

CLAIMED BY THE CONVICT

CLAIMED: BOOK 8

LENA LITTLE

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PREVIEW

Tory Sweet is never one to shy away from a good story, but interviewing Tobin Tate, aka the New Orleans Nightstalker, is a whole new level of danger. As a journalist, she's determined to get the truth about the murders he was accused of—no matter the cost.

When the power goes out during their interview, Tory finds herself trapped in the cell with Tobin. The darkness only heightens the tension between them, and Tory begins to see a different side of the man behind the infamous nickname.

In exchange for an honest interview, Tory gives herself over to Tobin, body and mind. But as their connection grows, she starts to question everything she thought she knew about the Nightstalker. Could he really be the one behind the murders or is he innocent?

As the hours tick by, Tory must make a choice. Will she stand by Tobin and help prove his innocence, no matter the danger? Or will she turn her back on him and the intense feelings growing between them?

Choosing isn't easy, especially since Tory harbors a secret of her own—a secret that may or may not be enough reason for her to abandon everything... for him.

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A s I step into the Louisiana penitentiary, I can feel my heart pounding against my chest so intensely that I unconsciously press my hand over it on top of my silk blouse. This place is somehow worse than I expected, with the stone walls seeming to be constantly damp despite the blue, cloudless sky outside, and the smell of dank mold filling the air. No part of me wants to be here, except the part that is so hungry for this story that I will surely starve without it.

A woman my age is working the front window, and she looks me over with annoyance as she makes the call for the guards to come and retrieve me. While we wait, she lowers her glasses and narrows her eyes. "I don't think we've ever had a reporter go directly into a cell before."

"It took a lot of convincing," I admit to her, trying to be friendly. "But that's just my interview style. I like there to be very few distractions."

"Hmm," she stares for a moment longer before shrugging and returning to type on her keyboard, loud and yellowed from age. "Whatever you say, I guess. That guy is a psycho though, not sure what more you need to know."

You have no idea, I think, but keep my lips pressed shut. Something tells me that I'm going to have a lot of probing questions before I eventually make it to Tobin's cell, so I might as well save my answers for the important ones.

After a few minutes in the uncomfortable lobby, two guards appear, looking beyond exasperated that I've interrupted

whatever it is that they were doing.

"Babysitting duty," I hear one of them mutter to the other, who nods. They're both tall, broad, fleshy men, and if I wasn't here specifically to see a murderer, I might be intimidated by them, but the truth is, they are probably the least scary men in this building right now.

"Ms. Sweet?" the mutterer says, loudly enough for me to hear this time. "Follow me, please."

The sound of the security gate buzzes as I pass through each of the three checkpoints, both guards' eyes scrutinizing my every move. First is a metal detector where I have to empty my pockets and hand them my messenger bag. They don't let me take in my laptop, which I expected, but after a cursory, uninterested glance, they allow me to keep my other things, as long as they are run through the huge metal machine.

I place my leatherbound journal, pen, and old-school tape recorder into the bin while the guard running the metal detector watches me with a mixture of suspicion and disbelief. It only takes a beat of time before he can't keep his mouth shut any longer.

"Why are you so interested in interviewing Tobin Tate?" the guard asks, his tone scathing. "That guy has fooled a lot of people with his charming facade. He's got admirers sending him letters every day."

I stand tall, holding the guard's gaze, determined to show him that I am a professional, not just another misguided fan. "I understand why people might see it that way," I reply, trying to keep my voice steady. "But as a journalist, my duty is to uncover the truth and report the facts. My only interest in Tobin Tate is as a subject of my article."

The guard scoffs, his eyes narrowing. "Just be careful," he warns, handing me back my belongings. "That man is dangerous. He's known for manipulating and deceiving those who get too close. Don't let his so-called charisma fool you."

I take my things, cramming them back in my bag, feeling a knot form in my stomach. I know that I must be cautious, but I

can't let fear control me. "Thank you for your warning," I say, trying to keep my voice even. "But I'm here to work, and I won't let anything or anyone stop me from doing my job."

After a few more moments, the guard on the other side of the barred metal door gives the affirmative, and one of the two men already with me walks me through the now-unlocked door while the other stays behind.

Guard number three is younger, his dark eyes telling me that he's seen more than the average person when it comes to the disturbing, but he's also the kindest of the prison employees that I've met so far.

"I apologize, Ms. Sweet, but since you're going into the max security portion of the prison, we have to do one last search. We can go physical, or I can bring in the dogs to scent-check you. Which do you prefer?"

Unconsciously, I grip the center of my blouse to hold it closed and shake my head. The only other woman in this entire building must be the receptionist and knowing that has me on edge. There's no way in hell that I'm going to be stripsearched by a bunch of strangers. "Dogs, please."

I hang my messenger bag on the hook on the wall and spread my arms wide, feet shoulder lengths apart, as the dogs do their jobs. Two German Shepherds are brought in, and after they perform their rather overly-thorough search, the handler lets me pet them and feed them each a Milk-bone he pulls from his pockets.

Actually, these are the kindest employees here, I muse, letting one of the dogs lick my hands before they're led away once more, and I'm left to stand and straighten my clothes, grab my bag, and finally be allowed deeper into the dark, sinister prison.

I've been second-guessing myself for days now, but the feeling is only getting more intense the closer I get to the man whose interview will no doubt launch my career from local paper writer to star journalist. I hope the danger is worth it because I'm terrified.

It took a lot of legwork on my end to get everything into place, but I have now received a rare privilege—a special permission to interview the notorious convicted murderer Tobin Tate, better known as the 'New Orleans Nightstalker'. After having just finished college, this is my first big assignment, my chance to prove myself. Never having been one for half measures, I skipped things like local courtroom dramas or more white-collar crimes to report on. I want big right out of the gate, and there's no one bigger on local minds right now than the New Orleans Nightstalker.

But as I make my way further into the prison, the reality of the situation begins to set in. Tobin Tate has been convicted of heinous crimes, and I'm about to come face to face with a man that has struck fear into the hearts of the city. All of the sudden, I feel young and inexperienced, but I'm driven by a thirst for the truth and a burning curiosity.

Because, ever since I first showed any sort of interest in Tobin's case, via a short letter written to him on the letterhead of the local newspaper I'm currently interning at, he's been in constant communication with me, swearing his innocence and...drawing me closer to him, as if he's a pied piper and I'm caught up in the spell of his song.

Anytime the furious need to interview him and see him face-to-face begins to morph into something unhealthy, I try to remind myself of what he did to those women...allegedly. Three young women, blond and innocent, strangled and dumped in the swamps for the gators. It makes me feel ill and shiver with nausea, but the reminders center me.

Approaching Tobin's cell, I'm filled with a mixture of fear and excitement. He has been through a trial that has captivated the nation, but as far as I know, I'm the only journalist he's agreed to speak to after being locked up. I'm about to be trapped in this tiny room with a man that has been deemed a monster. It freaks me out even as I remind myself that I must remain impartial to gather the facts.

Tobin hasn't exactly made it easy, though. His written words to me have been filled with promises of what kind of man he really is, as well as questions about what kind of woman would be so drawn to someone that the public has already deemed an unrepentant killer. I wish I could answer that question for myself, at least, but I can't. All I know is that I have to have this time with Tobin. I have to see for myself.

I've seen Tobin Tate's trial footage, and I know the evidence stacked against him. But I've also seen the doubts in the eyes of the jury, and I can't help but wonder if there's more to the story. I'm determined to uncover the truth, even if it means putting myself in danger. I won't let my emotions or fear impede the truth. I'm here to make history, and I won't let this opportunity slip away.

As I follow the two armed prison guards down the dimly lit hallway, my heart is pounding in my chest. I'm nervous and scared but also exhilarated. This interview is a once-in-alifetime opportunity.

Tobin Tate is considered dangerous, and so he's kept in solitary confinement. Despite everyone's advice, he had insisted that he would only do the interview if I was allowed to come into his cell alone. At first, the warden had forbidden it, but then I had called in a favor with a former professor whose brother was the governor. Even my professor had been baffled about why I wanted to be alone with the prisoner, but I had insisted that it was the best way to get a pure and honest story out of Tobin.

Before I know it, I stand before the entrance to the solitary cell, fear shooting through my veins right alongside an almost breathtaking exhilaration. One of the guards approaches me and hands me a small walkie-talkie. He looks at me sternly, his eyes incredibly serious as they look through mine as he speaks.

"Listen here, Miss. I don't need to tell you that this man you're about to interview is dangerous. He's a killer, a monster. So you need to be careful in there, alright?" he says, pointing to the big red button on the side of the walkie-talkie. "If you ever feel threatened, you don't need to say anything into it. Just push that button and we'll come in to get you immediately."

I nod, taking the walkie-talkie from him. I slip it into my pocket, feeling its weight against my hip. With my last few seconds before being thrown into the cell with Tate, I suck in a deep breath and mentally prepare myself to enter the dark, small room.

"Got it," I swallow hard. "Let's do this, then."

The guard simply shakes his head, muttering under his breath about how Tobin Tate isn't worth anyone's time. I ignore him, and with my head held high, I step into the cell as he swings the door open, holding a gray keycard against the electronic lock to disengage it.

It's time to face the notorious "New Orleans Nightstalker," to uncover the truth about the man behind the monster. My nerves are on edge, but my determination is unwavering. This is my moment, my chance to prove myself and uncover a story that will shake the world.

The room is small and windowless, with a single cot and a sink in the corner. The heavy, dank smell of mold and mildew is even stronger in here, and it's so dim that it takes a second for my eyes to adjust so I can see everything. My very first thought is how terrible that they have any human shoved into a place like this, shut away and forgotten like some sort of animal.

When my vision clears, Tobin is sitting on the edge of the cot, head down, his hair falling over his face. As I approach, I can see that he's much more handsome in person than he had appeared in the trial footage, but there's a dangerous glint in his forest green eyes. Tobin's hair is dark, but when the flickering light above hits it in just the right way, there's a warm hint of red there.

Before he had been convicted and doomed to these bright orange jumpsuits, he had worn tailored black suits to his trials, the lines of them showing the long, fit lines of his body. When the Louisiana courtroom would get too warm, he'd slide the suit jacket off and roll the sleeves of his also-black shirt up to display carved forearms, his skin warm and tan. It's no wonder so many women were distracted from his crimes and so

willing to write to him incessantly—Tobin is a gorgeous man, even now with an unhealthy pallor and his hair overgrown.

Neither of us speaks at first, and when the guard closes the door behind me with a clang, I nearly jump out of my skin. Tobin snorts in amusement. "Easy, honey," he rumbles, and those first words skitter across my nerves like white fire.

This man is a convicted murderer, but he has a following of devoted fans who believe that he is innocent. I've watched all the footage, and I'm fascinated by Tobin's story but also frightened by the monster that he's accused of being. Seeing him in person, though, and hearing him speak in that deep baritone voice, is something different altogether.

"Don't call me 'honey'," I hover near the cell door, the chill of the place sinking into my bones. "But you can call me Tory. Tory Sweet."

He raises his head and pushes that long hair out of his face and smiles like something predatory. "How about just 'sweets' then?"

I bristle. "Absolutely not. I had enough of that one my entire high school and college career, thank you very much."

"Sure thing, sweets." Tobin laughs, finding himself extraordinarily funny, and for some reason, this self-amused behavior makes some of my fear fade. It makes him seem more human.

I sit down on the opposite side of the cot, pulling out my leatherbound journal and pen, as well as the old tape recorder, keeping my head down so he doesn't see the way my mouth ticks up at the corner from his attempt at humor. Tobin watches my every move, his eyes moving with me, and I can feel his stare like a physical weight.

"Do you think we can begin now?" I ask.

"I suppose. I want to be a good host, after all." He settles himself against the wall, folding his arms behind his head. "Go ahead and get started, then."

This is it. The moment I've been preparing for. I'm either going to soar or crumble under the pressure. I take a deep

breath and begin my interview with Tobin Tate, the "New Orleans Nightstalker."

On the pages of my notebook, I have a list of questions scribbled down, in no certain order, but with his gruesome nickname tickling my mind, one of the queries sticks out, so that's where I decide to start.

I open my mouth, but then Tobin's hand shoots out and grabs me by the rest, causing my heart to shoot into my throat with terror.

"Think carefully about everything you say and do while in here," Tobin warns me in a low, menacing voice, the total antithesis to the joking demeanor he has displayed previously. "I don't believe there are security cameras in this cell, but I can never be too sure. We're never truly alone."

His words send a shiver down my spine, and I can feel my hands start to shake. I've always been driven by the thrill of the chase, but this is different. This is dangerous, and I can feel it in my bones. But I've come too far to turn back now. I set my teeth, steeling my nerves, and remind myself why I'm here. It's too important to give up now over a little fear.

I nod, trying to hide my fear and keep my focus. He's notorious for being unpredictable and dangerous, but when he sees my agreement, he slowly releases me and settles back into a comfortable position, as if the last minute didn't even happen.

"Got it," I respond, voice thready. "But, um," I clear my throat. "Let's get back to the interview. How do you feel about the moniker you've been given by the public, the 'New Orlean's Nightstalker'?"

He shrugs. "I'm what, the third famous 'Nightstalker'? I feel like they could have come up with something more creative."

"There were a few others that are still bandied around, but they didn't catch on. Do you prefer any of those, like 'The Bayou Butcher' or 'The Swampland Stranger'?"

Tobin scoffs. "Sweets, I never killed any of those women, so I don't *prefer* any of them." He rubs his stubbled chin with his

hand. "But if I had to pick, I guess 'Bayou Butcher' is the only one that isn't completely tired at this point."

I make a note as I continue speaking. "So since you're still so adamant that you're innocent, I assume that means you plan to appeal the verdict? And if so, what new information do you think your lawyer will bring to light in order to ensure your freedom?"

"Not much I can do from inside this damned cell, so I just have to hope that she—"

In the middle of Tobin speaking, there's a loud, almost deafening clank that echoes through the stone walls, and in an instant, the lights in the entire prison go out. The sudden darkness is jarring, and I jump, reaching into my pocket and wrapping my fingers around the walkie-talkie, feeling a small sense of comfort in its solidity. Tobin's cot creaks as he stands up too, and I can hear his footsteps coming closer to me in the dark. I take a step back, my heart racing.

"Don't worry, I won't hurt you," Tobin says, his voice low and smooth.

I want to believe him, but the fear is overwhelming. I take another step back, bumping into the wall of the cell. I can hear Tobin's breathing, and I know he's only a few inches away from me. I press the red button on the walkie-talkie with a shaking hand, hoping that the guards will come to my aid quickly.

The device beeps and the answering beep can be heard outside of the cell door, assumedly on one of the belts of the guards. There are muffled voices, and some haphazard pulling on the door handle, but the electronic lock has gone dead along with all the lights above us.

Fuck, I might be in trouble here.

"They can't get it, Tory," Tobin rumbles from somewhere in the dark. "I already said I won't hurt you."

With images of those strangled women in my head and my hand still on the walkie-talkie, I feel like I'm trapped. The

seconds stretch out into an eternity, and I realize that no one is coming to save me. I'm alone with Tobin Tate in the dark.

A t first, my attention is consumed by the sound of Tobin's steady breathing—in and out, in and out, but as the panic starts to ease, the noise of the rest of the prison starts to filter in. I hear the chaos outside the cell, the guards and other prisoners realizing that the power is out in the entire prison, then the sound of the guards once again pulling at the door futilely fills my ears, the old electronic locks refusing to work in either direction without power. Throughout the cacophony, the only light comes from a single, high window, casting a dim glow over the room.

Suddenly, Tobin is standing in front of me, his hand outstretched. He moves with a sense of purpose, his voice low and steady as he demands the walkie-talkie. I hesitate, feeling the weight of the situation bearing down on me. I don't know if I trust him, but I also don't have any other options.

"Give it to me if you want to make this as easy as possible," he repeats.

I reluctantly hand him the device, and he quickly crushes it beneath his foot. The crunch of the plastic and metal breaking echoes in the small cell, and I feel my heart racing with fear. I'm alone with a dangerous prisoner, and there's no way to call for help.

"What do you want?" I ask him, trying to keep my voice steady.

He gives me a calculating look, and I can see the wheels turning in his mind as he considers his next move. I know that I need to stay calm and be ready for anything, but I'm consumed with all the possibilities.

"Why did you do that?" I try another question, nodding down toward the crushed device. "They couldn't get in anyway."

"Because I need to make sure that no one can hear what we're about to say," Tobin replies, his eyes locked on mine.

"You mean you wanted me to be completely and totally trapped, right?"

He ignores the accusation and scrutinizes me with his piercing green eyes, and I can feel the weight of his gaze bearing down on me. "You made the right choice," he says, his tone low and intense. "Now, let's get down to business."

"W-what business, exactly?" I stutter, but he doesn't pressure me, instead waving to my now-discarded notebook.

"This interview that you seem to want so badly. Why are you so desperate to interview me, anyway?" Tobin asks, his voice deep and menacing.

"I want to know the truth," I reply, my voice shaking slightly.

"Do you think I'm innocent?" he asks, a smirk creeping across his lips.

"I don't know," I answer truthfully. "But I do think your trial was too quick, and that your defense seemed like they were being bribed to work against you."

He chuckles darkly, shifting the subject. "I've got a lot of admirers, you know. A lot of fan mail. Are you just another woman with a crush on me?"

I shake my head vehemently. "No, of course not."

He steps closer, his eyes gleaming in the sparse light. "Then do you find me attractive at least?"

I'm momentarily taken aback, and it takes me a moment to respond. "That's not relevant," I stammer.

He throws back his head and laughs, a deep, throaty cackle that echoes against the walls. "I think you're lying to yourself, Tory. I can see it in your eyes."

"I don't see how you can possibly see anything," I quip, trying not to appear as panicked as I am. I'm locked in this dark cell with him, and I'm not sure what to do. The guards have stopped trying to get in and the only sound I can hear is the faint sounds of the prison workers trying to contain the chaos outside. With hundreds of dangerous men on the loose, I guess a single vulnerable journalist must not be the priority.

The realization makes me feel utterly alone.

Tobin breaks the silence, "So, are you still going to do the interview?"

I hesitate, wondering if this is the best time, but then I realize there's nothing else to do but move forward. "Well...I guess it being dark doesn't change much. Let's do it."

He grins, "I'm excited to continue. And what about you, gorgeous?"

I try to ignore the compliment and steer the conversation back to the interview. "So, why did you agree to this interview?"

Tobin leans in, his voice low and seductive, "Well, I was hoping you'd be cute. It gets pretty lonely here, I have to admit. And here you are...all my wishes come true, little girl."

I repress a shiver of reluctant interest. "Stop that. Focus, please, or I'll have to cut this short."

"Ha. And go where? The other corner of the room? It's not like you can blame me. I've been staring at four gray walls and a bunch of dudes for months now and in walks you, you sinful little thing—all that long honey-blond hair, freckles, and tan skin. Hmm."

I feel my cheeks warm and try to steer the conversation back to more serious matters, "Can we please stick to the interview?"

He nods, but then his expression becomes serious. "If you really want to know why I agreed, it's because I felt an instant connection with you when I first read your letter. It was like nothing I've ever felt before."

I hesitate in the note I'm writing and look up at him, mouth going dry. "What do you mean?"

"I think you already know, Tory Sweets. Do you feel like we've met in another life? It feels that way for me." I try to speak, but Tobin won't let it go. "It feels like we're meant to meet," he says, his voice taking on a dreamy quality. "Don't you think?"

The hairs on the back of my neck stand up, and I can't help but feel like I'm in over my head. Even the thin daylight in the small window begins to fade as the sky outside goes a deep, menacing gray, thunder rumbling. The storm must have killed the power lines miles away, knocking out the prison electricity, and now it's on top of us, making it even harder for me to see the man in front of me. But Tobin's eyes are piercing, even in the shadows. He leans in closer, his gaze locked on mine, and I can feel the heat of his breath on my skin.

"Come on now, Tory," he tells me, his voice low and husky. "Don't be shy. You want the truth, don't you? The real story?"

I nod, unable to look away from him.

"Come a little closer and I'll tell you everything you've ever wanted to know, Sweets. I need to see your pretty face if we're going to really talk." He pats the cot next to him. "Right here, I think."

A denial is on my lips, but I pause. I am here to do a job, to uncover the truth, so what is another foot or so of personal space if I can get *all* of the information I crave? So, I do as he asks, but as I scoot closer, my leg brushing against his, I can feel my resolve faltering. The air between us crackles with dangerous energy, and I can feel my pulse racing in my veins.

Tobin smiles, his eyes gleaming with amusement. "Good girl," he says. "Now, let's really get to know each other, shall we?"

"I'm the only one that's going to be getting to know anyone," I point out, but freeze when I feel his hand on my knee, bare where my pencil skirt is riding up my thighs. His skin is so warm that it's almost hot, and my insides go molten. "Please don't touch me..."

"Go ahead and ask your questions, Sweets," he tells me. "As long as you're brave enough to sit here like this with me, I'll tell you every bit of truth you could ever want."

I swallow hard, trying to still my body. All I have to do is talk fast and this will all be over with. "I—well—how do you explain all the evidence found against you?"

With my question, his hand moves upward, the other one brushing my hair off my shoulder so he can speak directly into my ear. "It's all fabricated. When you're the law incarnate, it's a lot easier to enter fake evidence into trial without a problem."

"So you're saying someone in the government had it out for you?" My voice is breathy, but I'm not sure if it's with fear or the very, very unwelcome arousal that's starting to bloom inside me.

"Hmm, not necessarily me in particular, but I think I'm just a scapegoat..." Tobin's fingers are under my skirt now, tracing a heated path to my panties. "I'm just unlucky, I guess...but you're being such a good girl, Tory. Keep on asking."

"Don't you think it's a little hard to believe that someone in the government would fabricate an entire case against you, a random person? It must have taken a—ah, Tobin..." His fingers graze my slit over my panties, and my brain stutters to a stop. *I can't let this happen!* I think frantically, but my body doesn't respond in kind. Instead, it's on high alert, soaking up every bit of attention.

"Keep asking those questions, Sweets," he repeats, tone husky, fingers stroking up and down.

"It must have taken an incredible amount of effort to create something like that from scratch," I manage to finish, just as the hand on my shoulder moves down to my chest, expertly undoing the buttons on my silk blouse.

"Not if they just photoshopped the real killer out and inserted me in," he points out. Tobin pulls my panties aside and parts the folds of my pussy, damp with need, and growls. "Look at you, Tory, soaking wet for a killer, huh? Maybe I'm not so unlucky after all."

In one last attempt to control the situation, I move to pull away, but Tobin holds onto me tightly before resuming his caresses. "You want your answers, then you have to stay here with me," he insists. "But you're finding it hard, aren't you?"

All I can do is nod, feeling his fingers find my clit as pleasure crashes through me.

"Let me make that a little easier on you then, Sweets" he purrs, pulling his hand away from my pussy and putting all his attention on undoing my shirt. When he slides the slick fabric down my arms, he stands in front of me, stopping the blouse at my arms so my wrists are still in the sleeves, and tying the entire thing behind my back in a tight knot. I'm trapped by my own clothing, and now fear is building again like an inferno alongside my need for him. With him in front of me, his green eyes almost black with arousal and his messy hair hanging in his face, there's no denying that it's the New Orlean's Nightstalker messing with me like this.

"Better?" he asks. "Now you don't have to be so distracted."

I shake my head. "No. Undo me. I can't write if you've got me like this."

Tobin tsks, "You're about to get the most exclusive scoop that anyone has ever gotten, Tory, and all you have to do is hold still. You know what might make it more fun?" He picks up the old tape recorder and turns it on, the cassette whirring within, before stopping it again. "Perfect. We'll just use this so you can still ask your questions, hands-free. Just don't make too many extra noises, or it might be a little embarrassing when you play it back, hm? What do you think?"

I pull at my bonds, but they're snug. "You're just pretending to give me a choice, aren't you?"

His smirk is sharp. "You've caught me. I'm going to touch you, Tory, either way. At least this way you get something out of it. But if you just want to make this hard, I guess we can. My mouth can stay busy without a bunch of questions."

Oh, God, I think, closing my eyes and holding back the sob that wants to escape. I've never had so many emotions warring in me, but if I turn my body over to him, the attraction is so strong between us that all these fearful ideas will be drowned out soon enough. But how can I let the hands of some potential murderer be all over me?!

Tobin cups my breasts through the white lace bra, thumbs flicking over my nipples until I squirm. "Make the call, Sweets."

"Fine," I gasp. "Turn on the recorder. Just don't-"

"I already said I won't hurt you," he nips at the sensitive skin of my neck. "Now, let's get back to work."

The tape recorder whirs to life, and then his hands are back on me, pushing my skirt up my legs until it's bunched around my waist, matching white panties on full display. I look up towards the dark ceiling, trying to concentrate. "So you're saying you were framed, but you can't provide any sort of alibi, is that correct?"

He pushes my legs wide and presses himself between them, grinding himself on me while his busy fingers hook my bra. In some unfortunate twist of fate, I wore the only front-clasp brassiere I own today, so it's all too easy for him to push the thing down my arms just like my blouse. I shiver when the damp, cold prison air hits my nipples while his eyes rove over me so intensely I can almost feel them.

"Whoever framed me had enough money to pay off my job so they burned my time cards. I worked at a family-owned car repair garage while I paid off my student loans, but they were more than willing to throw me under the bus if it came with a big paycheck, so my only alibi disappeared," Tobin tells me while cupping my now-bare breasts, his thumbs repeating their previous movements on my naked flesh. It feels so good that I can barely concentrate, all the pleasure melting down to my core as I try to keep my moans at bay, not wanting them to be caught on the recording.

"Surely there are other ways of verifying-ah!" His mouth closes over one nipple, burning hot as he sucks. "V-verifying

your location. Cameras, or-"

Tobin lets my nipple slip out between his lips long enough to tell me, "Maybe, but that's why they locked me up so quickly. So none of that could be found."

There are things I *have* to ask him, questions that I've repeated to myself over and over again, but as his mouth works over my tits and one hand starts to work my panties down my legs, I can't recall a single one of them. When his thumb starts to circle my clit, spreading my wetness as he does so, it's hard to even formulate a thought. But I have to keep going because if not, I'm just letting the New Orleans Nightstalker ravage me for nothing...

"Did you do it?" I blurt out, and he raises his head from my chest to look me in the eye. "Did you kill those women?" I repeat, panting.

"No," he growls, sliding one digit into my channel with aching slowness. "Do you believe me?"

I can't answer him, and he knows it, but that doesn't stop him from pushing and pulling that one finger in and out while this thumb continues to stroke my engorged clit, making pleasure whip through me in blinding surges. Here we are, in the almost-pitch black, a storm raging outside fully now. I can feel the tension building in me, my legs shaking, but we're getting almost too far...

With a muttered curse, Tobin captures my mouth with his, and there's no softness to be found. It's just an overwhelming, pent-up need that he kisses me with, his tongue invading my mouth and mapping every inch of it, biting at my lips before delving deep again. I almost cry out in disappointment when his hands move away from my pussy when he grabs my hips and drags me across the rough cot so he can grind against me, hard. The length of his cock presses through his jumpsuit like an iron bar, and I'm all too aware there's only one layer of fabric separating us.

"Do you believe me?" Tobin grits out against my lips.

"I don't know," I plead.

"I can prove it to you," he swears, still rocking his hips into mine, one zipper pull away from sliding his cock into me. "Not here, but I can. *Damn*, I want you Tory, but you're not going to let me fuck you—" he thrusts hard, and I can't help but cry out, recording be damned. "Are you?"

"I-I can't stop you..."

"I can make you feel so good, baby girl." Now he pulls the zipper at his neck down, down, down, revealing the lines and planes of his muscular chest, the dark line of hair leading between his legs, and then—

"We can't," I tell him, even as he kisses a line down my neck, pulling his cock out, stroking the ridiculously long length of it with a practiced motion.

"We can," he corrects. "But if you don't want it, then just say so." Tobin pinches my nipples, his face so close to mine that we're almost touching. "Tell me you don't want me to fuck you, Tory."

Mind reeling, I come to the startling conclusion that I do want him to fuck me. I've never wanted anything this badly, criminal or not, and he has me feeling so good already that I know it will be a life-altering experience, but my want doesn't change the facts of it all.

No... I'm not worried that anyone will catch us. At this point, I don't even care about that. And I'm not worried about ruining my career by letting a killer fuck me in his jail cell because what Tobin said was true—there has been a connection between us since the beginning, and I've probably been convinced of his innocence for much longer than I'm willing to admit to myself.

I want Tobin Tate, even if that makes me a monster, too. But still...

"Can't," I gasp, feeling the blunt head of his cock sliding between my pussy lips, up and over my clit, and then back to my entrance, where he freezes at my words. "Not like this. I'm a virgin." Tobin is completely still, before he hisses, "Fuck," jerking his zipper back up to his stomach again, and raking a hand through his hair. "Why didn't you tell me?" he demands. "I was seconds away."

"I'm sorry! I never thought we would end up like this Tobin," I admit, any of the professionalism long gone as I speak to him with more familiarity than the two of us should have. "When we were writing to each other, you never said we—"

"Shut up, Tory," he hisses again, turning the tape recorder off and slapping a hand over my mouth. "We never know who is listening, remember?"

I turn my head to get his hand off me, but he removes it of his own accord, replacing it with his mouth again. I squirm, but it's useless when he's touching me like this. In this awful place, Tobin tastes like heaven and smells like deep evergreen forests, and when he's kissing me, we're anywhere but here.

"You're still going to be a good girl for me, aren't you?" he asks between kisses. "Because not being able to fuck you doesn't mean that I'm not going to make you come."

"What—" I start, but then he moves his mouth back to my tits, this time biting my stiff peaks before licking away the sting, shoving my legs apart at the same time.

"The right response is 'Yes, Tobin," he growls, nipping at me even sharper, making me yelp. "Say it."

"Yes, Tobin," I breathe, and then he's sucking and licking the tiny shock of pain away again. Once it's completely gone, Tobin slides down my body, hands on my knees, and I'm all too aware of what's going to come next.

I don't know if I can handle it, but his mind is already made up. "Good girl...you're such a good little girl for me, Tory. Let's see if you're still so good when I taste this pussy."

He doesn't waste any more time before burying his face between my thighs, tongue splitting me open and lathing every inch of my soaked pussy, pressing deep into my channel before licking devastating circles around my clit, lighting up the bundle of nerves and shooting sparks of pure bliss through my entire body. I want to grab his hair in my fists, but I'm still tied tightly, helpless as he licks and sucks at me.

"Does it feel good, baby?" he asks, looking up at me.

I know what he wants me to say, and I'm all too glad to give it at this point. "Yes, Tobin!"

He sucks my clit between his lips, inter-spreading suction with swirls of his tongue until I'm writhing against his face. Tobin wraps an arm around my waist to hold me still, the wet sounds of him eating my pussy filling the small cell, somehow louder than everything else. I sit up just enough to look down at him, his tongue spreading my pussy wide, and it's so erotic that I almost can't take it.

"Next time I see you," he says against my flesh, "I'm going to fuck you, do you hear me? So—" I feel two fingers this time at my entrance, pressing inside. "I'm going to get you ready for me right now, that way when I do, I can fill you up with my cock right away."

I don't question what he's saying, or the seeming impossibility of him getting out of prison to fuck me, too lost in how he's making me feel. There's a bomb inside of me, about to explode, and each swipe of his tongue or lips gets me closer and closer. The fullness of his fingers is stretching me, but it doesn't hurt as he works himself inside, but just adds to all the sensations rocking me.

My legs are shaking where he's lifted them over his shoulders, and all I can do is fall backward as the first spasms start to take over, but at that very moment, Tobin thrusts his two fingers deep and something pinches inside of me, a quick burst of pain that makes me cry out. Tobin doesn't speak, but turns up the intensity, sucking my clit relentlessly while he curls his fingers inside my channel, hitting a spot deep within that banishes all the pain in an instant, replacing it with pleasure so strong that I'm immediately on the verge of orgasm again.

He curls his fingers twice more, and then I'm coming on his face so hard that it's blinding, my muscles bearing down on his digits in spasms that wrack my body with sensation. Nothing has ever felt this good, and he continues to lick and

suck at my pussy as the waves of my orgasm crash over me again and again. There's no way they don't hear me crying out from pleasure outside the walls, but I don't care. This is worth *everything*.

As my soul comes back down from the ceiling and into my body once more, the song of the summer storm filters through the buzzing in my head until it's all I hear. Tobin is gentle as he pulls my panties back up and straightens my skirt before carefully untying the blouse that is still around my arms. It never became painful, but as the blood rushes back into my ignored fingers, I hiss, flexing them before shrugging my bra back on, followed by my shirt.

Tobin has lifted himself back on the cot, dragging his forearm over his wet mouth in a motion that has me blushing, before he fixes his jumpsuit. What I just did is so far beyond appropriate, and so far beyond anything that I expected to be doing, that I can't even feel guilty yet.

But I'm sure that will come later.

Finally, I can't stand the silence between us, not with the way I'm still pulsing between my legs. "Do you think they know?" I ask, waving towards the cell door.

He shrugs one massive shoulder. "I don't know. We might have gotten lucky. I'm not too good at telling time anymore, but I think when you got here, it was about thirty minutes before rec time, which means most of the prison was probably outside in the yard when the power went down." He chuckles to himself. "And that, Sweets, could cause a whole hell of a lot of chaos."

Curious, and feeling the first shivers of shame, I stand on my shaky legs and walk to the cell door, pressing my ear against it. "Hello?"

Nothing.

"Hello?" I try again, and still, there is silence. I can hear noises in the distance, but directly outside the door, it sounds like the hallway is empty.

Slightly miffed, I cross my arms. "I can't believe they would just abandon me in here."

"Now now, baby girl, you know you had a good time," he drawls. I sigh and retake my seat next to him on the cot.

"Well this is not how I planned this visit to go," I tell him. "Or this day, for that matter."

"That goes the same for me too," he replies. I feel him put a finger under my chin and turn my face towards his, just as lightning illuminates the room for a brief second, showing me his masculine, gorgeous face in the white light. "But we'll make it work, won't we?"

"Yeah...we sort of have to." I let my eyes flutter closed, and allow myself a few moments of self-loathing. "God, this is wrong on so many levels."

"Only if you let yourself believe it is, Sweets. Now, I think we need to actually do an interview if we want to sell this whole visit as legit and not a sneaky conjugal interlude. You think we can get that done fast?"

I watch him gather my things, handing me the tape recorder, notebook, and pencil case before sitting himself down next to me once more, and I struggle to find any terror or apprehension left in me. It's a heavy thing to acknowledge that I really think this man is innocent because once I admit it to myself, then the burden of helping to set him free lies on my shoulders.

"You're being honest about not killing those women, aren't you?" I whisper, and Tobin nods without a word.

"Hell," I say softly, resting my head in my hands. "I believe you."

"Well between you, me, and my mama, that makes three." When Tobin smiles at me now, there is kindness behind the frightening, cold facade. "I'll take those odds."

TWENTY MINUTES LATER, just as suddenly as the lights disappeared, they flicker back on, and Tobin and I are thrown back into the real world all at once.

"They'll be here any second," he tells me as we do one last check of ourselves to make sure we look the same as when I first arrived. "Don't give them any indication that things are different. Don't even let it seem like you have even a little bit of compassion toward me, alright? I'm going to be a prick, and you're going to be offended by it."

The image of his dark head between my legs flashes across my mind, but I stuff it away as fast as I can, as if the guards will be able to pull it right out of my mind and see my guilt. "Alright. I can do that."

As I gather my things and prepare to leave Tobin's cell, I feel a heavy weight settle in my chest. I can't shake the feeling that I'm leaving something important behind, like I'll never have the chance to see him again. He looks just as disappointed as I feel, which only confirms my belief that he's innocent.

"I hate leaving you here," I confess, my voice barely above a whisper.

He gives me a small smile and reaches out to take my hand. "I'll be okay, Tory, but you have to go."

The guards come in and their expressions change when they see me sitting on the floor, far from Tobin who is on the bed. They look suspicious, and I can see them exchanging worried looks, but I simply stand and brush myself off. "It's about time!" I scold. "Good to know I was a high priority for you!"

They wince at the sarcasm. "There was no way for us to get in here. Are you hurt?" The guard on the right asks.

I look down at their hands—one has a taser, and the other handcuffs, ready to take Tobin out at any indication he did something wrong. "He was a perfect gentleman," I insist.

Their faces are skeptical, but I also know that it will be a lot less of a headache for them if I come out of this unscathed and not brutalized by their worst prisoner. It takes a second, but I see relief visibly settle over them once they realize I'm being serious.

"Okay...good," the second guard says while the other backs Tobin into the corner so he can't bolt when they let me out. "Storm is letting up, so let's get you the hell out of here and into the storm shelter while we still have a chance."

Once more before following the guard out, I take a long look at Tobin, committing him to memory and wishing I had more time with him. He returns my gaze with a sad smile, and I feel like my heart is being ripped in two.

The guards insist that we have to hurry up and get to the storm shelter portion of the prison because the power is coming from the backup generator and won't last forever, and there's a tornado warning. I agree at first, just so they don't linger in Tobin's cell any longer than they have to, but as we're shuffled towards the shelter, I tell them I've had a change of heart and that I'm going home. An argument ensues, but now that the interview is over, they aren't responsible for me. So at the first opportunity, I slip away and back to my own car to drive home despite the storm.

As I drive through the wind and rain, I can't shake the feeling that I'm leaving something behind. Something more than just a full interview, and a large portion of my innocence. At a stop light, I look at my passenger seat, and tuck my loose items, the tape recorder, and the notebook, into my messenger bag so I don't forget them. My thoughts are a jumbled mess, and I don't trust myself to remember a single extra thing for the rest of the day.

Even once I'm home, the storm still rages outside, but in my heart, a different kind of storm is brewing. A storm of questions, doubts, and a desperate need for the truth.

F or a few minutes, the tornado sirens sound, but as expected, no one comes for me. They don't last very long, but even if the storm had reached a fever pitch, I can't help but feel like I'd rather be in the midst of it all than in this tiny, bleak cell that has been my prison for months now.

I had railed against the injustice of it all for the first week or so that I had been locked up, but eventually, the monotony and inevitability of it got to me. Time passed in a blur, and I was slowly coming to terms with the fact that this was to be my life now. And then, suddenly, there was a ray of hope. Tory walked in. She was like a breath of fresh air, and just seeing her brought a glimmer of hope into my otherwise dark and lonely existence.

We had written letters back and forth for weeks, but I never really believed that she would come here. I hadn't even had time to ask how she managed it, having to keep up the facade she expected of me, before things dissolved into me on my knees before her. Now I might not ever see her again, but at least I had the opportunity to taste her before our time was up. God, even the thought of it makes me half-hard.

With the power fiasco, I know it's unlikely I'll be given any dinner tonight, so sleep is about the only thing left for me to do. I lie on my cot, resigned to satisfying myself with memories of Tory instead of food, when I feel something hard and rectangular under my pillow. Curious, I raise up enough to pull it out, the small thing heavy in my grip. It's a pencil case, the same one Tory brought in with her, but seeing it makes me

frown. I know I handed it to her before she was escorted out, which means she must have left it on purpose. What in the hell could she expect me to do with pens and pencils?

Still, the thought of having something of hers in my hand makes the awful night a little less terrible, so I unzip it, wanting to touch the same things that she has recently, just to feel a little closer. But when I pick up the first pen, something is off about it. The weight isn't right.

A shock runs through me. There's no way she would take a risk like this...

With my heart in my throat, I unscrew the top portion of the ink pen, and it quickly becomes apparent that the pen casing is just a facade. I shake out whatever is within, and into my palm falls a syringe marked *KETAMINE*.

My heart is pounding and my hands are shaking as I unscrew the others. Three of the five pens are syringes... Tory left me tranquilizers, and with them, a real means of escape. The fourth pen is just a pen, but inside the fifth is a rolled-up piece of paper with nothing but an address on it.

I'm filled with gratitude for Tory—gratitude so strong that it almost feels like love. She's left me a chance or freedom at a huge risk to herself, and a map to make my way to her. Freedom, and the chance to be with the woman I knew was mine the minute she walked into my cell, is more than I deserve, innocent or not. But I'll take them either way. If I was a better man I'd flush the syringes down the toilet and never think about them, or her, ever again, because I know what kind of risk this puts her in... but even though I'm not a killer, I'm not necessarily a good man, either.

I'm getting the fuck out of here, and I'm finding Tory. Just thinking about her beautiful face and soft, curvy body makes my mouth water at the memory of her taste.

Then, as if fate itself is conspiring to give me a chance, the tornado sirens go off again. I guess the prison staff can't justify 'forgetting' me a second time, so within minutes, I hear the click of my cell lock as two exhausted, pissed-off guards

come to escort me to the basement level of the prison where they're moving the convicts for safety.

Don't worry boys, I think, amused, I'll make sure you get some rest.

It's all too easy to slip a syringe up each sleeve while they fumble for the cuffs to put on me. In another stroke of insane luck, neither of them has their handcuffs, having used them on two other prisoners out in the yard before throwing them back in their cells still cuffed according to what they tell each other. I've never been too much trouble to move, so, despite my reputation as a killer and every basic rule they must have learned as correction officers, I hear them speaking quietly to each other and agreeing just to get the first pair of cuffs off the next guard they run into. Both of them are freaked out by the prospect of a tornado, something we don't see often around here, and it will be their hurry to save their own skin that will assure my escape.

In the place of cuffs, each guard grabs one of my arms and walks me out of the cell. I let each syringe slide into my restrained hands, thumbs over the plungers. I have to make this happen before we're out of the empty solitary hallway. There's a man on each side of me, both of them stressed to the max, but there's no time to decide which target should be first.

So, in one fell swoop, I make my move. I swiftly pull out the tranquilizers and administer them to both guards, using their shock to my advantage. The first man is easy, the needle sinking into the side of his neck and taking him down in seconds, but the other has his hand on his sidearm by the time I'm able to tackle him to the ground. I'm not a small man, and while the corrections officer might have a few dozen pounds over me, I've spent so much of my time here working out that it isn't too much of a struggle to put an arm on his throat while the other injects him in the neck, too. Watching him slump into unconsciousness is almost unreal....this is my chance. My only chance, and it's time to move.

After pulling the key cards off both unconscious guards, I sprint down the empty hallway, dodging obstacles like open doors and discarded supplies as I go. My heart is pounding in

my chest, and I feel an adrenaline rush like I've never experienced before. I know that I need to get out of the prison as quickly as possible, and I don't stop until I reach a side door that leads outside. It's barred and marked with at least five warning signs, but the key card unlocks it easily, and with everyone in the storm shelter, no one sees me go.

The storm is raging outside, but I don't hesitate. I run into the rain, feeling the wind and rain whip at my face. I've never felt so alive, and for the first time in weeks, I feel a sense of freedom. I know that I have a long journey ahead of me, but I'm determined to make the most of this opportunity.

I can't shake Tory from my mind. Every time I close my eyes, I see her beautiful face, her long honey-blond hair, and her freckles. She was so brave to come in and interview me, and our connection was instant. I imagine her beneath me or kneeling in front of me with my cock in her mouth, and the promise of that makes me move even faster. She was even braver to leave me the tranquilizers so I could escape, and I plan on making it up to her in every possible way once I find her again.

I remember how she looked at me with those big, warm eyes, and I could tell she believed in my innocence. I could see it in the way she leaned in, listening intently to every word I said. I see a future with this woman that I could have never dreamed of before, and it's the thought of her, swollen with our child and glowing, that keeps me warm even as the rain chills my body.

I know the odds are against me, and I'm a wanted man now, but I have to try. I have to see Tory again and find a way to make things right. I won't let anything stand in my way.

During my flight, I stay close to the walls until I can slip out of the car gate, but it's pitch black out here, and my feet sink deeper into the muck with each step. Normally, stopping during a prison escape would be a quick ticket back behind bars, but tonight is different. I may have hours before my absence is noted, so when I see a small, squat building ahead of me, I take the chance and make my way there, desperate for a bit of shelter. It's a maintenance shed, full of rusted tools and

cobwebs, but at least I'm not getting more soaked by the minute here. I need to wait out the worst of this storm if I want to have any hope of getting to Tory without drowning first.

I lay myself down on the floor of the old maintenance shed, exhausted from my escape as the adrenaline slowly bleeds away. The sound of the storm raging outside is the only thing keeping me company as I struggle to stay awake. But eventually, my heavy eyes win, and I drift off into a deep sleep.

I DON'T KNOW how long I sleep, but when I wake up, it's the middle of the night, and the sirens that had lulled me to sleep now sound different. My heart races as I realize that these aren't the tornado sirens that I had fallen asleep to. They're the escaped prisoner sirens, and the storm is pretty much over.

I can see the lights of a city not too far in the distance and I know that's where I need to go. I step out of the shed, taking my first steps toward freedom, towards the unknown. I pay attention to every single sound as I run once more, my feet pounding against the pavement.

Eventually, I come to a gas station on the outskirts of the city. I see a car, an old Buick, with the keys still in the ignition and I make a split-second decision. Thus far, I've been framed for every crime I've been accused of, but I guess I'm going to have to break a few laws in order to get justice for myself. With one last look to make sure that the car's owner can't see me out of the gas station window, I jump in, rev the engine and take off into the night.

"Oh shit," I chuckle to myself, sort of in shock. "Really living up to reputation now aren't you, *Nightstalker?*"

I know that I'm taking a risk, but I have to keep moving. I have to keep going. I'm not sure what the future holds, but I'm determined to make the most of this opportunity. To find Tory and see her face again. To prove my innocence and start over. This is just the beginning of my journey.

At a stop light, I dig the pencil case out of my jumpsuit pocket and unscrew the fake pen with the address paper curled inside. Thankfully, the plastic kept it dry during my flight, and Tory included rough directions from the prison to her home. She was definitely taking a gamble, assuming I'm familiar with the area, but her hunch was right. I'm less than an hour from her...the thought makes a smirk pull at my mouth.

As I make my way toward Tory's house, my pulse pounds in my ears, my blood heating with the knowledge of what I'm going to do to her once we are together once more. I've been dreaming of this moment for what feels like an eternity, even if it's only been a few hours. I've never obsessed about a woman like this before... Hell, I've barely had more than a passing interest in one before, either, so falling hard for the little journalist is a totally new experience for me.

The stolen car I drove gets left behind as I approach her house, the sound of its engine fading away as I push it into neutral and let it roll down a hill and into a swampy lake. I want to make sure that no one follows me to her house, so I walk the rest of the way on foot.

She lives in an upscale neighborhood, but on the outskirts of the group of houses, so her backyard borders nothing but swampland, which allows me to approach her bedroom window without being seen by any nosy neighbors.

Every second I'm getting closer to actually being some sort of predator, I think, pressing my hands against the glass. She's left the curtain open, like she knew I would be here tonight.

As I peer inside, I'm struck by the sight of Tory sleeping peacefully in her bed. I can hardly believe that I'm finally here, so close to her in the real world, not in the confines of the prison. I'm relieved to see that the window is unlocked, so I don't have to pound on it and frighten her, and I take a deep breath before carefully opening it and climbing inside. Tory stirs as soon as she hears the window opening, but when she sees that it's me, she relaxes and greets me with a warm smile. My heart swells with happiness, and I feel a rush of gratitude toward her for giving me a chance to start a new life, free from the constraints of prison. But my genuine appreciation for

Tory is quickly eclipsed by need when I see what she's wearing—nothing but a cream-colored silk robe, the dark points of her nipples visible through the fabric.

"You did it," she breathes, eyes shining. "I can't believe you're here"

I can't wait. I lean over, grabbing her chin roughly and slamming my mouth into hers, desperate to prove to myself that this isn't just a dream. Tory tastes like mint and honey, and after a second of shock, she's kissing me back, pulling me towards the bed before freezing.

"Tory," I groan, "What-"

"Undress," she commands. "You're soaking wet."

I chuckle, unzipping the orange jumpsuit and letting the wet thing fall to the ground, discarded. "Do you want me to shower, Sweets? It's been a long night, and I've come a long way."

She chews her lip, considering, before shaking her head. "Can you make it quick?"

I give her the affirmative, and she points me towards the ensuite bathroom, declining my invitation to join, choosing instead to just tell me once more to make it quick. After cleaning myself faster than I ever have in my entire life, I dry off with a fluffy towel and make my way back to the bedroom to join Tory in her queen-size bed. She's sitting up, waiting on me, and opens her arms as soon as I reach the end of the mattress. I let the towel around my waist slide down to join my jumpsuit on the floor, crawling to Tory so I can wordlessly untie her robe, pushing her backward with a single finger between her breasts so I can see all of her.

In the moonlight, she's a flawless thing, and more importantly, all mine. She lies back on her elbows, robe wide open, only the single slip of her underwear hiding her body from me. There are shadows of bruises on her soft thighs where I held her in place to lick her pussy earlier, and I want to leave more signs of my claim on her so the entire world knows that Tory is mine, but that will have to come later. If she's going to let

me be the first person to fuck her, then I'm going to have to go much slower than I want.

Her eyes go heavy as I pick up one delicate foot and kiss the hollow of her ankle, then her calf, and keep going. Tory falls backward with a sigh but jumps when my lips graze the skin of her inner thigh with my lips.

"Tobin!" she exclaims when I don't stop and put my mouth between her legs like she so clearly wants, but instead I continue my ascent over her skin.

"Patience, baby girl," I tell her, and she makes a noise that is so full of want I feel my cock surging forward against the bedsheets.

"We could be arrested at any second," she points out. "Sorry if I don't exactly have a ton of patience."

"We've got until the morning. That's plenty of time for me to make good on my promise." I punctuate my words by sucking on the spot of her neck where her pulse thrums.

"Promise?" she asks dreamily.

"To fuck you, sweet girl. Remember, I got you all ready for me earlier, so it doesn't have to hurt at all. You just need to lie back and take this cock."

When I rub my manhood against her thighs as I speak, her eyes go wide, but she doesn't push me away but pulls me into a kiss instead. I take my time with her mouth now that I have the luxury over it, kissing and licking at her until I memorize every sigh and sweet sound that she makes, before leaving her sweet lips to trace a path over her jawline, along her neck, and to her collarbone.

Tory is soft and pliable until I reach her breasts, but as I plump them with my hands and rub the stubble of my cheeks over her taut peaks, her body goes stiff as if electrified. I take my time here, too, using my teeth in tiny nibbles before licking away any pain until her moans come freely, her feet working restlessly on the bed beside us. The clean, sweet taste of her skin is subtle, but I know where it's even more delicious.

Now that her hands are free, Tory drags her nails across my scalp when I part her folds with my tongue, her heady flavor filling my mouth. I've never been harder in my life, but I have to make the moment last. Who knows when the next time we will have even a moment to ourselves?

Her pussy takes two of my fingers easily, gripping them hard as Tory starts to work her hips against me, and as addicting as it is to hear her sounds of bliss as I pleasure her with my mouth, it's almost time to make her mine completely. I need her as close to the edge as possible before I fill her, and we're rapidly approaching that point. Tory wraps her legs around my head, her inner walls fluttering when I curve my fingers deep within her to hit her g spot, but I don't let her grind herself against me to completion. When she comes tonight, it's going to be on my cock.

It's a struggle to untangle myself from her, and her disappointment is palpable, but she still loops her arms around my neck when I kiss her while I position myself outside of her dripping entrance. Carefully, I take one of her quivering legs and lay it over my shoulder while my other hand holds my manhood in place.

"I'm about to stretch this tight little pussy out, baby girl," I growl. "I hope you're ready."

She only whimpers but nods, and with that, I push forward.

Tory is so tiny, and I'm far from it, so at first, her body resists the invasion of my member. But inch by agonizing inch, her pussy allows me access, her walls gripping me like a vise. Every bit of ground I gain takes an infinite amount of patience, and by the time I finally bottom out in her, there's sweat beading on my forehead from the exertion. Her hands are fisted in the sheets, pupils blown wide.

"I'm inside you, Tory," I grit out. "All the way inside you, baby."

"Oh my *God*," she keens. Her fair skin is flushed, color high on her cheeks. "I-I can't believe it fits."

I grab her face with my hand, forcing her to look me in the eye as I begin to move, pulling out nearly all the way before pushing back home with equal slowness. "You're made for me," I growl, pistoning into her again, harder this time. "That's why you take me so well."

Watching her face and her bouncing tits as I fuck her would be enough to make me want to explode all on their own, but feeling the way her channel sucks me in is like nothing I've ever experienced. It takes all of my willpower to fuck her slowly and deliberately, pushing the broad head of my cock over her g spot with each thrust until her words become unintelligible, her neck and back stiff with the intensity of the pleasure I'm bringing her. Like this, I can pinch her nipples and stroke her clit with my thumb, amplifying everything she's feeling to a fever pitch, and seeing her experience all of this for the first time will be seared into my brain forever.

Tory nearly screams when she starts to orgasm, her inner walls gripping me and spasming hard. I feel a hot rush of warmth as she comes all over my cock, her cries of pleasure turning into sobs of ecstasy as she careens out of control, the climax wracking her body in hard waves.

Knowing that I've gotten her over the edge means that I can give up any pretenses of being in control, so I fuck her with abandon, the sound of our flesh slapping together echoing off the bedroom walls. My balls tighten up against my body, the tension that has been growing to unbearable levels at the base of my spine snapping like a rubber band as the hardest orgasm I've ever had rips through me, whiting out my vision. Seeing and feeling me come has Tory shuddering with the aftershocks of her own peak.

God, nothing has ever felt this good. I fall forward, holding my weight on my elbows as my arms still shake, kissing Tory languidly as our bodies come back down to earth.

"You're mine," I whisper into her ear. "From the moment you walked into that fucking cell, you were mine, you know that?"

I think that she's just too taken aback to say anything, but when we break the kiss, she whispers, "Yes, only yours." THE NEXT MORNING dawns bright and full of promise, with Tory warm and sleepy in my arms. She invites me, with mischievous eyes, into the shower with her, and I'm more than happy to oblige.

Last night, I had barely registered the hedonistic, simple joy of the shower, just wanting to get back to Tory's bed, but I take some time to savor it with her now. I step in with her, hot water raining down on my skin. It's been weeks since I've had a proper shower like this, one where I can stand for as long as I want without the threat of a guard telling me to hurry up or water so cold it feels like it will shatter my bones. I close my eyes and tilt my head back, letting the water wash over my face, as the woman I adore wraps her arms around my waist from behind, planting kisses along my spine.

I take a deep breath, inhaling the steamy air, and let out a long sigh. The sensation is indescribable. The freedom to linger, to use as much soap and shampoo as I need, and to not have to worry about anyone watching me, is truly liberating, but it all pales in comparison to *her*.

I reach for the soap and lather it up in my hands, inhaling the sweet, sugary scent that reminds me so much of Tory. I move her in front of me and rub it over her shoulders, arms, and breasts until she's flush and panting. Tory returns the favor, and the feeling of the bubbles and her clever hands on my skin is pure bliss.

The water continues to cascade down my body, and I let out a contented sigh. The warmth of the shower soothes my muscles and relaxes me. I could stand here forever.

We end up with Tory against the wall, her legs around me as I drive into her, until she reaches a shivering orgasm, sobbing her bliss into my neck.

After dressing in the sweats Tory had bought me in the hopes I would make it to her, I sit at the dining room table, my eyes fixated on the sunrise that streams through the windows. The

hues of pink and orange illuminate the room, and the warm glow engulfs me. I take a sip of my coffee, savoring the taste and the freedom I now have. I know it won't last long, but for now, I'll soak it in.

My eyes are fixated on the sunrise streaming through the windows. Hues of pink and orange illuminate the room, a warm glow engulfing me. Savoring the taste and freedom of my coffee, I take a sip. I know this won't last long, but for now, I'll soak it in.

Gently swaying cypress trees catch my eye as I peer out the window. Spanish moss hangs low, almost reaching the ground. Inhaling the sweet scent of magnolias and warm, humid air, I remind myself that this is Louisiana, my home.

Unfortunately, home is no longer safe for me. I've been framed for crimes I didn't commit. To clear my name, I must go on the run. I'm innocent, but the law won't listen. Leaving everything behind, I must do it now.

For the moment, I'll relish in my freedom. Closing my eyes, I take another sip of coffee, letting the warm sun wash over my face. For a moment, I forget the danger that lies ahead.

The New Orleans Nightstalker, I think, my stomach sinking. In court, they had forced us all to look at those horrific images of women brutalized and killed so many times that it had made me physically ill. Knowing that, how could the jury have still convicted me? Falling into the darkness of those thoughts is all too easy, but then I see Tory move out of the corner of my eye, refilling her cup, and I can breathe again.

"Come here, Sweets," I tell her, and she does, moving across the floor until she can settle in my lap, her legs slung over mine as she cradles her cup.

We sip our coffee, both lost in thought before Tory breaks the silence, her voice filled with wonder. "I can't believe it actually worked," she says. "Our plan was so risky, but it all came together perfectly."

I smile at her, feeling a sense of pride. "I knew it would," I reply. "With my brilliant step-sister involved, how could it

gh, please don't say the 'S' word," I groan, kissing his cheek and standing while Tobin laughs.

"Why not? It's the truth, isn't it?" he chuckles, and I shoot him a dirty look over my shoulder.

"It still makes me feel weirdly guilty, Tobin."

Despite it making me uncomfortable, especially when I think of all the things we've done to each other in the past twenty-four hours, he looks oddly smug about the whole thing. "Don't worry about it, Sweets. No one even knows besides my mama and dad."

I still cringe. Tobin's father is my step-father, which makes this entire thing beyond weird, but less so when I consider that his father has only been married to my mom for 3 months now. Tobin was a one-night stand baby, a secret that my step-father kept from my mother, and still does. He supported Tobin and his mother when he was a child, but he had only met the young boy twice. It wasn't until I was visiting my mother and witnessed the way my step-father had gone white as a sheet watching Tobin get arrested that everything began to get twisted for me.

I had pulled him outside and demanded to know what was wrong, and why he was so invested in the New Orlean's Nightstalker case, that my step-father had admitted that I had an estranged step-brother. Tobin. And then, in some weird fatherly show of guilt, he begged me to investigate the case and see if his son was really guilty or not.

The Nightstalker case had terrified me at first, but knowing that this man was somehow connected to me struck my curiosity hard, and that's how the letters started. After that... well...

It's safe to say we hit it off rather well.

After being so convinced that Tobin would be proven innocent, I watched in disbelief as everyone from his defense, to the judge, and even the jury proved that they had their mind made up that he was guilty, despite the lack of real evidence against him. I couldn't stand idly by and watch as an innocent man was sent away to spend the rest of his life in prison, step-brother or no.

So I started to dig deeper into the case, determined to uncover the truth. What I found was a web of lies and corruption that shocked even me. The police commissioner was behind the framing of Tobin because his son was the real killer and just so happened to look like Tobin. I was horrified to think that someone with so much power and influence could manipulate the system so easily, but I was more determined than ever to get Tobin out of prison and clear his name.

I spent every spare moment I had gathering evidence, interviewing witnesses, and piecing together the real story. And finally, when I had enough evidence to back up my claims, I wrote an entire expose on the police commissioner and his son, along with all the proof I had collected. It had taken months while Tobin languished away behind bars, but I knew I had to do things right, or he and I would never win.

Breaking Tobin out of prison was only the first step. I knew that if I wasn't able to prove him innocent then we would both be on the run forever—me for breaking him out and him for escaping. So, with a heavy heart, I made the decision to publish my article and let the chips fall where they may.

As we sit here in my quaint kitchen, I can feel the weight of our future hanging over us. But I also know that we're doing the right thing. The truth needs to be told, and Tobin deserves to be free. When I look at him, I see so much more than just an innocent man framed to take the fall for the police

commissioner's son. I *definitely* don't see a stepbrother, that's for certain.

I think about all the preparations I've made for our escape. Getting fake IDs, purchasing a small beachfront cabin in Mexico, and buying a used car with cash. It all seemed so surreal, like I was living in a movie. But the reality was that Tobin was innocent, and the system failed him. I had to do something, and I was willing to risk everything to clear his name and give us a chance at a new life. Truth be told, I had expected to wait a few more weeks for Tobin to escape, so when he showed up at my window last night, it had been a shock, but a welcome one.

With him in my bedroom, the attraction between us burned brighter than ever, proving to be that the instant connection between us wasn't just something made from adrenaline and physical attraction. It's so much more than that. Now, he has made me his, and it's time for me to take over and get us the hell out of Louisiana and to our little piece of paradise while we wait for the bomb of my article to drop.

Even as he calls me over to perch on his lap, my mind races with the thought of getting caught. The police will be at my door soon, it's only a matter of time. The tranquilizer kit I left behind worked flawlessly, but there's no way that they don't suspect me already.

I'm aware that I must have a positive attitude and keep my attention locked on to our ultimate goal, but I've never felt more young and helpless in my entire life. We need to cross the border before our faces are splashed across the media and we become the most wanted criminals in the country. I think detailing about the expose I've written, the police commissioner's corruption and how his son is the real killer. It will be my saving grace—once it's published, the world will know the truth, and Tobin and I can come back home. Our entire lives rest on my ability to write an article that will capture everyone's attention and eventually set us free. Tobin's arrest caused a media ruckus, but I need this article and the proof of his innocence to be a firestorm.

Until then, I will keep pushing forward, with him by my side, as we embark on this dangerous journey to clear his name and start a new life together. When I consider everything in our way, like a murder conviction and prison escape, an incredibly distant and tenuous step-sibling label seems laughably unimportant.

As I finish my coffee, he reaches over and takes my hand, gazing into my eyes with love and gratitude. Looking at his handsome face, I feel hope, despite the fear and uncertainty that's gnawing at me. Leaving my home, my career, and everything I've worked so hard for, is no small thing. But I know it's worth it for him. For the man I love, even if I'm still having a hard time admitting it to myself.

Tobin stands up and grabs the single duffle bag I packed for us both. Heading outside, he loads our things into the car. While I rinse out our coffee cups, a twinge of sadness grips me at the thought of leaving my home. But then, I spot him waiting outside, and I remember why I'm doing this. He's worth more to me than anything in this little house, and I'll follow him to the ends of the earth to make sure he can have the full life he's owed if need be. Taking a deep breath, I make my way outside, prepared to face whatever the future may hold.

The Accord runs loudly behind us as he reaches into the duffle bag before closing the trunk, handing me a pair of clippers with a grim look on his face. Feeling a pang of sadness, I run my hands through his long, if messy, hair a few more times, and sigh. "Let's do it, then."

He sits on the steps of my porch while I shave his head down to a stubble, the dark strand blowing away in the restless wind. He doesn't even bother checking the cut, just rubbing his hand over the short strands with an unreadable expression, before he nods. "Perfect. Now, let's get the hell out of here."

"Go ahead and get in the car. I have one more thing to do."

I go back inside my dark home one last time, to my tiny office and the PC there within. On the screen is my article, perfectly typed and edited, just one click away from being published in the local paper. If I had more time, I'd have liked to contact some bigger names in media, like the New York Times, but I have to have faith that my piece will reach the masses even coming from this little publication. I had texted my boss this morning before shattering my normal phone into a million pieces, telling him to expect a bombshell. I hope he's ready for it because I'm so nervous I can barely lift my fingers to the keyboard to type.

My entire future, and Tobin's too, rest within these few pages. I lay my hand on the computer screen and close my eyes, breathing deeply as I let go and turn my fate over to the universe.

Then, resolved, I hit 'PUBLISH', rise from my seat, grab the enormous magnet I had ordered days ago from the Amazon box in the hallway, and destroy my hard drive with one long, slow swipe.

Now, like Tobin suggested, it really is time to get the hell out of here.

The car tires rumble beneath us as we speed down the road, leaving our old lives behind. By now, Tobin's escape must be national news, and it's likely I've been wrapped up into it as well, but we avoid listening to any news stations on purpose. Our families probably know we're on the run, and every move we make from here on out has to be perfectly calculated, or it will all have been for nothing. The weight of our escape is heavy on my shoulders, but I carry it without complaint.

My eyes are fixed on the road ahead, but Tobin and I keep glancing at the rearview mirror, our hearts racing every time we think we see the flashing lights of the police behind us. The fear of being caught is palpable, and every second that passes feels like an eternity. Keeping to the back roads and moving through neighborhoods instead of the main parts of town works for a little while, but we have to decide what is more valuable—the speed that traveling directly to Mexico would grant us while leaving us more vulnerable to law enforcement, or keeping a low profile but moving at a snail's pace.

Eventually, we opt for speed.

We've been driving for what seems like an endless amount of time, and the exhaustion is starting to take its toll. It's impossible to stop and rest, knowing that our faces might be recognized, so we sleep and drive in shifts. Avoiding the temptation of stopping at a truck stop to sleep is difficult, but when considering that sleeping somewhere that public would make it possible that we might never wake up again, it becomes easier to power through.

Instead, we drive through the night, the darkness outside enveloping us as the hours tick by. The night turns into day, and then back into night again. The only thing that keeps us going is the fast food and energy drinks we consume to keep ourselves from passing out.

Our eyes are bloodshot, and our bodies ache from sitting for so long, but we push through, taking turns driving and napping. We jump at every sudden noise or movement, knowing that at any moment, we could be caught. But we're determined to make it to Mexico and start our new life, no matter the cost.

Just a few miles to the crossing, Tobin begins to get restless. "What's wrong?" I ask. "Nervous?"

"It's not too late, you know," he tells me, jaw set and staring straight ahead. "You can turn back. I'll get out right here if you want me to, and you can go back to your life. You don't have to risk anymore, Tory."

My chest aches for him as I shake my head empathetically. "Absolutely not. We've come this far, and we're going to get the rest of the way together, too."

"You shouldn't have to throw it all away for me, Sweets."

I keep my eyes on the road but reach over and grab his hand in mine. "I'm not throwing anything away. I've got *you*, and you're worth more than all the material things I've ever owned."

He stays silent but raises my hand to his lips and brushes them across my knuckles. I almost tell him that I love him, but everything is so emotionally charged that I don't want him to think I'm only saying it in the spur of the moment. It isn't until we hit the traffic leading up to the border that I hear him breathe a soft, "Thank you."

"You're welcome, Tobin."

My palms are sweaty as we approach the border crossing, and I flex them on the steering wheel to try and banish the shaking that has taken hold. I'm full of nervous energy, but he's still

and silent. I risked everything to help him escape from prison, but while I would undoubtedly be arrested and charged for helping him escape if we were caught, he's the one that will lose the rest of his life. We're just inches away from crossing the border into Mexico, and the fear is almost suffocating. Fear, and a healthy dose of hopeful anticipation.

I try to take Tobin's hand again, but his eyes are fixed on the checkpoint ahead. We've rehearsed what we'll say, but as we get closer, my mind goes blank. All I can think about is the truth, the fact that Tobin is an escaped prisoner, and we're about to get caught. We're walking right into the hands of dozens of officers... exactly the people we've been trying to avoid.

I can't stand his silence. It's pressing on my ears, making my nerves even worse, so I try to get his attention in one of the only ways I know will. "Hey," I start, biting my lip. "You know one reason I can't wait for us to get to our new place? Besides the obvious..."

He looks over at me, his face illuminated only by the streetlights. "What?"

"Because I've missed you. I've missed...this," I punctuate my statement by laying my hand on his leg and running it upward.

His nostrils flare, his tense frame softening and turning towards me. Just like that, he's alive again, energy sparking in the air between us as he grabs my wandering hand and places it against his hard length. "I've missed you too, Sweets. In so many ways."

The night we spent making love seems so long ago, even though it's less than a week ago. The days and nights have sort of blended together, and I don't even feel like much of a person anymore, just an exhausted sack of skin and bones, but we're in the home stretch now. Just one more push.

I stroke him through his sweatpants for a few seconds before the cars start moving once more and the moment of liveliness is gone, but I know my Tobin is still in there, and that's all that matters for the moment. Once it's finally our turn, the border guards approach our car, and I try to keep my breathing steady. I hand them our passports, perfect fakes I had to delve into the dark web to find, and travel documents, my hands shaking with nerves. They examine the documents carefully, taking their time while my blood rushes in my ears so loud that it's almost deafening.

I glance over at Tobin, and I can see the fear in his eyes even as he speaks to the guards, trying to appear nonchalant and normal. We've come so far and have so much to gain. it can't all be for nothing. I refuse to believe it.

Finally, one of the guards approaches again after talking to his coworkers and asks us to step out of the car. My heart sinks, and Tobin and I exchange a worried glance as we do as we're told. We stand by the side of the road, watching as the guards search our car, their eyes scanning every inch of it.

"Where are you headed?" one of them asks, not bothering to look at us as he circles our car.

"To Tijuana for a vacation," I tell him quickly. "I included our reservations in the documents I handed over with our passports."

He squints at me now, and then at Tobin. "Hmm. Alright. Do you guys come through here a lot? I feel like you look familiar."

My mouth goes dry as I try to formulate a response, but then, suddenly, the guards finish their search and wave us through. I stare at them in disbelief, and Tobin and I exchange a relieved smile. We're actually going to make it! I think, getting back into the car and letting the border patrol guide us through.

As the lights and sounds of the crowded, busy border begin to fade away in the rearview mirror, the tension in the car starts to melt, replaced by a tentative, almost shocking joy. It feels surreal, like we're in a dream, but it's real. We made it.

"Fuck," Tobin says softly. "Fuck, you beautiful genius. You did it. We're through."

Once we are truly away from civilization, we switch seats and I let Tobin drive. With the adrenaline in my bloodstream

disappearing, I'm feeling spent, and it's nice to just be the one observing the scenery for the time being.

I sit in the passenger seat, my eyes glued to the window as we drive through the dark and arid desert landscape. It's so unlike the swampy, foggy scenery of home that it fascinates me and makes me sad all at the same time. I've barely noticed where we've been this entire drive, too focused on getting to the end, and now that we've succeeded, it hits me how far away from home I really am.

As we drive further into the desert, the starry sky above us is the only source of light. The cool night air whips through the open car windows and I close my eyes, inhaling the fresh scent of night-blooming flowers and the distant sea.

Tobin glances over at me, a small smile playing at the corner of his lips. "You okay?" he asks, his voice low and raspy.

I open my eyes and meet his gaze, feeling a rush of love and gratitude wash over me. "Yeah, I'm okay," I reply with a sigh. "I know I sound like a broken record, but I can't believe we made it."

He gives my hand a reassuring squeeze before focusing on the road ahead. "Me neither," he says. "But we're not out of the woods yet. We still have to get to this beachside mansion that you've bought us."

A laugh bursts out of me. "If by mansion you mean shack, then yeah, you've got the right idea."

"Shack, mansion, tent, I don't care as long as there's a place I can fuck you as soon as we get here," he rumbles, causing goosebumps to pop up all over my skin.

"I'm sure I smell like a foot," I point out, but Tobin seems undeterred.

"We'll figure it out. I just need to find a way to remind you that you belong to *me*, Sweets. Even when this is all over."

As we drive further into the desert, the terrain becomes more rugged, and the darkness seems to deepen. Then, in the distance, I see a faint light, and my heart jumps with excitement. It's the beach house. Our sanctuary.

As we get closer, I can see the small building sitting right on the beach, waves lapping at the shore. It's nothing fancy, but it's ours. And it's safe.

Tobin pulls up to the house and kills the engine. We both sit in silence for a moment, taking in the stillness of the night and the sound of the waves.

"We made it," he says finally, turning to look at me.

I nod, a tear slipping down my cheek. "Thank you," I say, leaning over to kiss him. "I couldn't have done this without you."

He smiles and takes my hand. "We're in this together," he says. "Always."

We get out of the car and walk towards the beach house, feeling a sense of awe at the beauty of the desert and the ocean. The cool desert night air embraces me. The moon is full, casting a silver light over everything, and the sound of waves crashing in the distance is all I can hear.

I look at the man who inspired me to flee all this way, to take a chance on a prisoner and see his innocence through all the lies, and who I'm falling so in love with. My exhausted body is filled with a surge of energy as, for the moment, my worries disappear.

I can see the same energy, the same passion, rising in him, and it's like our minds collide as we both have the same idea at the exact same moment. Tobin and I don't say a word to each other as we race toward the water, discarding our clothes as we go. The sand beneath my feet feels cool and gritty, with just a little of the day's warmth still buried deep.

We reach the water's edge, and he grins at me. "Hope you can swim, Sweets," he declares before diving beneath the waves.

I follow closely, rushing into the ocean as the water rushes around my legs. The sensation is exhilarating, and the warm, salty water provides a welcome relief from being cooped up in the hot car. Once we are waist deep, he pulls me against him, and it's instinctual for me to wrap my legs around him, connecting us after far too long. There is peace and comfort in

his embrace, but it only takes a few breaths before we both remember that we're nude and that peaceful calm catches fire.

As we float in the ocean, our bodies intertwined, the moonlight dances on the water, creating a soft, ethereal glow around us. Tobin's hands gently caress my back as we kiss, his lips tender against mine. The water out here where it's deeper is cool, but our bodies generate a heat that consumes us, leaving us wanting more. It's almost effortless to maneuver his cock at my entrance and grab onto his sculpted arms as he sinks into me. I trace the lines, dips, and valleys of his muscular chest as he fills me, and we both groan as he bottoms out.

Arms linked around his neck and our mouths pressed together in lazy, deep kisses, we christen our new temporary home with him pistoning into me with smooth, fluid thrusts. The pleasure that he's building inside of me is slow and molten and feels like a wire growing tighter with each movement of his hips. All I can do is bury my face in his neck and let him fuck tirelessly, my entire body supported by and wrapped around his.

We both come together, with me crying out my pleasure to the moon while stars dance in front of my eyes. I can feel the hot rush of his spend in my pussy right before he grunts, fucking me for three more hard strokes, and then going still. I kiss him, holding his face in my hands, full of some powerful, unnamable emotion.

Except...it does have a name, if I'm brave enough to use it. But then, Tobin beats me to the punch.

We break the kiss, our eyes locked onto each other's, and his hands move to my face when I let my own fall to rest on his chest. "I love you, Tory," he whispers, his voice filled with emotion.

I smile, a warm feeling spreading through me, tears pricking the corners of my eyes. "I love you too, Tobin," I say before we kiss once more. "Does that make the two of us crazy?"

"Not any crazier than breaking out of prison and fleeing to Mexico, no," he laughs.

Our bodies sway with the rhythm of the ocean, as our love continues to grow stronger with each passing moment. We've been through so much to be here, and I'm grateful for this moment of pure joy and passion.

Tobin's hands slide down my body, pulling me closer to him as we float together in the water. The sound of the waves crashing against the shore is the only thing we can hear, and it's a sweet, calming melody. Eventually, we break apart, exhaustion creeping in until we can't avoid it, so we swim back to shore, hand in hand.

As we reach the beach, he begins to pull on his sandy clothes while I do the same, leaving him to unload our meager belongings while I unlock the house and turn on the lights. The shack is smaller than most apartments, and less equipped by far, but it's our secret haven until the world is ready to atone for the mistakes committed against Tobin.

We shower the salt from our skin before falling into bed for the night in each other's arms, and I sleep the deepest sleep of my entire life.

I FIND Tobin sitting in the sand on a towel the next morning, a cup of instant coffee steaming in his hand. He scoots over to make room for me, and I lay my head on his shoulder while we watch the sun creep up over the horizon. This morning is our new beginning, and the first of many we will share.

The days blend together, each one a peaceful blur of sunshine, sand, and surf. We wake up early and head straight to the ocean, relishing the feel of the cool water against our skin. We swim and splash, laughing and enjoying the freedom of our new life. There's no rush, no deadlines, no pressure. Just us and the ocean.

As time passes, though, our minds start to wander. We try to push aside the nagging feeling of uncertainty that's been haunting us since we fled the US, but it's always there, lurking at the edges of our thoughts.

What's happening back home? Are they looking for us? Have they found out where we are? The questions plague us, stealing our peace and leaving us with a constant sense of unease.

Despite the beauty and tranquility of our new surroundings, we can't fully relax. We're always on edge, waiting for the other shoe to drop. We know we can't stay hidden forever, but the thought of returning to our old life fills us with fear and dread.

So we try to make the most of our time in Puerto Peñasco, soaking up the sun and enjoying each other's company. We spend lazy afternoons lying on the beach, watching the waves roll in and out. We explore the nearby towns and villages, sampling the local food and immersing ourselves in the culture.

But no matter how much fun we have, the nagging feeling of uncertainty remains. It's like a dark cloud hanging over our heads, threatening to rain down at any moment.

We talk about it, of course. We share our fears and concerns, and we try to come up with a plan. But there's no easy solution, no magic answer that will make everything better.

So we continue to live each day as it comes, taking comfort in the small moments of joy that we find in each other's company. And when we're feeling particularly anxious, we return to the water, letting the cool waves wash over us and soothe our troubled souls.

In those moments, we're weightless, free from the worries and fears that plague us on land. We're just two people, lost in the vast expanse of the ocean, united in our love and our determination to make it through whatever comes our way.

Languid peace like that couldn't last forever, though, and one oddly chilled morning, Tobin tells me it's time that we check in and see what chaos my article has caused. Reluctantly, I agree, and we have a stoic breakfast, planning to leave as soon as we finish, but the closer it gets to time to depart, the more anxious I become.

I don't want to go. I don't care if anyone reads my article. Here, Tobin and I are safe, and I don't want to give this up. It's not much of a life, but at least it *is* one.

He eventually notices how upset I am when I drop the mug that I'm washing, "Sweets, what's going on?"

"Let's just not go," I suggest desperately. "We can take side jobs and just stay here. Who cares about our lives back home?"

He pulls me into his chest, rubbing my back in soothing motions. "No, Tory, we can't do that. This is about clearing my name and putting a real murderer behind bars, remember?"

I sniffle, but nod. "Yes..."

"Hey, I have an idea," he pulls away enough to look me in the face. "I've got an idea to help you relax. Come with me...."

It's not a surprise when he leads me to the bedroom, and I start to protest. "Tobin, not now..." But when he pulls me into a heated kiss, any other complaints die before they start.

"This will be different," he insists. "I promise. Kneel on the bed, hands on the headboard." I start to object once more, but he shakes his head once. "Tory, you should know better by now than to try and tell me no. Kneel. Now."

I huff, but do as I'm told, gripping the cheap bamboo headboard while he comes up behind me. His hands are slow but forceful as they strip my jean shorts off my body, followed by my underwear. Tobin cups my asscheeks, massaging them in his palms while he kisses a path up my spine, dragging my loose tank top up with his teeth. I shiver, my grip growing tighter, and his massaging hands move more inward with each caress.

When he dips his head between my legs and licks my pussy with one long stroke of his tongue, my legs feel weak, and even more so when he grips my cheeks again and parts them while he eats me out from behind, the sound of his mouth sucking at my clit filling the small room. It feels so, *so good*, but I have this suspicion that his plan to relax me isn't to make me come like this.

Thoughts float away as he continues to worship me with his mouth, my legs shaking to the point I can barely hold myself up, but everything comes back into sharp focus when I feel his thumb on my asshole.

I jump, but Tobin grips me hard, hands on my hips as he holds me in place. The sensation is odd, especially when that digit goes *inside* of my back channel, making me feel so much fuller than I am, but it isn't necessarily bad. Combined with his mouth on me, it's almost amazing.

Of course, as soon as I'm about to come, he stops, leaving me on the bed and exiting the room before returning with a small jar of coconut oil. My eyes go wide, his intentions suddenly crystal clear.

"Tobin, I don't think—"

"Hush," he snaps, yanking his shirt over his head, pushing his gym shorts to the ground, and stepping out of them as he stalks towards me on the bed. He unscrews the lid on the oil, taking some on his fingers as he crawls behind me again. My heart is beating like a hummingbird, quick and nervous, as he spreads the oil over my asshole, letting one finger slip deep into my back channel as he does. "Relax, baby girl, I know you can take this cock in your ass."

Resigned, full of adrenaline, and still so turned on that it's almost painful, I lay my forehead between my hands on the baseboard and clench my teeth as I feel the broad head of his cock pressing against my asshole, pushing until my body gives in and he begins to slide inside.

I suck in a breath. It *hurts* at first, burning and uncomfortable, but as my ass accepts more and more inches of his cock, the burning abates and leaves behind that strangely full sensation in its wake. It's such an intense feeling that I almost can't take it, but just as I feel his balls slap against the mouth of my pussy once he fills my ass completely, he reaches underneath us and begins to make firm circles on my clit with his fingers. As soon as that pleasure sparks, he pulls out and slams home in my back channel, the sensations of it all leaving me reeling.

"I knew that pretty little ass could take my cock," he praises roughly. "Such a good girl, my little Tory."

It goes on like this for long minutes, the feeling of him in my ass and his fingers on my clit driving me to a peak I didn't think I'd be able to reach like this. I'm going to come so hard that it's almost frightening, tears pricking the corners of my eyes as I get closer and closer, my entire body shaking like a leaf.

He makes a strangled sound, his strokes going unsteady, and when I feel the first spurt of his come in my back channel, hot and thick, it's the last piece of the puzzle for me and I orgasm so hard that I think I may faint. Pleasure rolls over me again and again, spasms wracking my frame as I sob out Tobin's name.

It eventually ebbs, and he wraps me in his arms and lowers us both to the bed, him spooned around me, kissing the back of my sweaty neck and shoulders as we catch our breath.

"Relaxed now?" he asks, and I groan, laughing reluctantly.

"I hate giving you the satisfaction, but yes. But I think we need to shower before we leave."

"Agreed." He rises up, turning my face to him with one finger under my chin and kisses my mouth softly. "I'll go get it started. See you in there, Sweets."

As WE PULL INTO TOWN, the tension in the car is so thick I can almost reach out and grab a handful. I grip the steering wheel tightly, my knuckles turning white as I navigate the unfamiliar streets of the large town, while Tobin sits beside me, his eyes scanning the surroundings for any sign of danger.

Every car that passes us sends shivers down my spine, and I can't help but think of the worst-case scenarios. What if they've found us out? What if we're being followed, even here, in our hidden sanctuary? It's nearly impossible, but until

I know the outcome of my article, I don't think I can ever relax,

The police station looms ahead of us, and nausea rolls in me. I half expect to be greeted with handcuffs and a cold, sterile cell.

But instead, we're met with a sense of excitement and chaos. Officers are rushing around, phones ringing off the hook. It's clear that something big has happened.

Tobin and I had left the beach shack after our interlude and shower, heading into town and this time, taking the burner phone we'd left off since our arrival. There's a single familiar fast-food restaurant with golden arches that I know will have wifi, and that's what we use to google Tobin's name as soon as the internet connects.

The results are beyond anything we could have ever hoped. Every news story talks about the police commissioner's son being arrested, and how once 'Innocent man Tobin Tate and his fearless journalist step-sister' reappear, all charges will be dropped. I wince at the step-sister title again, but everything else seems to have gone so perfectly that it's almost hard to believe.

Heart in my throat, Tobin and I read piece after piece, all of them full of promises from the government that we are free people once we come home. The articles instruct us, if we somehow find ourselves reading the article, to go to the nearest police station and let them know who we are.

He goes through all the emotions known to man, from joy to fear, to powerful relief that leaves him rubbing his eyes and sucking in shaky breaths.

"We have to go," he whispers. "To the police station, I mean. To see for ourselves."

So now, as we approach the front desk, a young officer looks up at us, eyeing us warily. "Can I help you?" he asks in heavily accented English.

"We're here to check on our case," Tobin says, his voice steady.

The officer nods, flipping through some papers on his desk. "What case is that?"

"The missing person case," Tobin informs him. "Tobin Tate and Tory Sweet."

The officer freezes, looks over both our faces carefully, and lets out a low whistle. "That's... unexpected."

"I know it's a different country and all, but can you confirm that we really aren't wanted back in the states?" I ask, wringing my hands anxiously.

"Officially, I'll have to make some calls, but unofficially? Your case is known *worldwide*. I think you really are safe to go home if you want." He's still in disbelief it seems, shaking his head. "You can leave your contact information or come back tomorrow and I'll have a firm answer about your next steps, okay?"

We thank him, leaving the number on the burner phone. Making our way back to the car, our minds are spinning with the news, and it's hard to even talk. Our success is so total and complete that it's hard to think... hard to even breathe.

For the first time since we fled the US, I feel a glimmer of hope for our future back home in Louisiana. Maybe we can start over, maybe we can build a new life without the constant fear and uncertainty, but now we have all those precious choices in front of us. We can choose.

Tobin reaches over, taking my hand in his. "Looks like you don't have to worry about the New Orleans Nightstalker anymore," he says with a grin.

"No, it looks like I don't," I reply, feeling a sense of freedom I hadn't felt in a long time.

We're almost back to the beach shack when he insists I stop the car on the sandy road, hopping out and running over to my side and pulling me out into the desert sand with me. He seems frantic, and flustered, to the point I'm almost nervous.

[&]quot;Tobin, what-"

He drops to his knees, both my hands in his. "I couldn't wait until we got back. I can't wait another fucking second. Marry me, Tory. I... I don't have a ring. I couldn't grab it before we left, obviously, but I have it for you as soon as we're back home. My grandmother's ring, it's a family heirloom, and—fuck!" He drags his hand over his stubbly hair. "Look, just... will you marry me, Tory?"

"Yes," I breathe, stunned, and right there on the side of the road, he sweeps me into an embrace, spinning me in a circle, weightless for the first time since I met him back in that horrible prison cell. "Yes, Tobin, yes, yes, yes."

EPILOGUE

Five Years Later

I t's the five-year anniversary of the publishing of Tory's article that set me free, and our frantic flight to Mexico. Now, the little journalist is my wife, lying in the hospital bed of our birthing suite with our daughter cradled in her arms. Peaceful. Happy.

Our last days in Mexico had been insane, and it feels just like yesterday if I think about it too hard. The day after finding out that the commissioner's son had been arrested, we also learned that our families were interviewed at a press conference, telling us both that it's safe to come home whenever we're ready. Seeing the information come from them—siblings, aunts, uncles—that we were safe made it real. It was over.

And then, the bombshell of all bombshells dropped. We discovered that there were millions of dollars being offered to us both for the first exclusive interviews about our escape and the events that led up to it. It was our comeuppance for all that we had suffered, Tory and I both, in the fight for justice.

Life would never be the same, but that's exactly how I had wanted it.

Now I look at my wife, the sun shining on her blond hair and the peach fuzz on our baby's head, and can barely repress the gratitude I feel.

"How does it feel to be a mother, Pulitzer prize-winning journalist Tory Tate?" I ask, sliding into the bed beside her.

Tory smiles softly. "Why don't you ask my protege here, Tiffany Tate?" she nods down to our daughter.

"Later. She seems to be sleeping right now."

"Hmm. Good point," Tory replies quietly, turning her face to kiss me. "I'm sure she'll have plenty to say later."

"That I'm sure of, Sweets. That, I'm definitely sure of."

EXTENDED EPILOGUE

Fifteen Years Later

hat do you mean 'sleepover'?"

Tory turns to look at me, an amused smile playing at her lips as she puts the grocery delivery away, her hair piled on top of her head in a messy bun and her black-on-black yoga set making her fair skin glow. It's almost too easy to let her distract me, but this is too important.

"A sleepover, Tobin. You know, sleeping bags in the living room, pizza, movies, a bunch of soda. A sleepover."

"Well, Tiffany isn't going," I tell her firmly.

"Actually, they invited Tiffany AND Tara. Their younger daughter is in Tara's kindergarten class, but Tiffany is actually close with their older daughter, which is why they suggested the sleepover in the first place."

The alarm bells going off in my head turn into sirens, and I cross my arms after I all but throw the gallon of milk in the refrigerator, slamming the door behind me. "You must have lost your damn mind, Tory. These are MY girls, my flesh and blood, and I don't want them spending any time with anyone but us."

Now my wife frowns. "Tobin, you can't keep them from making friends and socializing. That's not healthy."

She might have a point, but I'm not conceding. "Okay...well, why can't they have the sleepover here?"

"Because we didn't invite their kids over, but..." She cocks her hip to the side, leaning on the counter as she considers. "I don't see why that wouldn't work just as well. If we're going to change things up, though, you're making the phone call. I have a hard enough time relating to the other moms at the school without being so demanding. We both know that's your strong suit anyway."

"Let me see these people first before I make any decisions," I hold my hand out for her phone, and Tory pulls up the wife's Facebook. The other family looks normal enough, with a tan, dark-haired mother and a bespeckled, skinny father. No red flags yet...in fact, seeing that the other dad is probably a big wimp makes me happy. It means I won't have any trouble making this situation go in my favor. "You got the phone number?"

"It's under 'Katelyn's Mom'."

I flick the contact tab open and make the call, Tory waving me out of the kitchen so she can finish putting things away. Someone answers on the third ring, and I assume it's the dad.

"Hello?" the man says, his voice nasally.

"Is this Katelyn's dad?"

"Yes," he responds, sounding annoyed. "I assume from the contact name being 'Tiffany's Mom' on my end that this is Tiffany's dad. You certainly don't sound like her mother after all."

His attempt at humor only pisses me off *immediately*. "Look, smartass. This *is* Tiffany's dad, so congrats, you aren't a total dumbass. I'm calling because we're switching the sleepover to our place. They will *always* be at our place. Schedule can stay the same. 6pm tonight according to my wife."

The man sputters. "You aren't going to just tell me what—"

"Listen, asshole." I lower my voice so Tory doesn't hear. She isn't going to like what I have to say. "I don't know you or your wife or what kind of home you run, but I guarantee you know who we are. My wife is, *by far*, the highest-earning parent in the entire fucking private school. Our home security

is bulletproof, our house is big enough to house the entire class for a sleepover if we want, and if you want your kids to have anything to do with my daughters, you better get used to things being this way because I promise you it's never going to change. And your kids better count themselves lucky that Tiffany and Tara even want to be their friends."

Long seconds stretch as the other dad is speechless, but finally, he says, sounding subdued, "We can just cancel...."

"Hell no we aren't canceling," I bark out in laughter. "My daughters and my wife are looking forward to this. See you at six tonight, buddy."

I rejoin Tory and hand her the phone, a smug smile on my face, which makes her roll her eyes. "I don't even want to know what you did, but I'm assuming the other kids are coming here tonight?"

"You've got it."

Tory has left a few things out for me to put on the top shelf, but when I turn around from the task, she's cradling her phone in her hand with a sad look on her face. I come up behind her where she's standing in front of the island, looking over her shoulder to see that she has the other mom's Facebook still pulled up, looking at a picture of her in a bikini.

"Tobin...are you less attracted to me because I never really lost all the baby weight?" she asks, her voice small and self-conscious. "Do you wish I looked like this?"

I snatch the device from her hand and toss it down the counter away from us, and in one smooth motion, fist my hand in her hair and push her between the shoulders until her chest is flush with the countertop. Her words make me feel a million different things—sadness, anger, and most of all, a burning need to make her sure that I've never been more into her. I step forward until my cock is pressed against her ass, rapidly hardening.

"Does *this* feel like I want you to look any other way, Sweets?" I growl, and she shivers as I grind against her.

"N-no," she gasps. "I guess it doesn't."

"Tory, listen to me right now." As I speak, I remove my hand from between her shoulders and start to peel her leggings down her ass, taking her panties with them. "You've never been hotter, and these curves don't just mean that you've carried my children, they also mean that I can be just a little rougher—" I punctuate my statement by smacking her asscheek, the crack echoing in the kitchen along with her yelp that melts into a moan. "And mark my words, Sweets. I am *not done* putting babies in you."

I spank her a few more times, alternating cheeks until her backside is nice and rosy and her pussy lips peeking out are swollen and shimmering wet for me. Rock hard already, I pull my joggers down just enough to pull my cock out and without hesitation, push into her tight channel. Tory is more than ready for me, the flesh of her ass warm from the spanking as it slaps against my hips as I thrust into her. She grips the other end of the marble island in her hands, riding out the fucking I'm giving her with soft sounds that crescendo as I keep up my relentless pace.

God, she's so hot like this, bent over and just taking it whenever and wherever I want to give it to her. Rising up on her tiptoes to give me better access, Tory lowers her forehead to the cool marble as shudders start to work their way up her spine. She's close, which is a relief, because so am I.

I wrap an arm under her to hold her up as she begins to come around my cock, her pussy milking me with powerful spasms that have me careening right after her into ecstasy.

Filling up my wife with my come is one of the singular pleasures in life, and I'll never get tired of how it makes me feel, the sensation covering me like a wave as I spill inside her.

I start to lean forward to brush her now-sweaty hair off her forehead and whisper some sweet nothings, but we both hear the telltale sound of the school bus air brakes outside, and rush to pull our clothes back on. A glance at the clock confirms my suspicions, and I laugh as Tory curses under her breath as she tries to fix her clothes and hair fast enough to get out the door to get the kids off the bus. It's amusing and beautifully domestic.

Damn, I love this life.

EXTENDED EPILOGUE

I pinch the bridge of my nose as I watch Tobin speak to Katelyn and Nina's father in hushed tones, so close to him that their chests are almost touching. Except Tobin towers over the smaller man, who is hunched inward, nodding up at my husband in clear fear.

Once Tobin is done, he clasps the other man on the shoulder as if all is forgiven, but from the haunted look on the other man's face, it clearly isn't. Oh well, it isn't like I don't know my husband well enough to have known this was going to happen.

Tiffany and Tara are both vibrating with excitement as Tobin escorts their little friends inside, taking their overnight Jansport backpacks and hanging them up by the door with our children's school bags. Katelyn's backpack, like Tiffany's, is glittery with her initials emblazoned in bright letters, while little Nina's bag has Paw Patrol characters to match Tara's Peppa Pig bag.

I barely have time to greet the girls before Tobin is taking them in the kitchen, answering all the millions of questions all four kids are now throwing at him, dutifully pouring their sodas and distributing greasy slices of pepperoni pizza on hot pink paper plates. Watching my tall, demanding husband take charge of the little girl's slumber party has my heart melting in my chest with how much I love him. I don't know what I did to deserve such a perfect life with such an amazing man, but I'll never second-guess my choices.

Tobin is my soulmate, and as I watch him escort the babbling group of girls to the front room where *Tangled* is already pulled up on the TV ready to go, I know I'll never stop falling for him, deeper in love each day.

We've come a long way from prison breaks and hideouts on the beach, but I'd do it all again a million times over for this life.

The End. Thanks for reading!

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