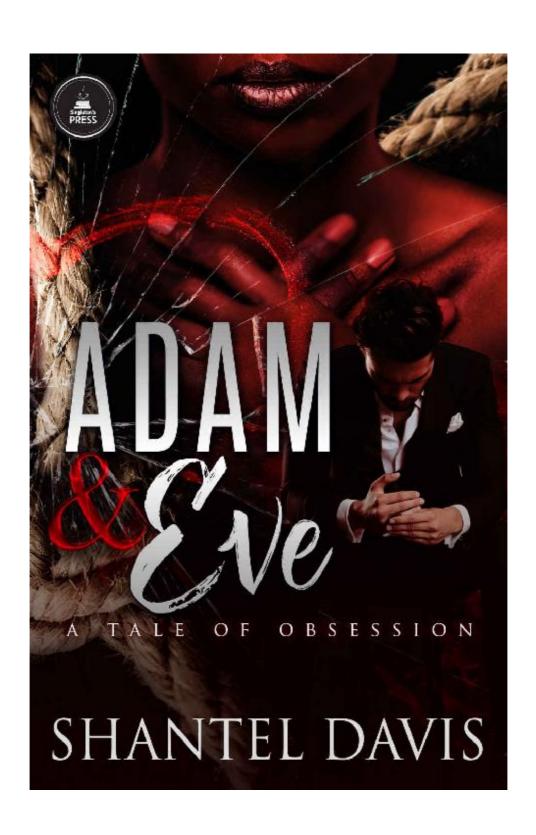


A TALE OF OBSESSION

SHANTEL DAVIS





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Cover Designer: TakeCover Designs

Interior Designer: Infinity Book Covers

Book Editor: Nicole Singleton

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Prologue



My want for her—from the very beginning—had always been wicked, immoral, and frightening. The intensity of it scared even me, and nothing ever scared me. She made me *feel* for the first time in my life. For a man like me, that was terrifying, but it was also fucking exhilarating. Soon, my want turned into need, and then obsession. From there, it developed into full-blown addiction. She became all that I thought of.

If I was a better, less selfish man, I would have forced myself to stay away from her. We were from two different worlds; one light, one dark. I knew the darkness of my world would inevitably swallow her whole. But I couldn't let her go. I wouldn't even lie and say I'd tried. I hadn't. Every fiber of my being screamed that Eve was mine. She was meant for me. I could live without her, but I didn't want to.

I was rational enough to know that she wasn't ready for me, though. She was too naive, too innocent, too young. I'd break her. So, in silence I'd suffered. Watching, wanting, waiting, needing only her. She was always right within my reach but never close enough to touch. Until... I took her.



Now I had her, and it still didn't seem real to me. It was a chore to keep myself from reaching out and touching her. I needed to make sure it wasn't a dream or some surreal fantasy my mind had conjured up after finally breaking from reality and giving me what I'd wanted for so long. I blinked once, then twice before I closed my eyes and drew in a calming breath. The scent of her enveloped me. It was ambrosia, honeyed-vanilla and something that was unique to only her.

My cock thickened, and my thoughts shifted to explicitness without much effort. Did she taste as good as she smelled? My mouth watered in anticipation of the moment when I would find out. Licking my lips, I could almost taste her. There was so much I wanted to do to her, with her. For her. But, for the moment, all I could do was wait.

For hours, I sat, watching her, listening to her light snores. I was so in tune with her I could feel the exact moment she awakened. The air in the room crackled with electricity. Goosebumps danced across my skin. Her eyes fluttered and her lips, full and plush, curled into a smile, a smile that caused my heart to beat a quick staccato against my chest. Sweat slickened my palms.

To say I'd imagined her waking up just like this a million times wouldn't have been an exaggeration. Damn, she was beautiful. Her skin glowed. The darkness was a startling contrast against the white sheets and vastly different from mine, which was another problem on its own. In my world, like married like. That meant she wouldn't have been accepted in my circle. I couldn't care less about that now.

I wanted to savor the moment, but it wasn't long before she realized today would not be like other days. The panic on her face pulled at me. It took everything in me not to go to her, comfort her. I forced myself to wait.

What would happen next?
Would she scream?

Cry?

Beg?

I drew in a deep breath then held it for a spell. After a few moments, my chest burned, and I felt like I would suffocate. However, I didn't dare breathe. I couldn't ruin the moment. Wouldn't.

Thirty-nine seconds... That was how long it took her to realize she couldn't move. As a precaution, I'd tied both her arms and legs to the bed. Frantically, she scanned the room, searching the darkness for something. She couldn't see me. I'd hidden in the shadows, as always.

Tilting her head, her eyes zeroed in on the spot where I stood. She'd sensed me in the darkness, proving that she was just as in sync with me as I was with her. She tugged roughly against the ropes. She was afraid, but she didn't cry. I was proud of her for not crying.

Show yourself, my mind screamed.

I stepped into the light then put all my emotions behind my signature smile. Women usually swooned at the sight of it. It was charming and disarming so I'd been told. Too bad it was a façade—a veil I hid behind. Eve had been the only person to ever see through the disguise.

It was a shame more people in the world weren't like her. They'd be safer if they were, but most humans were so shallow that all it took was a nice suit and the flash of pearly white teeth for them to trust someone. She knew better. That was what had drawn me to her. She'd seen the monster inside me, and she wasn't afraid. Cautious, but not afraid.

Her first scream startled me from my thoughts. Our eyes connected. In hers, I saw more anger than fear. There was too much distance between us. I took two short strides toward her.

Violently, she shook her head. "Stay away from me." Her voice was cold and alarming.

Her reaction bothered me. I stopped and dropped my shaking hands to my side. Stay away? Why? She should've wanted me near. She was mine, and I was hers. I did everything I could to rein in the tide of rising anger that engulfed me.

"Don't do that. Don't push me away," I roared, sounding menacing to my own ears, which was why I was not surprised

when her eyes grew large with terror. Her struggle against her restraints became even more intense than before while her screams grew louder.

Ignoring her hysterics, I made my way to her. When I was close enough to reach out and touch her, I stopped. While I wanted to feel her, I didn't want it to be against her will. Suddenly, she froze. Mid-scream, she tilted her head and examined me. She gasped, and her pretty eyes narrowed. Recognition set in.

Yes! That was the moment I'd been waiting for.

"Is this some kind of sick joke?" she barked. "Untie me, now!" She feverishly redoubled her efforts to get loose.

If looks could kill, I thought. When I made no attempts to until her, she devolved, started throwing a tantrum. The words she directed at me were venomous. Her beautiful mouth was lethal, and I had to remember to take nothing she said in the heat of the moment personally.

"Calm the fuck down," I snapped, regretting it almost immediately, I calmed my tone and explained, "The ropes aren't meant to keep you hostage."

She snarled in response and snatched against the ropes so hard the headboard hit the wall with a loud thud. "Then why the hell am I tied up?"

"Enough! Stop fucking moving. Stop yelling and let me talk."

I didn't know if it was the bass in my voice or the threat of the hunting knife I'd pulled from my pants pocket that stilled her. But I was glad she had stopped her futile attempts to get away. Didn't she know I wouldn't hurt her? I calmed my voice and told her, "You're going to hurt yourself."

She threw me a look of disdain before glancing at her hands. For the first time, she examined the ropes that tied her to the bed, our bed— in our house— like they were snakes. She didn't know all of this was ours. Not yet, but she would learn soon enough. I'd built all of it for us and our future children.

"Why am I here?" she asked.

"Because of your actions. I didn't want to take you, I swear. I had planned to wait, but you forced my hand."

I hadn't wanted the beginning of our lives to start as such, but her actions, and hers alone, had forced me to act prematurely. This was what I had to do. I had a plan that I'd painstakingly followed. I'd never considered myself to be a patient man, but I'd been patient with her. For three years, I'd waited. Although I wanted her to come to me willingly, waiting had become too hard when she'd met him.

I couldn't take it. Day after day, watching them together. They were getting too close.

It wasn't supposed to be like this. Our happily ever after had been so close, and she was on the verge of ruining it.

What had been so special about him?

"Why not me, Eve?" I asked, demanding she answer me.

I knew my current mindset was too extreme, but I couldn't get my heart to realize it. I needed answers. She'd spent nearly four years ignoring me, pretending she didn't know I existed. But after only a few months, she was ready to love him? That was unacceptable. Why him? After all these years, why hadn't she chosen me? She knew I was there, waiting patiently. How could she have not seen me when I was always right there, protecting her from the world that meant to do her harm?

Long seconds passed, and when she didn't answer, I felt insecure. She stared at me like I was a fucking lunatic ... like she was confused. Self-doubt and animosity crept in, causing my head to pound. Could I have been wrong? Taking a deep breath, I exhaled the truth. *No!* I was right about everything. There was no need for such trivial thoughts now that she was here.

She was locked in with me, without outside influences. She would have no choice but to see we were meant for one another. I expected her to resist and to fight. I looked forward to it. It was what any sane woman would do. I would endure it all. There would come a time when she would beg for me to take her, to make love to her. Her surrender would be all that much sweeter. I had to admit, it was not the ideal plan, but it was all I had

This shouldn't be all you have! You had plans, my mind screamed. This is Michael's fucking fault.

He was the one to blame for this. I should have killed him.

You might have. You hit him in the head with a fucking crow bar, you idiot!

I ignored the voice in my head. He—the voice—never had anything positive to say. Besides, I didn't hit Michael all that hard. He would wake up. I just hoped it was with one hell of a fucking headache.

He deserved whatever pain I'd caused him and more. I couldn't believe he thought I would sit back and allow him to take her from me. I'd watched them walk hand-in-hand into that hotel. I imagined all the dirty, filthy things he wanted to do with her. There was no way I would allow that to happen. She was mine. Her pussy. Her heart. Her mind. Her soul.

Out of my peripheral I saw her watching as I paced, probably trying to figure out what I would do next.

Fear and uncertainty were in her eyes when she asked, "Who are you talking to?"

I ignored her question. "You shouldn't fear me. I'd never hurt you," I said before giving her my back.

I needed a minute to myself to rein in my anger. Thinking about all her betrayals made me furious. We couldn't have a real conversation, not when I was so bent out of shape.

Trying another tactic, she pleaded, "Please, please. Let me go. I won't tell anybody."

From the slight tremble of her voice, I assumed those were manipulative tears running from her hazel eyes down her onyx cheeks.

"Who would believe you if you did tell?"

My response was condescending, but it was also the truth. She'd be laughed out of Florida if she went to the police with a story of being kidnapped by me, and she damn well knew it. That was why she didn't reply. What she had to say was irrelevant anyway; she wouldn't be going anywhere to tell anyone anything. I was tempted to tell her just that. Instead I chose to remain silent and unmoved by her fake tears.

She was mine, and I was hers. We were meant to be together, created only for each other. She was broken like me. I saw the cracks in her armor. This was what had to happen. I reassured myself mentally while pacing back and forth in front of the large king-sized bed. The adrenaline coursing through my veins wouldn't allow me to sit or stand still.

After getting myself under control, I turned to face her. "Why didn't you ever see me?"

She pulled her eyes from the spot on the wall, her face stained with fake tears. If I didn't know any better, I would have believed she really didn't know what I was asking her. But I did know better. For four years I'd been there. She had to have sensed me, watching and protecting her. I was certain of it.

"Why did you never see me?" I repeated the question in a roar that caused her to jump. "You never acknowledge me. Why Davis? Why Michael? Why not me? What was so special about them? What about them caught your attention? Why ignore me? For years, you've avoided and fought what was happening between us. I need fucking answers." I resorted to pounding my fist angrily against my chest because it was the only thing I could do to keep from grabbing and shaking some sense into her.

Her only response was to stare at me as if I was crazy. The contemptuous look in her eyes told me she thought I was about as sane as any random person in a nut house. *I was not fucking crazy!* Why was she looking at me like I was? Maybe she was in shock because of my outburst? I needed to calm down. Our relationship couldn't start off like that. Nothing would be accomplished if I continued as I was.

I decided to leave her be and have a moment alone with my thoughts. I loosened my grip on the knife I'd forgotten I was holding and placed it back into my pocket. She visibly relaxed, but not to the point that she wasn't still on guard. Her lips trembled but her chin stayed strong.

Eve blinked rapidly as I watched her watch me. I could see it in her eyes. She was plotting while I fought against the urge to reach out and touch her, but it was a losing battle. Anxiously, I moved toward her, reached for her, and she flinched away. Her rejection hurt. It was okay though. Time healed all wounds. And all we had was time.

I took a step back and tossed my hands up in submission. "Fine. It's fine. It's okay. I won't touch you, and we don't have to talk now. We have all the time in the world to work our problems out. Don't worry. I still want you, and when you decide to tell me the truth, I'll forgive you." Backing further away from the bed, I gave her the space she wanted. "We'll talk later," I reiterated. "I just wanted you to know that I'm not angry with you. I'm angry at all the time wasted."

The crocodile tears began again. "What are you talking about? I barely know you," she wheezed out between fake sobs.

Her denial enraged me. However, when I spoke up, I managed to keep my tone more even and calm than I felt. "You know very well what I'm talking about. You chose to ignore me

and not them. You hurt me purposely by flaunting them in front of me. They weren't meant for you. How could you do that to me? Pretend you wanted them when we could have so much between us?"

It's because you're not worthy.

"Shut up," I yelled and shook my head violently, trying to make the voice go away.

The fucker. It was always at times like this when it would come into my head. Taunting me, fucking with me to make me think I was crazy. I was not fucking crazy.

She was crying harder. I didn't understand. Why was she crying? I wanted to yell at her to stop. She didn't cry. That wasn't how she dealt with problems in her life. But I refrained from doing so. I bit the inside of my inner cheek so hard I drew blood. I could taste it, but the pain calmed me a bit.

For the first time since I was thirteen, I wished I had taken my medicine. The meds made it easier for me to focus, to seem normal. I didn't want her to see me like this. The thought of her thinking of me as crazy physically hurt my heart. Closing my eyes, I resisted the urge to claw at my own chest. I counted the breaths I took and concentrated on feeling more stable. It worked. The voice stopped, and I focused all my attention back on her

"What on earth is wrong with you?" she asked, the tone in her voice told me she was perplexed.

That simple question sent me down the rabbit hole. For a while, only one thought assailed me: Why did she hate me? I bit down on my bottom lip as I dug my nails into the palm of my hand. The pain, the blood I drew kept me from grabbing her and snapping her neck.

"Why are you doing this to me, Professor?" she murmured.

She stared up at me. Her big hazel eyes cloudy, but just beyond the surface, I saw a bit of defiance.

"Call me Adam," I said gently.

She frowned at me, turned her lips down in such a way that drew my gaze to them. In an instant I was turned on. I imagined my cock between those thick plush lips. She was speaking, but I was too distracted to hear her. My mind was flooded with sensual images of us together. I could see, feel and hear it all like it was happening in real time. Her tight pussy wrapped around my cock. Her soft dark body against my pale one... Her thick legs wrapped around my waist as she pulled me closer, calling for me.

The images were so vivid, so encompassing that my knees felt as if they would buckle. On auto pilot, I made my way to the other side of the room. I stopped at the red chaise I'd put in the room especially for her. It looked identical to the one she had in her house. I'd watched her for years so I knew she sat on that red chaise and read for hours.

Often, I imagined her bent over it with her firm round ass in the air while I moved in and out of her. In my dreams, she begged me to fuck her harder. I sat down, just me and my thoughts lest I got ahead of myself and did something stupid.



I stared straight ahead to avoid making eye contact with the crazed man in the corner. I had to calm down enough to get my wits about me in order to see a way out of the predicament I was in. I'd known something was wrong as soon as I woke up. The bed had been too soft. The energy in the room hadn't felt right. But God knew I hadn't expected to wake up tied to some deranged man's bed.

No way could this be real, I thought.

I had to be dreaming. I'd hoped I was dreaming; however, it took no time at all for me to realize I had not awakened in a nightmare. It was real. I shouldn't have been surprised. My luck had been shit since the day I'd been born. Everybody I loved had died. My father had abandoned me. It seemed that no matter how many obstacles I overcame, or how many hurdles I jumped, another just popped up. I felt like the world would continue to fuck with me until the day I died and being kidnap was part of the "fuck Eve" plot.

Breathe, Eve. Just breathe, I thought.

Only seconds had passed before I chanced a glance in his direction again, but not for long. I didn't need him to catch me watching him. I was surprised that in spite of my steadily rising anxiety and anger, I was able to remain calm. Well as calm as I could be. How do I get out of this? Why me? Taking a moment, I ran all he said through my head.

Why didn't you see me?

That question in particular taunted me. The logical side of me screamed, of course I've seen you. I'd have to be blind not to. He stuck out like a god among mortals. He was beautiful but dangerously so. Every time I'd seen him, his gray eyes always held a glint of malevolence in them. I knew I was the only one who noticed because I had to look beyond his perfections to see it. Most people wouldn't and didn't do that. I'd heard many of my female peers allude as such.

I remembered running into him often around campus. He tried to engage me a few times, but instinctually, I knew to stay away. I'd made it a point to start avoiding him. Which made me to think the question he kept asking—why didn't you see me?— wasn't literal. It was something deeper. Figuring it out may have been my only way to get out of here.

I thought about what his question could mean so hard for so long that my head started to hurt. *I'm going to die here*, I thought. I was not usually the pessimist, but the entire ordeal was playing out like some fucked up version of Misery.

Was that going to happen to me if I don't get out of here?

No, that was not going to happen to me. Why? Because there was just no way any of what was happening could be real. I just needed to wake up. I closed my eyes, wishing, praying and hoping God or any other deity would answer. When I opened my eyes, I'd no longer be in this nightmare. I'd be home, in my own bed, back to reality.

I made the mistake of opening my eyes. Oh, why did I open my eyes? What I saw staring back at me caused any feelings of hope to quickly dissipate. All the air in my lungs escaped, the hairs on the back of my neck stood on end. The professor's stormy gray eyes were locked in on me. Only, it was as if he was looking right through me as opposed to at me.

He was truly crazy. Certifiable. He was the kind of crazy for which he had papers to prove it I was sure.

Don't freak out, my mind screamed.

The urge to try to get loose from the ropes again overwhelmed me. Don't do it, I chastised myself mentally. Let the professor stay focused on whatever was going through his twisted head instead of on me.

I realized fighting against my restraint was a waste of energy. I could use that time to figure out how I would escape if I ever did get loose. I took another deep, calming breath as I searched the room for anything that could tell me where the hell I was. However, all I saw were the foot of the bed I was tied to, a large oak dresser and the chaise he sat on. The walls were white. There were no windows and two closed doors. Panic tightened my chest. There was a lot of empty space in the huge room.

I kept telling myself to stay calm and breathe, but that bullcrap wasn't working. Anxiety prickled at my skin and made

me feel like thousands of ants were crawling over me. Inhaling didn't help. The familiar smell of patchouli oil and vanilla in the room enveloped me and disturbed me all at the same time. It smelled just like my home. The scent usually relaxed me, but now it made me nauseous. That couldn't be a coincidence.

All clues led to this being planned. The realization hit me like a ton of bricks. The world around me stilled and I choked back the scream threatening to break free from somewhere deep within. So this would be how I would die?

My chest tightened, and it got hard for me to breathe. It hurt holding back, but I wouldn't disturb the loony toon across the room. This was a nightmare I'd never imagined for myself. There was no scenario in my head where any of this turned out well. I was a criminology major. I'd read about things like this. He was going to rape, torture and kill me. No one would know because there was no one to report me missing or to miss me.

My mom was dead. I never knew my dad. I had no friends, and my few acquaintances would think I'd dropped out of school and disappeared. It would be plausible. I'd acquired massive debt trying to graduate on my own. The money from my grandfather's life insurance and savings was almost gone. I had nothing and no one. We'll that wasn't exactly true. Michael crossed my mind, giving me a modicum of hope. I latched on to it, but it was fleeting. The insecure little person in me had always thought that he was too perfect—too right— and it made me wonder if he had something to do with what was happening to me. Something about him had always seemed off. He was the reason I was in the hotel when I'd gotten taken. That shit couldn't be a coincidence, unless....

What if he was—

Fear, an emotion I was not accustomed to, rushed over me. What if Michael was somewhere lying in a ditch, hurt or dead because of me? I began to hyperventilate. Trying to breathe past the lump in my throat became hard.

All of a sudden, I heard a harsh, "Stop screaming. Why the fuck are you screaming?" Professor Adam loomed over me. His eyes frantically roamed over me as if he expected me to be hurt.

"Did you kill him? Is he dead?" I blurted out the question before I could stop myself.

If he had, did I really want to know?

His brows furrowed. "Who? Did I kill who?" He regarded me in confusion.

"Never mind," I said quickly.

I wished I'd never brought him out of his lala land. He looked happy there. When he realized what I was talking about —who I was talking about—the look he gave me made every hair on my body stand on end.

Eyes narrowed, face twisted, he lashed out. "You mean him? You care for him," he accused. "You do," he answered his own question before I could.

I watched as a range of emotions played across his handsome face. Anger, insecurity, envy. It was almost comical. I would have laughed if I wasn't so thoroughly horrified at the possibility that he would admit that he'd actually killed Michael.

"He shouldn't matter. Not when you have me," he spat through a snarl.

He looked downright evil, like he was ready to cause me pain. And again, I wished I would have kept my mouth shut. I wasn't scared to die, but I didn't want to be tortured for days before I was killed.

"I'm sorry, I didn't—" I began but closed my mouth when he sat on the bed beside me.

His posture was rigidly straight. His khaki pants brushed my leg. The feel of the rough material against my skin drew my attention from his cold eyes to my leg.

Alarm riddled my senses. Where were my clothes? What had he done to me? I panicked at the thought of all the things he could have done when I was passed out. He'd obviously drugged me since I couldn't remember how I'd gotten there. Mentally, I focused on the space between my thighs. Nothing felt different. No soreness. I was relieved but distracted. I didn't register him leaning in close, but I did feel the pain that followed when he pinched a large amount of fat on my inner thigh.

I snatched my thigh away. "Don't touch me," I yelled at him.

I was seething, so angry the emotion caused my body to quake. How dare he put his hands on me. I was furious. But I was smart enough to realize I was at a disadvantage and couldn't attack him like I wanted. I settled for cursing him out in my head, hoping the words didn't slip from my lips. Pain hadn't

ever been a friend of mine, and I didn't want to give him a reason to inflict anymore.

Several seconds of silence passed between us before he spoke up. He bared his teeth at me like an animal. "You're asking about him when you're lying in my bed. Why would you do that to me, Eve?" His tone dropped to menacing, barely above a whisper tone. "Why are you being so disrespectful?"

Was he for real? I found his eyes only to realize he was serious. Not only was he serious, but he was expecting an answer from me. He had me tied to a bed and he was acting like a jealous boyfriend?

I wanted to curse him to hell. I wanted to tell his mentally inept self to get out of my face with his asinine questions. But I knew better than to aggravate the situation any further. I turned away from him and bit my tongue so hard, the metallic taste of blood filled my mouth. It kept the nasty words that I was dying to say from escaping. I'd have to learn to keep my mouth shut.

He wasn't okay with my silence. Suddenly, his weight shifted on the bed. He grabbed me roughly by my chin and then snatched my head to face him. He leaned in so close our noses touched. So close the heat radiating off his body warmed my cold skin.

"Don't fucking turn away from me when I'm talking to you, and when I ask you a question, I expect a fucking answer. Do you understand me? In this relationship we don't ignore one another," he said coolly.

What? I was so confused. What relationship? I refused to play into his delusions. Instead of replying, I moved my attention to his eyes. I caught a glimpse of the crazy in them. I

didn't know what my chances were of getting out of here, but I knew I needed to stay alive and pain free for as long as possible. Logically, I was probably going to die. I knew that. However, I was not about to die begging and crying, pleading for my life.

That gave me a new perspective and a new idea. I'd survived the death of all my immediate family, foster care, heartbreak, beatings and sexual assault. I'd been fighting since I was a child. I'd never been a victim. From the very beginning, I'd always fought back. I'd fought them all—foster families, bullies, perverts, anybody who'd tried to harm me, and I'd come out on top. This time would be no different. I'd gone through and survived too much in life to cower now.

"What I'm not going to do, Professor, is pretend with you. Fuck you. You are freaking insane." I gathered as much saliva as I could into my dry mouth and spit directly in his face.

Most of it ricocheted back into my own. My first instinct was to wipe it away. The burning of ropes against my skin when I tried brought me back to my senses. Acting irrationally when I was pissed off had always been one of my faults.

I realized that in my current situation, it may cost me my life. I was in no position to defend myself after my little tantrum. I was at his mercy, and if someone had spit on me, I'd want to draw blood. With those thoughts in mind, I braced myself for the violence I knew would follow.

I closed my eyes and waited...and waited. Nothing came. I slowly opened my eyes and found him standing next to the bed. He stared down at me with what could easily be mistaken for pride. Or was that lust? I had no idea what was looking at me from behind that man's eyes. That was even scarier. I didn't know what he was thinking. That not only annoyed me, but it left me confused.

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Her defiance re-thickened my softening dick. That was my Eve, the one I knew and had grown to love. There was the fiery hot-tempered woman who had gotten my attention four years earlier. I remembered it like it was yesterday...

My Friday noon class had just finished. I was walking across the campus to my car when I heard her for the first time. Her voice was thick and sweet like honey with a hard edge.

"Thank you. Don't get me wrong, I appreciate the compliment and the offer, but if you ever touch me again..."

Usually I would have kept walking, let campus security handle it, but her threat gave me pause. I turned to find her back to me. I watched as she raised herself onto her toes and whispered into the boy's ear. His face turned ghostly pale. She cocked her head to the side and laughed when he took a step back. I closed the distance between us, some unseen force drawing me to her.

Before I reached them, he was walking away. Distracted I bumped into her. She stumbled a bit. I grabbed her arms to steady her. Her soft, round ass brushed against my cock and it came to life. My skin prickled. I was surprised by my body's immediate reaction. I hadn't even seen her face, and I wanted her. The smell of chocolate and vanilla invaded my nose. I closed my eyes and inhaled. She smelled divine.

"Excuse you," she snapped. She spun on me with her fist clenched, poised to attack.

The hostility in her voice made me smile. The sunlight at her back made her look as if she was glowing. I nearly commented on how beautiful she was. It was hard not to.

She was a tall girl, but at six-foot-five, I still towered over her. She shaded her eyes then looked up so she could see my face clearly.

"Oh! Professor, I'm sorry," she said before backing up, putting space between us.

I wondered how she knew I was a professor. I hadn't seen her in any of my classes, and I was often mistaken for a student. I didn't look like a twenty-eight-year-old and was younger than all my colleagues.

"Are you in one of my classes?" I asked.

Instead of answering verbally, she nodded once. When she switched her backpack from one shoulder to the other nervously, I noticed the blade in her hand.

"Were you going to use that on him?" I asked.

She shoved the weapon she wasn't supposed to have on school grounds into the pocket of the baggy navy-blue basketball shorts she had on. She wore a light blue wife beater and flip flops the same color as her top. Although she was dressed like many of the girls on campus, it looked a lot different on her voluptuous body. The men's wear did little to hide her curves, large breasts, and slightly rounded stomach. I had a nice view of her nice, plump, round ass. It was noticeable even in the baggy gym shorts.

Some part of me thought she would cower and lie, but she didn't.

In a sweet, southern accented voice she said, "I would have gutted him and left him bleeding out if he hadn't left me alone." Then she gave me an easy smile, innocent and lethal.

Admitting that she'd been about to commit a violent act so boldly caused my dick to harden. I shifted my laptop bag in front of me, so she couldn't see the evidence of what her words had done.

"Oh, I see." I didn't know what else to say.

I hadn't expected honesty from her. She had to know that me reporting her could got her expelled, but she didn't care. Why?

"Excuse me, she said then side stepped me as if in a rush.

"Wait." I'd shouted louder than needed. I didn't want her to leave. "Can I buy you a cup of coffee?" I blurted out when she continued to walk away She paused, just outside of my reach. She turned then stared up at me long and hard. It was as if she could see through me. I saw the change in her eyes when she caught a glimpse of the monster behind the mask. I thought her response to seeing the real me would be fear or revulsion, not morbid curiosity. She tilted her head as if studying me.

But in the end, I guess her sense of curiosity couldn't override her sense of self-preservation. Instead of questioning or exploring what she saw, like I knew she wanted to, she dropped her gaze. She took a tentative step back.

"No", she said. She then turned and damn near jogged away without a second look in my direction.

In silent disbelief, I watched her until she was out of sight. I wasn't accustomed to rejection. I was never without attention because of my looks, education and money. Women threw themselves at me. Men wanted to be me, but none of those things mattered to her. She'd walked away from me without a second glance—like I was one of the boys on campus. I was furious, then perplexed. I knew then she was special.

After that day, I couldn't let the thought of her go. I replayed our first encounter over and over in my head that weekend. What had she said to the boy she'd threatened? What had she seen in me?

Even when my fiancé, Jenny, had dragged me from one society event to another, droning on and on about our wedding, my thoughts never drifted far away from her for long. I didn't even know her name at the time, but she was all I could think about.

When I fucked Jenny, it was Eve I'd imagined. I used Jenny's body like I'd never done before. For years, sex with

Jenny was a once or twice a week obligation, always missionary, with the lights off, the boring 'make love to me' bullshit women like her craved.

However, that Sunday night, I bent, twisted and touched her in places and ways I was sure never crossed her prim and proper mind. When I was done with her, she couldn't meet my eyes. I knew she was afraid they'd give away the fact she'd liked the dirty things I'd done to her.

Girls like Jenny had been taught to be ashamed of anything that wasn't vanilla. Life to her was all about what would be acceptable to her peers. She was depriving herself for no reason, having no idea about some of the kink the people she dealt with daily were into. I didn't feel it was my responsibility to tell her.

I left her curled up on the bed we shared, looking confused but thoroughly fucked. Afterwards, I drove to the condominium I kept for when I wanted to be alone. That night, I couldn't sleep. I didn't want to sleep. Instead I sat up drinking Scotch, and for the first time, I thought about what married life with Jenny would be like.

She hadn't been my choice. I would have never chosen a woman like her. My parents had introduced us at eighteen. They'd told me that she would be my bride. An arrangement between our parents had taken place before either of us were born. Old money married old money. That was how it was in my world. We allowed ourselves to be bred like animals.

From the moment I met Jenny, I disliked her. Everything about her was straight and typical. Blond hair, blue eyes, model like figure, large fake breast. If asked, I would admit that she was very beautiful, but did beauty really matter when she looked like everyone around her and lacked substance?

The way she spoke, dressed and fucked were boring. She had no goals for her life. She'd been trained to be subservient, obedient. To not want more than she'd be given. That night I'd began to loathe her and the thought of attaching myself to that way of life. She was too much like my mother. Growing up, I watched my father cheat on and disrespect her. No matter what he did, she took it with a fake smile. Her lifestyle was paramount to her dignity. She had no respect for herself and for that I hated her, and women like her.

After watching my parents and their friends, I had no belief in the sanctity of marriage. It was a piece of paper to me, the combining of fortunes. Wasn't it?

I chuckled at the fact that a girl I wouldn't usually notice simply walking away from me made me question what I'd never questioned before. She was ordinary compared to the women I was accustomed to. Pretty and curvy. Nothing special. Exactly like hundreds of other girls on campus. But some unnamed, undeniable force drew me to her. She felt it, too. The awareness between us the first time we met had been tangible. I needed to know more.

The very next day I learned her name. Eve. For weeks after, I watched her, gaining insight. At first, only in class, or when I just happened to see her around campus. Then suddenly she was everywhere I went, or I was everywhere she went. I wasn't sure which. She pretended not to notice me. That made me wonder if our meeting had the same effect on her as it had on me. It must have.

I started following her. She was a study in contrast. She was a loner but knew everyone. She had friends, but none were close. Men approached her, but she turned them all down. She never drew attention to herself. On the weekends, she never went out, and there was always melancholy in her eyes. To most,

she looked to be an introvert, but I knew she was hiding. From what? I'd wondered.

After a while, watching wasn't enough. I made my presence known. I'd purposely run into her too many times to count during her freshman year. She was always polite but detached. I'd start up a conversation, and she'd find a way to participate without saying much. She'd answer me in one or two words then she would scurry off. I didn't like it. I'd wanted to pry the words from her mouth. I wanted her to tell me why her eyes always looked so sad when nobody was watching. She was an enigma, my enigma. I had to figure her out.

Just before Christmas I decided to go through with my wedding. I wouldn't cause myself undo stress because of a girl when I didn't even know what I wanted from her. When the announcement was made, a few of my students wanted invites. I couldn't invite everyone, and I couldn't pick and choose.

I organized a contest of sorts for my English Lit students. The class with the best research papers on obsessive love in gothic literature would be invited to my wedding. Eve's class would win of course. It would allow me time to interact with her outside of classes. What happened that day would cause my curiosity for her to cross the line.

On my wedding day, instead of being focused on my bride, I watched and waited for Eve to enter the church. I didn't care about the harpist or the fact that everything was beautifully decorated in white. I didn't even care about how good Jenny looked in her fifty-thousand-dollar dress. I searched for Eve and was beyond disappointed that she hadn't shown up.

An hour into my reception, I was incensed. Why hadn't she come? I stood up to leave, and that was when I saw her. She was out on the dance floor. There had to be a hundred people crowded around, but my eyes easily zeroed in on her. She stood out in a black wrap dress that hugged her curves and stopped

mid-thigh. The black pumps she wore elongated her thick, shapely legs. She was smiling and dancing to the classical music like she'd been trained to do so.

Her body swayed sensually. Her spirit called to me. Mesmerized, I couldn't have stopped watching her if I'd wanted to. Then suddenly her haunting eyes connected with mine. She blessed me with a warm, bright, rare smile. The first she'd ever directed at me. She'd killed and revived me with that simple gesture.

A quote from her report on Jane Eyre came to mind: "I have little left in myself — I must have you. The world may laugh — may call me absurd, selfish — but it does not signify. My very soul demands you: it will be satisfied, or it will take deadly vengeance on its frame."

At that very moment, I felt my world shift. I wanted her more than I wanted my next breath. I knew I wouldn't be able to live without her. If she'd have promised to look at me, smile at me, stay with me forever, I would have given it all up. My birthright, the money, the cars, the women, my very being.

Sadly, I knew I had to walked away. I couldn't have her, yet. She wasn't ready for me. I wouldn't force myself into her life because I'd stain and break her. Men like me dirtied pretty things like her. She'd end up like one of the women I despised. She was too young, too pure. She needed to live, to experience and to find herself before I exposed her to me. I wanted her so badly. To realize I had to let her go caused my heart to ache.

Was this what love felt like? I asked myself.

I'd never been in love before. Didn't think I was capable of it. I didn't love her, but I could honestly say I'd lie, cheat, steal, maim, and kill for her. All because of that smile. It was the

hardest thing I'd ever had to do, but I left my reception after our eyes disconnected

When I returned from my honeymoon a month later, she'd changed. Her body language was different, so was her smile. She was happier than I'd seen her in prior months. I wanted to know why. Three days later I saw her with him. I found out after some snooping that his name was Davis.

Davis was a fucking cliché, even more so than I. Tall, literally dark and handsome. His looks rivaled my own. He excelled academically and in sports. Girls swooned at the sight of the campus football star— the all-around, wholesome, progressive black college man—rising above adversity. Ask anybody and they'd tell you he was going to be something when he graduated.

I could imagine their future together, living in a cute little house with a white picket fence, two or three kids. He'd go to work and control the finances, therefore controlling her. She wouldn't like that, but would stay, because she was loyal. She'd raise perfect little replicas of them both. Happy content children, with bland personalities. She'd be happy, somewhat. Without me. He was perfect for her. Just the thought made me want to snap his fucking neck.

For days I watched them, trying to decide my next move. They looked good together and that bothered me. Made me feel insecure and lonely. I wasn't familiar with either of those feelings, and it nearly drove me mad. At the very beginning I promised myself I wouldn't interfere too much in her life, but I had to make sure that relationship didn't last long. I gave it three months; the longest three months of my life. I knew that she needed the experiences she shared with him to help her grow. My meds helped me stay calm. For the first time in years, I took them regularly. They held the demons at bay.

When the public displays of affection went from playful, sweet, and teasing to sexual and heated, I knew he had to go. It was only a matter of time before she gave herself to him. Her body first then her heart and soul would follow. I couldn't let that happen.

I wouldn't lie and say I was ashamed of what I did next. I was not. Bianca was expensive but turned out to be worth every penny. She was an exotic Dominican beauty with a body built for sin. Black waist-length hair, big tits, a small waist and a large ass. She was enough to temp the devil himself. She was perfect.

The agency I found her at charged two-thousand an hour for her services. I offered her double. She had no problem with approaching Davis outside the locker room after a game. I watched as she pretended to be his biggest fan. When she offered to fuck him, he sent Eve home without hesitation. He didn't blink an eye as he lied to her. She was too trusting. She suspected nothing.

I followed him and Bianca to a hotel. That night she fucked him in positions and ways only a professional could. She'd taken pictures and recorded the encounter, like I'd told her to. As I watched him betray Eve in the footage with a whore, I thought about snapping his neck. How could he do that to her? The only thing that stopped me was knowing he would be out of her life soon.

Three days. It took Bianca three days to convince him to confess his sins to Eve. Bianca had stood at his side with her arms wrapped around his waist dressed in jeans and a university t-shirt. She really did look the part of a college student instead of a whore; an Oscar worthy performance.

Without shame, he introduced Bianca as his girlfriend like he hadn't cheated on his actual girlfriend with her. Eve stared at the both them for a few seconds, pushed past them and walked off without a word. Five days later, when I stopped paying Bianca for her time, she quickly disappeared from Davis' life.

It took no time for him to run back to Eve. He begged and pleaded for her to come back. When he asked for another chance, she'd told him to kiss her black ass and walked away. I stood on the second floor of the library eavesdropping. At the exit, she'd paused and turned as if she'd felt someone there—like she'd felt me there. She searched for me, her gaze immediately finding mine. There was a question in her eyes as if she'd wanted to know how much I'd seen and heard. I turned away before she could see the truth. When I turned back around, she was gone. I fell deeper into my obsession with her.

When I came back to the present, Eve was watching me with a look of disgust on her face.

"What are you grinning at?" she barked.

"You. You're everything I expected," I said while I rubbed her saliva into my skin.

Her look of disgust deepened.

"Are you hungry?" I asked. "I bet you are."

I didn't wait for her to answer. She didn't have to know that I knew she was hungry by the growling in her stomach. I also knew exactly what she would want. I turned away from the bed and walked over to the bedroom door. I slid the security panel back, dialed my pin code which activated my intercom. My maid, Ava, answered immediately.

"I'd like a steak, fried Cajun shrimp, a baked potato with sour cream and unsalted butter with a side of broccoli, steamed. Water with crushed ice and lemonade with fresh strawberry slices."

I'd ordered all Eve's favorites to show her just how much I knew about her. I turned back to ger to gage her reaction. I got none. She turned away from me, disgust no longer written across her features.

FOUR



My emotions were all over the place; one moment I was okay with knowing I was probably going to die in that room, and the next, I didn't know how I felt. He knew my favorite meal? I wondered if it would be my last.

What else did he know?

How long had he been watching me?

I'd always been a bit morbid. That was one of the reasons I was majoring in Criminology. I'd read countless books on serial killers and psychopaths, spent hours researching. I was so well-versed in the criminal mind I could get away with murder. That was how I knew for a fact that I was dealing with a sick individual. I couldn't handle him with my usual head-on approach.

Again, I ran all the times I'd actually seen him through my mind. It was easy to remember once I thought about it. He always seemed to be there; in the library, the cafeteria, outside the grocery store, even once during the summer in Atlanta when I visited home.

My most vivid memory was his wedding day. *He's married*, my mind screamed. Where was his wife? Instead of adding yet another question I couldn't answer to the millions that were already in my head, I came right out and asked him.

I steadied my voice. "Where is your wife? How can you be married and do something like this?"

The tortured look on his face almost made me want to take the question back. Almost.

"My wife is none of your concern." He walked back over to the chaise lounge and sat down with his back to me.

I considered pushing him to answer my question but quickly decided against it. Just like the question about Michal, I might not have wanted to hear the answer.

The next thirty minutes passed with us sitting in silence, avoiding the other's gaze. The anxiety coming from worrying about what would happen next had me on edge. So much so, I damn near jumped out of my skin when there was a buzz at the door. The professor got up and walked to the door without a glance my way. I laid there, figuring I would be wasting my time to try to do anything. He was smart. I knew getting away wouldn't be easy.

He opened the door wide but blocked my view with his body. He rolled a food tray into the room then whispered something to the person, or persons, who'd brought the tray. Once he was done, the door clicked shut. He opened the keypad again and put in a few numbers. I squinted trying to see them, but his fingers moved too quick.

Without acknowledging me, he wheeled the tray over into a shadowy corner of the room. I couldn't see him, but my eyes never left the corner he'd disappeared into. I stared so hard that I was startled when a light suddenly clicked on. Plates of food set on a small brown oak kitchen table with a chair on either side. It made me curious to see what else was hiding in the shadows.

The smell of food caused my stomach to growl loudly, reminding me that I hadn't eaten in hours. I was also thirsty and had to pee.

Whatever it takes. Whatever it takes, I repeated over and over in my head.

With thirty uninterrupted minutes of thought, I'd come to the decision I'd do whatever it was he wanted me to do without putting up a fight. I needed to stay alive to get the hell out of whatever he'd trapped me in. If he wanted sex, I'd have sex with him. If he wanted a girlfriend, sex slave, companion, cook; I'd be all those things. I would do what I needed to do to get up out of here unscarred physically and emotionally.

Before I could fix my mouth to ask him how I was going to eat tied to a bed, his hand went into his pocket and out came the menacing looking hunting knife. His threat to slit my throat looped in my head like a broken record. Logically, I knew he was about to cut me loose, but my heart still hammered against my ribcage.

Slowly, he approached the bed and sat to the side of me. Our eyes were connected the entire time. I had to be sure he wasn't going to make good on his previous threats. I didn't know why he was staring at me as such. First, he cut both my legs loose, then he pinned me with a stare that promised something bad would happen if I tried anything. Again, I thought about hitting him, but I wasn't stupid.

First my right arm, and then my left was cut loose. I sat up then stretched out my sore body while rubbing my aching wrist. I was grateful I had no rope burns. He stood from the bed but said nothing. His silence unnerved me.

"Bathroom?" I asked, voice calmer than expected.

He nodded toward another door in the room, opposite of the door the food had come through. My toes sank into the plush carpet when I stood. I watched him cautiously as I made my way across the room. I tried to make it to the bathroom without looking back, but I couldn't help myself. I glanced over my shoulder to find his eyes exploring every inch of my body. He didn't look one bit ashamed that he had been caught at it. He was a pervert.

I slipped into the bathroom and eased the door closed behind me. I was surprised by the lock on the door. I clicked it into place and started searching the bathroom. I looked for a way to escape, but there were no windows. I really hadn't expected there to be. I doubted he would have let me go into the bathroom alone if it would be that easy to escape.

Like the room, the walls were painted white. Black and red towels were organized on the sink and hanging on the towel rack. It was the exact same way at my house. I cringed at yet another similarity and wanted to freak the hell out again, but I calmed myself by taking a few deep breaths. There was no way

out, and by looking for one, I was just wasting time and disappointing myself.

I sat down on the toilet as I scanned the room. While I handled my business, I looked at everything else I hadn't paid attention to at first. A large white ordinary glass enclosed shower stall was to the right of me. A medicine cabinet sat above the sink and a full-size mirror hung on the wall. For some reason I figured the room would be different and fancier decorated because of who the professor was. I knew he was rich. His wedding had been lavish. I would have never figured him to be so plain.

I got up and then washed my hands. Once done, I opened the medicine cabinet. Inside was a toothbrush, toothpaste, a brush, a comb, and medicine bottles. I ignored everything except the toothbrush and toothpaste, grateful to be able to wash the nasty taste from my mouth. After brushing my teeth and washing my face, I closed the medicine cabinet, but reopened it. Something told me to look at the pill bottles. I picked them up one at a time. All four had the professor's name on it; Adam Winchester. One read take one a day for anxiety. The instruction labels on all the others had been torn so I couldn't tell what they were or what they treated.

I made a mental note to asked him, just not anytime soon. I closed the cabinet, looked at the shower and considered a bath, but my stomach and nerves protested that idea. I took a deep breath. I turned and looked down at the door handle. The thought of going back into that room unnerved me. But I knew I had to lest he freaked out again. I opened the door and was startled when I came face-to-face with Adam. He was standing right outside the door, the same sad look from earlier had returned to his face.

Nervously, I chewed at my bottom lip and wondered if I should ask him what was wrong, just to see where his head was.

I didn't get the chance. He turned and stalked back to the other side of the room where the food was waiting. I followed him quietly, figuring if I had done something wrong, he would have told me.

FIVE



She had locked the fucking door. I fumed silently at her slight against me. Why was she purposely trying to hurt me? Feeling my anger mounting, I took a deep breath to compose myself. The rational side of me knew the circumstances surrounding how she ended up here with me would cause a few hiccups in my plan. I had kidnapped her and tied her to our bed. But no one had ever accused me of being rational.

Psycho.

Should I really expect her to trust me? The voice in my head screamed no, but my heart said yes. And why did she have to ask about Jenny? Nothing else mattered in this room beside us. Regardless, I didn't feel it was any of her business. I wouldn't hold her past against her, so she shouldn't hold mine against me.

I rolled my neck to relieve some of the tension that had built up. I took a sip of my Scotch and concentrated on her eating instead of my jumbled thoughts. Her lips wrapping around the fork made me ache to have them wrapped around my cock. I shifted in my seat. I tried to think of nonsexual things, but it was hard when all I wanted to do was throw her on the bed and fuck my progeny into her.

However, I swore to myself that I wouldn't force her. No matter what, I wouldn't take her against her will. My ego wouldn't allow me to. I wanted her to beg for me, to yearn for the pleasure I planned to give her. I grinned despite trying not to. Oh, the pleasurable things I had planned for us.

"What are you smiling at? You know that's creepy right?" she asked with her mouth full of food.

She was calm... too calm. She was speaking as if this was an everyday event. I tilted my head and studied her face. She stilled her fork midair then smiled at me. She smiled at me. Her smile wasn't forced but I knew it wasn't genuine. I was set to be confused until it dawned on me what she was doing. She was treating me like I was a fucking crazy man. She tried to make herself appear more human, trying to get on my good side so I wouldn't harm her. She was trying to play me.

So, she was going to make this fun?

"You..." I chuckled. "You're funny and cute," I answered generically.

She didn't respond. She shoved baked potato in her mouth and stared at the wall behind my head. I could tell she was having some kind of internal conflict by the way her eyes darted back and forth and by the way her upper lip twitched. My first instinct was to ask her what was on her mind, but I didn't. I wanted her to get in the habit of asking me whatever she wanted

to know. I'd always answer her truthfully, without hesitation as long as it was something she needed answers to.

I waited her out. Her right leg shook which told me she was fighting hard to remain silent. She looked up at me then back to her plate. She repeated that same action three or four times in a span of five minutes.

"What are the meds in the cabinet for?" she blurted out.

I hesitated for a bit to make her think I wasn't going to answer her. She cast a nervous glance in my direction before letting her eyes scan the room. She fidgeted in her chair while I kept my face placid.

Her chest heaved up and down. The fidgeting caused her breasts to bounce underneath her sheer top, her hard nipples straining against the fabric. I enjoyed the view. If not for that I would have answered her right away. As far as the pills? I had purposely left them in the cabinet for her to see. I wanted her to know our life together wouldn't be without obstacles.

"Prozac and Risperidone. Both well-known antipsychotics," I responded.

I watched as her eyes shifted nervously from me to the food on her plate. Seconds that seemed like hours passed with us in silence. However, I could tell what she was thinking by her tight-lipped nonresponse.

"Are you crazy?" she asked.

I hadn't expected her to come right out and ask. I didn't think she had the nerve.

"No, I'm not. I may be... slightly imbalanced. That is a better way to describe me," I joked, but I was serious.

Crazy was not knowing how to come back from madness. I always pulled myself back. She didn't have to voice it, but the doubt was written all over her face.

"Are auditory hallucination part of your 'imbalance'?" She used finger quotes when she said imbalanced.

I nodded but didn't elaborate. I'd never told anyone how bad my episodes could get. That was something I would save for later, for when she understood me better. I rolled my shoulders and waited for her next question. The wait wasn't long.

She pushed her plate away. She'd barely eaten anything. "Why am I here?" Placing her elbows on the table, Eve steepled her fingers together then rested her head on them as she waited for an answer.

I debated on whether I should tell her the truth. How would she react to knowing I'd watched her for four years and she was now mine whether she liked it or not? Maybe if I told her that I wanted her so I took her, it would sound a little less creepy. Then realized I'd sound crazy either way.

"Tick tock, tick tock...what will you do?" that voice sang in my head.

I ignored him and took a deep breath before I swallowed down the rest of my Scotch. I needed the drink before I told her the part I'd played in her freshman year. I started from the beginning of our story and told her everything, well almost everything. When I finished, she stared at me in utter disbelief.

Her mouth opened like she was about to say something but quickly closed it again.

She shoved away from the table and made her way to the bed. Eve slid under the fluffy white comforter and pulled it up to her neck like it could protect her. I said nothing, allowing her to be alone with her thoughts. Besides, there wasn't anything I could say to make her understand why I'd done what I had. Sometimes I didn't even understand it.

I got up from the chair and took one last look at our plates. While she had barely eaten, I hadn't even touched my food. I thought about eating, but quickly dismissed it. I'd eaten breakfast. It was well past midnight. Fatigue from the long day was setting in.

I never took my eyes off Eve as I made my way across the room to the chaise lounge. Her face was blank of emotion. It infuriated me that I didn't know what she was thinking.

After I removed my shoes, I reached into the concealed ottoman and pulled out a blanket. I got as comfortable as I could. I watched her until she turned away from my gaze. I wanted so badly to lie beside her. We didn't have to have sex. I just wanted to touch her, breathe her in, but I knew that wouldn't be happening anytime soon.

I pretended to be asleep until I heard her lightly snoring. Thirty-seven minutes. It had taken her thirty-seven minutes to fall into a comfortable sleep after I'd revealed I'd been watching her for years. That wasn't normal.

Normal women would be too scared to sleep. They'd be screaming and crying, trying to find a way to escape. They'd be afraid. Though she might have been genuinely frightened when she first woke up—even I would have been a bit put off after

waking up tied to a bed with a familiar stranger watching me—however, after the initial shock wore off, she'd been running on anger.

Her reaction confirmed to me what I knew all along; she was like me. I held my breath, careful not to wake her. I got up and walked as quietly as I could over to the bed. The thick carpet helped to mask my footsteps. She was lying comfortably on her back, legs spread and her mouth slightly ajar. She'd kicked the cover off. Her shirt had risen just below her breast and her hands lay on her inner thighs. Her smooth dark skin tempted me to touch. I dug my nails into my palms. It wasn't time for that. We had more to discuss. There was so much more she needed to know.

I wondered how she'd react when I told her I knew her secrets. All of them.



Eve's sophomore year had been eye opening. By chance, I'd seen her out one Saturday night about three weeks after fall semester started. She was driving down a popular crowded strip that was lined with clubs. I'd walked away from my colleagues to follow her when she emerged from the parking garage.

She was dressed differently than I'd ever seen her. Her wild curly hair was loose around her shoulders. She wore light makeup and her lips were painted blood red making her usually young face appear older, sensual. I kept my distance. Despite being in five-inch stiletto heels she moved quickly. Her steps never faltered. Her red bandage dress clung to her like a second skin. She walked with purpose, ignoring the men trying to get her attention. Many eyes were on her, but it seemed she hardly noticed.

I followed her for nearly fifteen minutes. Fewer and fewer people surrounded us. It made me even more curious to

see where she was going. Another block and we'd be in a residential area. Suddenly she turned short and walked down an alley way. She stopped at a building I recognized as an old cigar factory. She knocked and a guy the size of a body builder opened the door. She posed sexily allowing his eyes to roam over her voluptuous body. She spoke to him in a hushed tone for about a half a minute before he beckoned her inside, his hand at the small of her back just above her ass.

I waited, peaking around the building into the dark alley. When I was sure she wasn't coming back out, I followed her path and knocked on the door as she'd done. The same guy answered.

He looked behind me then to each side of me. "No female companion?" he questioned.

I shook my head.

"Three-hundred bucks to come in alone," he said and held his hand out after he'd given me the once over.

I doubted the cover was as high as three-hundred, but because I wore an expensive black Armani suit, I guessed he figured I could afford it. I paid him in cash.

I didn't know what I expected when I walked into the building. Honestly, I had no expectation when I entered. From wall-to-wall the room was decorated in black and red. The walls were painted solid black. Red and black sofas sat scattered throughout. All in attendance were dressed in variations of red and black. The ones who had on clothes at least.

Men and women of all ages, shapes, sizes and colors danced, talked, fondled in different stages of undress. A large

percentage were nude or in lingerie. A big neon sign hung from the ceiling like a disco ball read: INFERNO. A fast techno beat thumped from the speakers. Eve was full of surprises. I would have never imagined her in such a place.

I made my way through the crowd then up a set of stairs. There were about fifteen rooms divided between three floors. They were all the size of studio apartments and in each room, people watched and, or participated in any and every sexual act I'd ever thought about, read about or had seen.

While I searched for Eve, I saw things that would have made a porn addict blush. I got distracted from my search as I watched two women who were covered in tattoos and shaped like fifties pinup girls take clamps from various parts of the other's body. They kissed each spot on the skin left bright red by the devices. It was the first thing in the club I'd been interested in watching, I was tempted to stay, but finding Eve was more urgent. I pulled myself away from the door and another man replaced me, his hand on his naked cock.

Two rooms down, I stopped and stood outside the door. I'd spotted a woman who looked like Eve but knew I had to be mistaken. The woman stood on a circular stage. Men and women surrounded her. They watched, captivated as she rolled her body like a wave in the ocean to a slow R&B beat.

I walked further into the room, mesmerized. It was her. The red dress she wore was pulled down, exposing her large firm breasts. Her nipples, the size and color of HERSHEY'S KISSES, were erect. I couldn't wrap my mind around the fact that I was looking at Eve. The ever quiet, always shy Eve was dancing nearly naked in a room full of strangers. The Weeknd's, "Wicked Games" played over the speakers as she slinked down to the floor. On all fours, she crawled her way from the edge of the stage. Her bare ass and shaved pussy on display. My blood pumped through my veins so rapidly my skin heated.

She stopped then turned on her back, her dress riding her thighs. She spread her legs then ran her fingers through her wet folds. Her eyes lulled closed. Someone gasped. Maybe it was me? Taking a seat, I watched as she danced for another song and then another. I didn't blink, scared I'd miss something. Then, just like that, it was over. She was done with her mental foreplay. It had ended too soon.

When she walked off stage, all eyes followed her. I suspected if not for the two men who stood guarding what I assumed were the dressing rooms, many would have physically followed, me included. The sexual energy wafting off her was like a magnetic pull.

I waited anxiously as she did whatever she was doing in the room. After a few minutes had passed, she came out, completely put back together. Absent was the makeup she'd been wearing earlier. Her face looked sweet and innocent again, but now I knew better. She'd never be my sweet naïve Eve again.

She walked with her head down. Another guard, bigger than the one at the door, followed beside her and kept people from approaching her. I followed them, unnoticed, when they exited the club. They were ahead of me, but I could still see them clearly. He walked her to her car. She spoke to him in a hushed tone, kissed his cheek, got in her car and he watched her drive off, before turning to leave.

I checked my wallet and counted thirteen-hundred-dollars. I thought about bribing him for more info on her and how often she went to the place called INFERNO but decided against it. The suit that he wore looked just as expensive as my own, and they seemed to know one another. If I questioned him, and he turned down the money, he could tell her I'd been asking questions. He could have easily described me to her. Then she'd know I'd seen her. I put the money back in my wallet then put it

away. I decided to wait. I decided I would follow her again the next Saturday to see if she returned to the club, but she didn't.

Three weeks passed before she went out again. I'd only been parked in the driveway of the empty house across the street from her house for a short while. She was wearing simple jeans and a t-shirt when she exited the house. I thought she was about to run an errand. I would have gone home, thinking I'd wasted another Saturday if I hadn't noticed her duffle bag. She threw it in the back of her car and drove off. She drove to the gas station down the street from her house where she filled her car with gas.

I followed her to I-4 North, heading to Orlando. An hour and a half she drove without stopping. She pulled up alongside a ranch-style home that was surrounded by acres of land. The yard and driveway were filled with cars and people. She got out of her car only when the guard I recognized from the club knocked on the window. He led her inside. I got out of my car, and even though lots of people milled around, I decided against going inside. I didn't want to be spotted. I walked around the side of the house. All the windows were opened, and the song from the club filled the air. I followed it to the back of the house. I saw only flashes of Eve, as so many people stood around trying to get a glimpse of her, too. She was dancing again, and yet again, it was over as quickly as it had begun.

"Do you know who she is?" I asked the slender built Hispanic man who stood next to me.

He eyed me suspiciously before answering. "That's Eve. You must be new to the scene?"

I was confused. "New to what?"

"The Taboo Community. Everybody here is an exhibitionist, a nudist, voyeurs, or swingers. The freaks of

nature, man. Why are you even here if you don't know anything?"

"I came to see her," I answered honestly.

"Didn't we all?" He chuckled and took a swig from the cup he held. "Too bad that's all you can do. She's into watching and being watched. Nothing else, which is a pity. I'd give my life savings to fuck her."

I cringed at the idea of him touching her and walked away before he could say anything that would cause me to physically harm him. Eve's car was already gone when I made my way back to the front of the house through the crowd. I drove home thinking she was a lot more complex than I'd originally assumed.

She went to different clubs, events, and parties for the next six months until one night she was leaving INFERNO, her bodyguard— I'd learned his name was Gus— didn't show up to escort her out. She'd danced and left like she usually did. I noticed a car following her. I followed him. I assumed she didn't know either one of us were following her. Being so trusting and unaware of her surroundings was dangerous. One day I would teach her that.

She took a detour and stopped at an all-night grocer. The parking lot was unusually crowded for that time of night. She circled the lot for a moment, looking for a spot to park. Then, without thought of her safety it seemed, she parked on the side of the building, away from the rest of the cars and foot traffic. He pulled up beside her. I stopped just far enough away to be inconspicuous, but not too far away that he would be able to harm her without me intervening.

I watched him as he watched her get out of the car. I recognized the possessive, predatory gleam in his eyes. It was

almost identical to mine. He wanted her as much as I did, but there was malice. He'd planned to hurt her. There was no way I would let that happen. When she came out. He sat in his car with his posture tight. I could tell he was struggling to restrain himself from acting in the parking lot.

He followed her to her house. Sat outside just a few houses away from her place, watching her. I pulled up into the driveway of the empty house across the street from where she lived. It was where I usually parked. He had to go, I thought

I got out and grabbed the tire iron and hunting knife from my truck. I used the shadows of the trees to make my way to the car. My rising fury threatened to blind me. What did he plan to do to her? The thought of him hurting or touching her filled me with so much rage that my body felt like it was on fire.

When I got to his window, I managed to smile as I tapped at it. His face turned bright red with surprise and fear, then he proceeded to rolled down the window.

He stammered, "Is there a prob—"

For moments, I smiled down at him. So much so that nervousness skittered across his features. "Yes, there is a problem. You. You can't have her," came out in nothing more than a broken whisper. I simultaneously reached into the window and slit his throat before he could finish the question forming in his mind.

His warm blood bathed my face and mouth. I reveled in the feel and taste of it. The man feverishly grabbed his throat. He tried to stave off the flow of blood, but there was nothing he could do. It would take less than a minute for him to bleed to death, but first... I opened his car door then dragged him out by his shaggy blond hair. He slumped to the ground as I stood over him. I used the tire iron to land blows onto every inch of his body. He needed to suffer. I beat him until the voice in my head quieted. Then I beat him until the erratic beat of my heart slowed.

Covered in his blood, I picked up his lifeless body and pushed it into his backseat. I got in the driver seat, started his car then drove away. I smiled when the heavens opened up and rain fell. It would cleanse away any evidence of him ever being there. I drove him to my favorite hiding spot.

The next day while Eve was in class I drove to her house and left a note in her mail box.

I was watching you. I love to see you dance. Leave the door open for me.

She couldn't stay there anymore. Who knew who else knew where she lived? I couldn't be there all the time to protect her. I knew that note would scare any woman. Eve may have been a conundrum, but she was no fool. She moved two days later. After that, her late-night dances ceased, which was fine with me. I would be the only person she danced for in the future.

"Adam"

My name on her lips brought me back to the present. At first, I thought I imagined it. I remained frozen in place, waiting for her to called for me again. Seconds passed in silence. Only my blood rushing in my ears could be heard. But just when I began to think I'd imagine it—

"Adam" she whispered again and shifted onto her back.

Lazily she trailed her right hand down her abdomen. Was this real or was my mind playing tricks on me? Her legs spread apart. She traced the flesh of her right thigh with her finger tips then groaned. I didn't blink, disturbed by the thought of missing anything.

"Adam," she moaned again, confirming my thoughts that I'd heard my name. "Touch me, Adam. Touch me please," she pled for me in her dreams.

Just once, I promised myself. I got on my knees in front of the bed—the need to taste her drove me. Just once... And besides, she wanted it. I wrapped my arms around her thighs then roughly yanked her to the edge of the bed. Her ass was positioned just right for me to taste her. I glanced up to make sure she was awake. She was. I wanted her to be lucid when I gave her pleasure for the first time. There was no surprise, no fear or revulsion on her face, just a wicked glint in her eyes. She knew what I was about to do and licked her lips in anticipation of it.

I snatched her underwear to the side and found her cunt slick with her juices. The scent of her want was heady and dizzying to me. I slowly wrapped my tongue around her clit, latching on to it. I sucked and licked at it until she was panting and trying to crawl away. Wrapping my arms around her thighs, I locked her into place and spread her legs further apart.

"Oh shit," she gasped, her back arched. "Please," she begged. "More."

I gave her what she wanted. Using two fingers, I spread her pussy lips, slid my tongue deep inside her. I fucked her with it, eliciting a pretty moan from her. I replaced my tongue with two fingers. Our eyes met. I saw her, seeing me. I slowed the rhythm of my fingers as I slid them in and out of her wetness,

causing her to hiss. Eyes wide opened, she watched me, unflinching as I finger fucked her. Her walls clenched, tightening. She threw her head back in ecstasy. She was so close. She tried closing her legs over my hand. I stopped long enough to roughly push them back apart.

"Don't move, or I'll stop," I snapped.

"Wh—" she started to protest but lost her ability to speak when I laved my tongue up and down the folds of her pussy.

I was rewarded with a gush of fresh cum. I licked the wetness as it dripped down to her ass. Her whimpers made my dick jerk. A part of me contemplated fucking her then and there, knowing she would let me, but then I would miss out on the chance of making her beg for it. Instead I slid two fingers back into her. I positioned them in a 'come here' motion and watched as her body arched then convulsed. Her juices flooded my fingers. I removed them then sucked the rest out of her while she chanted my name like a prayer. If my mouth hadn't been full, I would have pointed that out to her.

SEVEN



I laid sprawled out on the bed with my heart hammering against my rib cage. I attempted to catch my breath while Adam stood over me. I watched him watching me, waiting for him to pounce. The predatory gleam in his eyes told me that was what would happen next. The shameful thing was, I wanted it to happen. I was burning from the inside out.

I groaned inwardly because my ploy had backfired on me. I hadn't been sleeping when I put on my little show for him. I thought he'd screw me and then be done with me. I'd had no plans to enjoy it. I shouldn't have enjoyed it, but the moment he French kissed my pussy, I was a goner. Was there something wrong with me?

The knowing smile on his lips let me know he was aware of my satisfaction. That irked me. I snatched my eyes away from his. I casted them downward as I didn't want him to see my shame. However, it was his manhood that drew my attention. His hard dick peeked out at me from behind the fly of

his boxers. I turned away quickly. He chuckled when he caught me staring at it.

He was a cocky bastard. Admittedly, he had a right to be cocky. If I was only judging by the size of the monster in his boxers and threw in the fact that he made me orgasm harder than ever, he had the right to be downright arrogant. My pussy quivered at the thought. Yet again, I was unnerved.

"What's wrong with you? Why are you looking at me that way?" I asked.

"Did you allow me to do that because you wanted it or because you thought I'd free you after?"

I turned to lay on my side, trying to will my body to calm as it still hummed from my orgasm. "Does it matter?" I asked.

He nodded. "Yes, it matters."

Did I tell the truth or lie? I thought about it for a second. If he was still going to hurt me, then telling the truth wouldn't stop him. However, I figured to lie would incite his rage more. I didn't want to be on the receiving end of it. I decided to tell the truth.

"If it'll get me out of here, do with me as you please. You won't get a fight from me."

The pout on his face told me he didn't like my answer. It was weird to see a grown man pouting. It was strange that pouting had even been a response to my answer.

I adjusted the pillow to see him better. "What? You wanted me to lie?"

"No, but I didn't think you'd be quite as honest since you lie so often," he said.

"Excuse me?" I asked, perplexed. "What have I lied to you about?"

"You've known this entire time I was there watching, haven't you?"

He stared at me expectantly, like my answer would change everything. The tension in the room was thick as he waited for my answer.

"You've asked me this before and I told you no," I said.

No matter what he said or did, I wouldn't tell him otherwise. I refused to play into his delusions. I could tell he didn't like my response by the way he glared at me. For a split-second he did nothing more than glare at me until he took a step back from the bed and smiled.

"You're lying. And you're damaged, just as damaged as me." It was a statement not a question.

"Why do you say that?" I asked, curious as to what his answer would be.

"I saw you. All those years watching you... You looked through others while staring directly at me. You knew what I was and now you're pretending."

I waved him off. "I don't even know what that means. What are you? Are you not human?"

"Just admit it." His voice rose with each word. "You knew I was there all along. You aren't afraid of me. You can pretend all you want. It's just a game to you and you know it. All that faking as if you're afraid, as if you want me to take you against your will and hoping I'll let you go after, it's a front. You want me just as much as I want you."

It was at that very moment it occurred to me that Adam was more than just crazy. He was the kind of mentally deranged that only an insane asylum and-or prison could help. I wasn't a professional yet, but if I had to diagnose him, I'd say he was either a high functioning anti-social or borderline personality. High functioning, yes, but crazy none the less. He'd created a whole narrative in his head to justify his kidnapping of me. I was in more danger than I originally thought.

I was freaking out mentally, but I also wanted to tell him to kiss my natural black ass.

"You're mental. If all that were true, you wouldn't have had to kidnap me."

"Kidnapping you is irrelevant. What's happening now is. You shouldn't be this calm or calculating. Why aren't you afraid of me, Eve?"

I thought about his words for a minute before responding. I'd always lived with an absence of fear. My feelings had always been binary. Anger and pride were the only emotions I was familiar with, and I could be manipulative when I needed to be. I was a product of a screwed-up childhood filled

with abandonment issues. I didn't think I was capable of much else.

"Honestly, Adam, I'm not afraid of you, per se. I'm afraid of being tortured and killed. But...I don't think you want to hurt me, do you?"

"I would never hurt you," he responded with so much conviction I believed him.

Almost.

What would happen if whatever this was didn't turn out the way he wanted it to? What would happen if I pissed him off to the point of no return? Would he snap?

However, I was not one to dwell on questions I couldn't answer so I continued. "I also don't have it in me to cry, scream and run around the room like one of those chicks in the movies to appease you. If a scared girl is what you wanted, you picked the wrong girl. I already know in the end, you'll do what you want. And even if you decide to kill me, everybody's got to die one day, don't they? Just don't do anything weird to me or torture me for days on end. Make it quick and painless, please."

Adam gazed down at me wide eyed and exasperated. I almost laughed at the shock on his face; he was suddenly looking at me like I had been looking at him earlier.

"You're just as crazy as I am," he said. "Yeah, you might need some meds for that."

He was just as sarcastic as he was serious.

I was offended. "No, I'm good, but why don't you take yours?"

I flipped over on the bed, my back to him.

"Yeah, I might just do that," I heard him say before I closed my eyes.

EIGHT



"Eve..."

That was the third time I'd whispered her name in her ear in an attempt to wake her up. She'd been asleep for nine hours and I was bored. After I woke up, I spent the morning arranging things so we'd be comfortable.

"Eve," I called louder and smacked her right ass cheek. Not hard, just enough to sting.

She jumped up in bed, disoriented. "What the hell?"

Her right arm swung towards my head. I caught it just in time. Any slower and she would have connected her closed fist with the side of my face.

"Fuck," I yelled out when her left hand connected with my cheek.

She slapped me, hard. That was not the reaction I expected.

I scowled at her. "Why did you do that?"

She glared right back. "Are you seriously going to ask me why I hit you after you hit me?" she snapped.

"Love tap, baby," I said getting up from the bed, heading to the bathroom to check my face. "You on the other hand tried to take my head off."

"You deserve it," she mumbled under her breath.

I didn't think she'd meant for me to hear it, but I did. In front of the mirror, I examined my face. My cheek was bright red and stung. I marched out of the bathroom and charged toward her. The sleepy expression on her face disappeared. She attempted to get up from the bed, but she was too slow. I grabbed her by her ankle and yanked her back onto the bed. She fell backwards, her hands went up defensively, covering her face and head.

I caged her between my arms, using my weight to hold her in place. "You shouldn't hit people. Some just might hit you back," I warned

She looked somewhere between enraged and almost amused. "Take your own advice next time you think about slapping my ass like that. Now get off me," she spat between clenched teeth then attempted to push me off her.

"No. Apologize," I demanded, only half serious.

My anger had dissipated as soon as my body came in contact with hers. I was glad I hadn't bothered to put on anything but boxers. I felt the heat of her pussy against my cock through the thin fabric. I pressed into her, eliciting a groan. I wondered if she realized it would be so easy to pull her underwear to the side and slide right in...

NINE



My composure was slipping. I could feel his hardness pressed against me. I fought the urge to push up against him. What was wrong with me? Why was he affecting me as such? Maybe he was right. Maybe I was just as screwed up as him.

"Get off me, Adam," I protested, but even to my ears it sounded weak.

He shook his head. "No. I said apologize."

"Not a chance. Get off me!"

He grinned. It was devious and filled with the promise of things to come.

"Fuck me? How about I fuck you?" He pressed a kiss right between my cleavage, trailed his tongue from the point up

my neck. "It would be my pleasure to fuck you," he said with his lips pressed against my ear, his voice in a low growl.

I arched into him just as his weight lifted from my body. I thought he was going to get up. I didn't know whether to be happy or sad about that, but he didn't get up. Adam lifted just enough so he could ghost his fingers across my skin, from my knee, up my thigh. He stopped when he touched the fabric of my panties.

"Is that what you want, Eve? For me to fuck you?"

He kissed me softly against the corner of my mouth then slid his tongue across my chin, down my neck, stopping at my collar bone. He sucked then nibbled lightly before twirling his tongue on the same spot. His tongue... I remembered the things that tongue did to my pussy. I fisted his shirt. My clit thumped, and my leg trembled. I had to bite the inside of my cheek to stop myself from moaning in pleasure.

"Yes, you want me to fuck you," he whispered. "But... I won't," he said before he pushed off me.

He walked away, leaving me with my heart thundering and my pussy throbbing. I wanted—no—I needed for him to come back and give me some relief, but I'd be damned if I begged for it.

You need to get yourself together, I thought. Stop thinking about sex with him. Are you nuts?

Suddenly, Adam started humming. It drew my attention because of how eerily familiar it was. I tried to place the song but couldn't. I turned and watched him as he set food on the table. He seemed unaffected by what just happened seconds earlier, while I wrestled mentally with many emotions. My body was on edge.

"You hungry?" The question was thrown over his shoulder.

Yes, I was hungry, but not for food. I ignored him

He turned away from the food, his gaze fixed on me. "You look hungry," he teased in double-entendre and licked his lips.

Involuntarily my eyes followed the trail his tongue made. He was purposely messing with me, and I was falling for it. I wanted to get up and knock the smug expression off his face. I also wanted to sit on his face and find out what else his tongue could do.

I sighed in frustration and tried to sound as unaffected as he looked when I said, "No I'm not hungry." I lied; my stomach was empty. "I'm going to take a shower." I pushed up from the bed. I Ignored the tingle between my thighs. "Did you happen to think about what I would wear while I was your slave?" I asked nastily.

"Yep, I sure did," he responded, still smiling. "Everything you need is in the chest of drawers."

I stomped over to the dresser and pulled out the top drawer. I searched for something to put on that covered a little more than what I was currently wearing. In the first drawer, I found tank tops, camis and underwear—bikini— thongs, some my own, most new. None of my granny panties though. The next three were filled with the same. Not a bra in sight.

He watched me the entire time. I felt it. When I spoke, I didn't bother turning around as I knew I already had his attention.

"Where are the clothes?" I asked.

"You're looking at them," he responded.

"No, I mean clothes, like sweats, shirts, pants? This stuff goes under clothes." I picked up a hand full of the thin pieces of fabric and let them drop back into the drawer.

"That's what I want you to wear. That's all you need to wear No one's here but us."

I could tell from his tone there was no use in debating the subject with him.

I didn't leave well enough alone, however. "And what if I said I want you to go get me some real clothes?"

He didn't answer right away. The silence lasted so long I was forced to turn and look at him. His face was scrunched up in thought, then a slow calculated smile spread across his lips. His eyes lit up wickedly.

"If you keep questioning me, I could take what is in the drawers and have them thrown away. Then, you could walk around naked. Yeah I like the idea of that." He walked to the door, opened the panel.

I knew what he was about to do next, so I shouted for him to stop. "Okay. All right. I'll wear what you have for me," I conceded.

"Shucks!" He snapped his fingers, sounding like a Leave It to Beaver character.

He closed the panel then smiled deviously at me. I snatched a random pair of underwear and a tank top from the drawer, not caring if they matched, and headed to the bathroom. I was pissed off. I hated that he'd taken away all my control. I couldn't even wear what I wanted.

Just before I walked into the bathroom he said, "Besides, there's no need to play shy with me, Eve. I've seen you naked already."

I paused and whipped around to face him. "You saw me naked? When and how?"

No sooner had I asked the questions, I remembered the clothes I'd woken up in after he'd taken me. The clothes I had on weren't my own. He had to have undressed and redressed me.

He watched me, observing my face for a few seconds, then he turned and started rearranging the plates on the table again. He ignored me like I hadn't asked him a question.

"Are you—"

I forgot everything I was about to ask when he started humming again. That song, I knew that song. I just couldn't remember from where or why it was important. I just knew it was. I stood there, listening until it hits me like a ton of bricks.

It was the song I danced to. The only song I danced to, and that was when I realized he knew. How could he? I

wondered.

Instead of asking him, I left him setting the table and went into the bathroom. In the shower, I ran through my memories, searching them for his face and came up with nothing. I'd never seen him in any of the places I'd danced. I would have noticed. Maybe someone told him they saw me. It wasn't like I hid the fact that I was dancing. As an adult I didn't feel the need to hide or explain my actions to anyone.

Would he ask me why I danced? Was he judging me? Was that what had put me on his radar? Then I thought of the reason I started dancing and wondered if he knew why. Panic set in. The thought of him knowing why was affecting me more than him knowing at all.

I didn't want anyone to know how much Davis had hurt me, so I hadn't told anyone about him cheating, then breaking up with me in freshman year or about how it had twisted my view of myself. When I thought about it, I felt stupid about that whole relationship. I had actually thought Davis loved me.

Being with him had felt right. He was perfect and him wanting me made me feel perfect. Then he'd cheated. The girl he left me for was my complete opposite. She was walking sexuality; exotic, beautiful and slim. I spent nights awake wondering if he ever really loved me or my body like he said he had. I'd even beat myself up for never having sex with him, blaming us never being intimate for the reason he cheated on me. But after a week or so I was grateful that I hadn't fucked him. If all it took was physical features to sway him away from me, he wasn't worth it. I got tired of long sleepless nights and start going out.

At first, I spent many nights in different clubs around Tampa, dancing by myself or with a partner, feeling free. Dancing was therapy for me. Stripping came later. I got the idea from a book I'd read. The chick masturbated on camera for men

to pay for college tuition and it helped with her self-esteem. I couldn't imagine touching myself for some anonymous stranger behind a computer screen, although I'd never had any problem with nudity.

It had taken me years to learn to love my body, and when I looked at myself in the mirror, I liked what I saw. A slightly rounded stomach, wide hips, thick smooth thighs, my ass round and firm, legs long and flawless skin. I thought why not combine the two. Why not dance naked? The thought had left my mind a quickly as it came though. and I went on about my normal life.

It wasn't long after my sophomore year that I started to dance for people. I happened to be looking at ads on Craigslist for jobs. My money was tight. My stipend from student loans running low, and after paying my cellphone bill for a few months and buying food, I would be broke. I needed a job immediately. I came across an ad for dancers at a strip club. They wanted voluptuous, natural, and attractive. That described me.

I called the number before I could talk myself out of it. I was given an address and the name of the person to speak to. I wore what I considered my sexiest outfit; a black crop top that fell just below my breast, no bra and a skater skirt that stopped below my ass cheeks, no panties and a pair of black ankle booties with a thin, sharp four-inch heel.

The club was in a bad neighborhood in Clearwater, thirty-minutes from my house in Tampa. The building that housed the club was painted slime green with a neon sign that flashed Vegas Nights in a strip mall with empty shops on both sides of it. It was uninviting, but it didn't sway me. Not much anyway.

A HELP WANTED sign that said they were looking for girls of all shapes, sizes and colors hung on the black painted

door. No bodyguard stood at the entrance like I had seen in movies, and it was nearly empty when I walked in even though it was after ten on a Friday night.

I thought about turning around to leave after seeing only white faces inside. Florida was a tricky place when it came to race. One part could be diverse and open minded then I could cross the street into hillbilly hell. The black girl behind the bar who asked me who I was looking for calmed my nerves and stopped my retreat toward the door.

Joe the manager, who weighed a hundred pounds too much for his frame, was the same height as I was and ugly. It made my skin crawl when he had looked me over with his beady green eyes. When he was done, he grinned, showing all thirty-two of his brown stained teeth.

You're one sexy bitch," he complimented in the only way I think he was capable of.

I was hired without even dancing.

Heather, a blond girl with a face that left a lot to be desired, was assigned to show me the ropes. Joe had called her a pro that had been dancing ten years, which contradicted what she told me. She said she was twenty-five. To me she looked forty-five. The thick makeup she was wearing did very little to hide the discoloration and age lines around her eyes and mouth. She was pale and ivory skinned with large fake tits. Her one redeeming asset were nicely shaped legs that went on forever. She had no ass to speak of, but said she made good money, which worried me. I was the exact opposite of her and hoped I wasn't wasting my time. She took me to the back where the girls usually changed. I hadn't thought about clothes to dance in, but Heather assured me what I had on was ok.

I watched three girls dance before it was my turn. I shook my head at the rhythmless bouncing and gyrating they did. It didn't seem to matter that they couldn't dance on beat. The men still hooted and hollered while throwing bills at them.

By the time I went on stage, fifty to sixty more people had come in, mostly men. A handful of women sat around drinking and smoking. I walked onto the stage to whistles and catcalls. I was nervous but calmed myself with deep breaths.

The DJ called my name. I hadn't felt the need to make up one. He seemed to believe it was fake anyway when I told him. The song, the one that would become what I called my theme song, the one I would dance to every time I danced, came on.

I closed my eyes because I wasn't brave enough to look at the faces in the crowd at first. I let the feeling overtake me. I moved my body, swaying my hips to the beat. I didn't even attempt to touch the pole. I was not flexible enough for it and I cringed at the thought of all the germs the other girls had left behind from rubbing their bare asses and pussies on it.

I did what came naturally; felt the beat and moved my body until I was comfortable enough to open my eyes. When I did money was raining down on me while some people stared in awe. I felt powerful, renewed and bold. I dropped to the floor then crawled over to a man. His black business suit looked expensive. His tan skin and chiseled face made him attractive.

I concentrated only on him. I got on my back and spread my legs exposing my slick center to him. He stood, looked as if he wanted to touch, even extended his hands to do so, but stopped himself. Pulled away after glancing behind me at the bodyguard that stood at the back of the stage. He frowned, but that didn't stop him from raining down five and ten-dollar bills that he had folded in his hands onto me.

When the song ended— way too soon in my opinion—everybody applauded, and I wanted to dance again. I felt electric. Every part of me pulsed. I was addicted. I walked off stage like I had been instructed to do by Heather. I left the money behind like she told me. Someone would collect it for me. I looked back before exiting the stage and couldn't believe all that money was mine to keep.

Later that night, when I counted all the bills. I couldn't believe I'd made twelve-hundred dollars after dancing less than fifteen minutes. It would last me the rest of the semester, until my loan money came again. I was tempted to go back the next weekend, but after that night, I no longer danced for money. Profiting from it had made me feel dirty, made it feel elicit. I never returned to that club.

I researched, found parties with people who had fetishes. Through that I learned I was an exhibitionist. Exhibitionist disorder was a mental health disorder shared by those who liked to expose themselves for sexual gratification. I embraced the idea. Why lie to myself? I'd masturbated and came like I never had before that first night I danced.

I delved right in with both feet. Party after party, I danced. It helped with making me love my body again. It also chased away demons of the past.

"Are you okay in there?" Adam called from behind the bathroom door.

I ignored him and cut off the water that had turned cold. I was shivering and hadn't even noticed because I was so caught up in my thoughts and memories.

I answered after he knocked a third time. "Yeah, be out in a minute."

I pushed the thoughts of dancing and him knowing about it to the back of my mind. In the long run, it didn't matter. I grabbed a towel to dry myself then slipped on my shirt and underwear before looking at myself in the mirror for the first time. I looked different than I had yesterday, more relaxed. How could that be? My eyes didn't reveal the answers. I didn't dwell on the thought long. I had bigger fish to fry.

My wet hair, natural and curly, hung down to the middle of my back. I searched for something to tame it under the sink. The first thing I saw was a blow dryer and flat iron. They were the same ones I had at my house, the ones I'd saved for months to buy, both in unopened boxes.

I was not at all surprised by them being there. The shock of him knowing intimate things about me had worn off. I pushed them to the side and behind them was a first aid kit on one side of a shelf, and on the other side, a long plastic container with a white top. I opened it and found hair ties, combs and hair products: olive oil, shea butter, coconut oil and everything else I used.

He really had been watching me and taking notes. I shook away the creepiness of it all. It wouldn't help for me to start freaking out again. I grabbed the olive oil and squeezed some into my hand then rubbed it throughout my hair. Without combing or brushing it, I tied it into a ponytail at the nape of my neck, tucking the hanging hair under.

I unlocked the door, opened it and was startled to find that Adam stood in the same spot he had the first time I came out of the bathroom, this Time he held a bottle of cocoa butter.

"Lotion? I could rub it on you if you want," he offered.

"Are you going to wait outside the bathroom door every time I use it, you perv?"

I pushed past him. He grabbed my wrist, pulled me to him, then trapped me between his body and the wall. "That's not very nice, pushing me," he whispered playfully, while running his fingers up my exposed arms.

Goosebumps broke out on my skin.

"Move please," I demanded between gritted teeth, mad at myself for not being as repulsed by his touch as I should have been.

"You're so fucking beautiful," was his response against my ear. He trailed the lobe of it with his tongue causing my entire body to tremble and butterflies to take flight in my stomach. I fought against the need to touch him. "Open your eyes and look at me. I want to see your eyes."

I hadn't even realized I'd closed them, but I was going to keep them closed. Was too afraid of what he'd see.

"So much fight in you," he crooned, then eased his warm hand underneath my shirt until he was palming my breast. He teased my nipple between his fingers. A soft whimper forcefully escaped my mouth. "It'll be so rewarding when you break and beg me to fuck you," he whispered against my lips.

Those words yanked me out of whatever haze I'd been in. My eyes shot open. I sneered at him. "I'll never beg you for anything," I spat.

He laughed. "Eventually you will, Eve. Your body's already begging for it," he taunted.

Aggravated, I pushed past him. This time he let me. I headed for the food. I sat down and picked up a fork full of fluffy eggs and put them in my mouth. I shouldn't have been surprised they were just how I liked them, whisked with milk and scrambled in butter. I pretended that episode against the bathroom wall never happened.

Adam walked over and sat down across from me with a hurt expression on his face. I could tell it was fake. I noticed his hardened manhood pressing against the opening of his boxers.

"I wanted to lotion your body, and all you want to do is eat. I thought you weren't hungry," he said.

I ignored him.



After eating, she sat silently, pensively with her head down while studying her hands. She was deep in thought, and while I wanted to know what her thoughts were, I wouldn't push her. I couldn't stop myself from touching her though. It was my way of letting her know I was there when she was ready to talk. I reached across the table and laced our fingers together. Her gaze moved up to my face. She didn't speak, but her eyes told me not to touch her.

It was amusing. I liked the fact that she wasn't pretending with me right now. It had been less than forty-eight hours with us here together and she'd shown me new sides of herself. She was human, flawed and unafraid to let me know her emotions. People being completely real with me was not something I'd experienced much of in life. The people who usually took up space in my everyday life were fake, plastic, and rehearsed. Even my parents lied for me.

She tilted our hands back and forth as she studied them. I ignored her and enjoyed the feel of her soft skin against mine. She snatched her hand away and stood up abruptly, almost knocking over her chair. I didn't react.

"How long do you plan on keeping me here?" she snapped.

"As long as it takes."

I had an inkling as to what her next question would be. It would be easy for me to answer it without her asking, but I liked her voice; low and melodious, sweet, and southern. After four years of her barely acknowledging me—only a word here another there— I needed to hear her speaking to me.

She looked away. Her thumb on her free hand went to her mouth and she bit at the skin on the side of her nail. She was nervous. I'd seen her do that often. I always wondered how the skin stayed so smooth and unscarred.

"As long as what takes?" Her voice trembled.

I thought about it. If I told her the truth, I knew she would only pretend to cooperate in order to be set free. I'd fall for it because I was weak and starved for her attention.

I said, "There's no specific agenda or time frame."

She rolled her eyes. "That's not vague at all, Adam." She sat down then crossed her hands in her lap. "How about an easier question? Where am I?"

"In a room in our home."

Her brows knit together. Confusion blanketed her face. "Our home? As in yours and mine?"

"Yes. I had it built specifically for you and me."

"But—" she started then stopped, violently shaking her head. "No, I'm not even about to attempt to unpack that."

I didn't want her to shut down on me just because my answers hadn't been satisfactory to her. I asked, "Anything else you want to know?"

"How did you know?"

"How'd I know what?"

She bit down then chewed at her bottom lip with her eyes downcast. "About the dancing—how'd you know I danced?"

I didn't hesitate to tell her about that night, the first night I saw her and the many nights I followed her after. I told her everything except of course about what happened to the guy and my note to her. No need to rock the boat.

"Wow, I was really dense. I never thought to pay attention to my surroundings. I could have been really hurt. Damn." She lowered her head to the table.

I wanted to comfort her. Tell her that I wouldn't have let anyone hurt her, but I knew she didn't want to hear that. I remained quiet. The silence was deafening. I wished she would say something, even if all she did was curse at me. I thought about things to do to distract me. I ate then read over the paper. When I was done she still hadn't said anything or moved much at all. Thirty minutes of it was all I could take

"You want to watch some TV? Read maybe?" I asked.

That got her attention. She glanced up at me. There was a look of bewilderment on her face. I pointed to the corner of the room on the wall across from the bed. A laptop and tablet sat next to a 32-inch flat screen television. She turned and looked at them and then back at me strangely.

"Were those here before?" she asked.

"No. I had them delivered, and I set them up while you showered," I said.

She eyeballed me then the electronics suspiciously.

"Wifi?" she asked.

I nodded.

She asked, "Can I send emails?"

"No."

"I didn't think I would be able to, but it never hurts to ask." She hopped up and headed toward the new TV, but then she stopped and turned to face me. "Are you planning on killing me?"

I was almost offended by the question but knew I had no right to be. I pushed back against the rise of irritation before I answered. I couldn't blame her for thinking the worst of me.

"No, of course not," I said.

"Good. After what you told me, I don't think I'm ready to die anymore, not today at least." She gave me the first genuine smile she'd given me since that night at my wedding.

My pulse raced. I watched as she walked over to the electronics and picked up the tablet. She typed something, waited, and then sat down. The sounds of a game filled the room.

"You know I can feel you staring at me, right?" she asked without looking up from her game.

"Does it bother you?"

"Yes, but I figure you're not going to stop, so it's just going to take some getting use to."

I got up from my chair then made my way over to the bed. I slid in next to her then pulled her feet into my lap. She paused then cocked her head in my direction when I started massaging one.

"What are you doing?" she asked with a raised brow.

Her whole body had gone rigidly still.

"Relax," I said. "Keep playing."

It took her a while, but she nodded then turned her eyes back to the screen. This was how I'd always imagined us.

ELEVEN



It was day five. We were eating breakfast, pretending the situation we were in was normal when it was anything but. It had started to feel normal though. I could admit that. Adam sat across from me in boxers and a t-shirt with his perfect hair messed up—perfectly. He was reading the newspaper. Not from his phone or tablet like normal people, but an actual newspaper.

Every morning it arrived with breakfast, and he read every single page. It was unusual for 2018 since everyone's cell stayed glued to their hand. Somehow, I found it endearing. And that bothered me. Nothing about him was supposed to be appealing, but it was. He looked happy and content. That annoyed me

"I can feel you staring, why?" he asked.

"Because I'm curious," I said.

He took the time to neatly fold his paper and place it on the table before giving me his full attention.

"About?"

"The very first day we met. Would I be here if I had said yes to coffee?"

"So, you do remember?" he asked.

"Somewhat, now that I've thought back."

"To be honest, Eve, I don't know."

I didn't believe him. He knew. He just avoided telling me things he thought I wouldn't like to hear.

"Interesting," I said.

"Is it?" He shifted and readjusted himself in his seat.

"Yes. The fact that such an inconsequential moment in time could change my entire life is very interesting."

"Inconsequential?" He frowned, drawing his brows together. "I wouldn't call the moment that changed our destinies inconsequential." He spat inconsequential out like it had turned sour in his mouth.

I shrugged, not caring about his change in mood. "It was inconsequential to me. You were just another man trying to get some pussy."

His frown deepened. "Is that what you thought, Eve?"

"That's what I know, Adam. That look in your eyes, the lust in your voice, the hard dick you tried to hide behind your briefcase. So typical."

"Now that's interesting," he said, mocking my earlier words with a condescending smirk on his lips.

"How so?"

"You didn't remember that day at all at first. Now you remember every detail of it."

"Don't read anything into it. Like I said, it was only after I thought about it."

"Hmmm" he hummed in disbelief.

I rolled my eyes, wishing I'd never brought it up.

"You know what I think, Eve?"

"What, Adam? Please tell me another one of your crazy theories on how I've been fighting my feelings for you for years." The sarcasm in my voice had to be obvious.

"Mock me all you want, but I know you were just as drawn to and turned on by me as I was by you. That's why you ran that day." He reached across the table and traced his fingertips across my hand, sending tingles up my spine.

My heart rate climbed as I watched his eyes darken.

"Did you want me instantly like I wanted you? Did you feel the pull, Eve?"

I snatched my hand away. "No."

It wasn't a complete lie. I thought he was beautiful that first day. No one had ever attempted to rescue me. I'd always had to be my own hero. I even thought about going to coffee with him for a half a second. But again, like I'd said, something about him had been off putting. Everything in me said run. I always listened to my instincts. They kept me safe and they obviously were right. He was a nut. I tried not to fidget under his appraisal.

He chuckled then leaned back in his chair and observed me for a second before commenting. "I don't believe you, and you don't believe all I want to do is fuck you. That's what you tell yourself. That's what you want this to be about. Anything deeper scares you."

"Because that's all this is about. Look at us." I gestured to my nearly naked form.

He was in boxers and a t-shirt. To further prove my point, I ran my tongue slowly across my bottom lip. His eyes followed the trail my tongue made. He even leaned in.

I shook my head. "See? Look at you, ready to jump on me over something as simple as wetting my lips. Why don't we just fuck so I can go home? Don't make this about more than it is." The sound of his hand slamming against the table startled me. "No," he shouted.

I shot up from my seat, afraid. I tried backing away, but just as fast, he was up, roughly grabbing my face.

"Look at me." He didn't force my head around, but his grip on my jaw tightened until I faced him willingly. "Don't you fucking dare venture to tell me what I want. I know what I want, Eve, and it's not just to fuck you. From the moment I saw you standing in that courtyard I knew this thing between us was deeper than sex. You're mine, the other half of me, and you'll come to realize it soon enough or maybe it'll take years. I don't care. I'll wait until you do." His hold loosened, and his hand dropped to his sides. He was so angry heat radiated off his body.

I swallowed, and sat down before I fell, I was reeling from the violent grip of fear that had overtaken me. I also had to get control over the other feeling that had settled in the pit of my stomach. Adam wanted a reaction out of me, but I wouldn't give him one. Yes, his grip on my face hurt, but I would be damn if I relinquished any more control over my person to him.

"You're so full of shit," I snapped. "From the moment I saw you," I mocked his words.

I expected him to become angrier the more I antagonized him, but instead, a lascivious smile slowly spread across his lips.

"I have a question," he drawled, his tone bold and sexy.

"What?" I stuttered, taken aback by his sudden change in mood.

"Are you wet?"

His question threw me off even more.

"That's a really random question, Adam."

"Answer the question, Eve. I dare you"

"No. I'm not."

He retook his seat, leaned back in his chair then took hold of his dick that lay long and hard against his thigh. The thin fabric of his boxers hid nothing. I tried to pretend like I didn't notice, but my eyes kept finding their way back to it. He caught my split-second glance then smirked.

"I'll make a deal with you, Eve. If I reach under the table and find that your pussy isn't sopping wet," he drawled, making his words sound deliciously nasty, "I'll let you go?"

"Yeah right. You say that until you find out I'm dry as the Sahara, then you'll find another reason to keep me here. I'm not even going to entertain your lies, Adam."

His forehead scrunched up at my words "I'm not the liar, Eve. You are. So, do we have a deal?"

Annoyed deep down in my soul I got up and left him sitting at the table. I heard him laughing as I closed the

bathroom door. I didn't even have to check my panties to know they were wet. I took them and my shirt off then got into the shower and tried to wash some of my annoyance away.

TWELVE



I decided to give Eve reprieve. My teasing seemed to be a bit too much. It worked though because a couple of days followed without incident. I fed off the smallest bit of attention she gave me. I listened intently while she shared things, her likes and wants, stories from her childhood when she was happy. We watched movies and talked about mundane shit like we were friends.

The entire time, she asked nothing of me. There were no questions about my wife or when I'd let her go. She showed me no hostility, and best of all, she let me touch her. I started thinking I could see a light at the end of the tunnel.

Maybe she was coming around?

Curiosity got the better of me after a while. I wanted to know why she was suddenly okay with being there. We lay in bed together, side by side, both staring at the ceiling while enjoying being in one another's space. The last thing I wanted to do was bring tension back to our situation, but I couldn't stop myself from thinking about it.

I asked, "What's changed?"

The mattress shifted. I felt the heat of her stare on the side of my face. I knew she wanted me to turn and look at her, but I couldn't. I was too scared to face her. I didn't want to see the truth in her eyes. Her words alone would probably hurt enough.

"You want to know the truth?" she asked.

It pleased me that I didn't have to elaborate about what I meant by the question. She just knew. It was like that at times. She knew me without me having to explain myself to her. That confirmed that what I'd done the last four years had been worth it. We were meant to be.

"No lie to me," I responded sarcastically.

I didn't have to see her roll them to know she was rolling her pretty eyes. That seemed to be her favorite response when it came to me.

"I've resigned myself to just accept this. What else could do? "

Her declaration made me frown. I wanted her to want to be there with me. She reached out to cup my face. She brushed her thumb against my jawline. Her hands were soft and felt good against my skin.

"You need to shave," she said.

The simple show of affection caused my heart to beat rapidly. It didn't erase the fact that she'd just told me she'd just given up and let me have my way. Her rejection hurt more than her anger did.

As if sensing my mood change, she said, "Don't be like that." She smoothed her hand down my cheek, trying to make me feel better. "It's not exactly a bad thing, me accepting something I have no control over. At least I am no longer fighting you. That's a plus."

No, it's wasn't a fucking plus, but for the sake of not turning our conversation into an argument I said nothing as she continued.

"I decided to consider this a vacation." She licked her lips before continuing. "Honestly, I was kind of tired of it all." I noted sadness in her eyes and voice before she withdrew her hand and turned onto her back.

"I know," I said.

"I figured you would." She exhaled and closed her eyes.

Finally, she was coming to accept the fact that I knew things about her. I knew she was tired of school, tired of trying to make everything work in her favor without any help. I didn't have to imagine it was hard for her because I could see it in her eyes. She had looked drained in the last eight to ten months.

She needed someone. I wanted to intervene so many times. It would have been easy to hand her a check or even a suitcase full of money. Her school debt I could have paid a hundred times over without thought. I'd never go broke. But I knew she wouldn't accept it. I wouldn't have wanted her to

accept my help either. Handouts and charity weren't part of who she was. It would have changed her.

"You know sometimes I think about killing myself? Like my momma," she said out of the blue. "Even went as far as swallowing a bottle of pills, but I got scared and threw them up. I'm not even brave enough to end it all." She laughed bitterly.

Her confession surprised me and filled me with dread. I hadn't known it was that bad. The thought of her leaving me, permanently, before I got a chance to be like this with her brought tears to my eyes. It rendered me speechless. For the first time in a long time I didn't know what to say, so I said nothing.

I pulled her closer and wrapped my arms around her. She pressed her face against my chest. I felt my t-shirt moisten with her tears. I didn't care. I held her tight and let her cry herself to sleep, all while fighting back my own tears. I'd never cried before, and I didn't know if I wanted my first time to be in front of her. The thought of missing the signs that she had once been ready to end it all and I hadn't been there to help her through it filled me with unfamiliar emotions. I fought against them and concentrated on the feel of her warm body pressed against mine.

It wasn't too long before my eyes became heavy. It had been years since I'd fallen asleep without the help of sleeping pills. I wasn't surprised that all it took was her body heat warming me. I was lulled to sleep by the sounds of her even breathing.

THIRTEEN



It felt like I'd only been sleeping a few minutes when Adam violently shook me awake. Groggily I sat up in bed, rubbed my eyes and tried to focus on his face. When the haze of sleep cleared my head enough to take in my surroundings, I found him sitting next to me with his jaw clenched. I heard his teeth grinding. It was obvious he was furious, but why? Panic replaced fatigue.

I tried to think of what I could have done. The last thing I remembered was telling him about my suicide attempt. Could that have been the reason? I gazed over at the digital alarm clock on the night stand. It was five in the morning. He wouldn't have waited that long to say something if that had been what had pissed him off. Patience was not one of his virtues.

"Who's Dwight?" he questioned, jealousy evident in his tone.

I groaned inwardly then lied directly to his face without remorse. "Dwight? I don't know a Dwight."

He knew I was lying. The look on his face said as much. I only dealt with Dwight in my dreams or nightmares.

"Why do you do that?" he asked.

"Do what?" I sucked my teeth, annoyed, and laid back down, hoping this conversation would end sooner rather than later.

"Lie. Why do you use cautious words or outright lies when the truth would be so much easier? You say you don't know Dwight, but you called for him over and over in your sleep. Sounds like you know Dwight to me."

He was pressuring me.

"Please go to bed, Adam. It's too late for twenty-one questions."

I just wanted to go back to sleep. I was tired physically and mentally.

"Answer me," he demanded angrily, slamming his fist against the nightstand next to the bed.

It startled me fully awake. I jumped, but I didn't cower.

"No," I shouted back.

I refused to share what I'd never shared with anyone else. He knew too much already.

He snatched the bed covers off me. "Get up."

I glared at him but stayed right where I was.

"Get the fuck up," he growled, his eyes daring me to do anything but follow his directive.

Fine. I was tired of being bullied. If he wanted to fight, a fight he would get. I pushed myself up from the bed angrily and got right in his face.

"What are you going to do, Professor? Are you going to beat the answer out of me? I highly doubt it."

Rage masked his features making him appear animalistic, but I was not intimidated by his evil stare down. I felt just as much rage and anger as he did, probably more at the fact that he felt entitled to know what I didn't want to tell him.

"Rose..."

That name from his lips took the wind out of my sail. Suddenly I felt exposed and vulnerable.

"Don't do this," I pleaded.

The pleading wasn't intentional. I wanted it to sound like a demand, but it came out weak. I was weak. Running my hands through my hair, I pulled the strands at the root. A

misguided attempt to snatch out the unwelcomed memories that name always brought up. Rose was a part of my past I'd been fighting years to forget. Thinking about what happened involving her caused nausea to roil in my gut. I sat down on the side of the bed to keep from falling to my knees.

How in the hell did he know about Rose and how much did he know?

I'd only told my counselor and the therapist at children services I was forced to see. Most of what I told them had been lies and they'd said what we talked about would be confidential. I never even told the police what happened to me, no matter how many times they questioned. The truth would have made it worse for Dwight.

FOURTEEN



The tears and hurt I saw in her eyes pulled at something in me. Made me wish I'd never awakened her. I mentally pushed back at it. I didn't have time to humor her. At first this was one of the two secrets of hers I'd swore I'd never bring up. Sexual assault at such a young age was never easy to deal with and probably even harder for someone like Eve who liked to compartmentalize things. But how could I help heal her if she didn't talk about the things that hurt her?

You're telling lies, the voice sang in my head.

He was half right. I was telling half-truths. I wouldn't deny the fact that jealousy played part in my anger. I'd watched her whisper his name as she reached for him in her sleep. I snapped.

Before I knew what was happening, she startled me from my thoughts by charging toward me. I saw rage vibrating just under her skin. I braced myself for an attack. She stopped just out of reach. Instead of lashing out physically she stood there, glaring at me.

Her lip curled in disgust. "Is there anything you don't know about me? Do I have any secrets you don't know about?"

"No," I answered honestly.

I wanted to tell her that was how it was supposed to be. How would I heal her if I didn't know everything about her? I kept that thought to myself. Now was not the time.

She laughed bitterly. Her fists were clenched so tightly at her side. I could tell it was taking everything in her to not physically attack me. Her only other weapons were her words. They had the ability to hurt me more than any punch could.

"I am sorry. Go back to bed. I won't mention it again," I offered, anything to deescalate the situation.

"No," she snapped angrily. "You wanted to talk about it, now let's talk about it. What do you think you know about Dwight and Rose?"

"Nothing," I lied unconvincingly.

"Tell me," she demanded.

I refused to go any further with the Rose and Dwight discussion. "No."

She was seething, her whole body was visibly shaking. I saw it in her eyes that she was about to make me regret bringing up the subject.

"Tell me! Tell me now, you motherfucker."

She reached out and slapped me. Once. Twice, and then again. Crazed she chanted "tell me" over and over again. I realized then this wouldn't end well whether I told her or not. I'd pushed her over the edge. There was no turning back.

Just get it over with, the voice said.

"Ok I'll tell you," I said holding up my hands defensively, successfully blocking her next blow.

"I read your file, the one from when you were in the hospital. It said your foster mother caught her live-in boyfriend molesting you."

A sob left her mouth, and she sank to the floor. Cautiously I approached her, feeling tears come to my own eyes. I wished I could go back in time. If I could have, I would've never confronted her.

I got down beside her on the floor. She allowed me to pull her into my arms. "I'm sorry. There's nothing to be ashamed of. It wasn't your fault. You were a child."

My anger threatened to choke me. I didn't know who I was angrier at, myself for causing her to cry or her foster dad for taking advantage of her.

"Ha! You're an idiot." She laughed, it was cold and shrill. "I'm not ashamed of anything. You don't know shit." She pushed away from me. "I liked it," she confessed. "How does that truth sit with you, Adam?"

"Liked it?" I couldn't wrap my head around the thought of a fifteen-year-old girl wanting to have sex with her middleaged foster dad. "You liked having sex with some old man?"

She laughed at my expense.

"What if I did, Adam? What if I told you I liked the way he fucked me? What if I told you I begged for him to? He was twenty-four, Adam. Not some old man you conjured up. The devil's in the detail, Adam. You called yourself researching me, but you missed that bit of information."

I had missed that tidbit. I had simply assumed he was as old as her foster mother.

"He was twenty-four, and I was fifteen. That was only nine years. He was twenty years Rose's junior, and no one saw anything wrong with that. We should have been allowed to be together. He was only with Rose because she took care of him and allowed him to do whatever he wanted. He didn't love her. He loved *me*."

Suddenly she pushed up from the floor and started pacing back and forth. I watched her feet sink into the plush carpet to avoid looking at her face.

"Rose was a joke, a bitter lonely bitch. She was morbidly obese with a nasty attitude. How she was approved to foster children is a freaking mystery to me. He didn't even have sex with her. I listened through the walls as she complained about him cheating on her. She was always whining. He was going to leave her. There was no way she could hold onto him. Even paying him to be with her wouldn't have worked for long. He was good looking, young and screwed like a porn star. She should have been grateful when I made him stay." She paused long enough to make sure she had my attention.

"When he came into my room about six months after I moved there, I pretended to be shy and played naïve when he said he wanted to ask me some questions—to make sure I hadn't been through anything traumatic. That night he spread my legs and licked my pussy. He asked if anyone had ever done it to me before. He continued long after I answered the question. No, no one had ever touched me there. Many had tried, but he was the first I allowed. He was the first that I wanted to touch me. The first that I hadn't fought. That night was the first time I had an orgasm.

The next day he was nervous and anxious, jumping every time I walked into a room he and Rose were in. He expected me to tell, but I didn't. I wanted him to do it again. Two days later he came back to my room. He didn't use any pretenses or lies that time. He stood over my bed, looking down at me. His chest was bare, and he was only wearing boxers. He'd slipped his dick out and I watched him stroke himself. I had gone to bed naked that night, waiting for him to come. I removed the cover and I spread my legs and begged for him to taste me again. He did while he stroked himself to completion."

"It went on like that for weeks. He'd wait until Rose went to sleep, to work, the grocery store or anywhere else and then he'd taste me. I begged him so many times to fuck me, but he never would. I found out why later when he came home one day with a birth control prescription he had gotten from one of the women he messed with.

He told me he wanted to feel all of me when we made love. He told me he used protection with every female he'd had sex with, but he wouldn't with me because I was special; his first virgin. He said I had to wait for the pills to start working. He would still come into my room on those nights we were waiting. I begged him to do me every night. I wanted so badly to know what it would feel like. Would sex make me feel complete? The moments he was between my legs, making me cum was the only time I felt good.

I anticipated the moment I was no longer a virgin so much that I told him I'd go and be with someone else if he didn't want me. Hell, I had no shortage of offers. Little boys and grown men had always been trying to get a taste. He'd grabbed me by my throat and threatened to kill me if I did. I believed him, so I waited thirteen more days."

"Stop, I don't want to hear anymore," I interrupted.

I hated myself for not being able to listen. I'd opened the can of worms and now she wanted to get it off her chest, but I didn't want to hear about another man touching her. I especially didn't want to hear about her liking it.

The actual story was turning out to be ten times worse than what I read in the file. The file contained no details of a seedy love affair. My emotions swayed somewhere in between lust and hate. I wanted so badly to have been her first and only. I wanted to be the one to teach her about pleasure. I hated him for taking that from me, but the thought of him giving her pleasure also stiffened my cock.

"Hell no." She roughly wiped the tears away from her eyes with the back of her hand then jabbed a finger at me. "You're going to listen to every word, you selfish bastard. It's killing you, isn't it?" she taunted. "I can see it. Jealousy is

oozing from every pore on your body. You hate that I liked it so much, don't you? For that reason alone I'm going to enjoy telling you every little detail. And you're going to listen, or I'll refuse to speak to you no matter how long you keep me here, I can promise you that. I won't say a word to you," she threatened.

My body grew tense at her words. I knew then, unequivocally, that she was hurting me purposely. I wanted her to stop, but what choice did I have? I couldn't live with her going back to acting as if I didn't exist. I nodded my head for her to continue, believing her threat.

"Thirteen days later," she started where she'd left off, "Rose went to work. He planned it, made it perfect. It doesn't take much to seduce a fifteen-year-old. If I remember correctly, all it took was some cheap gas station flowers, a seafood dinner from a takeout spot and the thought of him spending Rose's money on me. He made me feel special and wanted. I hadn't felt that in a long time. That night he kissed my lips for the first time, and I was hooked on the taste of him. He taught me how to stroke him, suck him and please him. I enjoyed making him feel good. When he slid all nine-inches of himself into me, I barely felt the pain that was supposed to accompany losing your virginity. It was the best feeling ever. He fucked me like he loved me. I needed somebody to love me, and I thought, in his own way, he did."

"For a year, we sexed on every surface of her house. Sometimes for hours at a time and never got caught. It's really ironic that a quickie on the bathroom sink is what done us in. We were so caught up in each other, we didn't hear Rose drive up or the keys as she unlocked the door. How we didn't hear her lard ass walking up the squeaky stairs is beyond me.

She hit him first, with the mop that was kept in the bathroom. He fell and hit his head on the bath tub. It knocked

him out cold. I was so scared—not of her— but scared for him. I thought he was dead. There was so much blood coming from the cut on his head. I bent down naked with his cum dripping from me, trying to wake him. The first whack from the mop surprised me. The second one made me mad, madder than I'd ever been. Why was she so angry over a man who wasn't even hers? I jumped up ready to beat her ass, but she had the broken mop to keep me from getting to her and she used it to beat me all over my naked body until I begged her to stop. I remember Dwight getting up and pushing her off me just before I passed out.

When I woke, I was in the hospital with a concussion, bruised ribs, marked black and blue and my face swollen. And somehow, she still ended up being the victim. She'd told the police that I'd attacked her and that Dwight helped me. They believed her. Her bruises were her proof. What really had happened was that she'd fallen against the door hurting herself when Dwight had pushed her off me. He'd saved my life. But the word of a foster child and a man with a criminal record couldn't stand against that of a law-abiding foster mother who'd taken in over fifty kids into her home. He went to prison, was sentenced to two years, and I went to a group home. I had been in lot of jacked up foster homes, but a group home with fifty other broken angry girls was a nightmare.

"Fuck, I didn't kno—"

She angrily cut me off. "Shut the hell up, Adam. You wanted my story. Shut up and listen. Do you know what it's like to go to bed hungry? To barely sleep because if you let your guard down, anything could happen. Do you know what it's like to be beaten unconscious to wake up to find the one good thing in your world is gone? No, you don't. Your life from birth has been all peaches and cream. You had access to the best of everything. How in the hell did you turn out so messed up? Then again most rich people are... Privilege is a hell of a drug.

The only bright spot after being sent off to the horror house were letters from Dwight. We wrote each other until I got accepted to school in Florida. I wonder what would have happened between us if circumstances had been different."

She paused and glanced my way making sure she still had my full attention. She knew forcing me to listen to her talk that way about another man was killing me, slowly. A part of me was proud of her. Her viciousness rivaled my own, like I knew it would.

"I thought of him often. I've had sex with other men and enjoyed it. I love the feel of a thick cock, stroking in and out of my pussy, but I could never find anyone who could make me cum harder than he did. I'm wet right now just thinking about him," she goaded while staring directly into my eyes as she cut my heart out with her razor-sharp words. I felt every word like a literal stab to the chest.

Her ploy worked. My temper flared, making me feel as if I was burning from the inside out. I needed to get away from her. I rose from the floor and decided to walk away before I did or said something that I would regret. She wanted my anger.

"Where are you going?" She rushed over and grabbed me around the waist, stopping me. "You wanted to know who Dwight was, I told you. Why are you mad?" she taunted me.

"Let me go, Eve," I demanded through gritted teeth.

"No. Look at me, Adam," she whispered nastily. "Look at me so I can tell you more of my ugly truths."

When I didn't immediately turn, she shouted the words so loud my ears rang. When I still refused to face her, she stepped around me. When we were face-to-face, she studied me expressionlessly. It was unexpected when her hand rose, I flinched expecting violence.

Instead of slapping me again, she ran the tips of her fingers across my lips. "You're as stunning as you are crazy," she murmured, then she backed up, giving herself space to pull her shirt over her head.

The sight of her breast caused me to groan. They were heavy, but firm. Her Hershey colored nipples were hard and begging to be sucked. She was imperfect perfection. I wanted to run my hands down her slightly rounded belly and touch every inch of her exposed skin. Her panties were the next to go. She pushed them down her thighs then bent slightly to take them the rest of the way off. She smelled them before dropping them to the floor.

"I'm so wet." She proved it by running her fingers through the folds of her pussy and showing me the evidence. "Want to taste?" she invited.

The visual alone caused me to have to bite back a moan, but the invitation made my mouth water. She was playing with me. I wanted to turn away. I should have turned away, but I couldn't. Her body was too beautiful, a work of art. I'd imagined her coming to me like this a countless number of times over the years and here she was. A part of me didn't even care that it was all a part of a sick game she was playing. She was naked, and I was torn. I wanted to be angry at her, but I felt that I deserved this.

She stepped close, so close we breathed the same breath. On her tip toes she pressed against me. I let her kiss my neck. I almost lost myself in the feel of her lips against my skin. It was hard to do, but I stopped her, shoved her away.

She laughed and reached for me again. "Don't you want me?"

She had no idea how much I wanted her, but not like that. Not after she'd told me what happened and not with memories of another man fresh in her mind. I wouldn't allow her to use me. I laughed at my own thoughts, her using me. It was ridiculous. I was forcing her to be here.

"Go take a cold shower." I gave her my back.

I returned to the bed and let out a frustrated sigh. I placed my bowed head in my hands, cast my eyes to the floor and thought about yesterday when she was happy. She'd been laughing and smiling at me. It made me feel better, but only for a moment. Sounds of something crashing startled me out of the moment. I looked up to find the tablet I'd given her in pieces on the floor next to the bathroom door.

FIFTEEN



A bark of laughter escaped his mouth. It was not the reaction I was expecting after throwing a tantrum and breaking his expensive tablet. It took the wind out of my sails. I wondered if I'd pushed him too far. Would he retaliate?

So much for behaving myself. I was doing everything that I said I wouldn't do. I was supposed to be cooperating. It had been easy to do so far. I wasn't pretending to be happy the past couple of days. I had gotten content with being there.

I found out that I enjoyed talking to and spending time with him. But, no, he couldn't be happy with my acquiescence. He had to pick, prod and poke. So, what if I wanted to keep some things to myself? I shouldn't have had to prostrate myself for him. He wanted me here. I was here. He should have cut out the extra and just enjoyed my company.

In the same instant that his laughter stopped, his eyes found mine. He studied me, and I did the same to him. I realized it was the first time his guard had ever been down. I saw the

vulnerability, the sadness and self-doubt. Under all the bat-ish crazy was a human, a beautifully flawed human. Annoyance took over my mood. I didn't want to feel anything for him.

"Why didn't you just offer to pay me?" I blurted out, interrupting our observation of each other.

He looked confused. "What do you mean, pay you?"

I was confused, too, and I blamed him. A minute before, I was chastising myself for aggravating our situation. Now I was going take it a step further by asking him a question that I knew would most likely set him off again.

Maybe I should take a few of his meds, I thought.

"Pay me to fuck you, play house, to do whatever it is you have me here to do. I know your family is one of the wealthiest families in Florida. Why all this?" I swept my hand around the room. "This room and this stuff in it, the staff that waits on us, it can't be cheap. You could have just paid me to fuck you. It would have been easier and cheaper than this. Shit, it didn't even have to be a lot of money."

By the time I finished my rant, his mouth had fallen open and his face was bright red. Even the tops of his ears were aflame, and his lips were tightly pressed together in a thin line. A storm brewed in his eyes. Abruptly, he stood from the bed. He charged at me like a crazed bull. It was becoming a habit of his.

I should have expected it, but I didn't. I couldn't move in time to get away. My back hit the floor, hard. He landed on top of me, knocking the breath from my lungs. It took a few seconds for it to return. In that time, he'd managed to grab my wrist and pin them above my head.

His face was so close that I could feel his lips move against mine when he spoke. "You're a whore now, Eve? You're telling me that you would have been willing to sell your body to me, the same one you haven't given to anyone in years?" He snarled down at me.

I was tempted to truthfully answer. Yes, I would have taken his money. I would have paid off some of my student loans and fucked him until he got tired of me. I would have done it without regret, but the expression on his face told me he wouldn't like my honesty.

"Answer me," he yelled, causing me to wince and my ears to ring.

Still I said nothing. I lay there, silently. Eyes devoid of emotion.

"I'm going to assume your silence means yes, and that you are a whore." He managed to keep my hands encased in a tight grip above my head with one hand. He slightly lifted his weight off me and reached down between us with the other. "If you're so fucking keen on being my whore, I'll treat you like one." He pulled his cock through the hole of his boxers and pressed it against my slick opening.

"Threaten a girl with a good time why don't you," I said. I spread my legs wide for him. "Screwing me is the reason I'm here isn't it? So, go ahead."

His body stiffened as he searched my eye for something. Love? He wouldn't find it. I was incapable of that emotion. No one had taught me to love. I licked my lips seductively, bucked my hips and grinned up at him, daring him to penetrate me.

"Fuck! What is wrong with you?" he yelled through clenched teeth, then pushed off me.

First thing he did when he was on his feet was snatch the lamp from the nightstand and threw it. It exploded against the wall. Coincidently it hit the same spot I'd just thrown the tablet.

"You're so fucking frustrating you'd drive a saint to madness." He jabbed his fingers in my direction. "If I wanted to fuck you, if that was all that this was about, yes, I would have paid you. Hell, I could have probably fucked you for free if that's all this was about. You want me. The signs are in how your body reacts to me, whether you want it to or not. You want me. But you won't admit it, because you're a frustrating bitch who insists on torturing me."

Defeated, he threw his hands up in the air, opened his mouth and yelled at the top of his lungs. When he was done, he took a deep breath. I could see he was trying to control his anger, but it didn't work.

He ended up speaking to me between gritted teeth again. "What can I do to get you to understand there's more to this than fucking? You're mine. Made for me, and the sooner you understand that, the sooner we'll be able to start our life together. This is destiny." His chest rose and fell rapidly.

His fists clenched and then unclenched. I could see it in his eyes. He sincerely believed all he had been spewing. He wanted me to believe it, too. I sat up and tilted my head so I could gaze up at him. I ran what he'd said to me—-all of it, even the stuff from days earlier— through my mind a few times. I knew he was expecting a response.

I thought about not saying anything at all. I knew that the words that were about to leave my mouth wouldn't make my situation any better.

"Destiny is bullshit. There's no invisible power that controls fate. There's no higher being that knows our future. No sky daddy creating women from ribs. No baby in a diaper whispering secrets of love and happily ever after into our ears. There's just free will and you used your free will to impose upon mine, simply because you feel entitled to everything you want, which is typical of your kind."

He sneered. "My kind?"

"Yes, your kind," I responded clearly and consciously. "Rich, white and narcissistic. It's all very cliché and lazy, and what I'm not going to do is feed into your sense of entitlement by pretending it's okay that you brought me here or that I want to be here."

He stood there with his mouth agape like he was in disbelief. It was as if I often left him that way, and it would have been funny had the situation been *funny*.

"You—You..." He sputtered and growled like a deranged animal as he paced erratically.

Then just has suddenly as he'd started, he stopped and took a step toward me. Aggression and anger radiated from him. His face was enraged, and it looked as if a demonic mask had taken over his features. I was afraid that he'd come unhinged.

When he took another step in my direction, I hopped off the floor and scurried my naked ass to the other side of the room, putting the table between us for my safety. *You should have kept your mouth shut*, I scolded myself. Even with knowing that I had earned his anger, I refused to apologize for telling him the truth as I saw it. I would have to deal with the consequences. I prepared myself for him charging me again, but he didn't attempt anything.

"You... you..." he stuttered once more.

His face reddened as he shook his head. He looked as if he was struggling to find the right words to say or was holding them back. He threw his hands into the air, turned abruptly and walked toward the bathroom. I jumped, damn near out of my skin, when his fist collided with the bathroom door. He then shoved the door he'd just battered open, stormed inside and slammed it shut behind him

It took me a minute to remember to breathe after that door slammed. Air escaped my mouth in a whoosh, followed by something akin to nervous laughter. Another minute passed with me standing there staring at the door until a sense of relief washed over me. He could have easily taken his anger out on me instead of the door.

This situation was getting progressively worse. Next time, I thought, he might not be so kind. Both of us throwing tantrums every five minutes wasn't going to get me out of that room. I needed a moment alone and hoped he stayed in the bathroom for a while. I needed to think without his eyes on me. His gaze was so distracting, so intense. It was like he was trying to steal my soul. Pretending it didn't affect me had me on edge. Sometimes I found myself liking it, becoming heated from the weight of it. Then I'd get mad at myself for liking it. The situation was messing with my mind. I needed to get out.

I sat down at the table and found myself cautiously glancing at the door every other second. It was only after the shower came on that I figured he probably wasn't coming out anytime soon. Then and only then did I let myself relax fully.

An hour passed while I gave myself a good talking to. I decided to chill with the attitude and smart remarks that came natural to me. I knew I wouldn't keep pushing him and keep coming away unharmed. And I had to apologize. That would be the hard part.

I got up and made my way over to the dresser to find clothes to put on. I debated on whether to stay undressed. Nudity might help me in the long run. However, I decided against it and slipped into a long wife beater. I wouldn't make it too obvious that I was trying to play him. Outside the bathroom door, I took a deep breath to calm my nerves before knocking.

"Adam," I called to him. He didn't respond. "May I come in?" I asked.

Again, he said nothing. I turned the knob to see if it was locked. It wasn't. I pushed the door open and found him sitting on the toilet with his head bowed. His hands were covering his eyes. His hair was wet and there was a towel wrapped around him.

Cautiously, I made my way over to where he was sitting. He remained unmoving even when I was on my knees in front of him. I reached for his right hand, the one he had punched the door with, and then examined it. The blood was gone, but the skin was a bright angry red. He went to snatch away, but I wouldn't let him. I brought it to my lips then pressed a quick kiss to his knuckles. It was a peace offering. My way of apologizing without saying words that I didn't mean. Even the thought of fixing my mouth to tell him those words caused me

to inwardly recoil. He deserved everything I had given him for kidnapping me.

After intertwining our fingers, then and only then did he look at me. Like always, he searched my eyes for something. I gave him nothing. He expected too much from me. I stared blankly at him. My reluctance to allow him to read me made him try to snatch his hand from me again. I didn't let him.

"Don't be mad. You can't really expect me to react like I love this situation. I am not here because I choose to be."

"But—" he started, but I cut him off before he could go into another one of his "we're meant to be" rants.

"No buts. You want too much from me, especially when you're continuously triggering me with all your invasive questions and your confessions. It's hard sharing so much of myself with you. It's even harder knowing that you already know so many of my secrets. These are things I never planned to share with anyone, and you took it upon yourself to learn them." I paused to give him time to speak.

He put his head back down instead of responding. Okay, that didn't go where I wanted it. I didn't know why I thought he would give me a response.

I back-pedaled and tried another route. "Adam and Eve... You don't see irony in our names?"

His eyes found mine as he contemplated his answer. "No. No, I don't. Is this another one of your games?"

I rolled my eyes before continuing. "Adam and Eve? The people in the Bible?"

"I don't believe in that bullshit. You'd think a species so obsessed with cocks and cunts, guns and violence wouldn't believe in such pious, sanctimonious crap," he responded indignantly.

"Calm down, Nietzsche. You're preaching to the choir. I'm not a believer either. We found something we have in common at least," I responded.

"We have so much more than that in common, Eve." His voice dropped an octave. "More than you know. More than I think you'll ever be willing to admit."

I rolled my eyes. "I doubt it."

"Fine. Doubt me for now. But tell me, Eve, what else do you think we have in common with this fairytale our names are taken from?"

He wasn't smiling, but he was no longer looking angry or sad. I took that as a plus. I needed him back in a good mood.

"You think I'm yours and was made for you. Eve was made from Adam's rib, to be his helpmate, his companion. That's sort of how you see me; but then again you also could be the serpent that tempts Eve," I said teasingly.

"I tempt you?" he questioned as he reached out and traced my bottom lip with his thumb.

I smacked his hand away then sighed. "Why ask me something you know the answer to?"

"Because I want to hear you say it. Say I tempt you as much as you tempt me. Say you want me as much as I want you."

"That's not a fair request, Adam, because if—"

"Fuck fairness," he growled, interrupting me. "I want you to finally admit what you feel for me, so I can stop feeling like I'm in this alone."

Damn that growl did something to my insides. Something was definitely wrong with me, because his demands should have been pissing me off under the circumstances, but no. My panties were becoming soaking wet.

Resist the devil and he shall flee.

Ironically, in the middle of talk about a religion I didn't believe in I was using scripture from it to provide me strength.

"Let me get the first-aid kit," I offered, trying to change the subject.

I was afraid I'd say too much, or the wrong thing, and he'd read too much into my answer. I made a move to stand but he reached out and pushed down on my shoulder to keep me where I was.

A predatory smile spread across his face. "I tempt you, Eve?" he leaned into me and whispered.

His warm breath against my ear caused my pussy to gush, and to my horror, a moan almost escaped my tightly pressed together lips. Yeah, he was definitely the snake. He was dangling an apple in front of me, tempting me. Eat the apple, Eve. The consequences be damned. I was tempted, really tempted, even under the current circumstances.

"Yeah, you do," I answered honestly, breathlessly.

But just because I wanted to fuck him didn't mean we were going to end up living some fairytale life together. That was where our wires would always get crossed. Adam saw us as something real. However, anything of the sort—outside of this room would never be.

"I. like. your. honesty." He leaned into me punctuating each word with a teasing peck against a different part of my face; my forehead, nose, right cheek, then left cheek.

My breathing got even heavier. He was about to kiss me. I could feel it. Shamelessly, I anticipated the feel of his lips against mine. I moistened them with the tip of my tongue, then waited. He slanted his head. His lips were a breath away from mine. I'd never been so turned on in my life. That confirmed that I was as twisted in the head as him.

"The first-aid kit, it's under the sink," he said, breaking me out of my trance.

"What?" I was confused, my mind was stuck on the thought of his lips against mine.

"The first-aid kit, it's under the sink." He pointed, then sat back.

His body heat was gone before I took my next breath. He'd put space between us. His voice was back to normal—calm—unlike my insides. My stomach clenched as my pussy throbbed.

"You did that on purpose," I said.

I wasn't angry, but I did feel some type of way about how he was always purposely teasing me.

He laughed in response. Reached out and ran the back of his hand down my cheek lovingly. "You don't want me, Eve, so you shouldn't be bothered."

He laughed again when I pushed his hand away.

"Jackass. Clean your hand yourself." I got up and stomped from the bathroom. His obnoxious laughter trailed behind me.

It was at that moment, pissed off and horny, that I realized normal people didn't act like us. I should have been hysterical, begging him to let me go, but instead I was on the verge of begging him to screw me. I shouldn't have wanted him to, but I did. I wish he had approached me the right way. I wouldn't have minded being locked in a room with him, and he was right. I would have fucked him for free, but that wasn't the case. He'd kidnapped me and had turned this into a game of wills.

Too bad for him, I liked games. Getting into bed I pulled my shirt over my head then threw it on the floor. I lay there naked and left the covers off, purposely. When he walked out of the bathroom, I heard his breath hitch. I held back a smile. We would see who won his little game.

SIXTEEN



I wanted to scream, but I wouldn't. He'd use it as an excuse to follow me into the bathroom. That was the last thing I wanted. I bit my tongue and pressed my head against the cool shower wall to calm myself down a bit. It had been three days since the Dwight incident. I'd made sure to behave as best as I could. The tension when we were in the room together made it hard to do. It put me on edge.

He was not helping the situation. He seemed to be attempting to punish me by way of teasing my body. And it was working. I hated to admit it. He had me craving him. A simple touch from him set my skin on fire. He was trying to break me. He wanted me to give in.

I tried to give as good as I got, but all I ended up doing was frustrating myself even more. He played his game so well that, in the end, the only option I had left was to lock myself in the bathroom to obtain some semblance of peace. I'd been

standing under the flow of water for the past thirty or so minutes, hiding from him.

Something had to give and soon. I slammed my eyes shut and let myself enjoy the hot water beating down my back, but it was short lived. I didn't even need the sudden sound of footsteps against the tiled floors to let me know he'd entered the bathroom. His presence caused tension in my sore back. It still hurt from where I'd hit the floor the other night.

"Just go away," I said, back still turned to him.

I refused to turn around, hoping he'd take the hint and leave. I needed a time out from this situation. He could at least give me time alone in the shower. I didn't know why he even wanted me here. All we did was fight.

"Eve... Eve..." He started chanting my name like a petulant toddler once he realized I was not going to respond.

Fed up with it all, I was thin on patience. I spun around so fast and so angrily that it caused me to lose my balance. I steadied myself against the wall and readied for the battle I know is about to ensue.

"I should at least be able to wash my—"

Whatever else I planned to say was quickly forgotten. In front of me he stood in naked glory. That was the first time I'd gotten to look at him fully exposed. I came to the conclusion that this man had been made to torture me. That was the only reason anybody as physically perfect as him would want me.

His olive skin was flawless, not a scar. He was muscular, but not bulky. Long and lean, a patch of light dark hair led from his six-pack to his groin. When my eyes landed below his waist, I couldn't help but lick my lips. His dick, a shade or two darker than his tanned skin, looked tasty. I'd always had an oral fixation and I wondered what he would taste like? Sin probably.

Well played Mr. Socio, I thought.

He knew I wouldn't be able to bark insults at him while in awe of his body. No woman with eyes would be able to. I had to force myself to look away from his heavy cock and when I did, I found the devil in his smug expression. At that very moment, I hated him.

I dropped my eyes so he wouldn't be able to see the fire he'd started in them. That didn't help me much since they landed on his stomach. The urge to reach out and trail my fingers down the hard planes of his abs was immediate and had me hell hot. I gave up. He'd won. He'd officially driven me to the edge of insanity. I wanted him just as much as he wanted me to want him. However, I'd rather cut out my own tongue than tell him.

I sucked my teeth and then tried to keep my face as bland as possible. I gave him the middle finger before turning around again. He laughed like I was a joke.

"Jackass," I mumbled under my breath.

I thought he'd leave. I nearly jumped out of my skin when he entered the shower behind me instead. Still, I ignored him as much as I could. He only allowed me to do so for a moment before he reached around me. Stilling my hand, he removed the wash cloth I forgot I was holding.

I sighed. "What are you doing?"

"You're not allowed to wash yourself anymore. I know that you use this time to hide from me. I don't like that, so now the pleasure of cleaning your delectable body is mine alone."

My pussy clenched in response to his declaration. Again, I wondered what was wrong with me. Why did the crazy mess he always let come out of his mouth sound so devilishly hot? And where in hell did my anger go?

I stopped breathing when he pressed a kiss in the middle of my back. My body trembled as his lips trailed down my spine. His warm hand never lost contact with my skin. My nerves felt electrified. He eased down to his knees, lifted my foot and used the soapy rag to wash one then the other.

I stood there, breathing raggedly and falling apart. My heart beat dangerous rate. My nipples painfully hardened. It was the most erotic thing I'd ever experienced. I didn't want him to stop, but I needed him to stop.

When I reached for him without thought or instructions, panic took me by the throat. I snatched my hand back just before I made the mistake of touching him. I liked the way he made my body feel, but I wouldn't encourage him. I needed to be strong. I attempted to pulled away. Attempted because I didn't put that much effort into it. It was a feeble attempt. It'd been so long since I'd had a man touch my body.

"Stay still," he commanded gruffly and bit into the meatiest part of my ass cheek.

On weak knees I tried my best not to move as he licked a trail back up my spine, causing the butterflies in my stomach to take flight. I was on fire. I couldn't help but squirm.

"I said stay still."

As punishment, he reached up then pinched my hard nipple. Pain and pleasure overwhelmed my senses. Please fuck me was on the tip of my tongue. And I knew that he would. I'd be put out of my misery, but then what?

I couldn't take it anymore. I also knew I couldn't have sex with him either. But I'd go crazy if I didn't get some relief. I slid my hands between my thighs and nearly came when my fingers grazed my clit. Applying pressure caused my eyes to roll to the back of my skull. My head fell forward against the tiled shower wall. Fuck, I was so close... It was like soaring towards the sun.

I rubbed my clit in a circular motion. Adam's mouth on my skin heightened my pleasure. My frustrations ebbed away as I felt myself about to orgasm. My toes curled at the same time my back bowed. My body needed it so bad. I chased it... soaring... I was so close. Suddenly the water from the shower turned icy, ruining my impending orgasm, leaving behind a dull ache.

Startled by the sudden temperature change, my eyes flew open. I quickly backed away from the cold spray. Adam roughly spun me around to face him. Anger blazed in his eyes.

I wrapped one arm over my breasts, suddenly feeling the need to cover myself. "What now?" I asked.

He reached out, removed my arm then pulled me to him. Through gritted teeth he said, "You don't bring yourself pleasure. Only I do that. This is mine," he hissed while cupping my pussy. "You have no reason to touch yourself in a sexual way unless I tell you. You want to cum, you ask me, and I'll make you cum. And don't ever cover yourself in front of me."

I had to ask myself if he was for real although the look on his face said he was. I scoffed at the audacity but didn't know what else to do besides shake my head at his lunacy. Never mind the fact I was slightly turned on by it.

We're going to kill each other in this room, I thought.

"Please move," I snapped then shoved past him in a hurry to get out of the bathroom.

He'd officially ruined showers for me.

"Ahhh," I yelled out in frustration when I opened the drawers wanting to cover my nudity and all that greeted me were thin pieces of fabric.

I slammed the drawer shut.

He emerged from the bathroom with annoyance in his eyes. "Why are you screaming?" he asked.

"Because, this is crazy. I'm crazy. You're a damn nutcase! This whole scenario is crazy, and you keep managing to add more elements of crazy to it." "Could you stop yelling and just talk to me?" He sounded tired.

Good. So was I. Ignored him as I made my way toward the bed. I was determined to go to sleep. It was the only time I could really escape him. He grabbed me from behind before I reached the bed.

I snatched away. "Don't touch me."

"Why? Why wouldn't I touch you, Eve?"

"Because I said so. Because I don't want you to touch me. Because this game you're playing is tiring and insane." I ticked off each very legitimate reason on my fingers.

"There's no game, Eve."

"Bullcrap. Why am I here then?" I asked for the hundredth time.

"Because I want you here," he replied calmly.

Like always, he didn't elaborate. His answers made me grind my teeth.

"Did you even think this through before deciding to kidnap me? Did you not imagine how I would act? Nah you didn't. How in the world can you be so smart, but so stupid?"

"Eve—" he started but I cut him off.

I didn't want to hear any more of his sick fantasies about us living happily-ever-after.

"Why don't you leave? You ever heard of absence making the heart grow fonder? Maybe you should try it. Don't you have somewhere to go? It's been almost two weeks and you haven't left or called anyone. Don't you have a life? I can understand me not leaving, but why do you always have to be here?"

"You want me to leave?" He looked at me like it was the most absurd suggestion ever spoken by man.

"Yes. Fuck me and let me go or leave." I pointed towards the door.

I was fed up. Done. I stood my ground as he made his way towards me.

His hand went to my hair. Violently, he tugged at it, forcing my head back to look up at him. "Tell me, Eve," there was an edge to his tone, menacing. I didn't bother trying to get him off me. Besides, I was not exactly scared. My nipples tightening was evidence to that. "Do you want me to fuck you so you can pretend that's why I brought you here or do you want me to fuck you because your body craves me? I think it's the latter."

When I expected him to let me go, he leaned in and pressed kisses against the pulse on my exposed neck. Pursing my lips tightly together, I refused to answer while fighting to keep a moan from slipping my lips. I wouldn't play his games, even though my body liked his game.

He continued to kiss and lick the sensitive spot on my neck until pleasure crawled under my skin like ants. I found myself once more fighting the urge to beg him to screw me. His hand fell from my hair and crept between us. Easily he found my nipple. He pinched it and caused me to hiss.

"Give me the right answer, Eve. End this. You want me as much as I want you."

"No," I managed to squeak out.

He froze and dropped his hand. My eyes, that I hadn't even realized I'd closed, popped opened. The look in his eyes was so intense.

"I don't like it. I hate you," I blurted out that lie in frustration.

I shoved away from him. Left him standing in the middle of the room with a hurt and confused look on his face. I didn't care if he stood there all night or not, as long as he left me alone. Crawling on to the bed I reached for the comforter that had managed to fall on the floor.

Adam pushed me from behind, causing me to land flat on my stomach.

"Get on your knees," he demanded before I could lash out at him for shoving me.

"Leave me the hell alone. I'm not in the mood for your games. Just let me go to sleep," I snapped.

Whap! His hand connected with my naked backside. It stung.

My anger was immediate. "I told you about hitting me," I yelled and tried to get up.

I was going to teach him to keep his hands to himself. He shoved me back on to the bed again.

"Get on your fucking knees, Eve. I won't ask again."

Something in his voice told me I should do as he demanded. Images of him punching the door flashed in my head. I didn't want my face to take the place of the door. Reluctantly I pushed up on to my knees with my hands flat on the bed and eyes downcast. I gritted my teeth forcing myself to stay still, waiting to see what would come next. I didn't know what to expect and my nerves were on end with him being behind me. I assumed he was going to tease me. Bringing me to the precipice just to never push me over was his brand of punishment.

My assumption had been wrong. I screamed out in pleasure and pain when he slammed his full length into me, filling me completely. Grabbing my waist, he pushed even further, stretching my walls.

"Is this what you want, Eve? To be fucked? You're so warm. So tight," he moaned. "Why did you make me do this?" he questioned in a tone that was both lust-filled and angry.

He pounded into me. I yelled out when he smacked my ass. My walls tightened around his shaft. I could feel my orgasm building. I threw my ass back at him. He wrapped my hair around his hand and pulled my head back, exposing my neck.

He bent and ran his tongue across my pulse. My eyes rolled into the back of my head.

"This is so good. I waited so long," he whispered against my ear, fucking me harder as the frame of the bed slammed against the wall.

I struggled to catch my breath.

"Tell me this is what you want, Eve."

I heard the plea in his voice, but I was too trapped in the feeling of what he was doing to me to form the words. All I could do was feel and let my body do the talking for me. I met him stroke for stroke. I tightened my walls around his dick, milked him.

"I'm cumming," he shouted, pushing deeper into me.

He dug his nails into my waist, hissed snake like as he came inside of me. I quaked and reached my peak seconds after him. It felt so good I wondered if I should have left well-enough alone.

SEVENTEEN



He wouldn't say anything. He'd been sitting in the chair at the table for nearly two hours with our juices drying on his dick. I'd asked him what was wrong, even broke down and pleaded for him to tell me. How could he be mad after what we'd just done? Wasn't that why he had me here? I didn't understand and trying to understand had given me a headache.

EIGHTEEN



I was fucking disgusted with myself. After pulling on pants, I took a seat furthest away from her. This wasn't how it was supposed to be. I swore I wouldn't take her until she begged me to, but I'd fucked it all up. I let my anger get the best of me. She'd kept testing my self-control. I thought we were finally getting somewhere. I could only imagine what she was thinking. My actions had confirmed her feelings that this was all about fucking her.

I chanced a look in her direction. She was sitting on the bed with her knees tucked under her chin.

"I'm sorry," I said, although apologizing to her didn't make me feel any less small.

She looked up from her hands with confusion written all over her face. "Sorry for what?"

Like she didn't know?

"I'm sorry for making you do that, for taking you so roughly."

I loved the feel of being inside of her, but the second it was over, regret washed over me like rain.

She licked her lips and shook her head. "Why be sorry? I liked it."

I knew she was playing me again. I wanted her to want me, not put on a fake front designed to get me to let her go.

"Why does this have to be so difficult?" I asked aloud, rhetorically.

The never-ending back and forth, her pushing, me pulling. It was wreaking havoc on our relationship. It wasn't supposed to be like this.

"Look at me, Adam." She went silent while waiting, after a few seconds when I didn't comply, she shouted, "Look at me!"

Our eyes connected.

"Oh my God." She shook her head then she stopped suddenly. She focused on me with pity written on her face. "This is sad, truly sad. You know, even after all that happened, I actually feel bad for you. You really did believe this would turn into some happily ever after type mess, your own little twisted

fairytale. There's something disturbing about that. But seriously, listen to me, and hear me clearly because I think this advice will be actually helpful." She jumped out of the bed and walked heavy footed over to where I sat and stood in front of me.

"There is no me and you. There is no happily-ever-after for people like us. I'm messed up, and you're even more messed up in the head than I am." She bent and waited for our eyes to meet before speaking again. "I will never be with you like you want. I won't ever love you. I don't know what love is, and you don't either. You could keep me in this room for a million years, and all you'll ever get from me is sex and maybe my hate." She nodded her head. "Yeah, I can see myself hating you. Why wouldn't I? You kidnapped me, took away my choices, and now you aim to drive me crazy with your constant whining about us being together."

She pulled out my heart in a few words then she pushed herself up straight using the chair handles. She stormed back to the bed, laid down and pulled the covers over her head.

It was half an hour later, and I was numb. She was sleeping comfortably like she hadn't broken me with her little speech, as if I really didn't matter to her.

You don't. You know you mean nothing to her. I ignored the voice.

I was too occupied with my own thoughts to consider any of it. Emotionally and mentally conflicted, I thought for the first time that maybe I shouldn't have brought her here. Maybe none of it was meant to be, like she'd said. Maybe none of this was real, although it felt real. In the grand scheme of things, did it matter? What could I do? Keep her locked away until I bent her to my will? "Adam," Eve called out to me, drawing me out of my thoughts.

I didn't know how long she'd been awake or how long I'd been staring into space, but it seemed like hours. I was feeling unusually tired. I needed sleep.

"Adam," she called again when I didn't answer her right away.

She called my name so many times it turned into a chant, but I didn't acknowledge her, not once. It was safer to stay in my head, where she wasn't constantly trying to ruin what we could have. But in true Eve form, she persisted. Her voice became softer, seductive, pulling at the primal part of me until I had no choice but to look at her.

"I'm sorry," she said, drawing her bottom lip between her teeth.

She pushed off the bed and slinked onto the floor. Naked, on her hands and knees she crawled to me. It was the most sensual thing I'd ever witnessed. I couldn't take my eyes off her. She stopped in front of me. Involuntarily my legs spread to accommodate her, giving her the space she needed. I was angry at her and even angrier at myself, but that anger didn't stop me from wanting her close. She laid her head on my lap and pouted prettily up at me while massaging my thigh.

"What are you doing?" I asked.

She didn't answer, just kept touching me. It was all too much. I turned away and concentrated on a spot on the white

wall. It helped me ignore the feeling of her warm hand on my thigh.

"I'm sorry," she said again. Her hand traveled toward my dick. I moved to stop her, but she batted my hand away and unzipped my zipper. "I'm sorry." Her soft hand reached in and pulled my cock out of my boxers. I was rock hard already just because she was near. She stroked me from tip to root. "I'm sorry," she repeated, voice sensual and soothing.

She went to wrap her lips around me. It was the hardest thing I'd ever had to do. I pushed her hands away. I didn't need her pity.

I was disgusted with myself. I felt needy. I wanted her to tell me that she was apologizing because she regretted what she had said and was not just doing this to appease me.

Reading my mood, she gave me her version of an apology. "I'll try to be better," she promised.

I believed her, but would it be enough? In my head it was. Those simple words confirmed to me that she cared, but after tonight, she'd have to prove it.

"Adam," she called my name again, drawing my attention to her lips and away from my plans. "Can I taste you?"

This was it, the moment I'd waited for. It caused every nerve in my body to stand at attention. She was giving herself to me. No teasing, or coercing. Her submission had me wanting to beat my chest like King-Fucking- Kong in celebration. Her eyes never left mine as she waited for me to give her permission.

It's another ploy. She hates you, the voice reasoned.

Doubt crept up my spine until she spoke again.

"Let me please you." Her voice was low and husky.

I nearly came on myself at just the sound. I nodded because I didn't think I had it in me to speak. When her hot mouth enveloped my cock, it only felt like mere seconds before I was cumming. I warned her so she would have a chance to pull away, but she continued sucking and licking me. She slid me to the back of her throat, taking all I had to give. When she eased me out of her mouth slowly and placed sweet kisses on the head of my dick, I trembled.

"I'm sorry," she said one last time.

"Go to bed, Eve. It's late," I said instead of asking her if she really meant it when she apologized.

She stared at me. I took a page from her playbook. I stared back, my gray eyes clashing with her brown ones. I erased every hint of human emotion from my face. I gave her nothing. Treated her like she had treated me, for years.

At least a minute passed before she got up from the floor then glanced toward the bathroom. She wanted to isolate herself again, but instead walked over to the bed, got in and she pulled the covers to her chin. "Goodnight, Adam," she whispered.

Closing my eyes, shutting the image of her out, I responded, "Goodbye, Eve."

NINETEEN



I was still asleep. I must have been. I closed my eyes and opened them over and over again, hoping each time the room door would still be open. When I saw that it was, I called out to Adam and got no response.

I got up from the bed and walked cautiously to the door to peek out. Outside the room was a fully furnished basement. I saw stairs that led to a door which was also opened. I realized I'd been locked inside some sort of panic room.

Was I free? Was this another one of his games? I wondered if I would step outside the room just to have him tackle me and drag me back in. I hated to admit it, but I was scared. I turned back and called for Adam again before walking over to check inside the bathroom. When I turned back around, I noticed a bag at the foot of the bed that had jeans and a t-shirt draped across it. I rushed over and grabbed the heavy bag. I unzipped it and my eyes bugged out when I saw all the hundred-

dollar bills inside. There was more money in that bag than I'd ever seen or probably would ever see in my whole life. I pulled out stack after stack. A note fell out of the bag. I picked it up and read it.

I'm sorry. This should help you get a new start somewhere.

-Adam

I was free, but I didn't know how to feel about it. So many emotions were running through my mind. Did I stay, or did I go? I was going of course, but something held me there, trapped. When the answer for what I was feeling didn't come, I pushed everything to the back of my mind, grabbed the clothes and put them on. Bathing and brushing my teeth never even crossed my mind.

Hurriedly I walked to the door. Apprehension hit me again before I stepped over the threshold. Was he really letting me go? Did I want to go? Would I ever find a man willing to go through so much trouble for me? The insecurities and fear of being alone threatened to drown me. Frowning, I shook my head. Leave it to my own mind to be toying with me.

Just leave. Think about the rest later.

I hesitated for a minute longer, and then I took one step out of the room. When nothing terrible happened, I took another step. Before I knew it, I was up the stairs and cautiously peeking out of the door. The coast was clear. I walked down a long hallway that led to another set of stairs. I followed those down to the front door which was opened.

It was hard for me to believe he was letting me go. My instincts urged me to put the money down and just run from it, but I hefted the heavy bag over my shoulder. I wasn't stupid. I hated the life I'd been living two and a half weeks earlier. To change that I would need money. Hell, I had earned the money.

I kept my eyes forward. I walked through the eerily quiet house, not wanting to see any parts of what I knew would be impressive. I sped walked out of the front door only stopping to give myself a second to breathe in the fresh air, before hurrying down the steps. A yellow cab waited for me in the circular driveway. The driver got out and reached for my bag, but I waved him off. He headed back to the driver's side.

I wanted to hop in the cab and ask the driver to speed off, but I couldn't help myself. I turned, feeling the heat of his eyes on me. Adam stood at the door, looking older than he had just a few hours before. His expression was somber. He didn't break eye contact, and I got a glimpse of something fleeting in them that gave me chills in the hot Florida sun.

Just leave before he changes his mind, I thought.

I went against my better judgement. I made my way back toward him. With every step I took, his face relaxed a bit. His eyes perked up more. I stopped cold in my tracks. If I gave him any false hope, I knew I would end up right back in that room until he broke me. I didn't know how it happened, but I could read Adam better than any other person I'd ever known. Instinctively, I knew he was letting me go while hoping I would willingly stay.

He was hopeless but could have saved himself a lot of hurt by simply believing me when I'd told him the truth the night before. Love and happily ever after endings weren't options for people like us.

"Will—" I started, but my voice cracked.

I was choked up with some weird emotion that I could not and did not want to explain. It made it hard for me to continue. Closing my eyes and steeling myself against everything I was feeling, I let myself imagine what could have been if we weren't two mentally jacked up individuals, but only for a moment.

"Will you come after me?" I asked after regaining my composure.

I kept my eyes closed as I awaited his answer.

"I'll try not to," I heard him answer in one breath.

In the next, he slammed the door shut.

TWENTY



"Adam Fitzgerald, where have you been? I haven't seen you in more than a month."

My wife started in on me as soon as I walked into the house we shared. I stopped on my way up the stairs and let my gaze sweep her. She was beautiful in a traditional way. Tall and lithe, with the body of a ballet dancer. She was wearing a flowery sundress and her blonde hair was perfectly coifed. Not a strand out of place. What was most impressive was the fact that she managed to sound caring and sincere as she chastised me about being away. I knew she was full of shit. Her cold, iceblue eyes told on her.

She didn't give a fuck about me. She was more worried about how my disappearing act would reflect on her. She needed me there to make her friends believe she had some type of fairytale marriage. She fed off their envy. Disgusted with the fact that I even married her, I shook my head and said nothing.

"You're going to ignore me, Adam?" She scoffed and stomped her foot like an overgrown child.

It was unattractive. Ignoring her I dragged myself upstairs. I refused to participate in her temper tantrum, and I needed a shower. When I made it to the top of the stairs, I still heard her ranting.

She was on the phone. "He's back, and he looks horrible"

I already knew who she was talking to—my father. Over the years, she'd tried using him to bend my will for her. As if he could. If he possessed that power, I would have taken his place at the helm of my family's marketing firm years ago. He'd been pressuring me since I graduated college.

In the shower with my head pressed against the cool tile and with warm water beating down my back, unwanted thoughts of Eve crept in. Images of her bent over, cumming for me nearly buckled my knees. My cock became incredibly hard. Groaning in pain, I was forced to grip my shaft. I stroked up and down to the memory of the silky feel of her skin against mine. I heard her calling my name. I felt her pussy gripping me as if she was there. The memories were so vivid it was as if I was living it again.

I'd never forget how her pussy felt wrapped around my dick, how it felt to cum deep inside her. I came, angrily calling out her name. With my orgasm came clarity. There were changes in my life that needed to be made, starting with my marriage. I'd returned with the intentions of going back to my normal life. I didn't think I could, not after a glimpse of what I could have.

My lawyer was the first call I made after getting dressed. He answered on the first ring like always. I didn't bother with the usual forced pleasantries.

"I want a divorce. I need it to happen soon as possible. Send me the papers by the end of the day, and I'll have them to you first thing in the morning."

I hung up then booted my computer to wait for what I knew was coming next. Though I paid my lawyer, he reported to my father. That meant daddy dearest would receive a call from him about my plans. Not five minutes passed before my office phone rang.

"Father," I answered indifferently.

"Son." He exhaled a sigh before speaking. "I know you've been with the black girl. I hope you haven't done anything I can't clean up this time. I can't keep hiding bodies for you."

"One body," I snarled angrily into the phone. The rest I'd taken care of myself. "And I can assure you you've spent more time cleaning up your own fuck ups than you have mine. Furthermore, Maggie's death was as much as your fault as it was mine. You shouldn't have disrespected Mother in her own house. Her blood is on your hands."

He snapped, "Didn't I tell you never to speak that name to me again?"

I heard the hurt and hate in his voice. I believed he actually thought he'd loved her. The idea of him loving someone made me laugh. Men like my father didn't know what love was. They liked control.

"You brought her up," I reminded him. "I guess thirteen years hasn't been long enough for you to get over that incident."

"Incident? What you did wasn't a simple incident," he said, seething.

Maggie. She was a subject my father didn't like discussing unless of course it was to blame me for her death. She had been a twenty- something-year-old secretary he'd been fucking. She was ambitious and determined to take him away from my mother.

Sure, I'd slit her throat while she luxuriated in my mother's bathtub, but he was also to blame. He had brought her into our twisted world and gave her hopes of becoming a permanent part of it, knowing that she would never be more than his whore. As far as I was concerned, it was his responsibility to clean up that mess because he'd created it. Every so often he would try to hold her over my head, but it wouldn't work. I felt no guilt about what I'd done to her, because she deserved it.

The day she'd died, I'd over heard her on the phone calling my mother. She'd told her to come home quickly, that it was an emergency. Then I'd heard her and my father fucking in my parents' bedroom. She wanted them to be caught. I killed her because she didn't know her place.

"I killed her because of you. You—"

Clearing his throat, he interrupted me and changed the subject before I could say more. "Mr. Bynum called me to tell me you're considering divorce. I won't allow it. Why can't you just do what you're supposed to?"

"What I'm supposed to? Old man, you've lost your fucking mind."

I didn't bother with wasting another word on him. I hung up. Arguments with my father were always fruitless. They just resulted in pissing me off.

TWENTY-ONE



"You have to consider how this will look, Adam. We haven't even been married five years and you've asked for a divorce."

Jenny sat on the opposite end of a dining room table that could sit twenty people. I still felt the need to put more space between us. She was pissing me off, but I indulged her. Sat through the "family breakfast" she insisted we should have when I told her we needed to talk. Now I was ready to go, but not before she signed our divorce papers. My lawyer had them delivered to me first thing that morning. I asked her to sign them as soon as we finished eating breakfast.

"Are you listening to me?" she whined in the annoying nasally voice she used whenever she wanted to get her way.

It had never worked on me, so why she insisted using it was beyond me. I hated that voice. It caused my willingness to listen to what she had to say to dissipate.

"Your father won't allow you to divorce me." She finished her little tantrum with that tidbit.

I sighed heavily and cast my gaze to the ceiling. The fool woman didn't know she was teetering on the edge of my patience. and she'd regret pushing me any further.

"Just sign the fucking papers, Jenny," I managed to grit out.

Rising from my chair, I made my way to her side and placed the pen that she'd refused to take earlier on the table next to her plate. I took a step back and pinned her with a serious stare.

She glared back defiantly. "No," she snapped and threw the papers.

They hit my chest, and I became momentarily distracted, watching as they scattered then fluttered to the tiled floor. Catching me off guard, her hand connected with my cheek. It stung worse than when Eve had hit me. The pain and the taste of blood in my mouth made my dick hard. Her uncharacteristic show of defiance pulled at the baser side of me.

For a moment I didn't know whether I wanted to fuck her or kill her. In an instant my body decided for me. The temptation to bend her over on the dining room table and fuck her hard and fast until she was raw hit me head on. My arousal for her was fleeting though. I hadn't fucked her in years. I wouldn't start again. A lack of backbone had always been one of my points of contention when it came to women. There were more Jennys in the world than Eves. Women like Jenny were complacent. They'd do and put up with anything to stay with a man for a title and money. That had never been an attractive trait to have in my opinion.

I stepped back. A smirk came to my lips when her face turned bright red. She was embarrassed about striking me. Prim and proper princesses didn't hit their husbands. I was amused; until she spoke.

"It's that bitch, isn't it? That black bitch," she roared, her usually soft whiney voice now loud and clear.

"What the fuck did you say?"

She ignored my menacing tone and step in her direction and continued. Jenny had always been and would always be a stupid, stupid woman.

"Oh yeah, I know about her." She wagged her head up and down like a fucking bobble head doll. "I knew about that bitch from the beginning. I know you've been following her. That's where you've been for the last month, and now you want to leave me for her? For her?" she accused and correctly so.

I didn't care that she knew. It was her indignant tone when she said *her* that caused my blood to boil. I didn't like her insinuations.

Instead of reaching out and snapping her neck like I wanted to, I exhaled my murderess intent. Her suddenly disappearing would cause questions and interfere with my plans.

My tone was even when I responded to her. I forced my balled-up fist to remain at my side. "Leave her out of it and watch what you say about her."

I didn't ask her how she knew about Eve. I figured my father had a hand in her finding out.

"What does she do for you?" She freaked out and grabbed my shirt. "How did she convince you to leave me?"

I shoved her off me and straightened my jacket. "She has nothing to do with why I'm leaving you.",

That was true at the moment. I wasn't even sure I would ever get Eve back. Regardless, my marriage was over.

"She has nothing to do with this?" Jenny laughed at my declaration, her thin lips pressed together tightly. "You're a liar." She eyed me skeptically, accusingly. "She has everything to do with this. For nearly four years you've been making a fool out of me, and I allowed you for the sake of our marriage, but those —" she pointed down at the papers scattered about on the floor — "I won't sign those. I refuse to let you make a fool of me publicly over a fat black bitch that came from nothing, who is nothing."

Tears gathered in the corner of her eyes. She was hurting emotionally, but I wanted her to hurt physically. Before I could restrain myself, she was against the kitchen door, my right hand tightly gripped her long, pale neck. Blood rushed to her face. Tears pooled in her eyes then ran down her rosy cheeks. She clawed at my hand and exposed wrist with her finger nails trying to pry them from around her neck. Enraged by her words,

I barely felt it. I applied pressure, enough to let her know I was serious. That only made her fight harder for air. I squeezed until her eyes bulged and her arms went limp.

"Sign the fucking papers, and keep your mouth closed." I banged her head against the wall to add to her pain because she'd truly pissed me off. "You know nothing of her, but you think because you come from money and daddy treated you like a princess, you're actually royalty?" I chuckled, without humor. "You're a fucking joke, and you know I know it, so don't pull that self-righteous, better than thou bullshit with me." I applied more pressure, enough to make her turn blue.

"I should fucking end you right now. I'd get away with it, too. Or, better yet, how about make this world miserable for you? What would your bigoted daddy and prissy friends think of you if they knew you started fucking the middle-aged black gardener before you turned sixteen? Then again, I bet your friends already know. Only your parents were fooled by your purity act.

I almost laughed in your face when you tried to convince me you were a virgin the first time I fucked you. I'd had enough pussy to know a virgin you were not. You are no one to judge her. Now sign the fucking papers," I spat before letting her go, she fell to the floor and gulped for air so fast she choked on it.

I stared down at her coldly without any feelings of guilt over what I'd just done. She deserved it for running her big fucking mouth. Gathering the papers from the floor and pen from the table, I held them out to her.

"This is the last time I ask you nicely. I'm sure you can imagine what me asking not so nicely will consist of. Sign them."

Her eyes glazed over with fright and she hurriedly reached for the papers and pen, no longer caring to rub her bruised neck. She signed the papers with shaky hands. With even more nervousness, she handed them back to me, but not without giving me her best scathing look. It made me laugh.

I took the time to check her signature and then turned to leave. I found everything to be in order, but I stopped and looked down at her. Her eyes shot up. She was sobbing like I was supposed to be anything but apathetic to her tears.

"Keep the house and everything in it. My lawyer will call you about the terms we agreed upon in the pre-nuptial agreement. Don't contact me, Jenny, under any circumstances." I left her on the floor. "I mean it. Don't contact me ever again, or you'll be sorry," I threw over my shoulder before exiting the kitchen and walking out of my old life.

TWENTY-TWO



Five months later...

"Hello, Eve. Waiting for somebody?"

At the sound of his voice, the air around me became so thick it made it hard for me to breathe. I knew I'd see him again. The thought that he'd never let me go was always in the back of my mind. I just hadn't expected him to show up so soon.

I whipped my head in his direction to find him lording over me. He looked perfectly put together and deceptively calm. The tick in his jaw was the only evidence of his anger. His usual cold eyes never left mine as he smoothly popped open his suit jacket and slid into the seat across from me. His face remained a neutral mask of arrogance until his gaze slid from my face to my round belly. His eyes went from ice cold to artic.

Jesus be a fence. My pregnancy was why I'd hoped he'd find me later than sooner. It had taken two missed periods and a week of throwing up for me to realize that I might be pregnant. I'd brought a pregnancy test, and when they both came back positive, I bought ten more. When they all came back positive, my crazy had kicked in and I ended up sprawled out on my bathroom floor. I cried for an hour then I laughed for another. Then I came to the conclusion that I had obviously committed some horrible, unforgivable sin in a past life, and Adam was my penance for it.

Even after the test, I held onto hope that I wasn't truly pregnant until I went to the doctor. The doctor, a blood test and an ultrasound confirmed I was pregnant. It had been the worst day of my life. What the heck was I going to do with a baby? A crazy man's baby at that? I thought about getting an abortion, but just the thought of killing my baby didn't sit right with me.

I pushed all the questions and what ifs to the back of my mind. I needed to live in the reality of it all. I was pregnant and was going to become a mother. There was nothing that would change that, so I started acting like I was going to be a mother. I went to my doctor's appointments, ate healthy and took my meds. I'd figure the rest out later.

After that, I was on an emotional roller coaster. Some days were good. Some days were freaking depressing because I knew I couldn't raise a baby by myself. I sure as hell didn't want to be tied to Adam for the rest of my life. Then sometimes I thought it wouldn't be so bad to raise a child with him, even if he was a nutjob.

I ran many scenarios through my mind. A few included Adam. I'd picture us as a family then I'd suddenly miss him being around. Then I'd berate myself for even thinking about him. Resentment for him crept in. If he would have left me alone, I wouldn't be in the predicament I was in. But after a few

more weeks passed, soon all of the stray emotions were replaced with feelings of excitement about my child.

"Eve," Adam barked my name, breaking me from my thoughts.

Startled my phone slipped from my hand and hit the table, hard. He immediately reached for it and slid it into his jacket pocket. I ignored him and the loss of my phone. I closed my eyes and massaged my temples until some of the pounding in my head alleviated. This was not how I expected my day to turn out.

I was supposed to be meeting Michael to discuss a permanent move from Florida. When I reopened eyes, the first thing I did was search the sidewalk outside the diner for him. It was two in the afternoon according to the clocks in the diner. He and I were supposed to meet at two o'clock. He was never late. It sucked that today would be his first time. I needed him. I sent out a silent prayer asking God or whatever other deity that was listening to send him to save me, then I took it back. Adam was my mess to deal with. I wouldn't drag Michael any further into my messed-up situation. He'd already helped me enough the past few months,

The day after Adam let me go, Michael was the first call I made. I needed to know he was okay. In the back of my mind, I always wondered if Adam had actually killed him. When he answered the phone, I'd felt so relieved, but in the same instant I felt guilty for thinking the worst of Adam. He hadn't hurt me. Why would I think he'd killed someone?

After the shock wore off, the flood gates opened. I broke down and told him everything. He begged me to call the police, but I didn't want to go that route. Who would believe me? Adam's family, the Winchesters, were rich, powerful and white. I was some poor black girl who'd grown up in foster care. I'd come off looking like a nut job, and Adam would have an easier time finding me. I left well-enough alone. I had money, and I had my freedom. That was enough.

When Michael couldn't convince me to go to the police, he offered to help me. He suggested I move from Tampa to Miami. He used his connections to keep me off Adam's radar. He'd been my rock ever since. Every weekend he'd make the five-hour drive to visit me and help me prepare for my future. He was a true friend.

"Eve," Adam calling my name again snatched me out of my thoughts. "Were you ever going to tell me?"

It was a simple question with a complicated answer. No, I wasn't or maybe I was. I really didn't know. I thought it but kept my mouth closed. It was not the time for me to tell him the unadulterated truth. That never seemed to do much other than piss him off.

"Answer my fucking question, Eve."

I faced away from him. "I don't want to talk about this right now, Adam."

He reached over the table and clasped my jaw within his warm palm and made me look at him. He then leaned over the table so that we were face-to-face. The anger radiating from him was palpable. I really didn't give a care. I didn't owe him anything. I could tell his patience with me was wearing thin. It was taking everything in him not to make a scene, which gave me a sense of comfort. I was safe in public.

I knocked his hand away and sat rigid. I ignored his question and asked one of my own. "Why are you here, Adam?

You said you would let me go."

"I said I would try," he corrected. His hard stare in response made me want to fidget.

I cut my eyes at him. "It's only been five months. You could have tried harder."

He stood abruptly. "Get up, Eve. Let's go. We need to talk." He said louder than I think he meant to.

I gazed around the diner and found a couple of the customers were staring our way.

I shook my head. I refused. "No, I'm not going anywhere with you."

He reached for me. I managed to scoot further into the booth, out of his reach

"Get up, Eve, and let's go."

It was a directive I refused to follow.

"No," I said again.

"Get the fuck up," he repeated, but this time he roared it. The sound reverberated and caused all activity in the dinner to cease. I damn near jumped out of my skin but managed to physically stay put in my seat. Out the corner of my eye, I noticed two big men in suits approaching us. He'd brought reinforcements.

"Don't make me move you, Eve. You know what lengths I'll go to if I have to." Cocking his head to the side he dared me to not do as he said. "It's not a threat. It's a promise".

I hesitated, but only for a second because I did know what he was capable of. I got up as fast as my round belly would allow. Simultaneously being terrified, pissed off and panicking had my hands shaking uncontrollably as I stood. He saw them, and his eyes softened.

He opened his mouth to say something but was interrupted.

"Are you okay, ma'am?" The blonde middle-aged waitress who had brought me my order earlier stepped in between us. What a brave soul.

"She's fine," Adam answered for me and hit her with an expression so hard she damn near wilted where she stood.

She didn't back down though. "You sure?" she stuttered, looking at me. "I can call the police."

That wasn't such a bad idea, I thought. But then would that cause her trouble? Probably.

"No ma'am. I'm fine."

As soon as the words left my mouth, Adam grabbed my arm and pulled me to the side of him. "Let's go."

I was embarrassed as all the customers watched me being darn near dragged from the diner. A few even pulled out their phones and took pictures, documenting my kidnapping, but nobody tried to interfere any further. I wanted to melt into the floor. I purposely dragged my feet, trying to delay the inventible and unknown. When I refused to keep up, he tried to lift and carry me to an awaiting Black SUV.

"No. I can walk," I snapped.

I shoved his arms away. I straightened my back and sped up a modicum. He grabbed ahold of me by my wrist when I still lagged behind. I tried to snatch away but his grip was ironclad. Another Black SUV pulled up and stopped behind the one Adam directed me into. The two men who had followed us out of the diner got into it.

Adam opened the door then signaled for me to get in.

I snatched my arm from his grip then swung around to face him. "We need to get one thing straight. I'm not going back to that room, Adam."

He sighed in annoyance then slid his hands down his face like he was tired of dealing with me. The feeling was mutual. If he was tired of dealing with me, he could have simply left me the hell alone.

"Don't play with me, Eve. Get in the fucking car," he spat, sending a pointed glare my way.

"I will when you tell me you're not taking me back to that room. Give me your word," I managed to choke out pass the lump in my throat.

The stare he penned me with in response bordered on frightening. I thought about pushing the issue until I noticed several people from inside the restaurant had come out to watch us. Out of my peripheral, I saw a young black man approaching cautiously, ready to help me. For his sake, with my heart crashing in my chest, I got into the car. I knew if I showed my black behind like I wanted to, and anyone intervened, there would be worse consequences for them than me. I was also smart enough to know if the police became involved, I'd probably never see my baby after I gave birth. People like Adam had the power to take children away from mothers. Knowing how powerful his family was, was one of the reasons I never went to the police after he released me.

"Take us to this address," Adam ordered..

He gave the driver my address and a momentary sense relief washed over me. At least I wasn't headed back to that locked room. Maybe he did just want to talk, but on the other hand, I was also wondering how he knew where I lived and how long had he known. Did he know Michael helped me? How would he react to that?

He interrupted my thoughts with a repeat of his earlier question. "Were you going to tell me?" His voice was icy again.

The car stopped suddenly. We'd pulled up in front of the small cottage I was renting. It was only a ten-minute walk from the dinner. It took us less than three minutes to drive there. On

weak legs I hopped out of the car and walked as fast as I could up the stairs. When I reached into the pocket of my caftan to retrieve my keys I realized I'd left them on the table.

Before I could turn around, Adam reached passed me, stuck my key in and unlocked my door.

I rolled my eyes. "Thank you"

I pushed the door open then stopped in the hall that led to the living room to take off my shoes.

"Were you going to tell me?" he asked again while walking behind me.

I heard the desperation in his voice. I could have answered him outright and assuaged some of his worries. I knew what would make him happy, but in true Eve fashion, I felt the need to antagonize him. Because I was annoyed, I wanted to annoy him as well.

"How do you know it's yours?"

That was a big mistake. He damn near snatched my arm from the socket forcing me to turn and face him. I winced in pain. If looks could kill, I would have dropped dead just from the weight of his stare.

He scowled down at me, his grip on my wrist was getting tighter by the second. "Say that to me again," he dared me.

"If you don't let my arm go..." I left the threat hanging in the air.

His grip tightened even more until my arm began to throb. Fed up, I shoved him and snatched away. It didn't appease my anger though. With all my strength I reared back and hit him with a hard blow to the side of the head. He took it. Didn't even flinch. I slapped him next.

When he figured I was done, he said, "I'm sorry for grabbing you in that manner, but if you insist on continuing to push me, Eve, I'll start pushing back," he growled in my face.

"You don't scare me and don't ever put your hands on me like that again," I yelled.

I was so livid my anger nearly choked me. I reached up and slapped him several more times until my hand started to hurt. Again, like the hits had no effect on him at all, he took them without flinching. When my hand dropped to my side, his face was bright red.

He straightened and took a step back. "Are you done with your tantrum?" he asked.

"Don't you ever touch me like that again, Adam, or I'll show you a tantrum. You don't know me as well as you think you do."

"You think I don't," he said.

Suddenly I felt tired. I needed to sit down and come to grips with the fact that Adam knew I was pregnant. I was never getting rid of him. I left him standing at the door. I headed for

my favorite chair. When I turned the corner and entered my living room, my soul left my body momentarily. I couldn't move or breathe. The shock of what I saw paralyzed me.

Adam's hand on my shoulder brought me back to reality.

I yelled. "What the hell did you do?"

In a few steps I made my way over to a badly beaten Michael. He was slumped over on my sofa with his hands tied, bleeding profusely from his head. I thought he was dead until he wheezed in pain. I reached down to untie him.

"Get the fuck away from him, Eve." The fury in Adam's tone caused me to hesitate, but only for a second.

I knelt in front of Michael then searched for the best way to go about getting him loose. There was so much blood I was afraid that if I touched him, I might have made whatever Adam had done to him worse.

"What did you do to him?" I screamed at Adam without looking at him.

Guilt flooded my body. He'd been a good friend. Had even offered to help me raise my child. To see him bloodied and beaten, I regretted calling him. I should have never gotten him involved again. A sudden gasp drew my attention from Michael to the floor beside the couch. I jerked my head in the direction it came from and found a white woman lying on the floor regaining consciousness.

"Who is that, Adam?" My eyes flew to Adam who stared at me nonchalantly.

He behaved as if he didn't have two people tied up in my home.

"My ex-wife."

"How did she get in here? Never mind how. Just call the ambulance."

"No," he answered while stalking my way.

Before I could react, he bent and grabbed my hand and tried to pull me away from Michael. I refused to budge. We played tug of war for a few seconds until he finally straightened and reached for my hair. I shoved him away. Michael's hand found mine. He gripped it, trying to get my attention. Adam saw it. The look that came to his face caused me to snatch away.

"I'm sorry," I whispered to Michael.

I apologized because I should have been stronger and never involved him. Michael groaned. Our eyes connected. I saw something there that I couldn't read and didn't have time to decipher. He needed help. I stood and headed for my purse. My phone was in there.

I pushed past Adam. I needed to get to my phone I grabbed my purse from the floor where I'd dropped it then remembered Adam had taken my phone. I turned to find him where I'd left him. He removed my phone from his jacket pocket and spitefully threw it against the wall so hard that it shattered into pieces.

TWENTY-THREE



My anger started in the pit of my stomach and rose, spreading like wildfire. Like always she chose someone else over me. She had her hands balled at her sides as if she was ready to fight me, for him. Why? She didn't even know him, not the real him. A cruel familiar pain slashed through my chest. My anger morphed into rage. I bit into my lip so hard it bled.

Stalking over to where she stood. Without much force, I shoved her into the reclining chair behind her. It was time to end it all. She tried to stand.

"Don't fucking move, Eve."

I was on edge. The stern tone of my voice sounded harsh and menacing to my own ears. It wasn't surprising to me that her hardheaded-ass remained seated.

"Ask him why he's here, Eve."

"No." She shook her head and stubbornly folded her arm across her chest. "I don't want to hear anything from you. Just call an ambulance and get away from me."

She didn't understand that she was taking me to a place I never wanted to go with her, but a man could only take so much.

"Ask him now," I roared causing Eve to nearly jump from the seat.

Eve straightened in her chair and shook her head and glared at me defiantly.

"Okay, I see I've indulged you too often. Allowing your defiance has made you doubt me. I'd never hurt you, but..."

I turned and stalked over to Michael. He'd managed to pull himself to a seated position, but his head lulled to the side. He looked as if he was a second away from passing out again. Still I could tell he was aware of my presence when I stopped in front of him. I could physically feel the heat of his hate and contempt for me rolling off him in waves.

Hate me? Why? He'd brought this on himself. For five months he'd lied to me. Each time he called and told me he hadn't found her had caused me physical pain. Then I became suspicious and hired another private detective. He'd found her in two days and sent me pictures of him and her together.

A part of me understood why he lied. He was trying to save her. If I wasn't around, I would want someone like him in her life. Because of that I'd simply fired and threatened him when I found out he'd crossed me again. That should have been the end to our relationship with him, but then I'd heard their

voicemails. He'd offered to help raise our child, leaving me completely out of the picture. He was a fool if he thought I would allow him to live to do that.

His one good eye shot up at me. There was still fight in him, even though he hadn't faired so well in the first one. I'd had fun beating him with a baseball bat until he begged me to stop. I grabbed him by his neck. Lifted him from the sofa, causing him to whimper in pain.

"I advise you to ask him why he's here, Eve, before I make him tell you. My way," I threatened.

"Why are you doing this? You can't—" She started, but she was too choked up to continue. She quickly regained her composure. "Stop this. You can't do this to people." She started rocking in her chair.

"This is how you behave for him? All the tears and emotions? For him?" It infuriated me while simultaneously hurting my soul. "He doesn't deserve your tears. Michael tell her why you don't deserve them," I demanded. I snatched his head around, so he faced her. "Tell her now." I leveled a punch to his gut so hard it caused him to fold. I was sure I'd broken one or two of his ribs, but he refused to cry out. Eve did loud enough for the both of them.

"Just leave him alone. You tell me. Please stop this and just tell me. I don't need the stress," she pleaded quietly, sounding defeated and tired.

I let Michael go. He crumbled to the floor in a heap beside Jenny. I was having trouble being moved by her tears for another fucking man, but she was right. She didn't need any undue stress while she was pregnant. I made my way over to where she was seated. Just out of her reach, I rotated my tense neck before speaking.

"He's the reason my ex-wife knows where you live. Michael here told my wifey dearest where she could find you, and she got it in her pea brain head that if she got rid of you, I'd go back to her."

She stared at me in confusion then I watched as her brain started and she slowly connected the piece.

Her eyes widened. "You hired him?"

"Yes."

"I knew it," she mumbled under her breath. "And she wants to hurt me?"

"Yes."

She swallowed hard, shaking her head violently. "All of this is because of you." She stabbed an accusatory finger at me while suddenly jumping up from her seat. "What else did you do? Now that I think of it, you were responsible for what happened with Davis, too?" she blurted out of the blue. "That's why you were there that day looking like the cat that ate the canary."

It was a question I wouldn't answer ever. She read the truth in my eyes though.

"Oh my God, you did. You're the devil. Do you know what I went through? Never mind. Just take them and go. I can't

deal with them or your crazy obsessiveness right now. I'm pregnant, tired and my feet hurt. Get the hell out," she yelled and waved toward the door. I reached for her, and she flinched away. "No. Don't touch me. Just go, Adam. You have to let this fantasy of us being together go. It is destructive," she declared, a trail of tears streaked down her cheeks.

I hated to see her cry. I hated even more that I made her cry, but she had to understand that there was no way I could do what she asked of me.

"What do you want from me, Eve?" I reached for her again.

She snatched away again and took several steps to distance herself as far away from me as she could in the small living room. Having her flat-out reject me felt like blunt force trauma to my chest. No matter how often she did it, I knew I'd never became accustomed to the pain of it. Every time it hurt a little more.

"I can't do that, Eve. I tried."

"You have to. You can't keep trying to control my life. Trying to impose yourself on me. We don't fit. We'll never fit," she yelled, slamming her hand against the wall.

"No! I don't want to control you. You control me. You own me. You could command me to do anything, besides leaving. That's not an option. Tell me what I need to do to make things between us right. I'll do it."

"Stop this." She backed away further, shaking her head. "There's nothing you could do. Too much damage has already

been done. Look at them." She pointed behind me to Michael and Jenny. "You have people half dead in my living room."

"Don't say that. Tell me. I'll give you whatever it takes." My voice climbed along with my heart rate. "You want cars? Houses? Clothes? I'll give them to you. You want me to kill for you? I'll spend the rest of my life spilling blood on soil in your name."

"Stop! Do you not know how crazy you sound?"

"Do you want me to cry for you? Beg? I'll fucking beg. I'll get down on my knees right here and beg for you. I'll do it. You could ask me to do anything and I'll do it, but don't ask me to let you go. These few months without you nearly broke me."

When I finished my declaration, a new emotion, one I couldn't read, was in her eyes along with a look of shock on her face.

Waiting for her to say something, anything, was causing tightly woven strands inside me to loosen and when they completely snapped, I didn't know what I'd do. Why couldn't she understand that she needed me as much as I needed her? Now more than ever. We needed to be together, to raise our child together.

I took a deep breath ready to be her—

"Adam," she called my name, interrupting my thoughts. I watched through shocked eyes as she swayed. "I feel funny," she mumbled and reached for me, then suddenly she was falling.

My heart stopped. I couldn't breathe, but my body somehow moved. I caught her just before her head hit the side table.

I picked her up and cradled her in my arms. "It's going to be okay," I whispered. I headed out of the door without a backwards glance. I'd deal with those two later. If anything happened to her and my child, I didn't know what I'd do.

You'll snap, the voice chimed in.

I agreed, and if that happened, no one would be safe.

TWENTY-FOUR



These last two weeks of living with Adam by choice had been worse than living with Adam in that room by force. Like before, he was always there— everywhere— watching. Only now he hardly ever spoke. He was like a ghost, haunting me. He wasn't cruel or abusive. He took care of all my needs and wants. He just didn't speak to me or really look at me. I didn't know how to take this Adam. In a strange way, it caused me to low-key miss the old Adam. That made me feel weird and conflicted. I was not supposed to care either way.

The silent treatment started the day I'd awakened in the hospital and found out I had preeclampsia and could lose my child. Or we could both die. Adam had the nerve to put all the blame on me like he didn't have a part in causing me stress. Everything had been his fault. If he would have never brought me to that room...

I wanted to tell him just that but couldn't. He was worried. It was written all over his face, and I wasn't a complete

monster. He'd listened to the doctor warn us about what could happen if I didn't go on bed rest and reduce my stress with tears in his eyes. Men like Adam didn't cry, didn't feel. His show of emotion was endearing, but scary. I got distracted trying to make sense of it in my head. Then I'd started thinking about what had happened in my apartment.

When the doctor left the room, the first thing out of my mouth had been to ask him about his wife and Michael. I needed to know what had happened to them.

"Did you hurt them?" It sounded like more of an accusation than a question.

I wasn't exactly surprised when he lost it. His gunmetal eyes had darkened to nearly black. The look he'd given me—a combination of disgust and anger— had me feeling only an inch tall.

"The first thing you do is ask me about them after hearing that you and my child could possibly die?" He'd sneered at me while rising from his seat then he bent down next to my bed so that we were eye to eye. I wanted to look away from the intensity in his eyes but couldn't, his hand on my jaw made sure of that. "I'd forgive you for almost everything, but if my child dies..." he left the threat hanging in the air.

Recoiling away from his anger, I'd shrunk back into the hospital bed. The cold tone of his voice had chilled my blood. I still wanted to say something though, anything to defend myself. Before I could formulate a response, he'd turned, reared back and punched the wall next to the door so hard it left a dent behind. Then he stormed out of the room like the devil was at his heels.

I was stunned at his reaction, and for the first time, I feared Adam. What if I pushed him to hurt me? Then I thought about why he was mad, and I felt guilty, just a bit. Michael had lied to me for months, and Adam's wife had tried to hurt me. I shouldn't have cared what happened to either of them. In the same sense, I also shouldn't have cared about Adam's feelings either. He was the cause of all my recent woes, but I did care, and it made absolutely no sense.

I chocked it up to hormones and decided I would apologize, if only for my own sake. The reality of my situation dictated I was going to need his help. With my new medical issue, I had few options. I didn't know anything about raising a child. Just the thought of doing so alone made me feel like I was drowning.

When he returned, I was prepared to tuck my tail between my legs and grovel if I had to. I would have if he hadn't ignored me when I tried. The next day when I was released, I didn't object when he told me we were going back to the house he claimed to have built for us. I had no one else, and I was sad to say, I needed his help. My baby had to be my number one concern.

Adam wouldn't have to harm me if I lost my child. I'd most likely end myself. The baby already meant everything to me. I had nobody. My child would be someone I could put my all into. He or she would make life worth living. After showing me around the house and introducing me to his staff, he rarely spoke to me. Neither did the staff. Somewhere in between all the silence, he told me that he was now divorced.

Two weeks later, I was sitting on the sofa in his cold sterile house trying to figure out a way to make my current living arrangement less uncomfortable. I considered apologizing again. The question was, would he be receptive? I chewed at my nails, contemplating how to approach him.

Just as I decided to get up and find him to blurt it out and hope for the best, he walked into the room. Tension followed. My neck stiffened, and my nerves went haywire. I sat stock still as he headed right for me. I watched him as he laid five books on the coffee table. He looked everywhere but at me. Untucking my legs, I reached for one of the books once he arranged them to his liking. I sighed. More baby books.

"How many of these do you expect me to read?" I asked.

I'd read so many I swore my eyes would cross if I had to read another. I didn't really expect a response, but I'd hoped for one. Finally, and I was sure with much reluctance on his part, he spared me a glance. Our eyes met. He didn't speak or blink. He just stared at me in that penetrating way he did that made me think he could see right through me.

I frowned. The look made me feel guilty and small, but I was proud of myself for not turning away under the heat of it. I was able to catch a glimpse of hurt in his eyes. All he wanted was for me to read the baby books. Maybe I could have done that without being a smart-aleck, right?

Then something clicked. I became irrationally angry. Why was I feeling guilty? I hadn't done anything to him. Why was I even contemplating apologizing? Instead, I challenged his stare with one of my own. He frowned then shook his head with disappointment. He righted himself, and without a word, he pivoted on the heel of his expensive shoes and walked back toward the kitchen.

I fought the urge to chuck one of the books at the back of his head. Annoyance and anger made it hard for me to see straight. The sudden urge to tell him to fuck off—directly to his face propelled me to my feet. I was ready to fight. As soon as I

stood my head swam and the dizziness that followed made my stomach churn. Quickly I sat back down. I had to close my eyes and swallow hard to keep from puking. I took deep breaths until I calmed down enough to think rationally.

What we were doing? Acting like two stubborn children wasn't working. I needed to talk with Adam like an adult. I didn't think he would be as dedicated to his silent treatment if he knew how much it was affecting me. I should have told him the very first day we arrived at this house, but I was too busy being stubborn. He had the right to be worried about the health of his child. I had the right to be angry, but not about that.

It was a catch-22. I blinked back tears. Just the thought of crying made me angry. Crying wasn't something I was used to. It was then I realized I was going to have to let the past go for now. I was going to have to let my guard down and have a talk with Adam about the future. The reality of the situation was I was stuck with him for the next eighteen years.

I was still thinking about the talk I needed to have with Adam later that night in bed. I'd had ample time to speak with him earlier as he sat across the table from me while we ate dinner, but I couldn't figure out a way to start the conversation. Hell, I didn't even know what I really wanted to say. Me apologizing to him seemed backwards in my mind. He was the one who made things bad between us.

Then I reasoned that maybe him taking me wasn't all that bad. Maybe If I would have confronted him when I first found out he was watching me it wouldn't have come to this point. I was not as naïve as I pretended to be at times. Even though I didn't know the extent of his interest at the time, I'd noticed him noticing me. Yet, I ignored it.

I also wondered what would have happened if he wouldn't have taken me? I was at my wits end mentally and physically. Even being with Michael hadn't been helping. I'd been going through the motions of everyday life on auto pilot. Then he came, my weird, stalkerish knight in dull armor, and sort of saved me?

Speaking of Michael, I wondered if I should tell Adam about the text I'd received from him. Michael had asked where I was and if I was okay. I didn't plan on texting or calling him back. He was supposed to be my friend. I had trusted him. I'd let my guard down for him and he had been lying to me the entire time. To someone like me, who didn't trust anybody, that was unforgivable. I was more likely to forgive Adam for his craziness before Michael for his betrayal. I never trusted Adam, but I did trust Michael. That hurt because I didn't normally trust people. To have him lie to me the way he had was worse than Adam kidnapping me.

All the thoughts floating in my head at one time caused my brain to throb. I sat up and threw my legs over the side of the bed. I decided to go to Adam right that second. I wasn't going to get any sleep until I did. I still didn't know what I was going to say. I figured I'd just start talking until something came. I pulled on the red silk robe he'd bought me then headed toward the master bedroom.

TWENTEY-FIVE



I was awakened by the feeling of someone watching me. When I opened my eyes, I found Eve standing at the foot of my bed staring down at me. I was unable to decipher whether it was a dream or not. Before I even tried, I slid from under the covers. The side effects of sleeping pill and sitting up so abruptly caused blood to rush to my head which made my temples pound.

"What's wrong?" I asked through the grogginess, not sure she would respond.

"Nothing's wrong," she said.

I didn't believe her and began to panic internally.

"Is something wrong with the baby?" I asked. Had she changed her mind? Was she leaving me again? "Really what's wrong? Is it the baby?"

She hesitated to answer which caused my heart to drop. I didn't know what she deciphered from the look on my face, but it made her rush to answer my question.

"No. I just wanted to know if I could sleep with you?" she asked.

Totally a fucking dream. Her request sounded too good to be real.

She sighed audibly. "Can I lay down or not, Adam? No, you're not dreaming."

Had I said that out loud or did she know me that well?

She broke me from my thoughts. "May I?"

I wanted to tell her no. I shouldn't be so easy to forgive her after she'd hurt me. But I was weak, and I'd missed her. I pulled back the sheets and made space for her beside me. I saw the uncertainty in her eyes as she made her way around the bed, but it didn't stop her. When she slid her warm body next to mine, I almost choked on air.

Long minutes passed as we lay side by side, just breathing.

"Adam," she started, then stopped. She cleared her throat.

I held my breath. With Eve I never knew what to expect. I prepared for the worst.

"I'm sorry," she said, her voice soft.

Her apology surprised me, and though I wanted to believe it was sincere, I didn't. Last time she apologized and then left as soon as I gave her the option.

"Are you really? And for what?" I asked.

"I'm sorry for making you worry about me and the baby."

"That's it?" She had so much more to be apologetic about. "What about everything else?"

"That's all I feel I need to apologize for. Can't that be enough?"

No, because you hurt me, I wanted to scream, but I kept that to myself. I knew it would turn our conversation into an argument. I remained silent until she spoke again.

"What do you want from me, Adam?"

"I want everything. I want us, our baby. A family. I want to protect you."

I want to fuck you into a sinful oblivion. I kept that last part to myself, knowing the deep down she still thought everything I had done was all about sex. I needed her to know it was about more, much more.

"I hate that I needed to hear you say that," she admitted and continued before I could respond. "You know I'll never love you, right?"

"I don't care. Love is trivial. I want devotion. I want adoration. I want you by my side willingly."

She sniggered. "You're hopeless. You just described love, Adam."

"No, love is a disease. An affliction one catches. It causes pain and suffering. It can be cured. I don't want you to cause me pain, and I'd die before I purposely caused you any. Love is like a hit of heroine; temporary."

She rose on her elbows and turned so she was facing me. "So, what you're saying is you've done heroine?"

There was amusement, but also doubt in her eyes. The doubt rubbed me the wrong way. Would we ever get past that phase in our relationship? Not if she kept fighting me.

"You know what the fuck I mean," I snapped and regretted it immediately.

On her elbows she cocked her head. Her eyes as she searched my mine. She reached for me. Instinctually, I went to pull back. I was so used to her lashing out, I expected her to strike me. Instead she traced her thumb over my lips before leaning into me. The world stopped, and all my doubts and fears faded when she pressed her lips to mine and with her tongue, mimicked the action her fingers had done seconds earlier.

Tugging my lips open with her teeth, she twirled her tongue, tasting my mouth. Our first kiss made me feel everything around me and damned her. From that moment forth only death could take her from me. I closed my eyes and reveled in the feel of her lips against mine.

I let her control the pace until she tangled her hands into my hair, pulling me closer. I lost it. I took control. She melted into me. Her heartbeat hammered against my chest. Tasting her sweet mouth was too much, but not enough. I felt like I was burning from the inside out. When she pulled away, I fought the urge to protest.

"I don't think this will work, but I'll try," she whispered against my lips.

That was enough for me. Resting my forehead against hers, I tried to think of the right thing to say to make her feel secure.

"You'll get use to this, being here with me, being a family," I encouraged.

She sighed then pulled away. "Sleep... We need sleep".

She avoided my eyes then flipped onto her back. She threw her arm over her eyes. I felt the melancholy emotions rolling off her and I hated it. I knew my impatience wasn't rational. I was asking her for a lot but fuck rational. I wanted what I wanted.

In silence I watched her fall asleep. I fought to keep my thoughts to myself, even though I had so much more I wanted to say, promises I wanted to make, promises I wanted her to make. I had to remind myself none of it was necessary in the grand

scheme of things. None of it mattered because she was there next to me, and I didn't plan on losing her.

Hours later, while she was sleeping, I was still awake watching the rise and fall of her chest. I noticed her robe had inched up her hips exposing the tiniest pair of lace panties, I wanted to touch her, to run my hands up and down the stretch marks on her hips. Bury my face in her hair, inhale her, kiss her stomach, talk to my child, but I didn't. All that would come with time. I laid stock-still while fighting sleep. I was terrified that I would close my eyes and when I opened them, she'd be gone.

TWENTY-SIX



Adam woke me with soft kisses to the back of my neck. The urge to pull away was overwhelming, but I'd promised I'd try, and I was going to. Even if it drove me crazy. I closed my eyes and let the thought of us, our child and the future sink into me. I didn't exactly hate what I envisioned.

"Good morning," I said then used the excuse of morning sickness to pull myself from his embrace.

"Good morning," he replied, his tone indicated he wasn't fooled.

After getting out of bed, washing my face and brushing my teeth, I changed into a t-shirt and tights. He watched me the entire time... Which isn't creepy at all, I thought sarcastically. I followed him down stairs where breakfast waited for us. I didn't think I'd ever get used to having someone cook me three meals

a day. We ate breakfast in silence, giving me too much time to think.

"I'm curious about something," I said.

"What's that?" he asked without looking up from his plate.

He was still in a mood. I rolled my eyes. He was so hot and cold. Maybe I should just leave him alone, I thought, but genuine curiosity had me doing the opposite.

"What do your parent's think about this situation?" I asked.

He tensed but unexpectantly answered right away.

"My parents are of no consequence." He dismissed me and returned to picking at his food.

It wasn't what I wanted to hear. "Are you always going to be like this?"

"Like what?" he snapped.

"Closed off, secretive. You're so invasive when it comes to my life, but you want to keep everything about yourself a secret."

He finally looked up at me then grimaced at the anger he found on my face.

"Fine, Eve. My father knows about you, and he doesn't want us together. Do you want to know what he said, word for word?"

"Yes, tell me."

A harsh, bitter laugh trickled from between his lips. His fork fell from his fingers then clattered against his plate. "And when I tell you, will you use it as an excuse to run away again?"

"No. I'm just curious because these are people I'm assuming I'll have to deal with and who'll be around my child. I'd like to know what they think of me, what you've told them. I don't understand where the sudden anger is coming from."

"It's coming from you trying to push me away again."

"Paranoid much?"

"No, I'm not."

"I asked you an important question that I feel I need to know the answer to. Or do you expect for me to wait for you to divulge everything, bit by bit, like you did about your divorce?"

How was the relationship he wanted going to work if he was going to keep secrets and snapped at me every time I asked him about something he considered personal? Instead of answering me outright, he grumbled something under his breath so low I couldn't hear him. *Speak louder, jackass,* I thought but caught myself before I said it out loud.

"I just don't want to talk about them," he said.

"You're being really extra. Why are you really mad, Adam?"

"Just leave it alone, and eat, Eve," he said, voiced strained.

"No. Tell me." I dropped my fork onto the plate. That got his attention.

Straightening his back, he adverted his eyes. Since he was being a coward, I decided to answer for him. The truth was written all over him.

"You're still mad about me leaving? I thought we had solved our issues last night."

"We did," he said then ran his hand down his face.

"You're mad, and it's killing you holding it inside."

On some level, I realized he was trying not to piss me off or stress me out because of the baby, but inadvertently, he was doing both with his messed-up attitude.

"Just say you're mad so we can move on."

"You're damn right I'm mad," he exploded, banging his hand against the table. "You left me. You made plans to raise my child without me. That's what happened, nothing will change that. Next fucking subject."

"Don't *next fucking subject* me. Get it off your chest since it's obvious you'll sulk until you do."

"Sulking? I'm not sulking, I'm not a fucking child, Eve. You mind fucked me, and this is the end result. I'm not fucking sulking. I'm broken, and you broke me. Can you imagine how I felt to find out you were pregnant? Five months, Eve, and you didn't try to contact me once. You never planned on telling me, did you?" He got right up in my face, demanding his answer.

His anger warmed the space around us. I opened my mouth to lie, then closed it. Neither of my explanations for why I wasn't going to tell him would make him any less angry. I couldn't form the words, so I just shook my head.

"I knew you weren't. You're fucking selfish," he snarled.

My head whiplashed back like he'd slapped me. I couldn't believe he was accusing me of being selfish.

"Stop pretending your selfishness isn't the reason we're here. You kidnapped—" I started but stopped myself. I was not raising my blood pressure rehashing the past. "If we can't come to a mutual understanding and admit we've both made mistakes, I might as well leave. I still have enough of the money you gave me to rent a place until after the baby comes and then I can get a job. You don't even have to be involved if you don't want."

I folded my arms across my chest and waited for him to respond.

Hurt flashed in his eyes. I ignored the feeling that came from it.

"So, it's just that easy? Take it or leave it?" His tone was somewhat calmer.

"It has to be." My voice was devoid of any emotions though all I was doing at that moment was feeling. Later when I was by myself, I would blame it on the hormones. "I've said sorry and promised I'd try. There isn't anything more I can do."

"I could almost hat—" he cut off his declaration of hating me midsentence. He dragged his hand down his face. "I didn't mean that. We'll make it work."

I didn't know how to respond to that, or why there was a sudden ache in my chest, so I said nothing. He returned to his seat then we both sat, pretending to eat. Neither one of us confident that whatever we had, would work.

A quote from a book I'd read a few months prior popped into my head suddenly: "You can pretend for a long time, but one day it all falls away and you are alone."

Coincidently it was from a book about a white man who drove a Black woman crazy. Pretending wouldn't work, not for long. What happened when it all fell apart?

TWENTY-SEVEN



"Are you sure you know everything about her?"

When my father popped up on campus, I was only slightly annoyed by his presence, because I expected him. Him mentioning Eve turned his unwanted visit into an unpleasant one. He leaned back in his chair with a smug and pleased expression on his face. His eyes locked with mine awaiting my reaction.

I cocked my head to the side, studied him and wondered in what direction he was going with his questioning and would the end result be me having to kill him? Probably. He was ruthless, and I knew what length he'd go to remove Eve from my life. He wanted to have an image of the perfect family, and in his mind, Eve skewed that image.

"I'm sure," I answered simply then waited for him to elaborate.

However, knowing my father, if he did know anything of importance about her, he'd keep it locked away until he had no other choice but to tell me or use it against me. Whichever came first. His face hardened at my answer. But he nodded his acceptance. He changed the subject.

"What is it about her, son? For years she's been your singular focus."

"She made me feel."

It was that simple. From day one my reaction to her had been visceral. For someone like me, that meant something.

"That's it? She made you feel?" He fell back against the chair, throwing his hands up. "That bullshit. In my time you didn't worry about feelings. Black and white didn't mix. You should be getting ready to give your mother grandkids and taking over my position. Not losing your head over a fucking black bitch. All nig—"

Eve's ringtone interrupted the vile shit my father was about to say, essentially saving his life. In nearly two months, Eve had never called me before. I knew it must have been something important. I kept my eyes on him as I answered immediately. He wore a devious smirk that I wanted to knock off his face. I recognized the fact that he was purposely trying to bait me, or either he was pleased with the fact that he had. Maybe he was testing just how dedicated to my relationship I was.

"Please come home," Eve said nervously then hung up.

Everything outside of getting to her was forgotten. "I have to go."

I stood then grabbed my keys from the desk drawer before I headed for the door.

My father grabbed my arm as I passed him. "At least let us meet her." He narrowed his eyes and his tone dropped. "She's about to have my grandchild, isn't she? And we need to discuss my retirement and you taking your rightful place in the company."

I glared down at him. I wondered again what his angle was. Better yet, how had he known she was pregnant? I didn't have time to dwell on either.

"Fine," I agreed, even though I had no attention of him meeting her or talking to him about either subject.

I snatched away and jogged out to my car. I drove home without knowing if I'd followed any rules of traffic to get there. My heart was in my stomach.

"Eve," I called to her soon as I made it through the door.

I half walked, half ran to the kitchen when she answered.

"I cooked for you," she greeted me when I rushed through the door.

"What the fuck? You cooked? I thought something bad had happened," I snapped at her and immediately regretted it.

The hurt in her eyes was fleeting, but I still saw it. I felt like shit for causing it. Cooking was one of the things I'd told

her would please me and she was putting forth an effort. I grabbed her and pulled her to me when she tried to push past me and storm out of the kitchen.

I pulled her into an embrace. She stiffened. "I'm sorry," I apologized sincerely, pressing a kiss against the pulse of her neck. "Can we start over?"

"Nah, I'm good. I suddenly have a headache." She twisted away, at least tried to.

"I really am sorry. I got scared. You know I'm on edge about the baby." I felt her body relax. "You're beautiful though," I complimented.

She nodded then accepted my apology. She backed up and allowed the barley there silk robe she was wearing over her lingerie drop to the floor. Underneath was a sheer baby doll dress. My breath caught.

"I made my favorite since you've never told me yours." She turned to grab the already prepared plates from the island.

Before she could, I charged toward her. I watched her eyes get big. She gasped when I lifted her from the floor and set her on the counter.

"Wait." She pushed back on my chest. "What about dinner?"

"Fuck dinner. It's been months since I've touched you. I've been dreaming of tasting you again."

"Okay," she whispered breathlessly then spread her legs.

TWENTY-EIGHT



Much later we're lying in bed, sweaty, a tangled mess of limbs. For the first time in a long time I felt at peace, as much as I could in my current situation.

"Marry me, Eve," Adam blurted out, interrupting the quiet in the room.

And just like that, the feeling of peace was gone.

"No."

I rolled my eyes in the dark knowing he wouldn't see it and bit my tongue to keep from telling him the thought of being his wife was terrifying. When he wanted to fuck me, he locked me in a room for days and I ended up pregnant. Now I lived with him. What in the hell would happen if I married him and wanted to leave?

"Why not?" He rolled over onto his elbow and stared at the side of my face.

I took my time turning to face him before answering. "Because marriage is for normal people who do normal people shit. Neither one of us are normal."

"My name will provide you protection, guarantee you and my child will never go without anything if something happens to me."

I shook my head, vehement about not doing it. "It sounds good, but it's another trap, like the room down stairs. Your way of insuring I don't leave."

"That's bullshit. You will never leave me regardless if we're married or not."

It was a warning which reminded me that he was nutcase. For the sake of my child, I was willing to deal with a little bit of crazy as long as he didn't get too out of hand.

"Can we talk about this another time?" I changed the subject by straddling him.

"Wha- what are you doing?" he asked as if he didn't already know.

His dick was already a full participant in my getting him to shut up. I slid down onto it and made his frown dissipate. His

face relaxed, but hardheaded as ever he managed to grit his final words between his teeth.

"We will talk about this and marri—" I made sure he lost his train of thought when I flexed my pussy muscle around him. His hand gripped my hips. His nails digging into the meaty flesh. "This convers—"

"Shhh. No more talking tonight."

I use my knees to push myself up then down. I repeated the motion until he no longer looked interested in talking about anything. His hands found my ass. My eyes lulled shut. He pushed up, filling me. Suddenly I had the craziest thought: If I had to spend the next eighteen years with a crazy man, at least it was one with some good sex.

I stared at the screen, mesmerized by the sound of my baby's heartbeat yet again. It was the third time hearing it, but each time I was no less awed by the experience. I tried to make out what each image was as the doctor pointed to where the important stuff like the lungs, heart, spine and penis were.

"Did you hear that? He said penis. It's a boy.".

I was so emotional I could barely get the words out of my mouth or tear my eyes away from the screen long enough to look at Adam. When I did, I rolled my eyes at him.

Squeezing his hand, I drew his attention from the doctor. "You hear that?" I asked again. "It's a boy."

"I already knew," he said.

I frowned at that. There was no need to ask how he knew. He knew everything. I guessed there was no need to

wonder what the baby's name would be, I thought bitterly. I knew that if I even thought it would be anything other than Adam Junior, the worst argument would occur.

I lowered my voice then leaned in to whisper, "Stop glaring at the doctor like you want to kill him."

He forced a smile to his face that looked more like a grimace. "I told you to request a female doctor after the last visit. Watching him touch you agitates me." Adam didn't even pretend to whisper.

The doctor laughed. "I could recommend you to a colleague." The red-faced Danny DeVito look-a-like turned and faced us as he removed his gloves. "But I would like to stay on this late in the pregnancy."

"Yes, a female do—".

I cut Adam off, raising my hand. "No, you're fine." Then I cut my eyes at Adam "Cut that shit out," I snapped.

His hand tightened in mine. "Fine. Now can you leave while she gets dressed," he in return snapped at the doctor.

"That whole Neanderthal act is getting old," I admonished when the doctor closed the door behind him. "Help me up."

Adam grabbed my arm then pulled me into sitting position. Then he pretty much proceeded to redress me. It took everything in me not to be annoyed, but it was how he'd been

since I'd given him some, too helpful. He even helped me put my tennis shoes on, tied them, then walked me to the car like I was an invalid.

"I have two classes. One at eleven and one at two. Then maybe we can go to the movies after."

Adam lifted my hand and kissed the knuckles as we drove toward the house. I didn't even flinch or cringe at the show of affection. I was getting used to it.

"Are you going to bitch about me adding too much butter to my popcorn this time?" I asked.

I saw him cut his eyes at me. I laughed a genuine laugh. He hadn't yet learned the lesson that he couldn't force me to do anything that I didn't want to. The rest of the drive home was made in comfortable silence. Every day with Adam was getting easier.

The ringing of the doorbell jolted me awake. It didn't register at first that it was the doorbell. In the few months I'd been living with Adam, there had been no visitors outside of the staff he employed, and they had keys.

Groggily I glanced over at the clock and saw one-thirty in the afternoon which meant Adam was still in class and the staff would be gone. It was up to me to answer it.

Should I? I thought.

Adam had been telling me that his home was my home, and it had started to feel like home, but still what if it was his kinfolk? The bell sounded again, and curiosity overrode my doubts. Standing, I stretched, running my hand over my belly. I

couldn't believe how huge I had gotten when I still had a few weeks to go. The baby kicked as the bell rang for the third time.

I wobbled out of the guestroom that had been turned into the master bedroom. Adam insisted I stop walking up the stairs, scared I'd fall after I'd almost done so a few weeks back. I cursed inwardly when I saw the eyes staring into the doorbell camera. Without ever meeting the man I knew it was Adam's father. Adam was the spitting image of him, just the younger version. His familiar gray eyes looked less menacing.

Now I had a decision to make. Should or shouldn't I open the door? Adam had said his father didn't like me. I also knew Adam had been ignoring invitations from his parents to meet me. At first, that bothered me. Would my son and I be hidden away in this house like some kind of secret? Then, after a bit of thought, I knew we wouldn't be. Adam had no problem taking me out in public. He just never wanted to visit his parents.

Would Adam be pissed if I ignored his father? We'd had a good last couple of months. Did I want to go back to before we agreed to make it work? No. I decided to open the door and to be on my best behavior

"Hello. How are—" I started pleasantly, but my words were cut off when Adam's father pushed past me and walked into our home like he owned it without so much as an introduction or hello.

Rude as he could be. I guessed the apple didn't fall far from the tree.

"Close the door and stop gawking at me. Come and sit, girl," he ordered in a tone that was reminiscent of Jim Crow south.

I blinked once and then twice? Was he talking to me? Biting the inside of my jaw was the only thing that kept me from going off. *Remember this is Adam's father*, I thought. I didn't want to put him in a position to have to choose between me and his real family.

"I prefer to stand, *sir*." I spat the sir out because saying it left a bad taste in my mouth.

"Sit down, girl."

Our eyes connected. Like his son's, his eyes told on him. He was a different kind of animal than Adam though, but just as dangerous. That was scary. While Adam had my best interest at heart, it was clear his father didn't.

For the sake of my child I sat. I didn't need the meeting turning volatile and he already looked as if he wanted to strike me. I sat in the chair furthest from him. I watched him cautiously as he unbuttoned his suit jacket and leaned back against the sofa. For about a half a minute, he just glanced around the room.

"What brings you here? Adam didn't menti—"

With a raise of his hand he cut me off. "I talk, you listen," he ordered.

Yes, suh, masta, I mocked sarcastically in my head, but nodded for him to continue. I was curious as to why he was visiting me.

"I know that son of mine has filled your head with pretty little lies. You think you won the lottery because you're about to push out that bastard." He sneered then pointed down at my belly.

I want to dispute his accusation. His son is ninety-nine percent of the reason I was there and ninety-nine percent of the reason I stayed. Telling him that would prolong the time we had to remain in one another's presence. I had no desire to be near him anymore than I had to be.

I let him continue uninterrupted. "When you give birth, I want you gone. Leave my grandson. He's one of us even if he'll be a half breed. I know Adam gave you money. Use it to disappear this time for good or my son and the police will find out your secrets."

I wanted to laugh at him. There was no way I was leaving my child with them. I didn't even dignify it with a response.

Out of curiosity I asked, "What secrets are those? Everything there is to know about me Adam knows."

He chuckled, and it was not goodheartedly.

"Does he know you killed that black bitch who raised you?"

His words slammed into me. Mentally, I freaked out. Outwardly my expression never changed. I was good at bluffing.

"I don't know what you're talking about." My voice hitched. I sounded unconvincing and he knew I was lying.

A big smile broke out on his face making me want to smack him. "Sure, you don't, but if you leave, no one but me and you will know the truth," he said then stood, taking me in from feet to head as he did. The way he leered made my skin crawl. "I can see what my son sees in you. I had a couple of you back in my day. Sweetest pussy I ever tasted, but you're not good for much else."

Unmoved by his insult, I did and said nothing. He was trying to get a reaction out of me.

"He has good taste." He licked his lips. "You know I fucked his wife?" he blurted out randomly. "After he took my Maggie, I feel he owes me. And since he owes me, you owe me like Jenny did. Can't fuck you all big and pregnant though, but..." His eyes fell to my lips. "I bet you're a good cock sucker."

Who was Maggie? was my initial thought, then I processed the rest of what he'd said, and my face crashed. Standing with my fist balled at my side it took everything in me not to swing.

"Now I know for sure you're an even bigger nut than your son. You need to leave," I managed to grit out past the lump in my throat.

I couldn't believe he thought I was going to suck his cock because of some bullcrap between him and his son. Then again, why wouldn't he think that? Being associated with Adam caused crazy mess to happen.

He ignored me and took several steps in my direction until we were standing face-to-face. "I could call the cops right now and tell them to check your grandfather's backyard. That's where you buried her isn't it? Or..." He left the other option hanging in the air.

Tears gathered in my eyes, but I didn't cry.

"Tears won't help you, girl. Either you do it or give birth in jail," he growled.

My insides churned as he removed his jacket then unbuttoned and unzipped his pants.

"On your knees, girl." When I didn't move fast enough, he grabbed a handful of my hair and yelled his directive again right in my face, making my ears ring.

Anger, the type I hadn't felt in years, threatened to choke me. If I hadn't been pregnant, I would have tried my best to beat him to death. Instead I lowered myself onto my knees. I concentrated on his shoes until his pants dropped to the floor. When I looked up his dick was mere inches away from my face.

Pleading with my eyes, I tried to get him to change his mind. A grunt left his mouth and his brows pressed together. Staring down at me he gave his version of the charming and disarming smile his son used to lull his victims and for a moment, I hated them both equally. I wouldn't have been in that predicament, there on my knees, if it wasn't for Adam.

"Go ahead, suck it."

When he gripped his dick and pressed it against my lips, I allowed it to slip between. Luckily, I was too numb to taste, smell or even feel him in my mouth. I thought about biting it off. The only thing that stopped me was knowing that a blow to the head could be fatal. I knew if I bit his dick off, he was going to try and bludgeon me.

He used my head to guide himself in and out of my mouth. His hand tightened around my jaw, signaling to me that he was close or orgasm. While he was distracted, I eased my hand under the sofa cushion to remove the blade Adam had taken from me the night he kidnapped me. I'd found it when I was snooping through his things and had taken it back. I always kept it close by, just in case. I was living with an unstable person after all.

One moment I had it tightly gripped in my hand, feeling powerful again. In the next moment I was no longer holding it. Liquid warmed my face at the same time that pain exploded in my head. It took a second for me to realize Adam's father had hit me with a closed fist in the side of my head. My ears rung, it took what felt like forever for my vision to clear.

When it did, I looked up to find Adam's father staring down at me with a look of disbelief on his face. His hands were covered in blood and the knife was laying on the floor at his feet.

"What the fuck did you do?" he yelled.

He bent, wobbled, righted himself, and then began to frantically search his pants pockets for what I assumed was his phone. Did he really think he would get away with sexually assaulting me? Maybe he had... Entitlement was part of the American way for white men.

I watched as he straightened, turned and attempted to backtrack to the sofa. He ended up on his knees before he made it. Calmly, I stood and walked over to where he'd fallen onto his back. He was losing a lot of blood and fast. It was to be expected since I'd stabbed him in his liver, at least I hoped I had. I'd read on the internet that those wounds were almost always fatal unless treated immediately.

I was giddy at the thought. Nothing in me cared about the fact the he was probably going to die. I took a step back to avoid his hand when he reached for me.

"Call a fucking ambulance," he yelled as loud as blood loss would let him.

He would be rude to the end, I saw.

"No, I'd rather watch you bleed to death."

"Please. I'll give you money, I won't even report it to the police," he pleaded just like I had before he shoved his dick in my mouth.

Bending over him I got ready to do just as I said, watch him bleed to death, but his phone ringing distracted me. He used it to his advantage. In a last-ditch effort to save his life, he lunged toward me. Instead of preparing to defend myself, my hands automatically went to my belly. All I could think about was protecting my baby. Then suddenly I was falling... falling... My head slammed against the glass coffee table. I had mere seconds to regret not slitting his throat after stabbing him before everything went black

EPLOGUE



Standing outside the house I'd shared with Jenny., I reared back and threw what remained of my pills as hard and as far as I could into the woods. I didn't need them anymore. Eve had been back almost two years. My son was strong and healthy, on the verge of walking and anybody who stood in our way was gone. Thinking about my son made me smile like always. He was the perfect combination of his mother and I; caramel complexioned with, kinky brown hair.

Sometimes I'd just sit for hours staring at him. In his bright steel gray eyes, I'd catch flashes of me. I could see he'd inherited more of me than his mother, which was reassuring, I knew if anything happened to me, he'd do anything to protect her like I did.

She's going to be mad when she remembers, the voice warned out of the blue

"She won't. The doctor said the amnesia's permeant. It's been over a year, and she hasn't remembered a thing from the last ten years," I answered aloud unafraid to speak to him since I was alone.

Okay, let's say that's true, you're still going to ruin it, and this time it won't be just her leaving you. She'll take your son with her.

"Shut up," I barked, wishing he would leave me alone, but he was a result of me not taking my meds. I'd rather live with him than feel like a zombie all the time. "Don't you think I've thought of that? I know I can control my moods." Now that I had the family I'd always wanted, it was easier. "And even if she does remember, she wouldn't leave."

"Adam."

Eve interrupted my conversation from a distance. Turning, I found her holding Damon's hand, as they made their way toward me.

"Stay there. It's too dangerous to come back here," I yelled, and she stopped right away.

She bent and whispered something to Damon that caused him to giggle.

"Come, Daddy. Eat, eat," he encouraged, waving me over.

"Just one more second, son."

Turning, I had to finish doing what I'd come there to do. Say goodbye forever. I looked down at the two large stones sitting side by side. One marked my bitch of a wife, Jenny's, grave and the other Michael's. The images of me wrapping my hands around their necks, squeezing until the fight and breath left their bodies made my dick semi hard. I had intended to let them go like I had promised Eve I would, but it didn't sit right with me having them around where they could ruin everything. That was what people like them did, they ruined things.

Speaking of Michael, I pulled his cellphone from my pocket and threw it into the woods like I'd done my meds. I'd been texting Eve on it under the guise of being him for a year, not once had she answered, which meant I no longer needed it.

Further back in the woods was my mother and father in unmarked graves. There was no way I could have allowed my father to live after what he'd done to Eve. I'd killed him before I even took Eve to the hospital. Used the same knife she had gutted him with to slit his throat.

Killing my mother came after I watched everything between my father and Eve unfold. I saw everything he had done to her. Heard him call my mother and explain to her what had happened. She had been on her way to pick him up with plans to cover up his mess. You'd think after all he'd done to her, she wouldn't want to be involved. Her unwavering loyalty to my father's money earned her a slow death. I took all my fury and hatred for him out on her. She had died like she lived, on her knees.

Somewhere even further back was Eve's foster mother. I'd followed Eve on one of her trips back to Atlanta. I didn't know what had possessed her to go back to see that horrid woman, but she had. Whatever happened in the house ended with her trying to cover up her death. She managed to get the body to her grandfather's house but did a shabby job at burying her. I made sure no one would ever find out what she done.

There were three other bodies. The man who followed her home and Davis were there.

Who didn't know you were going to kill him? the voice said then laughed.

Of course, I was. He had hurt Eve.

Really? the voice taunted. You facilitated that hurt when you hired Bianca.

"Semantics. I didn't guide his dick into her pussy."

Speaking of Bianca... She was back there somewhere, too. She'd decided to try and bribe me. Stupid, stupid girl.

Maybe you should say a prayer, the voice urged.

I laughed but decided to play along. "Dear sky fairy, I hope they all burn in hell if there is one. Amen," I whispered, then busted out into a fit of laughter.

"What's so funny?" Eve called out.

"Nothing. Nothing at all."

I turned away from the past and jogged over to where my new life stood. I picked up my son and headed toward the house. It would be torn down the next day. The land would never be sold, so no one could ever discover the graveyard. I would never return, unless of course I found Dwight. Even though Eve claimed to like what he'd done to her, he should have never touched her. She was a child, and he took what should have been mine.



I side-eyed Adam as I took his hand. Two years ago, it would have been hard as hell to pretend that I didn't hear him having a full-blown conversation with himself. But I'd become accustomed to pretending.

I had amnesia. At least that was what everyone thought. When I woke up in the hospital sixteen days after I had been admitted, I couldn't remember anything. I had post traumatic amnesia from a brain injury. I was told my brain had swollen so drastically, they had to cut out a piece of my skull to save my life. For about an hour or so after I woke up I thought I was still a teen girl living in foster care, not a married woman with a newborn baby. Then I went back to sleep and when I woke up it was all back.

I only stuck with the amnesia story because it was easier than explaining all that had happened, and by then, Adam had already fed me a crock of bull about us being a big happy family. He didn't mention his father or my foster mother, who I didn't kill by the way. I went to her house for closure. I needed to let my hate for her go. We ended up getting into a screaming match and she either stroked out or had a heart attack. She literally keeled over and died in front of me.

I panicked, scared that I would be blamed for her death, and I buried her. That was it. Sometimes I thought Adam thought I was a killer like him. I would have thought I was if I hadn't seen him kill his father himself. After hitting my head I'd come to in time to see Adam murder him. He'd tried to beg for his life, even told Adam about my foster mother. Like I'd suspected, Adam confirmed he already knew and had covered it up.

Out of curiosity, I'd asked about his mother and father on the way home from the hospital. He'd said they were on an extended vacation. Which made me suspect that he'd killed his mother, too, or maybe he'd sent her away. I tried to never think too hard about it. A normal person would have been terrified, but not me. He'd killed for me. He'd saved me from my own careless mistakes. Instead of fearing him, it endeared me to

him. For that I forgave him for all his misdeeds and became the woman he wanted. Luckily that involved being myself, with some wife duties. I figured if it all fell apart, Adam would do what he had to do to fix it.

A B O U T T H E A U T H O R

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