



CAPTURED BY THE  
MAFIA BOSS

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**EVIE ROSE**

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# CONTENT NOTES

These content notes are made available so readers can inform themselves if they want to. They're based on movie classification notes. Some readers might consider these as 'spoilers'.

- Bad language: frequent
- Sex: fully described sex scenes with dirty talk
- Violence: on and off page
- Other: death of parent, death of side character, dubious consent, kidnap, bondage, age gap, primal play

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## OLIVIA

As cemeteries go, this one is beautiful, I suppose. The Camden mafia's dearly departed are buried in this green haven within London; the grass is fresh and springy, and blood-red tulips stand rigid in beds. The air is scented with the tang of rain, even though the sun has come out.

I watch the mourners from behind a yew tree, the dark boughs and scarlet berries screening me from view. My lip twists with distaste, but a mixture of grief and determination curdles in my stomach. At least one of them is a liar.

I wasn't invited to Trudy's funeral—probably because they think I'm dead—so I brought myself. Everyone I left when I fled the Camden mafia is there, dressed in black. All the people I loved or was supposed to love.

And King.

My pulse flutters. The most dangerous of them all. Tall, dark haired. Imposing. Ethan King murdered his own brother. No one can prove it, but those are the whispers. You don't seamlessly take over your brother's London sector and get close to his widow without causing some gossip.

Even an innocent like me can see what happened to the deceased mafia boss. The question is, who killed Trudy, who is in the coffin being lowered to rest next to her late husband. She was practically a mother to me, and her son—the man it was arranged I should marry—is at her graveside.

My dad should be here too, above or below ground. But we didn't have a funeral for him. There's supposedly the idea

he's out of town on business. That was what Henry said, anyway.

To think I used to believe him.

I heft the flowers I've brought, a big display of white chrysanthemums and lily of the valley. Sprinkled in are pansies, rosemary, and daisies. And the blade held tucked into the bottom? It's laced with that innocent-looking lily of the valley. So sweet smelling, it's intoxicating.

Literally. Toxic. One nick with that knife and they'll die a painful death.

I know whoever killed Trudy and my father will reveal themselves at this funeral, so I watch.

Henry, the golden boy, is distraught with grief. Crazy with the loss. When the part comes for people to throw handfuls of soil onto the coffin he jumps right into the grave, weeping. Tears course down his face.

Not him. His father was murdered just like mine, and now his mother too. He thinks the dutiful girl his parents picked out for him—me—is dead too.

I examine each mourner, one by one, watching for tells. Everyone looks suitably upset. Sober. Sad.

Except King.

He's unmoved, but for his glittering eyes and tense jaw. King isn't distraught, he's furious. Angry enough to kill, I wonder?

He's dressed in a perfectly tailored black suit, legs planted, arms crossed. But his hair is a little untamed, and he's so broad in the shoulders he seems liable to burst out with a flex of his muscles.

I observe him as the priest intones a dirgey religious something, and I know.

King murdered her.

And I'm going to get my revenge. One little cut will be all it takes.

I keep my head down as I approach. I am just a flower delivery girl. I'm wearing anonymous black trousers and a shapeless black coat. My long chestnut hair is tucked under a mousy wig in an unflattering and dull bob.

I make nervous sounds of apology as I creep through the mourners. No one looks at me. A few people see the beautiful but forgettable arrangement I carry, and murmur sympathetically. I could be anyone. Trudy was well-liked by her people.

Unlike King. My nearly uncle-in-law was a power couple with Trudy, but he's a grumpy man. Where Henry's father was all charm, King is dark and forbidding.

I'd be lying if I said that brooding dangerous thing wasn't more than a little hot. But delicious men can still be killers; it's practically compulsory in London. I didn't get out of Camden to be drawn back in by a tug of lust.

One cut.

Everyone is dispersing now, their grief as changeable as the weather. It was raining earlier, and while it has cleared to bright sunshine the ground is wet and muddy underfoot.

I draw level with King.

He stares down at the soil on Trudy's coffin. His handful is still gripped in his fist, his knuckles white. Dirty hands. He can't even bring himself to give her the respect she's due as the leader of Camden.

Well, he's the mafioso now, isn't he?

I guess that was what he wanted: to be the ruler, the only one. He killed his brother, probably my father, and Trudy, all in the pursuit of power.

There was a time—a single night—when I imagined I saw something else in King. A warm, tender man who talked with me about books and films and laughed at my jokes. But in the morning, he was cold as ever. Anyone can play the good guy for an evening, I suppose.



I place the flowers by Trudy's grave, palming the knife and making a soft sobbing noise that isn't entirely feigned.

My heart thuds so loudly it's a helicopter landing in my chest. I ease backwards, intending to accidentally brush King's shoulder. The blade is impossibly sharp. I'll slice open his arm through his suit, nick his skin, and be gone before he even realises he's been cut.

A vice-like grip immobilises my wrist.

“Don't.”

He jerks me back until my bottom is pressed to his front.

Oh shit oh shit oh shit.

He doesn't know. He can't know. He can't realise who I am. Henry hasn't twigged, or any of the hangers-on. King barely knows me.

Even through my shapeless coat, I can feel him. His heat. His strength. The planes of his hard body where my curves meet his muscles.

His thighs shift against my arse, and for a second I'm sure I feel his solid hot length at the small of my back like a gun, primed and ready to go off.

“You don't want to do that,” he murmurs, voice rough like soft fur brushed the wrong way.

He could kill me. Around us the low chatter of the rest of the mourners continues. Nobody has noticed our little scene playing out here. All they'd see would be me standing dangerously close to King.

He *could* kill me.

But it's okay, he won't. I'm not important enough. He doesn't know who—

“Olivia.” He says my name into my ear, his breath a caress.

I let out a tiny squeak as terror beats through me. The air clots in my throat.

Despite the pain shooting through my arm from his hold, I twist. Always my father's daughter, finding a way to play this to my advantage. If I can just...

I mean to turn and slice his leg as I break away, but instead I find myself flush with him. He has effortlessly adjusted his grip and pulled me back in. My eyeline is at his pecs. And even disguised in this expensive suit, I see the shape of his broad chest. Muscle.

Fear shouldn't heat my skin like this, like sun-warmed petals shaken from a blown-out rose. He's terrifying. I look up and up and up until I'm staring belligerently into his face.

I haven't seen him this close before and I can't help but take him in, greedily. He obviously shaved this morning but already has a shadow of stubble. He has a face that would make models weep, all hard angles. His monstera-leaf green eyes and black hair shot through with silver give him a wild look totally at odds with his refined shirt and tie.

But his eyes. There's something deep and dark and glittering there I've never seen before, not in all the time I felt them on me when I lived in the Camden castle with him and all his minions. Low in my belly, there's an answering trill. Like a previously dormant part of me recognises this alpha male and wants him.

"Get out of here," he growls softly.

But he doesn't release my wrist. If I just flick the blade...

As I try to, King's other hand covers mine and the knife falls to the grass with a soft thud as pain shoots up my arm. I stifle a cry.

His foot is on the blade before I can react.

"Now go. Live." He shoves me away, but his eyes follow with depths of longing and conflict I can't begin to unpack. "I don't want to see you again."

King is letting me go? I've survived an encounter with a hungry black bear.

"Run, flower girl," he mouths.

And I do.

I run back to my little job at the florist.

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## KING

One month later.

I look out at the mermaid. Although, legendary as mermaids are, they're not as pretty as Olivia swimming in the Thames. I sigh.

I had hoped she would have a long and happy life, away from me and Camden and London. I had envisaged her moving to France or something, bathing in the sea.

“Are you sure of what you heard?”

“Boss, I prefer my head attached to my shoulders,” says Brenna. She's my spy within Camden and was an advisor to Trudy for years. “I wouldn't lie to you.”

I grunt. Brenna is right. Henry is a loose cannon. He's always been savage, but this is London, ruled by mafia lords. We all are. Some say he's mad or mentally ill, and that's the only reason he's still alive and I haven't put a bullet in his head. *Yet.*

The truth is I promised his mother I'd take care of him, and I'm sentimental enough to want to do that.

But threatening Olivia? That's unacceptable.

“There they are.” Brenna nods at the far bank of the river.

Henry's friends Carter and Steven appear where Olivia has left her clothes.

Shit.

Nominally speaking, they are my men, but their loyalty is clearly with Henry. I wonder how many others would be fool enough to accompany that madman. There will be consequences for those two, and Henry.

As the Camden sector lord, I protect my people with an iron fist in a velvet glove. I didn't ask for the job, not that anyone ever asks for it. Most *take* the position by violence, whereas it was practically forced upon me. But when your brother is beating up his wife, you intervene as things turn deadly. Or at least, I did. And I don't regret it.

My gaze returns to Olivia. She's finished her cold-water swim and is floating on her back, casual as you like. I suppress a pang of yearning.

The last time I saw her she was wearing an ugly wig, and although still beautiful, unimaginably beautiful, she didn't have the compelling presence she has now. Her dark hair floats around her head like a halo. She's not a mermaid, she's a river angel. And just below the surface of the water, there's a hint of her curves, so, so tempting.

I've wanted those curves since I first saw her.

Wrong, so wrong.

I might be fucked up, but lusting after my nephew's betrothed is beyond the pale, even for me. Yes, it was a power match made by their parents, but they seemed well suited as friends. So I've watched and loved her from a distance. And when she disappeared, and everyone assumed she was dead, I knew better. Because she couldn't be. I'd know in my soul if Olivia was gone because it would break off the last part of me.

On the far bank Carter and Steven have collected Olivia's clothes, where she probably has a knife secreted away. I've always thought they were stupid, but Olivia isn't to be trifled with. They're right to remove any sense of security if they want to catch her alive.

"You know, Henry won't be as kind to Olivia as he was to Trudy," Brenna says conversationally, and I tense. "He ended

it quickly for his mother, but I doubt he would object to his friends having a bit of fun with the woman who spurned him.”

I growl incoherently. Brenna is right, of course. Henry was distraught when Olivia left. Her clothes were discovered at the edge of one of the Hammersmith swimming lakes. But she'll pay for his grief; it's petrified into anger and resentment in the months since she's been gone.

It took me a while to track Olivia down, working at a flower shop like she wasn't a princess. Clever girl. And now I have to get her out of the way, before she's murdered or hurt or worse. Any harm to her is not an option. Not for me.

“Can you deal with Carter and Steven?”

“You want them dead?”

“Of course.” They made this inevitable. I've let Henry and his treacherous friends live too long, just as I let his father live too long. And if the price of Olivia's safety is I die removing Henry, so be it.

Olivia is still floating in the water, wearing a flower-patterned pale-blue swimsuit and nothing else. Damn, if I'd known all this time that I could get a fix of seeing Olivia by coming to the river ten miles out of London, I would... Have not done it. Not just because I'm not a pervert, but because I wouldn't want to impose the danger of being part of the mafia onto her, when she's free and safe in her anonymity.

But I would have dreamed of coming to watch her. She swims elegantly, lithe as she turns onto her front and cuts a line through the water. Lazily cooling down after her exercise, making her way...

I strip off my suit jacket and tie.

“We move now,” I command Brenna. “They'll take her as she comes out of the water. She's about to swim right into their trap.”

Brenna pauses for a second before she sees I'm correct. Then she's off, at a run, heading towards the bridge and around. But she won't get there in time to stop them harming

Olivia, and Carter and Steven aren't in the line of sight for me to shoot them.

I yank my shirt over my head and shove off my trousers, leaving my boxers. Watching Olivia in the water has caused an inconvenient turgidity I would rather she didn't notice.

Bad enough to be kidnapped, worse to think that I'd do anything like that against her will. Because I wouldn't.

I slip noiselessly into the water.

My blood pounds through me in anticipation of our chase. I can see how this ends. Her and me, naked, me hunting her. Me the predator, her the prey. My cock hardens further, despite the chilly water. I'd love her to flee from me, checking over her shoulder that I'm following. Running until I catch her and pin her with my body. Then when I hold her down, I'd find her wet, writhing with need, arching up, begging me to take her. A fun game of seduction.

In my dreams anyway.

This reality is quite different.

I'm going to catch her, make her safe, kill our enemies, then release her back to nature, like the soft animal she is, for all she likes playing with knives.

But right now, I can imagine this is our game, for all it is a necessity.

Olivia might be a mermaid, but I am a shark.

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## OLIVIA

One second I'm swimming idly back towards my clothes, frowning a little when I can't see anything where I thought I'd left them, the next, something has caught my ankle. I kick—hard—to dislodge the plant. Then as my brain registers that no fish or pond weed is as heated as what holds me, panic overtakes. A hand—warm and male and uncompromising—clamps over my mouth.

I yell but it comes out as a muffled squeal, and there's no one to hear anyway. I picked this spot to swim because it's deserted.

Panic crashes through me.

I thrash, kicking out against him, striking his shins. I fight like my life depends on it, which it probably does. He grunts as my elbow connects with solid chest muscle. I draw back and try to shove him again, harder, but it doesn't connect. Scrabbling for the riverbed, soft wet mud squelches beneath my toes and a little fish wriggles free from under my heel. Lucky fish.

I'm not so fortunate. My flailing arm hits skin, and there's an "oof" from my assailant. I lash out again, but this time he's prepared, catching my wrist.

"Stop it, you little fool." A snarl.

I freeze as my mind whirls. I'd know that voice anywhere.

King.

What does the boss of Camden want with me?



King uses my momentary shock to grab my other wrist too and pin them together at my tummy.

My feet slip and I fall hard forwards before he yanks me against his chest.

My stomach heaves and his hand absorbs my sob.

I know the answer. Last time I saw him, I tried to kill him. He hasn't forgotten, and he wants revenge. Never mind that I failed.

Pinned.

I'm totally pinned.

My chest heaves. I'm going to be sick. I'm going to die.

This is not how I wanted to die.

The brutal threat to life is why I got out of Camden and all the deadly machinations of that world. I want to tend plants. I want to see beautiful things. I want revenge against King for murdering Trudy, yes, and I've been plotting that, quietly. But I want to *live*.

"Stop fighting and you'll be safe."

And if ever there were words to make me hysterical, it's those. Bad things happen to women who are caught by Camden men. I should know. I nearly married one.

I struggle with every part of my body. I swear even my useless appendix is trying to get away from King. I attempt to bite his fingers, but they're too tight over my mouth. My legs are kicking the water so much it's boiling around us, and I'm striking his knees, his thighs, his calves.

It's no use. The river flows past, and no one is coming to help as King carries me to the far bank. Away from my clothes and knife. Away from where I walked the half mile from my car. Far from my small safe life.

He's saying soft comforting things like I'm a wild animal he's trying to calm as he slaughters it. I don't hear them. He drags us out of the water, slipping a little on the muddy riverbank, but never letting up.

I go limp, thinking I can get to the ground and roll away free. But King isn't falling for that. With ruthless efficiency he gags me with his tie, binds my wrists behind my back with what I guess is his leather belt, and my ankles with his suit jacket.

He doesn't notice my little fitness tracker attached to my swimming costume, but it won't do me any good either way. It's an old piece of junk I only still use because I have years of swim records on it. Sitting me up against a tree trunk, he wraps his shirt around my shoulders and wrings the water out of my hair with surprisingly gentle hands.

I try to head butt him, but he dodges away, laughing softly.

Only then does he step into his suit trousers, buttoning them slowly. He's still dripping with water and his chest glistens in the sunlight.

I glare at him.

My kidnapper is irrefutably beautiful. He has a boxer's physique, with taut muscles and broad shoulders. He's all grace and tightly held power that would shatter worlds if he unleashed it.

He's gorgeous, menacing, and has me completely within his control. Shamefully, that last one heats the core between my legs. He cannot find out that he turns me on. That would be the end.

I test my bonds, not bothering to hide what I'm doing. He expects it.

"They're tight, Olivia." He hasn't taken his eyes off me. He heaves a sigh, crosses his arms, and scowls at me like this is my fault that he kidnapped and tied me up.

"I guess we'd better go home," he says under his breath, resigned.

I shake my head desperately. Not where my father went missing, Trudy died, and Henry Senior's ghost is said to walk. There's a reason I escaped. I can't go back there.

I don't expect my response to do anything, but King's brows snap together, then relax.

"No, not the castle. *My* home."

Oh.

I didn't know he had another home.

"If I untie your feet, will you try to escape?"

I roll my eyes in the only reply that idiocy of a question deserves.

"Yes, of course you will. I'll carry you."

I expect him to put me over his shoulder in an undignified fireman's lift, but he scoops me up in his arms like a lover carrying his bride over the threshold.

Except I'm his captive.

And tied up.

And I'm the furthest thing from his bride.

How the hell am I going to get away? About all I can do is headbutt him, and I'm already exhausted from fighting and he is utterly unperturbed. There's no point and his warmth is strangely comforting against my side.

I turn the situation around in my head, twisting it like a Rubik's cube, but I can't see a way out. I can't see a solution. I'll have to wait for my opportunity. Then we're at his car—a massive black SUV that says luxury and bulletproof glass—and he's placing me carefully into the passenger seat.

He killed Trudy, Henry Senior, and quite possibly my father. Maybe people in Camden blamed him for my death, even though I escaped.

Now, he's going to kill me.

Unless I get to him first.

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We're not in the car for long, since he can fly a helicopter. Of course he can. And there's no one around to say, hey, maybe

don't kidnap that girl, as he carries me across the tiny airfield outside the city.

We head southwest, and I think we're in Cornwall by the time he lands.

If only I didn't have this tie in my mouth, I'd tell him how I'm going to kill him wherever he takes me. Slowly.

I blink in surprise as I see where we are. Instead of... I don't know what I expected, but it isn't a cute little stone cottage nestled in the hills. There's no one—not even another house—within sight.

King sighs when he looks across at me and shakes his head. "You'll still run, won't you?"

And that's how it ends up he carries me—what am I, a bloody doll?—into what I suppose is his house.

"Where are we?" I demand as he removes my gag after placing me onto a squashy leather sofa. The room is small and low ceiled. There's a feature exposed stone fireplace, a plush carpet, and shelves and shelves of books. Cosy.

King, in his expensive suit trousers and nothing on top, is lighting a fire, even though it's summer.

"Somewhere we won't be disturbed. There's no point in escaping. I own the whole area."

It's not like I thought he'd answer truthfully. It hardly matters, as I'm on my own either way. My only defence outside of Camden was anonymity. There's no one I can call.

"Why am I here?" More to the point, why hasn't he killed me?

My wrists ache from trying to break out of my restraints, but while his back is turned again, I try to wriggle a gap.

"Don't worry, I'll let you go once it's safe."

What does that mean? "I was safe before you kidnapped me."

"No. You weren't."

“Like hell.”

“Olivia.” He leaves the fire and stands over me. I drag my gaze up his body until our eyes meet. I’m flushed from my cheeks to my squirmy insides. He really needs to put on some more clothes so I can concentrate on escaping. As it is, all I can do is feel the echoes of him holding me to him. All I can think about is how it would feel to be pinned down by him again, but in a bed this time. To be pinned by a specific part of his anatomy. My imagination is hazy on that detail, but the thought of his weight on me, his strong hands making wicked mischief...

Despite the silver at his temples, King is in great shape. His still-bare chest is toned and scattered with black hair that leads down to the v pointing to where his trousers begin. His shoulders are wide and his arms bulge with muscles. Biceps? Triceps? Who knows. They make my mouth water.

He is, frankly, gorgeous.

He’s at least forty years old to my twenty, and it’s embarrassing how much that turns me on. All that experience and knowledge. And yes, the danger is part of the appeal. Not when it’s used against me, like Henry did, but in the abstract... I can’t help but want all that masculine force protecting me.

Except, that’s not what’s happening here, is it?

“I’m still dirty with river water, and so are you.”

I didn’t mean that to sound suggestive, but King’s eyes flare as soon as I’ve said it, and I would kick myself if I wasn’t tied up. But then... “Maybe we could shower?”

I can’t pretend that isn’t a hint. Because it’s occurring to me that this might not be as bad as I had first anticipated. There’s sexual tension crackling as brightly between us as the fire behind King.

“Right. And you need something better to wear.”

Quite honestly, I’m kinda liking his shirt, if not anything else about this situation.

Okay, I'm wet and horny as hell for him, but I'm not telling anyone that.

I swore I'd murder him for what he did to Trudy. I've been planning how to kill him and haven't forgotten. I imagined it would be poisoning his food or blowing up his car. But no, I think I'll revert to a knife. There must be one in the kitchen.

So this hint of flirtation and blaze of attraction in King's eyes serves my purpose threefold. Gain his trust. Fog his senses with lust. Try not to lose myself in the process. Get revenge for Trudy and my father. Escape.

Simple.

---

## KING

I have no fucking idea what I'm doing. But when Olivia asks for a shower, my cock stands to attention. I can see us together, water cascading over our naked bodies, me thrusting into her from behind.

Not going to happen. I squash the thought.

I will not underestimate Olivia. She'll kill me with a smile on her face and a knife in my gut given half an opportunity.

"You can stand outside," she says, eyes on my still-bare chest.

"And let you find a way to escape?"

"From a bathroom." She looks so innocent.

I kneel at her feet and undo my knotted suit jacket. Her ankles are a little red and I can't help but soothe my thumb over the hurt. I wish...

"Turn." And when she obeys to give me her wrists, that compliance shoots arousal from my heart to my cock.

She eases her hands through the arms of my shirt. "Are you going to join me?"

"No."

I point to the bathroom. Her legs are bare, and I allow myself to look as I follow her in.

She's teasing me as she unbuttons my shirt as she walks, slowly, tantalising. I pretend insouciance as I close the door and lean against the tiles. It's an indulgent bathroom, with a

huge claw-footed bathtub, a walk-in shower, skylights I wouldn't put it past Olivia to escape from, and a score of potted plants that make the room feel like a jungle.

She's still wearing the modest swimsuit from when I stole her from the water. Yeah, as if I wasn't in love enough with this girl, she has to go and be cute as well as dangerous. My favourite combination. Or perhaps that's just her.

"Get undressed. Wash." I hook a towel for her and turn on the tap.

I avert my gaze down and hear her swimsuit hit the tiles. Her toes are so damn pretty, the nails painted in a sweet shimmery pale blue. I watch her feet step under the beat of water.

My imagination supplies the image of the spray hitting her tits and I bite back a groan.

"You're also still dirty."

"I'll live." Maybe the sheen of sweat over my skin will prevent me from...

"Why don't you join me?"

I want to. Join her, look. Fuck her until we're both so sated we can barely move. I want to claim her for my own and never let her go.

There's only one part of that which makes any sense. Keeping my eyes trained on the floor, I push off my trousers and boxers simultaneously and step into the shower. Thanking my past self for installing a ridiculously big rainfall shower that covers about four square metres, I grit my teeth and think of unsexy things as the warm water hits me. I mustn't get a hard-on.

"You won't look at my naked breasts? Warm soapy water is running over them." Her voice is sultry and full of promise.

"No," I grunt, but the image is in my head, exactly as she intends. My cock rises in response.

"So honourable," she says with a lick of irony.



I find the shower gel while desperately ensuring I don't look at her perfect body. But the memory of holding her in my arms echoes, undeniable. I soap myself perfunctorily, staring at Olivia's feet. She curls her toes and gently drags the arch of her foot up her calf.

"Are you liking looking at my feet?"

Fuck, this woman is a minx and a siren. I refuse to be drawn.

"It looks as though you are," she murmurs.

Yeah, I bet it does. I have a hard-on that could be used as a baseball bat.

I must not look at her shapely legs, the curve of her hips, or the dip where her strong legs gives way to soft and pink and yielding.

"Would you wash my back?"

"No!"

I push the soap from my hair and almost scramble away, snagging a towel and wrapping it around my waist. I don't take my eyes from her feet. I never want to let her out of my sight again.

She lingers over washing and I swear she's torturing me. But at least I've covered my cock now, even if it's tenting the towel, and eventually she turns off the shower and there's a soft rustle.

I risk looking up and exhale with relief when I find her wrapped in one of my towels, a sexy smile on her lips and speculation in her clever eyes.

"I need to use the loo." She tugs the fluffy white towel closer around herself.

"I won't look." I wave my hand and focus on a banana plant, its veined leaves tinged with red.

"Okay."

The air shifts. There's something wrong. I scowl as I try to understand what's happening.

“You could have joined me, you know,” she purrs. My mind can’t parse the difference. And if I had been one iota more concentrated on my arousal, I’d have missed the sound of the door catch.

My head whips up in time to see Olivia’s naked shoulder slip out of sight. I throw myself after her, all my chase instincts triggered like she’s a little rabbit and I’m a fox. Blood pounds through my limbs, and for the second time today I relish the feel of hunting my girl.

She’s halfway to the front door by the time I’m out of the bathroom, and in three steps I’ve caught up with her. A moment later, she’s in my arms, kicking and thrashing. I hold her tight, lifting her off the floor and carrying her in a bear hug to the bedroom. The one place I know it’s easy to tie her down.

My towel falls as I carry her, and I kick it aside. She’s slippery wet with water from the shower, but as I dump her on my bed and swiftly tie her wrist with the strap at the headboard, I realise something.

My balls don’t hurt.

Neither do my eyes. Or my scalp.

She’s a smart woman, but though she’s kicked the shit out of my calves, she hasn’t gone for anything incapacitating. I see what’s going on.

I affix her other wrist, then catch her ankle as she attempts to jam her heel into my chest, allowing myself to enjoy the softness of her skin under my fingertips.

When she’s spread-eagled on my bed, her back arches, pushing her breasts up.

“You bastard.”

I stand back and regard her at my leisure. Tied down, legs open, gorgeous. She tests her bonds and her mouth opens to an “o” as she gasps. Her blue eyes are black, the pupils wide.

“You can throw your voice.”

She jerks her hand then curls her fingers on the rope. Her hips flex a little as she finds that she's fully caught.

"Can be useful."

"Cute trick. Enough to make a man doubt his sanity."

"Not someone as arrogant as you, obviously."

"Pride, Olivia. Not arrogance."

She's spread on my bed, exposed. These restraints are intended for a quite different purpose than keeping a woman prisoner, and the flush of her face reveals she knows that too.

The water on her skin has dried, but I can't help but glance between her legs. Her pussy lips glisten with arousal.

"You knew I'd catch you."

She knew the door was locked with my fingerprint, she saw me open it. Her mouth sets in a mulish line. Stubborn.

"If you wanted to escape, you'd have tried the skylight."

"Are you just going to leave me tied up? What's your plan, King? Why am I even here? You're not going to kill me."

"I'm not going to kill you, no." In fact, I'm going to protect her with my life.

"Let me go."

I shake my head.

"I can help, you know. Ease that ache." I allow her to see my gaze on where she's wet and pink and needy. I should be telling her about Henry, and the threat to her life. Justifying my actions and helping her see I'm not the enemy. "Just say the word."

Our gazes meet, and I know she's remembering the same night I am.

Almost two years ago. I'd arrived in Camden only a month before, and was still trying to work out the machinations of my late brother's inner circle. Who was deranged, who was safe, who would kill me at the drop of a hat.

I'd been in the library late one night. Nobody in that house used the library. It was just for show. After all, who needs antiquated books when you have smartphones and Wi-Fi? Answer: me. And Olivia.

She crept in, covered by the darkness. I had been sprawled in a chair, glasses perched on my nose, working on my laptop trying to figure out the mess of finances my brother had left. It hadn't been just Trudy's life in danger from Henry Senior, it was the whole organisation.

Her eyes had gone wide and scared. I asked her about what book she'd been fetching—a botany text—and she'd ended up curled in a chair opposite, telling me about the plants she loved.

And I think that was when I fell in love with her. That sweet earnestness and curiosity. She was as interested in the natural world as a kitten. And she was guileless, innocent, naive. The look in her eyes said she barely understood her own feelings, never mind my overwhelming desire for her. It was hours before I sent her to bed and denied my need to pull her onto my lap.

The next day, Henry had arrived home.

A longstanding political match I hadn't paid any attention to suddenly gained a painful resonance. She and Henry seemed to like each other well enough, and I swore not to get involved, however much I wanted Olivia for myself.

But I didn't forget those hours in her company, and what I let myself imagine was interest in her eyes.

"I'm going to kill you," she hisses.

I'm not imagining it now. Her gaze scorches me.

"Before you kill me." I shrug. "I can make you feel good."

"I can't stop you."

"No, you're right. I could kiss your pussy and force you to come on my tongue."

Pink flushes her neck and over her collarbones.

“But I won’t unless you ask, Lia.”

She blinks at the sound of my private pet name for her. Understandable. I’ve never used it. I’ve thought about calling her sweet endearments while I thrust into her, but no words have ever been said. She’s my secret indulgence, dreaming of her slight body willingly on top of me, taking her pleasure and giving herself to me. Too many times I’ve wrapped my fingers around my cock, closed my eyes, and pictured my Lia.

I wish she were mine.

She trembles.

I wait. Seconds, then longer.

Then I breathe a sigh and turn away. Even if I expected it, it hurts to remember who I am. She’s too good for a brutal and cynical old mobster like me. Too perfect for a man as scarred as I am.

“When the danger is over,” I say harshly, “I’ll let you go.” When I’ve neutralised Henry.

“I want...” The softness of her voice makes me pause. “Fix the ache, King.”

There’s twice as much blood in my veins suddenly. In my cock, pounding through my limbs. I turn back and meet her gaze.

If this is all I ever have, I’ll be grateful. Crumbs of Lia is more than I thought I’d get. “I’ll always fix anything you need.”

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## OLIVIA

“Lia,” he breathes like it’s a relief I’ve accepted his offer.

With infinite slowness he stretches his massive body over mine. But instead of pressing his weight into me as I expect and want, he holds himself aloof. He brackets me, one elbow on either side of my chest.

Our noses brush before he kisses me. A touch of softness at first, a gentle prelude. But there’s a burning ache I must have fulfilled. Not by a toy or my fingers, but by him.

The man who fuelled a thousand dirty thoughts since we met. I mewl into his mouth with frustration.

The bastard has the temerity to chuckle.

But what did I expect? In my dreams he teases me, orders me, fucks me exactly the way I need. In real life, King was always going to do only what he wanted.

I stretch up to try to get some contact between us, and on my throbbing pussy.

My erect nipples brush the coarse hair of his chest and send pleasure pulsing down my body as his lips take mine in a lazy kiss.

“I could slip into you, Olivia,” he kisses along my jaw and murmurs into my ear. It sends delicious shivers down my spine. “There’s nothing you could do to stop me.”

My cheeks flush with heat at how much I crave that. To be totally at his mercy, him taking everything.

“Don’t fall asleep, King. You know I’m going to kill you.” It’s embarrassingly slutty of me that being tied down with only my smart mouth as a defence makes me want to lure King into losing control. “It’ll be all the sooner if I have the excuse you forced me.”

Because, yes, I need this big dark creature to maul and overwhelm me. But I haven’t forgotten who he is. King. What he is. The mafia boss of Camden who got to his position at the top by being utterly ruthless. By killing.

“Oh no darling,” he purrs, “I won’t make you do this. You’ll have to beg for me to fuck you. You’ll have to speak your desires. If you want to play at being the helpless defiled innocent, or any other game we might both enjoy, you must confess it to me first. But…” He shifts down my body, leaving my breasts exposed to the cool air. “Since you asked prettily for this ache to be eased, I’ll do that for you.”

He drags his tongue over me like he’s tasting me. The open-mouthed kisses—are they even kisses when he’s practically devouring me?—are so carnal and hungry that I writhe under him.

“I’ve been waiting too long,” he murmurs onto my skin. “I never thought I’d have you.”

Does he want this? My fuzzy brain can’t comprehend that, or what it might mean.

He draws inexorably down, so slowly and leaving one hand at my breast, trailing kisses as he goes. I’m too wound up to care that he’s the last person I should trust and desire.

His stubble brushes the sensitive skin of my inner thighs, sending a shiver through me. It’s not just the feel of him, it’s that it is *him*.

King murmurs that I’m lovely, delicious, his good girl, as explores my body. I can hardly hear, but it’s like every one of my cells knows King’s voice and is primed to respond.

His breath over my core makes me moan. He rolls one nipple between his fingers and licks my pussy.

I almost shoot off the bed. It's a lightning bolt, this pleasure, unexpected. Another lick, again directly onto the place I need it most, and I'm practically sobbing, my wrists and ankles straining at the ropes. I have no way to touch him or reciprocate and that makes this even sexier.

It takes me a second to recognise the feel of his fingertip at my entrance, resting on my wet folds. The first there, excluding my own.

"Please," I gasp.

King doesn't answer in words. He slips in. I'm dripping with arousal, so he has no trouble sliding up to his knuckle. And the whole time he's licking me in firm strokes. Lapping at my clit unrelentingly and teasing my nipple too. It's like nothing I've ever felt, certainly nothing I can do for myself. He's big and overwhelming. He's knowing, too. Every touch calculated to make me crazy. His attention on my every unintentional gasp and twitch enhances each of his strokes. Being tied down makes this infinitely hotter. I can't move away. I can't satisfy him. I can't second-guess whether I'm doing the right thing in my inexperience. I can't do anything but take what he gives me.

So I do. I take and take and take. I let his touch fill me with pulses and shakes that feel so good while building and tantalising into something more.

The release he promised creeps up on me, a warm shadow of tide that pushes forward, withdraws, floods and ebbs, until eventually it breaks over me.

It's not gentle or quick or soft. I'm thankful to be tied down in the middle of nowhere because I jerk and shake and the scream that falls from my lips isn't cute. I feel the orgasm down to my toes, impossibly.

I come so hard I'm pretty sure I would have kicked him in the face if I wasn't restrained.

My hands clutch at the bonds and my pussy at his fingers. Good but not enough.



As soon as the pleasure eases, I want more. I'm desperate for him.

I open my eyes and King's meet mine, an infuriating, self-satisfied, prideful expression spread across his face. He made me come so intensely my back bowed and I might never be the same again, and he's going to be an asshole about it.

*He murdered my friend.* Trudy, who cared for me like I was the daughter she never had.

He probably murdered my father.

He's the reason I ran from Camden, and everything I knew. But it's really fucking difficult to focus on that when I'm still having aftershocks from my orgasm and drowning in the green of King's eyes. A riverbank full of life, his eyes.

Even reminding myself he's a killer doesn't dissuade my body from responding.

I have to get out of here. Not just because I want my own life, away from being a pawn in the London mafia territories' petty games, but because if I don't, I will start thinking being with King is a good idea.

"Here's the deal. I'm going to lock that window in the bathroom." King crawls languorously up my body and holds himself over, aloof. "You can't escape. And even if you did, all the land for miles around belongs to me. There's no one to see you, or to run to."

I'm mesmerised by his half-smile. I don't understand it, and my gaze darts below his waist. He's... I've never... My brain stutters. How can he think when he has an erection like that? I couldn't make my brain work when he had me so worked up. I still can't.

"If you run, I will chase you down. I'd enjoy it. But Lia, do not doubt for a moment: I will catch you."

The clear, sweet mountain air is like breathing honey all of a sudden. I can't bear it for the sheer need to be chased. By him.

"Why?"

“Because you’re safe here, with me.”

I roll my eyes. “Sure.”

He doesn’t comment, but undoes my bindings with careful hands, his palm smoothing over the place where the rope bit into my skin. He’s a contradiction. Big and harsh and powerful, and yet tender and generous.

Having released me, he throws open the wardrobe door, revealing a collection of suits and expensive sharp shirts, a pile of jeans and tracksuit bottoms, T-shirts, checked lumberjack shirts, and a whole stack of woollen jumpers.

I sit up to gaze at his toned buttocks for the two seconds they’re on show before he pulls on underwear, dark jeans and the softest-looking T-shirt I’ve ever seen.

I feel like I ought to turn away while he’s dressing, as though that is intruding, despite me watching him in the shower. But I shake off the sensation. I mean, how silly is it? He’s kidnapped me. He’s touched me. I’m not spying. He’s clothing himself in front of me as though it’s the most normal situation in the world. Like we’ve been together hundreds of times.

But my brain stutters on the simple act of him dressing, maybe because it’s not aggressive or sexual. It’s the sort of thing a lover sees. A partner.

“You going to choose something to wear?” He gestures at the wardrobe.

“As good as Harrods,” I snip back.

“We’ll get you some clothes.” His mouth twists. “In the meantime, if you want to cover up, here are your options. I’ll be in the kitchen.” He stalks out.

Nothing fits. Not even slightly.

I slide my fingertips over every garment and imagine it on King’s body. The smooth cotton, the rough wool. Eventually, I pick a green and grey checked shirt that falls almost to my knees, and the heavy fabric rubs on my erect nipples. I roll up the sleeves so I can use my hands, then pad through the house.

I take my time to examine everything. I tell myself it's because I'm looking for weapons, or a way out. But honestly, it is an insight into King that I always wanted and only once allowed myself to fantasise about.

That one night in the library, soon after he took over.

I thought that night I felt something hot and sweet in his gaze, but when I saw him next, it was gone, replaced by cool indifference.

It never mattered to my body, which flared to life whenever he was in the vicinity.

*Focus, Olivia. You have an opportunity.* It's a crappy opportunity, yes, but haven't I been wanting to kill King? To get revenge for everything that has gone on in Camden, and that drove me away. I don't want to return, now I'm out. I like my wings. I like the freedom away from an arranged marriage and fear. I love my little job at the florist.

There's no lack of potential weapons. Solid brass and stone sculptures line shelves and windowsills. I had no idea he loved art, but this house reveals a deep passion for quality. Everything just so. No item out of place.

I find his study. A top-end computer, plus all the tech. I sink into the plush leather desk chair. It's too big for me, and I feel small and delicate in it. Behind the computer the window reveals a view of outstanding stark beauty. A clear sky, mountains fading into misty blue at the horizon. A fabulous garden in the foreground, a riot of herbs and flowers. I tear my gaze away to focus on looking for clues. This room is more modern than the refined comfort and old-world quality of the rest of the house. Still, the white walls are hung with art and the enormous desk has trinkets and—

My eyes snag on one object.

A knife. A familiar knife.

With shaking hands, I lift it off its custom-made wooden cradle.

Why does he have my knife? There's nothing very pretty or unique in it. Though my father gave it to me, and it has a

nice metal handle engraved with flowers, it's out of keeping with all his other possessions, which are of the finest craftsmanship.

Maybe it has a value I don't know about? I examine it for a few seconds but find no more than what I already knew: it's a small silver knife.

It takes me a few moments to figure out how to secret the blade into the shirt, but eventually I tuck it into one bulky rolled sleeve, and you can't see it. Much.

His kitchen is filled with the scent of a delicious stew. King is chopping herbs.

How the hell did he get those?

"From the garden," he replies when he shoots a sidelong glance at me.

"I wasn't wondering," I lie. And it's only then that I realise the thought I should have been having was about acquiring that knife he's using.

"You were. Your face is an audiobook. Even when you're in disguise."

I wish I could deny it. I should be better at this whole being a peerless, poised beauty thing. But actually, I can't. I am not poised. I am a bit untidy and wilful, and I love swimming.

I look at the hob and wonder where King learned to cook, then turn so he can't see that question too. Instead, I gravitate to the window. The view of the hills, mottled with shades of green and the odd rocky outcrop is breathtaking. The sky is a perfect streak of pink to orange, like a bouquet of fragrant roses. It's lovely in the way a simple item of ideal utility is beautiful.

Like King. Perfectly proportioned. Even his imperfections are aesthetically pleasing. That long slash of a scar I saw on his upper arm, and the circular wound on his side make him only more appealing. Those flaws prevent him from being too gorgeous to be believed, but my mind circles back to why I've been trying to ignore his appearance.

“Why did you kill Trudy?”

My question is the toll of a bell. Clear and ringing through the air.

I don't turn around. King isn't going to murder me tonight after chopping herbs, so I might as well find answers to what's been bugging me all this time.

“I didn't.”

I snort. “Who did then? The boogie man?” I'm a little disappointed. I thought King would admit it.

“Henry.” He appears beside me and passes over a mug. Our fingers brush as I accept it and the contact sends a pulse of longing through me as though now I've been touched by him my body will reach out towards him at every opportunity.

“His mother.” I don't bother hiding my disbelief. “He murdered his mother.”

“Yeah.”

Tea. Exactly the shade I prefer, milky. I take a sip and find it has half a sugar. When I meet his eyes over the rim of the mug, they're implacable. He knows how I drink my tea.

What else does he know? Hopefully not how he makes my blood heat, or that I have a knife hidden in my shirt sleeve.

His shirt.

Whatever.

“I really thought you'd have a better story, King. Something with sharks would have been more believable.” I look back at the sunset.

He nods. “I'll bear that in mind next time I'm accused of a murder I didn't commit. Sharks.”

“Big ones. White teeth.”

“Noted.”

I fiddle with the handle of my mug. So ordinary and yet not. I've never done this before—well, I've drunk tea of

course, I'm a Brit, I was born drinking tea. But not orgasms and lingering eye fucking and asking things likely to get me killed.

Not the shirt wearing, either. Henry might have been my fiancé, but it was a political arrangement and we never did anything like that. My father was old-fashioned, and until I realised how vulnerable I was without him, I toed the line as a good girl. Pure. Sweet. Innocent.

Not the sort who would kill with a poisoned knife.

I turn back to where King is pouring a glass of wine, setting out flatware, and plating up our food like I'm his guest for dinner.

I screw up my courage and ask the question he is waiting patiently for.

“Why would Henry kill his mother?”

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## KING

This is not the conversation I thought we'd have. I imagined she'd first want to know why I'd kidnapped her, but she's taken that as given. As though being snatched away from the life she built is simply what she expects from life.

I suppose it should be. She was due to be the wife of the heir to Camden before she disappeared. But there are so many questions she could ask.

“Henry was angry with her.” That's the simple truth.

She rolls her eyes and sips her tea. I love seeing her wearing my shirt. It hangs loosely over her and allows me to fantasise she picked it casually up after I discarded it, so she'd be surrounded by my scent. She chose one of my favourites, and it's even better to kid myself we have tastes in common. That maybe she'd like my life here, away from London.

“You need to talk more if you're going to convince me not to kill you, King.”

“Says the woman who was begging me only an hour ago. You don't bite the hand that makes you come.”

“Praying mantis.”

I laugh, because I believe it. She'd eat me alive, and I'd let her.

So, much as I don't want to explain this, I do. “Henry thought Trudy was a whore. Told her so repeatedly. Simple misogyny.”

There's a flicker of recognition in Olivia's eyes. He's said this to her, too.

"Because she and I worked closely, he assumed we were sleeping together. And he despised that she would be with anyone but his father."

"But he was dead."

I shrug. "Some men think a woman should throw herself onto a funeral pyre. Henry seems to be one."

She shakes her head, but not in a way that says disbelief. More distaste.

It takes everything in me to walk away, back to the kitchen to finish preparing food for us. The stew is simple ingredients from the freezer and the garden. Living here before my brother's death made me self-sufficient. And though I haven't returned as often as I'd like, I've kept it up to scratch.

Olivia eyes the food warily when I place it before her.

"It's not poisoned. That's not my style."

There is only one risky item in that kitchen, and it's the large chef's knife I used to chop up the vegetables. I cleaned it and slid it into its hiding spot when Olivia's back was turned. No point in putting temptation in her hand. I guess she believes what I said about Trudy, but that doesn't mean she won't use any weapon she can find against me.

She seems to declare a ceasefire and compliments my food as she eats. If "not bad" is a compliment, which I think it is.

She's too beautiful and vulnerable and all I want to do is wrap her in my arms and keep her safe and with me. Ravage her too. I want everything from this girl. And compared to me, she is a girl. I should be ashamed of not being able to control my lust for a fresh-faced ingenue. Forty years of almost perfect discipline, and then I meet Olivia and I've never felt the same since. I haven't desired anyone like I do her.

It's dark outside now. The pure velvet black of the Cornish hills, strewn with sparkles. It's far from the dirty yellow of the city.



I've missed it, and being here, and being home with my Lia—

Fuck. She's not mine. I have to remember that.

But my heart can't. Being here with Lia by my side, however unwillingly, fills my heart to bursting.

She's as lovely as the night, and as underrated. That chestnut brown hair, the rich colour of polished wood falling over her face. Those big blue eyes.

"What are we going to do?" She pushes her bowl away, empty.

I consider saying, "Get married, have as many children as you like and live here together, forever".

"I'm leaving tomorrow morning. You're staying here until I return."

"That is not happening."

"It is. When the threat is eliminated, I'll let you go." *I have* to release my girl. I'm too old for her. Too dark. Too dirtied by all the things I've done.

"You'd leave me?" Her fingers trail down the open neck of my shirt she's wearing.

Interesting. Seduction? I didn't think Olivia would go in for that again. Yes, she tried it earlier, but she already succeeded, and it didn't get her out.

"I'll send you back to your life. And I'll return to Camden." Without her. My heart tugs painfully at the prospect.

"Who is this imaginary threat, then?"

"Henry."

"The dead one or the one I was engaged to?" She clearly doesn't believe me.

"The one who is angry you decided to leave, when he believed you were his by rights."

"Henry doesn't know where I am."

“He did. And I found you.” I care a lot more than Henry and have resources he can only dream of. But he’s not without his ways.

“That was because I was following you.”

Her confession stills me. For a moment my stupid heart thinks she might have trailed me because she felt the same tug of connection between us as I do. Then I come to my senses.

“You were stalking me like a tigress follows a bison.”

Her smile is feral, her lips pink and her nipples pebbled through the fabric of my shirt.

It makes me painfully hard. I imagine having sex with her on this table. Sweeping away all the crockery from dinner onto the floor and bending her over. She’s naked under that shirt. It would be too easy...

“You really want to protect me?” She rises and saunters over, pausing almost within my reach.

“Yes.” I’d do anything for her.

She leans in. “Then will you tell me one thing? Truthfully this time?”

I catch her scent and it’s intoxicating. Not her perfume, but the essence of her skin is like wild roses over a mountain stream in summer. From here I can see the flecks of navy in her eyes again. I indulge in looking, and it fills me up. The sight of her.

“Yes.”

I feel the blade on my throat before my brain catches up.

Fuck.

Olivia’s knife. In a flash I realise why her rolled-up sleeves were so bulky. She found and hid it, ready.

I’d forgotten. I couldn’t risk leaving it anywhere in the palace in Camden, so I brought her little blade here, away from prying eyes. A stupid, sentimental impulse to keep the knife Lia tried to use to kill me.

I've let my guard down, and now I'm going to pay the price.

With my life.

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## OLIVIA

“Don’t leave.”

I laugh mirthlessly. “I think you’re misunderstanding how revenge and escape work.” I press the knife into his neck. Close, but not close enough to break the skin. My other hand is on his shoulder. The same shoulder that pressed to my thigh as he made me come.

I shake the thought away. He murdered my father. Despite what he says, he probably murdered Trudy. He definitely murdered his own brother.

If he gives oral sex like a god that doesn’t make up for his less appealing qualities.

“I brought you here because you’re in danger,” King says mildly.

“You said.”

“Kill me, fine. But don’t die yourself because you’re too proud to take my advice.”

It’s a weird thing to say when you’re about to snuff it, and I consider. But I don’t move the knife. “You killed my father.”

“No.”

If this blade weren’t poisoned, I’d draw just a tiny bit of blood, so he knows I’m serious. But instead, I shift around so I can see his face. My heart skips.

It’s impassive. The hard lines of his jaw and the firm set of his generous mouth show no sign of fear.

“Are you going to spin a yarn that Henry killed him too?”

Henry seems to be the villain de jour, and although he hit me once, I’m sceptical. He lost his temper, but surely golden boy Henry wouldn’t...

Am I kidding myself?

“I think your father was trying to break off the match between you and Henry.”

“What?”

“There were rumours about Henry’s... Shall we say, lack of respect for consent.”

“I...” It was... Over me? My father died because of me?

“Trudy was concerned too. Henry was sniffing around, making himself crazy about the fact I was her second in command while she’d made him play prince in waiting. Your father was talking—quietly—about breaking off the match. Then he disappeared.”

“You don’t know what happened to him?”

King goes to shake his head and my blade presses into his neck.

“No.”

But he’s lying. I’m certain he is. I watched this man more than is healthy when I lived under his rule.

“May I remind you that I have a knife at your throat? You seem to have forgotten.”

He pauses and those poison-ivy-leaf eyes narrow.

“You’re not going to like this.”

“Tell me.”

He licks his lips, but his gaze doesn’t waver from mine. “Henry made a throw-away comment about taking your father out of town. I should have...” He swallows. “I blame myself,” he says softly.

It’s on the tip of my tongue to comfort him. I bite off the impulse.

But I look for reasons for King to dispose of my father and come up as blank as I have since he went missing. He was no threat to King.

And the worst thing is, it makes sense that my father might have been reconsidering my match with Henry. I'd seen the concern on his face as Henry became more erratic.

It's too logical not to be true.

It doesn't mean King doesn't deserve to die. There is one more charge, and this one is undeniable.

"Why did you kill your brother? For power?"

The bastard laughs. "You think I killed him?"

"That's what everyone thinks."

He sobers.

"I know. But when I execute someone, I don't feed them poison anonymously." King's lip curls with disgust. "I shoot them. That's my way."

I consider this. He's not subtle, King. He doesn't give a flying flamingo how anyone judges him.

"Remember how he was found?"

"In the garden, having had a heart attack then fallen and cracked his head open." A so-called accident.

"He thought he had Trudy completely broken. Under his control. But he didn't. By the time I arrived it was too late for me to do anything but take the blame."

I don't understand but something is ringing true in his words. I keep the knife pressed against him. Because a beautiful, dangerous man should not be underestimated. The heat of his skin has seeped from his neck to my wrist while we talk, like two trees growing and merging together over time.

"Trudy poisoned him."

I snort. "Trudy killed her husband, then invited his brother to come and live with her. Why? They were happy and in love."

“They seemed so. But it took a lot of makeup to conceal the bruises. Eventually, Trudy feared for her life.”

“They were the power couple. Perfect.”

“That’s what my brother wanted everyone to see. But you know better. His son is the same.”

I drag in air, my head light and dizzy with realisation.

My leaving Camden had been prompted by my father’s disappearance, yes, but also by Henry becoming increasingly volatile. Henry raving about loving me, then pushing me away. He’d been capable of changing like a gust of wind, one moment sweet, the next sneering and vibrating with fury.

“He hit me, once,” I whisper. The first time I’ve ever said the words to anyone.

“I know.” King looks like he would crush the world in his palm. Specifically, Henry’s world.

My hand would be shaking if my forearm weren’t stabilised on King’s shoulder.

“Trudy murdered her husband because he abused her.” I try it aloud, testing it. And so many things slip into place. Little words and looks. The clothes Trudy wore and her penchant for heavy makeup. It’s so obvious now King says it, I can’t believe I didn’t notice before. “And you turned up to take advantage of the chaos.”

“Trudy called me, panicking,” King replies calmly.

I dredge up memories of Trudy in the days after her husband’s death. All this makes a terrible amount of sense.

“She was scared Henry junior would blame her. The easiest way to protect her was to ensure everyone suspected someone else.”

“You.”

“Me,” he agrees.

I don’t think he’s lying.

My arm is beginning to get tired of holding the knife to King's neck and I yearn to take it down. I wish I hadn't started this and there's a shiver of thought that maybe I could have just asked these questions and he'd have answered them from across the table. But then, I wouldn't be seeing his green eyes so close again.

As I did when he tied me down and ravaged me, I remind myself. I should want retribution for that, at least. But having him near has become as essential as water.

“Why did you agree to it?”

His mouth twists with distaste. “I had an ill-conceived thought it was my responsibility. I knew what my brother was, and I should have killed him myself years ago. Instead, I turned a blind eye, living out here in the wilderness, making obscene amounts of money, and pretending I wasn't from Camden.”

“It wasn't your fault.”

Outside an animal moves. The sun set while we tussled and ate and argued.

“Henry hurt you and I blame myself for that.”

“I'm still here. Alive.”

Our gazes have been locked this whole time, but now his pupils dilate until his eyes are almost entirely black, only a slither of pine trees at midnight remaining.

“And I thank god for that every day. But Olivia, you need to kill me soon or I'll begin to think this is something else.”

I glance down at his lap. He's sporting a hard-on that takes my breath away. I can see the firm line of his cock like a steel rod pressing against his jeans. The sight makes me go all squirmy between the legs.

And that's when I have to acknowledge it.

The simple truth.

I'm not going to kill King.

“I believe you. But ...”



“You need to be free. And I must return to Camden.”

“Yes.” Tomorrow I have to go back to my life. Whatever he says about keeping me locked up here, I’ll need to leave. If I move on to a new city, a new life, I’ll be safe.

I’ll never see King again, and my heart twangs uncomfortably at that acknowledgement. But it was never meant to be for us. We’re on two different paths: the dead girl and the mafia boss.

He must do his dirty job.

“But tonight...” There’s one night.

We understand each other with a look.

I move my hand from his neck at the same time as he feints to the side, and in half a second I’m in his arms, and he’s kissing me like I’m air and he’s tied down under six feet of water.

“Lia,” he growls, dragging me flush to him.

The relief that he understands, and wants me, floods over my body like a waterfall. It washes me away.

The knife clatters to the floor, forgotten. Whatever he’s offering, I’m accepting. Yes, this is insanity. There’s no future for us, even with both of us alive.

I reach up and grasp the back of his neck to drag his mouth closer, to deepen the kiss. And he comes so willingly, it’s a second before I notice my hand is wet.

Jerking back, I stare at my palm, smeared with blood.

With horror, my gaze flicks to where I held my knife against his neck. In our haste, I cut him.

The poison will be seeping through his bloodstream, pulling him into death.

I’ve murdered the man I love.

---

KING

Her chest heaves, and I can't tell if it's a sob or if she might be sick.

“King.” She says my name brokenly.

“What?”

The slight cut on my neck barely hurts, but my finger comes away damp. It's nothing, but Olivia is distraught.

She gestures woodenly at the knife on the floor. Her face crumples. “It was laced with poison.”

She falls into a chair, head in her hands.

I pick up the knife—that little ornate blade that I kept because it reminded me of Olivia—and study it. The last time she saw it I stomped it into the mud at Trudy's funeral. Now though, it is perfectly clean.

Unlike my soul. Because a decent man would remind her of what she knows, and not let her make herself sad. A good man wouldn't see this as something he can use to his advantage.

But I am not a *good* man.

“What poison did you put on it?” I ask casually.

“Lily of the valley. You have an hour. Maybe two at a push.”

“It'll take that long to get to a hospital.” What will she do if she thinks I have just hours left to live? I'm curious.

Her shoulders shudder, then still. “The helicopter.”

“I can’t fly it if I might lose consciousness. A crash could hurt innocent people. I won’t do that.”

“I’ll come with you. You *cannot* die.”

“Especially not with you with me,” I say gently. “I can think of better things to do in the next two hours than go to hospital.” I plant the seed into her thoughts. A tiny seed no bigger than a pinhead.

“King... Ethan. I’m so sorry.”

I shrug. “It was a mistake. If we hadn’t both got carried away, I wouldn’t have been cut.”

Her eyes are full of tears, and I pull her to her feet. “Enough of that. You said two hours. What would you like to do?”

She clings to me, her cheek sweetly on my chest. Her words are muffled by my shirt.

“Tell me,” I command, my patience wearing thin.

“Whatever you want,” she whispers miserably. And that won’t do.

“No, Lia. Whatever *you* want.”

“I need...” She tails off and looks away, a bit shy. Guilty and tentative about her desires now she thinks a dying man is demanding she reveal them.

I take her chin in my fingers and force her gaze to mine. Then I wait. It takes a full minute, or maybe two. The internal battle waging in her is a sight to behold.

“Take my virginity.”

Blood surges to my cock. I’m so hard it’s almost painful.

“You want me to take your virginity, little girl? After you’ve sent me to my grave?” I can’t resist taunting her. “You’d risk me planting my seed in you, to carry that burden alone?”

She'll never be alone. I won't let her struggle, and any child of mine will be under my protection. True, Olivia might actually kill me when she realises... But being *in* her? Worth it.

“Yes.” Her eyes are wide and her breath is short. “Give me a baby.”

“With pleasure.” And I can't help the grin on my face as we meet in a clash. My hands are in her hair and at her waist. Finally. Touching her like this is the answer to a question written on my soul.

Olivia. My temptation. My siren.

She's kissing me with the sort of ferocity usually reserved for life-and-death situations.

Which I suppose this is. In her mind, anyway.

Beautiful, maddening, deadly Olivia is in my arms where she belongs.

Her kiss is artless as it is passionate as she grabs at my shirt. I don't want to let go of her for a second, even to take off our clothes. Now she wants this, the hunger in my blood is all-consuming.

“The bedroom,” I say between kisses, and try to corral her that way. She's beyond such logic, undoing my belt with unpractised clumsy fingers that make my cock impossibly hard.

“I want you on a bed.”

I feel her nod.

“You'll be comfortable when I fuck your sweet pussy for the first time.”

She lets out a little whimper and I think it's my words but then her hand is on my cock, palming me through the fabric of my boxers.

It shouldn't be this arousing, but it's Olivia. My body doesn't know right or wrong with this girl, it just *knows*.

I want to do everything with her. But I'll start with the basics. I'm going to make her come again. I'm going to make her soft and pliable and boneless with pleasure. Then I'm going to make her mine.

I don't care that it's only for tonight, and she wants a different path from the one my duty dictates. Even if we only ever have this time together, I will make it count. I'll spoil her so thoroughly, being with anyone else will be unthinkable. I want to give her the world.

I get us into my bedroom, cup her arse and lift her onto the bed following her down without breaking our kiss.

While she's all quick movements and hurried touches, I'm calmer than I've been in years. I don't have to panic or rush. I'm at peace. This won't be enough, but it'll be sufficient to remember in the years after she's gone.

To that end, I slow. And when she squeaks with frustration, I murmur, "Do I need to get the ropes back out, or will you behave?"

"King." She digs her nails into my shoulders and scrapes them down.

I arch into the pain. But I ignore her intention to hurry. I take one hand, kiss her palm, and place it over her head on the pillow. Then the other.

"Stay there, Lia."

"You're so bossy," she whispers, and stretches luxuriously before her hands find my biceps and squeeze. I flex for her, a little, then growl playfully and replace her wrists, running my fingers down the soft skin of her inner arms.

I take in every detail of her as I explore her body with my fingertips and mouth.

I'm only a man, so of course her sweet breasts get extra attention and it's only when she tightens her fingers in my hair that I notice she's disobeyed, again. I hold her nipple captive between my teeth and swirl my tongue over the firm tip, a little punishment and reward. I love that she wants to touch me.

This has to fuel a lifetime of memories, and I breathe in the vanilla scent of her and combine my pleasure and Olivia's with kisses that make her shiver deliciously beneath me. She's beautifully responsive to my every movement and incredibly curious. Much as I try to keep her hands away for fear of going off too soon, the second I let her out of my grasp she's kneading my buttocks or tracing my collarbones.

I could tie her up again, but we're both enjoying this little argument and her disobedience.

I'm happy to allow her to play.

Until her palm finds my cock. And fuck, her small hand, wanton and yet innocent. She strokes me too lightly but my body doesn't care, responding more strongly as though she were as rough and quick as I am with myself. Olivia steals the air from my lungs when she encircles her fingers over the head and pushes down. I can feel precum seeping out, my desperation for her mounting with every slight movement she makes. I'm still holding myself over her, and her hand disappears down at our hips. I've brought her legs up to waist level, and she's so open to me, knees spread apart without a hint of embarrassment.

But all the time she's watching my face, and I watch hers for any sign this is less than what she wants. But there's nothing. Just lust and need, and affection and something a dark creature in my chest purrs is love, but my brain can't accept.

Perfect, beautiful Olivia.

I push her hand away and make my own way to that soft core of her. She sighs with relief as I ease between her folds. She's so wet it spills out, coating my knuckles. It's almost too simple to slip two fingers into her passage and stroke, matching that movement to my thumb circling her clit. I watch her face as she steadily, oh so gradually, loses herself under my slow ministrations.

I make it deliberately languorous, taking forever to build up her pleasure. I kiss her breasts, cheeks, lips. I tell her she feels like heaven and looks like a fallen angel. I lose words of

love onto her skin, so quiet as she moans I know she can't hear what a fool I am for her.

And when she comes, pulsing around my fingers and bucking her hips, I begin again.

I repeat it all, the same and different, tending her until she gasps and cries out and clings to my neck.

"Ethan." Her voice is hoarse and my name, my real name, on her lips is better than I could have imagined. Her eyes are closed after her second orgasm and her body almost liquid she's so at ease.

"Lia."

"I made a request. You promised." She doesn't sound relaxed anymore.

"I know." I've waited my whole life for this. As though I'd forget.

She pulls my head down and whispers in my ear. "Fuck me, King. Take me. The way I know you can. I want to feel the echo of you in me years from now. Ruin me for any other man. Make me regret what I did and mourn you until my dying breath. Make me pine and cry for you and your body once you're gone. Give me something to remember you by."

And damn, I want to. I want her more than anything. I'd give up my life, everything I've built, and several limbs for her.

But...

I can't do this. She's too precious, and what we have is too honest to sully this moment with a lie.

"Olivia."

She gazes up at me with blown-out pupils. Those sharp blue eyes are still hazy with the ecstasy of her orgasm.

"Yes?"

"Get the knife."

She stiffens.

“I’m not—”

“Get the knife.” I use a deeper voice this time and she quakes.

“But...”

I quell her with a look and put a gap between us to allow her up. Shaking with irritation and desire and probably five other emotions, she rolls off the bed, pads through into the lounge, unaware or unembarrassed by her lack of clothing. I turn onto my back. She returns immediately, and though her naked body is lithe and lovely, her face is creased with sadness.

“Come here.” I pat my thigh then prop my hands under my head on the pillows.

As she straddles me her eyes flick down to where my hard-on is undiminished. Then she’s settled on my lap, her pussy gleaming with her juices and touching the base of my cock. Her hair has dried a little frizzy and it falls over her shoulders. Every part of her is either sexy or desirable. Except, right now, that tragic expression.

“Do you remember when you last saw that knife?”

“Yes.” Her voice breaks a little and her eyes shimmer with tears.

“You wanted to kill me.” I was rather proud of her. As well as furious she risked her own life on such a bone-headed mission.

Her mouth falls open and clearly she wishes she could deny it. She gives the smallest nod possible.

“I’m sorry I hurt you to make you drop the knife.” I’d take back everything that has ever hurt her.

“That was nothing, it...” I see the moment she makes the connection I’ve laid out for her. “You fucker,” she breathes, but a smile tugs at her lips.

“I kept it as a memento. I couldn’t see your face, but I wanted a piece of you, my maddening beauty.”



“You ground my knife into the mud under your heel. It had been raining.” She leans forward, outraged, a little delighted, and almost predatory. Her hair falls in a curtain and she still has her knife in her hand. She brings it to my chest, brushing it over the thicket on my pectorals.

“And afterwards I cleaned it. Meticulously.” Not a trace of mud or poison left on that blade.

She shakes her head in disbelief. “And to think I felt sorry for you.”

“I take care of what is mine.”

“You take what’s yours, do you?” she murmurs, stretching over me. “And take care of it.”

I don’t dare breathe. I don’t dare voice the hope growing in my chest, that maybe, just maybe...

“Now you’re going to survive, you’ll have to live with the consequences of taking my virginity.” Her smile is saucy as she eases back over me and rubs her soaking folds along my length.

“And what might that be?” It’s all I can do to hold my hands idly behind my head and not grab her and grind her down onto me.

I crave her in the most animalistic way possible. To have. Take. Own.

“You said you’d ruin me for anyone else,” she purrs. “So I’ll want to keep you.”

“You can keep me. I’m yours.” The declaration is out before I can stop it, like my vocal cords have been waiting to say that, as patient and desperate as my cock is to be inside her.

“Mine.” She draws out the word like she’s savouring it.

I can’t pretend much longer. Reaching down, I push her hip and she rises to allow me to notch the head of my cock at her entrance. I stare up at her. I’m under her spell. Insane with love for her.

“Go on then.”

She eases down onto me. A little at a time, getting used to the feel. I keep watching her face, because if I see where we join, where my cock is slipping into her, I’ll lose it. Only focusing on her wide eyes prevents me from being overcome by her tight wet heat.

“If you need to, you can stop,” I tell her softly, though if she wanted to I might shatter with disappointment. If she needs more time... I will give her anything she needs.

“No,” she breathes and sinks onto me. “I can’t stop. I don’t know if I’ll ever be able to. Maybe I’ll never get enough of you. Perhaps I’ll always want you inside me like this.”

“Yes.” That works for me. If all I do from now until eternity is satisfy her sexually, I’ll be happy.

Another shift and I flex my hips and we’re joined to the hilt, her clit pressing on my pelvic bone, her softness enveloping me. It’s everything I can do to remain still and allow her to become accustomed.

“Does it hurt?” I’m afraid to ask.

“No, it feels...” She closes her eyes for a moment, and I stroke my hand up her back. “Right. Perfect.” She lifts herself off an inch and then sinks down with a soft exhalation.

“Yes.” I grasp her hips, but she needs no encouragement. She’s riding me, slowly at first, then with more confidence. Then with urgency. All that desperation I managed to restrain in both of us has returned, stronger. She’s so fucking gorgeous, taking her satisfaction on my cock. I can’t resist. I bring my thumb to her clit.

The effect is instant.

She moans and begins to shake with the effort of sustaining moving over me, so I thrust from underneath, matching her. Her hands are on my chest now, holding herself off me. The trust implied is as good as the pleasure.

She’s driving me wild, and I don’t know how much more of her innocent seduction I can take. Tension is building in my

groin, a demand to not simply orgasm, but stake a claim on my girl. My other hand finds her nipple and I pinch just hard enough to hurt in the best way.

“Come on my cock, Lia.”

I have no idea if it is my touch on her breast or my request that tips her over, but she pulses around me, head falling forwards. Her hair falls over her shoulders and my hand. I keep up my touches through her orgasm, gentling and shifting so it isn't too much for her. And eventually, she's still. Wrecked. So lovely in her debauched pleasure my heart can barely stand it.

I grasp her shoulder and she sinks willingly onto me, and her mouth finds mine. Her kiss is messy and passionate and sweet. She's not done, and neither am I. She struggles to keep up movement on my cock and though I help, this position doesn't give us what we need.

“Enough.”

Not breaking our kiss, I flip her over, pulling her under me. I nearly, so nearly, ram straight back into her. But I don't, despite the compulsion.

“Yes?” I gasp out. Does she need a break? Does it hurt?

She looks up at me, hair splayed on the pillow around her like a dark halo. My avenging angel. She nods.

A slow slide of my body fully into hers again and damn but it's like coming home after a century, when it's actually only been seven seconds of me not being completely inside of her. And a lifetime before that.

She grasps my shoulders as I ease into a steady rhythm, aware it's still her first time. But I can't help but hook my fingers under her thigh and bring it up. That change of angle, the deeper penetration, makes her moan with delight, her eyelids fluttering.

“Yes, Ethan, anything.” She clutches at me. “More.”

And then I don't hold back. I pound into her hard and deep. It feels so good my vision blurs, my whole body

vibrating. She asked for it, and I'm going to provide. My cock in her so thoroughly, with her fucked so well she'll never want to leave my bed.

I won't let her.

"Mine."

I barely recognise my voice.

She whimpers and clutches at my back. For half a second I wonder if I'm hurting her with this brutal, possessive thrusting into her soft pussy. Nailing her into the mattress. But then her heels are on my buttocks, with me at every stroke, urging me on.

"I'm yours."

"Gunna fill you up." My chest is tight with mounting pleasure and tearing with unbearable love.

"Yes." Her nails dig into my shoulder blades. "Please."

I can't stop. Not just because of my body's imperative, but she won't let me, her fingers digging in, pulling me deeper. I come with a shout, shooting into her. It wrecks me, and I'm a shuddering, sweating, burst-with-happiness mess. I don't know my own name, but I know hers.

Olivia.

My love, my downfall.

I'm still breathing hard as she runs her fingertips down my back.

"I wanted this," she whispers.

"Not as much as I did," I murmur, catching her bottom lip and sucking it into my mouth.

We kiss and brush noses and I whisper her name until we can't put off moving any longer.

I carry her to the bathroom and clean her up first, washing off my come that seeps down her thighs, teasing her about what a dirty girl that makes her, when I think it's adorable.

And hot. Seeing her marked as mine causes my cock to rise again.

I ignore the impulse, but Olivia has other ideas, getting to her knees under the spray, and taking me in her mouth. She's tentative at first, but it's still filthy, the sight of her lips stretched around my cock. I'll never get over it, over her.

Then, as the pressure begins to build and my balls tighten, she pulls away.

I give an involuntary grunt of dissent and frustration. And she, my siren, smiles.

“I can't keep that up. Fuck my mouth.”

“I...”

Like maddened ring fighters, two impulses in me clash. I couldn't sully my sweet Olivia like that. But oh fuck I want to use her mouth the way she's suggesting.

“King.” She grips my wrist and brings my hand to the back of her head. My fingers slip into her hair and tighten without my volition. She slides her wet lips over the dripping head of my cock and makes a soft noise of approval. The muscles in my arm tense as I gently bring her head further onto my cock. Then her hand is on my thigh, her gaze on my face, urging me.

I pull back out, the friction of her lips almost too much. Her fingers tug at my arse.

I give in.

The first thrust of my hips is like treacle. But I can see her breasts heaving and the gleam in her eye. She's enjoying the feel of me in her mouth. So the next is a little harder, deeper, and it's moments before I lose control. My gaze never wavers from hers as I piston between her pretty pink lips. It's so fucking good and I don't even try to hold out. I come with a roar, her hair in my fist. And Olivia in every one of my senses.

She swallows then licks her lips. Her skin is flushed from the hot water and arousal. I pull her to her feet, wrap my arms

around her and whisper words of thanks and gratitude and praise.

This woman is everything.

And I'm going to have to let her go.

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## OLIVIA

The first blowjob I've ever given in my life, and I have to say, I think I did pretty darn well. Ethan certainly appears pleased. He hasn't stopped touching me since he was inside me. Like if he isn't holding on, I'll fly away.

This man. I'm obsessed with him. There's a slight soreness between my legs and I want to hold onto that forever. He'll always have been my first; I want him to be my all.

If only I'd found him in some other time and place. But he's the head of Camden, and I'm dead to that world.

There's this hiatus, this slither of a chance he's whisked me away to, and then there's nothing. He dries me in a fluffy towel then swipes his thumb over my cheek and kisses me so sweetly I want to cry.

I want to yell at the heavens.

The one thing I don't do, is ask for the impossible.

He takes my hand and leads me to the bedroom and dresses me in the shirt of his I chose then pulls on a pair of jeans. It's a warm night.

Neither of us speaks. I think because there's an inevitability about the end to this, and I for one don't want to admit it.

I'm reaching for him when there's the snick of a door.

My eyes meet King's.

Shit.

He pushes me back and hisses, “Stay here.”

I ignore the order, remaining at his elbow. Whatever or whoever is here, we’ll face it together.

---

Henry stands in the open doorway, a gun pointing at King as we emerge into the living room. He’s holding a fake hand, and he waves it at us.

“Really should upgrade your security, King. Your fingerprints are everywhere.” Shit. The door was locked with a fingerprint, and Henry just let himself in.

How did he find us?

“Olivia.” Ethan’s voice is like granite. “Get back.”

“Good to see you, Olivia. Enjoy your swim?”

Then it hits me.

“I didn’t know,” I whisper. But I should have. I disposed of everything except that stupid fitness tracker that barely did anything. I only ever wore it when I went swimming, and now I’m going to pay dearly for that mistake.

One naive error and this perfect interlude is spoiled by Henry. Bastard.

“What did he force you to do?” Henry’s lip curls.

His voice and question pour molten lava into my chest.

“Nothing.” How dare he turn up here, as though I’m his toy to reclaim. “I’m here of my own volition.”

“My men were bringing you to me, darling, so we could be married.”

King takes a step forward as Henry does. The young blond lion and the big cunning bear. Henry is outmatched.

Except for the gun.

I should be afraid. Henry is trying to kill King, and take me. He killed those I loved the most.



I'm not scared. My body doesn't know fear. I'm furious with Henry. My anger is a boiling sky. It is steaming from my every pore. This man drove me from my home and nearly caused me to murder a good man. My fury could obliterate London and smash the whole of England to rubble.

Henry wants me? Fine. He'll get a fuck of a lot more than he bargained for.

"I'll go with you, but leave King be."

"No." King grasps my wrist, but I shake him off.

There's no choice and no time to find a weapon or plan. I will avenge my father. I will avenge Trudy. And I will not allow Henry to harm King.

Henry's eyes narrow. I can see him considering what is the biggest prize. Me, or his so-called revenge against King for his father's death.

"I'm sorry I left. I was..." I gulp and look down. Honestly, I should be on the stage I'm such a good actress. "Scared, after my father's death." I must get him and that gun away from King.

"Very natural," Henry agrees, then like a Janus, he turns the gun on me.

"No." King is shaking.

"Henry. No one else needs to die. If you can keep me safe, I'll join you."

"Come to me, bride."

Every instinct shouts that this is wrong as I walk with slow steps to Henry. As soon as I'm within reach, his fingers are on my upper arm like a vice and the barrel of the gun is at my throat.

Again, I should be afraid. But all I have is determination and the raw knowledge that I will do anything to save King, then I'll do everything to get back to him. Nothing and no one, certainly not a useless coward like Henry, will stop me.

“I have my bride.” He yanks me to him as he addresses King. “We’re leaving. If you try something, I’ll shoot her.”

Fuck.

I manage to glance back at King as Henry drags me from the house, me tripping over myself to stay with him. My glimpse of Ethan’s face shows pure fear and horror.

I try to transmit one simple message to him. *Trust me. I can do this.*

And I pray he received it.

“Where are we going?” Henry takes me up a rough track. In my bare feet I’m struggling to keep up, and quite soon I’m going to be bloodied.

“There’s a road in a few miles,” Henry replies, not looking at me. His fingers dig painfully into my arm and the gun hasn’t wavered from my neck. “I’ve missed you, Olivia.”

“Where’s my dad?”

“Don’t worry, Steven saw to him. We thought you were with him, which is why I didn’t come for you sooner, darling. I’m glad I got you away.”

And that’s when I’m certain he’s lying. Because it wouldn’t matter what happened. My father would have contacted me, were he still alive.

Henry blathers, and I don’t know whether he’s talking to himself or to me. Something about nobility and fortune. I’m not listening. I’m wondering how to get that gun off him. The path takes us around the hill and eventually I see a red SUV. Subtle.

“I won’t have my fiancée wearing my enemy’s clothes,” he says as he opens the boot, revealing the outfit I put on to go swimming. It’s a summer dress and a lightweight coat perfect for any conditions. With a surprisingly weighted hem.

“Thank you,” I murmur. And though my knife is missing from the ensemble, my heart rate spikes. Because in that unusually heavy hem is stitched a blade.

Trudy gave me this long coat. And I can't believe I never made the connection before. Of course King didn't murder his brother. It was Trudy who taught me about flowers and plants, and casually, amongst that, she showed me which plants were poisonous, or would cause fits, or visions.

I make myself sound contrite and sweet. Unassuming. "Could I have a moment alone to change?"

Henry's mouth twitches with annoyance.

"Please." I cast my gaze down in faux modesty and make my voice tremble. "I didn't get any privacy with King."

And that's true. Just *absolutely* what I wanted.

I dive for the coat as soon as Henry's back is turned and find the irregular place in the hem. It's the work of a second to use the point of the knife to cut it out of the fabric. It's a short blade with the simplest handle imaginable, and it fits in my hand.

I don't change my clothes; I'm King's woman now. But I shove my painful feet into my shoes and almost cry at the relief. Then I turn and look at the back of the man I once assumed I'd marry.

"Henry," I say, throwing my voice off the car as I creep up to him. He's looking out into the dark, where we came from.

"What?" he snaps.

Then the knife is at his throat. "Drop the gun."

"Olivia." He stills. "You don't want to do this."

I press the blade and it's sharper than it looks. A line of red trickles down to his collar.

"Where did you get that?" There's panic—outright panic—in his voice.

"Your mother sends her compliments."

"No!" Henry shudders, and drops the gun. I kick it, hard, and in the dark I don't see where it lands. In bushes somewhere to my right.

Henry's shoulders shake.

I'm more poised than I've ever been.

"Tell me where my father's body is and I'll spare your life."

I want to bury him. Mourn him properly.

Henry chuckles mirthlessly, a little manic. "You'll never find him. I'm about to take that secret to my death."

"Relax. It was just a nick."

The laugh turns into a sob. "The smallest cut from Trudy's knives..."

Shit. I shove Henry away and hold the blade at arm's length. Tears are streaming down Henry's face, glistening in the moonlight.

His face wrinkles into a snarl. "Bitch. I should have finished you along with her."

But he slumps to the ground, coughing.

My fingers tighten around the knife before I drop it.

Poisoned. Trudy gave me a blade laced with toxins and I've used it to kill her son.

Henry clutches at his neck, and I do the one thing I know.

I run.

Back down the track I just came with Henry, I throw myself towards the man I know can figure this out. My feet scream at me, my thighs are on fire. I'm running away from what I've done and who I am and—

"Olivia!"

King is there, on the path before me.

I fling myself into his arms, tears behind my eyes for everything that's happened, and my role in it.

"Hush. Hush." He soothes me like I'm a wild creature, his hands on my back and tight around my waist.

"Where is he?" King's voice is a rumble.

I point with a shaking hand. “It’s just him. He seems to have come without backup.”

“Do I need to finish it?” he says into my hair.

And I know, for sure, whatever I’d done he’d support me. Where a normal person would call the police, King will fix anything I require, no matter how bad.

And it’s crazy, but that is the hottest, best thing I can think of.

I shake my head. Trudy will have been clever. It’s a fast poison. “He’ll be dead within an hour.”

King smiles. “You and your herbs. Remind me never to cross you. But he’s still out there, alive for now?”

“Yes.”

King nods. “Do you trust me?”

“Yes.” It’s not even a question.

“Go back to the house. Lock the door. Don’t answer for anyone but me. Wait. And whatever you see on the news, stay. Don’t leave.”

I start to ask what he’s going to do, but he shakes his head.

“How long?”

“I don’t know. But I’ll be back. I promise.” He presses a hard kiss to my mouth, then releases me with a little push. I watch him go. To clean up.

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It’s two days before the news shows footage of a helicopter crash. Three dead.

Ethan King.

Tears fill my eyes.

Henry Junior.

My heart thumps.

An image of me from a couple of years ago flashes on screen. Olivia Porter.

There are accompanying images of burning wreckage of the helicopter I've been in with King. They say my death is thought to be an accident, and Henry was avenging his father's death by murdering King.

I'm still staring at the unthinkable—I'm officially dead—again—when there's a knock on the door.

I rush and it's only when I remember King's words that I pause.

“Who is it?”

A barely restrained growl of impatience.

I throw open the door and King is on me, crushing me in his arms.

The relief is visceral. Like a waterfall or a tide, and I'm powerless against it. I should ask questions about what happened, but I pull him to the bedroom and within minutes he's thrusting inside me, covering me, both our desperation overcoming any common sense.

Anything to put off the reality I'll have to deal with: both of us returning to separate lives.

Hours later, we're in bed, temporarily sated. King won't tell me what he did.

“What now?” I ask, though I would love to remain here, in King's house and in his arms.

King smiles sadly and drags over the coat I stripped from his body when he arrived.

He gives me a passport, and flipping it open, I see my new name.

Olivia Kingston.

“Do you have one too? With the same surname?”

It's a sheer guess, but he nods slowly, uncertainty in his gaze.

“You could walk back into London with a different name and take up your position in Camden,” I murmur, realising the power of what he’s done. But he gave me *his name*. It’s there in black and white, the proof I belong to him, whatever happens.

“I could,” he agrees. “We’re both free to do whatever we want, now.”

And maybe he didn’t mean this new name to bind me to him, but I can’t help but think this meant something to him too.

“Don’t leave.” I throw out the request like a bullet.

King raises his eyebrows.

“No one knows we’re here. Don’t return to Camden. We can stay. We share a name; be my husband.”

“You’d give up your freedom for me?” His eyes are wide and full of disbelieving hope.

“Only if you give up your power for me.”

“My Lia.” He pulls me on top of him and kisses me. “I’d throw away my fortune for one more night with you.”

“You mean it?”

He holds me so tight in reply all my doubts are vanquished. I melt into him like butter in the sun.

“I thought you’d never ask,” he whispers against my lips. “I expected to have to persuade you.”

“You don’t mind?” I can’t believe it.

“Flint will take over Camden,” King says, smiling. “He’ll be a good leader. Henry is gone. That story is finished.”

“But you’ll be cast as the villain. I saw that on TV.” It’s so damn unfair.

“If I have you, I’ll be your villain,” he croons.

“You’ll be mine.” I cannot get close enough to this man. His voice. His heat. His rough fingertips on my skin. A powerful, handsome creature who wants me. My luck is a

jungle. A forest. My luck is as everlasting and lush as nature itself.

“I love you.” I blurt it out.

“Oh Lia. I’ve been waiting for those words.” King draws back to hold my face and look into my eyes. “You’ve done it now. I’ll never let you go.”



# EPILOGUE: KING

4 years later

She's stalking me like a hunter. I sit by the river, the early evening light sparking in the water as I relax with a beer. And she creeps up, my maddening, beautiful, stealthy girl.

I watch her from the corner of my eye. This is one of our favourite games, along with chase. She loves to be chased, my girl, and I love to pretend to be her big-bad. Sometimes she chases me and I run, though I could never be afraid of her physically. But in matters of the heart... Ah, there she has me caught.

I wait until the last second, as she is about to jump onto my back, before I spin and scoop our daughter up into my arms with a playful growl. She giggles helplessly, her chestnut brown hair flying.

"Daddy!" She screams with glee as I twirl her around, holding fast. Then I crush her to my chest. For a moment she hugs me in return. Then she wriggles and makes complaints of, "Squash! Too tight!" and I free her immediately.

It's been four years since Olivia and I died, and now my whole time in London feels like a vivid play I had to act in compared to the sweet reality of our life now.

“Trudy!” Olivia walks out of our house and instantly spots us down by the river. The house is full of life now, as it should be. No longer just my refuge, it’s our paradise. Mine and Olivia’s.

Olivia swims in the river every day. She’s been teaching Trudy and there’s nothing that makes my heart fuller than watching my two girls have fun together. My wife and my daughter.

A few miles away, by the road, Olivia has a plant nursery. It makes a tidy profit and she likes that independence, even though we don’t need the money because my investments cover everything we’d ever need. More lucrative than the dirty business I used to have to do.

Olivia’s little knife is mounted on the wall, well out of reach of Trudy. A memento of how we finally found each other. Maybe one day we’ll tell our daughter about her namesake, and see if she wants to take her place as a Princess of Camden. I quietly keep in touch with Flint, who has promised that our daughter’s inheritance is hers, should she want it.

Every year we take her to her grandfather’s grave, just outside London. We found him. Eventually.

Olivia and my eyes meet and she smiles.

“Dinner’s ready,” she says.

“Then bedtime. Maybe Mummy will have a swim while I read you a story,” I say to Trudy, but I look at Olivia.

That blush. She knows what I’m suggesting.

It’s summer and the days are long. The evenings are warm and scented with heather and gorse. Our daughter goes to sleep in the light and there will still be time before the sky is stained red and orange and pink with sunset.

I’m filled with a deep contentment. Everything I need is here. This little house, my wife, my daughter. That’s all I need. We might be dead in the eyes of the world, with new names and new lives outside of London, but we’re finally living.

And there will be plenty of time this evening for me to chase and catch my beautiful wife.

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Want to see King and Olivia recreate the river kidnap later that evening? [Click here to get an exclusive four-years-down-the-road epilogue: https://evieroseauthor.com/extended-epilogues/.](https://evieroseauthor.com/extended-epilogues/)

# INSTALOVE BY EVIE ROSE

## Taken by the Kingpin

They call me the lost princess...

But I'm a normal girl, late for my first work evening-do. Sure, a mob boss is *watching* me. Making my tummy flutter.

Tall, dark, older and dangerous, I shouldn't want him. When the clock ticks to midnight and I officially turn eighteen, I tell him I'm done with my family's mafia.

But it's not done with me.

Snatched away and trapped in Sebastian's luxurious apartment, I have no choice but to bargain. I won't try to escape, he'll teach me how to defend myself.

Then our lessons escalate, and soon I'm aching and needy and... What if I could be *his* princess...?

## Caught by the Mob Boss

He's filthy rich. Grumpy. Dangerous. Hot.

I'm untouched and pure. And I've been sent to kill him.

I creep into his bedroom late at night, knife in hand. The moonlight reveals the beauty of the mafia kingpin's face and the silver in his hair, and I hesitate.

Mistake.

Now he's captured me, and I'm at his mercy. He says he'll let me go if I beg him to take me...

I can't.

Partly from pride, but also... I don't want to leave. I want to be *his*.

# CONTEMPORARY ROMANCE BY EVIE ROSE WRITING AS EVE PENDLE

[Her Nemesis until 5pm](#) - Secrets of Wildbrook free newsletter exclusive!

Starting a new job is difficult enough, without your new colleague being a complete arsehole. Competitive, gorgeous, but off limits, the only thing Emily likes about Luke is the coffee he brings her every morning. Until they're sent on a job together and snowed in. There's only one bed, and maybe she doesn't hate her nemesis as much as she thought.

And maybe he's never hated her at all...

[Her Fake Date Until Midnight](#) - Secrets of Wildbrook Book 1

**He's hot. Rich. Domineering. And grumpy.**

Hedley Decker is used to people obeying his every command, but the unconscious stray dog on his doorstep isn't impressed, and nor is the pretty veterinarian who saves it. Overhearing that she needs a date for her ex-boyfriend's wedding, he proposes a deal: she'll help him find the real owner before the puppies arrive, he'll be her fake date. She's a temptation he can't resist, but he must return to London in a month or risk his secrets being exposed.

**She's kind, trapped, and soon to be broke.**

Her dad's illness means Clara Rowe must keep her job at the only veterinary clinic, owned by her ex's father. If that means overtime and going to a wedding solo, so be it. Then gorgeous and arrogant billionaire Hedley Decker storms in with an offer of one night of pretense and pleasure that's too good to be true.

Searching for the lost dog's owner, their spark of attraction flares. He's returning to his city life; she knows better than to risk her heart. How can they have forever love when they're faking it, and time is running out?

[Her Grumpy Neighbour until Halloween](#) - Secrets of Wildbrook Book 2

**He's gorgeous but grumpy**

When reclusive celebrity chef Kit Morton finds a woman sneaking around his neighbor's house with a camera, he's annoyed to find himself attracted to the turquoise-haired intruder. He has a cookbook to write and doesn't have time to deal with the mystery of his neighbor's disappearance or Ellen the 'house-sitter' who is out of her depth. He ought to call the police or keep his distance. Instead, he can't stop thinking about her.

**She's conspicuous, cheerful, and in a lot of trouble**

Suddenly homeless after a social media disaster, Ellen lucks out with two months in a country cottage by exaggerating her animal care experience a tiny bit. How difficult can it be? But when she turns up, there's no owner, no instructions, just a

handsome, arrogant man with a kitchen knife. Worse still, every time she makes an embarrassing mistake, he's watching.

When the heating goes kaput at Ellen's borrowed house, Kit grudgingly invites her over for hot food, hot showers... and hot sex. They have to get it out of their systems quickly because he hates publicity and she's desperate for fame. And Kit's neighbor is due back at Halloween...

**Her Boss until Christmas** - Secrets of Wildbrook Book 3

**She can't stand him, but his offer is too tempting**

Gifted a scrap of land by a mysterious donor, Iris Blaese thinks she's lucked out with her new life in the village of Wildbrook. Until she meets her neighbor. He's obnoxious, gorgeous, unavoidable, and worse still, he's carelessly endangering wildlife. But when she confronts him, he offers her a job... with a catch.

**He's a cynical billionaire with too many secrets**

Bennett Gastrell is hiding half his life from his friends, and half from the woman he's loved for years. Iris loathes him, or at least who she thinks he is, so when she storms into his house, furious about badgers (of all things), he grabs his opportunity. If within two months she can convince him of her conservation plans, he'll continue to pay her exorbitant salary and leave her to run his estate. If she can't, she'll spend one night in his bed, and do anything he desires... willingly.

Iris is determined to win, even if it means seducing a man she despises. It's just two months, and his gaze does make her want things she ought not. Then a social media leak threatens to reveal Bennett's secrets and destroy everything he's built, including Iris' burgeoning trust...

**Her Billionaire Bet until Spring** - Secrets of Wildbrook Book 4

**She found the perfect guy, for one night**

Trish Weston has a crumbling house, eye watering debt, and her brother's wedding to host. She absolutely doesn't have time to camp in the wilderness, or walk a second day with a hot stranger she meets on the mountain top. But she's never been good at following the rules. Then a storm comes in, trapping them, and there's only one tent.

**He told one small lie...**

Grayson Archer likes computers, dislikes people, and thinks nature is generally best seen in a photo. But having sold his social media app, he's a billionaire without purpose, looking for answers in the mountains he remembers from childhood. Instead, he finds Trish: gorgeous, impulsive, and with no idea who he is. One night was never going to be enough, but the wind steals the scrap of paper with her number.

**One chance to win her back**

When Grayson tracks her down, Trish isn't interested in a man who ghosted her, forgot to mention he's a billionaire, and actually likes wearing suits. But she does need an assistant...

He's a precise computer scientist, she's a chaotic mountaineer. He's determined, she's skeptical. So he proposes a deal. For each day he manages everything she demands as his boss, he gets to be boss in the bedroom. All night.