparing myself, I watch as he gets closer.

Jesus, he's even stupider than I thought possible. What the fuck was I thinking dating him? I need my head examined. One more step, asshole, come on, bingo. Reaching both arms above my head and behind me, I grab Travis's ears, pulling with all my might. Forcing him to either fling himself over the couch or get his ears ripped off.

Once he lands on his back on the coffee table, flattening the legs to the floor, I raise my right foot and slam it on his chest. The glass top of the coffee table shatters under his weight and the force of my foot to chest maneuver. While he's struggling to breathe and get to his feet, I'm already standing and ready. When he looks up, I throw out a combination punch to his right cheek and then his nose.

His screams for help, which only annoys the hell out of me. I should have just knocked the son-of-a-bitch out and just been done with it. I can hear the guys rooting me on and calling me a badass. I'm so glad this didn't cost me the job, or at least I hope it doesn't.

"Travis, I threw your sorry ass out of *my* house. I made it abundantly clear you're not welcome in *my* house. Did you not understand the point of me saying '*we're over, get the hell out*'?" I could shoot him. I mean, he is in my house. He is my ex and I'm a woman. Naw, waste of a good bullet, and I just got the carpets cleaned.

“Brooklyn, listen. That entire situation is just a huge misunderstanding. You’re totally overreacting. Why don’t you end your call, and we can sit down and...” He froze at the same time I got the biggest smile on my face. Sirens. One of the guys must have called the police. They have all my information.

Without looking away from Travis, I raise my voice enough for the guys to know it’s them I’m speaking to. “Gentlemen, I thought I had taken care of my rodent problem well over nine months ago. Apparently, this particular rodent didn’t get a clear enough message.”



CHAPTER SIX

Dakota

As soon as Brooklyn answers the video call, I swear I almost fell over backwards. She is gorgeous. That seems like such a generic word to describe her. Her hair is dark, not black, but not a simple brown either. It's beautiful and really compliments her eyes. I don't think I've actually ever met someone with heterochromia iridum. One of her eyes is a beautiful blue, and the other is an amber brown. She really does have a beautiful smile. I'm glad she and Lennie seem to get along so well.

When I spot the asshole behind her, I want to jump through the screen and beat some ass. The moment her face became hard, I had only thought I was impressed. When she finishes kicking the shit out of her ex and literally has him on his knees begging her to listen to him, I can't help but to cheer. "Our girl is a badass! Lyn, you are so fucking hired!" Oops, my excitement just got away from me.

When Lyn and the dumbass at her feet both freeze, I can't help the smile from spreading across my face. "Lyn, again, my name is Dakota. That would be your local exterminating

service. We assumed as you were kicking the shit out of this little punk ass bitch, you'd need the exterminator to provide a pickup." That smile of hers is going to melt my soul or what there is left of it. Slow it down, man. This is business, not pleasure.

"Creed, Dakota, guys I have yet to meet, I'm so embarrassed and seriously pissed off, as well. This 'punk ass bitch' as you so eloquently put it, is my ex-boyfriend. I caught him balls deep in my baby sister. I'm not normally one to air my dirty laundry, but I also didn't want you thinking I got violent for nothing."

I can't help the shocked expression I know is covering my face. I know it's shock because I see a similar look on my brothers' faces. I can't hold my tongue anymore. "You cheated on her? Are you out of your fucking mind? You're dumb as fuck. She won't be taking you back, because she'll be moving soon." I stop to look around at the guys and see they're all nodding their heads in agreement. I hope she doesn't think we're overruling her choices or anything like that.

"Lyn, we'll stay right here while you deal with the police. Once they take out the rodent, we can continue our talk, introductions, and work out when we can collect you and your things." When she smiles again, and gives us another wink, I can't help returning her smile and the wink. "Oh, and Lyn? We'll lower our voices while you work everything out. That way our chattering won't get annoying." She just gave us a thumbs up and I'm totally fine with that.

“Creed, did you lower the volume of the call?”

“Fuck yeah I did. I don’t mean this in a sexist way or anything, but I’ve never seen a woman handle her shit like that. If everything works out, I hope she’ll get Lennie to train and take it seriously.” I knew they would see what I’m seeing.

I can tell Hunter’s about to chime in by the expression on his face. “Brother, we’d have to be blind not to have seen how she can handle herself, which also means she’ll be able to protect Lennon. She could motivate all of us to take training more seriously.” They have good points, but am I the only one that’s noticed how gorgeous she is?

“What I saw should never have happened. Who the fuck does he think he is, breaking into her home, telling her she’s overreacting when he fucked her sister? I don’t give a fuck what the sister looks like. You don’t do that to people. His scrawny ass should have been thanking the Gods that he landed a goddess like Brooklyn.” Phoenix doesn’t talk often, but when he does, he hits a home run with the truth.

At least I know he sees what I do. Needing to bring everyone back on track, I just start talking. “So, what do we want to do? Since we’re moving, we could always pick her and her stuff up on the way. All of us are packed. We only have you, Lennie, and some things here and there to load up. Once that’s done, we’re ready to pull out.” The expression on Creed’s face means he’s thinking. That means he’ll have an answer in..3..2..1.

“Once Lyn finishes with her rodent removal and we finish talking, we can work out the finer details of the travel arrangements. I’d like to be able to pick her up on Friday. The sooner we get to the new place and settle in, the quicker I can get Lennie into school. We’ll have plenty of time to get everything set up for the new house, as well as our new private security company.”

While we watch the cops arrest her ex-boyfriend and escort him out of the house, she signs the paperwork they’ve handed her. Just when I thought things couldn’t get more interesting, it did. The best part, it was all Creed’s fault. That’s the part that makes it even funnier.



CHAPTER SEVEN

Brooklyn

Well, that was completely fucking embarrassing. However, I will say it was nice that Creed must have fucked up, lowering the volume of their conversation. Even as I was dealing with the police and Travis acting like a fool, I heard every word they said. Now that I know what they think, it makes everything a bit easier.

When I fully face the tv again, I'm once again mind blown at how hot these men are. "Gentlemen, now that we're alone, I feel I should tell you, I heard every word that was said. I'm sorry you had to see me get violent. I don't normally do that, but in his case, well, he deserved it. As for training Lennie, yes, she will be training with me. Now, as for picking me up on Friday, there's a problem. Whether I got this job or not, I was preparing to move. What you see is all the furniture, other than my bed, that I have left. Most of my clothes and other personal things are already packed. So unless you like what you see and want to take it with us, I will need to sell it."

I'm glad I thought ahead and sold what I wanted and needed to. I donated a lot of my stuff, just not all of it. I also need to

know where the hell I'm going, and how I'm going to transport my baby. This is happening pretty fast, but my gut tells me it's for the best.

“Well, we're not only furnishing the house. We also have a very large office space to furnish. I, for one, really like your living room furniture, and think it would look great in one of our offices or even in the house. We can just pick up everything and sort it out later. If that's alright with you?” I haven't met this one yet, but I swear they keep getting cuter and cuter.

“I don't think you and I have officially met. Who are you?” Wait, a house to furnish as in we all will live in the same house? Oh, give me strength. I haven't been with a man longer than I've been single. That alone should have queued me in on Travis. I'd call it denial, but I acknowledged something was wrong. Maybe I just blinded myself to it and took a fake sense of security in the predictable.

“I apologize, Brooklyn, you're right. My name is Phoenix Dixon. Please call me Phoenix. You look a bit shell-shocked. I'm assuming it just sank in that you'll be living with multiple men and one eleven-year-old girl going on twenty-one. Is this going to be a problem for you, or do you think you can handle it?” I don't know, but damn, I'd like to fucking try. Shit, calm down, that is not what he means.

“It did just dawn on me, but I'm sure there's no safer place in the world for an adult woman and a preteen female to live. I'm

sure it will take some adjusting on all our parts, but we should be fine.”

“Well then, I guess we need to work out all the finer details and schedule us picking you up. You don’t mind a fireman’s carry, do you?” Oh, this one is funny and a flirt. Two can play this game.

“You must be Hunter Hornisher. It’s nice to meet you, and as for a fireman carry, not unless there’s an ass smack that comes along with it.” I send him a wink, and when his face takes on a shocked expression, we all burst into a fit of laughter. Hell, I surprised myself with that comeback.

Hunter looks to be the shortest, but he’ll still tower over my five-foot eight frame. I’d say six foot and damn, is he well built. They all are. Hunter has dirty blond hair, and his eyes look like an even mixture of brown and red. Oh, what’s that color called? Cognac, that’s it. When everyone finally stops laughing, I can’t help but to turn a little red. Well, hell, the flirting has officially started.

This might be a business meeting, but I can’t let an open door swing wide open without taking a step inside. I’m a single woman and I’ve been single for some time. I’m not easy, but there’s nothing wrong with having some fun.

“Very nice retort, Brooklyn, very nice indeed. I’ll remember that ass smack. I wouldn’t want to disappoint you.” The smirk he gives me is very sexy and alarming in a fun way.

Smiling, I nod my head in acknowledgement. “I was able to figure out the timing and everything while the police were

collecting the rodent. El Paso to Rhome, Texas, will take around twelve hours, give or take for stops. By my calculations, we can be at your house around eleven in the evening on Friday. We would crash on the floor of your place to leave early the next morning. After having someone grab us some breakfast and we load up, we'll leave from your place for Ridgedale, Missouri. We'll arrive later that evening. If that's alright with you?"

"I'm alright with that as long as everyone's good with sleeping on the floor. Part of my property is the large field on the right side of my house. It's got dirt covering it, but it's actually an old parking lot. I don't know what kind of vehicles you'll have, but I also have a four-car garage. You guys can make use of whatever you want. I do have to make arrangements for my baby to be shipped to me."

"You're talking to four men about your baby. To us, that means your car. That's what we call our cars. Is that what you're talking about?" Smiling and arching an eyebrow, I simply nod my head. I can't wait to see where this part of our conversation goes.

"Well then, that is something we all have in common. I'll tell you about ours if you'll tell us about yours. Deal?" I can't help but I motion my hand in a *'please continue'* type wave, and lean back on my couch to listen. "Alright, well, Creed has a 2010 cobalt blue, Sierra Off-road Jeep Wrangler, soft top. Dakota has a 2018, blood red Dodge Challenger GT Spirit. Phoenix over here has a 2017 jet black, Chevrolet Corvette and I have a 2011 silver Mazda RX-8. So if you have a baby

like we do, it will go into the car hauler for transport alongside ours. What kind of baby do you have?" I can see the questioning looks and even looks of skepticism.

They all have gorgeous babies. I know all about cars, thanks to my dad. However, my baby puts their babies to shame. I can't wait to see the looks on their faces. Teach them to be skeptical of what a woman calls her baby. "Well, gentlemen, my baby is a 1964 ½, baby powder blue, Ford Mustang Convertible and I'm its second owner. My dad was the first owner. I would prefer not to put too many miles on her. I sold my truck simply because I didn't want to relocate two vehicles. I will get a regular driving car after we are all settled in."

The looks of shock and admiration that's written all over their faces is awesome. "Lyn, you did say a 1964 ½ Mustang, right? I mean, I wasn't hearing things?" I can't help the chuckle that escapes at the end of Phoenix's question.

As I'm nodding my head yes, the guys break into a chorus of questions. I have to admit I'm a bit focused on Phoenix, but I answer them the best I can. I'm very distracted by his eyes. They're the greenest eyes I've ever seen. He has blond hair and is also very muscular. They're all wearing the same thing, just different colors.

Now that I'm feeling more at ease, I lean back on my couch as we continue the conversation... interview? Both, it's both.



CHAPTER EIGHT

Phoenix

Brooklyn's a badass fighter, quick-witted, not shy, stunningly beautiful, and she knows about cars. When she tells us about her baby, I can't help but to lock eyes with her and not blink. Jesus, fuck, I hope we can keep her. Please say yes, please say yes. I need to calm down. She's being hired for Lennie, not us or me.

She's perfect. I mean, she'll be great for Lennie, and good for us as well. I wonder how the guys would feel about me dating her? It'd be great to be able to share her. I wonder how she would feel about having several of us to herself. Whoa, where did those thoughts come from? Hold up, let's slow the fuck down, one thing at a time.

Shaking my head at our obvious attempt to kill time just to keep talking to Lyn, I mentally chuckle. They can't lie to me. I know that's what they're doing. So, I decide we aren't getting any closer to picking her up or getting to know her better if we're staying on this call.

"Everyone, I think we've pretty much worked out most of the details. We should end this call and make sure we're ready to

go on Friday. I would love to sit here all night and chat the night away getting to know Lyn better, but we have our own packing and loading to do. We also need to make sure we have extra covers and wheel locks for Lyn's baby." Jaxon is going to love her baby.

"Phoenix, Bella has her own covers and wheel locks for being transported. She just had a bath and a good wax, so she is protected there as well. She has a full tank of gas and is ready for her chariot." Listening to her talk about her baby makes me smile so wide, my cheeks actually hurt.

I can't help the words that fly out of my mouth next. "Brooklyn Dawn Lacey, will you marry us and live with us forever plus a day?" Nothing prepared me for her sensual laugh and her mind-blowing response.

"Well, how about we wait till we know if we can live under the same roof first? Then we can discuss you men taking my name." Not a bit of hesitation in her response. We all burst out laughing yet again, until we're brought to our feet. We all notice him at the same time. What the fuck is with men breaking into her house and sneaking up on her? Bullshit.

I don't even try to mask the anger or the warning of violence in my tone. "Lyn, behind you! Whoever you are, get the fuck away from her! We can and will ID you, not that there will be much left to identify after we hunt you down." The son of a bitch is smiling. What the actual fuck? I can't help but look over at my brothers, who have stood with me. Their expressions are as hard, if not harder than mine is.

This guy has some nerve. The fucker is laughing at us and looking her over, so help me. “Gentlemen, my name is Brooks Lacey. I’m Lyn’s father. I’m glad to see you’ve taken to her and are already protective of my girl. But, I promise you, I don’t mean her any harm. I came by because I heard Brooklyn had to kick the shit out of her ex, Travis. I needed to see that my baby girl is truly fine. I hadn’t really doubted it, but a father needs visual proof sometimes.” When he turns to Lyn, she has the biggest smile on her face.

Now that they’re side by side, there’s no denying she is his daughter. Lyn is a very beautiful female version of her father. They even share the Heterochromia Iridum gene.

“We’re actually still on the same call, sir. We saw her kick the shit out of him. He’s nothing but a little punk ass bitch, if you’ll excuse my language. Not because a woman kicked his ass, but because he came in between family and told Lyn she was being overly dramatic.” Oh shit, his head snapped up so fast I think I heard it pop.

I truly didn’t know a face could actually turn that shade of red, or I guess I’d call it crimson. I do now. “He said Brooklyn was being overly dramatic?” His tone and fierce expression told me that was not meant as a question and no one should make any sudden movements.

I like to watch those TV shows that show people screwing up and approaching what they think is a docile animal, only to find out that they are, in fact, vicious. That’s what I’m seeing in Lyn’s dad right now. “I’m going to shoot him in the mother

fucking dick! I told you I would Lyn, I wasn't joking. Motherfucker, *'overly dramatic'*! Are you shitting me right now? Gentlemen, when will you be getting our girl out of here?" That sounds nicer than I thought it would, 'our girl'. Damn it, focus.

"Mr. Lacey, we'll be there late Friday evening. We were just about to end this call so everyone can work on getting ready. We just want to make sure she'll be safe till we get there. We don't doubt she can take care of herself. We got to see that firsthand, but still."

When he holds up his hand to stop me, I thought I'd screwed up somehow. "Gentlemen, call me Brooks and I'll most likely be staying with Lyn till Saturday. I'll help her get all her stuff ready for y'all's arrival. I will say this, and I hope you four are smart enough to heed this warning. You better make damn sure that nothing happens to Lyn. If anything does, I will find you, and trust me when I say you don't want that. I'm the only one that is to know where she is going. Her mother is currently moving in with our other daughter. I recently, as in today, found out that Lyn's mother has been having an affair. Neither one of those women deserves Lyn in their life." Oh, sweet Jesus, seeing the hurt and anger on Lyn's face was almost too much.

As she turns to look at her dad, I can see the rage building in her. She is, without a doubt, a daddy's girl. Good to know. "She's been what?" Holy shit, her mood took a dangerous turn, and with that thought, I think it's for the best that we distract her before she goes off half-cocked and kills someone.

“Lyn? Lyn? Brooklyn! Look at me. There you go. We all need you to breathe. I understand your anger, but let your dad handle her. We need to focus on picking you up and getting all of us, especially getting Lennie settled in the new place. How about this? You and your dad have a fun evening, and forget the other assholes that couldn’t appreciate what they had. Do you two like Chinese?” I can’t help the chuckle I let out. I can tell I threw them both off with that question. Both of them look at me with lost expressions. “Do you two like Chinese food?”

“Yes, Dad and I both do but...” She’s even cuter when she’s totally confused.

“Awesome. I’m going to have some Chinese and beer delivered. Dinner is on us. Lyn, no getting arrested. It wouldn’t look good for our new Security Company if the Head of our Human Resource Department was to get arrested. Don’t look at me that way. We’ll finish discussing it Saturday. Think about it and we’ll talk. Now, good night, Lyn and Brooks.”

Once the call with Lyn is disconnected, Lennie comes flying into the room. “Well, do we get to keep her? Can she travel with us? Isn’t she gorgeous? Can we pick her up? I’m so excited to learn new things for my hair. Oh my gosh, maybe she can teach me how to cook. This is going to be so awesome.” I really need to bottle some of her energy.

“Lennie, beautiful, take a breath. Yes, we can keep her. Yes, she is gorgeous, and we’ll be getting to her place on Friday night. I think it’s awesome she’s going to teach you how to do

new hairstyles and stuff. I'm quite sure she'll teach you how to cook if you ask her. So, you need to work on packing your room. We all need to do the same thing and get the rest of the stuff loaded tomorrow. I'll order us some Chinese as well. That way there's no real mess to clean up."

Looking over at Creed, he gives us all a nod. "Well, you heard the man. Let's get busy. We may be pretty much prepared for this, but we've never had a woman living with us. This will be an adjustment for us all." With that said, we all walk out of the room and I grab my phone.

When the Chinese delivery arrives, we all grab our food and take off to our rooms or designated packing area. We ate and packed at the same time. I think the combination of the move, starting the new business, and, of course, Brooklyn, has got us all motivated.



CHAPTER NINE

Brooklyn

Once the call was disconnected, I turned to look at my dad when I see him letting in his dogs. Bubbles runs to me, barking her head off. I have a love hate relationship with that damn dog. Looking over at my chair, I see that Lucifer has made himself at home. Damn dog. “Dad, seriously, you brought the dogs. Why?”

“Lyn, come on. I couldn’t leave them and possibly have your mother take them or worse, take them to the pound. Besides, they love you.”

Just as Bubbles finally shuts up, the delivery man knocks at the door, sending her into fits of barking so hard, her little body shakes and bounces all over the place. While I send the dogs out back, Dad opens the front door.

Phoenix said he would do it, and he wasn’t joking. Forty minutes from hanging up to food delivery. The giggles pouring out of me as dad unloads the delivery driver’s arms. I guess not knowing what we would like, he ordered a bit of everything. It won’t go to waste. One thing my dad and I have

in common, we can eat. If by chance we can't finish, my neighbors will love this.

When I take a couple of the bags from him and follow him to the kitchen island, I decide he's not going to continue holding me off. Opening the bags, we find everything we need. Got to love the functionality of the spork. I grab each of us a bottle of water out of the fridge and when we take a seat on the bar stools, I prepare myself to get some damn answers.

"Alright Dad, we're alone, you've checked the house out twice." Waving my hand towards the backdoor. "Come on, you brought the dogs for fuck's sake. You wanna tell me what the hell you're so worried about?" He can't continue to hide shit from me, and he damn well knows it, so he best start talking.

"Brooklyn Dawn Lacey, I'm still your father, and if I want to be protective, it's my right. So just deal with it, lil lady." Oh no, he didn't. If he thinks for a second that shits gonna fly with me, he doesn't know me as well as he thinks he does. Two can play the name game.

"Brooks Michael Lacey, I'm twenty-seven years old and you know damn good and well I don't need your protection. I'm not buying the *'daddy needs to protect his baby girl'* bullshit. Spill it, Lacey, or I'll make sure you have no clue where I'm going Saturday." I can't believe he is actually trying to be more stubborn than me. He forgets I have him in me as well as granny and papa.

I want to laugh seeing the expression of, *'well shit'* cross his face. "Alright, alright, it's for my protection more than yours. I might have shot at Dean when I caught him and your mom together. I might have inadvertently missed Dean and shot your mother in the leg. She's in the hospital being observed and Dean may be after me for doing it." I can't keep a straight face and I lose it.

I'm laughing so hard I can't breathe. I'm crying and fall off the bar stool. He shot Mom. Oh, my god I would have paid to see that entire situation unfold. I manage to squeak out one word. "So." I can't stop laughing. Woosah, eeekkk. Alright, alright. I clear my throat in an attempt to gain some control of myself. Nope, I roll backwards, continuing to laugh my ass off.

"Brooklyn Dawn, I don't see what's so damn funny. If you don't get your ass back up here, I'm going to eat all the beef, broccoli and low mein. Come on, get up here and... Brooklyn Dawn Lacey, what the fuck was that bullshit?" I totally just snatched the two containers of food from him.

"Don't threaten my food, Dad. You know those are my favorites. You don't have to be so mean." I'm such a bitch because I'm still laughing on the inside. Shot Mom, oh my god. "Go on, Dad, tell me what the hell happened." I'm proud I managed to say that without laughing out loud.

"I accidentally shot your mother." His pause and look nearly made me lose it again. "In the fucking leg, that's what happened. Lyn, stop snickering. It's not funny. The only reason

I'm not in jail right now is because when Dean and your mom went running out of the house, I shot and Larry saw everything and stuck up for me. You know, that *'in the heat of the moment'* thing. Dean said he was going to either kick my ass or shoot me in the leg. Fuck Lyn, you know I'd never do anything like that on purpose. Even with her cheating on me. I'm just not that type of man." Once I finish chewing the mouth full of lo mein, maybe I can get him to calm down. First, I guess I need to be cool, calm and collected and not fucking laugh.

"Dad, look, it was an accident. Anyone that knows you knows you'd never, ever hurt a woman on purpose. Even if she hurts you. Once Dean calms down, he'll see reason, and this will be over. He isn't going to come after you. Bubbles, which everyone is scared of, is in the backyard with Lucifer. I've never known a dog with that sweet of a name to actually be a demon."

"I swear I should have switched their names the moment we got both of them, but oh no, your mother thought a poodle named Bubbles would be so cute. You know she named Lucifer too. Who would have ever guessed that a Doberman Pincher is a fucking pussy? Your mother still gets pissed when I call him Lucey."

"How about we eat this amazing Chinese, or at least as much as we can, then we can move on to other things? I was thinking... wait, Dad? Did you eat all the dumplings?" Looking around the island and inside the bags, I don't see them. "Dad, you did. I didn't even see you put any food into

your mouth. How the hell did you manage to eat all the fucking dumplings? The fortune cookies are mine, old man. I can't believe you."

"You're the one talking and laughing more than eating this really excellent Chinese food. Don't blame me if you missed out on something." He is such a pain. He's lucky I love him as much as I do. Taking all the dumplings, what the hell?

Now that I know what's going on. I can relax a little bit. Dean isn't going to come after Dad. That man's always talked the talk but has yet to walk the walk. I know exactly where Travis's dumb ass is. He'll be in jail till his daddy, our local Judge, cools down. He has a nasty temper when it comes to his kids breaking the law. Not to mention that Travis got his ass handed to him by me.

"Well, I have a few more boxes to pack. Are you finished eating? I know I am. Why don't I run all this extra food next door? They love Chinese and with Molly's leg in a cast, they aren't going out to too many places. Help me pack all this up. It'll take me five minutes."

Once we got everything together and I ran the food next door, it actually took me closer to thirty minutes. Molly can talk and getting a southern woman like her to shut up is a gold medal Olympic event. Got to love her, though. I'm going to miss her and the kids.

When I finally make it out of Molly's, I hear Bubbles and Lucifer are flipping the fuck out. Quickly sneaking back into Molly's, I signal her that I'm taking her shotgun that she keeps

behind the door. She waves at me to go and picks up her phone. I know she's calling the police for me.

Instead of walking around the house, I climb on the bed of her truck and jump over my fence. My landing makes Lucifer whine, but he relaxes at the same time. Bubbles is still barking like her life depends on it. I can hear the fight inside my house. Motherfucker, if Dean actually came after my dad, I may shoot his dumb ass.

Once I got my backdoor open, I fly into the house and had the shotgun against Dean's head before he could finish his swing. He was on top of my dad, about to hit him, but he's not moving so much as an inch now. Through gritted teeth, I warn him. "Move one motherfucking inch and I promise a closed casket funeral will be necessary."

I cannot believe this fucker actually came after my dad and at my house, of all places. Fucking idiot. "First you betray his friendship of almost forty years. You break up his marriage to my mother. He shoots at you and your chicken shit ass moves, allowing my mom to take the hit. Then, on top of all of that, you have the fucking balls to break into my house to come after him!" I know my voice is getting louder and louder with each word and I don't fucking care. "Do you realize I could fucking shoot you right now? I mean seriously, do you get that?"

"Brooklyn, listen to me. You aren't going to shoot me, so why don't you step aside and let me and your dad finish this?" Oh

my god this guy thinks he knows me. I think I'm going to have to introduce him to the real me.

Removing the shotgun from his head, I quickly chamber a round and on a pump-action shotgun that shit is loud. The sound alone has been known to make grown men shit themselves. He was about to move till he heard that. He raised his hands back up and then froze. "Now, tell me again what I'm not going to do in my own motherfucking house! Who the fuck do you think you are? I've already kicked the shit out of Travis today. Do I need to kick the shit out of you to get the fucking point across that people need to stop fucking with my family?"

"Brooklyn, I can hear the police. You need to put that shotgun away before you go to jail. I will press charges." Jesus, he's a moron. I can hear the Sheriff when he opens my front door and clears his throat. This should be good.

"No, Dean, the only one going to jail is you. She's right. She could have blown your dumb ass head off and walked away free and clear. Now I know why you never could pass the test to be a cop. You're an idiot. Lyn, how about you step to the side so we can get Mr. Smith here in a pair of our finest bracelets? He can share a cell with Travis." I do feel like my point was made, so I graciously move to the side.

"Are you kidding me? I want her arrested for threatening my life. She held that shotgun to my head and she even chambered a round. Now, damn it, I know my..." The Sheriff looks like he's about to lose his mind.

“Dean, you don’t know a damn thing. I will tell you what your rights are though, so don’t you worry. You have the right to remain silent. Anything you say can and will be used against you in a court of law. If you cannot afford an attorney, one will be provided for you. Do you understand your rights?”

“Yeah, I got it, but what am I being charged with?” Dean keeps this shit up and Larry’s liable to add more charges.

“You’re being charged with breaking and entering. You are being charged with assault with intent to cause bodily harm. We’re also going to charge you with resisting arrest just for the fact that you’re a dick. Don’t bother telling me I can’t do that, because I can, and I am.”

After the police once again leave my house, I move Dad into the bathroom to help him clean up. “Well Dad, he looks worse than you do. How the hell did he get you down? You’re a better fighter than that.”

“Oh, I took a step backwards and forgot I left those damn plates on the floor for Bubbles and Lucifer. When I stepped on it, it caused me to lose my balance and the asshole pounced. He only got two swings in before you came charging into the house like a woman possessed.” Woman possessed, you got that right when it comes to those I care about.

“Well, I know I’ve had enough excitement for the day. Two men have been arrested inside my house today. Those gorgeous men and that beautiful little girl will be here tomorrow. Let’s get some sleep. We can get the rest of this

done in the morning. Does that sound like a good plan?"
Please say yes, I am so damn exhausted.

"I absolutely agree. We can get some rest and then get back to it in the morning. There isn't much left anyways." We literally walk into my room and collapse across my bed. We slept in our clothes, both of us spread out sideways.



CHAPTER TEN

Hunter

I don't think I slept last night, I think I died. We managed to get almost all of the packing done last night. We even started loading some stuff. I'm so damn pumped to get on the road, pick up Lyn, and get to the new house. It's kind of pathetic.

“Hey, Creed, I think we should go ahead and load the portable parking lot. As long as we leave one vehicle out, and the rental we pick up today, we should be good with vehicles. We have two rigs.”

As we all sit down to drink our coffee, Lennie skips into the kitchen and straight to the refrigerator. I don't know how she can drink those fruity smoothies every morning. I get a toothache just thinking about it.

I can't believe how this day is flying by. It took three hours to load the damn cars because we kept arguing about who's car should stay out. I mean, seriously. Finally getting that accomplished, of course, by letting Creed have his way, it's time for lunch, which someone needs to pick up and it was time to pick up the rental, yet another argument.

Creed, Dakota and Phoenix went to pick up the rental. The plan was Phoenix would then take Creed's Jeep to pick up lunch. That, of course, didn't happen. Phoenix and Dakota came home in the rental, while Creed went to get lunch. By the time all was said and done, it's now eight in the evening and we're all exhausted.

Everyone woke up in good moods, with a buzz of excitement in the air, even though we all slept on the floor in the living room. Lennie's loading the extended van we rented for the drive. There's no way any of us were willing to put that kind of mileage on our babies. Dakota is standing at the back of the rig that's loaded with all of our furniture. "Dakota, is the house empty? Have you done one last walk through?"

"Uncle Phoenix, Uncle Dakota and I did a walk through. The only thing left in the house is, umm, well, y'all's special bag that I'm not allowed to touch." When she shrugs her shoulders and climbs into the back of the van, I look over to Phoenix.

"She means our bag that has our weapons in it. I'll grab it and make sure the house is shut and locked up. The cleaning crew will be here on Monday and have a key. They know to return it to the base's housing office. Load up and I'll be right back."

I go ahead and give the two rigs a thumbs up so they can start heading out. Kerrigan and Keegan will meet up with Jaxon at Lyn's house. I hope she meant it when she said that big lot next to her house is an old parking lot. I googled it just to make sure both trucks would fit. I would have hated for one of them to get stuck.

Once we load into the van, I wave goodbye to the house. We've all lived together in that house since Lennie's mom died. Creed was devastated, and Lennie never got to know Hadlee. Lennie wasn't even a week old when cancer took Hadlee from us. We were always close, so it was like losing a sister. It's a good thing to move away and get a fresh start. We all need it.

"Everyone wave bye to the old house. We're onto bigger and better things. Let's not forget where we're headed first." When cheers rise up, I know I've said the right thing.

Looking in the rearview mirror, I can see that Lennie has made herself a comfy little fort in the back seat. Phoenix is leaning against the window with his feet stretched out across the seat. Dakota's in the single captain style seat and Creed's up front with me, relaxing in the passenger seat.

"Brooklyn!! I'm so excited to see her and meet her in person. Why didn't you guys let me stay for the rest of the questions? Who was that guy that was trying to sneak up on Brooklyn? Did she know him? She seemed really..." Hold up, wait, what? Lennie saw him?

Out of the corner of my eye, I see Creed twist in his seat to look back at her. "Lennie, you saw that man sneaking up on Lyn? Why didn't you say anything to us or to Lyn?" I'm so confused right now.

"I didn't need to say anything. She knew he was there. Didn't you guys see her point her thumb up and motion it towards her back? When I saw him, I winked at her and opened my eyes

kinda wide. She knew he was there and was just waiting for him to get closer. Well, I think that's what she was waiting for. Did she kick his butt? Who was he? Are y'all gonna kick his butt for messing with our Brooklyn? I think you should."

I seriously need to check to see where this child gets her energy. I think we could all use a dose of it. I'll just continue driving and let Creed play twenty questions with her.

"Lennie, down girl. To answer all your questions, no, we didn't see her little signal. Yes, she definitely kicked his butt. He's Brooklyn's ex-boyfriend and no, we are not going to kick his butt for messing with *'our'* Brooklyn. He was arrested and taken to jail. Besides, we're on our way to pick her up. She is moving with us and we'll all keep each other safe. Is that alright with you?"

"Alright, Daddy, seems fair to me. So are you all going to date Brooklyn or just one of you? I read this book and the main character is a female. She's smart, strong and pretty like Brooklyn. She had like three or four, I can't remember, husbands or boyfriends. She was never alone and was always safe. That would totally make us one big family. Oh my gosh, wait, I could finally get a baby brother or baby sister. Come on, aren't you going to tell me? I'm not a baby, you know. I know where babies come from and everything." Oh my Jesus, Creed shut her up already.

"Lennon Marie Creed, what have you been reading, and who told you where babies come from?" I really am trying not to laugh. I'm trying really fucking hard and I'm losing the battle.

First, Dakota loses it and bursts out laughing. That causes a chain reaction of epic proportions. Phoenix loses it and starts laughing. I'm barely holding on and finally I can't take it anymore and burst out laughing so hard my eyes start to water. If that isn't bad enough, Creed loses all sense of control and bursts into a fit of laughter. Dakota is curled over laughing so hard he's disappeared from sight. What makes it all that much worse is Lennie is sitting in the back, looking at us all like we've lost our collective minds.

"Daddy, seriously, I learned about babies in school. The book was a suggested read on my Kindle. It was really good. I can't wait for the second book to be released. Hey, you all should read it. Maybe it will help you guys know how to handle Brooklyn. You know what, I could talk to her for y'all. I wouldn't mind."

A chorus of no's ring out throughout the van. "There will be no talking to Lyn about any kind of relationship. If, and when, we feel it's appropriate, *we*," waving his arm to encompass all of us men, "will talk to her. Do I make myself clear, young lady?" Creed does the daddy attitude thing so well. I don't think I would be able to do that, but then, ya never know.

"Alright, Daddy, jeez, fine. I won't say anything. How much longer till we get to Brooklyn's?" I swear, that girl can change the direction of a conversation quicker than someone can change the channel when the President comes on the TV.

"We still have a while on the road. We won't get to Brooklyn's till way later tonight. So read and book, listen to music,

whatever makes you happy. Just remember to let us know when you need to use the restroom and don't wait till the last minute to say something. We won't always be near a rest area." I couldn't have said it better myself, Creed. Mostly because I wouldn't have known what to say.

Two pit stops for a driver change, bathroom breaks, getting gas and food. We've been on the road for almost eleven hours. I'm back behind the wheel, but I was able to take a nice long nap when Dakota took over for me.

Keeping my voice low so I don't wake Lennie, I grab Creed's attention by poking his arm and calling his name. "Sorry, man, but I didn't want to accidentally raise my voice and wake Lennie. Do you think you should text Lyn and let her know we're close? GPS is saying we're about thirty minutes out."

"Yeah, I can do that. I'm hoping we can get Lennie out of the van without waking her, but I seriously doubt it." When he gets out his cell phone, the damn thing nearly blinds me because it's so bright.



CHAPTER ELEVEN

Brooklyn

Dad hasn't really said a word since we got up. We had coffee and started packing what we didn't get done last night. He was even quiet through lunch and dinner. I can't take it anymore.

"Alright, Dad, I can almost hear your gerbil about to derail its treadmill. What's on your mind? What are you thinking about so hard?" Setting the tape down on the box he was closing, Dad turns to look at me with an expression that worries me.

"Lyn, how well do you know these men? I know they were all in the military and one of them has a little girl, but other than that, what do you know about them?" There it is. I figured he'd get around to asking sooner rather than later.

"Well, there are actually eight of them, not four. Creed, Phoenix, Dakota and Hunter, the ones you met over the video call, are all officially retired from the Army. Each one was up for promotions as well as reenlistment, but they all agreed to walk away. The team formed in boot camp and their friendship grew from there. They're all honorable men, Dad. From what I understand, the men driving the rigs here are three more of their team. I don't know much about the eighth man yet. He's

on some sort of mission right now and when he gets back, he'll be leaving the military, too.”

Well, I can see that only partly satisfied his questions. “What about the little girl’s mother? What happened to her? Do you know and do you know anything about her?” He really is a worrier, and I guess he forgets I know how to do my own research.

“I know Lennon’s mother’s name was Hadlee, and that she passed away a few days after Lennie was born. It turns out she had cancer the entire pregnancy. She wouldn’t accept any form of treatment because she was concerned about her baby. She sacrificed her life for Lennie. After she passed away, Creed brought Lennie home, and the other men moved in with him. That little girl has pretty much grown up with eight dads.”

That made his face drop. Now he sees why I want to be there for her so desperately. “Alright, Lyn, I get it. All I ask is that you stay in touch with me. I don’t want you to come back here at all. That means visiting, too. I’ll come to visit you.”

My phone making its notification sound interrupts our conversation. “Give me a second.” When I take my phone out of my pocket, I see that it’s Creed. “Dad, it’s Creed. Give me a few minutes.”

Creed: Hey, Lyn, we thought you’d like a heads up that we should arrive in about 30 minutes.

Brooklyn: Thanks, I was thinking you should be arriving soon. See you soon.

Creed: Not sure when the car hauler and moving truck will show up, but they'll be there by morning.

Brooklyn: Alright, see you soon

Walking outside, I see a large black van pull up in the driveway. The headlights turn off at the same time the driver shuts off the engine. The two front doors open simultaneously. Hunter gets out of the driver seat, closing the door, he stretches his hands to the sky to relieve his stiffness. Creed slides out of the front passenger seat and mimics Hunter's stretch.

Walking over to them, there's no holding back the smile taking over my face. "Creed, Hunter, it's nice to meet you in person. Is everyone else asleep? I made a pallet on the floor for Lennie. If she's out, I can get her if that's alright?"

"Dakota and Phoenix are asleep in the back as well. You might have to lean over Dakota to get to Lennie, but be my guest. Hunter, stay with her and help if she needs it. I need to use her restroom."

Waving Creed off toward my dad and opening the side doors fills my senses with man. Smirking to myself, I boost myself up into the van. Carefully leaning over Dakota, I slide one arm under Lennie's legs and my other under her head. Actually, lifting her may present a problem.

As I'm about to use every muscle in my body, while praying I don't go flying, I feel an arm encircle my waist. As I lift, an unknown arm pulls, helping me lift her clear of the seat. Turning my head to see who's helping me, "Shh, hey Dakota,

thank you. If you could help me turn around, I can get her from here.”

Climbing out of the van, I lift her closer to my chest to carry her inside the house. I see my dad’s already turned out the light in what was my office. Walking in the house, through the darkened living room, into the office, I lay her on the pallet of blankets I made for her. Good to know she’s a deep sleeper.

Standing up and stretching my back, I’m pretty sure I hear more vehicle doors closing. As I walk out of the office, I close the door halfway. I don’t want her freaking out, not knowing where she is, should she wake up. “Hey, Dad, you can turn the lights back on. Thanks for that.”

The instant my dad flips on the lights, I’m pretty sure my jaw hit the floor. There are now seven very hot, very tall, well-built men standing in my living room. I actually physically put my hand to my mouth. One to make sure I wasn’t slobbering and second to close my own mouth. Jesus, Lyn, get it together.

“Ma’am, my name’s Jaxon Landers and I’ll be taking care of your baby, right along with Creed’s Jeep, Dakota’s Dodge Challenger, Phoenix’s Chevrolet Corvette and Hunter’s Mazda RX-8. I have to admit, I’m a bit curious as to what kind of baby you have. The guys pretty much threatened me with disembowelment if I so much as scratch your baby, but wouldn’t tell me what it is. So, what is it?” It’s nice to know they are as protective of my baby as I am.

He really ma’am’d me. Well, it’s late, but god knows I’m wide awake. “I’ll tell you what, walk outside and around to the front

of the garage and I'll open the door. Then you can tell me if you think the guys were right to threaten you." Watching all of them walk out the front door, they all take off at a jog around the side of the garage to stand out front. They almost made me laugh. Well, here we go. Let's see what their faces say.

When I open the garage door and they actually see my baby, they all fall silent. "Oh my god, is that a 1964 ½ Ford Mustang? Tell me it is, please, lie to me if you have to." Jaxon is a nut.

I can't help the chuckle that flows from me. "There's no need to lie. It's exactly what you think it is. My dad was her first owner and then she came to me. Bella has less than twenty-five thousand original miles on her and she is one hundred percent original. If anyone was to suggest a MOD kit for her, I'd have to resort to violence."

"Oh yeah, no, no, no. You don't want to change a nut or a bolt on this gorgeous creation. I know what she would mean to me if she was mine." I can see he badly wants to touch her, but won't out of respect, more for the car than me and that's fine.

"Ma'am, I'm Keegan and this is my twin brother, Kerrigan. If it's alright, we'll just start loading your stuff now. That way, we're good to leave in the morning."

"You guys can go ahead and load the truck. The bags I'm keeping with me are inside the house by the kitchen island." Keegan and Kerrigan turn as one to look at my baby. They say nothing, but I can see the awe in their expressions.

Jaxon decides to help Keegan and Kerrigan get things loaded. “I don’t know where they find the energy.” Looking up at Phoenix, I simply smile.

“How about we load Bella in the morning when there’s proper lighting? I’d like to introduce you all to my dad, if that’s alright?”

Leading the small contingent of men into my house, they all introduce themselves. As soon as the military is mentioned, I know I’m not needed. Walking into the room that Lennie’s asleep in, I see Bubbles and Lucifer have made themselves comfortable on Lennie’s legs and belly.

Dad already has instructions on where to have the guys crash and that the extra blankets and such are in the living room closet. Closing my eyes, I can hear the rumble of laughter till sleep takes me over.

I open my eyes to see a little bombshell of a girl sitting beside me while she’s loving on Bubbles and Lucifer. “Good morning, Lennie. I hope you slept well. I see Bubbles and Lucifer have made a friend.”

“Oh my gosh, I thought your dad was joking when he told me their names. They’ve been following me around for almost an hour.” An hour? Shit, what time is it? I guess it doesn’t matter.

Looking into her eyes, I ask her in the most deadpan voice I can manage. “Do you need to use the bathroom?” When she shakes her head no, I yell, “Good.”

Quickly rolling, I take her down and unleash the tickling. “St-stop! Ahh, Daddy, save me!!” Oh you little shit. He wouldn’t. We haven’t even formally... son-of-a-bitch!

“Creed! You put me down right this instant. Don’t make me hurt you on my first day of work. Dakota! Phoenix! Hunter! Dad! Damn it.” I’m laughing, knowing that Creed’s picked me up and flipped me over his shoulder in a fireman’s carry. Then it hits me. I remember the conversation we all had. “Wait, oh shit, you wouldn’t. Creed, I’m warning you. Don’t you dare.” Realizing he’s carrying me outside makes me almost laugh.

I can feel him laughing, as well as hear him along with the others. Son-of-a-bitch, they’re going to... “ouch! You smacked my ass!” I swear to...

“No, actually, that was Hunter.”

“Well, what difference... ouch! Damn it! Phoenix!”

“Nope, sorry, that was Dakota.” Shit, that still leaves two.

“Phoenix, you don’t really... ouch! Damn it, Phoenix!” They’re laughing. I’m so glad this amuses them because I’m going to kill them.

“Lyn, you’re batting zero. That was Creed. You see, we drew straws to see what order we would go in. I had the longest straw, so I got to go last. We also figured it would show that we are men of our word and a great way to break the ice. Now, my only question is, do you want to be able to sit down afterwards?” Oh my god, I have to answer him, or I won’t be able to sit, and we still have to drive.

“Ok, seriously, I want to be able to sit down. Please, let me be able to sit down.” Using my hands, I push down on Creed’s back to lift my top half to look and see who’s standing behind Creed. I look directly into a pair of hazel eyes. “Hi, Dakota.” The moment he smiles and winks at me is when Pheonix smacks my ass. “Ouch, damn it. Are you four done playing with your nanny and Head of the Human Resources Department? I mean, wouldn’t this be classified as some kind of harassment or something?” They’re laughing and all I want to do is rub my ass. I’ll decide later if I’m mad, after I stop laughing.

Slowly, I feel Creed lowering me to stand on my own two feet, and in that split second, an idea forms. When he lets go, I act as though I’m going to stumble backwards. The moment Creed steps forward to grab me, I duck down, throw out my leg, sweeping his legs out from under him, taking him to the ground. His ass hitting the ground makes an audible thud. I burst out laughing, but the guys look seriously shocked. “Awe, did I hurt the big man’s pride?”

Everyone burst out laughing. I lean over Creed, offering him my hand to help him up, I see them coming. All in play I know, but I also need to show them I can, in fact, protect Lennie, as well as myself, against multiple threats. Giving a silent thanks to my dad, I brace myself for what I know is happening. Creed makes his move fast and first.

Once he grabs my hand, he tries to pull me down as he rolls to put me under him. Nope, not happening. So I use his own hand to do a one handed cartwheel over him, while swinging my

right leg wide to clock Dakota in the center of his chest, sending him down to the ground.

“You’re out, Uncle Dakota. Brooklyn got you down. Go, Brooklyn!” Well, I didn’t know there are rules to this. “Daddy, no cheating. She got you down, too. Now it’s up to Uncle Phoenix or Uncle Hunter.” Good to know she has my back.

I turn to position myself in a sideways stance. I may be facing Lennie, but I can watch both men coming at me from the right and left sides of me. If they think this little maneuver will help them, it won’t. When I realize one is going to come at me high and the other low, I know I have them. Once they’re close enough, I take a step back, throw a roundhouse to take Hunter down, while avoiding his arms as well as Phoenix’s. Ducking the upper half of my body, I spin around Phoenix, using my legs to slam him to the ground. If he would have gotten his balance quicker, I’d have been screwed.

“Yay, Brooklyn! I have never seen anyone beat the A Team before. That was awesome! Will you teach me how to fight?” Lennie is hooting and hollering. Apparently, seeing her family get their asses handed to them is entertaining.

Well, no time like the present. Let the lessons begin. “Lennie, if you notice, I didn’t actually fight. I used their own sizes and momentum against them. I just had to adjust myself a couple of times. If you will take training seriously, I will teach you to defend yourself.” Seeing her all excited makes me smile. While I watch the guys pick themselves off the ground, I get to admire them physically a little bit longer.



CHAPTER TWELVE

Creed

I wasn't completely sure what to expect when we pulled up to Lyn's house. When Lyn immediately went for Lennie to take care of her, my heart melted a bit. There's something about seeing my baby girl being carried by a woman that fills me with joy.

Now, standing here looking at her baby again, any car enthusiast's wet dream, I'm so done for. "Lyn, she really is gorgeous and indeed, very rare. We need to rearrange the babies. Jaxon!"

"I'm already on it, LT. I figured you would want them reorganized when I saw Bella last night. I've pulled them all out. We'll load Lyn's baby first. Once inside, I want her covered with her tire locks. Lyn, is that alright with you?"

When she turns around to face me, I swear my cock jerked for the first time in years. Calm down boy, now is not the time. What is wrong with me? I don't need my body reacting this way right now. "Creed, I'm giving you my ultimate trust." When she tosses me the key to her baby, I almost drop it from shock.

She has her baby's key on a single key chain that holds a Ford emblem. Low weight and barely any swing. She knows not to put a lot of weight on the ignition. "Lyn, are you sure? I mean, I'd love to, but only if you're sure." When she uses her hands like a model showcasing a car, and opens the driver's side door, I don't hesitate. I'm no fool.

Slowly sitting sideways on the driver's seat, I know I'll need to adjust it. I'm a bit taller than she is. Once I get the seat and mirrors properly adjusted, she closes the door. Rolling down the window, I put the key in the ignition, close my eyes and listen as my wrist turns the key. Bella, as Lyn calls her, starts and purrs like a fucking cougar. "Wow, she sounds amazing. Everyone get into position. I don't want any fuck ups loading this gorgeous baby."

Once everyone runs out of her garage and takes their loading positions, I back the car out effortlessly and line her tires up with the outside lower ramp. Hunter is inside the trailer, Dakota's on the outside right and Phoenix is on the outside left. Hunter gives me the signal, all right, let's load this beauty up.

It took almost no time at all to reload the vehicles. All of Lyn's furniture is loaded onto the moving truck and her bags are already in the van. "Alright, everyone, pay attention." Once everyone has given me their attention, I continue. "The way I figure it, we can make it to the new house tonight. From here it's an eight-hour drive. With stops along the way, I figure no more than twelve hours, maximum. Is everyone good with this?"

Seeing and or hearing everyone's agreement, it's that time. "Jaxon, Keegan and Kerrigan are you three good to go? Do you need anything?" When they each respond and give a thumbs up, I know I won't see them again until they reach the house shortly after we do.

It's time to get this show on the road. "Everyone else, load up! I'm glad we got to meet your dad. I'm sure it makes things easier that way. I'm sorry he had to rush off."

"Dad had to go see his lawyer this morning. Small country towns mean weekends for business too. We said our 'see ya later's'. He knows I'll give him a call in a few days to update him." It's nice seeing that Lyn and her dad are so close. I hope Lennie and I will always be close.

"Lyn, would you mind sitting up front with Hunter? The guys and I would like to speak with you. Lennie is going to crash till we stop for lunch, so you can sit with her afterwards. Is that alright with the both of you?" When they both nod their heads and Lennie yawns, I knew I made the right call. We've never been on a road trip where Lennie didn't sleep for at least half of it.

I'm glad Hunter thought ahead and rented us the largest van they had. With four huge men and two smallish females, we needed the room. Once everyone is loaded, Hunter wastes no time getting on the road. Dakota, Phoenix and myself share the first bench seat so we can all be closer to Hunter and Lyn in the front. It's then that it truly dawns on me that we're all retired and working for ourselves. We've hired a gorgeous,

kickass nanny, as well as making her a part of the company. The most important thing is her solid trust in us.

When I scoot forward in my seat, I motion for Dakota and Phoenix to move with me. Keeping our voices almost to a whisper, “Lyn, can we talk to you for a bit?”

When Lyn turns to give us her attention, she doesn’t just turn her head, she twists her entire body to sit on her knees, facing Hunter, but turning her head towards us. When she gives you her attention, you damn well know it. “You see, it really didn’t dawn on me how much faith and trust you’re instilling in us till a little while ago. You know where we said we were going, but truthfully you have no idea, but you came with us anyway. Do you mind if I ask why?”

There’s that beaming smile. “Do you guys honestly think I would hop into a vehicle with four men that happen to have a child with them if I didn’t do my homework on all of you? You may have retired from the military, but the military hasn’t forgotten about you. I have connections too and made some inquiries about you all.”

She’s intelligent, funny, quick witted, a damn good fighter and protector. Lennie already adores her and her taking us down, won us all. Well, all except one. I don’t think Crow will be home from his mission for another couple of weeks. I think he’ll like her a lot.

“I also know your entire team was up for promotion and all of you chose retirement instead. All eight of you met in bootcamp. You became a cohesive group that worked well

together and haven't separated since then. I know you're all honorable, respected, single, intelligent, supportive, good-looking, loving men. Is there anything I'm missing? I mean, other than not going through the endless awards and ribbons each of you have."

Holy shit, she did do her homework. Leave it to a woman. They can and will find everything out about you. The alphabet organizations have nothing on a determined woman. Wait, hold up, did she just say we're all good looking? She did, I know she did. I don't think she realizes she said it, but I definitely caught it.

"Well then, I guess the only other thing to do is to tell you about where we're going. We bought a five-hundred-acre estate. It has four cabins, fully restored and modernized. The main house, where we'll all be staying, is an early 1800's Plantation Home. It has four floors and has also been restored and modernized. We wanted the feel of the old plantation home, but with modern conveniences. All of that is in the middle and back of the property. Dakota, you want to take over?"

The way she watches whoever's speaking is with such intensity, there's no doubting if you have her undivided attention. I can't wait to see how she handles the house and her new position at our company.

Dakota's smile and wink let me know he has no qualms about having her attention fully devoted to him. "Sure, I can do that. Our office sits on the front twenty acres of the property. That's

where we'll be working and where Squirt will be picked up and dropped off for school. We've installed a security system in the house, on the outside of the house, around the property, as well as in and around the security company. It's our design and no one else knows it. Each of us has a specialty, but we all know security. Hunter, Dakota, Phoenix and myself have worked together to accomplish a lot out here before our final move."

He's not missing a beat. I hope he doesn't... "The house and office both have multiple panic rooms." Well, shit. "The house has one on every floor, including the basement that sits right on top of the other. Once one room is triggered to lock, the others lock and the alarm sends out a code. The business, house, cabins and other outbuildings are fully protected." Well, I wasn't going to tell her all that yet, but whatever. Leave it to Dakota to not leave anything out.

Since Dakota went all matter of fact, I'll distract her from that part. "You know we're going to Ridgedale, Missouri. It has a beautiful waterway. It's such a small community that it may seem like an abandoned town, but it's not. We should arrive before any of the big rigs."

I don't know Lyn well enough yet to be able to read her facial expressions. Although right now, I'd have to say she's schooled herself, so she doesn't show anything. Well, there's no point stopping now. Might as well say the rest.

"Lyn, we've had a family meeting and decided that you're the woman of the estate. It will be set up how you like it. We're

not decorators by any stretch of the imagination. We'd also like you to have an office in the house as well as office spaces in the main office building. Being the Head of the Human Resources Department won't be easy. You'll interview and hire your own assistant and or secretary. Your salary will include pay for any staff you need. If you need more, we'll get it taken care of."

The expression on her face is priceless. "You're Lennon's nanny, first and foremost. I want you to understand that. She'll always come first. We're giving you the HR job for several reasons. One, we figured you'd like something to do while Lennie is in school. Two, we believe everyone should have a nest egg and this will help you build one and finally, well, because we think you'll be as good for us as you will be for Lennie."



CHAPTER THIRTEEN

Lennie's Diary

Dear Diary,

So we got to my new nanny's house to pick her up and my daddy and uncles totally picked her up and spanked her butt. It is so cool that she played with me and with them. She didn't even get mad. That's so cool. It was great the way she got them back, though.

Oh. My. Gosh, Brooklyn's smile really is pretty. I freaking love her hair. It's dark and so shiny. Her hair is up in a cool ponytail that looks like it's being held up by her own hair and not a ponytail holder. So cool.

Diary, her baby, her car is so pretty. Blue isn't my favorite color but the baby blue like her car is, is really pretty. Her car is way older than any of the other cars. My daddy was so totally excited about it. He even called her car cherry. I didn't know that didn't mean red? I learned it means original.

Brooklyn even picks on Daddy and my uncles. I like her picking on them. Not many people will do that. They need a taste of their own medicine. It will be so much fun having another girl in the house. I finally have someone I can talk to

about, well, stuff. Hmm, I wonder if I can help them all get a little closer.

I've got time to think. I may only be eleven, but I read really good books and have a lot of ideas. Diary, let the mission begin. I'm going to set all of them up. This is going to be so much fun.

Brooklyn is so cool. I know we just met and everything, but it kinda already feels like I have a mom. I don't know if that's bad or not. I never got to know my real mom.

Her name was Hadlee Marie Creed. She died days after I was born. Daddy says she had cancer. I guess they found out she was sick when she was already pregnant with me.

I've always wanted a mom. Diary, does that make me mean? Do you think that means I don't love my real mom? I mean, I'd like to say I love her, but since I never got to meet her, I just don't know.

I can't wait to get to the new house. I guess we're a little more than halfway there. We've stopped for lunch, bathroom breaks, gas and the old people walked around to stretch out. Well, more for another time.



CHAPTER FOURTEEN

Dakota

We hit the road again after a much needed lunch break. We all keep pretty quiet and just sit back, enjoying the scenery. It really is a beautiful country. I'm just looking forward to the peace and quiet. Being in the military was a lot to deal with on a daily basis. I know it'll take some adjusting, but we'll be alright. Besides, we have Lyn.

"Lyn?" Is she asleep or just zoned out on the view, kinda like everyone else? Well, except Hunter, he's driving again. It has to be a control thing with him. No matter where we've gone or what we've done, Hunter has always been the driver. Alright, let's try again. "Earth to Lyn. Are you with us, Lyn? Come in, Lyn."

Seeing her jump and spin in her seat made me and everyone else chuckle. "What? Oh, I'm sorry. I was lost in a daydream I think, or just spaced out. Anyway, what's up?"

I know everyone can see the smile spread across my face, and that's fine. "I was asking, which room would you like to organize first? Is there an order you'd like to get this done in?"

Damn, her eyes lit up and her smile grew even bigger and brighter.

“Oh, well, I think we should do Lennie’s room and then the kitchen. Everything else we can just wing it. We can put things in the proper rooms and take our time putting the house together. Lennie needs to be ready for school and other activities. We need the kitchen so I can prepare meals, snacks and so on. How’s that sound?” She makes total sense.

We all nod our heads and let out a collective, “Sounds good.” Lennie’s room is done, although there’s a surprise there. I honestly think both Lennie and Lyn will love, so that should be fun.

“Since Lennie looks out for the count, I think there is something you should know. I had another man arrested at the house. This time, however, it didn’t directly involve me. Dean, the guy my mother was, or is, having an affair with, came after my dad. So, I put a Mossberg 500 to the back of his head. I told him unless he wanted a closed casket funeral, he better let my father up. You guys need to know I don’t fuck around when it comes to the safety of those I care about. I’ll kill without thought or remorse. I wanted you all to know that.” I know she can read the pleased look on my face.

After reassuring her that we think she did the right thing, we spent a lot of the drive time filling the air with chatter, making plans for this or that, and napping on and off.

I swear it seems like in a blink of an eye I hear Creed announce we’re pulling onto the property. When I look at the

clock, I realized after chatting for a while, I must have dozed off. It was dark outside, and the clock read ten pm.

When we turn onto what Creed refers to as the driveway, I almost laugh. It not only looks like a dirt road, but it's also long enough to be called a dirt road. Following the bend in the drive, I hear Lyn call out. "Holy shit! A real plantation house? You weren't kidding. You literally meant a multi-level mansion. It is a true plantation house. This is ours? All this land is ours as well? Wow."

Hearing and seeing her excitement makes me excited all over again. I can't wait till she sees the surprise we had done for Squirt. It's not even for me, but I'm fucking excited about revealing it.

"Lyn, we're happy you like it. Like I said, it's from the 1800's, but it has been updated without ruining the aesthetics. The household rooms are on the main floor. The kitchen, parlor, offices, living room, all that. The second floor is all bedrooms with en suites. The third floor, well, it's a surprise for Lennie, and we can't wait to show her and you. Make sure you tell us if she doesn't truly like it. She won't tell us, no matter what." Creed is right. Lennie loves us all so much she wouldn't want to hurt our feelings by telling us she doesn't like something we did just for her.

"No worries, Creed. I'll make sure I find out what she really thinks and let you all know. May I suggest that you guys show her the third floor first? I know she misses her friend Charlie

and seeing the room might help with that a bit and get her excited.”

Considering everything we have to do, she has a valid point. “Lyn has a good point. It would also keep her occupied while we’re getting stuff into the house. Not that she’s really in the way, but you know what I mean.”

“Hey, I had Spotify playing. What are you guys talking about?” Lennie surprises us all when she pipes up out of nowhere. Well, we were going to need her attention, anyway.

“We’re here and the guys say they did something and we have to check it out to make sure they’ve done it properly. Are you ready for this inspection, Inspector Lennie?” I’m so relieved when Lyn takes the lead. We suck at keeping things from Lennie, so I’m completely amazed we were able to keep this one.

As Hunter pulls up to the house and parks, we all climb out of the rental. Before Lennie can take off, which I can tell she wants to do, I grab her ponytail. “Hold up, Squirt. Remember, inspection first, snack and then bedtime. You can explore inside the house tomorrow, but even then, you’re not to leave the house without one of us. Got it?” I almost want to cross my fingers in hopes she likes what we did for her.

Oh yeah, I can see the pout forming on her face and the whine coming before it starts. “No, I’m serious, Lennie. You and Lyn don’t know this land. Until you both are more familiar with it, there is no wandering off alone. Deal?”

“Fine,” she huffs out with that wicked little grin of her’s, “Let’s go see what we’re supposed to inspect then.” Holding in my laughter at her attempt to whine, we follow Lennie up the grand front steps to a wide, expansive, wrap-around porch. It holds two swings, one on each side. There are a couple of rocking chairs and small tables scattered here and there. I hope Lyn likes to sit outside. Nothing like a nice porch, coffee, and great company in the early morning and evenings.

The front entryway is a set of double doors that have to stand around ten feet high. Once Creed unlocks the door and opens one of the two doors, a loud chirping begins. “That’s the alarm system. Once you enter the house, you have sixty seconds to type in your code. We each have our own specific number combination. I will give them to you later. Once we settle in, you’ll change your code to something you can remember. Please do not use anyone’s birthday, old address or social security number. It needs to be four numbers that are not easily associated with you or anyone else in the house.”

Once Creed types in his numbers and we’ve set our travel bags down, we all follow him up the stairs. There are two sets of curved grand staircases. They really are stunning. The walls of the foyer are a very soft gray with white molding. Hanging in the center of the room and between the two staircases is an antique glass chandelier.

Climbing up to the first landing would make this the second floor. The walls and trim are the same color as the foyer downstairs. All the doors are white. The floor is split in two by the staircase landing. There are twelve doors that line the

hallways. Six doors to the right and six doors to the left. Turning to the right, we continue our climb up the single staircase to the third floor. No one ever counts the basement as a floor, and I don't know why. Especially if it's usable.

Once we reach the top floor, there is a small landing in front of a single door. When Creed steps to the side, he looks down at Lennie with a heartfelt smile. "Lennie, this is for you. This is your space. All we ask is that you remember you're on the top floor. We did have some sound proofing done, but stomping feet can still be heard. Are you ready?"

"I'm totally ready. Brooklyn, you're coming in with me, right?" She's excited and doesn't even know what's on the other side of the door. She really is so adorable. The Gods won't be able to save any boy or man that hurts her.

Lyn places her hand on Lennie's shoulder. "Of course. I wouldn't want to miss this. Go on, open the door. Let's see this surprise." When she opened the door, the squeal that came out of that child could have damn near shattered glass. I know it made everyone wince.



CHAPTER FIFTEEN

Phoenix

Holy shit, my ears. How in the hell does a noise like that come out of a five-foot-tall girl weighing no more than a buck ten? “Hey, guys, I don’t think she likes what she sees so far.”

“Uncle Phoenix, don’t be a dork your whole life.” I even laugh at that. Just to think, I used to feel the same way about my parents.

Following her and Lyn into the first room really is an experience. I guess you could call this her living room area or tv room. It has a couple of big plush chairs, a couple of bean bags, a coffee table and some end tables. There is a small entertainment center that has a TV and all that goes with it. We picked a somewhat neutral color for this room and went with an aged white. Since the natural lighting is low, it helps brighten the entire floor up.

Walking in and stepping to the left, she enters her closet. This was a space of great debate. Half of us said it was too big and the other half said it wasn’t going to be big enough. So, we met in the middle. She has room for all her clothes, shoes and

all that stuff. She also has a small vanity where she can do her hair and all the stuff that girls do.

“Lennie, I’m totally digging this room. I see serious shopping trips in our future. The color of the walls is bright and cheerful without being too over the top. Nice choice whoever selected it. Lennie, what do you think?” I love that she’s getting Lennie to open up in front of us. We want her to know she can tell us anything. We have always been that way, but sometimes it feels as though she keeps quiet so she doesn’t put ripples in the water.

“I seriously love everything I have seen so far. I don’t think I would have gone with a rose-gray type color in here, but it really does look pretty. I can’t wait till all my stuff gets here. Wait, what’s that little door in the wall?”

Lyn walks over to it and opens it. Turning around, she has a big smile on her face. “That would be a laundry chute. So at the end of everyday you’re going to put all your dirty clothes in it. They’ll slide down to a basket with your name on it. Each room that has a chute will have a basket. Make sure you use it, and that goes for all of you. I’m not going to be chasing dirty laundry all over this house. Does everyone understand me on this?”

She stands there, hand on hip, and doesn’t move on until she hears ‘*yes ma’am*’ from each of us. Lyn really is going to be good for all of us. Especially Lennie. I didn’t realize she was going to be doing our laundry, too. When Lennie walks to the next door and opens it, I think she may have lost her mind.

She's jumping up and down as she enters the room, dragging Lyn by her wrist in behind her. "Welcome to your palace, Princess." The smile she has on her face when she turns around and looks at us is bright enough to make the sun look dim.

"Oh, my gosh! A real canopy bed. Is this why you decided to donate my bed instead of bringing it? Holy cow! It even has the tied back curtains. I love the color of the walls. I really like how the bottom half is a light purple and the upper half is a soft pink. This room is so amazing! The throw rug is totally shag. I love this. This isn't a joke, right? This is really mine?"

We'd decided to let Creed answer this if she asked it or something similar. "Yes, baby girl, it's real, and it's all yours. We may not like it, but you're not a baby anymore. You deserve your privacy just as much as we do. So, in our opinion, it's only fair to give you your own space. You're not finished though."

As she turns to run out of her bedroom, she freezes with an odd expression taking over her face. "What's with the jar on the dresser?" Walking up to it, she read it. "It says '*Household Swear Jar.*' You guys are really going to try to stop cursing?" When she sees us all nod, she squeals and takes off running with Lyn hot on her heels. Watching them race across the living room area makes us all laugh.

When she opens the farthest door to the right, she squeals again. My ears may start bleeding if she keeps this shi-crap up.

The swear jars will pay for her college by the end of the week if we're all not on guard. I chuckle to myself at the thought.

"I have a guest room? I can have friends stay over and say, '*you can stay in my guest room*'. Oh and I love that the walls are like my room. Except the bottom half is jade color and the top half is like a burnt yellow. It's not too bright. I love this. Holy smokes."

We're all totally prepared with fingers deeply embedded in our ears when she walks out of her guest room to the final door and opens it. "Oh. My. God! I have my own bathroom! Look at that tub. I can soak and shave. Well, when I start shaving. My own linen closet and everything. Eeek, I don't even know what to say."

The minute she turns around and we see the smile along with tears, we converge on her. Wrapping her up in a big family hug. Lyn hugging Lennie, and all of us hugging them. I can say with absolute certainty that she loves her private place. There's just one more thing we need to show her. Her safe room.

We don't want to scare her, but with the security business we're starting, we have to be prepared for anything. There was no debate on this, and we all quickly agreed to the added features.

"Lennie, we need you to pay attention to this next part. Lyn, you as well. The guest bedroom is more than what you see. If you look at the door frame, you'll see a secondary door that's hidden inside the wall. That door is what completes this room

and makes it a safe room. When the room is activated, it will also activate the other three safe rooms. Activating the rooms is as simple as placing your hand, palm down on the small mirror hanging beside the door. It only looks like a picture on glass. We'll add Lennie and Lyn to the hand scanner tomorrow. That way, only those that live on the property can activate them."

We've placed bets as to how long Lennie and or Lyn can go without having to test the safe rooms. Half of us said within twenty-four hours, while the other half gave them forty-eight hours.

"Once activated, a signal will go out to a watch we'll all be wearing at all times. There will also be a household chime that rings out the secondary notification. Once you hear that chime, you have 60 seconds to get to one of the four safe rooms." I see Lennie back up, flush against Lyn. Shit, I think I just might have startled Lennie, and I didn't mean to.

"What your uncle Dakota is also saying is it's just for emergencies. As unlikely as it is that we'll ever need one of the panic rooms, we'll still perform drills on getting to one. Everyone should know how to get to each room from at least two different ways. The rooms are fireproof, heat proof and have their own air filtration systems, water and small hidden sewer systems. Once all the rooms close their doors, a staircase will descend from this room to the second-floor panic room. A separate staircase will then open from the second floor to the first-floor panic room." I can tell that didn't help calm Lennie's nerves any. Crap.

Lyn looks from Lennie's face around to all of us. Her smile and quick wink tells me she'll have this well in hand pretty damn quick. Being honest with myself, I'm glad because I don't want Lennie or Lyn scared in their own home.

“Alright, so here's what I see. Your daddy and uncles are going to be doing security. Since they don't exactly know what to expect, they went all gung ho on building us a seriously safe house. So from now on, we'll call the panic rooms Fort Knox. Panic room just sounds creepy. So, we'll have some races to see who can get inside one of the Fort Knox rooms the fastest and how many different ways there are to get to each one of them. I see a family friendly competition between me and you, kiddo. The guys can't play with us because they designed it. How does that sound?”

Oh, you sweet, gorgeous creature. We managed to scare the shit out of her, and Lyn turns it into a game, lightening the mood and her spirit.

Smiling a very mischievous smile, Lennie looks at Lyn. “You're on.”



CHAPTER SIXTEEN

Brooklyn

Leave it to men to scare the shit out of a little girl. There were so many better ways to explain the concept of a panic room. What's done is done, and I have lightened the mood a bit.

“Alright, Lennie, I’m going to have your stuff brought up so you can get started organizing your rooms in the morning. I’ll make sure the laundry baskets get placed where they need to go. Don’t forget to drop all dirty clothes down the laundry chute in your closet. We’re going to go to the second floor and figure out who’s getting what bedroom.” I can see the glow in Lennie’s eyes. She is so excited. Hell, I’m excited for her.

We can hear her on the phone to Charlie as we walk out of Lennie’s main door and down the stairs to the second floor. She must be on a video call because she kept saying look. I know she loves it all and I’m very proud of the guys for thinking of her.

Once we’re on the second floor, we all just stand there looking left and right down the single, long hallway. “Alright, guys, how do you want to do this? I pick a room and then you all battle it out over the others, or what?”

I hear a chuckle and turn in time to see who it was. “How about you pick your room and then assign ours? All the rooms on this floor are essentially master suites, so it’s only a matter of location.” Leave it to Hunter to be matter of fact and logical.

Well, alrighty then. Lady of the manor, I got this. “Alright, let’s go to the right. I know you said upstairs was pretty soundproof, but I don’t think we need to test the sound proofing. So let’s pick the rooms under the guest bedroom and bathroom side. I’ll take the very end room. As for you guys, well, I can only think of one way to select rooms, by military rank. So, Creed will be across the hall from me. Dakota, you’ll be next door to Creed. Phoenix will be across from Dakota and next to me. That leaves Hunter to choose the room next to Dakota or next to Phoenix.” When I see a mix of smiles and frowns. I can’t help giggling.

“If you guys don’t like what I picked, you’re more than welcome to talk between yourselves and work it out. Otherwise, we need to unload the rental, and I do believe I hear the distinct rumbling of an eighteen-wheeler. That means our babies are here. They’ll need to be unloaded and put in the garage. There is a garage, right?” Creed’s expression of being slightly annoyed is actually cute.

“Gorgeous, what kind of guys would we be if we let anything get on, scratch or allow any other form of wickedness to happen to our babies? Of course, we have a garage. There’s an eight stall in the back of the house.”

“Since all the rooms on this floor are the same in design, I’m guessing we can style them how we’d like them to look? You know, to our own personal tastes.” I assume nothing.

“Yes, I figured we can all design our personal spaces how we want to. Honestly, though, we’re not too much on interior decorating, so you might find yourself just telling us what to do.”

At least Creed can admit his shortcomings. “Well, then I suggest we go meet the truck carrying our babies. Wait, one of us needs to let Lennie know we’re going outside.”

“Here, Lyn, this house has an intercom system along with the security system. It’s way too big to be trying to yell at one another. Each floor has a button. Whichever button you press, that entire floor will be able to hear you. Watch.” Hunter pushes the button marked three, which is obviously Lennie’s floor.

“Lennie, we’re all going outside to meet the truck loaded with our babies. If you want to come, that’s fine. If you don’t, push the number two on the speaker device and tell us what you plan on doing. We’ll be gone for about thirty minutes.”

Once he releases the button, I expect to hear her running down the stairs. Instead, she activates the intercom. “I’m going to stay in my room to get an idea of where I’m going to put things. No offense, but I’ve seen your cars and I’m not interested.” Well, that’s that.

Getting downstairs is always so much easier, or at least it seems that way. Most likely because you’re walking down and

not up. Creed and Dakota lead our merry band through the parlor. A bright white room. This room is screaming for color.

As we exit the parlor, I think we enter a breakfast nook. Which is actually very cute. It's off the kitchen and what looks to be a mud room. I cannot wait to explore this place later. I can't help sneaking a peek at the kitchen and almost fall over. Not even kidding. If Dakota hadn't been behind me, I would have face planted on the floor.

"Ok, hold up. Who designed this kitchen and who's the cook? Since you guys didn't know me yet, one of you must cook. Spill it." Looking around at them, they all raise their hands. "Are you kidding me? We have five cooks in this house. Holy hell, I hope there's a gym."

"If you can think of it, I can almost guarantee it's on the property somewhere. The gym, for example, is, or will be, in the basement of the office building. We're putting it there so we can work out before and after work. We don't just come by these bodies naturally. We do have to put in some effort."

I really can't help the giggle that escapes at Hunter's bluntness. Mainly because, boy oh boy, he isn't wrong. Shooting them a wink, I scoot out the door before the thought of those bodies can start really forming in my mind. Flirting and being in a real relationship is totally different. And how the hell would I choose, anyway?

When we all walk out of the back door, I come to a dead stop. There's a golf cart and a couple of four wheelers. Looking over to see where the garage is, it's maybe a couple hundred

yards away. “You’re kidding me, right? Are you guys telling me you can’t handle a brisk walk or even a quick sprint? I’m so disappointed.” Shaking my head in disappointment, I prove my point and take off running. The area is well lit, so seeing isn’t an issue. Damn, it feels good to stretch my legs. Hell, my entire body. Hearing the guys picking up their pace to catch me, I increased my speed to see what they’ve got.

“I win!” I didn’t mean to really start a race, but it was fun anyway.

“For fuck’s sake, Lyn, how do you run like that? We know chasers and trackers that can’t move that fast. Phoenix is the fastest runner of the four of us and you left him like he was standing still.” Cool, seems I’ve impressed Creed at least.

It’s not till we all catch our breath that I can see how large the garage actually is. The garage is made of some kind of dark wood and the roof overhangs on at least three sides. It has a total of eight bays. Most of the bay doors are currently open, so I can see that you can drive straight through.

The truck has pulled up just past the garage. We’ll be able to back the cars off the truck and pull each of them into their own bay. I didn’t think about how slow moving it is to unload one vehicle at a time. Unloading took longer than loading because we’re all paranoid about scratching one of our babies.

After pulling the cars off the portable parking lot, we head back to the house at a leisurely pace. “I’m hoping the kitchen has been stocked. I’d really like to get us all a snack. We all

need to crash and get some rest. Especially knowing the other truck will be here by morning.”

“Gorgeous.” I love when one of them calls me that. “We would love a snack and yes, the kitchen is fully stocked. You don’t have to worry about unloading the truck.”

“Sounds good to me. I’m going to call Lennie down. She can help put together a snack, simple but good.” Plus, it will give her and me some time together without the men around. Not to mention, giving me a break from all the hotness floating around, turning me into a hot mess.

Once we step into the house, I use the intercom to call her down. “Lennie, do you want to help me make a snack for everyone before bed time? The other truck will be here somewhat soon.”

“I’ll be right down, Mo-Brooklyn. Don’t start without me.” It took me a second, but I realized she almost called me Mom. An honest slip, but either way, I’m seriously flattered. Turning around, I can see the guys didn’t miss the slip either, and their shocked expressions warm my heart.

“Guys, you don’t need to say anything. I’m sure it was just a slip of the tongue and if not, well, I’m flattered. Now, go on and let us women cook. We’ll call you when we’re ready.” My heart is racing and I need them to go so I can take a few centering breaths.

I can see their shock replaced by relief like a slow moving picture show. “Alright, we’ll be in the main office on this level. We already have some things set up in there and boxes

everywhere. If you need us, call us.” All I do is nod my head,
shooing them away.



CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

Hunter

When we left the foyer, Lennie had just flown down the stairs and was joining Lyn in the kitchen. Hell, I'm just excited to eat something. The room we picked on the main floor for the household office was originally a medium size ballroom. We didn't see the need to keep that, so we had it converted into an office for us. We had the walls and ceilings done in a bright white. The floor is American Redwood. I think it's cedar with a clear coat on it. I'm not a floor guy.

"Creed, I think we should call Lyn's dad. We need to let him know we made it and she's safe. I was also thinking we might offer him a job as well. When we were talking back at Lyn's old place, he mentioned that he's a mechanic. Having one of those around full time is never a bad idea." My brothers all look at me and I know they're on board with this idea.

Taking Creed's wave as the go ahead to call Brooks, I pull out my phone. Swiping my screen to activate my phone, I find his name. Tapping the call button, I wait for Brooks to answer. When it goes to voicemail, I leave a brief message and hang up.

We all know Phoenix is the quiet one, so when he starts talking, we listen. “What the rainy day double fuck is this? I don’t get it.” The expression on his face doesn’t bode well for whatever he’s looking at. “We’ve been emailed requesting our protection of a high-profile member of the military while he travels overseas. According to his itinerary, he will leave Dulles International Airport in four days and will be flying to Berlin, where he’ll have a brief meeting. It doesn’t say with who. I really don’t like information gaps. From Berlin, he’s flying back to Dulles, where our protection detail will end.” The look on Creed’s face means he sees something or has a gut feeling that something isn’t quite up to speed, other than the obvious missing information.

“Phoenix, who is this *‘high profile member of the Military’* we’re supposed to protect and we’re not even fully up and running yet? I know it’s putting a bad taste in my mouth already and I don’t know any deets yet.” When he shrugs his shoulders, we all straighten our backs.

“Hold up, you’re telling me there’s no name? Whoever this person is will be flying to Germany for a couple hours and then turn around only to fly right back? Something isn’t adding up. What the fuck is all the cloak and dagger for if everything is on the up and up?” Man, I really don’t like this, and I can tell my brothers don’t either.

Looking right at Creed, we all know what’s coming. “Hunter, I want you to see if anyone knows what this is about. I want to know if this itinerary has been filed. I want to know anything

and everything as soon as possible.” I knew my orders before he even said them.

He’ll have Dakota access or, more commonly known as hack, the Post Commander’s office computer, while Phoenix takes lots of pictures of those coming and going from his office. He is now going to say we have 48 hours to get everything accomplished.

“Alright guys, you know what you each need to do. You have 48 hours to get your files together so we can meet and see if this entire trip is on the level.” Do I know my LT or what?

All of us were so deep into information gathering that no one heard Lyn or Lennie call out to us. When we get into research mode for a mission, or anything really, it’s as bad as a writer getting lost in that writer’s fog I’ve heard about. So, it was inevitable that when Lyn touches my back, I jump and turn, sending my fist flying.

At the exact moment I was about to pull the punch, realizing what was happening, Lyn grabs my wrist and twists it. While she has my wrist in a twist, she drops to a knee, sweeping my legs out from under me, making me land hard as hell directly on my back. Fuck me, that hurt.

“Holy shit, Lyn. Where did you learn that?” I knew that was Lennie without even looking. All of us guys were either too shocked or laughing too hard to speak. In my case, trying to catch my breath.

“Lennie, you can learn how to do that, too. I train at least four times a week and run every morning. There is no way I can eat

the junk I do and keep an athletic build. I can teach you how to fight to protect yourself, but there is one major rule you must agree to. No using what you learn to bully or harm anyone. This is for protection purposes only. Alright?" We had a feeling she would get Lennie training and take it seriously.

"Now hold on, Lyn." Creed, man, what the fuck? "We've offered to teach her, and she would never follow through or take things seriously. I would hate for you to possibly waste your time when she won't give you one hundred percent." I see it, reverse psychology, well played Creed. Shit, I'm going to feel that take down later. I just know it.

"Dad, I will take it seriously. Brooklyn, I promise I will do whatever you say. I'll show everyone that I can be a bada..."

"Lennon Marie Creed, watch your mouth. I know you're not a baby, but you also don't want cursing to become a bad habit. Your daddy, your uncles and I have already fallen victim to the habit. That's why there's a swear jar in your room. Anytime one of us curses, we have to put money in the jar. Save yourself. Do you hear me?" Wow, she is really good. I would have never thought to phrase it like that. I would have just sounded like a hypocrite.

"Yes, ma'am, I understand and you're right. I don't want that habit. Who gets the money in the swear jars?"

"You know, Lennie, I think you should get that money. I'll admit this will be hard for us, but we can try. Can't we guys?" I'm going to go broke. I can see it now. Son-of-a-bit... well, shi... oh my god, completely broke. Fully standing up again, I

want to wince and whine from the sudden impact on the wood floor, but I'll live. I've had worse.

“Now that the excitement is over, how about we all sit down for a snack? I'm exhausted and would like some sleep before we have to unload the other truck.”

Look at her already taking charge. I like it. “If I remember right, Lennie's stuff and your stuff was the last to be loaded on the remaining truck. I personally don't see a problem starting in the morning and getting it unloaded.”

I can smell our snack before we even make it halfway to the dining room. It's audible when we all take a deep inhale through our noses to get an even better whiff. “Guys, I smell garlic bread. Not the store-bought kind either. This is the homemade stuff. I think I may be in Heaven.”

As we walk through the vestibule that leads into the dining room, Phoenix even comments on the aroma. “I smell garlic, rosemary, and oregano. Spaghetti. I bet it's spaghetti. Am I right, gorgeous? Lennie, is it spaghetti? That's a magnificent snack.”

We can't help but laugh when the girls simply shrug their shoulders. Walking into the dining room gives an entirely new meaning to family dinner. The table is made of dark mahogany, with fourteen matching chairs. Two are high back with arm rests at either end. I would call each of them the head of the table. The six chairs on either side of the table contain the same designs but are shorter in height. Their cushions look

like they're made from antique velvet or something similar. It's a bit fancy and relaxing at the same time.

We saw this entire set in town when we were looking around. We agreed to buy it and had it delivered. It sat in the garage for a long time, but as soon as this room was finished and clean, we brought it in.

The walls are a light shade of marbled gray. No idea how that was painted. The trim looks to be a satin white with a soft fleur de lis pattern. The floors throughout the house, other than private quarters, are made of American Redwood. Expensive, but durable and long lasting. The outside wall has two floor to ceiling windows that let a perfect amount of light in. The finishing piece, in my opinion, is the chandelier hanging in the center of the room, over the center of the long, formal dining table.

We stop behind chairs and wait for further instructions. We're not so formal, but even I have to admit I like the idea of all of us eating together. Lyn's voice brings me out of my inner thoughts and I'll never complain about that either.



CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

Brooklyn

“Gentlemen, what you see and smell before you will be a daily ritual. At a more appropriate time, of course. We’ll eat every meal as a family. Now, I understand that sometimes business or even school will interfere with this, on occasion.” Watching them standing behind their chairs is almost comical. I think they might actually be salivating.

“If you’ll all take your seats, we can get started. It would be great if Keegan and Kerrigan show up before we’re finished, they could join us. I made sure we’d have enough. Has anyone thought of calling Jaxon to see if he’d like a snack?”

When I hear no response, I hold my hand out to Creed. “Either let me borrow your phone to call him or you call him, please. He is a member of this team and therefore this family, so he should be here as well. While you’re at it, can you call Keegan and Kerrigan to see how much longer they’ll be, or if they’ll make it in tonight?”

I start dishing out the snack and then I hear what I was hoping I would. “Well, Lyn wants the family together for a late dinner, so get your butt to the main house. Would you please call the

other two and see how long it'll be before they arrive, or if they'll make it in tonight?" Hearing a pause, I wait to hear what's going on. "That's great. Have them park and come into the main house as well."

As he hangs up his phone and slips it back into his pocket, he directs his attention back toward me. "They actually just pulled up, so Jaxon will have them come as well." I'm assuming they're hungry because it took them less than five minutes from the time of the phone call to hearing them enter the house.

Watching as Jaxon, Keegan, and Kerrigan walk into the dining room and sit down almost makes me laugh at their expressions. "If you guys wouldn't mind, after you each have a few bites, tell us what you think? I'm very curious, as I'm sure Lennie is. No lies. We cannot improve if you all refuse to be honest with us." I know there isn't anything wrong with the pasta dish, but them being honest with Lennie is important.

"I don't know about the other guys, but this is amazing. I think this is a pasta salad, but it's on the sweeter side." Dakota just put a huge gleaming smile on Lennie's face.

"Anyone else have anything to say?" The table suddenly erupts into a clash of compliments from everyone. Now, I get to blow all their minds. "Well, we're both so glad that you love this snack so much. I would like to inform you that Lennie made this. I verbally directed her but, other than that, I was hands off. This is one hundred percent all Lennie. I wanted you all to say what you thought first, so you would be honest."

“My baby girl made this? I’m even more impressed and glad you got my cooking gene. I can BBQ better than cook. Lennie, I’m so proud of you. I can tell from all the nodding heads around the table that your uncles all agree with me.”

“Can I just say, if this is the caliber of food we’re going to be getting from Lyn and Lennie, we may need to up our amount of workout days. I know I’m going to enjoy this as often as I can. I’m so glad I get my walking papers on Friday. After that, I’ll be here full time.” I didn’t expect to hear Keegan speak up. That’s a very nice compliment and Lennie is beaming.

I know it’s important to Lennie’s development. She’s comfortable around her dad and uncles, but she doesn’t openly communicate with them and I’d like to see that change. So while we’re eating, I prompt her to talk about whatever comes to her mind.

“If everyone is finished, I suggest we clear the table, rinse the dishes and load them into the dishwasher. Lennie and I already took care of the dishes we prepared the salad with as well as straightening up the kitchen, so we’re a step ahead there. I’ll load the dishwasher, Lennie, you’ll rinse. Gentlemen, if you’ll scrape what’s left on your plates into the trash and hand your dishes to Lennie, we can get everything cleaned up pretty quickly.”

Clean up went like a precision military exercise. It took all of thirty minutes to get everything taken care of and put away. “Well, that went quickly and smoothly. I think we all need to get some sleep and I’d like to unload Lennie’s belongings first

thing in the morning, if possible. Does this sound good to everyone?”

A sudden clap of hands behind me causes me to jump, spin and swing all in one motion. Seeing Hunter, it's like he anticipated my reaction. He caught my arm and wrapped it around me, enfolding me in a tight hug. “Shit, Hunter, I'm so sorry. You startled me and I reacted. I'll calm down as I get used to my new environment.” For fuck's sake, they're going to think Creed's hired a basketcase.

“Hold up there, gorgeous. It's alright. I didn't mean to startle you. You don't have to answer this, but is there a reason you're so jumpy? Like I said, you don't have to answer the question, but we all have some form of PTSD.” I look around and notice everyone, including Lennie, is waiting for me to either answer or not answer.

I take a deep breath, and mentally prepare myself to tell a tale I've had to recently talk about at the parole hearing. I wasn't planning on talking about it yet, but my stupid reactions are forcing my hand. I pull myself from Hunter's arms and lean against the closest wall, everyone seems to take a similar relaxed stance.

“So, when I was fifteen, I was excited to have my first boyfriend. I was so excited that I didn't pay attention to what was happening, or maybe I was simply blind to what was happening. I don't know. I was being trained. I think that's what the police called it. Anyway, we were together for thirteen months. Over this time, he slowly started pulling me

away from my friends. Saying he just wanted to be with me all the time. I was young and dumb. What I wasn't expecting was the first time he hit me." Well, hell, that made them explode.

"He fucking did what!? No one has the right to touch you in any way without your permission." I don't know what I was expecting exactly, but I don't think it was Phoenix being the one to explode first.

"Hold on, let me get this out." The only thing I could think to do was push off the wall and make my way over to Phoenix, placing one of my hands in his and search his eyes. I could not only see his anger, but feel it. "Please, let me get this out." When he nods, I place a chaste kiss on his cheek. Stepping back, I walk over and lean against the wall again.

"So, anyway. I was fifteen when he hit me for the first time. He freaked out on himself, cried and even dropped to his knees apologizing, and I fell for it. After the initial hit, he struck me a few more times over the next few months." I have to stop, closing my eyes, I take a really deep, cleansing breath. I tighten both of my hands into fists, squeeze them, and then release, allowing my muscles to relax. When I begin to open my eyes, I feel hands being placed on me. It took me a second to realize I didn't jump.

Eyes wide open now, I see they're all standing close to me, touching me and I'm alright with it. "The last time, he beat and raped me. I was still a virgin at the time. By the time he finished with me, I couldn't see. Both of my eyes were swollen shut. My mouth was busted, my face was one massive

swollen bruise. My chest, stomach and inner thighs were also covered in bruises, blood, or both. He blamed me, telling me I shouldn't have been such a tease. When he was finished, he threw me in his car, drove me home and literally kicked me out of his car.”

I can do this, finish it, Lyn. I feel my hand being squeezed. Looking down at the hand, I follow it up to the person it belongs to, Creed. I return the gesture, squeezing back, and continue. “I don't know how long I was sprawled in the front yard. Our neighbor took his dog out and found me. Once he got my dad, they took me to the hospital. The short of it is, I told them everything. Any questions the police, the medical staff, the trauma counselor or my dad asked, I answered. I was in a lot of physical pain, but that was quickly being replaced with a raging anger. By the time all was said and done, he was arrested, prosecuted and sentenced to twenty-five years to life. Some of the injuries I had could have resulted in my death. So he was prosecuted for rape and attempted murder.”

Surprisingly, I actually feel better having spoken about it. I was still looking down at my hands, which were holding one of Creed's and one of Phoenix's. I'm almost scared to look up. Afraid to see the judgment in their eyes. When I do finally get up the nerve to do so, I don't see what I was expecting. I see pure, raw hostile anger.



CHAPTER NINETEEN

Creed

Absorbing what Lyn just shared with us, gives me an urgent need to hurt something. The genuine anger and rage I see in the other guys' faces is fucking palpable. "Lyn, can he get paroled? I want to know if you could be in any danger."

"I'm sorry. I should have told you about this from the beginning. I wouldn't want my child possibly exposed to danger, either. We can just set my stuff to the side and I'll go back to..." And with that, I cover her mouth with my hand.

"Hold on there. I'm not asking because of Lennie. I'm asking because of you. You're here and therefore, ours. You won't be going anywhere. I want to know if he will ever be eligible for parole, so we can try to stop it and or make your paper trail disappear." I can see it in her face. My words have shocked her.

When I feel Lennie squeeze in between me and Lyn, I step back to give her room. I hate that she's heard this, but at the same time I feel it may spur her into wanting to train with us so she's able to protect herself. She's not naïve and knows there are dangers in the world, but this brings it home.

“Brooklyn, I’m glad that bad man went to prison. No one will ever do that to me. I have you to train me, plus Daddy and my uncles. If anyone comes after me, I’ll make him spit out his own nuts.” What the fuck did Lennie just say?

“Lennon Marie Creed, although I’m glad you used that correctly in a sentence, no ma’am. I don’t want to hear that come out of your mouth again. Do you understand me?” Whoa, Lyn pounced on that real damn fast. Lennie nods her head and responds with a ‘yes, ma’am’. “Now, you are correct. I will teach you to protect yourself. I didn’t know how back then and that’s just one reason why I learned. Let’s get some rest and save the rest of this talk for another time.”

When she looks up and around at us, Lyn gives us what I’d call a half-hearted smile and a wink. After watching her take Lennie up stairs, we all just stood there in a stunned silence.

We all vacated the kitchen, walking through the house and instead of heading up to bed, we went out the front door. Stepping outside, we all take much needed deep breaths. I know my brothers and I’m sure they’re feeling the same rage I am.

“Kerrigan and Jaxon, you load the stuff on the ramp. Keegan, lower the ramp after they’ve got a load on. The rest of us will take turns taking Lennie’s things up to her floor, and I think we’ll save the rest of it till tomorrow. I’m running on fumes, but with what we were just told, there’s no way I’m sleeping right away, so might as well make use of the time.”

When I turn around to hand a box to Hunter, it's Brooklyn standing there. She looks up at me and I can tell she's wanting to say something. I simply raise an eyebrow and give her a slight nod to prompt her to speak. "Creed, thanks for dropping the topic. I really do appreciate it. It's still very hard sometimes." I simply give her a smile and brush my hand down her arm for comfort.

Once we get into the perfect rhythm, unloading the truck goes relatively quickly. I'll admit I didn't realize my daughter owns enough shi - stuff to actually fill a few rooms. I'm glad we only had to cart the stuff up to her floor and not help unpack. That, I'll leave to Lennie and Lyn.

I'm standing by the truck waiting for another load to be lowered, looking around the property. "Hey, Creed," Lyn's voice manages to make me jump. I guess my attention was too fixated. "Shi - oot, sorry, Creed, didn't mean to catch you off guard."

I have to laugh it off because I don't even know why I jumped. I'm not a jumpy person. "No worries. No clue why I jumped. Anyway, what's up?"

"I wanted to let you know that I'm going to stay with Lennie tonight. She'll either be too excited to sleep or so exhausted she'll pass out. I'm fine with either way. I'll help make sense of the mess up there in the morning. I'm also going to have her go through her clothes as we're putting her things away. Some of those clothes can't possibly fit her anymore. If it's alright, I'll gather everything up and take them to the nearest shelter.

Do you think you or the other guys might have some stuff to get rid of? If so, I can collect those items as well.” I would have never thought of going through my things and definitely never thought of donating the shi - stuff.

“Lyn, I think that’s a brilliant idea. I’ll pass the word on to the guys. I’ll have them place everything they don’t need or want in a box outside their rooms. Oh, hey, what about all the kitchen stuff? Can you give some of that away as well? Other than the house kitchen, there’s one in each cabin and then one in the office building, but they’ve all been stocked. So all the kitchen supplies still packed up in the truck aren’t really needed. At least I don’t think so.”

Lyn’s face is so lit up with joy it’s contagious. I can feel my own smile getting bigger. “Creed, that would be so amazing. If we put all the kitchen boxes in the dining room, I’ll go through it all to make sure we don’t still need some of it. I’ll re-box it as I go and we can donate what’s left. Oh, this is going to be wonderful. Thank you, babe.”

Before I know what’s happening, Lyn jumps up, wraps her arms around my neck, lays a kiss on my lips, jumps back down and takes off running back into the house. Holy shit, she kissed me. Not a peck on the cheek. A full lips to lips hard mwuah of a kiss.

Dragging my eyes away from the door, I see everyone standing stock still, smirks on their faces and eyebrows lifted. I just shrug my shoulders, return a smile, and grab a box.



CHAPTER TWENTY

Brooklyn

After getting a good night's sleep, Lennie and I tackle her room. I can't believe how much fun I'm having helping Lennie put all of her stuff in its proper place. This girl has a lot of stuff, too.

"Alright, girly, we need to go through all these clothes, coats, shoes and whatever else is in this room. You could help a lot of people out by donating your used clothing. I already spoke with your dad and he's going to have all your uncles do it as well. Sometime this weekend, you and I will go through the kitchen supplies and box up what we don't need or what we have extras of. Hopefully, we can help a lot of families. How's that sound?" Taking a sip of my coffee, I send a wink to Lennie.

Lennie may not realize I'm paying attention to her physical reactions, but I am. "I think that's a great idea. I don't have to give away the stuff I really like, right? I mean, as long as whatever it is still fits me."

"No, Squirt, you don't have to get rid of anything. Especially anything that still fits. We'll slowly go through your stuff and

whatever is too small, or you no longer want, we'll donate. Ok?" When I see her bright smile, I know she understands.

"I totally get it, and this will be a lot of fun. I can try the clothes on as we find the ones that look too small or just the ones I don't like anymore. I can't wait till I can start school here. I mean, I'm a little nervous because it's not only a new school but new people too. I can handle it though, right, yeah I can totally handle.."

"Lennie, breathe. Jesus, girlfriend, you have got to learn to slow down as well as breathe properly when you're having a conversation. You don't make statements, mix them with questions and then make more statements. You have to give the person you're talking to a chance to answer. We're going to work on you slowing your speech to an understandable and considerate speed."

When she turns to look at me, her eyes are crossed and she's sticking her tongue out at me. There's no staying serious with her expression.

"Girl, you better hope your face doesn't get stuck..." I jump at the sound of running or banging, I can't tell which. I grab Lennie, placing her in the back of her closet. I lower my voice to a whisper. "Shh, stay right here and stay low like you are. I'll be right back." Holding my hand out for her to be still, I mouth 'stay'.

I quickly run over to stand on the backside of her closet door frame. I don't know what's going on, but I'm fucking ready. I hear Lennie's main door open and direct my attention back to

her. I put my finger to my lips and air tap my hand for her to be quiet and get down. Then I take a fighting stance and focus on the doorway.

The moment I see colored material enter the door, I attack, lifting my knee and slamming it into a gut. When whoever it is bends over, I reign down kidney punches, taking our attacker to the ground. I quickly mount his back, about to continue the ass whooping I'm dishing out, when I'm grabbed from behind and hear my name being yelled at the same time.

"Lyn! Babe, stop! You're beating the shit out of Hunter! Stop fighting, babe, shhh, you're safe and Lennie is safe." I can feel arms around me and I feel my body relaxing, but my mind is still in fight mode. I can tell it's Dakota that's got me wrapped up in his arms.

"Lyn, talk to me. What happened? Lennie, come on out, Squirt. I think Uncle Hunter entered in a bad way and that put Lyn into protection mode. I want you to hit your intercom and call for your daddy and the rest of your uncles, tell them stat and say my floor."

I let go of trying to figure out what's happening and let my body go limp in Dakota's arms. I can feel the shift he makes as he wraps his arms around my legs and back, picking me up. I feel another shift as he moves over to one of Lennie's chairs and lowers us down, cradling me to his chest. Lennie's in the background using the intercom system to call everyone to her floor.

“Fuck, Hunter?” I need to know if he’s alright. “Is he alright? I didn’t... I didn’t know it was him. Shit.” Sobbing, I can hear the others coming up the stairs and running into the room. I’m going to lose this job, I just know it.

My mind just jumps to the past and it’s like my mind is gone. There’s no flight mode with me at all. It’s a fight, and it’s a fight mode with a vicious rage. The doctor calls them red out episodes and said I could be very dangerous if not brought out of an episode quick enough. It’s been so long since I’ve been this jumpy, but before now, my life was predictable.

I don’t look up, but hear the guys walk in Lennie’s main door. Dakota won’t let me look at Hunter. Me and my fucking jumpiness. Hunter’s going to hate me, and I can’t blame him. Hell, I hate myself right now. Fuck! I hate being tethered to this nightmare of a reality. As long as I’m aware, I’m fine, but God forbid something or someone catches me off guard.

“Brothers just tend to Hunter. I think he may have startled Lyn, and she got the drop on him and whooped his ass. We’re all going to have to learn to announce ourselves or we’re all looking for a future ass whooping from Lyn and this woman knows how to fight.” Great, now they think I’m hell bent on whooping all their asses.

“Dakota, let me sit up. Where’s Lennie? Is she alright? Did I scare her? Fuck, is Hunter alright or even conscious? He got an abdominal knee and several kidney punches. Why the hell did he come running up here like that? I didn’t mean to hurt anyone.”

I see Lennie bounce her cheerful self over to Dakota and me. “Whoa, girlfriend, take a breath. You’re asking so many questions that no one can answer you.” She starts to chuckle, and I only have one come back for her.

“Smart ass.” I see Hunter walking, slash that, limping over to me. He slowly lowers himself to sit on the table in front of me. I’m still mostly on Dakota’s lap, but I lean forward enough to touch him.

“Hunter, babe, I’m so sorry. I heard someone making a lot of noise and it was getting louder, so I went into mama bear mode. I couldn’t let anything happen to Lennie.” I know I’m speaking and sobbing, but there’s no stopping it.

“That would be my fault.” Looking up, I watch as Creed walks around Phoenix. “I might have seen a local on the property and that threw us into an offensive, defensive mode. Hunter was the closest of us to the door and the best person to go back inside to protect you and Lennie without the intruder noticing, if it would have been needed. I was obviously mistaken.”

I’m not even trying to hold back the frustrating growl that escapes me or the tears that are streaming down my face. “This is fucked up. If Dakota wouldn’t have gotten to me as quickly as he did, this could have turned very bad, very quick. Lennie, are you alright? Did I frighten you?” I can barely see at this point. My vision all jacked up due to tears.

“Aww, Brooklyn, I’m fine. Really. Now I definitely want to learn how to fight. Dad’s right though. Uncle Hunter is the one

always startling you. This time he got his butt handed to him.” I hear her, but something else has my focus.

I’m stuck in my head. They had seen someone, and it threw these former military men, now security men, into action. Totally logical and stupid me, I go and beat the shit out of one of them.

“Lyn, look at me. Now, stop it. He is not here. He is in prison, remember? Look at me, I’m sitting right here. Granted, I might be pissing blood for a few days, but I’m fine. The bruises will start showing up soon and guess what? They’ll go away too, and I’ll be fine.” Seeing him wince in pain as he speaks is far from making me feel better.

“Personally, I’m fucking impressed. Only Crow, who you’ll meet when he’s finished with his mission, has ever been able to get the drop on me. I’ll work really hard on trying not to startle you anymore. Especially since the price for it is physical pain, but it also doesn’t help you with your PTSD. I really am sorry. I’ll do better.” Ah Hunter, you’re such a sweetie.

When I look up at Creed, then to Phoenix and finally back at Dakota, I see them all gawk at his words, and he looks at them in confusion. “What, am I not allowed to admit when I’ve fucked up?” The whole group falls into small fits of laughter and Hunter grabs his sides where I battered his kidneys. That only makes some of us laugh harder. I did stop crying though, so that’s good.



CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

Phoenix

I can't believe the shit storm I walked in on or rather ran into when Squirt activated her intercom, calling out for help. I never expected to walk in on a semiconscious Hunter and Dakota trying to hold onto a thrashing Brooklyn. Jesus, what a woman.

“So, just wondering, so I know not to do it in the future, what exactly did Hunter do?” Well, fuck me. I wasn't expecting everyone in the room to give me dirty looks. “What? “I didn't mean it as an insult. I meant what did he do to scare the shit out of her to get that kind of response? Was it the running sound, like thumping or what was it specifically? We all need to learn this type of stuff. Not only to prevent it from happening again, but to help Brooklyn overcome such a reaction. Plus, we all have our own forms of PTSD responses. We're just used to each other and have naturally adapted.”

Looking down at Lyn, who's still sitting on Dakota's lap and leaning forward to touch Hunter, I simply shrug my shoulders. I really do want some details. So, I raise an eyebrow in

question. She takes a deep breath, so I know she's going to explain.

“Alright, so like I said earlier, I think I'm overreacting because of the new environment as well as all the new people around me. I'm sure I'll calm down and adjust as we get into a rhythm of life together. As for why I kicked Hunter's ass, well, that's simple. He threw me into fight-or-flight mode when he rushed his way up the stairs. The fact that I had Lennie with me, there was no option of flight. I think the soundproofing made his hurried steps sound like heavy thumps. All I could think was to protect Lennie. So, I did. A well-placed knee and several kidney punches later and I'm being dragged off of him by Dakota.”

I watch as she looks back at Dakota again. He's quickly starting to sport a couple of black eyes. I'm pretty sure when she looked back at him a couple of minutes ago, she didn't see it, but now she notices the rag he's holding to his nose. “Oh, my fucking God, Dakota, did I do that? Let go of me so I can get you some ice.”

I knew Dakota wasn't going to let her up. Not until she calmed down and listened to reason. So I took that opportunity to say my piece, as he wrapped his arm tighter around her waist.

“Brooklyn, look at me. Remember me, Phoenix? Come on, focus. Jaxon has already gone down to get ice and some salve for Hunter. From what it looks like, you broke Dakota's nose when he was pulling you off of Hunter. Hunter may have a couple of bruised ribs at most. Don't look so horrified. Trust

me, they've had worse. They'll heal. We all have triggers that can set us off, resulting in different responses. That's what's important right now. You, being the new kid on the block, simply means a readjustment. You're not a horrible person. No one is mad at you and, like Hunter said, and I agree, I'm impressed."

I know which trigger seems to set us all off, so let's start there. "The biggest trigger we all seem to have is a sudden noise. Especially when it happens out of our direct line of sight. I say we start there. Simple announcement before entering a room, not being overly quiet or noisy so that sounds will alert us but not trigger our fight-or-flight response. Will that work for everyone?"

Seeing them all agreeing looks to be helping Lyn calm down, which is a good thing. "Creed, you got any suggestions on where we go from here? The truck is empty. All of our babies are properly stored and everything that belongs to Lennie is up here. Might I add, it's time for breakfast."

We all look to Creed and most likely always will. He's been our leader since the third week of boot camp and I don't see that changing anytime soon. "Honestly, I think we need to work on getting things in order after we eat. Lennie, you don't start school till Wednesday, so you have plenty of time to get all your shi-stuff dealt with. I suggest we have some food and then we'll start the day."

"Oh no y'all don't. Don't you go raiding the kitchen. Give Lennie and I an hour and then meet us in the dining room. If

you'd call the others, we'll make sure to have enough. We will always have enough food for them. They're family. Lennie, I didn't mean to volunteer you. Would you like to learn how to make loaded omelets?"

She really calms down when she knows someone needs to be taken care of. Her trauma has made her a caretaker and there's nothing wrong with that, but we have to make sure she takes care of herself as well. Self-care is very important.

Lennie smiles and holds out her hand to Lyn. Taking her hand, Lyn stands up and they both walk out of the room without a word. Looking around at my brothers and then back at the door, I check to make sure they've gone downstairs.

"If no one else will say it, I will. Jesus fucking Christ, that is one hell of a woman. I don't know where or who trained her, but she's damn good. She doesn't waste a movement. There's a point to each move she makes. She just disabled two Special Forces soldiers within a few minutes."

"I have to admit, I didn't protect my nose because I didn't even think of her using her head as a weapon. Not being sexist, but the average female wouldn't think of something like that. I know better for next time. We need to help her. I really think helping Lyn will help us all."

Dakota has a valid point. I'm now wondering what else she can do and did this training she went through positively affect anything else? "Before my brain goes into overdrive and takes off on me, I need coffee, food and to check the company emails."

Everyone mumbles, they agree, and we walk out of Lennie's domain. Heading down to the kitchen, there's nothing quiet about us. We're either talking, laughing, or talking and laughing. Hunter's leaning on Creed for balance and to help him get down the stairs, poor bastard.



CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO

Brooklyn

Today seemed to fly by and I really didn't mind. I still feel awful for Hunter's ribs and Dakota's nose. Lennie and I made omelets, and the guys raved about how loaded they were and how the cheese was perfectly melted. I'm so glad my dad taught me how to cook.

After that, we all had things to get done and seemed to spread out all over the house. Lennie and I teamed up a little in her room, then my room, and ended up in the kitchen. We saw the guys all over the place as well. Even with just one day of work, everything's looking better. Lunch wasn't a big affair. I don't want them thinking they'll get spoiled every day. So Lennie and I went with sub sandwiches.

Dinner was a pasta dish, and of course, there were no leftovers. I guess I'm going to have to figure something else out for my midnight snacks. It's been a couple of hours since everyone went to their own rooms. I'm up walking the main floor to ease my mind. The house is quiet and so is the property. It's almost too quiet. I may need to invest in one of those ambient noise machines.

Making my way into the kitchen for some hot tea, I see a shadow behind one of the windows that shouldn't be there. Keeping myself in the dark so whoever it is can't see me, I make sure not to make a sound. What the fuck?

As I start to back up, I feel a hand cover my mouth at the same time I hear, "Shh, it's Creed. Breathe, babe, just relax. Whoever that is tripped the sensor alarms."

I slowly back up more into Creed's chest. He wraps both arms around my waist, pulling me closer to him as he backs us up. In a very low whisper, I ask, "Creed, who is that? They're in the shadows. I can't see them very well." The lights on the outside of the house cast a nice glow, but this person is in the darkest part.

When we both look back at the window, he's gone. Creed picks me up, throws me into a fireman's carry while raising his hand to hit what looks like a switch on the wall as he dashes for the staircase. Taking two steps at a time, he puts me back onto my own feet when we make it to the second floor.

"Lyn, get up to Lennie's room. Once you're inside, lock her main exterior door. Either get in bed with her or sit in her room but lock her bedroom door as well. One of us will text you all clear, when it is, in fact, all clear. Now go." He turns me around and lightly swats my ass. Not only does it spur me to get to Lennie, but it makes me turn to glance at him. When he winks at me, I swear my panties melt. Not now Lyn, for fuck's sake, talk about bad timing.

As I'm about to race up the next flight of stairs, I see the guys flying out of their rooms and heading to Creed. Once I get to Lennie's floor, I quietly enter her main door. After closing it and locking it, I notice the decorative lights she's hung up because I can see. Her bedroom door is closed, but I still need to physically see her. Walking over to her bedroom, I open her door and see that she's fast asleep in her bed.

Closing her door, I check her closet, bathroom and guest bedroom. Everything is how it should be, so I take a seat on one of her couches in her living room area. I make sure my body is angled toward the main door so I can respond to any threat.

Sitting here in the dark gives me time to think, even though I don't really want to. I truly thought it was Max. I didn't realize how much I was still trapped by him. I refuse to let him win. It can't be him. He's in prison. My thoughts are interrupted by my phone chiming. Looking down at it, I see a text from Hunter.

Hunter: All is well. We're on our way up. Unlock the door please

I hop up, walk over to the door, and unlock it. Then I take my place back on the couch.

Lyn: Door unlocked. Sitting in living room. Stay quiet, Lennie still sleeping

Sitting back, waiting for the guys to walk in, my phone chimes. I'm wondering what he couldn't say to me in person.

When I look down at my phone, I see a message from my dad. I really do miss him.

Dad: Hey girl, how's everything going?

Lyn: Hey yourself. So far, so good. I've had a couple fight responses and hurt two of the guys, but they said PTSD is a bitch and that they'd help me with it. Isn't that great?

Dad: That is good news. Being military gives them an advantage. I just wanted to check on you. It's not the same around here, but I'm proud of you. I love you, now get some rest.

Looking up at the guys entering Lennie's front room, they all look to have annoyed expressions, but I'm still learning to read them. Looking directly at Creed, I raise an eyebrow in curiosity.

“We didn't see anyone, but there is a footprint where you and I saw the shadow standing. It's probably a local teen, bored with nothing better to do. If it happens again, we'll catch him and make sure he or she understands this is private property and what could happen. I say we all get to bed.”

Climbing off the couch, we all head out the door. Closing the door behind me, I walk down to the second floor and directly to my room. My bed is definitely calling my name and I'm gladly going to answer.



As the days started passing by, we all fall into a nice rhythm. Lennie was happy with her new school and was making friends easily. The guys had done some security jobs, but nothing that made them have to be gone for a while.

Sitting in the breakfast nook, I have resumes spread out. I didn't think so many people would want to relocate, live on the property, and be my assistant. Boy, was I wrong. I'm pretty sure I've managed to narrow the applications down to three.

My cell phone chiming makes me jump because it's been so quiet in the kitchen area. Pulling out my phone and looking at the screen, I start shaking. I know a panic attack with a side order of anxiety attack is about to roll through my body like a tsunami.

I don't even hear the guys walk in the room. I'm numb, I can't think. Then I feel my phone being pulled out of my hand. "Lyn, babe, who is that with Brooks? Your dad looks both angry enough to kill and scared to death. Lyn? Babe? Talk to us." When I look up at Creed, I can feel the tears flowing down my cheeks and my body shaking.

"That's, umm, that's Maximillan Lucien, the ex I put in prison. He's, he's the one that beat me, raped me and dumped me in my front yard. I, I..." I can't breathe. "I, I..."

"Lyn, babe, you need to look at me. Look at my eyes. Damn it Brooklyn, this is Creed talking to you. You look at me. There you go, breathe and look at me." I'm so confused.

"He's not supposed to be out of prison. He has my dad. My dad is my everything." When I look up, I see seven pairs of

eyes belonging to the new men in my life. I don't know why I feel better and don't really fucking care at the moment. "Please, help me get my dad back from him?"

I'm soon picked up off the chair. I'm not even sure by who and I don't care. Then I hear Creed talking. "Let's go into the living room and talk about this. Dakota, take Lyn, Hunter and Phoenix come with me to the office and then we'll meet up with them. Jaxon, double check that the property is on full lockdown. Keegan and Kerrigan search the other cabins and make sure they're sealed up tight. Once you've seen to that, meet us in the living room."

I can feel us moving, but I just can't think. How can I be numb and panicking at the same time? That son-of-a-bitch has my dad. I don't understand how this is happening. I have to get him back. I don't care how it happens, but my dad means everything to me and if something were to happen to him because of me, I won't survive it.

I feel a cool cloth being placed on my face. I look up and see Hunter. All I can see is he can't stand up straight, and that's my fault, too. Everything is my fault. I put him in prison. I didn't give Travis my love. I've hurt Hunter and Dakota. Now he has my dad. Everything is wrong. I'm stuck in a never-ending nightmare.

Fuck. What was I thinking, leaving the only place I've known? Everything was fine and nothing unexpected happened. Well, not really, but I could live with it. Fuck, I can't breathe.

“Lyn, you need to stop. I can see it in your eyes. This is not your fault, and you need to stop blaming yourself for everything that goes wrong. I surprised you and got taken down for it. Like I told you then, and it still stands that I’m fucking impressed. Not only did you handle me, but you also managed to nail the shit out of Dakota. As for this Max asshole, that isn’t your fault either. It may take a minute, but we’ll help you get free of the tether that’s keeping you cocooned in the past.”

I know I’m smiling, but I also know it’s not reaching my eyes. How does he know what’s running through my head? Right now, all I can truly think about is my dad and getting him back.



CHAPTER TWENTY-THREE

Dakota

I don't even want to hazard a guess at what that sick fucker is up to, but he won't be getting to Lyn, and we'll get Brooks back. I can't believe I'm thinking this, but Lyn doesn't feel right in my arms. It's like she's lost, and we can't have that. Time to snap her out of it. I know Hunter tried, but he was more placating, and I believe Lyn needs to be triggered with a bit of sarcasm. I hope she understands, eventually.

Deciding the kitchen is the best place for this. I turn around and walk right back toward the kitchen. "So, that's it? That sorry son-of-a-bitch sends you a picture, and he breaks you. Wow, I thought you were stronger than that. I mean, it is your dad, but I'm sure he'll be fine. He seems like a man who has his shit together."

When I walk back into the kitchen with her, I sit her on one of the island bar stools. Walking around the island to make some coffee, I'm waiting for everything I spouted to sink into her brain and when it does, she'll let me have it, or at least I hope she does. I put the kettle on for those that want tea and it's as I turn toward the coffee pot, I literally hear her growl.

“What the fuck did you say to me? You said, ‘*breaks me*’? Is that what you said? That son-of-a-bitch didn’t break me all those years ago and he sure as fuck isn’t going to break me now,” she seethes.

“What he’s going to do is give me my dad back. I’ll make sure he goes back to prison or has a permanent fucking dirt nap. Frankly, I don’t give a damn which happens, but one or the other will.” Oh boy, she’s so pissed she’s turning purple, I think. Holy hell, I didn’t even think that was truly possible.

“Lyn, I never really had a doubt what you’d do or what we’d do to help you. The last thing we need, though, is for you to withdraw into yourself. Babe, not one of us doubts anything about you. It’s you that’s doubting yourself and that’s what you need to stop. I know that look, so just stop. Yes, it’s easier said than done, but you have a great support system here. We’ll help you get Brooks back and deal with, what did you say his name is?”

“Everyone calls him Max, but his full name is Maximilian Lucien. He’s thirty by now. He was born in Texas and has lived there his entire life. That’s also where he’s been while he was in prison. I don’t know how he found my dad. I don’t know how he’s out of prison because his parole was denied. He even caused an incident at the parole hearing after it was denied. By the end of it, he’d been shot. I wasn’t there at that time but my attorney called to tell me what was said and what happened.”

I hold up a finger, causing her to stop. I can hear the others walking this way. “The guys are coming, so let’s not say any more or you’ll be forced to repeat yourself, plus if I know Creed, he’ll have information because he took Hunter and Phoenix with him. I’m telling you so they don’t accidentally startle you. Jaxon is also walking up to the backdoor and walking in behind you.”

I notice how she’s observing her surroundings without even looking like she is. She’s taking stock of everyone and everything. She needs to focus and learn to lock her emotions away at the drop of a dime. So, let’s put her to the test. “Lyn, do you realize what you’re doing?” Her look of shock and confusion tells me she has no clue she’s even doing anything, which means it’s automatic.

“I’m just sitting here wondering if you’re going to pour that coffee or not.” I see what she’s trying to do, and I’m not going to let this fly.

Raising my voice so everybody can hear me, “Everyone freeze where you are. Nobody moves or makes any noise. I believe Lyn here is a natural tracker and I’m going to prove it to her.” I look around where everyone is frozen, including Keegan and Kerrigan. I don’t think she saw them walk in so this will be interesting. “Lyn, babe, I want you to close your eyes. I’m going to call out someone’s name and you’re going to tell me where they are and anything else about them you can, okay?”

“Alright, I don’t see a real point to this or how it’s going to help me now, but fine. My eyes are closed. Go.” She’s testy,

but I'm still willing to bet she's a tracker.

"First, Jaxon."

"Jaxon is just inside the side door. He hasn't closed the door yet. So, one foot is still outside." Wow, very good.

"Very good. Jaxon, come on in and close the door. Next, Creed."

"Creed has one hand on Hunter's shoulder because he's holding his right side. Most likely from me beating the shit out of his kidneys. Sorry, Hunter. Creed's right leg is actually in the kitchen and his left is still on the backside of the threshold in the dining room."

"Damn, babe, that's great. Alright, Creed and Hunter, you two can sit down. Next, tell me where Kerrigan and Keegan are?" The odd face she's made is making me really curious.

"You mean the two jackasses who in the exact moment you said freeze grabbed each other's legs like they were slow motion falling and then locked said appendages to actually stay standing? They're behind where Hunter was positioned and two steps to the left towards the front of the house. In addition, Phoenix is half in and half out of the bathroom in the hall, just around the corner." Now I didn't even know that. How the fuck did she? "I could see half of his shadow. That's how I knew where Phoenix was."

"You gorgeous are a true tracker. Everyone, take a seat. Coffee is ready and water is ready for tea. Let's get to planning and

get Brooks back, as well as burying the motherfucker that took him and hurt our girl.”



CHAPTER TWENTY-FOUR

Hunter

I'm not sure how this is going to make anyone feel, but it's at least a start and information. I know I'd like to get a hold of this fucker and remove his balls with the dullest knife I can find. Then tie him up in the swamps of Louisiana with raw, bloody steaks tied around his fucking neck.

“Alrighty then, now that we know our girl is not only an amazing car collector, organizer, cook, nanny and fighter, we now know she's a better tracker than any of us. Here's what we managed to find out, and it's some serious bullshit. His name is Maxamillion Lucien, as we already know, no middle name. He's thirty years old, and he was in fact denied parole. Just like Lyn said.”

Well, that was the easy part of the story. “This next part, well, you'll hear for yourselves. According to records, after Lyn and her dad left the parole hearing, Max flipped the fuck out as soon as his parole was denied. In the melee of the fighting, he was shot. They didn't think he would survive the gunshot wound, but obviously, he did. Shortly after he was stable

enough to be removed from I.C.U., they were going to transport him to the infirmary at the prison.”

The expression on everyone’s face is the same: curiosity. “When they loaded him into the prison van for transport, the fucking guards left him. They went back inside the hospital to grab his case of secured medications. When they returned to the van, he was gone. Creed, I think you should take it from here.”

Lyn is really not going to like this next bit, but she needs to know everything that has happened up till this point. “Babe, you know your dad is the one that bought your house. He gave the other house to your mother in the divorce to shut her up. The divorce isn’t final, but it’s in the works. Anyway, your dad was reported missing two days ago. He met with his attorney, went to the local cafe for some coffee, but never showed up for work. When the police went looking for him, they found the house had been broken into and a small amount of blood by the front door. Once they completed the search of the house, they found two dogs dead in a back room. They’re assuming till test results come back that the blood by the door belongs to your dad.”

I can tell she’s processing everything that’s been said. When she’s listening, she taps her fingers lightly on her leg and when she’s thinking they don’t move. It’s almost like if she moves a finger, she’ll lose the information. Similar to when I’m driving and get lost, I turn down the radio to see where I’m going. Makes no sense, but it totally works.

“He has to want me. I don’t know how he found out where I lived before moving with you guys, but he went there because he thought that’s where I was. The only way he would have found me here is if he got a hold of dad’s phone. I sent him a text after we first arrived with the address and that all was well. But that leaves a major question unanswered. How the fuck did he know where I was living to begin with?” I wonder if she realizes she’s crying and rubbing a hole in her leg by rubbing the shit out of it now.

“From the information we could gather in a quick search, your information is available on the internet. Simply type in your name and almost everything about you came up, except this address. Since you just moved, your information hasn’t been updated. As for getting this address, you would have to be correct that he got it from your text to your dad. The good news right now is we all saw Brooks, so we know he is in good condition, if not seriously pissed off. The bad news is, there’s not a damn thing we can do till Max makes contact.”

Shit, she’s turning even redder. I can’t blame her, but it’s not going to help the situation. When she takes a seriously deep breath and releases it, I know something is gonna happen. I’m just not sure what. All I want to do is tell her how hot she looks when she’s pissed and get her dad back. Well, maybe not in that particular order, but still.

Well, before she explodes, I better tell her the other information we found. I know it’ll upset her, and she’ll blame herself, which is total bullshit. “Lyn, you need to hear the rest. After your dad went missing, they went to look for Dean to

question him because of a prior incident. They found Dean at a gathering that was forming a search party. Apparently, a couple of other people have disappeared as well. Three men by the name of Joshua Turner, Marc Yates and Travis Dane. Now we know your dad is also among the missing,”

“Josh, Marc and Travis are my three exes. Josh was my first attempt at a relationship. It didn’t go well. Mark was more of a friend than an actual boyfriend. I was his beard, he’s gay, and in small town USA that’s not accepted, but that’s for another time. Travis was my first real relationship, if you want to call it that. Why would he take them? He damn near killed me years ago, and he’s been in prison learning God knows what. I will not let him hurt my dad anymore than he already has, and I don’t want him to hurt my ex-boyfriends either. None of them have anything to do with this.”

“Jaxon, can you help me out here? Lyn’s not seeing the entire picture.” Making eye contact with Jaxon and Phoenix, they understand and take seats opposite Lyn. They need to see her face as much as I do to be able to read her. Watching her eyes look down towards my rib area, I wave her off. “Don’t worry about my ribs. They’re almost back to normal. Right now, worry about what you need to be worrying about.”

“Lil sis, listen. First, we don’t know exactly what he wants. Second, we don’t know where the hell he’s even at. So trying to make some kind of move at this point is foolhardy. Last but not least, we not only want Brooks and the other three back alive and preferably unhurt, we also want to get our hands on

Max. He needs to be taught just because you want something, doesn't mean you have a right to it." Leave it to Jaxon.

"I can't say I have anything to really add to what Jaxon said, except this. We all want you safe and we'll keep you safe, but we'll also get this asshole. Not only for what he's doing now, but what he fucking did years ago. He forfeited his life that day, in my opinion." Phoenix is blunt and to the point.

"Lyn, we're all adults here, so let's just stop with all of our internal guessing games. If I say anything wrong, feel free to correct me, but I don't think I will. Creed, Phoenix, Dakota and myself look at you as ours. I don't mean in a 'sisterly' way like Jaxon, Keegan and Kerrigan do. We have shared many things over the years, but never a person, but for them, for you, I'm willing to share you with them because I know what their true intentions are. Will you truly be ours?"

I had not planned on saying anything like that. What the fuck did I just do and where is my self-control? What a shit moment, and I'm sure the guys want to kill me right now. But I believe in fate and I strongly believe in following my gut. It's never steered me wrong, but for fuck's sake, a better time would have been great.

Looking into her shocked wide eyes, I might as well finish the fucking hole I'm digging for everyone. "Yes, I realize this is shit timing, but I want this out of the way. I also understand it's fast, but I believe in saying what I feel, think and never going against my gut. Look, I know I literally just word vomited a lot of information but hear me out. We all can feel

the tension and we don't need it, not now and never, really. So let's just get it out of the way."

We have other more serious things to deal with and this tension between us all needs to stop. The four of us who want Lyn are either sitting beside her or standing in front of her, so fuck it, let's do this. "Brooklyn Dawn Lacey, will you date Creed, Dakota, Phoenix and myself? We promise not to get jealous of one another and we'll make sure we openly communicate about anything that comes up. What do you say?"

"Hold on, let's be clear that Keegan, Kerrigan, and I see Lyn as a sister, not a lover. As gorgeous as she is, we agree to keep our friendship with her platonic. Lyn, trust me, if we were heterosexual, we'd be all about that train, but we're not." Yeah, I didn't think to say anything about Jaxon and the K brothers. I'm glad Jaxon felt comfortable enough to say something.

Watching Lyn and the others react to what's been said is awesome. The guys look both surprised, embarrassed, and excited. Lyn looks completely mind blown, slightly speechless, and a lot turned on. Damn, I hope she says yes. I know I'm an asshole and have the worst fucking timing. Fuck me, I'm internally babbling.

"I'm not really sure what to say. This isn't a normal, everyday question you've just asked." She pauses and closes her eyes. I watch as I can only imagine the questions racing through her head. This isn't a normal arrangement, but I honestly believe

it's the right one for us. I see it when her mind settles, her eyes open, and she speaks.

“Yes, if this is truly how all of you feel, then yes, I’m willing to explore this avenue. There’s something about you all that makes me feel, well, home and safe. I haven’t truly felt either in a very long time. Obviously, I’ve never done anything like this before, but you all feel right to me. For right now, though, I have to ask that we move very slowly. My priority is getting my dad and my exes out of the hands of that crazy asshole. Once I know they’re all safe, I can focus on other matters.”

When I see everyone’s faces light up, I know I took away a large part of our stress. I decide then to lean forward and place a light kiss on Lyn’s lips, only to jerk backwards from the pain of the countertop digging into my sensitive ribs. Then each of the guys followed my example, each giving her a light kiss. Jaxon, Kerrigan and Keegan each give her a peck on the cheek.

I’ll be the first to admit that my timing was truly horrific, but it served two purposes. First, it took her by surprise, forcing her to refocus and calm herself down. I couldn’t have her exploding and possibly kicking all of our asses. The other reason was the tension was getting thick enough to cut with a butter knife. I’m one for going for the gold and not the wait and see thing.



CHAPTER TWENTY-FIVE

Creed

I feel like Hunter just threw us all under the bus, but the bus had balloon tires. It went well, but it could have gone terribly wrong. I understand why he announced how we all felt to Lyn, but for fuck's sake, a little heads up next time. Well, I can say I have a girlfriend now. Wow, it's been a minute.

“Gorgeous, brothers, if I could redirect this meeting, that would be great. We have no choice but to wait for the asshole to make contact with our girl again. Once that happens, we can figure out what he wants and so on. Once we get some more information, we can get a plan together to get Brooks back.” I hope the others are enjoying the feel of those bus tires, cause now it's my turn.

“Once we get Brooks back, I would like him to move here on the property. He can have one of the cabins as his own. If he wants to work, we'll offer him the position of Grounds Manager. He can handle all the lawns, trees, property maintenance as well as vehicle maintenance. Hunter brought this up once before, and I agree with him. Brook's will have a staff that his salary will cover.” I didn't realize I was looking

directly at Lyn, but I guess it's appropriate since I'm speaking about her dad.

“You're certain we'll get my dad back alive? I'm scared of what Max will do to him. All those years he was in prison because of me. What if he takes all the anger out on Dad? I mean, it was me...”

“Whoa! Stop right there. Max was in prison because of his own actions. He was not there because of you. He was there because of what he did *to* you. Let's get that shit straight right fucking now. None of what happened was your fault. What is currently happening is not your fault. That asshole is an obsessive, narcissistic douche canoe, and he's about to be taught a permanent lesson.”

If it's the last thing I manage to accomplish, I'll get Lyn to understand she holds no responsibility for the dumb fuck's actions. “Now, I'd like a couple of guys to sleep up on Lennie's floor tonight. A couple sleep in the same room as Lyn on the second floor and the others on the main floor, spread out. Until we know more, we're on guard and no one is to be left completely alone. Lyn, especially you.”

I'm waiting to hear the argument as to who's going to sleep where. I'm a bit shocked when there's not a single word spoken except to tell me who was going to be where.

I'm happy to say this day is passing by without any issues. I'm not happy that we haven't heard anything else from Brooks or the asshole. I'd think I'd rather texts or something be coming

in. The silence is deafening and Lyn's on a quickly unraveling rope and I'd rather she not snap.

After we had dinner, spent some time with Lennie, as well as helping her with some homework, that was an experience that made me feel dumb, everyone split up to get some rest. Lyn led Hunter and myself up to her room.

"I'm not going to ask two of the men I'm now dating to sleep on the floor. Besides, I could use some cuddles. If you two don't mind sleeping together with me in the same bed."

"No, babe, we don't mind. This relationship we're all starting together moves at your pace. We also want you to get some rest and knowing you feel safe will accomplish that. So get that sexy ass in the bed and lay in the middle. I'll be on one side, and Creed will be on the other."

Lyn slips off her leggings and slips off her bra without taking her shirt off. That is impressive. Hunter and I remove our shoes, shirts and unbutton our jeans just to ease the pressure on our abdomen. She then does as Hunter instructs and climbs in bed. We follow her, each on our own side.

Turning my back to her so I can face the door, she cuddles up to my back, sliding her arm around my chest. I grip her hand in one of mine to let her know she's not alone. I assume Hunter is the big spoon to her little spoon. I know he's hurting, so the rest will do him a world of good. I'm finally able to relax a bit when I feel her breath start to even out. At least she feels safe enough with us to fall asleep. That makes me happy.

All I keep thinking is I have to figure this out. Wait, I need to practice what I preach. *We* have to figure this out. We know he wants Lyn. It's easy to conclude he wants to finish what he failed to do all those years ago. He wants to hurt her. He wants to violate her again and then he wants to kill her as punishment for getting him thrown in jail. He sees this entire situation as her fault. He refuses to take responsibility for any of his actions.

I must have actually fallen asleep because I'm woken by Lennie and Lyn cackling like a couple of hens. I yawn and stretch, realizing Hunter is still in the bed, sleeping. "What are you two cackling hens laughing at?"

Then I get pounced on by Lennie. "Dad, I want breakfast and Brooklyn said she wasn't leaving this room till you and Uncle Hunter woke up. So wake up." Then she crawls over me to snuggle up to Hunter. At least she remembers he's ribs are still a bit sensitive and is very easy with him. "Uncle Hunter, wake up. I'm starving to death while you get your beauty sleep."

He opens an eye and peers at me. All I can do is give him a nod at the same time I jump out of bed. Hunter has a mischievous expression, but no one's worried because he can't move like he would with healthy ribs. While I'm walking into the ensuite, I turn when I hear Hunter cry out from a bit of pain. Lyn sat on the bed next to him and I'm thinking she jarred him. Closing the bathroom door, I do my business and as I'm washing my hands, the bathroom door flies open and makes me jump.

“Sorry, but he just texted me. Hunter is taking Lennie down stairs to get us some breakfast and coffee.” Grabbing a towel, I quickly dry my hands. I’m glad he thought to get Lennie out of here.

“Let me see your phone.” Lyn hands me her phone and I take my one free arm, wrapping it around her shoulders. Pulling her into me, I feel her arms wrap around my waist and squeeze.

Looking at her phone and the message that was sent, I take a deep breath. “I was expecting this. When we all laid down last night, it was like I could see into his mind and I knew what his next move would be. Max is going to offer an exchange. If you turn yourself over to him, he’ll let your dad go or let the other men go. It’s a lie. He can’t have loose ends, so he’ll have to kill all of you. Your men won’t allow that. Let’s go downstairs, get some food and coffee. We have some planning to do.”

I wasn’t expecting her to maneuver herself in front of me, keeping her arms around me the entire time. I take her phone and slip it into her back pocket as I wrap both my arms around her and pull her tighter to me. Looking down into her eyes and then to her mouth, I see what I’ve needed to see: permission.

“I’m going to pick you up Lyn, and I’m going to press your back to the wall. Then I’m going to kiss you. If you have any issues with what I’ve said, say so now.” She boosts herself up to kiss me and I pick her up.

When she wraps her legs around my waist, there is no stopping my body’s response. I take a step forward, pressing

her back to the wall and deepening our kiss. Our tongues seem to take slow delight in exploring each other's mouths. When she tightens her legs around me in order to bring me even closer to her, I almost cum right there in my jeans.

I can't help grinding into her. I want her to know how hard she makes me. Her intake of breath and small moan would have had me stripping her down, if it wasn't for the knock at the bedroom door and the fact that she's misplacing her emotions. I want her, but not like this. And I'd be no better than that asshole if I took advantage of her state of mind right now.

I let out a low growl that makes her giggle. Pulling back from our kiss, I meet her eyes. Jesus, she's gorgeous. I don't break eye contact with her but yell out, "We're on our way down. I just need to grab a shirt."

I can hear the snickering on the other side of the door. "Alright, but don't make me send up Lennie to get you two. We're all hungry and no one is willing to cook." Jaxon, I knew it.

"Okay, Jaxon," I chuckle. "We'll be right there."

As I lower Lyn to the floor, another small growl escapes her. I quickly grab her hair and give it a little tug for her to come to me. Placing my lips a whisper's distance from her mouth.

"Lyn, I need and want to worship your body." Bending down very close to the arch of her neck, I whisper, "because I want to taste you and then I want you to ride this cock you've made even harder." Standing up, I see the glint in her eyes and her smile.

“Babe, I know this is shit timing to start a relationship or to be thinking of sex, but I need you to know how I’m feeling as well as thinking. Now, we better open that door before he really does have Lennie walk in.”

“I’m not leaving until I see this door open and all the clothing where it should be.” He’s such a pain in the ass at times. Opening the bedroom door, I raise an eyebrow at him.

“See, it wasn’t that hard. Well, maybe it was.” When he looks over my body and winks, I chuckle at him. “Now, go get a shirt and we can all go downstairs, eat, have some coffee and make plans.”



CHAPTER TWENTY-SIX

Brooklyn

After eating, cleaning up, chatting and having more coffee, we can finally start planning. “Could we move from the kitchen to another room? We have a lot to talk about, prepare for and personally, I’d like to be comfortable. Lennie, I would appreciate it if you would go to your floor and do some reading, chill out or whatever. We have some boring meeting stuff to handle for the new company.”

Shi-shoot, I didn’t want to actually lie to her, but I could tell from her expression she was getting ready to argue and I have to keep her out of this. Looking at her, I’m hoping she sees I really need her to do this for me. “I can do that, but can someone come up and maybe play battleship with me? Can Uncle Jaxon come with me?”

We all look over to Jaxon, who’s standing by Keegan and Kerrigan. “Well, let’s see. Blah, blah, business meeting or hanging out with the coolest niece I have? I’m with Lennie. Keegan, Kerrigan, what about you two? Adulting or hanging out with Squirt?”

Watching as the smiles cross all three of their faces, I can guess what they're choosing to do and I adore them for it. They announce they're going with Squirt and in a flash, Keegan runs over, grabs Lennie, throws her over his shoulder, takes off running with her laughing and calling for her smoothie. Jaxon grabs her drink and Kerrigan grabs the already blended refill jar. Then, they take off after the other two, sounding like a herd of elephants while racing up to her floor.

“Alright, guys, I need to plan, to work on arrangements or whatever we need to in order to get my dad back. Would it be out of place for me to ask for a kiss?” Seeing their smiles is enough of an answer for me.

Hunter walks over to me and I gently take his face and lay one hell of a kiss on him that he doesn't hesitate to give back. Once I pull back, he smiles and walks off in the direction of the office. Dakota then walks up to me and kisses me like I'm his first drink of water in days. When I pull back, he kisses my nose and walks off in the same direction as Hunter. Phoenix is the next to walk up to me, and I swear he gives me the most passionate kiss I've ever had. Completely toe curling. Again, when I pull back, he caresses my cheek and walks to the office. Last but surely not least, Creed is before me. He picks me up and I naturally wrap my legs around him. As he's kissing me, he's moving us forward. When we come to a stop and I finally come up for air, we're standing directly in the middle of all of *my guys* and I like it.

I release my legs and slowly slide down the front of Creed's body. Alright, focus. There are more important things than a pair of wet panties and hard cocks. I know what my body and my mental state is trying to do. I won't use the guys like that. "Guys, what do you.."

I don't even get to finish my sentence before my cell phone alerts to a text message. Creed pulls it out of my back pocket and activates my screen before I can even reach for it. "Creed? What does it say?" I almost don't want to know, but I need my dad back.

Looking up, Creed turns my phone around for all of us to see it. "He sent me a picture of my dad before. We know he has him. What's the fucking point? What's his endgame?" When I look up at my guys, it hits me. I know what Max's endgame is. "He wants my dad and me dead. That's his endgame. Well fuck him, I want my life and I want and need my dad in it too.

"That's our spitfire. Now we have two pictures. Let's put them on the computer and then on the big screen to see what information we can learn from them." These guys really know what they're doing.

Before I can even blink, the two pictures are side by side on a solid white wall. I can even see the small differences in the pictures and you can tell Max tried to keep them as identical as he could. Max is standing by my dad in both pictures. Dad's sitting down and looks to be zip-tied to the chair. Dad's hands are different, I think.

“I can see some small variations between the two pictures, but nothing major. Nothing that stands out to me to possibly hint at where Max is holding my dad.” I take the lone chair directly in the middle of the room. It gives me the best view of the photos.

“Babe, I know this isn’t the best timing, but we’re going to use this to teach you. So, I want you to tell us anything and everything you see that’s different between the photos. I don’t care if it’s something as small as a hair being out of place on your dad’s head. Understand?” I must give Phoenix a ‘what the fuck’ look, because he comes over and kneels in front of me.

“Lyn, this is something we’re trained in. Believe it or not, it’s usually the smallest detail that can give the most information. Plus, another set of eyes is never a bad thing. Each of us will write a list of things we notice. Once done, we’ll compare to see what’s been possibly overlooked. It could lead to something, or it could lead to nothing, but we have to try.”

“I get it, babe. Ok, let’s make our lists and compare. The faster we can get my dad back and Max’s ass back in the prison, the happier I’ll be.” For the next twenty minutes or so, you could have heard a pin drop in the office. We’re all focused on the pictures and writing down everything we could see.

That’s when I see it and I couldn’t believe it. It’s an old game Dad and I used to play when mom and Bianca were around. It was our thing. We could talk without actually saying a word. In the first picture, my dad’s left hand is arched. His fingertips

and the ball of his hand are all that's touching his pant leg. The center of his hand is curved, like his knuckles are in the air, with his thumb straight up, raising above the rest of his hand. "Camping, North."

I didn't realize I spoke out loud till Creed turns to me. "What, babe? Did you say camping, north? I'm lost as to how you see that." I quickly explain how we used to talk without actually speaking and quickly focus on the second photo.

"The second photo, see his hands. One hand showing a zero and the other is showing five. It has to be my dad, Josh, Marc, Travis and Max. They're in the woods north. I don't understand how he would even know that? He hasn't been here to know where the woods are." Who would have thought a child's game might come in handy as an adult?



CHAPTER TWENTY-SEVEN

Max

That stupid bitch thinks she can just live her life all happy, without any worries. I got news for her. I've been planning this for years. She'll pay for getting me locked up. Who the hell does she think she is?

These mother fuckers that touched my property will also pay. I mean, what the fuck? You don't walk into another man's kitchen and just help yourself to his treats. Brooklyn is mine, and no one has the right to touch her but me. Their pain and deaths will hurt her, but those will be her fault, too. Her dad? Now his pain and death will break her.

Her dad may have whooped my ass when I was younger, but that was then, and this is now. "So, Brooks. I bet you never thought you'd get the chance to see me again. Well, here I am and I'm going to make your life hell. That whore you call your daughter, yeah, I'm going to make her life hell, too. Actually, worse than hell because it's her fault I was put behind bars. Maybe I'll keep her in a cage when I'm not using her."

"You're a fucking delusional idiot, aren't you? You were locked up because of what you did to her. Beating her, raping

her, then you dumped her on my front lawn like she was a bag of trash. Maximillan Lucien, you got exactly what you deserve. If it was up to me, the sentence would have been life without the possibility of parole. Better yet, the death penalty.” Must run in the family. Both he and his daughter think they are all high and mighty. I’ll show them otherwise.

I don’t have to take this shit from the whore’s father. Fuck this. Walking over to him, I stand in front of him and wait for him to look up at me. The moment he did, I punched him in the face. He can’t do anything about it with his hands and legs zip-tied to the chair. Besides the fact that felt fucking good. They always said I needed therapy, and that felt awesome. So, I hit him again, and again, and again and one more time just because I fucking can.

“Well, look who’s quiet now. What? Cat got your tongue? I’ll tell you what. If you ever fucking speak to me like that again, I’ll cut your fucking tongue out and find a cat to feed it to. Now sit there all bloody and pretty like, so I can take another picture to send to the whore. I’m done being ignored.”

“You stupid son-of-a-bitch. The entire town knows what kind of sick, twisted bastard you are. You ruined Lyn. You should have paid with your worthless fucking life. You’ll never get away with this.” Him speaking to me like this in front of the other three that violated my property is unacceptable. I won’t have that, so he’ll pay by watching.

Walking over to the three assholes I have tied up and secured to steaks in the ground, I stop in front of my first target.

They'll all feel my wrath soon enough, but this one's first. Looking down at him, I can see the fear in his eyes.

“You're the first one that thought they could touch my property. Josh, yeah, maybe I should make you pay for trespassing first.” Walking over to him, I slam my fist into his face and it nearly made me cum. God damn, that felt fucking good.

As soon as the fucker rolls on his side, I start kicking the ever living shit out of him. As his blood starts covering my boots, my dick is pulsing. Rubbing one of my hands over my jeans, on top of my cock, I know I need to cum.

Leaving the asshole to drown in his own blood, I walk out of the shelter and quickly unzip my jeans. Taking my dick in hand, I squeeze till I feel that amazing bite of pain and start stroking myself as fast as I can. Fuck, I can see it now. Forcing that bitch's legs apart and ramming my big, hard dick deep inside her. Oh, fuck yeah. Shooting my load all over the ground relieves so much pressure. Nothing will feel as good as her pussy, though.

After putting my dick away, I walk back inside to see that I'm pretty sure I killed Josh. So sad. Well, I think I'll add his body to the picture. I mean, messages can be seen as well as heard or read. After moving his ass behind Brooks, I walk over to my camera.

Everything looks the same through the viewer, so I snap the picture. Once I send it to my phone, I'll text it to her with a note. I'm laughing because soon, I'll have her ass too and I

plan on keeping myself occupied with her for some time. After all, she was the last piece of ass I had before my new home became a cage. So, she'll be my piece of ass for a while, now that I'm out.

What should I send along with the photo? Think, think, think. The text message needs to match my intentions. Wait, I got it. I'll help her remember the good ole days.

Max: I thought you'd like another picture of your dad. Tisk, Tisk, Tisk, I know he looks like hell, but he just wouldn't shut up. You remember how I hate when someone disobeys me, don't you, pumpkin? You disobeyed me, didn't you? I just might forgive you after you've been properly punished. Oh, and it seems Josh had a serious accident. His body doesn't do well against steel toe boots.

Setting my phone back down on the little makeshift table, I look back just to make sure dear ole dad is being still and silent. With a warning look, I turn and head out of the little shelter. There's nothing around to lead anyone to this area. I'm glad I was able to research real fast when I finally found where the bitch is.

I can't wait to get a hold of her. I'm going to fuck her over and over again. When I'm done with her pussy, I'll flip her over and fuck that little ass of hers. Then, when she's close to being unconscious, I'll hold my knife to dad's throat and make her suck me off. That bitch will learn and take her punishment before I slit her throat, but first, she'll watch dear old Daddy die.

I did manage to get a look at the little girl that lives in the house. After I handle the rest of them, maybe I'll keep her. She looks young enough to not only be a virgin, but groomable to be who and what I want. Now that idea has my cock throbbing.



CHAPTER TWENTY-EIGHT

Dakota

Right as we're about to go over what Lyn's noticed about her dad's hands and our own lists, her phone alerts us to another text message. When she holds up her phone to read the message, she drops it with a shriek and uses both of her hands to cover her face.

"Creed, get our girl. I'll get the phone. You guys try to calm her. Let me look at what the..." I can't finish my own statement, at least out loud. Brooks' right eye is so swollen, it's shut. His left eye looks as though it may match the right one soon. Jesus, the blood around his mouth and nose still shines like it's fresh. "Son of a bitch! He'll fucking die. Lyn, come on baby, your dad's hands are in shapes again. I know you don't want to look, but we need to get to him. Damn it, Lyn, look at your dad's hands and tell us what he's saying." I feel like such an asshole, but we have to know. Not only do we need her to focus, but it looks as though Brooks' life depends on it. She can break down later.

That maniac is going to slowly kill him. Handing the phone to Hunter, I hear his painful gasp as he sees the picture for the

first time. I make my way over to the mini fridge to grab a bottle of water. When I feel arms reach around me from behind, squeezing me, my body sags.

“Lyn, babe, I’m sorry. I shouldn’t have snapped at you like that. I just want to get to your dad. You having a great dad is awesome and something I’ve always wanted. I figured since we got you, maybe we could have your dad, too. Then I would have a father figure. I’m,” I clear the emotion from my throat. “I’m sorry.” I can feel her press her face into my back.

“Dakota, you’re right about my dad and you’re right to snap at me. I have to handle this. My dad would tell me to remember I have a Louisville Slugger for a spine. Will you grab me a bottle of water and come sit down with me? I’d like to look at Dad’s hands to see what he’s saying. Is there a way to cover Josh’s body? I can’t handle seeing that.”

I grab everyone a bottle and toss them to my brothers as Lyn and I rejoin the group and sit down. Lyn takes a deep breath and raises her hand to Hunter. “Phone please, babe?”

“Lyn, I’m going to put it up on the wall, except I’m going to cover Josh’s body and your dad’s face. You need to focus, and I can’t blame you for not being able to with that in your line of sight.”

Placing the picture on the wall with everything covered is easier on the rest of us as well. When she looks at me and smiles, that reassures me that I did the right thing.

“His right hand is balled into a fist. I don’t understand. That was our signal for stop. I guess that’s actually a universal

signal. But stop what? His left hand is in the shape of a gun but pointed to the ground. No guns? I don't understand what he's trying to say, 'stop, no guns'? Can this picture be added to the other two in the third spot? You know, in the order I received them."

She's smart, she's seeing a pattern. The only way to work it out is to put the pictures in order and then look at his hands. Maybe together like this his hands say something different.

"Okay, see how his hands are now. There's a pattern. Fucking hell, we haven't played this game since I was thirteen years old. If I remember how to read his hands, he's saying, they're north. No guns and they're not alone."

"Babe, is that all you see? I know you're upset, and it's not that I'm doubting you. I just want to make sure." I really need to watch how I ask her things. I really can sound harsh, even when I don't mean to.

"Well, I can tell the obvious, like he's also hungry and dehydrated. His coloring from picture to picture is changing. Now that he's hurt, it will affect him more. Max tried to keep everything, other than my dad and Josh's body, the exact same in the photos, and he failed. I bet if we look at the rest of my dad's body and what else is shown in the pictures, I think we might be able to find them." Whoa, did she just say 'we' as in her coming with us?

"Whoa, babe, hold on a second. When we locate him, you're not going with us. I'm well aware you can handle yourself, but I won't risk you getting anywhere near that sadistic son-of-a-

bitch.” Well, fuck me. When she looks up into my eyes, I swear she’s shooting daggers at me.

Then she started poking me in the chest like a petulant child being chastised. “Not going? I know you didn’t just tell me that I’m going to sit my ass at home while the men go fight this battle for me. I’ll be damned. That son-of-a-bitch has *‘my’* dad. That son-of-a-bitch has two other innocent men because of his obsession with me. He put his mother fucking hands on *‘my’* dad! And you have the nerve to tell me I’m not going? Well, fuck you, Dakota! I’m going and I’ll be the one to put him in the fucking ground! Do you all hear me?” Fuck! That repeated jabbing in my chest fucking hurts.

“Babe, Lyn, look... listen for fuck’s sake...” I can’t finish my thought when she whirls around and is about to leave the room. Shit!

Phoenix catches her. “Hold on a minute, gorgeous. I happen to disagree with Dakota. If you’ll give us a chance, we can discuss this and work it out. How about we try to narrow down where we think Max is holding them and then we can go from there? Dakota only wants to protect you, not hold you back. He just has a bad way of explaining himself.” Thank you, Phoenix.

“Lyn, I’m sorry. He’s right. I’m trying to protect you and would never want to hold you back, but I also know this can turn uglier very easily and I don’t want you or your dad getting hurt any more than you have if something goes wrong.” Fuck, this situation sucks.

“Alright everyone, let’s take a minute and calm down. Lyn, you deserve your revenge and we deserve the right to protect you. It wouldn’t matter if this was nothing more than business. We’d all still have the need and desire to protect you. With it not being business, changes nothing of how we feel about protecting you. So, we’ll find a common ground of understanding so that everyone is satisfied. Hunter, get the land map of all the properties north of us that include the mountains. Dakota, get that clear overlay so we can write on it without damaging the map itself.”

I think it would be best if I just let Creed take over. One, he’s our natural leader and I also believe he’s the best at keeping our emotions and tempers under control.



CHAPTER TWENTY-NINE

Creed

After drawing up everything we could think of on the overlay of the map, we were able to get a rough estimate of where they might be. If we're correct on the location, they're too close for comfort, but also far enough away that we can breathe.

"We have been at this for a few hours now, and I don't know about anyone else, but I'm starving. I think it's time we break for lunch. I also just got a text from Jaxon that they are coming down because they're hungry as well. Let's have a lunch break and check with the others on how things are going."

I no sooner get the words out of my mouth than Lennie walks into the office. Thank God Hunter was able to get the pictures off the wall before she came into the room. "Brooklyn, are we going to make lunch? I'm starving."

"Yes, how about you guys clean all this up and meet us in the kitchen in about thirty minutes? We'll have lunch, clean up and then look at what else Lennie's managed to accomplish in her rooms or that they really only played games." We all nod at her as she takes Lennie by the hand and they leave the office.

Once I know they're clear of the hallway, I turn to Jaxon and signal him to shut the office door. "Alright, now that Lyn is occupied, we can talk. Dakota, I understand how you feel and I don't want her to go either. However, this is her battle and if we try to keep her from it, she may never forgive us and could very well leave with Brooks and none of us want that. So, let's just include her in the plans and we can handle whatever happens along the way. We're amazing at adapting on the fly. This is no different."

Seeing everyone dip their heads in agreement, I release the breath I was holding. I just knew I was going to have to verbally spar with Dakota over this. He is the way over protective one. If Crow was back from his mission, it would be an entirely different battle.

If Crow was back, it'd actually be more of a war. I think I'm going to get in contact with his CO, now that he's crossed my mind. He was supposed to be home and out last week. None of us have heard a word. Not completely unusual, but my gut is telling me to check, so after this is taken care of, I will.

"Alright, so I want some cameras up in the north pass area, where we think they're at and we need to work on a response to Max's text messages. We want him to know he has her attention. The last thing we want is for him to think she doesn't care. Who knows what the psycho would do at that point."

We all come to an agreement on responding to the text messages. We also agree that Lyn will have to be the one to

actually respond, so that Max and her dad will get that it's her, but two very different messages. "Let's grab some lunch, get this message sent, give Lennie some attention, and whatever comes next, well, we'll handle it."

Dakota, Hunter, Jaxon, Kerrigan, Keegan, Phoenix, and I all walk into the kitchen to find one hell of a mess and no one in sight. It takes us all less than a split second to assume what's happened. "Son-of-a-bitch! How did no alarm go off?" If that fucker took them, I'll personally sink him six feet into the fucking ground."

As I'm about to give orders, Lyn and Lennie enter from the direction of the bathroom, cackling like a couple of hens, causing us all to jump on them both. "Where the fuck were you? What the hell happened here? You two took twenty years of our lives. We thought Max had somehow gotten into the house and passed the security system." Well, hell, now I owe the swear jar in Lennie's room more cash than I have on me. At this rate, I'm going to have to take out a personal loan for the damn jar.

"Daddy, what's the matter with everyone? We were making lunch and I slipped. I managed to catch myself, but then Brooklyn slipped and she wasn't able to catch herself. Her arm hit the bowl full of flour and sent it flying everywhere and sent me into a sneezing fit. That made things worse because my hand hit the egg carton, sending the eggs flying. That made the floor really slippery and stinky."

Damn it, our reactions have blown this out of proportion. Now, how the hell do I handle this? “Dad, are you listening to me? Other than a few clumsy mistakes and a mess, nothing is wrong. We went to the bathroom to try to clean up. Why did we take twenty years off your life? Who is Max and why would he want to break in and hurt us? Daddy, you promised no secrets. Not only are you keeping secrets from me, you’re lying to me too?” The look on her face damn near breaks me. Lyn walks over, grabs my hand and gives it a quick squeeze. She turns around to face Lennie, and I hope she can explain this better than I can.

“Hold on, Lennie, your dad and uncles didn’t lie to you and neither did I. What’s going on has to do with me and we’re just getting information together. We never meant to keep things from you, but we did avoid telling you. You remember what I told everyone here, in the kitchen? Well, that man has escaped from prison. He’s taken some old friends of mine and my dad as hostages. Lennie, he’s hurt my dad. Your dad and your uncles are helping me get my dad and those friends back and send Max back to prison. So, with all of that, this mess scared them and made them think something bad had happened.” Lyn looks hurt and Lennie looks devastated. Damn it.

I have to try to make this right. I’ve never gotten a look like that from Lennie, and I don’t want to keep seeing it. Taking a knee, I grasp one of Lennie’s hands. “Lennie, listen to me. How about we clean up this mess and sit down and talk? Hunter, can you order some lunch to be delivered?” Us

cleaning up the mess in the kitchen gives me a chance to get my thoughts in order. I really didn't want her to know about all this, but what's done is done.

It took us nearly two hours to clean the disaster of a kitchen, and apparently no one delivers in this town because everyone lives so far outside of town and spread out. Phoenix went to pick up our food order.

“Why don't we all sit down? We can talk and wait for Phoenix to return at the same time. Nothing that'll be said is new to him, anyway. Lennie, I'd appreciate it if you'd sit across from Lyn and myself. I'd like to see your beautiful face as we explain things better.”

The fact that she hasn't spoken a word since I lost my shit and jumped to conclusions is not going over with me very well. We all take a seat, leaving a space next to Lyn for Phoenix. Dakota is beside Lennie. Keegan, Kerrigan, and Jaxon have just grabbed chairs and sat down.

“Lennie, you know that your uncles and I got out of the military for a few reasons. The main reason being you. So we all agreed to set up a Security Company together. This is nothing new to you. The reason we hired Lyn was because you need a good female role model and there will be times when we will have to travel and none of us want to interrupt your routine or your life because of our job.” She already knew all this, but I feel like it needs to be fresh in her memory.

I really hate the look of betrayal she has on her face right now. “Lennon, this is a situation that just recently appeared. The

monster that hurt Lyn when she was fifteen not only took her dad, but a few of her friends, too. Your uncles and I won't allow this man to hurt Lyn or anyone else if we can help it. Not just because we think she's a great person, and she's awesome with you. We won't let this man hurt her because Lyn has agreed to date us." Well, I can tell by her face I finally said the right thing, because she's smiling.

"Wait! You and Lyn are dating? Like for reals? You're not messing with me or anything? And on top of that, she's dating all my uncles?" Thank you, God, she is excited.

"Yes, Lennie, we are dating and no, not all your uncles. She's agreed to date Hunter, Dakota, Phoenix and myself, of course. Jaxon, Kerrigan and Keegan see her as a sister, and she sees them the same way. So they'll have a platonic relationship with her. Are you alright with us dating Lyn? You need to be honest, because we're a family and you're right, we shouldn't keep things from each other." Before I can blink, Lennie is up and in Lyn's lap giving her the biggest hug I think I've ever seen her give to anyone. "I'll take that as a yes. You're happy about it."

When Phoenix walks in, he gives the puppy dog-look of curiosity. I just smile at him. "Why is Lennie hugging Lyn like she'll never see her again, and why do you all have goofy ass smiles on your faces? Oh, and it would be nice if someone would help bring in all this damn food."

"Uncle Phoenix, you cursed. You have to put a dollar in the swear jar." She has such a cheeky grin on her face, like she's

won the lottery.

“Keegan and Kerrigan, can you two go grab the rest of the food? Phoenix, we saved a seat next to Lyn. As for all the smiles and Lennie hugging our girl, well, I told her that Lyn is ‘our’ girl. Lennie is excited we are in a polyamorous plus relationship. Let’s eat and chat at the same time. I want everything out on the table as quickly as possible so we can handle other things.”

“Daddy, this isn’t a polyamorous relationship. It’s called a Reverse Harem, remember? Four or more men? So you all are Brooklyn’s harem.” Well, doesn’t she look pleased as punch at this revelation?

Watching Hunter hobble around the table to sit down causes me to wince in sympathetic pain. I’ve had bruised ribs and they suck and take forever to fully heal. While the guys unload their arms, it’s time to tell Lennie what’s happening.

“Everyone get some food. Lennie, go sit down. You can eat and listen at the same time. So you know what Lyn told you? Let me add to it. Lyn’s dad’s name is Brooks, and he’s a really great guy. Lyn and her dad have the same kind of relationship as you and I do. Anyway, Brooks was taken by the creep that hurt Lyn all those years ago. He’s sent pictures of Brooks to Lyn’s cell phone. The last picture he sent her shows he has hurt Brooks. Brooks looks beat up.” I hate seeing her happiness melt away, but she needs to know everything.

“Brooks and Lyn had a game they used to play where they could speak without saying actual words. Like sign language,

but their own made up sign language. Brooks has sent her messages in the pictures. So we have a rough idea of where the creep is keeping him and Lyn's old friends. Lennie, they aren't that far from here. That's why when we went into the kitchen for lunch and saw the mess, we freaked out. I apologize for not telling you." Lennie's face is a bit expressionless, which has me a little concerned. I get that exact expression sometimes.

"I want Lyn to stay safe. I also want her dad and her friends away from that creepy man. When we get Mr. Brooks back, can he stay here with us?"



CHAPTER THIRTY

Brooklyn

Lunch and the talk with Lennie went a lot better than I actually thought it would. Once we finish eating and cleaning, I went upstairs to check on her. I left the guys to work on planning for a while. They know how I feel about everything, and I need a mental break. My head is spinning with everything happening so quickly.

When Lennie opens the main door to her floor, I'm seriously struck silent. She really has got a lot of work done. It was already looking nice, but now it looks amazing and complete. "Wow, holy cow, girl, you weren't kidding. It looks amazing in here. Did you get all the rooms done?"

"Well, almost all of them. Uncle Jaxon suggested that I use my guest room as a storage room while I'm going through my stuff. That way, I can always stay organized and not feel overwhelmed. My bedroom, my closet, my bathroom and here in the living room are pretty much done. I grab a box and go through it as I'm putting stuff away. So I'm going through everything, putting away what I want to keep and putting what I don't want in a box for us to donate. Most of the boxes in my

guest room are for donation. In the corner, across from the door, are boxes I still need to go through.”

I’m very impressed with the ideas that Jaxon gave to help her multi-task. “I’m so proud of you, Lennie. You have gotten a lot done in a short amount of time. Putting things you don’t want in a box makes it easier to donate them later.” I will have to compliment the guys later on for doing a great job with her.

Sitting on one of the couches in her little living room, I pat the seat next to me. “How about you come sit down with me? Now that it’s just you and me, I’d like to know exactly how you feel about this relationship between your dad, uncles, and myself. Will you tell me your true feelings?”

Lennie doesn’t sit down next to me. She plops her little butt down instead. “I’m excited, and that’s being totally honest. I know for a fact that my dad hasn’t dated anyone or even shown the smallest bit of interest in a woman till you. I’m so happy. I have to write in my diary later because I was coming up with a plan to try and hook you up with my dad and all my uncles. Oh, and if it happens to come up, I don’t mind you having a baby or two. I don’t even care if they’re all boys.” I can’t help but wrap my arms around her in a tight hug.

“You know what, Squirt? You really are an amazing young lady. I’ll remember this conversation for the future when you threaten your baby brother or sister with death.” We both burst out laughing.

We spent hours up on Lennie’s floor. Between talking, joking around and going through the last few boxes she had, we were

having a great time. When her intercom activates, I swear it nearly made both of us jump out of our skin.

We both jump up and walk over to the intercom. Lennie reaches out and presses the button. “What, Uncle Phoenix?”

“What do you mean ‘*what*’? We all want to know if you two are going to stay up there all day and when will we be having dinner? It’s almost six in the evening and there are a lot of starving men down here.”

Lennie and I look at each other and both roll our eyes. Pressing the button myself, “Alright, babe, we’ll be down in a minute and we’ll feed you starving men.” Turning off the intercom, I look over the room. “Well, I guess we’ve had enough fun for today. Let’s go feed the poor neglected menfolk. Then I want you up here, taking a bath and reading something. Alright?”

While we’re walking out of her main door I hear, “yes ma’am. After dinner, I’ll come back upstairs, get my Kindle and take a bath.”

I can hear the guys rummaging through the kitchen all the way from the bottom of the stairs. I raise my voice just enough that it’s not drowned out by all the noise they’re making. “You guys better not be messing up our kitchen or our plans for dinner.”

When Lennie walks into the kitchen and bursts out laughing, I speed up. I can’t decide if I want to laugh or cry. Lennie has obviously chosen laughter. “Would one of you like to explain to us what in the world y’all are doing? I mean, we can see the

mess you're making of the kitchen. Are you supposed to be actually producing anything edible?"

Whoa, the looks of absolute insult I get are a bit shocking. "I'll have you know that dinner is in the oven. We're simply cleaning up. Hunter is still hurting a bit and accidentally put too much pressure on his side. That made him throw his arms out, hitting the pasta raw noodles we decided not to use everywhere." Well, jeez, I didn't expect Phoenix to be this butt hurt.

"I apologize." Once I see the smiles take over their faces and chests puff out, I know I'm forgiven. That was sadly too easy.

Playing along, Lennie and I walk into the dining room and take our seats. This feels a bit weird, but we can play along this time. I'm pleasantly shocked when I see my guys walk into the room with fresh baked raviolis, garlic bread and a big salad. "Oh my gosh, Dad, that looks amazing. You guys haven't cooked together in a long time. Brooklyn, you are in for a treat."

We had a great time eating and talking together, even though my mind was somewhere else. I really need to get my dad back. I'm so scared that that maniac is going to take him away from me. For Lennie, I keep my face neutral, but I can tell my guys can read me like an open book.

Out of nowhere, Jaxon shocks me. "I know you all need to talk and work some things out. So, Lennie and I will take care of the dinner dishes. Then she can go take her bath and read like she's supposed to. Squirt, if you'll message me after you're

finished with your bath, I'll bring a book up and read with you. Does that sound like a plan?"

"That would be great. I really appreciate it. Lennie, I want at least one hour of reading, alright? Once you have done that, you're free to do whatever, but bedtime is ten. You have school tomorrow. Does that sound fair?"

"Yes, ma'am, it sounds fair." We leave them to clean up and head into the office.

Hunter is the last to enter, and he makes sure he closes the door. Lennie may know and understand what's happening, but that doesn't mean I want her seeing the pictures of my dad, Josh's body, or hear what else we are discussing.



CHAPTER THIRTY-ONE

Lennie's Diary

Dear Diary,

You're not going to believe this, actually you will because I'm telling you. Anyway, Brooklyn's dating my dad and a few of my uncles! We have a real family. That is so cool. I know it's too soon, but I hope I get a brother or sister or maybe two. Being an only child isn't all it's cracked up to be.

Also, I hope they can get Brooklyn's dad and her friends before that guy can hurt them anymore. I know they didn't tell me any like details or anything but I'm ok with that. I just don't want anyone getting hurt.

Diary, I still can't believe the entire 3rd floor is my suite. I have everything any girl could want. Well, being able to call Brooklyn Mom would make life perfect. Anyway, I promised I would take my bath and then call Uncle Jaxon so we could read together.

More later!



CHAPTER THIRTY-TWO

Brooklyn

We were up way too late and managed to not figure out a damn thing. We all went to bed mumbling out how fucked up this situation is. By the time everything was said and done, the only accomplishment was sending out a text to Max. All I texted was, *'What do you want, Max?'*

Getting woken up by men rushing into my room is definitely a shocking experience. I will say it didn't force a physical response, so that's good, I think.

"Babe, there's a problem. It's your dad. Max has sent another text. He doesn't think you're taking him seriously enough. He's giving you five minutes to respond, or Brooks will suffer."

Hunter's expression has me scurrying to climb out of bed and run to him. Grabbing my phone, I completely lose my shit. "That fucking son-of-a-bitch. I'll text him back alright." When Hunter covers my hands, which covers my phone, I look up at him.

"Babe, before you react, you need to think. You need to calm down and think this through. If you send him an aggressively

angry message, he may hurt Brooks worse than he already has. Send him a neutral message. We need to find out for a fact what his endgame is. I know it's hard, but remove your emotions from this. Also, I hate this, but did you have a nickname for him? Calling him by the nickname may calm him and placate him into talking to you."

All I can do is nod my head because I know he's right. I don't want to give him any reason to hurt or kill my dad, Marc, or Travis. It's bad enough I didn't save Josh. "Will you all stay with me and help me with this? I need this to be over and everyone safe." Seeing their smiles and return nods helps calm me and gives me the added strength I need.

Brooklyn: What is it you want, Maxy?

Max: Come on now, pumpkin. You should know what I want. What I need. You're going to tell me what I want.

I look up at my men. "I know what he wants. Do I have to play his game or what?"

"Answer him the way he wants, but remind him you're not that fifteen-year-old little girl he once knew. We're here, you're safe and you're ours." Phoenix knows exactly what to say to help me.

Brooklyn: You want me. You need me, but you forget I'm not that little girl anymore. I want you to let my dad and the others go.

Max: Oh, my pumpkin, I'm well aware you're not a child anymore. If you want him, come and get him. Those men in

the house with you better stay away or I will kill them. You're mistaken if you think I care one way or the other. With them out of the way, that little girl looks quite fresh for the picking.

The anger building inside me with the knowledge that he knows about Lennie is about to drown me. I even hear the guys growling. They know he's trying to bait not only me, but them, too.

Brooklyn: You'll leave her alone. It's me you want. How am I supposed to get him when I don't know where you are? The Maxy I knew didn't like to play games.

Max: Pumpkin, do not test me. You will lose. What you're going to do is walk out of the back door and toward the mountains. You're going to keep going till I message you to stop. Again, those men will not follow you. Remember this, I can see you once you step out of that house. You have 10 minutes to exit the house. Time starts now.

When I look up again, the guys are in motion. "Lyn, get dressed and get your ass out the back door. We were somewhat prepared for this. Jaxon, Keegan and Kerrigan already headed into the mountains to the area close to where we think he might be. They were to check the trail cams, but haven't returned. I'm assuming that's because they've actually located him. Move, girl, get dressed."

I jump, realizing I wasn't moving. I pull on a pair of jeans over my sleep shorts. Grabbing a hoodie, I pull it on. I'm listening to Creed as I'm putting on socks and my hiking boots.

“Creed, what do I do? All I want to do is kill him.” I can feel my blood starting to boil. “I won’t let him hurt anyone, and I damn sure won’t let him get to my girl.”

“Baby, if you get that chance, kill him. This is about you and your dad, but you need to understand you’re not alone. We have other ways to leave this house than a fucking door. Now, get to the back door and walk out and don’t let him see you upset. He doesn’t deserve that satisfaction. Repeat it in your head, you’re not a little girl, and you’re not helpless. Now go.”

Without hesitation, I run out of my room, taking two steps at a time down the stairs. Once I get to the back door, I take a deep breath and calmly walk outside. What’s that saying, *‘Fake it like a porn star,’* I bet I could win an Emmy for my fake calm physical appearance.

I don’t look back or even to the sides of me, but I know I won’t be alone for long. I swear I can feel all the eyes on me as they get into position, and that’s fine. I can do this. I’m strong and I am not that little girl anymore. He doesn’t have power over me. That’s it. He doesn’t have power over me.



We all stood there watching Lyn leave the house, and it was killing us all, but what the asshole didn’t know is we have other ways out of this house. We’re starting a Security

Company, so we're prepared for just about anything. Hell, we even have a bunker in the basement.

Alright, damn it. I can't go running after her or even physically help the guys out there, but I can handle Lennie. I'm going to page her to the office and keep her there with me. I can track everyone. I made sure to remind them to turn their cell phones to vibrate and in a pocket they can easily feel. I'll direct them that way.

I've never felt so fucking useless. I want to be there for her and can't be. I'll just have to make do and help how I can. Remembering what Dakota said, I know he understood me without me having to say a word.

Now I have to get Lennie down here and explain to her why she has to stay with me. Shit, I hope she doesn't ask a million questions. Walking as fast as I can, fucking ribs, I enter the office and hit the intercom. "Hey, Lennie, wake up, Squirt. I need you to get dressed and come down to the office as if the house was on fire."

"Uncle Hunter, Brooklyn said she would..." No time for this.

"Lennon Marie Creed, move your little ass. I'm sorry, Squirt, but there's no time to explain right now. Once you get to the office, I will. Now move it." Releasing the button, I wince with pain. Who knew simply raising your voice tightens muscles that'll cause bruised ribs to fucking scream.

Getting the trackers activated only took a second. Slipping one on Lyn was easy. Her not knowing about it makes things more natural for her. I threw the map schematic on the wall,

overlaying the tracker pings gives me a perfect view of where each of them are headed. They're all making their way in the original directions and keeping a relatively equal pace with each other. Although they don't know that.

"Uncle Hunter, what the H-E double hockey sticks? Why are you... What are those moving dots? There's a lot of them." Her eyes widen when she realizes it's only her and me in the office.

"Before anything, close and lock the office door. Grab yourself something to snack on and drink out of the mini fridge over in the corner. Once you do that, come sit in your dad's chair and we'll talk."

After she closes and locks the door, she walks in the direction I point her towards. My eyebrows raise when she stops. She looks back at me and that's when it dawns on me that she doesn't see it. "Sorry, Squirt, open the cabinet in front of you. The small one is the refrigerator. It blends in with the wall unit. Will you grab me a bottle of water, please?"

I watch as she glances back at me, and I already know what's coming. "Yes, I can grab you a bottle of water, and you can please tell me what's going on? Is everyone alright? I'm not a baby, Uncle Hunter." Just looking at her tells me she's not a baby anymore, but it's still hard to accept she's almost twelve years old.

"I can, but I have to watch those dots and speak to them occasionally, so be patient. Let me handle them for a minute and then I'll start explaining everything that's going on."

Grateful of the nod she sends me, I turn my attention to all the tracker beacons. Sending texts will hopefully speed this up and get them home quicker.

Creed: Slow, steady north

Phoenix: Shift 20 degrees northeast, up pace x2, 100 paces behind lead

Dakota: Slow pace x1, ahead of lead by 30 paces

After I tag all trackers to be able to recheck their movement in a few, I turn to Squirt, who's sat down in her dad's seat. "Alright, Lennie, here's the deal. Lyn received a text, and it wasn't nice. The creep threatened to hurt her dad and the others if she didn't leave to meet him right away." I haven't told her everything yet, and her eyes are already wide open and full of anger.

Explaining everything that's happening and what we're doing only takes a few minutes. Luckily, she caught on quickly. "What a butthole. Can I help? I know I have to stay here, but can you give me something to do?"

I do have a little job for her and she can actually do it from right where she is. "Actually, I could use your help watching the only green dot on the map. That green dot is Brooklyn. I need you to tell me if that dot changes directions, speeds up, or stops. You doing that will allow me to watch all the blue dots, which happen to be your dad and the rest of your uncles."

She didn't hesitate. She turned her chair so she had a straight on view of Brooklyn's tracker dot. I must have watched her for

five minutes and I don't think she even blinked. Watching all the dots is driving me crazy. I wish I was out there with them.

“Uncle Hunter, Brooklyn stopped, look.” Looking from the wall map to her and back up to the wall map, I see Lyn's dot and it's not moving. That means one of two things. One, she received a text with directions or two, she's been stopped by Max himself.

Picking up my phone, I waste no time.

Creed: Shift 10 degrees northeast, 2x pace for 5, target stopped

Phoenix: Shift 5 degrees north, 2x for 3, target stopped

Dakota: Stop, target stopped, breach, 20 paces back

When my phone chimes with a text, I'm shocked to see Lyn's numbers.

Lyn: Forwarded Message... I see you, pumpkin. Turn to your left and walk straight from where you are till you see my eyes. See you very soon.

I'm turning red and squeezing my phone so hard I'm afraid I'm going to break it. Setting it on the desk, I take a deep breath. Rubbing my hands over my face and through my hair, I want to scream. Looking down, I see that Lennie has my phone.

“I know you're upset, so I forwarded the message Brooklyn forwarded to you to the others. The more they know, the better, right?” Smiling at her, I lean down and kiss her forehead.

“Yeah, Squirt, you’re right. You did good. Now we have to wait. Jaxon, Keegan and Kerrigan are on the other side of where Max should be. That puts Max, Mr. Brooks, Lyn’s friends, and Lyn in the middle of your dad and all your uncles. Fingers crossed and pray that this goes smoothly.”



CHAPTER THIRTY-THREE

Brooklyn

I know Max said he can see me, but I hope he couldn't tell I forwarded his message. I have to look at this differently. Mind over matter. The past is the past and I'm not a victim. I've stopped living like a victim and I'm done acting like a victim. I'm a fighter and I'm a survivor. He has no fucking power over me.

Repeating that to myself feels like I'm bringing up a shield of protection. I can do this. No, I will do this. I'm not a little girl anymore. I'm a badass. I took down Hunter a couple of times. No, don't feel bad. Come on, Lyn. Damn it, get it together.

Walking up this mountainside, it dawns on me that I'm on a trail. Why would he have me traveling on an obviously well-worn pathway? That makes no sense. I thought he would prefer that I be disoriented by my surroundings, not soothed by them. What the fuck is he up to? He really is fucking crazy, and I'm done playing this game.

Stopping at a split in the trail, I wait for some sign of which way I need to go. After a few minutes of hearing and seeing nothing, a voice speaking up makes me jump. Spinning to my

left, I see my dad being held by Max, with a large knife to his throat. I want to run to him but understand the scope of the situation.

I can see Max has used him for a punching bag more than the one time. “Oh, Dad, I’m sorry he’s done this to you.” Focusing my attention on the devil himself, “I want you to let him and the others go. I’m the one you want Maxy, and I’m right here.” Fuck me, I just had to swallow the rising bile.

There’s no containing my tears as I get a good look at him. “Alright, pumpkin, because you’ve been good, I’ll let your dad go. The others, well, that’s not happening. They placed their hands on what’s mine without permission.”

He lowers the knife from dad’s throat and allows him to walk over to me. Once he reaches me and drapes his arms around me, I hear that voice in my head, *‘Remember Lyn, play the game till it’s time to end it’*. Placing a kiss on my dad’s cheek, I step around him until I’m standing between him and Max. I’m so filled with anger but somehow manage to keep myself physically calm.

I may be facing straight ahead, but my eyes are looking around my environment, as well as listening the best I can. Hearing him speak once again damn near causes me to scream, but I manage to keep it together. I’m a badass. Keeping my eyes locked on him, I swear I’m not even blinking.

“My, my, look at you.” The mere sound of his voice damn near triggers my gag reflex. “You’re definitely not that little girl anymore. You’re all grown up. He was a little bitch, anyway.

You're better off without him." I can't believe he's trying to have a conversation with me. For fuck's sake, he's... wait.

"You said '*was a little bitch*' what do you mean by that? Who are you talking about? If you mean my exes, they aren't my problems anymore." Watching Max's facial expressions tells me nothing. He's cool, calm, and all collected. Sick fuck.

"Oh, well, you don't have to worry about any of them." He's fucking chuckling and I want to vomit. "You see, I went to see Travis to help me locate you. He wasn't really helpful. Well, other than directing me to the house you used to share with him. Low and behold, guess who I found?" How did he even know about Travis?

He's fucking joking, right? He thinks all this is fun and games time? He's so fucked in the head. His voice snaps me out of my internal thoughts. "Brooklyn, I asked you a fucking question and I expect an answer. Who do you think I found?"

Looking into his eyes, they're still as dead as they were all those years ago. Play along woman. Remember, play along till it's time to end the game. I fucking swear I'm going to rip his fucking balls off and feed them to him. "My dad, you found my dad."

"That's right, and do you know he had the nerve to tell me he didn't know where you were? I mean come on. There's no way Brooks Michael Lacey's going to let his cunt of a daughter go anywhere without him knowing where and with whom." I watch as he paces back and forth, never breaking eye contact with me.

“You know, pumpkin, it both amazes me and impresses me that he didn’t break with the pain I put him in. Oh, and those annoying mutts were easy enough to put down. One of the little fuckers actually bit me. Anyway, you don’t have to worry about feeding them.”

He really did kill Bubbles and Lucifer. I fucking swear I’ll make him pay. He’s next level fucking crazy, killing two little dogs. Oh, my god. I know tears are rolling down my face, but they’re not because I’m scared. These tears are from pure, unfiltered rage. “Then you know what happened?” His voice is feeding my temper and I feel as though I’m about to explode.

He’s looking at me like we’re having a normal conversation. For fuck’s sake, can we just get this over with? “Brooklyn! Again, I’ve asked you a fucking question and you’re not fucking answering me. I find that rude as well as very disrespectful.”

I will not roll my eyes at this arrogant, self-indulgent, narcissistic, delusional asshole. I’m shaking. Fuck, I need to stop. “I don’t know, Maxy. Would you tell me what happened?” There, you pompous prick.

“See there? That wasn’t hard now, was it?” Instead of directly answering him, I simply shake my head no. “Good girl. Now, what happened was dear ole Dad got a text message from his cunt of a daughter. So, you see, you told me where you were and here I am. Well, no, that’s not right. While at your dad’s, I saw pictures of you with two other men. They didn’t have my permission to touch you, so I went and grabbed their asses,

too.” I swear, Dad wouldn’t throw a picture away if I was in it. No matter how old it was.

I won’t let him continue to think he’s running this sick fucking game of his. “I want to know what you did to Marc and Travis. I saw what you did to Josh. He was no threat to you.” Something tells me there’s more to this story. “Max, what else have you done? You should be careful with your facial expressions. They do give a lot away.”



This is so much fun. She didn’t even notice the surprise that’s strapped to his back. That’ll be a shocker for whoever finds him. Well, that’s neither here nor there. Brooklyn won’t be around for that big boom.

I can’t believe she’s talking to me like she is. Does she not remember her last ass whooping? Well, time to remind her who’s in charge, because it sure the fuck isn’t her.

“Women should know their place, Brooklyn. You, of all people, should know that. Who the fuck do you think you’re talking to? You don’t demand answers from me. You answer my questions and do as you’re fucking told. Bitch, you need to remember your place and if you don’t remember, I’ll be glad to beat your ass to remind you. Maybe I should beat your ass while I have my cock buried deep inside you. You know, I think I like that plan better.”

Seriously? She's going to stand in front of me, crossing her arms over what belongs to me? Oh, you little bitch, I don't think so. Stalking over to her, she doesn't even flinch. Nope, time to remind her of her place. Without any warning, I swing out, slapping her across the face.

When she hits the ground, letting out that satisfying cry, my cock fucking pulses. The throbbing in my jeans reminds me of what it was like forcing myself into that virgin pussy. Slamming into her over and over as she screamed and cried. When I slapped her face, man, did she squeeze my cock. I need that and I'm going to get that.

That really makes my cock throb. Time to take her somewhere private and remind both of us of what my fucking cock feels like buried in her. Grabbing her by her hair, I pull her to a standing position. Forcing her body flat against mine feels amazing. I remember how whispering to her freaks her out, so why not?

“Come on, my little bitch, my cock is throbbing, and your pussy is going to take care of that for me. It'll be the last cock you ever feel.” Her breath hitching in fear causes two simultaneous actions. One, my cock throbbed so hard I could feel cum coat the head. Two, I yanked her head back, punching her in the face.

Oh yeah, “That pussy is mine, Brooklyn.” She thinks I tore her up the first time. Just wait. I'm going to use every fucking hole this whore has. Dragging her alongside me to my hideaway makes me want to damn near skip like a little kid about to sink

his teeth into a treat. Ha! I guess I am about to give myself a treat. I crack myself up sometimes.

Feeling a little resistance pulling my toy along with me, I turn back to see what the fucking hold up is.



One, he hits like a little bitch. God only knows how many times he had to have hit my dad to actually hurt him. I bet Lennie can hit harder than that, but I'll play along. Pulling my hair? Is he serious right now? I'm so hard-headed that shit doesn't even phase me, but I'll continue to play along. When he punches me in the face, that shit stung, and now I'm done with his game. It's time to finish it.

Digging my heels into the ground, forces him to stop. My fist is locked, cocked and ready to rock the instant he turns around. When he does, I let it fly. I hit him with an uppercut so hard he releases my hair and flies backwards, landing on his ass. It was beautiful, if I do say so myself.

Walking over to him, I stand beside his prone body. Looking down at him, I spit the blood gathered in my mouth on him.

“You pompous, delusional, sanctimonious, narcissistic asshole. I told you I wasn't that little girl anymore. I warned you, but you chose to see and hear what you wanted to. Well, here's your reality check. I'm going to kick the shit out of you.

I'm going to hurt you way more than you seem to think you hurt me. Then, when you think I'm finished, I have a surprise for you." They say therapy will cure what haunts you and is holding you back. I didn't realize I was still allowing him to affect me. No more.

He actually thought he could sweep my legs out from under me. "Tisk, tisk, tisk, you dumb son-of-a-bitch, I guess I need to remind you once again that I'm not a kid anymore." Avoiding his leg sweep was almost too easy. Regaining my balance, I bring up my right foot, my dominant foot, and slam it down on his nasty dick. Watching him roll around screaming and crying like the little bitch he is truly brings me joy.

"Damn! I bet that fucking hurt like a mother fucker. Hey guys, take a seat somewhere. Our girl's just getting started. Oh, and babe, no worries about Brooks. He's with Hunter and Lennie. We got the quick text you sent. Brilliant babe, just brilliant. Please, continue, don't let us interrupt." They didn't scare me because I knew they were close. Call it intuition, but I felt them.

"Oh, how rude of me. Max, these men you see around you are mine. We're a family and you just fucked with my family. You even thought you could threaten my little girl."

Walking around his legs, I reach down and grab his hair, pulling him up to a standing position. Looking him dead in the face, I say what I need to, getting it off my chest. "You attacked a fifteen-year-old little girl, because you're pathetic and a sorry excuse for a man. You beat me to feel powerful.

Only I didn't know how to protect myself, so all it did was show your true cowardice. You want to think you still affect me? You're not worth a moment of my time. You aren't a man. You're nothing more than a little bitch with an oversize clit."

That's when I lose it. I let go of his hair and start reigning down punch after punch after punch. When he drops to the ground, I drop-slam my knee down into his sternum, never missing a punch. "You. Will. Die. Today." I grind out between my teeth, accenting each word with a punch to his face, taking great satisfaction in the grunts of pain that escape him.

I know I'm covered in his blood. I know I'm covered in sweat, both his and mine. The tears, those are mine. After years of holding myself at a distance from people. Physically hurting people because they happen to catch me off guard. No more. "This is my life and I'm fucking taking it back. Phoenix! Baby, can you hand me dumbasses lame attempt at killing my dad?"

Looking back over my shoulder, I see him rise up and start walking to me. Turning back to the crying asshole, I thump his ear. When he jumps, I grab the front of his pants. "Oh, come on. You just told me once that pain makes your cock throb. I'm going to help you with that problem. Be still."

He stops moving and looks at me through one slightly open eye and even tries to smile. "Really? I mean, if you want to." Oh my god, he can't be serious.

Turning to look back at the guys, I widen my eyes as if to say '*what the actual fuck is wrong with him*'. They all shrug their

shoulders while shaking their heads like, *'we don't know'*. Taking the small package from Phoenix, I sent him a quick wink.

Opening Max's pants really does damn near make me throw up. He's actually fucking hard. Oh, my god. I can do this. Using one hand to hold his jeans open, making sure not to touch him, I use the other hand to place what he thought was a surprise for my dad against his quickly softening dick. "Max, what's the matter? Is it performance anxiety? I hear that's a real condition."

I can't help the evil chuckle that comes out of me. He tries to roll when he feels Jaxon behind him. Jaxon yanks Max's hands behind his back, forcing Max onto his side so he can use zip-ties to secure them. "We can't have you trying to remove your gift. I mean, I've decided I don't want it to kill you. Just blow off the most useless part of you. Then, when you go back to prison, you'll definitely be the perfect little bitch."

"You can't do this. I'll tell them it was you. Then you'll go to prison." Should I burst his bubble or let him think he's going to a regular prison? Decisions, decisions. Fuck it, I feel the need to see his pain.

"Oh, I didn't tell you. Shame on me. Well, you see, this is Federal land. You assaulted two Federal Employees, threatened one with rape, oh and that package that's currently on your package, that's Attempted Murder of a Federal Employee. So, you won't be seeing your old prison. No, you'll be going to a Maximum Security Federal Penitentiary where

you'll never see the light of day again." Seeing the shock that overtakes his face and then the tears that follow brings me a sick kind of joy.

I'm not exactly sure any of that is true, but Dad and I do work for the guys and they're federally contracted. It doesn't matter at this point. His look of fear and cries makes it worth a possible lie.

Standing up, Creed takes both of my hands and I swear dumps half a bottle of hand sanitizer in them. I'm completely taken off guard, because I thought he'd hand me a gun or something. I could still kiss him. "Thank you, babe. I really did need that. Now, how far back should we stand? I don't want to miss the show or miss out on his screams. At least until he passes out from blood loss and pain."



CHAPTER THIRTY-FOUR

Jaxon

I thought it was all over when we came up and found Lyn beating the shit out of Max, but oh no. I had no clue about the explosive charge he'd put on Brooks. What a dumb ass move.

Brooks knew what it was and told Phoenix as soon as he reached him. One of Phoenix's specialties is explosive devices. Phoenix was able to quickly remove the small device and retrofit it with a remote trigger.

Once everything is ready and Creed dumps what looks like an entire bottle of hand sanitizer into her hands. Where he got that, and why he has it, I don't know, but we all back up about twenty feet. I'm worried about her actually witnessing this. "Lyn, are you sure you want to watch this? It's pretty gross. Sadly, I've seen this kind of injury before and there is nothing fucking pretty about it."

"Are you kidding me? I wouldn't miss this show for anything. What he's about to feel is how I felt for years because of him. This will be his slow road to Hell, and I'm only too happy to watch him start that journey." I can't say I blame her, but I had to at least warn her.

We all gathered around Lyn in a loose semi-circle. “This is your show and closure. Phoenix, you need to let her push that button.” Turning back to Lyn, I smile at her. “That is, if she wants to. There’s nothing saying you have to, Lyn.”

She holds out her hand like I knew she would. Taking the device from Phoenix, I walk over and set it in her hand. “All you have to do is...” That’s all I was able to say when the loudest, most ear-piercing scream destroyed the silence of the early morning.

Watching her as Max screams, she never flinches, she doesn’t close her eyes, and she never looks away. The deep breath she releases is audible. It took me a second to realize there was a reason we could hear her release that deep breath. Max has passed out.

“Medic!” Turning, we all look at Creed. “What? We can’t let him die. Lyn wants him in prison as everyone’s bitch. There might have been a leak that he might be placed in a certain facility.” When he shrugs his shoulders, we all burst out laughing.

When an actual medical crew drove up in a humvee style vehicle, I swear tears were falling from laughing so hard. “Alright, hold up. How the fuck did this get arranged so quickly when none of us knew a damn thing for certain this morning?” I mean, I know we’re good, but we aren’t mind readers. I’ve missed something somewhere.

Keegan, Kerrigan, and I all look to Creed for an explanation. Giving us his attention. I realize he has one hell of a proud and

wicked grin on his face. This is gonna be good.

“As the youth of today would say, *‘see what happened was,’* a few well-placed text messages and phone calls. We kept in contact with Hunter the entire time. He kept us all heading towards our girl here. When Brooks came out, he met up with Phoenix. Right before that, somehow Lyn had snapped a picture, sending it to Lennie, I’m assuming by accident. Apparently, she didn’t hesitate sending it in a mass message to all of us. Phoenix responded with, *‘bomb, got it, medical.’* I’m very proud of her,”

Well holy shit, yeah, we all should be proud of her. Good thinking and quick thinking on Lennie’s part. She deserves a medal for that. My niece is brilliant. “Lennie went a step further than that. She sent Charlie Waldrop a text. I don’t know what it said, but Hunter received a text from Sergeant Waldrop asking if we needed help. Somewhere in there they arranged for an emergency medical transport as well as Federal Agents to get here pretty damn quick and here we are.”

Here we are? This starts as a possible cluster fuck and rapidly turns into a well executed take down. Lyn’s voice stops my inner monologue. “My dad is safe. I got justice, and he can’t hurt Lennie. Max got to live, and he’ll soon learn what it’s like to feel overpowered, demoralized and violated. Speaking of my dad, is he alright?”

“Lyn, your dad is in the house with Hunter and Lennie. I got a text saying that the medical team was looking him over and

Lennie was fussing over him. He's fine. You're the one we're most worried about. He hit you twice. Are you alright?"

"Yeah, it helps that I'm not fifteen anymore, and that he hits like a pussy ass bitch. Don't get me wrong, the punch to the face, that stung. As for hurting me though, no. I'm more concerned about him living and him being sent to his final destination." I can tell she wants to say something else, but isn't sure of herself.



CHAPTER THIRTY-FIVE

Brooklyn

When I see the medics loading Max into an ambulance and the handcuffs on his wrists, that have each wrist cuffed to the bed. I chuckle when I see the same has been done to each of his ankles.

“Hey, guys, we need to find out what he did with Marc and Travis.” I won’t blame myself for what he’s done to them. I know it’s not my fault, but the guilt is still there.

“Babe, stop. The medics have all three of them and Josh isn’t dead.” I snap my attention to Dakota.

“How do you know any of that? How did you find out Josh isn’t dead?” Oh my god, could he be right?

I feel his finger under my chin, turning my head. When I look closer at what he’s trying to show me, I’m stunned silent.

“Because they don’t put oxygen on dead men.”

That’s when I really see it. Three more stretchers, all surrounded by medics and law enforcement. There really isn’t anything for me to feel guilty about. My dad is safe, my exes

are safe, my men are safe and so am I. My dad, oh, I need... “I need to see my dad.”

“We all thought you might want to get to him after seeing that *dickless* was dealt with. That’s why I grabbed one of the four-wheelers. Hop on and I’ll take you to see Brooks. I’m pretty sure Lennie is driving him nuts already.” Jumping on the back, I reach my hands around Dakota’s waist. After I scoot myself as close to him as I can, he takes off.

I don’t know what’s wrong with me, but I’m horny as hell. I get called out by my rapist, essentially trade myself for my dad, beat the shit out of said rapist and then turned that rapist into dickless. As if that’s not enough adrenaline for one day, my body wants sex. I’ve lost my mind.

Pulling up to the house, it’s evident there’s activity going on. There’s the military or something like that and some medical people. It’s when I walk in the house I relax and burst out laughing. I can hear Lennie talking to my dad, and that girl is going ninety to nothing.

Dakota and I quietly walk into the main office, listening to Lennie. “So it’s cool if I call you Grandpa Brooks? That is so awesome. Thank you. Oh no, you keep that ice on like the medic guy said to. Do you want some coffee, water, orange juice or maybe some tea? We have cinnamon tea, chi tea, peppermint tea...” She freezes when she hears Dakota and I chuckling.

I wasn’t expecting what I saw when Lennie turns around. Her face was red and tear streaked. As soon as our eyes locked, the

tears started flowing. “Brooklyn! You’re alright! Grandpa Brooks and Uncle Hunter didn’t lie to me.”

Catching her, I wrap my arms around her and squeeze. “Sweetie, Grandpa Brooks and your uncle Hunter would never lie to you. Especially with something as important as what happened today. You can see me and I’m fine. Your dad and your other uncles will be here shortly. I promise they’re fine, too. Uncle Jaxon, Uncle Kerrigan, and Uncle Keegan will be back this evening.”

Lowering Lennie to stand on her own feet, I look at my dad. I can see what he’s going to do before he even moves. “Dad, stay put. We’ll come to you. I would hate for you to get into trouble. Lennie seems like a strict nurse and a good one.” The smile that flashes on her face is warm and loving.

“I’m going to ask you what happened out there? I’m going to ask you, why did they make me leave? I’m also going to ask you if you’re seeing all eight men in this unit? So, if there is anything that our Lennie-girl shouldn’t hear, say so now or answer me.” Turning to look at me, I nod at Lennie.

“Lennie isn’t a baby, Grandpa Brooks, and has every right to hear the answers to those questions. We made you leave because I’ve used you as a crutch ever since Max raped me. You’ve always been right there to catch me, sometimes before I even had a chance to fall. I love you, Dad, but you coddled me, and I allowed it to comfort me. I had, no, I needed to face him without you there. The guys and I had spoken about this, and they understood my reasoning. At the same time, I need

you to understand that I was never in any real danger. The guys were with me the entire time. I didn't know it for a fact, but it's like I could feel them. As for dating all eight men, no, I'm not."

Taking a minute to wipe the tears from my face and taking a deep breath, I continue.

"Jaxon, Kerrigan, Keegan, and I feel more like siblings than lovers. We've all agreed to have a platonic relationship. I'm dating Creed, Lennie's dad, Hunter, Dakota and Phoenix. Crow is the only one still missing, but he's on a mission. It's new for all of us and we're taking it day by day. Dad, for the first time in a very, very long time, I feel home. Just as important, I know I'm safe. I feel like I can spread my wings and honestly discover who I am. I'm not afraid anymore."

The smile my dad gives me fills my heart with understanding and faith. I know he's always tried to do right by me. Now, it's time for me to do right for myself.

"Yep, we are dating Lyn and we'll go at her pace. She's the boss." I can't help jumping and when I turn around, all four of them duck. "We may not always be the brightest light bulbs, but we know when to duck." We all burst out laughing so hard that tears were rolling down my face.

That's when I realized what I didn't do. "I didn't swing. You guys scared me. I jumped, but I didn't swing." The wonder I hear in my own voice makes me smile. I must have zoned more than I thought because I feel arms wrap around me. Opening my eyes, I see all my guys surrounding me. Looking

down, I can see and feel Lennie's arms wrap around my waist. Other than my dad, I can honestly say, for the first time ever, I truly feel loved and seen. This is perfect.



CHAPTER THIRTY-SIX

Creed

Waking up earlier than anyone else provides me with some thinking time. I hate to pull everyone from the break we've all been on for a couple of days, but we do have a company to start.

I'm hoping the guys were able to gather some intelligence about who and why this particular person needs our protection. The trip this person is taking seems like a simple meet, greet and return trip. So, what are we not being told? Either the guys know more, or we don't accept the job. It's that simple.

I also need to call Crow's CO. The last SITREP we got, Crow said he'd be home, out and here almost two weeks ago. Not one of us has heard anything different, and that's unacceptable.

"Penny for your thought." Son-of-a-bitch, Hunter, just scared the hell out of me. Goes to show how deep in thought I was.

"Hunter, are you trying to give me a fucking heart attack? Why the hell are you sneaking around, anyway?" He most likely wasn't sneaking.

“Sneaking? LT, you know I don’t have to sneak. Besides, you were so deep in thought a mouse could have scared you. Now, what has you so wrapped up in your own head this early in the morning?” Perceptive bastard.

The kitchen light being flipped on shows me he isn’t alone. Following him into the kitchen, I see Phoenix, Dakota and Brooks. I know my eyebrow is raised in curiosity and they all can see that.

“Creed, and before you say anything, Jaxon and the K brother’s are guarding our daughters, not that they need it now, but that’s beside the point.” As a dad, I know Brooks understands how I feel right now. The best I can do is offer him a smile and a nod.

Looking around the room only serves to pique my curiosity even more. “Someone want to fill me in on what’s going on or should I start guessing?” It takes a few minutes, but when Phoenix steps towards me and takes a seat across from me, I know it’s serious. I prepare myself and simply give him the go ahead nob.

“Last night, after the ladies and you went to bed, we all got to talking. There’s still one thing we can’t figure out.” Why do I have a feeling I’m not going to like where this leads? “How did Max know about Travis? He’d been in prison for a long time and knew nothing of her personal life or when she moved from her childhood home. He had no access to any computers. We checked. We also had a check run on Lyn to see if anyone

other than us had looked her up and that came back negative as well.” Shit, I was right. I’m not liking where this is going.

“Creed, son, there is no way he would have known about Travis. He told Max where she lived. When he arrived and found I was living in her old house, he asked where she was like he knew he wouldn’t find her. When I didn’t answer him, he went so crazy. The fucker killed my dogs. So, it begs the question: how the hell did he know? Ignore anything he spewed the other day and think about it.” Son-of-a-bitch, I don’t like the painting forming in my mind’s eye.

“So, what you’re saying is Max knew that Lyn wasn’t in the house anymore and that Brooks was. Brooks, Dad, you didn’t tell him about this place because inadvertently, Lyn did. She texted you her location and, in doing so, told Max. I believe you’re correct to be suspicious of how he knew what he did.”

Getting up, I walk over to the coffee pot, wondering who would have told Lyn’s attacker any information to help him find her. Just as important as, why? “Why, that’s what we need to focus on here.” Turning back to face everyone, I repeat what I said.

“Brother, no offense, but what fucking difference does it make? He’s dickless, ball-less and currently in the mental ward under medical observation. He’s not a threat to her or any other woman anymore.” Hunter, you’ve got to be the dumbest smart person I’ve ever met.

“Hunter, think about all that’s been said. Someone other than Max wants to hurt Lyn. They used Max, but now that he’s out

of the way...” There’s the look I was waiting for, understanding.

“So you’re saying she’s still in danger and no, I’m not asking, I’m clarifying. Then I would say there’s only two people that can possibly tell us who would want to hurt her.” We all turn and look at Brooks at the same time.

“I have no idea who would want to hurt her, especially using him. When this happened to her, the entire town was shocked and so angry. They had to move him out of state till the trial, for his safety. Actual lynch mobs formed, trying to get to him and hang him. We all fell in step with her, essentially.” The expression covering his face is easy to read. He still feels he didn’t protect her.

“Brooks, hold on a minute. You couldn’t have protected her from a danger no one knew existed. You have to stop blaming yourself.” Not many things scare me, but his expression does when he looks up at me.

“I hope and pray like hell you never have to experience what I did. The guilt has never gone away, and it’s never lightened off my shoulders. He fooled everyone. Worst part, he fooled me. So, whoever told him where to find her has to really hate her for some reason and I can’t help you with that because, as far as I know, everyone loves her.”

“Alright, if everyone loves her so much, is there someone that’s jealous of her? Jealous enough to want her taken out of the picture? Maybe even traumatize her enough that she’d take her own life? There has to be someone, and we need to figure

out who the hell it is.” Hearing an audible gasp. We all turn around to see Lyn standing in the door. Fuck.

Breaking eye contact with me, she looks right at her dad and says the one name no one would have ever considered in a million years. “Bianca.”



CHAPTER THIRTY-SEVEN

Brooklyn

My dad clearing his throat breaks the silence. “Brooklyn Dawn Lacey, you better have a damn good reason for accusing your sister of something so heinous.” Well, there’s a first time for everything and him defending Bianca and raising his voice to me is definitely one of those times. There’s actual anger in his eyes.

“Dad, you can’t be serious? You really don’t know all the shit she’s pulled on me over the years, do you?” There’s no point keeping this shit secret anymore. “Did you know the day I was released from the hospital after the attack, Bianca started calling me a whore? She told me I shouldn’t have led him on and not expected him to take what he needed. That the entire situation was my fucking fault. She’s an evil, narcissistic bitch. I can see by your expression you didn’t know. She would also take some of my things. When she first started, she knew I couldn’t just get up and stop her.”

He’s starting to look pissed, and that’s not what I need right now. What I need is for him to understand why I’m convinced it’s her that wants to see me broken. “There has to be more

than that if you're leveling that kind of accusation against your sister. I get that she's already betrayed you because of fucking Travis, but this, this is really serious."

Looking him in the eyes, it almost hurts that he'd question me. "Sadly, I do. Do you know why I only ever attempted to date Marc and Travis? No? It was because any time Bianca found out I liked someone or might even be getting that person's attention, she'd fuck them. She's the whore, not me. Every time anyone would show me attention, she'd cause issues, so I kept to my damned self."

I see the anger, the regret written all over my dad's face. Just as obviously as the mask he blindly wears being ashamed. He's convinced that I was hurt because he didn't protect me. How can you protect someone from a danger no one saw? You can't, simple as that.

It seemed like Bianca lived to make my life a living version of hell on earth. She verbally abused me for a long time, I didn't have the strength to defend myself. The first time I snatched her up by her hair after calling me a whore, she learned not to fuck with me anymore. At least not directly.

"Dad, listen. Some years ago, Bianca told her then boyfriend she had to stay home to be with me because I was still scared to be alone. I didn't think anything of it, because she was always using me in some sort of lie to cover her ass. Anyway, when he left, I swear it wasn't two minutes later a truck pulled up with a couple of guys I'd never seen before. I tried to warn her, even physically tried to stop her from getting into the

truck with them. She yelled at me, told me I wasn't her mom. She wasn't afraid of a man's touch and that she was earning great money. Dad, Bianca's a professional call girl and has been for years."

I hate the look on his face, but I need to finish this. I'm not a petty or vindictive person. I do believe it's Bianca. Walking over to him and kneeling in front of him, I take one of his fisted hands in mine. Taking a deep breath, I gather myself as well as ready myself for the bomb I'm about to drop.

"When I caught Travis fucking Bianca, I wasn't honestly shocked. I was pissed, but not shocked. Travis was yet another thing in my life that was predictable and, therefore, not a challenge. Anyway, remember how I posted the pictures and the video of them everywhere I could and then called her so-called boyfriend and told him? You remember all that?" Deep breath, time for the bomb drop.

"A couple of weeks later, she showed up at my house. Someone, most likely one of her customers, had beaten the shit out of her. I brought her in the house, cleaned her up, begged her to stop and then I threatened to tell you and mom, but mostly you. I haven't forgotten what she said to me that day.

'You don't fucking get it Brooklyn. Maybe if Max would have fucked you better, you would. It's your fucking fault I do what I do. You had and still have everyone's attention. Everyone walks on eggshells around poor Brooklyn.' What about me, Brooklyn? What the fuck about me? No one gave a damn

about me, that's what. So you know what? Fuck you, fuck Dad and fuck anyone else that thinks I'm wrong. When Max gets out. I hope he finds you, fucks you and finishes killing you, because you've been half dead since you were fifteen'.”

After a couple of minutes, Phoenix is the one that breaks the silence. “Lyn, are you sure she said ‘*when Max gets out*’? That would mean she knew something was going to happen. If anyone is reading this differently, please speak up.”

Quickly peering around the room, everyone seems to be in a stunned silence. When I feel my dad squeeze my hand, I look back at him. “Lyn, I never meant to hurt either one of you. I think I was so blinded by my own shame and guilt that I was oblivious to anything happening with Bianca. I can’t imagine the anger she’s filled with because of my actions.” Oh, no he doesn’t.

“Dad, I’m calling bullshit right there. Did you coddle me? Yeah, yeah you did. Was it the best course to take? No, but you didn’t know that then. God knows you only ever wanted to see me smile and don’t think you didn’t shower Bianca with love, affection and the occasional gifts. The best I can say is Bianca is a mini Mom and you know, deep in your heart, that she feels the same way Bianca does. Not necessarily wanting me hurt again, but the jealousy over your attention always seeming to be on me.”

“We can’t just let this go as a family squabble, Brooks. I’m sorry, but this has to be pursued. If it’s proven that Bianca was Max’s point of contact, she’ll be arrested and charged with at

least accessory. We made you a promise that we'd protect Lyn. That also means protecting her from her own family if need be." Oh shit, Creed, did you have to say it like that?

Before I could get a word out, my dad was up and in Creed's face. Creed wasn't backing down either. Thankfully, the other guys didn't move. Neither Creed or my dad are saying a damn thing, and that's almost worse than them yelling at each other. They're locked in a stare down. Shit.

Standing up, I slowly walk over to stand beside them. I feel a pair of arms reach around my waist and at first I'm confused till I see it's Hunter and the others have slightly repositioned themselves. In case this does lead to a fight, I'll be pulled out of the way. I understand it; I don't like it, but understand it.

Keeping my voice soft, "Daddy, you don't want to do this. You know Creed didn't mean that the way you took it. Remember when you'd protect me from Mom? He means it in a similar way. Only this time, if it was Bianca, she could have gotten you and me killed. Dad, please look at me?"

When he turns his head, locking eyes with me, we both broke at the same time and my guys were there to catch us both. Embracing each other in mutually tight hugs, we both cried.



CHAPTER THIRTY-EIGHT

Brooks

I don't want to admit what I'm hearing is possible. My heart is shattering all over again. I still hold the weight of guilt for not protecting Lyn from Max. Could I have been so attentive to her that I neglected Bianca so much as to make her hate her own sister and me? What have I done?

Pulling back from Lyn, I take my hands and gently wipe away her tears. Looking around at her guys, I can see their tension ease. Turning to face Creed, I know I need to apologize for going toe to toe with him over what I took personally as a threat.

“Creed, please forgive an old man for being a fool. I know in my heart you didn't mean it the way my mind took it and I appreciate you being protective of our girl. It's just hard to fathom Bianca being so twisted as to endanger her sis and me. It seems I've let both my girls down.”

Looking down at my shoes, I know I'm full of shame, regret, remorse and guilt. There isn't really a damn thing I can do about any of it, either. “Hold on there, Dad. There's no reason for you to hang your head that way. Both of your daughters are

adults and if Bianca had or has issues with you or Lyn, she should have brought them to your attention and tried to work matters out. She is the one that chose the path she's on and apparently has been on for sometime."

"Dad, Creed's right and if you look around the room, you'll see others that are agreeing with him. That includes me. I've always been able to talk to you about anything, and you gave Bianca the same invitation. The only difference is I took you up on the invitation, where she didn't."

I know they're right, but that doesn't really make any of this any better. I just want to walk away from all of this and make it all disappear. This is definitely one of those situations where ignoring the problem won't help the situation.

"I need a break. I know this isn't over by a long shot, but I need a break. How about we have some coffee and some breakfast? Plus, if I'm remembering correctly, Lennie should be down soon. She'll need breakfast and then be taken to her bus stop."

Walking over to the coffee pot, I place the half full decanter on the warmer and prep the coffee maker to brew another pot. Lyn catches my attention when she walks behind me and opens the fridge.

No one says anything while Lyn and I cook breakfast. I've already made my new granddaughter's fruit and yogurt smoothie. I can't bring myself to try one, but it does smell good and is loaded with healthy stuff. If she's going to have a daily addiction, at least it's a healthy addiction.



After having a quiet breakfast and seeing Lennie off to school, I leave the kitchen for some thinking space and time. Deciding I need time in the new office building, I grab an ATV and drive up the driveway. Arriving at our new office, I hadn't realized Hunter had even left the kitchen. "Hey, brother, I didn't know you were here. What's up?"

I swear that when he turns around and locks eyes with me, I freeze. "LT, the job we've been offered, say no. I don't understand what the hell is going on, but something isn't right in Dodge, if you get my meaning." I can always count on Hunter to tell it how he sees it.

"Were you able to find out any details? Like, who are we guarding? Who is this person meeting? How long is the meeting scheduled for? I mean, any information at all?" Well, fuck me. His face just hardened pretty damn quick.

"We all know the Old Man. We all know or should remember he stated he would, '*see us later*'. Well, now we know why. Creed, I'm telling you, something isn't right. His itinerary is so blacked out I'm surprised they even bothered to put anything on paper. He personally requested us for his protection detail. Why? Why would he use our team *and* wait until we're no longer on active duty to make this trip?" Now I understand why he looks the way he does.

“Hunter, let’s have a seat. I know the others will be here shortly. Once everyone is here, we can discuss this more. I will say I’m finding the entire situation as suspicious as you are.” The only thing I can think of to distract myself is making some coffee. I think I’m drinking more coffee now that I’m out of the military.

Walking over to the small coffee bar, I grab up everything and make a fresh pot of coffee. Once that pot is done, I set it on the top warmer and begin the process once again. I love this Bunn. Not only does it make coffee quickly, but because of the temperature of the water, it gives the coffee a true roast smell and taste. It can also keep two pots warm at the same time.

Glancing over, I double check that I’d left the office door open. I double and then triple checked the door for a couple of reasons. First, no one can surprise anyone else. We all agreed to work on and be more considerate of each other’s PTSD triggers. Two, knowing there would be ten people in this room, it needs air flow. As everyone starts to walk in, I point to the coffee bar. Once everyone makes their coffee or grabs water bottles out of the little fridge, they take a seat around the room.

I’m glad we invested in the ATVs for getting from the house to the main office. We still need to officially name it, but we have a basic license to run for now. We can deal with that later. Right now, we have shit to short out.

“Before I share what information Hunter managed to gather, were any of you able to gather any details on this job we’ve been offered?” Looking around the room, I can see damn near

the same expression on all of their faces, except Brooks and Lyn, of course.

“Creed, you know if there’s information out there, we’ll find it and follow any other trails that information may lead to. Having said that, something isn’t right with this situation. We all found the exact same information no matter what route we went. Each of us even went as far as to have all the blacked out areas on each page, revealed.” We’ve never gone that far before.

“Phoenix, are you going to leave me guessing or are you going to tell me what information the blacked out sections contained?” For fuck’s sake, just spill it.

“Creed, you know I don’t play games. That’s the thing. There was no information to be blacked out. It’s like they blacked out the section for the purpose of making people assume it’s been classified, but it’s blank. None of us can figure out the end game here and not one of us likes this. I know what my gut is telling me, but I’d like to hear what the other’s have to say first.” What in the hell is the Old Man up to and who the hell sanctioned this?

“Look, all I can say is everything about this smells like some kind of setup. I can’t say what kind or even who’s setting us up. “Is it the Old Man, us or us and the Old Man? All I know is I don’t like it. As long as we’ve all been together, we’ve never walked into something this blind before and I don’t believe we should start now. I vote we pass it up.” When

Phoenix has a gut feeling, there's never been one time we've gone against it.

“Alright, from what I'm seeing, everyone feels the same way. I'll respond by email that we're not interested in this protection detail at this time. Before I do, does anyone have anything else to say about the matter?”

I almost want to laugh at Lyn for raising her hand. “Lyn, this isn't a classroom in school, babe. You can speak up.”

“We all know I'm not military, but aren't any of you the least bit curious as to why this ‘Old Man’ as you all call him, is going to these extremes? I know I am. Think about it from an outsider's point of view. Some military person gives you what I'm assuming is a fake top-secret document. Don't look at me like that. Seriously, no real itinerary and this person wants to travel overseas for a meeting? Seems sketchy as shit to me.” When she shrugs her shoulders like what she just said was no big deal, we all chuckle at ourselves.

Phoenix walks over to Lyn and squats in front of her. “We were all looking at you like that because none of us were thinking of it quite that way. I honestly figured he was using military funds for a rendezvous or something similar. I didn't think of anything else till you said what you did.” Standing up, he walks back over to lean on the front of my desk.

“Lyn has a valid point and my own arrogance kept me from seeing it. For all we know, he could be committing espionage, treason or God knows what. So now we have another issue.” I didn't realize we were all giving him the same expression until

he snapped at all of us. “Don’t fucking look at me like that and listen. What happens if he is up to something and we could have prevented it? We may not be active duty anymore, but my oath didn’t end when I received my DD214. I say we dig deeper and use our connections and back channels. We know where he’s landing in Germany, so start connecting with your people over there.”

Part of me hates the fact that Brooklyn and Phoenix are actually correct and the other part of me is impressed that our girl thought of it in the first place. “Alright, Hunter, I want a tap all of his tech shit. Phoenix, make your phone calls, dig deep and then go deeper. Keegan, Kerrigan, Jaxon and Dakota, I want eyes on him at all times. Everyone has their orders. Report back tonight after Lennie is in bed.”

Lyn barks out. “Make sure you’re all home at six for dinner. Dinner is about Lennie’s day, so make sure you all ask her something about it.”



CHAPTER THIRTY-NINE

Brooks

Watching everyone walk out of Creed's office to do their assigned tasks in their own offices. I know Creed has things to do, but I need to speak with him. Taking a deep breath, I brace myself. "Creed, I know you're busy, but can I have a word with you, please?"

Lyn and Creed both look at me with big smiles. "Brooks, you never have to ask to speak with me, but please, what's on your mind?"

Here goes everything. "First, I want to take the opportunity to thank you for everything you've done. Whether you did it for Lyn, myself, or both, thank you. Second, and just as important, I don't want to leave. I know Lyn is capable of doing her job without me being around. I don't want to interfere with her life or the relationships she's forming..." Creed and Lyn laughing was the last thing I expected.

"Dad, we've all already spoken about this. As a matter of fact, Creed and I wanted to speak with you. How about I refill our coffees and Creed can speak with you?" Her smile has never

been brighter since she met these men and that little girl. I really am happy for her.

“This is a hundred percent truthful. Before everything with Max, we had all spoken about asking you to move onto the property. There are four empty cottages and you can choose which one you want. We’d like you to take charge of the property as Property Manager. You’ll have access to an account strictly for the upkeep and maintenance of the property. You’ll be paid and have the available funds to hire a staff to work for you. You’ll be the boss. What do you say?”

I can’t blink, I can’t speak. Hell, I can’t move. I know I have a coffee mug in my hand with fresh coffee in it, but I don’t remember taking it from Lyn. “Dad, are you alright? You look kind of shocked.”

“Well, I guess I’m shocked. In a good way, but yeah, I’m shocked and I accept. I’d be a damn fool to turn down that kind of offer. Besides having a dream job, being close to Lyn, I have a granddaughter to be around for now. Creed, son, I don’t even know what to say except thank you so much.”

“Brooks, Dad, did you really think I’d let the first person my daughter chose for a grandparent to just walk away only to see her on holidays? No, sir, I can’t do that to her, or to Lyn. Not only that, but to be honest, we all could use a positive father figure. Also, Lyn told us you’re a jack of all trades and a master of some. When can you move in?”

I feel like I’m going to explode with excitement. “Is right now too soon?” I must have said something right, because we all

burst out laughing.

“Now is perfect. I know you have things back there to handle before you complete your relocation. I was thinking that I would send Keegan and Kerrigan to escort you back, help you pack what you want and or need. Once you get everything you need accomplished, the three of you can head back. Will a week be enough time?” He is such a great guy.

“That’s probably more time than I need, but it does give room in case there’s some unexpected events. I know the brother’s have the cabin on the farthest parcel of land and that Jaxon has one in the middle. Would it be alright if I took the cabin closest to the main house and garage? I’d like to be close enough that Lennie can come see me if, and when, she wants to.” Well, that made both of their smiles brighten.

That’s when it dawns on me who he’s sending with me. “Wait a minute. Don’t you need all your men here to investigate the job you all have been offered?” I don’t want to be a nuisance.

“Not more than helping you move back here and watching over you. You’re not just an employee, you’re family. We protect our own. I would feel better with them with you so that Dean character doesn’t get any dumb ideas. If for no other reason, humor me and play along for Lyn’s sake.” He would go there.

“That’s low, Creed. Smart, but low. Laugh it up, both of you. Just remember, I’m essentially moving in. I do appreciate the help, though.”

I won't admit I'm glad I'll have company because I don't want to have to deal with Dean. I know he'll be kept away from me. I'll also call the Sheriff to let him know what's going on.

The look on Lyn's face has me concerned, but not necessarily on alert. "What if Bianca tries to do something to you? How do you protect yourself from your own daughter?"

I know Bianca isn't perfect, and she was spoiled by her mother, but setting her own sister up? "Lyn, I want you to table this. I can't even imagine your sister stooping to that low of a level. Yes, she's spoiled and very self-entitled, but what happened to you back then and what could have happened this time, I can't... I can't go there."

I was about to explain that my gut was arguing with my heart when a phone starts ringing. It sounded like it was in the same room, but muffled at the same time. Watching Creed, he was back behind his desk, opening a drawer before I could blink. When he lifts his hand, he has what I'd imagine a satellite phone would look like.

"Creed. SITREP." I never served in the military, but anyone can understand he's asking for a situational report. I just don't know who he's asking it from.

"Roger that. Give twenty minutes for return. Lie low, watch for call." Watching his body tense up makes me do the same.

Deciding to act on my own. I walk over to Creed's office door and yell out, "Guys, Creed needs you all, stat. Move it."



CHAPTER FORTY

Brooklyn

While I was listening to Creed speaking with someone, I hear Dad call for the guys. I didn't even realize Dad had gotten up, much less walked right in front of me to the door. Creed doesn't look happy with whatever Crow is saying.

When he hangs up, he looks even more stressed. Dad and I moved and are sitting on the side of the office. Creed's pacing back and forth behind his desk. Neither of us says a word and he only stops when the guys come jogging into the office.

When he turns to face the guys, they freeze and seem to take on a uniformed stance. Military training at its finest. Creed leans on his desk and clears his throat.

"Listen up, take a seat. We only have approximately fifteen minutes. Crow just called on the satellite phone and nothing he said was good. The situation is this; He has no clue where he is. He was hurt badly enough to lose consciousness and assumes he was transported during that time. He doesn't know what they did, but he's light sensitive." I don't know what they could have done to him to cause that, but I guess we'll figure that out when we get him home.

“Creed, how the fuck are we going to rescue him when he doesn’t know where he is? Wait, you said he called the satellite phone. We can trace any call coming into it. So getting to him shouldn’t be an issue. I don’t get what the issue is?” Here we go.

“Hunter, he said he’s being hunted. A small group has been trying to catch him and he says, kill him for over two weeks. He hasn’t tried to get a hold of us any sooner because he knew he was being closely tracked. He said he knows he’s managed to lose them, but also said he expects them to find him or catch up to him relatively quickly. We have eight minutes.”

“I need everyone on your equipment and ready to begin the trace the moment he picks up. He has the ringer off but is watching for its ring. Nothing else is more important than getting our last man home.”

The look that Creed gives my dad when they make eye contact is palpable. Dad immediately begins to shake his head no.

“Son, get that look off your face. No explanation is needed. He’s your brother and needs all of you. Get him home. I’m not going anywhere. If you need me to do anything, just tell me and I’m there.” Creed gave him a nod and I think he was about to say something till Phoenix spoke up.

“Two minutes, Creed. We’re all set up. Get ready to make the call. No matter where he is, the max it should take us to get to him is twenty-four hours. Reassure him and find out what we need to bring for him. Once we get him home, we can figure

out what was done to him. One minute.” When he picks up the phone, he takes a deep breath and calls Crow back.

“Brother, placing you on speaker. Everyone is in position to track and then rescue.” Short and to the point, but then I guess nothing more needs to be said.

“I don’t know what the fuck they did to me, but day light and even strong artificial lights are not my friends. They literally cause me physical pain. Tell the ball sacks to hurry the fuck up and find me. I’m over this shit and want to come home.”

I don’t know what Crow normally sounds like, but he has a very deep and scratchy voice. I almost burst out laughing when I see the guys’ response to being called ‘*ball sacks*’.

“Your brothers all flipped you off. We hired a nanny for Lennie, and boy, do we have a story about that for you. You’ll have to get your vacationing ass home if you’d like to meet her and hear the story of her kicking all of the A-Teams asses as well as other things.” He’s coughing, and it doesn’t sound like a normal cough to me.

I think Creed’s trying to distract him while the guys run their trace to find him. I think the best thing I can do is stay quiet unless I’m goaded into talking.

“Yeah, well, you all are slow as shit. So I don’t doubt a woman put you all on your asses.”

“Crow, I’ll put you on your ass too, babe. Don’t think I won’t.” Well, I was going to stay quiet.

“Awe, sweetheart, I don’t fight with women. There’s no challenge in it and it’s not a fair fight. I’m faster than you, as well as stronger than you.” All I want to do is tell him those that stir the shit pot will be forced to lick the spoon.

“I hate to break up this blossoming love affair, but we have a location. He’s in fucking Canada, of all places. He’s about ten clicks from the border. I don’t know what the hell you’re doing up there, but you need to head South-Southeast. You’ll hit Oak Island, or at least see it before you know it. Get on that island.”

Hunter is already starting to flip the hell out because he can’t be in on this rescue. He’s still not 100%. “Hunter, chill the fuck out. Dakota, Phoenix, grab Jaxon, Keegan and Kerrigan and go get him. Crow, hunker down and stay safe, your brothers should be there in about four to five hours. What do they need to bring with them?”

“Blood bags. I’m pretty sure I’ve lost blood or something. Just don’t ask, just bring them. We can figure out everything when I get there.” I can tell Crow was about to say something when we all heard a commotion on the other end. Crow cursing and the line goes dead. No one moves for a split second.

“Don’t just fucking stand there, go get him. Move your asses and keep in contact. Go!”

I can’t believe I just snapped at all of them, but they had to get out of the temporary stupor they were all in. Now, I guess it’s a waiting game.

Watching Creed walk over to his desk, and plop his ass in his desk chair, we lock eyes. “Now, all we can do is wait. I don’t want Lennie knowing anything about Crow being in danger or possibly hurt. I hate the idea of her worrying when there isn’t a damn thing we can do about it.”



CHAPTER FORTY-ONE

Crow

Mother fucking shit! No matter how fast I run, I swear they're able to keep up with me. What the absolute-fuck? I can smell the water, so I know I have to be close to being able to cross to Oak Island. Most people won't step foot on that damn island, calling it a cursed island.

Curses, yeah right. Just like werewolves, unicorns, fairies and witches are real. I may have issues due to the life I've chosen to live, but I haven't lost my sense of reality. People crack me up when they start talking about the paranormal.

I would be so screwed having to travel during the day if it wasn't for being darker than normal due to being overcast. The high grass also helps. When I break through the tall grass, my foot hits water. I thought the water would be seriously fucking cold, but it doesn't feel cold at all.

Submerging my body into the water, I go as deep as I can while still being able to breathe. My nose, ears, eyes and forehead are all that's out of the water. As quietly as I can, I swim across the water. The ball sacks didn't bother telling me the island's about a half a mile from the shoreline. Assholes.

The moment I hear voices again, I stop swimming across the water. I slowly lower myself into the water till all that's possibly visible is the top of my head till right below my nose. Being as still as I can, I don't even try to see who's after me. I just try to avoid them.

By the looks of the sky, I've been sitting in this water for over an hour. Why the fuck are these guys so hell bent on capturing me or killing me? I hate having blank spots in my damn memory. Once the voices fade off into the distance, I resume moving toward the island.

Making landfall fills me with mixed emotions. I'm relieved to be out of the damn water, but I also feel exposed to whoever's hunting me. Tucking myself into some trees, all I can do is wait for the calvary to show up.

I'm not sure if I fell asleep or just zoned out, but the sound of movement and whispering quickly drew my attention. It only took me a second to focus on the voices and realize I was hearing Dakota. Releasing a spurt of short whistles, I knew they would know it's me and follow the sound.

After another twenty minutes, I hear my name as light as a whisper in the wind. Releasing a quick pssst sound, I brace myself just in case I'm wrong about it being Dakota. It doesn't take long for me to see the guys walking damn near past me. I didn't move till I saw them stop, look around and then turn as one to look right at me.

"Damn, brother, you look like you've died and came back to say hi." Dakota's such an ass, accurate, but an ass

nonetheless.

“That would imply I missed you ball sacks and I still have my sanity, so we know that’s not the case. Now stop fucking around and get me the hell home.” I feel like I can breathe for the first time in a couple of weeks.

“Brother, are you sure you had people following you? We saw no footprints. Hell, we didn’t even see any prints from you. Is it that you were able to shake them when you entered the water or something?” I’m not fucking crazy, damn it.

“Phoenix, I know damn well I was being chased. There had to be at least ten of them and you’re telling me none of you found one footprint?” Looking at each of them as they shake their head no, I’m starting to feel a bit paranoid.



Finding Crow was as easy as finding a single blueberry among a couple of raspberries. There’s no evidence anywhere that he was being followed, much less chased or hunted down. Nothing about this situation is making any sense.

While he’s talking to Dakota, it gives me a few minutes to look him over. He literally looks like the physical manifestation of death. He’s pale as shit. His crystal blue eyes look too sharp and bright. That even sounds odd to me, but it’s true.

I think the best thing for us to do would be to get him back to the security office and to Creed. Something about him and this situation isn't right, and I don't like it.

“Alright, we need to get our asses back to the house. There's a lot to fill you in on, Crow, and I can guarantee it'll take damn near the entire trip back to explain everything.”

Putting my hand out, I wait for Crow to grip it to help him off the ground. When he takes my hand, I swear to fuck I thought he was going to break it. He tightened his grip around my hand so tight I couldn't help releasing a yelp once he's on his feet.

“Mother fucker. What the hell, man? Did you really have to damn near break my fucking hand to get your ass up off the ground?”

Shaking my hand out to help the feeling return to my fingers, I give Crow a serious go to hell look. “Damn, brother, I'm sorry. I didn't mean to squeeze like that. Honestly, it felt like a normal hand grip to me.”

Giving Dakota the go ahead, he takes the lead. Our group falls into line and I set myself to walk directly behind Crow. I'm not normally a suspicious person, but something isn't right here. I'm not letting him out of my sight till we get back to the house.

No matter what, he didn't ask for the blood he said he needed. Setting that aside, how the hell would he know he needed blood? I haven't seen any physical wounds on him. He does look dehydrated, anemic and tired.

I don't know what's really going on, but I will find out. I've never considered Crow a danger to anyone, but we've never had a relationship like we've recently started. He's to go nowhere without someone with him. At least till he seems more himself and less like the walking dead.



CHAPTER FORTY-TWO

Hunter

After waiting in the office for a few hours, Brooks went exploring to pick out which cabin he'd like to live in. We know he said he wants the cabin closest to the house to be closer to the main house for Lennie, but we want him to be sure.

With him out of the office, that leaves Lyn, Creed, and myself. There's a tension in the air and I'm not quite sure what it's from. I know the stretch and moan that Lyn releases makes my cock jump. Hell, even Creed looks over at me and raises an eyebrow.

We have hours till the guys return home with Crow. When Lyn lets out another noise that makes my cock jump, I can't take it anymore. "Lyn, if you keep making noises like that, one of us is going to fuck your pussy while the other fucks your mouth."

"If you're going to throw out a threat like that, I hope you're ready to follow through."

I look from Lyn to Creed and then back to Lyn. I know my smirk is matching Creed's. We're both thinking the same thing

because we both lift ourselves out of our chairs and walk over to Lyn, stopping right in front of her.

Holding out my hand, Lyn places her's over mine. Closing my hand, I carefully pull her out of her chair, placing her body flush with mine. Creed walks behind her, pressing his body against her. "Baby, this happens with you leading, or it doesn't happen at all. Neither of us want to scare you."

"Then I suggest someone lock the door. Then, to be honest, I really need to see the both of you naked. As you both take off your clothes, I'll take mine off. Sounds fair?"

Hell yeah, it sounds fair. Creed and I can only nod. Creed releases Lyn, walks over, and locks the doors. The blackout blinds are down, so no worries about someone peeking in. Stepping back from Lyn, Creed reaches me and stands beside me. As if we choreographed it, we both remove our Henleys.

I don't have to look at Creed to know his eyes match mine, totally glued to Lyn. When she removes her tank top, we both release moans of delight. Creed and I both reach down and step out of our shoes.

Her giggles make Creed and I chuckle. When we undo our belts, I nearly come in my pants, seeing Lyn lick her lips. I raise an eyebrow as she looks me in my eyes and winks. Before we could get our pants off, Lyn was sliding her leggings and panties down her thighs.

We both freeze when she stands up and we realize she's standing there completely naked. "Oh my god, Lyn, you're mouth watering and pure perfection."

“Well said, Creed. Lyn, stay right there, baby.”

Creed and I don't hesitate to remove the rest of our clothes as quickly as possible. When we're standing there in full view of Lyn, I have to say I'm loving the lusty look on her face. Creed and I walk over to her, slowly forcing her to back up to Creed's desk.

“I want you two in every way possible. Be gentle, but not too gentle.” That's all I was needing to hear.

“Lyn, I want you to turn and face Creed. Creed, why don't you stand to the side of your desk, making this gorgeous body lay across it to suck your dick? I'm going to take a knee and eat some pretty pussy. Spread those gorgeous legs, baby.”

The smile on Creed's face tells me he's following what I'm doing. When she lays across his desk, I move her ass to the side, angling her and separating her legs a bit more. Running my hand down her back and over her ass, I give her a light tap.

“You ready, baby?”

As my fingers slide down her ass and between her folds, her gasp of pleasure speaks volumes. Hearing another gasp, I look up to see Creed's fingers entwined in her hair while sliding her mouth down his cock. Kneeling behind her, I bury my face between her thighs and ass cheeks to get to her sweet pussy.

When she clenches her thighs around my head, I'm loving it. Slipping my tongue through her lips, I tease her entrance till her moans and clenching tells me she's close. I can tell it's been a while since she's been touched. Slipping a finger just

inside her heated core, I focus my tongue on her clit. Using my lips to suck it into my mouth as I finger fuck her.

As she pushes back onto my finger to get it to go deeper, I slip a second finger inside, curling them as I suck on her clit. Feeling her walls tighten around my finger and hearing her moans of pleasure makes my cock start to leak. She cums, drenching my tongue, my fingers, and my face.

Slowly withdrawing my fingers and mouth from her delicious pussy, I stand up, placing the head of my cock in her entrance; I don't get a chance to seat myself slowly into her. She pushes back so hard and fast she damn near takes me off my feet.

Giving her a smack, I slam into her with control. Bending over her back, placing my mouth next to her ear, with my cock balls deep, "Lyn, you need to be a good girl."

Looking up at Creed, "Brother, fuck her or I'm going to. I'm not going to last much longer." No problem there, Creed. No problem at all.



I've never done anything like this before and oh my god what I've been missing. Creed's fucking my mouth while Hunter fucks my pussy and I can't. Oh, my god. Breaking suction on Creed, there's no stopping the scream of pleasure when I cum around Hunter's dick.

As he's pounding into me, I'm stroking Creed faster and faster. "Hu-Hunter, please don't stop. Yes, yes, yes." Hearing Hunter grunt and call out my name sends me into another orgasm. How the hell? Wow.

I've always wanted to do this. I hope Creed doesn't get mad. When Hunter guides his dick out of me, I quickly move around his desk, hop up on it and lay down, offering myself to him. He doesn't hesitate to take advantage of my spread legs.

He steps up to me, feeling the head of his dick slide into me, I was nervous I wouldn't cum anymore. God, does he feel good and makes me feel full like Hunter did. Creed raises my legs to rest against his chest.

He wraps his hands around my thighs and starts fucking me and damn, is he amazing.

"Creed, please, don't st-stop. Oh fuck, yeah. Oh, Creed!" I've never had anyone pinch my clit and make me cum that hard. Jesus, I saw stars.

"Baby, Lyn, I can't last. Oh, fuck me, yeah!" I could feel him cum deep inside me, and it felt amazing. I've never cum this many times. My heart is racing and I really need to catch my breath.

"Lyn, are you alright baby? We didn't scare you or anything, did we?" There's no controlling my giggles.

"If that's y'all's version of scaring me, please feel free to scare the hell out of me a lot." Hearing them both chuckle is great.

“Not that I want to ruin the amazing moment we just shared, but I’d like a shower and to be dressed before my dad gets back.” I really hope he’s still out on the property. It’s not like we took hours. We were all too excited for that, I’m thinking.

That’s all it took for us to grab our clothes while laughing. Creed grabs a phone and we leave his office, running downstairs into the gym to clean up and put our clothes back on.

Once I’m finished washing, drying off and getting clothes on, I get a toe curling kiss from each of them. As Hunter and I separate, the phone Creed’s carrying rings.

Listening to Creed’s side of the conversation, I can tell they’re already on their way back. He’s giving Hunter some hand signals, and he takes my hand, leaning into my ear.

“Creed wants us to go to the office. We’d wanted to lie down with you and cuddle, but that’s going to have to wait. I hope you’re not mad at us.”

By the time I’m about to respond to Hunter, Creed hangs up the phone. Perfect timing. “No, I’m not mad. I completely understand. Your brothers will be home soon with a missing brother that’s likely to be hurt. He’s more important than me getting cuddles.”

At that point, I take the initiative and start walking upstairs, heading straight for Creed’s office. By the time the guys catch up with me and we enter the office, my dad is sitting there sipping on a cup of coffee.

Looking up as we enter, Dad has a smile of absolute contentment on his face. Not completely sure what that's about, but I won't deny it's nice to see.



CHAPTER FORTY-THREE

Creed

Walking into the office behind Hunter and Lyn, we all see Dad sitting there, happy as pig in shit. “Hey dad, what’s got that big smile on your face?”

He looks up at me like I’ve just asked the world’s dumbest question. “Well, son, to be completely honest, I walked a lot of this gorgeous property. I went exploring through the cabin that will soon be mine or is mine and I love it. Oh, and last but definitely not least, my daughter has one hell of a smile on her face. I haven’t seen one of her smiles reach her eyes in a very long time.”

Well, I’d like to think Hunter and I had something to do with that, but I’ll just keep that bit of news to myself. “Phoenix called and said they’re not that far out with Crow. Hunter, Lyn, why don’t you two have a seat because there’s more to say that you two didn’t hear.”

I don’t like this and something has the hairs on the back of my neck standing up, but I’ll guess we’ll find out soon enough. “When I was talking to Phoenix, he told me that something’s

off with Crow. He said that Crow looks like death warmed over but has the strength of a bodybuilder.”

I know that look on Hunter’s face, but he’s not understanding me yet. “Hunter, wait and listen. Phoenix said he placed his hand out to help Crow off the ground and Crow damn near broke his hand. You know Phoenix is not one to exaggerate a damn thing. He said it was as if Crow’s unfamiliar with his own body.”

Hell, even I feel like I’m not making any sense. “Creed, maybe it’s because he’s been running for his life for damn near two weeks. We’d probably look dead as well. He needs rest is all, and then he’ll be back to his pain in the ass ways.”

“I’m not so sure about that, and neither is Phoenix. He actually told me that his gut was telling him not to turn his back on Crow. That Crow isn’t lying about his skin’s sensitivity to the sun and the bright ambient lighting. It’s obvious he’s dehydrated, yet won’t drink any water. He doesn’t look physically wounded. No one has any idea why he asked them to bring him bags of blood. He hasn’t even asked for them. The entire situation isn’t sitting well with Phoenix or myself.”

I don’t know what’s going on, but I don’t think I want Brooks and Lyn in here when they arrive with him. Talking about a few other things, I make a point of pointing out that Lennie will be home soon.

“If it’s alright, I thought Lyn and I could grab Lennie from her bus stop and run into town? I promised Lennie pizza and a slushie. I should have asked first, but I’m still a new

grandfather, so I think I should get a little leeway. Plus, that'll get us out of the way when all your men get home and Crow won't be overwhelmed."

Smiling at Brooks and Lyn, it's like he could read my mind. "I don't know if it's because you're a dad or you're a mind reader, but either way, I'd be grateful if you got and kept our ladies out of the house for a bit."

When Brooks jumps up like he's struck it rich, Lyn and I both laugh at him. "Well then, we'll all be back in a couple of hours. We'll also bring back enough pizzas for eleven people."

Walking over and giving Lyn a kiss and patting Brooks on the back of the shoulder, helps to lift a weight off my shoulders. She kisses Hunter and then they're out the door and off to get Lennie and head to town. Thank God, that gives us at least two hours.

Hearing the door close, I call out to see if they've really left the building. When I get no response, I focus on what's coming. "Hunter, I don't want to think this way, but we should prepare one of the cells for Crow. I trust Phoenix, and more than that, I trust his judgment that Crow's either hiding something or truly doesn't know what's going on with his own body."

Between Hunter and myself, we each made two trips from the room where we put Crow's stuff in the house to the cell downstairs in the office building. This doesn't make either of us happy, but it is what it is and hopefully Crow understands.

Sitting back in the office, Hunter and I are sipping on bottles of water when I realize we have about an hour before the ladies and Brooks are back. No sooner do I finish that thought and we hear a vehicle pull up right beside the office. Turning and peeking out of the blackout shade, I see it's the guys. Releasing the shade, I look at Hunter.

"I just saw Crow and, if anything, Phoenix didn't say he was bad enough. Crow looks worse than the walking dead. Brace yourself. My gut tells me this isn't going to go well."

We may look relaxed when the guys start filing into the room, but we're far from it. "Damn, Crow-man, what the fuck happened to you? Man, if death had an actual ID, it would have a picture of your ass on it."

Way to go Hunter, for fuck's sake, why not throw the guy under the bus tires? "Hunter, I could have died a week ago, and I'd still be sexier than your ugly ass."

Well, his personality hasn't changed any. I'd like to say that's reassuring, but it's not. "Crow, we need to know what's going on with you. It's not just us we have to worry about. Lennie is out with Lyn and her dad, Brooks, but they're due back soon. So speak up and be quick about it."

"LT, I have nothing else to say. I told you everything over the phone. What I said is literally all I know. I can't tell you any more than that."

That's not good enough, nowhere near good enough, and I'm sure my face says it all. When I hear Lyn, I know I'm out of time. I'm thankful when I hear Lyn say that Brooks and

Lennie went to the house so Lennie can get started on her homework.

When Lyn walks into the office, a cascade of events happen. Crow whips around to look at Lyn. I swear he hisses at her. Crow went into motion, and we all moved as one, piling on top of Crow.

“Hunter! Get her out of here and don’t go near Crow. We’re taking him to a cell till we can figure out what the fuck’s happened to him.” Phoenix wasn’t kidding when he said Crow’s stronger than he was and looks like he died a week or more ago.

I’m able to grab him in a choke hold. Keegan, Kerrigan, and Phoenix are able to grab his arms and legs. Dakota took off to open any and all doors. At least that’s what I think he yelled out. Jaxon is on standby, should we need help.

I’m not sure how long it took us to get Crow into that fucking cell, but I’ll be damned if he comes out before we get answers. We’re all exhausted and slide down the walls of the basement. We’re all panting and exhausted, but not one of us has taken our eyes off of Crow.

“Brother, what the fuck is the matter with you? You don’t go after people like that. Especially people you haven’t even met yet. Not to fucking mention the woman you damn near attacked is dating Phoenix, Dakota, Hunter and myself! Until you start talking, you’re not leaving that fucking cell and don’t let me catch you calling out either.”

The sounds he's making can't be classified as human. I've got to call his CO and get some damn answers. Something isn't right here and I'm damn well going to find out what.



CHAPTER FORTY-FOUR

Brooklyn

When Crow turned to me, I could have sworn his eyes were red. I know the expression people see red when angry, but I'm pretty sure it isn't meant literally. I'm thankful to the guys. While the guys piled on Crow, Hunter pulled me back so hard and fast, I damn near fell.

I'm so glad I sent Lennie and my dad with pizza and drinks to the house. He's going to ask her for a picnic and a movie in her room when her homework is done. That'll keep her occupied for a few hours.

I didn't realize I was shaking till I tried to make coffee. My hands are shaking so much I spilled the coffee. "Shit, I need that right now."

"Hold on lil sis, let us help. Keegan, can you make the coffee? Kerrigan, go into the breakroom and grab those boxes of pizza. We need to catch our breaths and I think our lil sis needs to take a moment and breathe. Lyn, sit down for me. Your men will be back up here in a few minutes."

I don't think I sat down. It was more of a collapse into one of the cushy chairs. I know Keegan, Kerrigan, and Jaxon are

scurrying around, but my mind is in such a state of shock, nothing is truly registering with me.

Why would he hate me so much that he'd actually try to attack me? What could I have done to make him feel that kind of hatred for me? He seemed stressed, but joking over the phone. What the hell could have changed in the matter of twelve hours?

When I finally snap out of the daze I've been in, I realize all the guys are in the office now. They aren't talking, but they are eating. As I look around the room at each of them, I can see the level of stress that has all their faces creased in tight scowls.

The tension in the air is so thick, it's damn near suffocating. I want to check on Lennie and my dad, but I also want to speak with Crow. I know he can't do anything to me now, being locked in the cell.

I just need to know. I need to know if I need to go away. I won't come between these men. What's the saying, *'bro's before hoes and chicks before dicks'* that's it. I know damn well the guys aren't going to let me just go down there to talk to him, so.

"Hey, guys, I think I'd like to go check on Lennie and my dad. He has instructions to eat with Lennie and watch a movie. I'd just like to check on them and then maybe we could discuss what the fuck just happened and why?"

I can tell they all want to say something, so I just hold up my hand, signaling them all to stop. "Please, I just need a small

break. Then we can talk.”

Turning, I quickly exit the room, so I don't give them a chance to speak. I act like I'm going the back way up to the house. Hearing them talking and not in happy tones reassures me I'll have a few minutes with Crow. I don't think I'll need more than that.

Walking down the stairs to the basement door, I open it, walk through, and close it as quietly as I can. “I don't know why you're trying to sneak around, Brooklyn. I can hear you. Hell, I can smell you. What do you want?”

The sudden sound of his voice scares me, but I don't jump. Walking the rest of the way downstairs, the lights are off. When I reach to flip them on, he calls out to leave them off. The ambient light in the room only comes from a few portal windows, but it'll have to do.

Lowering my hand from the switch, I walk over to stand in front of the cell. I can't see him clearly, but I can tell where he is. I can't tell if the noises he's making are because of pain or sadness. Hell, I guess... Oh fuck it.

“Crow, why do you hate me when you've never really met me? I don't understand what it is about me that made you want to attack me.” I'm not a scared little girl anymore and no one will make me feel that way.

“Hate you? You think I hate you and that I was going to attack you in a violent way? No, my sweet, you misunderstand my intentions. I don't want to hurt you, Brooklyn. I want to taste you. I want to sip from your mouth and drink from your sweet

pussy. Hurt you? Oh no, my sweet, I'll kill anyone that hurts you."

I'm so confused. I don't understand. If all he wanted was a kiss and to make love to me, why did the guys respond like they did? More than that, why was he growling? "I don't understand. Upstairs, it seemed as though you wanted to rip me apart. That's why I jumped back, and I'm pretty sure why the guys piled on top of you."

When I look up, I look directly into his eyes. I feel so lost in them and I'm fine with it. The feeling of safety is palpable. How do I go from being scared to feeling safe? I - I...

"Brooklyn, my sweet, come kiss me. Fill my lungs with your breath. Let me taste you. There you go, come closer. Let me touch your beautiful body."

I want that. I need that. Wait, no, what's happening? The moment I stop walking toward him, he yanks open the cell door. His lips close over mine before I can make a sound. I feel myself moving backwards till my back touches the wall.

His kiss is deep and passionate. His hands are roaming all over my body and I don't want to stop him. Breaking the kiss, his lips go to my neck. "Crow, please?" I don't know what I'm asking for, but I'll take what he gives me.

Crow raises his head, his eyes closed. One of his hands is around my back, the other behind my neck like he's going to devour me. All I can think of is, yes, please. When I hear running upstairs, looking up at the ceiling, I hear the guys call my name.

Glancing back down at Crow, he opens his eyes and mouth at the same time. Eyes going wide, I hear my name as I scream at the sight before me.

To be Continued...

Wings of Rapture



About the Author

Micca Michaels is just one name I go by, mom, nana, auntie, sissy, twinsy, bestie are a few others. I love the quiet country life. Coffee and cookies bring me great joy. I'm 47 years old and looking forward to 50. My other half is one of my best friends and I'm blessed for that.

This book goes out to all my gorgeous minions. A Big thank you to all who have supported me through my up and down days.

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