



SCANDALOUS SECRETS BOOK 1

*Dante's
Storm*

B. LYBÆK



SCANDALOUS SECRETS BOOK 1

*Dante's
Storm*

B. LYBAEK

OceanofPDF.com

CONTENTS

Copyright

About

Also by

Acknowledgments

Scandalous Secrets reading order

Last note

Part I

Chapter 1

Chapter 2

Chapter 3

Chapter 4

Chapter 5

Chapter 6

Chapter 7

Chapter 8

Chapter 9

Chapter 10

Chapter 11

Chapter 12

Part II

Chapter 13

Chapter 14

Chapter 15

Chapter 16

Chapter 17

Chapter 18

Chapter 19

Chapter 20

Chapter 21

Chapter 22

Chapter 23

Chapter 24

Chapter 25

Chapter 26

Chapter 27

Chapter 28

Chapter 29

Chapter 30

Chapter 31

Chapter 32

Chapter 33

Chapter 34

Chapter 35

Chapter 36

Chapter 37

Chapter 38

Chapter 39

Chapter 40

Chapter 41

Chapter 42

Chapter 43

Chapter 44

Chapter 45

Chapter 46

Chapter 47

Get epilogues

Blurb

Triggers

Author note

Follow

OceanofPDF.com

copyright



Dante's Storm Copyright © 2023 by B. Lybaek

Cover Designer: DAZED designs graphic art

All rights reserved.

No part of this book may be reproduced in any form or by any electronic or mechanical means, including information storage and retrieval systems, without written permission from the author, except for the use of brief quotations in a book review.

Any unauthorized distribution, circulation or use of this text may be a direct infringement of the author's rights, and those responsible may be liable in law accordingly.

All names, characters, events, and places found in this book are either from the author's imagination or used fictitiously.

Any similarity to actual events, locations, organizations, or persons, live or dead, is entirely coincidental and not intended by the author.

All rights reserved.

OceanofPDF.com

about



Bibi is a dark romance author who is addicted to coffee, Piña coladas, and chocolate... all the beautiful things that make life go around.

She loves talking about herself in third person, it makes her feel special. She lives in the North East of England, in a small town no one has ever heard of. Her household (herself and her boyfriend of 10 years) is ruled by their feline mistress who puts the 'tude in tortitude.

Bibi is changing her pen name from Ren Blakely to B. Lybaek. A pure vanity move as she wanted to see her real name on her books #NamesMatters

You can find Bibi all over the internet.. probably procrastinating.



OceanofPDF.com

also by



OceanofPDF.com

The Drákon Legacy

Protégé

Heir

Leader

Ruler

OceanofPDF.com

The Metamorphosis Duet

Emotionally dark MF friends-to-lovers

Just Leave #1

Just Stay #2

OceanofPDF.com

Dancing with Desire

Dark stripper & stalker WhyChoose

Tempting Distractions

Untold Secrets

Beautiful Chances

Dancing with Desire OMNIBUS

OceanofPDF.com

The Cruz Kings MC

Co-write with Sarah JD

Tempted by a King

OceanofPDF.com

acknowledgments



Aimie, Alexis, Biana, Daisie, Jennifer, Jessica, and Kerrie—
the amazing alphas who helped savagely whip Dante and
Storm into shape.

Anoesjka, Dorothy, Melissa F, and Melissa M—the amazing
betas.

An extra thank you to Jennifer for being my proofreading
hero.

Tara and Sara for embracing my crazy idea and running
with it. I love you ladies!

OceanofPDF.com

Scandalous Secrets
reading order



OceanofPDF.com

Dante's Storm

By B. Lybaek

OceanofPDF.com

Lily's Ash

By Sarah JD

OceanofPDF.com

Avery's Fall

By T.L Hodel

OceanofPDF.com

last note



The scandal isn't in the secret, it's in those unwilling to accept that love can be unconventional, dark, and depraved.

OceanofPDF.com

part I



*Lust is a tool, desire a trap. Wield the first, and
you can take someone's soul. Fall into the second,
and they can take yours.*

—Riley Shane

OceanofPDF.com

I



OceanofPDF.com

Dante

My eyes turn to slits as I look at the pathetic waste-of-space couple strung up in front of me. The woman whimpers softly, no longer screaming the bloody roof down. The guy—her husband—retches again, and by the sounds, I'm pretty sure he isn't enjoying the meal prepared especially for them.

“What's the matter?” I ask, taunting him. “This is what you fed your foster kids, so it must be something you like yourself.”

Beth scoffs, the sound of her heels clicking on the concrete floor reverberates off the empty walls caging us in. The stench of piss becomes more prominent, and I sigh in exasperation. “That's the third piss strike,” I observe without turning around. “Who did it?”

A smile makes my lips twitch as the wife is quick to throw her husband under the bus. Partners for better, but obviously they're not taking the worse part all that seriously. “It was him. It was Sean.” Desperation wafts off of her, and her voice is so shrill I'm pretty sure that if she keeps going, only dogs will understand her.

“Shut up, you useless cunt,” Sean bites. “It was you. Your hole is so used you can't keep anything inside you.”

I turn my gaze on Beth and roll my eyes at the same time she shrugs. “I didn't see,” she casually says. “Maybe they should lick it up together?”

Throwing my head back, I laugh so loud it hurts my cheeks. “You’re bloody savage,” I say, smiling approvingly at the woman that’s now standing next to me. “Was *she* there when you picked these up?” I tip my head towards the couple, refusing to call them humans since they don’t have even a modicum of humanity in them.

Shaking her head, Beth says, “No, the Crimson Angel wasn’t there. But she had been.” The question of how she knows is at the tip of my tongue, but before I can ask, Beth carries on. “She’d left her calling card. Probably used the blood from the gash in Sean’s forehead.”

The Crimson Angel... one of Briarwood’s unknown vigilantes who takes pleasure in bringing down vile miscreants, but always hiding in the shadows. Since we’ve only captured her on camera once walking away, I know little except that she’s a woman. Well, that and the fact she likes to draw an angel using the blood of her victims, and if it happens to be one we’re after, they’re left alive for us to pick up—she’s considerate like that.

Though I might like to say that I no longer worry about the Angel, I very much do. The unknown person has a concerning amount of knowledge about us, what we do, and our targets. Apart from that one time, she’s outsmarted me every time I’ve tried to catch her either on camera or in the act. Since the Angel is assisting rather than hindering us, I’ve come to think of her as an unknown ally. Even so, I’m still not ready to let my guard down or to stop the search completely.

I run a hand down my face as I listen to Beth explain how she got a text with the location of where to pick up Sean and Sylvia. Of course, as always, the text couldn't be traced. But we got the people we're after, and that's all that matters.

"We've told you everything we know," Sean pipes up, his voice hoarse, weak even, from his tortured screams.

"Maybe," I allow. "But what if you know more than you realise? What if you've heard something you didn't think was important?"

At this point, it doesn't actually matter. I just enjoy giving them hope where there is none to be found.

"Or what about retribution for the innocents you've tortured and wronged?" I ask. Then I pull my phone out of my pocket and flick through my photos. I walk over to the couple and show them the pictures of their foster kids. "Do you remember what you did to Jade? To Craig? What about Madison and Myles?"

I continue to flick through the pictures while I list out the names and the crimes that go with them.

"You took money from the government to look after these children, but you pocketed the money yourself—" I'm interrupted by Sylvia when she begins to scream obscenities again. Closing the distance between us, I chuckle darkly before I backhand her so hard her head bounces off the wall. "The only reason you're not gagged right now is because it's dinnertime. While you enjoy a meal similar to what you gave the kids, I want you to do so while knowing that everything

they suffered, you will feel as well.” I pause, my gaze flicking between them and I bloody love seeing their faces pale.

The truth is that even if we could keep them alive long enough to feel all the transgressions and vile acts they’ve either committed or allowed to happen, it’ll never be enough. Those kids were all removed from abusive homes, handpicked by the couple that’s now at our mercy.

Sylvia used to work for the council at a trauma centre, that’s how she picked the ones no one would miss. Once they came to live with her and Sean, her husband, the children soon learned what true evil is. Being used, sold, and abused was part of their new life. The ones who should have protected them sold their little bodies, pocketing the money that would feed their addictions without remorse or pity for those they damned.

Tears prick at my eyes and I swallow the lump in my throat as I recall the hollow faces, and eyes so empty you just knew they’d resigned themselves to their fate—all while believing they were unlovable, useless.

Sean lets out a string of curses, most of them aimed at his wife. Ignoring them, I whistle and two men come to join us. They’re carrying a bowl that reeks so bad my eyes water. Yeah, the contents are directly from the bucket the not-so-happy couple were allowed to take a shite in, because that’s all they regularly allowed the children to eat—their own faeces.

“Bon appétit,” Beth hisses, her eyes trained on Sylvia while one of my guys forces the shite down her throat, completely

ignoring her gags and cries for mercy. “Make sure they swallow every. Last. Bite. And if they throw up, they can eat that as well.”

Beth is bloody ruthless when it comes to the likes of Sylvia and Sean. She’s been a part of this operation for longer than I can remember, and I know she’s more than an asset—she’s at the heart of it all.

Together, we walk out and leave the others to do their thing. “Are you going home tonight?” Beth asks, eyeing me when my phone rings again.

I already know it’s Caitlin, wanting to know the exact same thing. I decline the call and focus on the blonde woman with the pixie haircut. “Yeah, I think I have to.” She doesn’t ask anything else, only confirming she’ll stay here until tomorrow.

When she starts talking about her plans for flushing out the Potter family, I, not for the first time, wonder if it’s time for Beth to take on another position. However, my mind keeps thinking about my niece, and once her smiling face enters my mind, nothing else seems as important.

I’m so fucked.

“Do whatever you want,” I say, not unkindly. “I trust your judgement and they need to pay. But see if we can’t get more answers from the pricks in there about the Potters.”

Beth nods and makes some notes on her tablet. “This is the fifth case since September where that family keeps coming up. We need to narrow it down.”

“They’re close... too close,” I growl, cupping my chin as I eye Beth.

She nods. “Or... getting closer,” she says, her eyes flying across the tablet. “It’s getting closer to Briarwood. Look.”

Leaning in so I can see the screen, I look at the map she’s pulled up and the dots showing the last organisations we’ve shut down.

“We need to get Clive in on this,” I say. The words barely leave my mouth before Beth gets him on the phone. Standing back, I watch her tell him to get up here tonight. A small smile tugs at my lips at how authoritative and assured she is.

“Do you need me to stay?” I can’t help laughing when she covers the phone and quickly tells me to just go home.

“Yes, it’s all leading back to them,” she says, answering something Clive said. Her eyes go round, and she clutches her neck as tears well in her eyes. “Just get here, Clive.” Her voice breaks as the emotions she’s trying to leash bleed through.

After finishing the call, Beth straightens her spine and rolls her shoulders back, looking like she’s preparing for war. “I’ll make sure we get more answers. In the meantime, you need to start thinking about how far you’re willing to go. This seems much bigger than anything else, and we need to shut it down. I... we can’t let this go on much longer.”

“I know that,” I snarl, angered that she thinks I’m not giving it my all. “But what will you have me do? We can’t punish a

ghost, and so far, the Potters have done well at hiding their tracks.”

Holding up her hands, Beth apologises, only stopping when I wave her off. I know she isn't meaning to make it sound like I'm not doing everything possible, but I know this is hard on her. Beth craves justice as much as I do.

“We need someone who can get them out of hiding. Someone they won't suspect. What if I—”

I interrupt her, already knowing where she's going. “It can't be you,” I say. “We can't risk them knowing who you are. When they've flown under the radar for so long, we have to assume they could have come across you at any time. Until we know just how deep this goes, I can't risk it. I won't risk you, Beth.”

She makes a disgruntled sound, but I don't care. “Someone else then,” she insists, and I nod. “I'll find someone!” The vehemence in Beth's voice is what really gets to me, and I don't fight her on the matter. Instead, I give her permission to do some scouting.

“Get me a list of potentials, and we can go over them together in a couple of weeks. Don't approach them yet, we need to be smart about this,” I say, reminding her that she can't just start offering the job to those she thinks would be suitable candidates.

She immediately begins listing off names, and I make a note of the tiny list. Three names to be exact, and the first two I mentally veto for being too inexperienced.

“I’ll keep looking,” Beth says, reading my unimpressed facial expression without me saying anything. “Go! Get out of here. Spend some time with your nieces.”

Hearing someone remind me that Caitlin is my niece is just the reminder I need. Well, it’s not like I need a reminder, I know who she is. And it’s perfectly normal that she’s on my mind all the time, right?

After hugging Beth and making sure everyone knows she is in charge, I leave our spare warehouse in the north of England. As soon as I’m in my car, I ring Caitlin back. My heart skips a beat when her smiling face comes onto my screen.

“Dante,” she breathes. I love the way she always sounds like I’ve made her day when she says my name. “Are you coming home today?”

Shaking my head, I force a frown. “No, not today, Caitlin.”

Her face falls, and she bites her bottom lip. “O-okay.” She sounds so defeated I almost tell her the truth, but I stop myself. I’d rather surprise her.

II



OceanofPDF.com

Caitlin

The alley wall is cold to the touch, and I flinch as I make contact with the first brick. But I force my fingers to grip it firmly so I can hoist myself to the top. As I do that, the skirt on my school uniform bunches up, and I know that if anyone stands behind me, they'll get a good look at my knickers. I snicker at the thought, which is a non-issue. In this kind of weather, it's only the desperate, the needy, or those without a choice that are outside.

Which one am I?

If I'm honest, I do have a choice, I just don't like my other options—and I'm definitely both desperate and needy.

Scaling the wall is harder with how wet and slippery it is, but once I'm on top of the wall, I look around the dark and empty alley. There are no street lights back here, so I can barely see the rain as it pelts down, soaking me to the bone. My ears perk up as the telltale sign of the train reaches me. Where it's a nuisance to most people—a sound they'd prefer to live without—it sounds like freedom to me.

My skirt flies up, and my hair flows behind me as the vehicle passes me. It's 6:02 pm. Just as it always is when I sit here. In the beginning, I came here because I didn't want to go home until I knew I wouldn't be alone. Now... well, I'm not entirely sure why I'm here or what I'm looking for. Clarity, perhaps?

I've been to church, praying to get rid of the... of what I can't control, not that it did me any good. Or maybe that's why Mike asked me out the very next day. On the off-chance that his question was divinity inspired, I said yes. That was six months ago, and we're still together.

On paper, Mike checks all the boxes for a first boyfriend. He's sweet, kind, attentive, and good looking. His unruly, curly, dark brown hair is always sticking up all over the place, and every time he laughs, it's with his entire body. When he buys M&M's, he always gives me all the blue and green ones without sneaking them for himself. After our dates, he walks me home, never giving me more than a respectful peck on the cheek when we're at my front door.

He's picture perfect in every way, except not the one my twisted heart wants. Even though I know that, I cling to him like a security blanket of normalcy. Because if I let him go, I'll be alone with my thoughts and feelings—and I can't handle that. So for now, I'm giving him as much of me as I can, all the while knowing he's sharing himself completely with me.

The sound from my phone is a welcome distraction that saves me from mentally going down a route I'm constantly fighting to avoid.

Ave: Home soon? Xx

Ave: I'm staaarving! So if you aren't here within the hour, I might just die from starvation. Xx

Ave: Do you want that on your conscience? Xx

I chuckle, but before I can answer my sister's message, I get yet another one.

Ave: Don't answer that last part. I'm too fragile and hungry for full honesty. Uncle Dante isn't coming home today as planned, so it's just you and me for dinner. Xx

I already knew my uncle wouldn't be waiting for me at the house, but cold still seeps through my limbs as my sister confirms he's still out of town. I force myself to focus on the last part of her text, and a genuine smile spreads across my lips while my thumbs fly across the touchscreen as I reply. It's rare I get my sister all to myself without the twins she calls her BFFs also being around.

Me: I'll be home in twenty minutes. Think you can soldier through? Xx

The only answer I get is a sleeve of middle finger emojis, and I laugh as I jump down from the wall, my solemn mood forgotten for now. With a spring in my step, I rush through the deserted streets, only coming across a few cars on my way home. That's one upside to living in a small town like Briarwood, it's never extremely busy on the roads.

Even though it's late October, the cold doesn't register until I walk through the front door, greeted by a wall of heat. My drenched clothes drip onto the carpet, and I silently curse at the mess I'm making. Then I remember my sister is the only one home, so I quickly strip out of my soaked uniform. My blue tie, white shirt, and blue pleated skirt all land in a pile at the front door with my tights and shoes.

“Ave?” I shout. “I’m just going to have a quick shower. Do you mind getting started on the food?” When she doesn’t answer me, I assume she’s upstairs in her room.

Without looking around, I emerge from the passage with my schoolbag slung over one shoulder, my phone in hand, wearing only my bra and knickers that are also wet. Since my sister is the only other person in the house, I don’t bother covering up as I walk up the stairs to the second floor, where all our bedrooms are.

Walking by Dante’s closed bedroom door, my heartbeat increases at the same time as disappointment fills me anew. Although I’m beyond happy to spend the night with Ave, I hate he isn’t home. It’s been two days, and I don’t like it. I’ve already called him twice today, so I’m not sure I can come up with a third reason to get him on the phone—let alone a video call.

Don’t think about him, my mind hisses, and I really try my best not to. Why is it that the more you try not to focus on something, the harder it becomes to avoid? Does everyone have that problem? Or is it just me? Recently, it’s something I’ve been pondering more and more, and the irony isn’t lost on me.

After leaving my bag in front of the door to my bedroom, I walk over and knock on my sister’s. Without waiting for an answer, I stick my head inside. “Hey,” I say, beaming at her. “I’m just going to take a quick shower. Do you mind getting started?”

Ave spins in her office chair and faces me. Her dark brown hair is gathered in a messy bun, and she's rocking her glasses without prescription. I have no idea why she wears them, but it looks good on her and, after all this time, it's just one of those things.

"Can't we just call for a pizza?" She taps her pencil against her lips like she's only half paying attention to what we're talking about.

Since Dante left us the usual emergency credit card, which doubles as our source for food when we can't be arsed cooking, I nod. "Sure. Go ahead and order. I'll be downstairs soon."

"I got into both of the twins' emails today." Pride is palpable in her tone and her beaming smile is infectious. "I'd asked them to update the passwords to one of those no one is supposed to be able to hack."

Grinning, I ask, "But you did?"

"In less than fifteen minutes," she says, confirming what I already knew. My sister is a bloody genius. Then her smile falls. "I should have been able to do it in ten or less, though."

That's Ave in a nutshell, always looking at coulda, woulda, shoulda, instead of celebrating her achievements.

I roll my eyes at how predictable she is. Nothing is ever good enough in her eyes when it's her doing it. I don't know why she's holding herself to impossibly high standards. People from all sorts of genius colleges and unis have already tried to

recruit her, so it's not like there's any dispute as to how smart she is.

“Stop being so hard on yourself,” I scold, already knowing I've lost her to whatever she's mulling over in her mind. “And don't forget to order pizza.”

When Ave is gaming or sharpening her skills as a hacker, hunger is the only thing that will break her concentration. Since she's in the middle of whatever, it's probably best that all she has to do is tap the delivery app a few times. That way there's no chance she'll burn something—which, sadly, wouldn't be the first time.

“Oh, I have a surprise for you,” Ave grins wide, very much resembling the cat that ate the canary.

I narrow my eyes at her so I don't give my curiosity away because if I do, she'll torture me for as long as possible by dangling her knowledge in front of me like a carrot.

“Is it for my birthday?” I ask, all excited by the prospect.

My eighteenth birthday is right around the corner, and for the past year I've been so excited I've been bringing it up at least once a week. It's a wonder Dante and Ave aren't fed up with me yet. Maybe they already are, but not enough to tell me to bugger off.

“No. This surprise is for tonight,” Ave says. Then she tells me to get lost so she can finish her coding and order the pizza.

I mock salute her and awkwardly try to close her door with the hand that's clutching my phone when I hear a sharp intake

of breath behind me. My phone falls to the floor, and I gasp in shock as I whirl around. My hand shoots to my chest, resting on top of my pounding heart, and a goofy smile takes over my face as my eyes fall on Dante.

“You startled me,” I say, accusingly. “I didn’t think you’d be home until later this week.”

Instead of sharing my amusement, Dante clenches his jaw, his nostrils vibrating as he looks at me like I’ve done something wrong.

“Cat got your tongue?” I ask, adding a nervous laugh.

Seriously, why is he looking at me like that without saying anything? Feeling like his eyes are burning me, I focus on the scruff on his chin, and the few blond strands of hair that are hanging in front of his eyes.

With a huff, I bend down to retrieve my phone from where I dropped it. As I’m bent, he lets out a strangled sound, and I look up at him with a bemused expression.

“What’s going on with you?” I demand.

When I’m standing upright, he points at me. “Why are you walking around like that?” His voice makes the hairs on my arms stand at attention, and a shiver works its way down my spine.

Blimey... how could I forget that I’m only wearing my underwear? My soaked underwear. When I was talking with Ave, I was only sticking my face through her door, so I never thought about it. And when I left... well...

Rather than cover myself up, I cock my hip and deliberately fold my arms beneath my boobs. “You weren’t supposed to be home.” I don’t like being kept out of the loop, in fact, I despise it. “Didn’t you say you wouldn’t make it home until closer to the weekend?”

“Get dressed, Caitlin,” my uncle barks at me. Though his tone sounds like he’s annoyed, his eyes are glued to my cleavage. Despite the cold, I’m pretty sure Dante’s heated gaze is the reason my nipples are straining against the soft material of my bra.

I’m inwardly loving the way he’s looking at me, and I want to keep his eyes for as long as possible.

“No,” I say, smiling saccharinely at him. “Not until you answer my question.”

He mumbles something too low for me to hear before pinching the bridge of his nose. When he closes his eyes, I want to tell him to open them again, beg him to look at me and really see me. Instead, I take the opportunity to drink him in without worrying about being caught.

Dante is the epitome of a *man*, and not just because he’s thirty-four. Even though he’s lean cut, he’s brimming with muscles. His sandy blond hair is shaggy, getting in his eyes when it isn’t slicked back, and his blue eyes are hypnotising. His skin is covered in tribal tattoos, most of them from his surfer days.

I know I shouldn’t stand here in front of him, practically flaunting my body. I can’t help it, though. Whenever I’m

around him, I want—*no, I crave*—for him to look at me like I’m more than his niece and ward. And no, he’s not my uncle in the sense some call their parents’ friends’ uncle and aunt, he’s my dad’s brother. Half brother. The ‘half’ part isn’t relevant, definitely not a Hail Mary. We’re related by blood, and even if we weren’t, there’s no way he’d look at me like I do him.

The most awkward part is that I don’t know when my feelings for him morphed from familial to illicit. In some ways, I don’t think they ever changed, I just grew up. When I was ten, he fascinated me, and I knew already then that I was depending on him in a way I did with no others. But at that age it’s not love, is it? Puppy love, maybe... but it’s always felt like more.

When Dante clears his throat, I realise I’ve shamelessly been eating him up with my eyes for way longer than I meant to. Instead of listening to the part of me that wants to retreat, I force myself to straighten and meet his gaze.

“I came back an hour ago,” he says. His tongue darts out and licks his lips while his eyes keep looking at the area just above my crossed arms. “We can talk more when you’re dressed.”

With a nod, I move over to my closed bedroom door. “So you’re Ave’s surprise,” I state. I don’t really need him to answer. Hell, I didn’t even need to say it, I only did so to prolong my time out here. “You know I don’t like being lied to.” With those words, I disappear into my room, and because

I can feel his eyes on me, I sway my hips more than I need to before closing the door behind me.

This is why I need to know when he's coming back. It's not only because I count down the minutes, I need to mentally prepare myself. That's the only way I can keep myself from doing something stupid like I just did out there. Despite knowing it was wrong, I can't make myself regret it.

Within the last two years, I've noticed that Dante's eyes often linger in a way they never do with Ave, and the high I get from his heated stares is something I cling to, and can fly high on for days. The only problem is, every time I get a reaction, I want to push that much further next time—it's like I constantly have to one up myself, see how far I can take it.

After showering, I dress in a pair of PJ pants and my black turtleneck. Not only is the sweater comfortable and soft, but if I'm completely honest with myself, I'm picking it because it's too small and makes my boobs look killer. Then I text Mike to cancel our plans of going to the movies. The pang of guilt I feel isn't enough to go through with our date now that Dante is home.

III



OceanofPDF.com

Caitlin

“That’s it. I officially give up,” Ave says, throwing her arms up in the air.

She’s just landed on my most expensive property for the fifth time, and by now she’s completely bankrupt.

Dante chuckles and I whoop exaggeratedly before humming *‘We Are The Champions’*.

“Say it,” I demand, pinning my sister with a look she knows the meaning of well.

Ave gets out of the chair and gives me a sly look. “No,” she replies.

While laughing, I dart out of my chair and throw myself at her. It doesn’t take long before I have her pinned beneath me, and I start tickling her. She bucks and writhes, trying to get me off her as tears stream from her eyes while she cries for mercy.

“You’re the... the—” She can barely get the words out as I mercilessly tickle her, so I let up. “Bloody git.”

I throw my head back and laugh harder at her insult. “Those aren’t the magic words,” I sing-song, doubling my efforts. I will make her say the words.

“You win, I lose,” Ave huffs.

I lean down and kiss her forehead with an obnoxiously loud smooching sound. “And don’t you forget it,” I cackle as I reluctantly get off of her.

This is one of our family routines, pizza, followed by the bloodshed that's also known as Monopoly. Where I'm always playing to win, Ave plays for fun, and Dante... well, I don't really know why he plays besides doing it for us. It's been that way ever since we were children, and it's something I hope will never change.

"Alright, alright. Settle down," Dante says, trying to sound stern, but failing to hide the laughter in his voice. "Since Caitlin won, she gets to pick the movie."

I'm momentarily distracted when he gets up and heads to the kitchen. I swear, sometimes it's annoying that I'm so aware of him. Even when I don't mean to, I can't help notice every little thing he does.

My sister grumbles and gives me several annoyed looks. Where she's a horror fan, I'm anything but. Seriously, if it was up to her, we'd watch at least one slasher movie a day during Spooktober, as she's dubbed the month.

"Hmm, whatever should I pick?" I ask, dragging the moment out. "I mean there are so many Rom-Coms and Chick Flicks we haven't watched... oh, or we could rewatch some of my favourites..."

Despite being two years younger, Ave is a lot more patient than I am. Much to my disappointment, I'm not irritating her in the slightest.

"Ohhh, I know," I say, clapping enthusiastically. "What about *Love Actually*? We haven't watched it this month at all."

I hear Dante laughing from the kitchen, and the sound makes butterflies flutter in my stomach.

Ave finally gives me a reaction. “Really? You make us watch it at least three times every December. Must you taint Spooktober with it as well?”

Unable to keep the charade up, I stop my fruitless attempt at riling her up. “How about...” I shudder, not feeling up to the suggestion I’m about to make. “A Freddy Krueger movie?”

I absolutely loathe the burn-victim-turned-serial-killer, but he is preferable to the masked ones that never die, no matter how many bullets hit them. Hell, they don’t even have to run to catch their victims. Nope, a leisurely stroll, and the poor girl or guy will somehow trap themselves.

Sigh.

At least it makes sense with the man who traps people in nightmares...

Kind of...

Somehow.

“Really?” Ave perks up. When I nod, she throws herself so hard at me I almost fall backwards onto our couch. “You’re the best,” she beams. Then she gets her phone out and starts tapping away.

My sister’s excitement rubs off on me, and I can’t help feeling better about my selfish reason for indulging her taste, which I’m only doing so I can indulge in my obsession. I know it’s messed up, but I can’t help myself. By picking this,

she'll be engrossed in the movie and I'll... well, I'll be able to move closer to Dante without being awkward about it.

This charade started a few years ago. While Ave's horror movies had never bothered me, I got scared when we watched *'The Descent'*—those underdeveloped humanoids hiding in caves... just no, thank you—and Dante noticed. He wrapped his arm around my shoulder and pulled me closer to him. That's when I started exaggerating my fear, just so he'd hold me.

I know I'm playing with fire, that I shouldn't play him like this. Despite knowing, I can't make myself stop—believe me, I've tried.

While Dante makes popcorn, Ave starts the streaming service and settles on the movie she wants to watch, and I drape out the blankets and move the pillows around. I don't need to ask my sister where she prefers to sit, I already know she'll want the armchair so she can stretch out.

"I'll take the chair so you two can cosy up on the couch," Dante says when he returns with two large bowls of deliciously buttered and salted popcorn.

"Why?" Ave asks, looking like she's ready to fight him for the seat.

Gnawing on my bottom lip, I hide my face in my long, cinnamon brown hair. I know this is my fault. When the doorbell rings out, I leave them to their bickering, already knowing my sister won't be able to change Dante's mind. Not

after the stunt I pulled in the hallway between our bedrooms while only wearing my underwear.

Stupid! I mentally scold myself. What the hell was I thinking? Dante is a man, and I'm just... I'm his niece, so of course he isn't looking at me like that. I need to get over my forbidden crush, I know that. But how does one do that? Especially when they're living with the person they need to forget about?

As I open the door, I'm surprised to find Mike outside. "What are you doing here?" I ask, immediately regretting the question. "I'm so happy to see you," I quickly add, while dragging him inside. I shouldn't be surprised that I mean it, but I am, which makes me feel guilty.

Mike's a good guy, and he doesn't deserve the way I'm using him. Especially not the way I throw him aside as soon as there's an opportunity to spend more time with Dante.

Before I can talk sense into myself, I stand on my tip-toes and throw my arms around his neck. I don't care that his jacket is wet, or that rain drops cling to his face and hair.

"What do you mean?" he asks, sounding surprised.

Unable to keep up the conversation, I press my lips to his. A smile breaks free when he winds his arms around my waist, pulling me closer against him.

"I've missed you too, love."

Since pet names like love and lovie aren't commonly used down here in the south, I always feel special when Mike calls

me that. It always sounds like he truly means it, and I like being someone's love.

Forgetting that we aren't alone, I lick along the seams of his lips and coax his mouth open. My fingers tangle with his dark curls until he opens up, and his tongue strokes mine in slow movements. He tastes like the same peppermint toothpaste Dante uses, and with my eyes closed I can almost imagine it's him I'm kissing.

"Mike, it's nice to see you again."

When Dante's voice interrupts us, we both jump apart like we've been caught doing something we shouldn't. My cheeks burn from embarrassment, and with the look Dante gives me, I'm half wondering if he knows I was thinking about him.

"You too, Mr Hayton."

Feeling Dante's eyes on me, I keep mine on the floor.

Yeah, maybe necking in the dark passage isn't ideal, but it's not like it's his business. Besides, shouldn't he be glad I'm about to abandon our family night? That way, he doesn't have to pretend my presence isn't bothering him.

"We're going up to my room," I say, pulling at Mike's hand to get him moving. "Now you don't have to sit in the chair," I add, bitterly.

Shite, I pushed him too far earlier. What was I even thinking, parading around in my underwear like that?

Dante makes an exasperated sound. "Why don't you watch the movie with me and Avery? You know she wants us to

watch it as a family.”

Using my sister is a low blow, but I concede immediately. Turning away from my uncle, I wait while Mike hangs up his jacket and kicks off his shoes.

When we get into the living room, Ave beams from the armchair, sticking her tongue out at our uncle.

“Snooze, you lose,” she chants, then she cackles at the annoyed expression on his face.

“Being a troublemaker?” Mike asks, and when my sister nods, he laughs.

While the two of them talk, I move stuff around on the couch, so there’s room for me, Mike, and Dante, and even though I’m making a big production out of it, they mostly ignore my efforts.

“Bloody hell, Cait. Do you think we’ll fit with all that?” Mike laughs, pointing at the pillows and two throws I’ve claimed as mine.

I shrug and smile at him. “You’re right,” I say, shooting Dante a shite-eating grin. “When I have you to cuddle me, I don’t need all this.”

Is it right to use Mike like this? No.

Should I taunt Dante? No.

I really am such a mess. I know I should stop, but it’s hard not to enjoy it when my uncle looks like he’s about to blow a gasket. Ignoring him, I sit down in the middle of the couch.

Mike takes his seat on my left and immediately wraps one arm across my shoulder, while Dante sits at the opposite end on my right.

We sit like that for half the movie. Avery and Mike are completely engrossed in whatever Freddy is doing to the teenagers, and I'm busy pretending I'm not noticing the way Dante keeps glancing at me out of his peripheral vision.

As a wicked idea hits me, I move so my head is resting in Mike's lap, stretching my legs across Dante's. When my uncle's head snaps in my direction, I smile sweetly. "You don't mind, do you?" I ask, knowing he can't very well say no without making things awkward.

I spend the next fifteen minutes moving my feet around, careful not to make him spill the coffee he's holding, just to be a nuisance and because I'm still annoyed he wanted to take Ave's chair just to get away from me. A grown man of thirty-four wanted to get away from me, his seventeen-year-old niece.

"Caitlin!" Dante whisper-yells, keeping his volume so low he doesn't gain the attention of Ave and Mike.

As I look his way, the warning in his eyes is easy to read. When I don't stop poking him with my toes, he grabs a hold of my ankles. The heat from his hand is scorching me where my pyjama pants have ridden up, exposing my ankles. Dante shifts uncomfortably in his seat, and that's when I feel it.

My eyes widen and I almost choke on my breath as I feel the rigid bulge beneath my feet. My mouth pops open in

surprise, and when I look at my uncle, he looks as though he's in pain. His hold on my ankle tightens, but it's not uncomfortable. It's... exhilarating, especially since he's not preventing me from moving.

When he moves, I'm fully prepared for him to push me away. He doesn't, though. Instead, he places his cup on the table.

Although I know I should stop and leave him be, I can't—more accurately, I don't want to. I experimentally run my feet across the bulge, never looking away from his face. Dante's nostrils flare, but he keeps his gaze on the movie that's playing out on our TV.

I continue my exploration with my feet. I've felt Mike's hardness pressed against me while we've petted, but I've never taken it further than some over-the-clothes touching. Right now, though, I want to explore. I alternate between running the length of my foot up and down and wiggling my toes against the tip of his cock.

When Dante bites down on his lip, I smile, feeling victorious since I've drawn out a reaction from him. After a few minutes, he lets go of my ankle and removes the pillow from behind his head before discreetly placing it in his lap, on top of the blanket I'm lying beneath.

Is he... is that permission for me to continue? Or?

I feel bolder now that he has successfully shielded his crotch, and I wiggle my feet even more. My gaze is shifting

between him and the screen, but whatever nightmarish thing that's playing out isn't enough to keep my attention.

The inferno in Dante's sockets as he looks at me is scorching, and it's like he's holding me in place. I bite the inside of my cheek to not whimper or say anything I really shouldn't. I don't know how long he locks me in place like that, but it feels like hours. However, it's probably only seconds—a few minutes, tops—that fly by.

As soon as I can move, I turn my head, only to find my sister looking at me. She frowns as her gaze flicks between my face and Dante's. I swallow nervously and try to look like... well, like normal, I guess. What does normal look like, though? Do I furrow my brows? Raise them? And what about my mouth? Should I smile?

While I silently ponder those things, I pull my knees up and place a hand on Mike's thigh. Shite, Mike... I can't believe I just did... whatever I did, with him sitting right here. Something is definitely wrong with me.

Dante suddenly leaps to his feet, muttering curses as he frantically pulls at the blanket I'm hiding under. "Crikey, I'm sorry." He gestures wildly at a stain on the blanket. "I spilled coffee."

The matching dark stain covering dark jeans might make the story believable, and if I didn't know better, I would totally buy what he's trying to sell. However, since I can hear the insincerity in his tone, and know the cup was on the table, I know he isn't telling the truth. Or, maybe he is... there are

coffee stains on both textile items. I'm not so sure it was an accident, though.

Wrenching my gaze away from him, I gnaw on my bottom lip. I desperately want to say something to make him stay, but I shouldn't. As long as Dante stays, I'll continue to scheme up ways to touch him—or get him to touch me.

“Do you want us to wait for you?” Ave asks, pausing the movie.

Dante shakes his head. “Go ahead and finish. It's getting late, so I'm sure Mike needs to leave soon.”

I fail to hide my snort. Seriously, it's not even that late. The timestamp in the top left corner of the TV reads 9 pm. If Mike and I had gone to the movies as we'd originally planned, we wouldn't be getting out for another thirty minutes. However, I don't mention any of this. Instead, I keep quiet while my uncle leaves.

We finish the movie, and then Mike and Ave talk a bit about how fab it was. Their love for the gory goes over my head, but I still pretend to be interested because I like this part of me. The one where I'm not doing anything wrong, the one where I behave like a normal teen instead of the hag who's mistreating her boyfriend while thirsting for her uncle's attention.

All-consuming guilt makes it hard to breathe, like it's constricting my airways. No, I refuse to let myself wallow when Mike's here. I can't keep living in my head, he deserves my attention.

When my sister disappears upstairs, Mike decides it's time to head home. A quick glance out of the window confirms it's still raining.

“Do you want Dante to drive you home?” I ask, hoping he'll say no—and then I feel bad for wanting him to trek home alone in the rain. “I'm sure he wouldn't mind, especially not when it's dark.”

Mike laughs and cups my cheek. “I don't mind walking in the rain. Besides, this is Briarwood. Nothing bad ever happens here, whether it's light or dark.”

Our small town is secluded and boring. All our shops close at 10 pm, even the off licence liquor shop that should be open until later. Briarwood is one of those small towns where it feels like everyone knows everyone, even if that's not the case. Which is why they don't even card you in said off licence shop. Depending on the owner's mood, he'll either call your parents or let it slide—it's like throwing the dice with him.

We don't even have our own police department or hospital. Nope, during the merger a few years back, the council decided that ours just weren't worth the money. So if something did happen, help is twenty to thirty minutes away.

“What made you decide to drop by?” I suddenly ask.

I'm not sure why I didn't push for an answer when he showed up and I asked the same question, but for whatever reason, I didn't.

Mike frowns in confusion. “You invited me...” He trails off as he fishes his phone out of his back pocket. After unlocking it, he pulls up the text thread with me.

Caitlin x: Sorry for cancelling our movie night, but Dante is home. Fancy joining us for a FK marathon? Xxxx

I try to hide my confusion as I read the text for the third time, but it makes no sense. I never sent that text, and... oh bloody hell. Looks like I’ll be kicking Ave’s arse for this later. The cow promised to never hack me again after the last time she sent a text to Dante from my phone.

When the hell did she send this? Either she cockily assumed she’d win and get to pick the movie, or Mike was already nearby. Then again, he only lives like fifteen minutes away, so I suppose he could have made it after I beat her arse.

“Oh yeah, I totally forgot,” I say, shrugging like it’s no big deal. “After losing to Ave, I was too busy being a sore loser.”

This is what happens when Ave lands me in shite without giving me a heads up. I have to scramble to make stuff up on the spot, and I hate it. But since Mike knows I dislike horror movies, I have to say something.

Out of anyone I know, my sister is the most organised and level-headed. She never does anything without thoroughly thinking it through—and even then, she likes to look at it from a million different angles and weigh her options. Probabilities and numbers are her jam.

“I’m glad you invited me,” Mike says. The tinge of hurt in his tone makes me feel bad that I’m making this all about me in my head. Ave probably invited him over as a favour to me, which would be so like her.

“We haven’t done family night for so long that I got completely swept up in it.” When he still looks disappointed, I say, “I’m sorry. I know that’s not an excuse.”

Mike chuckles and runs a hand down my cheek. “Do I get a goodnight kiss?”

I wrap my arms around his neck and slant my lips to his. “Of course you do,” I breathe.

This is one time where Mike really goes for it. His tongue probes, demanding entrance. As soon as I part my lips, he delves inside, stroking his tongue around mine. It’s unhurried, leisurely, even—yet, it feels like more. Maybe it’s because his hands are grabbing handfuls of my ass, pulling me closer so our groins are perfectly aligned.

I try to make myself melt into the kiss, but no matter how much I try, I can’t get into it. Thoughts about Dante’s hard length beneath my foot are running on repeat in my mind like a movie. Pushing closer to Mike, I try again to get swept up in the feel of his lips on mine, but it feels... wrong, yet right at the same time. But where the feel of Dante’s hardness made my pussy flutter, Mike’s touch isn’t having the same effect.

“Wrap it up, you two. It’s time to say goodnight.” At the sound of Dante’s voice, I jump away from Mike like his touch is scalding.

Unbidden, guilt gnaws at my insides, and I'm not sure why.
I shouldn't feel guilty for kissing my boyfriend, should I?

OceanofPDF.com

IV



OceanofPDF.com

Caitlin

“A big party, eh?” Dante asks, quirking an eyebrow in mock surprise as he playfully leans against me. “Do you want a carriage and an anthem prepared for you as well?” He laughs before teasingly poking me in the side.

I let out a mock whine and grumble about the bruise I know I’ll be sporting within hours. My skin is the epitome of the saying *‘bruising like a peach’* and I know the discolouration will show soon.

Prick.

After unpeeling the banana in my hand, I wrap my lips around it. Instead of biting a piece off right away, I keep it in my mouth while looking at my uncle. His nostrils flare and his hands are clenched at his sides. The sight makes my core slick with need, and I forget we’re not alone.

“Get a bloody room, why don’t you?” Ave gripes.

The smile on my lips dies, and I remove the phallic fruit from my mouth.

“Shut up,” I mumble while showing her my pretty middle finger before she shoves another spoonful of soup into her mouth.

“Avery!” Dante growls, his face morphing from playful into aghast. “You’re old enough to know you shouldn’t say things like that. Not even as a joke. It’s wrong, and... just don’t.”

Heat creeps up my cheeks at the word.

Wrong!

Wrong!!

Wrong!!!

“Who says it’s a joke?” my sister volleys. “How many seventeen—*almost eighteen*—year-olds spend the night in their parents’ bed? You might not be our parent, but you’re as good as, so the point stands. And you say I’m being inappropriate after that display?” She shrugs one shoulder as if to say, *‘don’t mind me, I’m just spewing facts.’*

Dante’s reaction makes my stomach churn, and I wipe a hand across my now clammy forehead. “Stop it,” I cry, but I’m too late.

Bloody hell. After all this time, Dante should know that Ave’s comment was only a joke. I know most people never know when my sister is joking, what can I say, her people skills are lacking. But *he* should know.

With the poorly chosen words, my sister doesn’t just suck the good mood out of the room, she completely obliterates it. The plans for my eighteenth birthday party are no longer important, and I already know I’ll have to sleep by myself tonight. The thought is enough to kill my blush and instead make me pale as my breathing becomes shallow.

Dante doesn’t even glance at me once while he picks up his wallet and keys. “Don’t wait up,” he tosses over his shoulder before he exits the kitchen. The sound of the front door

slamming behind him is loud, too loud, and it makes me cringe.

I spin around, very much intending to lay into my sister for being such a prat.

“Cait...” Ave sniffles and looks at me from beneath her long, wet lashes. “I’m sorry. I didn’t think... I didn’t mean to...” I grind my teeth while mentally trying to make myself calm down. “Come on, look at me,” she begs. “I really was just joking, you know. I know you only sleep in his bed because of the nightmares. There’s... there’s no other reason, right?”

Yes.

“No.” I deny her words with a firm headshake. “Don’t be daft.”

She nods thoughtfully. “It’s already raining. Will you be okay?”

The thunder promised by the weather forecast hasn’t hit our part of town yet, but I know it will. And with the thunder comes the night terrors. The pity in her voice makes me feel like I’m the most pathetic person on earth, so I don’t answer her. Unable to stomach being in the same room as my sister, I escape while mumbling something about homework. I barely make it halfway up the stairs before I feel her hand on my elbow.

“Will you be okay?” Her eyes are full of regret as she repeats the question.

I swallow down the rising panic and plaster a smile on my face. “I’ll be fine. Go have fun with Camden and Connor.” Then I remember Lily’s words about them going to the cinema, and I pull some cash from my purse. “Don’t let the Bennett family corrupt you. Buy your salty popcorn instead of the sweet kind they insist on.”

Unable to stop myself from fidgeting under her all too knowing stare, I pull my sister in for a quick hug before I dart the rest of the way up the stairs.

As soon as I’m safely in my room, I change out of my clothes. The school uniform feels too tight, too constricting on my skin. I put on my PJ pants and contemplate finding another night t-shirt than my usual one. Seeing as it’s one of Dante’s, it doesn’t feel right to wear it now.

“What do you care? He isn’t home.” The words are for my ears only.

Although it’s still early, only 7:30 pm, I still go through my nighttime routine.

Brushing my teeth, check.

Bag packed for tomorrow, check.

School uniform ready and waiting, check.

It’s depressing to realise that only thirty minutes have passed when I’m out of things to do, but I don’t know what else I can occupy myself with. I don’t want to call Mike when I’m feeling like this. He would be here in a heartbeat if he

knew how terrified and lonely I feel, but I don't tell him—I never do.

Calling Ave is also out of the question. She isn't burdened by the accident as much as I am, and I love that for her. It also makes me more determined to keep it from her so she doesn't have to worry about me.

The last person on my very small list of people I can depend on is Dante, and the monster inside me demands I call him and guilt him into coming back. But I lock that shite down so fast the thoughts barely register. The part of me that craves him is constantly warring with the part that knows it's wrong and that it can never be. Tonight is one of those rare times where my good side wins out. If this is what it feels like to do the right thing, it's highly overrated, in my opinion.

After getting into bed, I turn the picture of mum and dad around so they're facing the wall. Even though I know they can't, I don't want them to see me falling apart. It's been close to nine years... yet it still feels like it was yesterday.

I shriek loudly and hide under my covers as the first thunderclap sounds. When the second one follows soon after, it becomes difficult to breathe.

When the sky rumbles again, I turn to my side and I whimper pathetically into my pillow while tears fall in a steady stream into the cornflower blue fabric.

Why did Ave have to open her big mouth? It's her fault I'm alone. I immediately shake those nasty thoughts from my head. Even though I know she was joking, she was still right.

Sleeping in Dante's bed isn't normal, and I'm definitely guilty of abusing his wish to help me. I know I need to cut the last cord and learn to stand on my own two feet.

As I hide like the small girl my mind reverts to when it thunders, I think back on the accident.

"Daddy, I don't like the storm," I whine, pulling the blanket I'm sharing with Ave above my eyes. "The thunder hurts my ears."

My sister is already asleep. Even snoring and drooling. It's disgusting, but mum says I can't tell her that.

"I know, bunny. I know. Nothing is going to happen, and we're almost home." Daddy sounds sure that we're okay.

Mum begins to sing. I don't recognise the song, but I like it when she sings, so I close my eyes and fist my plastic bag filled with sweets. It's Halloween and mum and dad's mates took me and Avery around the estate to Trick or Treat. We've done it before, but I definitely think I got more sweets this year than last year.

I giggle to myself as I reach for Ave's bag that's lying next to me.

"Behave, Cait." Mum's voice is stern, so I immediately give up on my plans to swap my sister's chocolate bars with peanuts for mine with caramel.

When I look out of the windows, I can't see anything but the black. Sometimes I get scared daddy can't see either, but he always tells me he can. He says it's his superpower.

Mum is still singing softly to me, and I make myself relax while I look through my green and white plastic bag. It's a big one, and it's almost full.

"Stop being silly, daddy," I scold as the car swerves.

Instead of laughing at me, dad curses under his breath, and mum stops singing. "Are you wearing your seatbelt, Cait?" she asks, and when I say yes, she makes me check Ave's.

Something changes inside the car, but I don't know what it is. I just know that both mum and dad look scared and the... a scream is torn out of me as the car skids and suddenly we're flipped over. Ave startles awake, and she screams.

"Look after your sister," mum says. Her words are rushed, and she's turning in the front passenger seat so she can look at us once before turning back to look ahead.

When the car doesn't stop moving, daddy shouts at us and mum screams.

"Listen to me, bunny. Everything is going to be okay," daddy shouts. "Don't let go of your sister's hand. Keep holding Ave's hand. Remember, you can't let go under any circumstances."

A full-on body shudder runs through me as I recall waking up in the hospital. The medical personnel kept insisting I had to let go of Ave's hand, and I screamed in protest. They had to sedate me so they could take us both into the operating theatre. While Ave needed a knee replacement after suffering a fractured patella, I had a ruptured spleen.

When I woke up again, my sister was lying next to me. Her hair that's darker than mine, splayed across her pillow. The moonshine that came in through the window made her skin look eerie white, and I remember being frightened she might die.

After begging the night nurses, they agreed to move our beds closer together so I could hold her hand and look after her, just as I'd promised our parents. At the time I thought they were being nice... now I know differently. Sure, it was still kind of them, but it's entirely more likely the gesture was because they were pitying us.

No one would tell me what happened, or let us out. The nurses kept telling us that everything would be fine, and I believed them. I'm pretty sure that's why I hate being lied to, because that's always felt like what they did. I get they might not have known what to say, maybe it wasn't even their responsibility to tell us. But the lies stung regardless.

Then, out of the blue, Uncle Dante arrived almost an entire day later. We hadn't seen him for almost a year, so to Avery, he was a stranger. Our dad's younger half brother, who was always chasing the perfect wave in Santa Cruz, California.

Even though he usually came to visit once a year, he didn't really show an interest in me and Ave—at least not beyond the *'hiya. Wow, you've grown'* superficial nonsense. But I always enjoyed looking at him. His sandy blond hair gleamed in the sun, and I liked to pretend his countless tattoos told a story just for me.

Dante was the one who sat us down and told us that mum and dad were now in heaven. He also swore at the doctor and nurses when they hesitated to let this tattooed man take us home.

At the funeral, he let us pick the flowers and songs, and afterwards, when he learned our parents wanted him to be our guardian, he left his life in America and moved back to Briarwood—the backend boring town in South East England, that he'd left behind when he was sixteen. Even though I'm sure that raising his two nieces alone when he was twenty-five wasn't part of his perfect life plans, he never complained. Instead, he's done everything in his power to give us as normal a life as possible.

By now, I've soaked my pillow with tears. The trip down memory lane caused by the thunder is making me shiver, and I know I won't get any sleep tonight—not without Dante here to comfort me, to hold me tight while calling me his perfect storm.

I don't know what time it is, but it feels like it's been hours. Knowing that I can't let Ave come home when I'm such a mess, I dig my phone out and send a text to Lily.

Me: Hey! I'm sorry to ask, but is there any chance Ave can sleep over? x

Lily: Of course, honey! Do you want me to suggest it? x

Fresh tears spring into my eyes at Lily's words. The redheaded super mom is nothing short of amazing. Her twin boys, Connor and Camden, are my sister's best mates.

Seriously, the three of them are so close they might as well be triplets. In this case, that's good. Then it won't look suspicious when Lily comes up with whatever reason for Avery to stay.

Me: Yes, please. Thank you, Lily x

To keep up pretences, I shoot my sister a text as well.

Me: I'm just about to go to sleep. When will you be home?

Xx

It's almost 11 pm, so it won't seem too out of the ordinary.

It takes less than five minutes for her to reply that she's staying with the twins—apparently, Dante has already okayed it.

Well, isn't that just swell? At least he isn't taking his shitty mood out on my sister.

Happy that Ave is taken care of for the night, I allow my eyes to close. I can rest for a little, I... just... can't... fall... asleep...

OceanofPDF.com

V



OceanofPDF.com

Caitlin

When I wake up the next morning, I'm surprised to find that I'm no longer huddled under the covers in my bed. Instead of the cornflower blue bedding, these sheets are white. There's an unexpected weight around my middle, hot air tickles my ear, and... what the hell? It feels like something hard is poking my bum.

I yawn loudly and stretch before turning to my other side, where I immediately come face-to-face with my uncle, who's still asleep. I close my eyes and pretend that he, like me, is enjoying this. That I'm not just here out of obligation, but because he wants me in his bed. No matter how much I try to cling to the lie, I already know it's just that.

When I shift ever so slightly, I feel the hardness against the front of my upper thigh. My core clenches with a burning need as I realise what's poking me. I know I shouldn't do anything, but damn. I really want to touch him. To see him... and to make him groan like he does whenever he brings a woman into the house.

Sure, he sneaks them in and thinks we don't know. I mean, honestly... Ave is sixteen and I'm almost eighteen—considering he left his home when he was my sister's age, he can't honestly be thinking we're that oblivious. Of course, we know what's going on when Dante closes the bedroom door, and we hear the springs in the mattress working overtime.

That's where the similarity between me and my sister ends, though. While she blasts her music to drown any sounds out, I listen as intently as possible to Dante's groans while I...

"Good morning," he rumbles, his voice gravelly from sleeping.

A rush of shyness hits me, and I can barely croak, "hi," without almost drowning in my guilt.

I can't be in here... I shouldn't be in here. He's just trying to take care of me, and I'm lying here, considering what would happen if I snake my hand beneath his boxers.

"Why am I here?" I ask, genuinely confused.

He sighs, and when he removes his arm, I immediately miss the weight. "You don't remember, do you? Shite, I'm so sorry I left yesterday, Cait." As he calls me that instead of my full name, I blink at him, momentarily forgetting what happened yesterday.

His blue gaze meets my green one, and I feel like I could drown in his eyes. They're always so expressive, and full of life. Right now, though, they're letting me know just how bad he feels.

"I was an arse," he admits.

Laughter bubbles up my throat as the hint of his American accent leaks through, even as he uses the English term. Though it's been almost nine years since he came back to England to take care of us, he still carries remnants of the years he spent across the pond.

“An arse?” I quip before moving one of my hands beneath the double cover we’re sharing and place it on his chest. It’s just above his heart, and I feel the steady rhythm below my palm. Then I sigh and steady myself. “Just tell me what happened.” His eyes dart down to where my hand is touching him, but since he doesn’t move, I keep it where I want it.

“When I came home, you had been sleepwalking, and you were standing outside on the patio. The rain had completely soaked you. Fuck, you were shivering while you called for...” he trails off and swallows audibly. I nod while silently imploring him to continue. “You kept whimpering while I dried you and... well... changed your clothes. So I thought it was best if you slept in here with me.”

My heart squeezes as he fills me in on what happened after I fell asleep. I tried so hard to stay awake, but obviously I failed. Though I feel bad that I clearly scared him, which I know he will never admit, I’m glad that Ave wasn’t home.

Without thinking, I stretch and mutter, “Thank you.” I only meant to remove the kink from my back, but somehow my body takes over, and I find myself softly pressing my lips to his. Although he stiffens against me, he doesn’t pull away. Instead, he wraps his arm around my back and pulls me closer.

Feeling brave, I add more pressure and a moan slips free when he reciprocates. My body is coming alive, and the parts that only pulse and throb when I’m around him do just that. The hardness is back, and I think I feel it twitching against my stomach.

“You make me feel safe,” I whisper against his lips, and I feel more than hear his rumbled groan.

Since he hasn't pulled away, I'm feeling extra empowered and I gently slide the hand still under the covers across his rigid length. The touch is so soft I can claim it was an accident if he freaks out, and if he doesn't...

“Caitlin!” Dante immediately pulls back, his blue eyes wide with... surprise and... no, it can't be. I know he doesn't want me, not like I want him. “Please don't do this,” he begs, clenching his eyes closed.

I want to say something, but nothing comes to mind. No witty remark or sassy comeback to ease the building tension. Instead, I feel like an utter twat for making him look and sound so tortured.

“Sorry,” I whisper, cupping his cheek. Then I gently press my lips to the stubbled skin. “Thank you for taking care of me.”

As I pull back, Dante follows me. His eyes remain closed, so I don't know how he knows exactly where I am. But he proves he does when his lips are on mine again. I gasp in surprise and delight.

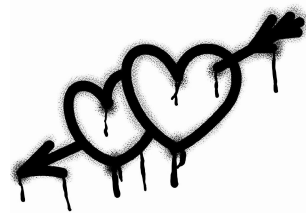
“Goddamnit, Cait... I can't... we can't...” He trails off as I arch my back, pressing my boobs against the hard planes of his chest. “Bloody hell! How am I meant to resist you?”

I want to tell him I don't want him to resist me, but the small voice in the back of my head holds me back. What we're

doing is wrong for so many reasons, yet the only thing that matters is that I feel guilty for tempting Dante when he's clearly so torn about it.

Instead of answering with words, I focus on how amazing his lips feel on mine. The action is innocent enough since both our mouths are closed, yet there's something extremely intimate about it.

When Dante pulls back with a tortured groan, I don't fight him. Instead, I slip out of bed and, without looking back, I make my way to my room to get ready.



When the last bell of the day rings I'm so happy to leave Briarwood College I almost skip down the halls. Although it's barely been two months since school started, the last year of the Sixth Form college is kicking my ass. Okay, that's probably mostly because I know I'll need to ace all my A Level exams at the end of the year to get accepted into a good university, but that shouldn't be a problem. My grades are close to perfect, and I'm actually enjoying most of my subjects.

Despite my internal grumbling, I'm actually enjoying Sixth Form. That's why I decided on spending two years doing that

instead of going straight to college when I finished Year 11 at sixteen. Plus, the upside is that I get to improve my grades, and hopefully get into a better college. Oxford no longer seems like such a longshot.

“Cait! Hey, come on now. Don’t make me run, you bloody tit.” I spin around and come face-to-face with my sister. She’s in Year 11, and in our small town we’re both in the same building. “Are you working today?” Ave sounds out of breath, like she’s been running to catch me, the twins hot on her heels as per usual.

If it wasn’t because me and Ave are close and share most things, I’d swear they’re all in some kind of relationship. However, my sister doesn’t seem interested in guys or girls at all—the only thing that gets her excited is when she hacks someone, or comes up with the perfect software code. And the twins... well, they’re a different story altogether.

I check the watch on my wrist before nodding. “Yep,” I say, then I turn around and greet Camden and Connor. “Is your mum in today?”

Two afternoons each week, I help Lily Bennett in the salon The Chic Strand. It’s mainly for work experience, and it doesn’t really pay anything apart from free haircuts and manicures. Since Lily is by far the best hairstylist in town, I’m not complaining, though.

You would think we’d only need one with how small Briarwood is. That isn’t the case, though. People actually drive here for her, which boggles my mind. Besides, as much as I

keep thinking that everyone knows everyone, it's not completely true. Over thirty thousand people live here, it just never feels like that many.

“She’s there.” The twins do that weird creepy thing where they speak in unison, and I swear they only do it because they know it freaks me out.

Pricks.

One of them breaks character and scrunches his face up while elbowing his brother, who punches him in kind.

“We completely forgot...” Twin One says.

Twin Two cringes. “Ahh shite, yeah. It’s your fault for being such a git.” He rolls his eyes at his brother before continuing. “Mum wanted us to ask if you can stay an extra hour today.”

My eyes widen as I witness the wonder twin powers in action right in front of me. One starting a sentence, the other finishing it. Seriously, it’s no wonder I can’t tell them apart. Ave has told me their differences enough times I probably should be able to remember them, but I can’t.

Since they love pulling stunts pretending to be each other, I will not subject myself to that by asking. In my head they’re Twin One and Twin Two, and as long as I don’t say that out loud I feel that’s fair. It would be much easier if my sister would just allow me to put a ‘*kick me*’ note on one of them. Alas, she won’t. Last time I tried, she was so angry I had to promise never to do it again.

I'm secretly thrilled when Ave announces they're going to wait for another of the wonder twins' mates, and I hurry along after saying goodbye.

It's not that I don't like the guys, they're actually kinda awesome. They've pretty much been at Avery's side since they were nine, and I don't think it's ever going to change. Sometimes I think I'm jealous of her. Not in a nasty way where I can't stand her happiness, but more like I wish I had friends like that. Maybe I would have if I wasn't so obsessed with what I cannot have.

"Hey Caitlin. You're early today." Lily smiles as she ushers me into the backroom. "There isn't really much to do right now, so I was thinking it would be a great time to do your hair?" She smiles serenely in that way of hers.

Lily Bennett is stunning. At five-foot-ten, she's about an inch taller than me. She always smiles, rarely wears her long, copper hair in any sort of updo—she has to be a witch. That's the only explanation for how it remains so straight and smooth looking, even after a full day at work. It would also explain how she keeps the twins in line. I suppose she's the proof of *'Mother knows best.'*

"So is that a yes?" Lily laughs good-naturedly.

I nod, overeager and still not sure it should be necessary to say so.

Lily gets to work while asking questions about school, and how Ave and I are doing. "And what about your uncle? What's

he up to these days?” Lily asks as she trims the edges of my long, cinnamon brown hair.

Even though she and Dante know each other from around town, she never really asks about him. I’ve never thought about that before, but it seems odd. I mean, my sister spends more time at Lily’s house than ours on most days, and on top of that, Lily’s been extremely helpful since our parents died.

I know she was friendly with my mum. Even though the Aussie beauty is roughly the same age as Dante, she came over all the time to help when he first got custody of us. She’d always cook extra food and bring it to us, along with several frozen home-cooked dishes. In short, if it wasn’t for Lily, I think our uncle would have brought us up on pizza. The joys of suddenly gaining two kids when you’re twenty-five.

The out of norm question brings heat to my cheeks, and I have to look away from the mirror. Was it really only this morning that I kissed Dante? And... he let me. Okay, so it might not have been a full-on kiss with tongue. Still... he didn’t pull away... no, it was more than that. I think he was into it.

What does that mean?

Does it mean anything?

Yeah, it *has* to.

Butterflies surge in my stomach, and I have to swallow my smile since it’s out of place and Lily is watching me.

Wait, Lily asked me a question, didn't she? Yeah, she did. About Dante... shite, it feels almost serendipitous that she's asking today of all days, like she knows what's on my mind.

"I think he's still doing his surfer thing," I say with a shrug.

Truthfully, I'm not exactly sure what Dante does. I know he was a famous surfer when he lived in America, and whenever I've asked, he says he's still competing and doing seminars. It takes him all over Europe, hell, he even has to go to America sometimes. While Ave loves when that happens, I hate it. I always end up fabricating all sorts of reasons to video call him just so I can see him.

Lily frowns, but says nothing. She continues working on my hair in silence, and when she's done, I puff it up with my hands.

"Thank you," I tell her warmly. Then I decline a manicure from one of the other girls at the salon, and instead do some of my homework while waiting for the end-of-day clients, as Lily calls them.

The evening rush isn't as bad today. After bringing them beverages and sweeping the cut hair away from the floor, there isn't much for me to do, so I end up spending more time studying. Even though she asked—well, technically the twins asked—if I could stay longer, Lily wants to send me home at the usual time, which is both a blessing and a curse.

"Do you mind if I hang out here until you close?" I ask. "I'm almost done with this book, and I don't want to forget

what I've read so far." With a smile, I point at the book I'm reading for my English class.

It's a much better reason than the real one, and Lily nods before she turns back to her client. Dante is out-of-town again today, and he said he wasn't sure he'd be home for dinner. The last thing I want is to be alone in the house when all I can do is count down the minutes until I can see him again.

"Earth to Caitlin," Lily laughs. "We're almost done. Do you want me to give you a lift home?"

Feeling like I've been caught, my face heats as I nod, accepting her offer. "Thank you."

She gives me a knowing look, like she knows where my head is at. "Oh, to be young and in love." When I try to deny it, she raises her perfectly plucked eyebrow. "It's none of my business, but I recognise love when I see it. How long have you been with Mike now?"

Shite... why didn't I think about him? My knee-jerk reaction was to deny the love part, which makes no sense when I'm with Mike. Mike, who would be hurt if he knew I didn't even think about him, and rightfully so. I really should end things.

While Lily closes up, she hums *'Love is in the Air'* and keeps grinning at me.

Although I try to ignore her, my mind is contemplating the word. Is that what I'm feeling for Dante? Love? It's not like it matters. It's a dirty secret that I can't ever tell anyone. I don't

like the crestfallen feeling that accompanies my thoughts, so I push them down. Rather than thinking about what can never be, I want to count the small wins. Dante let me back into his bed, and he kissed me—sort of.

We walk briskly to Lily's car, and as soon as we're inside, the heavens open. Water pelts down, making it impossible to see into the distance. Lily drives so slowly I'm wondering if we couldn't walk faster—not that I'm complaining. I know she's doing it for my sake since being in a car when it's raining this hard has me tensing up. That's why I'm doing my best to focus on something—anything—else, like the lyrics to the song playing on the radio.

My house is completely dark, and after looking at her watch, Lily suggests for me to come over to her place. She knows I don't deal well with storms and thunder.

“Thank you, Lily. But I'll be fine.” I try to muster up a smile as I thank her for the lift.

I almost trip over Dante's shoes that are haphazardly in front of the door, but before I can curse at the sloppiness, I notice a red substance on the toe of each shoe. It looks like paint, which makes no sense at all. I snap myself out of it with a headshake, and head to the kitchen so I can put the food Lily handed me before I left the car, in the fridge. As I walk from room to room, I switch the lights on, and as each lightbulb comes to life, my anxiety lessens.

At least until I look into the sink and see the unsealed black plastic bag. The sink is half-full with water and... I wrinkle

my nose as the stench of bleach hits my nostrils. This makes no bloody sense at all. Why is my uncle bathing a plastic bag with what looks like his clothes inside it?

Unable to curb my curiosity, I peek inside the bag. I gasp as I notice some red splatter, much like what's on his shoes. Did he spill ketchup? Or paint? But if that's the case, why aren't the clothes either in the trash or washing machine?

I forget all thoughts of the sullied clothes as I realise one important thing. He's been here, and he didn't tell me he was home already. Is he... no... surely he isn't hiding from me...

OceanofPDF.com

VI



OceanofPDF.com

Dante

I close my eyes as the rivulets of water cascade around my face and body. Fuck me, what a day.

The job was meant to be straightforward, especially with all the time that we'd put into research and planning. So why the fuck wasn't our mark alone? Baz's tracker assured us the target didn't have anyone with him, which clearly wasn't the case.

Christ... I squeeze my eyes shut harder as I remember the tiny girl that was hiding behind the shelves. She can't have been over ten years old.

Dirty doesn't even begin to describe her dishevelled appearance. In the dim light and with her darker skin tone, I didn't notice all the dirt and grime until we got her outside, and when I finally did notice... fuck!

I let out a disgusted and frustrated roar as I fist my hand and punch the wall twice. It took everything I had in me to keep my cool, so I didn't scare her more than she already was. Only the devil knows what she's been through. But I'm pretty sure I can take an educated guess with the blood that was smeared and dried across her inner thighs. The see-through nightie she wore was ripped, exposing her chest and...

I roar again as emotions threaten to pull me under.

Ten... at that age she should be playing with dolls and... I don't fucking know what kids at that age do. Despite having

raised my two nieces, I know next to nothing about children. Except this, they should never have the look in their eyes that the girl from today did.

Sadly, that's not the worst part—not the thing that's going to give me nightmares. When we finally got her to our headquarters and offered her some food, she fell to her knees and reached for my blood-soaked jeans while licking her lips.

She. Fucking. Licked. Her. Lips.

I took my time with the kill, revelling in his tortured screams of pain taking—but it wasn't enough. Nothing could ever be enough for that fucked up bastard who preferred girls between eight and eleven years old.

My stomach churns as thoughts of the girl keep assaulting my brain. Luckily, she's in better hands now. She's with Beth, and I know she'll take good care of her. I've already received a text to let me know that she's warming up to Beth. Which is good since the sick fuck killed her parents to get to her, and we haven't been able to find any other relatives.

I know I need to contact Barrett Marx about this case, after all, it was his connection—his angel as he calls her—who fucked up and found the location of the girl too late. I met the Aussie chap when I was seventeen. He was the one who opened this door for me, and he remains one of my best mates.

At sixteen I took a gap year and travelled to America. Surfing has always been my only interest, and that's how I met Luke and Barrett, or Baz as he prefers to be called. The latter is my age, but the former was a few years older.

Luke was the son of a high-profile politician, and despite being somewhat of a golden boy, his dad's career made haters and extremists constantly target him and his family. At first, I didn't know that Baz was there to keep an eye on Luke, but I learned that when he got outsmarted.

I was twenty-one when the Aussie called me and told me that some extremists had got to Luke. Not only did they slaughter him and his girlfriend, they fucking defiled his eleven-year-old sister and raped his girlfriend's corpse. With nothing but hatred, like I'd never felt before, in my veins, I abandoned my carefree lifestyle, spending an entire year tracking the sick fucks down, and then I made them pay.

Oh, did they fucking pay.

The reality of what I'd done hit me once I was through. Not trusting the shite I'd seen on TV, I was at a loss on how to get rid of the evidence. In a drunken stupor, I called my Aussie mate for help once I was done exacting my revenge.

In hindsight, that was a fucking risky thing to do. At the time I didn't know how Baz would react, but luckily for me, he's a Marx—and his family's Australian empire is built on shite like what I did.

After getting my mate involved, my life changed irrevocably. First, we burned everything that belonged to Luke's murderers to the ground—and the only thing to survive amongst the ashes was a playing card, the ace of diamonds. This led the media to name us just that; the Diamond Crew. Which is fine with me, and it's the reason we always leave that

particular card behind at all the crime scenes we're responsible for.

I stopped caring about chasing the perfect wave, instead my focus became catching the vile scum that makes everyone want to close their eyes and pretend they don't exist. The price of doing what I do is that I have no such luxury. I know every-bloody-thing about the creeps that go bump in the night, and the only thing that can quieten the sick shite I see, is when I get to turn the tables—making them scream and repent like it's going to change their fate.

With Baz's help, I found my calling and established my organisation. To this day, I owe my mate for making it so I could make my own instead of being sucked into the Marx empire. In the beginning, we were only in America, but when my brother and his wife tragically died, leaving me in charge of Avery and Caitlin, I had no choice but to move back to the fucking town I'd hoped I'd never have to return to.

Thankfully, Baz came through for me once again. Helping me establish my organisation here, so we're spanning both sides of the motherfucking pond. Unfortunately, this also means I have to travel a lot, and not for the first time I'm wondering if my Australian mate has the gift of sight.

Back when he helped me set things up, he pushed me hardcore to make a name for myself in the world of surfing. Of course, I didn't want to, I was too small-sighted to see the point. Now, all these years later, it's clear that the Aussie was right. Since my career is international, all the travelling isn't

out of place, and no one has raised an eyebrow at me being in America one day, and then having dinner with my nieces here in England the next.

The only downside to all the travelling is that I don't get to surf much anymore. Most of my career is being a spokesperson. So apart from either getting my board out when I'm in America, or driving to Norfolk on a rare day off, I don't see the waves much.

As I think about my life here, my mind unbidden takes me back to this morning.

I kissed Caitlin... I kissed my niece.

I know it's beyond awkward that she spends so much time in my bed, something I should have put a stop to much sooner. However, between her parents' death and my travelling, I've never been good at denying them anything. If I'm honest, I like to be the only one who can comfort her. It makes me feel like I'm doing something right.

That was all fine when she was younger, but now that she's almost eighteen... I can't fucking have her in my bed. My dick isn't getting the memo that she's off limits. All it cares about is how soft she feels against me... how amazing her curves are.

"Fuck!" I shout into the water, hating how she makes me feel.

I kill men who do what I'm having to remind myself daily that I can't. No, I don't get off to the image of young girls, and I feel nothing but familial love when I look at Avery—it's only

Caitlin. But I'm sixteen years older and... oh, yeah... she's my fucking niece. By blood, at least half, so no moral or kinship loopholes.

Their dad, Austin, was my half brother. I'm the result of our dad, Leonardo, going overboard during an office Christmas party. My biological mum died while giving birth, and Austin didn't know about me. Imagine the surprise the Haytons got when he suddenly got the call nine months after the party.

Luckily for me, my dad's wife Martha wasn't the grudge holding type. Despite me being a walking reminder of her husband's infidelity, she never treated me as anything but her own son. And even though Austin was twelve when I arrived, he always acted like the perfect big brother.

If there's such a thing as being too perfect, my brother was it. When I skipped the country at sixteen, he was already married and Caitlin was on her way. Honestly, his life is part of why I needed to get away. I never imagined myself living a life like that, and I constantly felt like we were being compared, even when no one said the words out loud. The fact that I never intended to come back, which my brother knew, is why I was so surprised Tania and Austin made me the legal guardian of Caitlin and Avery.

Caitlin... who...

No! I can't go there. I just can't.

As if my cock wants to prove me wrong, it hardens and juts out from my body. Pre-cum gathers at my slit. I ball my hands

into fists and rest my head against the white tiles on the wall. My breath saws out of me while I will my cock to give up.

She's my bloody niece.

My brother entrusted her safety and wellbeing to me. Even if I wasn't in the business of ridding the world of sick fucks who take advantage of children, Caitlin is so far outside the approved zone it's not even funny. My cock twitches every time I think of her name, her eyes, her lips, and her...

“No!” I growl, tightening my fists harder.

She isn't an unwilling victim. Yesterday she paraded around in her underwear and made you hard with her feet. This morning, she kissed you. My mind reminds me.

I'm so fucking weak, and before I know it, I close my hand around my aching, pierced length. A groan is torn from my chest as I pump furiously up and down—the barbells embedded in the underside of my dick make every stroke feel like heaven—fighting myself as I try not to think of my niece. It's a losing battle, though.

Caitlin's long legs, sizable ass, wide hips, and plump lips keep playing in my mind's eye. The way she whimpers my name when I bring her back from her night terrors, and... crikey, the way she feels in my arms.

In my fantasy, I'm wrapping her long, straight cinnamon brown hair around my hand while forcing my mouth on hers, coaxing her lips apart with my tongue. I stroke my cock with one hand while palming my balls with the other. My dick is

weeping, swelling even more as I pump myself harder, faster to the memory of her body flush against mine and all the things I want to do to her.

When I finally come, shooting my load all over the glass of the shower cubicle, I hear a gasp and my eyes dart up. I drop my jaw as my eyes zero in on the forbidden beauty that I didn't see while I was jacking off. Caitlin's eyes are hooded, her hand doing sinful things beneath her skirt.

I feel my eyes widen and I mindlessly lick my lips while looking at her through the glass. Her head is tilted slightly back, her eyes are... blimey, they're open, and she's looking right at me.

"Were you thinking about me?" she asks, her voice low and sultry.

Right now, I hate her bloody skirt because I want to see what she's doing. I want to know if she's buried her fingers in her wet cunt, or if she's just rubbing her swollen clit. Fuck, the sight of her has my dick growing hard again as I imagine being the one touching her like that.

"Lift your skirt," I demand on a rasp. "If you're going to be touching yourself in front of me, I want to watch." All my restraints and thoughts about right or wrong are gone, replaced by the single focus that is Caitlin.

She moans, and with trembling hands she lifts her skirt and bunches it around her hips. My lips part when I see she isn't wearing any underwear. I groan and fist my dick. Since I just came, I'm more sensitive, which makes it feel even better as I

pump my hand up and down to the same rhythm she's now fingering herself.

When she takes a stumbling step towards me, I shake my head and luckily she stops without pushing for more. Crikey, if she comes much closer, I don't know that I'll be able to keep my hands to myself.

Hating the dejected expression on her face, I swallow audibly. "I need to keep this distance between us," I admit. I know I should put a stop to this, but I just can't make myself do that.

Caitlin nods and bites down on her plump bottom lip. Her eyes are on my cock as she circles her nub that's peeking out from between her sex. Her cunt lips are glistening wet, and I can't stop thinking about how she might taste.

"Dante," she cries out, and I groan in response. Her legs are shaking and her hand is moving even faster. I fist my cock harder, squeezing to the point of pain while matching her pace. "I'm going to..."

"Yes!" I demand. "Let me see you fall apart on your hand." She whimpers, and when she closes her eyes, I growl. "Keep them open. Look at me, Caitlin. Watch how bloody hard you're making me." I pump my dick slower for emphasis.

We're both panting and both unable to look away from each other. I completely ignore the part of me that knows we're stepping over a line that we should never cross. All I can think about is her, her moans, her beautiful cunt, and the way she makes my cock throb. She really is the perfect storm.

“Do you know how hard it is for me not to pull you in here and lick those drops from your cunt?” I ask, loving the way her breath hitches in response to my crude words. “Do you even know how bloody irresistible you look right now? How much I want to touch you?”

She moves back a few steps until she’s leaning against the wall, never once looking away. “Then touch me,” she says, her voice low and sultry.

Fuck, is she even aware that she’s doing it? Or how much it makes me want to bite and lick her lips?

“You want this inside you?” I leisurely stroke myself from tip to base. “Or do you want my lips on your dripping core? Is that it? You want me to make you come with my mouth?”

She moans loudly and moves one hand under her white shirt, presumably to play with her nipples. “I-I want to touch you.”

I desperately want her to stop talking and just force her way in here, completely ignoring my plea for her to stay where she is. My resolve is crumbling and I know I have to either end this or... no, there’s no other alternative.

Disregarding her words, I continue to pump into my hand and tell her how much she’s turning me on, how bloody stunning she is, and how much I want to taste her. With each husky praise, she moans louder and her breath saws out of her. Then she cries my name and her hands still while she arches her back and closes her eyes. With a roar, I empty my balls for the second time, feeling both extremely satisfied and empty as

I frantically move my hips, instinctively seeking the warm, wet heat between her legs.

As soon as I regain my senses, guilt rushes over me and, rather than taking a moment to collect myself, I shout, “Caitlin!” My tone is clipped, and her name sounds like a declaration of war.

Instead of being relaxed after emptying my balls, twice, I’m wound up even tighter. She shouldn’t have seen that, and she definitely shouldn’t be touching herself like that in front of me. Fuck, who am I kidding? I shouldn’t have jerked off in front of her, I should have stopped her—us—I should have stopped us.

My niece’s gaze is trailing one drop of my cum that’s slowly sliding down the shower cubicle. When I growl her name, she stares at me through scared eyes.

“Dante,” she whispers. Confusion written all over her face, and I know it’s caused by my change. I shouldn’t be acting like this, I know that. Fuck, I should sit her down and properly explain why this is so wrong.

Caitlin swallows audibly, and her cheeks turn a bright red. “I-I...” Instead of finishing her sentence, she lets her skirt fall down before turning around and running out of the bathroom.

I find myself rooted to the spot and can only watch as she exits, her long hair flowing in the motion of her quick retreat, and within a few minutes, she slams the front door so hard the sound reverberates all the way up here.

Unable to quite believe what just happened, I keep staring at the bathroom door. Surely, I didn't just fucking spray cum on the see-through glass while my niece watched and touched herself.

No.

That's not it. She fled because I shouted at her, and that's all there is to it. Now I need to get dressed and go find her. Another storm is on the horizon, and Caitlin can't be alone when it hits Briarwood.

With a towel around my waist, I rush into my bedroom, frantically searching for something to wear. That's when I see it... the gun on my bed.

Fuck!

In my rush to shower before Caitlin and Avery came home, I didn't clean up first. Which means... I swear loudly as I remember the plastic bag with my bloodied clothes in the kitchen sink.

Double fuck!

How the bloody hell could I have been so careless? Yeah, I wanted to get my shite out of the way before we all sat down to enjoy another family dinner, but that's no excuse. For all these years, I've successfully hidden anything they shouldn't see from them, so why the fuck am I losing it today?

It doesn't take a genius to figure out the answer.

What she did yesterday, and the kiss.

Since this morning, I haven't been able to get Caitlin's soft, warm lips out of my mind.

After getting dressed, I find my phone and call Avery, but she hasn't heard from her sister.

"Dante, it's going to thunder again..." she says.

Yeah, I fucking know.

I take a deep breath and steady myself, so I don't bite Avery's head off. "I know," I say. "Look, just come home as soon as you can. I'll go find her."

Avery promises she'll be here as soon as she's picked a cake for Caitlin's surprise party. It's only a few days away, and so far we've managed to hide the surprise from her. Even Lily Bennett is in on it, and she's promised to make Caitlin think she needs to work Friday evening so we can set things up here.

After ending the call with Avery, I run downstairs and pick up the soaked bag from the kitchen. Maybe I didn't need to soak the bag in bleach, but it's not like I could risk any stains or drops to escape and leave a trail—not when the blood doesn't belong to me.

I end up throwing the bag in the boot of my car before I drive to the very bridge that, under normal circumstances, both my nieces refuse to go near. However, I know that when Caitlin is upset, she often ends up there, and tonight I have a feeling that's where I'll find her—and it's imperative I find her. I need to know what she saw, what she's thinking and... fuck it, I desperately need to know she isn't scared of me.

OceanofPDF.com

VII



OceanofPDF.com

Dante

“Caitlin! Caitlin!”

I’m driving on the bridge, shouting her name as loud as I can through the open car window while doing my best not to follow in my brother’s footsteps by driving off this cursed thing. The rain is coming down so heavy it’s hard to see a fucking thing, which also doesn’t help me hear if she’s answering.

After pulling off to the side, I put the hazard lights on so any other idiots that might drive in this weather can see my parked vehicle. Then I try to call her for the millionth time, but like all my previous calls, she sends it straight to voicemail. This is so not the fucking time to ignore me, regardless of the reason.

I hate not knowing if she’s okay. I mean, it’s clear she isn’t, since she won’t even take Avery’s calls. It’s a rarity for Caitlin to ignore her sister, and she only comes here when she’s too upset to hide her tormented sobs.

Guilt gnaws at me because I know it’s my fault. What the bloody hell was I thinking? What took place in the bathroom shouldn’t have happened, and that she took me off guard is a poor excuse. Sure, I had just given into my forbidden thoughts and fantasies, but as much as I want to, I can’t blame that for what transpired. My cock stirs at the memory of seeing Caitlin’s wet, swollen pussy lips, and the way her fingers disappeared into the very heat I wanted to bury myself in.

Fuck, and the clothes... I can't even begin to imagine what's going through Caitlin's head if she saw it. I. Need. To. Find. Her.

This is far from the first time I've followed my niece here. All the previous times she's gone right down to the water, throwing stones into the depths like she's trying to hurt the liquid. This time I can't see her at the edge, though, and it makes me wary. I shout her name over and over, but I don't get a reply.

My phone rings and I answer without looking at the caller. "Hello? Caitlin, is that you?" I don't even try to hide how frantic I am.

"Dante?" the voice on the opposite end asks. "Are you Dante Hayton?"

Ice spreads in my stomach, and I can barely form the words to confirm that's me. Somehow I manage, though. Being asked to verify my kinship to a relative over the phone brings back memories of when I got the call that changed my world—when I learned that my brother and sister-in-law had died in a horrific car accident.

"That's me," I answer gruffly.

"I saw her buy something from the guy that usually slings outside the off licence on Carson Street..."

She bloody did what?

Anger pulses through me, and I put the guy on speaker while I type a quick text to one of my guys and instruct him to

find out who's slinging product within my local area.

“Are you still there? I'm sorry if I'm overstepping, but she looked... troubled, and then she ran into the back alley by herself.”

The words barely make sense to me. “Who are you?” I spit.

“Sorry, this is Mr Watson, the owner of the Watson Pizzeria. You... umm... I believe you're acquainted with my business.”

That's a nice way to say that for my first two years back in Briarwood, we had food from his place at least three to four times a week. Now, it's only once or twice, which I guess is why he recognised my niece.

I thank him for his call and ask him to let me know if he sees her leave. Then I run back to the car and head straight to Carson Street.

Briarwood really is a sad excuse for a town, which is clear by the potholes everywhere. Don't even get me started on the annual floods, plural, as in too many every fucking year. I guess that's what happens when the County doesn't care, and your town is right against the North Sea. Bloody fabulous.

The good thing about all my mental griping about the town is that the drive is over before I know it. I don't bother turning the engine off before opening the door, once again throwing myself into the rain that's pelting down. I run straight to the alley, where I spot her almost immediately. She's sitting against the brickwall with her head resting on her knees, and her arms around her shins. While the elements do nothing to

shield her heartbreaking sobs, her face hides in the shadows surrounding her.

I call out her name, so she knows I'm approaching, and the devastation on her face causes me to halt. "Can I come closer?" I ask, suspiciously eyeing her clenched hand while I hold my hands up so my palms are facing her.

Her expression doesn't change, and I almost miss her muttering, "If you must." Caitlin's big green eyes are filled with so much sadness it feels as though some of it is pouring into me, just from looking at her.

Satisfied that she won't run, I close the distance between us. Despite all the rain, I sit my arse down in the pool she's shivering in. "Christ, you're freezing," I mumble, pulling her as close to me as I can.

She cranes her neck and looks up at me. "You found me." It's not a question. "I thought you were upset with me, and maybe you didn't..." She bites down on her lip to stop herself from talking.

I hate how she sounds like the mere thought hurts her.

Fuck me.

She's sitting outside in the pouring rain while thunder rolls across the sky, her literal nightmare, and yet she's concerned that I'm angry with her.

Maybe I should explain why I was upset, but I'm not sure I think it's necessary to spell it out. No, I think it's more important she knows I'm not upset with her. "Not with you," I

sigh, running my hand up and down her spine. “Never with you.”

The shift in her is immediate, and she burrows into my embrace, welcoming my comfort and heat. Compared to her, I’m a raging inferno, but it won’t stay like that for long if we don’t move.

“I shouldn’t have... I’m sorry.” She takes a deep breath, likely to steady herself. “Watching you was wrong, I know that. And... and I—”

“It belongs in the past, Caitlin. There’s no need to rehash it,” I say, interrupting her fake apology.

Yes, Caitlin hates being lied to as much as she hates lying herself, which is why I know her voice rises slightly when she’s being dishonest. And right now, she’s telling me what she thinks I want to hear. She’s not sorry, and she doesn’t think it was wrong.

Christ.

“Consider it forgotten.” My voice is gravelly and my throat is fucking parched.

Why is it she, a seventeen-year-old girl, can give voice to things that I can’t? I don’t want to talk about what she saw, or what I did—definitely not what *we* did. We need to leave it the fuck alone because it should never have happened.

“About what you might have seen in the kitchen,” I say, swallowing so hard my Adam’s apple bobs.

“I think we need to talk about it,” she throws back at me, completely ignoring the bloody clothes I’m hinting at. Her eyes are fierce as she looks at me. “It’s not like we did anything wrong. You didn’t even touch—” The sound of frustration coming from me makes her swallow whatever she wanted to say.

She no longer looks unguarded as she studies me. She’s retreating right in front of me, hiding inside her head where I can’t reach her and force her to see sense. Maybe I am going about this the wrong way. I’ve known for a long time that she was growing too dependent on me, and yeah, maybe even that feelings beyond what’s normal had surfaced. I thought I was doing right by the both of us by ignoring it, but it would seem not.

“What do you want me to say?” I ask, winding my fingers into her hair and angling her head so I can look at her. She’s too bloody tempting when she’s this close and looking at me like that, like she wants me to rip her clothes off. “What happened today can never happen again.”

A look of betrayal takes over her face, her features twisting. “But I-I…” she cuts herself off, and when she tries to shake her head, I become all too aware that my fingers are still in her hair. “We did nothing wrong.” As her voice quavers, my resolve almost slips, but I hold on to it tightly. I have to do right by her, and giving into my desire for her isn’t the way.

Seeing her like this, knowing I’m the reason, bloody hurts. All I’ve ever wanted was to protect her, take care of her. Right

now, I'd give everything for her not to look at me like I'm the reason for her anguish—even if it's the truth.

Yet I know I have to remain steadfast for her. She's so young, so scared—how can she possibly know what she wants? As far as I'm concerned, she's done nothing wrong. This is all on me, and I need to tell her that.

“It's my fault, do you hear me? Mine, and not yours. I never should have let things get that far, and I think...” I swallow. “I think we need to come up with another solution than you sleeping in my bed. Maybe we can all sleep in the living room or something.”

We both know my suggestion isn't the solution. We've tried it multiple times, and each was a colossal failure. And every time something fails, Caitlin blames it on herself. That's why I stopped trying to find workarounds, and instead just let her sleep with me. I can't keep doing that, though. It's not right that I'm risking her wellbeing just because I'm not man enough to help her overcome her trauma.

She takes a deep breath, retreating further. Then she shrugs out of my embrace and stands up. “Can I ask one favour?” I nod while getting up, but when I reach for her, she sidesteps me. “When you go to sleep tonight, and tell yourself you're doing the right thing, I want you to keep this in mind.”

“Keep what in mind?” I ask, swallowing as a block of ice erupts in my stomach at her stoic expression.

“That to you, the right thing is hurting me and lying.” She takes a ragged breath and rolls her shoulders back, like she's

ready to go to war. “I know you want me. You might not be ready to admit it to yourself, but don’t lie to *me*.”

The weight of her hissed words hits me like a sucker punch, and I wish I could tell her the truth. Admit that she’s right, that what I feel for her is so far from what an uncle should feel for his niece.

Everyone hates being lied to, but for Caitlin it’s more than that. Ever since the nurses told her everything would be fine after her parents died, she has actual issues with dishonesty. To her, it’s personal, and it doesn’t matter if it’s an insignificant white lie, or a big whopper. That’s also why it’s so surprising when she’s the one lying.

But I’m not lying to her when I say that what happened was a mistake, am I?

“And in turn, I’ll do something for you. From here on out, I relieve you from your duty. There’s only a few days until my birthday, and then you’re off the hook. I won’t ask you for anything and you won’t have to worry about me anymore.”

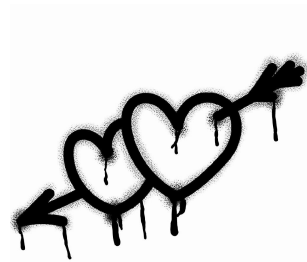
I can only watch as she searches for something in her pocket, and I’m relieved when she throws a small see-through bag with white powder at me. I’d completely forgotten about the reason I got the call from Mr Watson, why I knew where to find her. Catching the shite, I quickly empty it onto the ground so it’s gone.

Caitlin narrows her eyes on me. “You really have nothing to say, do you?” I stupidly shake my head. “Here I am, willing to give anything for our circumstances to be different. All I want

is to live in a world where we're not related. Yet, you can't even be bothered to be honest."

I open my mouth to say something, but I'm taken aback by her tone that's as hollow as the look in her eyes. Before I can stop her she runs down the dark alley, and I can barely make out her figure as she leaps on top of some bins and uses them to get close enough to the wall so she can crawl over it and escape.

What the fuck am I meant to do? I can't keep encouraging her just because I don't want to say no, and because... *because you secretly like it* my subconscious keeps spewing shite like that, and I keep shutting it the fuck down. I don't like it because she's my niece, it's because I haven't got laid in some time. Maybe I should let Caitlin do her own thing and get my cock serviced by someone else.



"Mhmm, that's it, sweetheart. Choke on my fucking cock." I'm not proud that I'm taking the easy way out. Rather than helping my niece, I'm at Dirty Diamonds.

I started in the booth, watching the woman hidden behind the red and gold mask touch herself while following my commands. But that wasn't enough to get Caitlin out of my

system, so now I'm getting sucked off by one of the whores working at Dirty Diamonds. She's pretty enough, and she doesn't at all look like my niece. She's shorter, skinnier, and her hair is bleached blonde. Her tits are a nice enough size, but her body isn't as alluring as... as anyone—no one in particular.

Nope.

“You like that, Dante? You like it when I tongue your balls?”

I huff in frustration. “I did, but you ruined it with your talk.”

She laughs throatily, like we're engaging in banter instead of understanding that I'm deadly serious, before shoving my cock into her mouth again. Why the fuck does she keep talking? With a grunt, I push her aside, a pop sounding as my semi-hard dick leaves her mouth.

“Aww, don't be like that, honey.” She bats her lashes at me. “Let me make you feel real good.”

I shake my head and remind her she's been trying for over half an hour, and I'm still not fully erect. It's a shitty thing to say, I know. But what the actual fuck? This is how she makes her living and she can't make me forget about... well, about... no one in particular.

A growl bubbles in my chest, begging to be set free. With jerky movements, I do my jeans back up and throw some cash at her.

“Better luck next time,” I say, smirking. Then I spin on my heel and leave to go find Beth in her office.

“Hey Dante.” She smiles as I walk through her office door. “What brings you by?”

Now there’s a loaded question.

“I got your email,” I say, referring to the one she sent me yesterday with a potential candidate to do some undercover work, as well as an update on the Potter case. “We can’t spare Clive, though. And I prefer to keep you and him working together.”

Beth’s brows furrow. “But he’s the most seasoned—”

“He is in some areas,” I agree. “That’s why you’re the dream team. What he lacks, you excel at.”

Even though I know she’s annoyed I’m shooting down her one and only candidate, she can’t hide her pleased grin. “Okay,” she relents. “But in that case, I think we’re out of options.”

I nod to show I’ve heard her.

“We need to look at potential recruits,” Beth says excitedly. “And I was wondering if you’ll let me do it?”

Despite her request being exactly what I had in mind, I pretend to consider it. “Hmm, I’m not sure,” I deadpan.

Before I can give her the okay, Beth shoots out of her chair. “Oh, come on. You know I’m the best one for it. Clive will get

sidetracked by their combat skills or kill numbers, and none of the others would fare any better. It has to be me, Dante.”

If I didn't already agree, she'd have me there. “According to your latest update, Peter Potter has been captured on CCTV on the outskirts of Briarwood, right?” When she nods her confirmation, I continue. “See if you can find someone who's around the same age as one of his sons. We might get some intel that way.”

Instead of saying thank you for giving her permission, Beth throws her head back and cackles. Then she shows me her note board where her update for a recruit has the words “Need someone to date Alan Potter” written with a red circle around it.

“Is this enough to convince you it should be me?” she asks, looking like the cat that ate the canary.

Laughing, I say, “There was never any doubt, Beth. You've got this.”

I only stay with Beth long enough to watch her going through the people working at Dirty Diamonds, note a few names, only to delete them again when their social media shows they're in a relationship.

“Don't hover,” she says without taking her eyes off her phone. “Like you said, I got this.”

I laugh as I leave her, knowing she'll be in full-blown research mode for the rest of the night. Besides, I have that bag to take care of.

After retrieving the bag with my bloodied clothes from the car, I throw it into the furnace. While I watch the flames destroy the evidence of what I did earlier today, I desperately try to come up with a plan for tomorrow. It's Halloween and I know both my nieces will be feeling down. While Avery will want to go to Lily and Alexander's house to be with the twins, I need her to stay at home.

Yes, that's it, isn't it? I need her to stay home from now until the birthday party. Then... well, after the party I can visit Baz in America, maybe even help him with some jobs. Anything to get me away from... from the house. I just need a change of scenery. Hell, maybe I should find someone to date.

After I get rid of all the evidence of the work I did today, I pull my phone from my jeans pocket and send a text to my mate.

Me: Are you in America?

Baz: Funny you should ask. I'm coming to see you on the 2nd of November. Didn't you get my email? Was going to call you tonight to sort things out. I know your niece's eighteenth birthday is coming up, but there's business that can't wait.

Me: It's her birthday on the 3rd. Can't leave until then, but I can meet you on the 2nd.

Baz: Let's talk tomorrow!

OceanofPDF.com

VIII



OceanofPDF.com

Caitlin

Dirty Diamonds? I bite down on my lip to stop myself from screaming in frustration when I see Dante's car parked outside the sex club.

Years ago he insisted we all needed tracking software on our phones, and he bought a family package so each of us can see where the other is. I've used it to stalk his location plenty of times, but when he leaves without saying where he's going it has always shown him at the local pub. I've long suspected he's worked around the GPS tracker, because once I went there when Ave didn't come home on time, and he wasn't where the app claimed he should be.

After I left him in the alley, I waited around the corner until I saw his red dot moving. Of course, I didn't believe my eyes when the dot stopped moving right here, but I still followed—needing to know if it was true... if he actually came here after I threw myself at him, and offered him everything I had to give.

My stupid heart constricts at the reminder of how stupid I'm being. Of course, Dante wouldn't be interested in me like that. But then why did he want to watch me touch myself? Why did he encourage it with deliciously naughty words? I refuse to give in to the hurt in my heart and the icy feeling in my stomach until I can somehow understand what's going on.

Am I being silly and naïve, desperately clinging to the hope Dante is feeling the same way I do? Well, yes—but that

doesn't mean I'm wrong when I refuse to believe he isn't feeling what I do.

I crouch behind the old-time phone booth when he suddenly comes out from the door with a big spray painted red heart and the words 'Employees only.' From my hiding spot I watch as he retrieves something that looks suspiciously like a black plastic bag from the boot of his car.

Is that the bag that was in the sink at home? I know he tried to change the subject to that when he showed up in the alley, but I wasn't about to let him. Now, I kind of wish I had. I don't even know what hurts more, that he's rejecting me, or that I'm pretty sure he's lying about it.

Shaking my head, I push the thoughts from my mind, and instead I focus on the bag in his hand. As I watch him walk through the door again, I can no longer lie to myself. I know it's not ketchup on the clothes, that doesn't stop me from wanting to cling to that truth, though. Because it's much easier to stomach and brush under the carpet than the truth—it's blood.

And if I accept that, I also have to face the next part. I might have been preoccupied with the way Dante was stroking his huge, beautiful, pierced cock in the shower, but I still eyed enough of his body to know there wasn't so much as a scratch on his perfect skin. That can only mean one thing... the blood isn't his.

Without stopping to consider the potential consequences, I straighten and walk up to the black door. Instead of looking

around I do my best to act like I belong, like it's okay for me to be here. I let out a relieved sigh when the door opens, and there isn't anyone on the other side.

As soon as I'm inside, I follow the narrow corridor. The areas I walk by are dimly lit by the red light bulbs that create an eerie atmosphere. Right now, it makes me think about blood and gore, definitely not sex.

"Hey there little lamb." The guy I run into as I round yet another corner places his hands on my shoulders to steady me as I jump in fright. "Are you lost?" he asks, his tone kind and confused.

I swallow nervously, feeling rather stupid that I didn't craft a plan in case I ran into someone. "I-I..." Nerves make me stutter and my voice sounds more like a squeak. This really is beyond stupid. When you knowingly walk into the lion's den you can't show fear, so I clear my throat and meet the stranger's gaze. "You know, I think I am. Would you believe I was on my way to get changed, but then someone asked me to meet umm... Kyle, yeah I think his name was Kyle. Anyway, I could have sworn he said to go left, do you think he meant I should turn right?" I flutter my lashes and try to look like these are actual events I'm describing, and not a lie so elaborate I don't even know how my mind conjured that story out of thin air.

"And who are you?" he asks.

I can't tell if he believes me or not, and the worry makes my heart beat faster in my chest. "I'm... my name is... Storm. Are

you Kyle?”

He chuckles and lets go of my shoulders. “I can be Kyle for a pretty little thing like you.” When he winks conspiratorially, I realise he doesn’t believe me at all. “You shouldn’t go snooping, Storm. This isn’t an awful place to work, and all the girls are well looked after. If anyone is being a twat, you let me or any of the other bouncers know, you don’t go looking for trouble on your own.”

I try to come up with something to say, but nothing comes to mind and before I can protest, not-Kyle nudges me along and I have no choice but to follow him. As he leads me through the place, I make sure to take in my surroundings so I can find my way back out.

Though I can’t say I’ve ever given much thought to how this place would look, I’m surprised by how clean it is. All the surfaces are shiny, the floor black and predictably the walls are red. Despite the creepy red lights, there’s nothing out of the ordinary—at least not from what I can see. It even smells nice, of flowers and freshly cut grass.

“Hey Benny.” A woman that only looks to be a little older than me smiles at the burly man at my back. “Who’s that?” she asks curiously as she tilts her head in my direction.

Ah, so not-Kyle’s name is Benny.

“Beth.” His gruff voice almost makes it sound like a curse rather than her name. While he walks around me, I notice the way he’s looking at me, and I don’t think it’s good. “Do you

not know this one? I found her near the emergency access, and she claims to be working here.”

My palms become sweaty and I nervously suck my bottom lip into my mouth as I wonder what will happen now that my cover is blown.

“Come off it, Benny. There are so many people working here it’s impossible to remember every face. Just leave the lass with me, and I’ll find out where she belongs,” Beth says, smiling at me the entire time. There’s nothing scary about this woman. Her eyes twinkle and her dimples are on full display, all of which makes me relax.

When Benny takes off, Beth links her arm with mine and asks me a few questions. Even though I hate doing so, I consider lying because I don’t want to admit that I shouldn’t be here, but I also don’t want to risk running into Dante so I need to get out of here.

“Look I’m sorry for showing up like this,” I say as we come to a stop in front of yet another door. “I don’t really work here but—”

Beth lets out a laugh. “You don’t say? Sweetie, I could spot from miles away that you haven’t worked here a day in your life.” When I ask how she knows she cackles and points at my jacket. “You’re wearing too much clothing, that’s how I know. Now if you came looking for a job, you’ll have to show me some ID or come back when you’re eighteen. Otherwise, I’m afraid I’ll have to ask you to leave.”

I sigh with relief knowing I'm free to go. After thanking Beth profusely and accepting the business card she's handed me, I leave through the front door.

OceanofPDF.com

IX



OceanofPDF.com

Caitlin

“Remove your hands from your face,” Ave shrieks, sounding entirely too chipper for this early, and I groan at her. “Come on, sleepyhead, don’t be like that. I need to see if you’ve suddenly got crow’s feet overnight. Don’t forget, as the eldest, you’re my ageing-mirror. What happens to you will probably also happen to me. Stop being so selfish and let me see.”

I try to bat her away and when that doesn’t help, I snarl, “Bloody hell, Ave. Let me sleep, why won’t you?” But I can’t keep the laughter out of my voice.

Truthfully, I love my sister’s over the top antics, and this is a tradition on my birthday. On hers, I wake her up to see if she’s magically become better at peopling—what can I say? Everyone has their own thing, and this is ours.

“At least move over,” she sing-songs. I do, and she wastes no time crawling under my duvet, placing her head on my outstretched arm. “Soooo, how does it feel to be eighteen?” she asks, making it sound like I just turned middle-aged rather than reaching the legal voting age.

I snort and roll my eyes at her. “It feels like I’m still a million times cooler than you.”

Ave shakes her head and shifts around to make herself more comfortable. “I actually came to see what you wanted to do tonight. I’m going to the movies with Camden and Connor, but

you don't mind, right? You mentioned Lily had asked you to work until late anyway, and I'll be home around the same time as you."

Even though my stomach plummets, I don't allow my disappointment to show. "Sure, Ave. That sounds like a great idea," I say, trying my hardest to sound like I'm cool with the entire thing.

If she's going to be around tonight, I don't have a right to ask her to cancel her plans with the twins. So what if that means we won't skip our last class to sneak out and get cake like we used to do? My cheeks hurt from faking my smile, but I'm determined not to let it slip.

Truthfully, it's not just Ave dismissing one of our traditions that's soured my mood. Eighteen is a milestone birthday, and ever since the anniversary of our parents' death just days ago, I've been sad they're not here to celebrate with me. Especially when I feel like I'm losing Dante as well.

When I came home after being at Dirty Diamonds, Dante wasn't here and I locked my door before I went to bed. For the first time, I didn't allow him to comfort and soothe me while calling me his perfect storm. I even pretended not to hear him almost kicking the door down in response to my terrified cries.

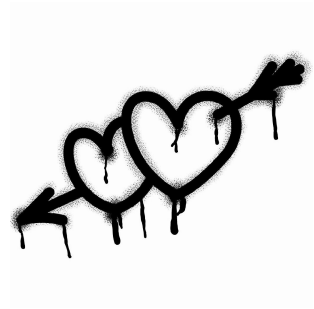
The day after, which was the anniversary of mum and dad's death, the three of us went to the cemetery and had a quiet night in. Even though every bone in my body wanted to get away from Dante, I couldn't do that to Ave. So I stuck it out and played nice. Since then, I've barricaded myself in my

room, planning my big move for tomorrow. That way, I don't have to look at him, and he doesn't have to put up with me. It seems like the perfect solution.

“Do you want to walk to school together?” Ave asks, pulling me out of my confused and depressing thoughts. I nod but when I make to get up, she turns to her side and looks straight at me. “Happy birthday, Caitlin. I love you.” She throws her arms around me, or tries to, and hugs me.

Tears gather in my eyes at my sister's declaration. She's my best friend. Or, she used to be, until I started keeping secrets. I can't tell her about Dante, though. I just can't.

“I love you too, Ave,” I whisper.



“I'm so glad you agreed to help me tonight,” Lily chirps. “I know you said you didn't have any plans, but I still feel bad I'm having you work on a Friday evening, so this is the least I can do.”

She ignores my mumbled answer and puts the finishing touches on my hair. I try to pretend that everything is okay, and that I'm not feeling heartbroken. Ironically, Mike is one of the few people that has mentioned my birthday, but since he's grounded, he couldn't hang in the hours between school

ending and me coming here to help Lily. Yet, he's the only one who I almost wish had said nothing. And when he gave me my present, a locket with a picture of us, I almost broke down and confessed that I've been cheating on him.

It makes me sick to my stomach that I'm treating him as badly as I am. I need to find the strength to woman up and end things because what I'm doing is beyond selfish and wrong.

My phone feels like it's burning in my pocket as I remember the breakup text in my drafts. I haven't sent it for several reasons. The biggest being that Mike deserves better, which is ironically also why the draft is there in the first place. But this is my mess, my selfish actions, and I don't want to treat the imminent breakup the same way. No, it has to be face-to-face.

Despite my hate for dishonesty, I don't think I'll ever tell Mike the truth about why. It might seem selfish, but what good can come from it? Telling him I've cheated will only lessen my guilt and make him feel worse. No, when the time comes, it has to be as pain free for him as possible.

Between my guilt and lies to Mike, Dante lying to me, and Ave skipping our cake tradition, I'm ready for the day to be over.

"There we go," she proudly says, taking two steps back as she gestures towards the mirror.

My mouth pops open as I watch my reflection through wide eyes. I look... I look amazing. While Lily's been working on my hair and makeup, she refused to let me look in the mirror. But now... wow.

She's curled my hair, and the shining strands cascade around my face and down my back. My eyes look bigger, my cheekbones sharper, and my lips are popping. She's kept the makeup colours in nude and light grey shades, which makes my features stand out even more. As I look down at myself, I feel rather silly that I'm still wearing my school uniform. The siren staring back at me shouldn't hide behind a white shirt, dark blue pleated skirt, and blue tie.

When I notice Lily looking expectantly at me, I immediately feel bad. She's gone to the trouble of doing all this, and as soon as we're done, I'll be going home to eat the red velvet cake in my bag with Ave.

"I have one more thing for you," Lily says, disappearing behind the curtain that separates the space that's only for employees. When she comes back, she's holding a present in her hand. "Your sister asked me to give you this. She figured you wanted to celebrate, and she wanted you to have something to change into."

I tear open the green wrapping paper and gasp as I hold up the present. It's a pair of black leather pants. Not just any pants... I'm pretty sure these are the ones I've had in my online basket for the past year. I don't even remember showing them to Ave. How the hell has she afforded them? They're over three hundred quid.

Lily laughs at my expression and urges me to try them on, which I do. Of course, they fit like a glove, which makes me feel like I'm ready. I don't know what for, I just know that I

can't go home. No, I need to go out and celebrate, even if it's by myself.

Before I can talk myself out of it, I grab a pair of scissors from the counter and cut into my white shirt. After I'm done, I put it back on and look in the mirror. Now, with some adjustments, the school shirt no longer looks out of place. With most of the buttons undone, my cleavage is on full display and it shows hints of my black bra. I've tied it above my waist, so my flat stomach and belly button are showing.

"Not too shabby," I tell myself, unable to stop smiling.

I don't look like the desperate, uncle-obsessed girl I am—I look like a woman.

As soon as I come back out, Lily insists we leave. "I guess the last appointment is a no-show," she says.

It's only eight in the evening, but usually the salon closes around five—six at the latest. So it must have been an important client for Lily to keep the place open, and for her to need me there. Where I assumed the place would be hopping, it's been anything but, so I'm not sure why she needed me here in the first place. Or why she needed me to wear heels that make my poor feet ache.

After closing up, we make the usual walk to her car so she can take me home. As we make our way across the carpark, I, for once, don't feel silly next to her. She always looks put together, and tonight is no different, since she looks like she's ready for a party in her short dress.

“Alexander and I are going out for dinner. Do you mind if we pick him up before I drop you off?” she asks, like she’s noticed me looking. Of course I don’t mind, and I tell her as much. Honestly, I’m just grateful she’s still willing to take me home.

Where Lily is easygoing, her other half is anything but. And from the moment he joins us in the car, the atmosphere changes. After half-heartedly trying to engage Alexander in small talk, I give up and lean back in the backseat.

The drive to my house feels quicker than usual, which is probably because I don’t want to go home. All the lights are off, signalling I’m the only one here.

“Thanks for the lift,” I tell Lily. She parks the car and unbuckles her seatbelt. When Alexander does the same and opens the front passenger door, I frown. “Umm... do you need to get something?” I ask.

“We do, actually,” Lily chirps. “I need to get some of the plastic containers back. We’ve run out.” It seems like a weird time to worry about the containers she’s brought us food in, but whatever.

I try to ignore their weird behaviour as we walk up to the front door. After rummaging through my school bag for what feels like forever, I finally find my keys and unlock... well, I try to unlock the door, but it’s unnecessary. Did Ave and I forget to lock up this morning? Dante was long gone when we made it downstairs, that is, if he ever came home last night, so

unless he's been home during the day, I didn't do it this morning.

Crap.

If anything is missing, he'll have my head. He's drilled the importance of locking up and activating the alarm into both mine and Ave's heads a million times.

"Is it always this dark?" Alexander gruffly asks.

I shake my head and I'm just about to answer when Lily drags me into the living room. "Watch it," I gasp, almost tripping in my heels. "What the hell—"

I'm interrupted when light suddenly floods the room, and there's a chorus of people shouting various versions of "Surprise!" and, "Happy birthday!"

My breath hitches as I gasp in surprise, and when I spin around, I come face-to-face with Ave, Dante, and Mike.

"Happy birthday, love," Mike murmurs as he pulls me into his embrace. "I'm sorry for lying about being grounded."

I sigh in contentment.

"You didn't honestly believe I'd leave you alone on your birthday?" Ave giggles as she pulls me away from Mike and into a bone-crushing hug. "We totally got you, didn't we?" She waggles her eyebrows.

Tears brim in my eyes at the thought of what they've done for me. I hug my sister back as hard as I can. "I bloody hate you," I whisper with zero heat.

“Hate Uncle Dante,” she says with a giggle. “He’s the one who organised it even though I told him you’d kill us both dead.” Her tone is that of a co-conspirator and not someone who tried to stop him.

“Is that so?” I laugh, gently slapping her arm before turning to Dante.

“Happy birthday, Caitlin.” His eyes dip to the valley of my breasts that’s generously exposed in my altered school shirt. When his eyes widen as if he likes what he sees, I forget my bruised ego. The thought of him checking me out makes heat pool in my lower belly, and I arch my back slightly.

“You did all of this?” I ask, my voice barely above a whisper. I take a step closer to him, intending to touch him. When he looks around like he’s uncomfortable, I’m even more determined to get my birthday hug, to feel his arms around me. And since we’re in a room full of people, he can’t really decline without it looking weird.

“He sure did,” my sister helpfully says. “He also bought the pants you’re wearing.” She winks and hip bumps me. Then she whispers something to Camden—or is it Connor—and she takes off with a smile.

I look behind us, and I’m honestly overwhelmed by the amount of people here. Apart from Mike, Lily, Alexander, Camden, Connor, Asher—the twins’ friend—I also recognise Dante’s Australian mate, Baz, who keeps looking at Lily, and a few of my mates from school. Maybe ‘mates’ is not exactly what we are... we’re friendly.

Between fearing storms and thunder, and wanting to spend as much time as possible at home with Dante, I haven't prioritised hanging out. Yet they're here. I smile at them and tell myself I'll go talk to them shortly.

“Maybe I could borrow you for a moment?” Dante asks, looking straight at me.

I'm so surprised by the question that I ask him to repeat it, and then I nod eagerly when he does. I don't know what he wants, but the mere promise of some alone time makes my breath saw out of me, and my heartbeat increases.

OceanofPDF.com

X



OceanofPDF.com

Caitlin

Dante takes us upstairs to my room, where we both sit down on my bed. “I wanted to give you this in private,” he says, his tone husky.

As I try to wrap my head around what he means, I slowly lick my lips. “You wanted to be alone with me?” I whisper.

He quickly shakes his head, and I frown in confusion. He literally said he wanted to give me something in private... and... well, it’s my eighteenth. Is that why he’s been holding back? Pretending he doesn’t want me like I want him?

“Don’t read anything into this,” he snaps as he pulls a small jewellery box from the pocket of his suit pants. “This was your mum’s.”

I can barely process his words, too confused by how none of what he says matches up to my thoughts. “My mum?” I ask, dumbfounded.

When he nods, I take the box from him, pretending not to notice the way he’s careful not to touch me. I quickly open the black velvet box and gasp as the gold ring inside is revealed. It’s beautiful, and I think I remember her wearing it.

“It was a present from your dad, and I know she wanted you to have this one,” Dante says.

My brows furrow in confusion. “How do you know she didn’t intend for Ave to have it?”

“Do you remember how much your parents loved to plan? Or maybe you didn’t know that about them...” he trails off like the last part just hit him. “Anyway, this and another ring were in their deposit box at the bank. Everything in there was marked for you and Avery, and this one had your name on it. I figured it would be a great present for today.”

I blink my tears away, my hands shaking as I remove the ring from the box and slide it onto my ring finger. It’s a snug fit, but I refuse to give up.

“Thank you,” I say, my voice trembling with the emotions I’m trying to keep leashed. “This is the best present you could have given me.”

I can feel Dante’s gaze searing into my skin, but I keep my eyes on the ring. I don’t want to look at him, not when I’m feeling so vulnerable and... I don’t even know. Under normal circumstances, I’d hug him, however, I don’t have to be a genius to know that wouldn’t be welcome. So instead, I just sit here, ignoring him while I look at the ring that once belonged to my mum.

“There’s something else,” he says before standing up. Then he thrusts a small, white envelope at me, and I take it without hesitating.

Inside the envelope is a gift certificate to Briarwood’s only tattoo shop, which is owned by one of Dante’s mates. “I know you want a tattoo, and at least this way I know it won’t be a crappy design, or a symbol you think means one thing just to find out years later, it means noodle soup.”

I burst out laughing. “Thank you,” I say. The amount of thought he has put into my presents makes me feel fuzzy. I get up from my bed and add, “I already know what I want.”

Dante’s body is pretty much one big canvas of artwork. Apart from his neck, face, and feet, there isn’t an area that isn’t covered—at least not from what I’ve seen. I’ve studied every visible line and design over a million times, and a few years ago I decided what I want for my first tattoo.

Feeling giddy at the prospect that I can finally get the tattoo I want, I move to hug him. My smile slips when he takes a step back, keeping the distance between us.

“Don’t I get a birthday hug?” I ask, slowly licking my lips.

“Caitlin.” My name is a growl, but instead of angry or exasperated, it sounds like he’s deflated.

I scoff. “Sorry,” I say, sarcastically. “Didn’t know I repulse you so much you can’t even hug me on my birthday, after giving me a present that used to belong to my dead mum.” Yeah, I’m laying it on thick, and I’m not even sorry.

My words have the desired effect. Dante closes the distance between us and wraps his muscular arms around me in a hug. My face is just above his heart, and I love that I can hear every beat.

Even though I know I shouldn’t, I sniff as his scent envelops me. The smokey and citrus notes in his fragrance are delicious, but nothing is as mouth watering as him—the smell that’s uniquely him. I don’t even know how to describe it. All I

know is that it makes my pussy throb and I want to squeeze my thighs together.

“Happy birthday, Caitlin.” The low tenor breaches my thoughts, and I mentally chastise myself. I let myself be wrapped up in his scent, rather than soaking in the feeling of his body against mine.

It’s all too easy to feel his hard muscles beneath the long-sleeved black button-up he’s wearing. Especially when his muscles tense as he squeezes me harder. It feels like he’s savouring this moment as well.

Loving how he’s dwarfing me in every way, I push myself closer. My body feels small next to his. Even though he’s lean rather than bulky, I’ve seen him without his shirt on enough times to know just how ripped he is. And at six-foot-four, he has a lot on my five-foot-nine frame.

“Thank you,” I whisper, scared to speak at a normal volume. I really don’t want to end the embrace.

I take a deep breath and steady myself before I lessen my hold on him—I’d rather be the one to end it. Before I can let go fully, Dante rasps, “Not yet,” and squeezes me tighter.

The smile that spreads across my face is wiped away when his hands move from my back, slowly moving down my exposed midriff until they settle on my hips. His large hands feel like they’re searing my flesh, making gooseflesh erupt across my skin.

“Dante,” I whisper.

I shift my weight from one foot to the other, the slight movement causes one of his legs to slip between mine. I half-moan as it perfectly positions his thigh between my legs, causing wetness to spread. Scared that it will make him back off, I grasp his arms and look up at him.

My breath hitches at the way he's looking at me, like he wants to devour me. I lick my lips again and swallow audibly. The air around us is charged, and it feels like we're in a bubble of our own.

When he doesn't pull away, I feel brazen—empowered by my need for him. Without taking my eyes off him, I rock my hips against his leg, loving the way his face hardens.

“Caitlin!” My name is a warning.

I smile, and say, “It's my birthday.”

Dante's answering laugh is a low chuckle. “And what do you want for your birthday?” he asks.

The question is loaded, and I'm torn between voicing what I want and not wanting to give him a reason to pull away.

“You,” I say, deciding on a mix of honesty and vagueness.

Dante's eyes, that are normally a rich, dark blue, are so dark it's hard to see the blue. Apart from his nostrils vibrating slightly on each exhale, he's completely still. His grip on my hips is hard, but not uncomfortably so.

Just as I think I've overstepped, he guides my hips back and forth so I'm grinding on his leg. My eyes flutter shut as I give myself over to him completely.

“Look at me, Caitlin,” he demands, and my eyes flutter open at the rough command. “You said you wanted this, so you don’t get to close your eyes. Nod if you understand.”

I bob my head up and down in a jerky movement, eager to give him what he wants, so he doesn’t stop making me feel so... blimey... I don’t even know what I’m feeling. Well, I’m bloody randy, that much I know. My pussy is so wet I can feel my wetness on my inner thighs. My sex clenches around nothing as the familiar fire builds inside me.

While I’ve engaged in some heavy petting with Mike, it’s never felt like this. Even the times I’ve pleased myself to the soundtrack of Dante shagging someone else, or when we watched each other get off has nothing on the inferno he’s creating right now.

“Oh!” I moan when he increases the pace, and I eagerly follow the rhythm he’s setting.

I’m panting as I move my hands beneath his shirt, needing to touch the hard planes of his stomach. I let the tips of my fingers run over him, touching every groove and valley on his body.

“You look so fucking beautiful right now,” Dante groans, sounding as though he’s in pain.

I’m about to answer when there’s a knock on my bedroom door, and before I can process anything, I find myself splayed on the floor. I look at Dante, who’s now at the other end of my room, his face is completely void of any expression.

“Did you push me?” I ask, feeling confused. “Did you actually push me to the bloody floor?” My voice rises as I realise that has to be what happened.

He gives me a warning look before calling, “Come in.”

A woman I don’t remember seeing before joins us. She smiles at Dante and leans so close her tits touch his arm. “Hi baby,” she purrs.

My stomach tightens as she practically wraps her body around him like she’s ivy and he’s the canopy.

Wait... baby?

I slowly get to my feet and narrow my eyes at the bitch who just interfered. “Who are you?” I ask, not even bothering to hide my hostility.

She runs a hand through her long blonde hair and laughs throatily. “It’s nice to meet you, Caitlin. I’m Dante’s girlfriend.” She holds out a hand that I completely ignore. “And happy birthday,” she adds.

“Girlfriend?” I question, unable to believe that’s what she just said.

Dante makes a sound like one of those fake coughs people use when they try to hide something, which is so out of character for him.

“Leave it alone, Caitlin.” I can barely keep my mouth closed as his growled words register.

The blonde laughs nervously, looking between us. “Baby, did you not tell her I was coming?” Her eyes settle on me, and when no one answers her, she fidgets. “It’s rather new, but I’m still—”

I rudely interrupt her. “Please stop talking,” I say, trying my best not to snarl at her.

Her eyes widen, and she turns to Dante, telling him she’ll be waiting downstairs. Then she looks at me and apologises for interrupting. Rationally, I know I have no right to be upset at her, but since I’m feeling anything but right now, I only nod to show her I’ve heard her.

Despite trying to appear unruffled and aloof, I can’t. As soon as the door closes behind... Dante’s girlfriend, my eyes dart to my uncle’s blue ones. He has the good grace to look contrite, apologetic even.

“Y-you have a girlfriend?” I whisper, agony exploding inside me. “What the bloody hell were you doing with me, then?” I feel like I just got sucker punched, and my throat is closing up.

“Keep your voice down,” Dante barks, making a fake and shrill laugh escape me. “Please, Caitlin,” he whispers, but I shake my head.

The feeling of betrayal awakens inside me, and slithers through my veins. How dare he act like that when... oh my God... he was about to get me off while his girlfriend was waiting downstairs... like the rest of the party that I had all but forgotten about.

Bloody hell, what's wrong with me? This isn't about Dante's girlfriend. I shouldn't be making out with him, especially not with Mike downstairs. Although it's easier to focus on my hurt, I can't deny my wrongdoing and selfishness.

"This is what's going to happen," I say, a sense of calm settling inside me. "You're going to get the fuck out of my room. Then you'll go downstairs and have fun with your mates and your lass." He cringes as I mention her. "And every time you see me head in your direction, you'll excuse yourself and stay as far away from me as possible."

I reach for the small envelope on my bed, the one with the generous gift certificate inside that I had already spent in my mind. With my eyes locked on his, I rip it until I can't make the pieces smaller.

"When I do finally get a tattoo, I don't want it to remind me of you," I coldly state. "From now on, we're nothing. Since I'm now an adult, you're not even my legal guardian. Nod if you understand." My lips twitch as I make a mockery of the words he spoke to me not too long ago while grinding me on his bloody leg.

Dante looks taken aback by whatever he sees on my face, but he doesn't contradict me. He walks over to the door and opens it, then he turns around to look at me. "You need to forget about me, Caitlin." Even though the words should hurt, they don't. How can they when my heart's already breaking from his betrayal and lies?

XI



OceanofPDF.com

Dante

“Relax, mate. She’s eighteen now, so what’s the harm of letting her experience it fully?” Baz chuckles, watching me watch Caitlin from a distance.

True to her word, my niece has acted like I’m invisible since we came back downstairs. I can’t say I blame her, not at bloody all. That doesn’t mean I have to like the way she’s chugging drink after drink, though.

This is exactly why I needed Sugar to be here and pretend to be my girlfriend. I can’t help myself around my niece, so I chose the coward’s way out. However, even this is proving to be ineffective. Christ, how long was I alone with Caitlin before my resolve crumbled and I made her grind on my leg? All the while, her sister, her boyfriend, and Baz were right downstairs. Any of them could have burst in and caught us, but with Caitlin, I just can’t help myself.

I’m a bloody sad excuse for a man.

“So, you have a girlfriend now?” the Aussie asks, quirking a brow, clearly not believing me. “How very domestic of you,” he muses.

I ignore him and look around. By now, it’s only Caitlin and Mike—who’s practically draped over her—myself, Sugar, and Baz. Avery left with the Bennetts and Asher, and everyone else trickled out after them.

Doing my best to ignore my niece, I reminisce about the good old days with my mate. Everything was so much simpler when we were just two young lads always chasing the perfect wave. Back then, we didn't care about mortgages or savings. As long as we had enough to get by, everything was fine.

At least that's what I thought... It wasn't until Luke's death that I learned Baz wasn't the hobo-chic laid back surfer I thought him to be. Well, maybe he was... but he was also so much more. Even though he turned out to differ completely from who I thought he was, I never held it against him.

The life he had been groomed into made sense to me back then, and it still does to this day. If he hadn't opened my eyes to what can be done, I'd probably still be a bum on a beach with my surfboard in hand. Now, thanks to him, my life is richer—and I get to punish the sick and the twisted.

I purposefully force myself to think about something else, because after what I did with my eighteen-year-old niece, I'm not sure that label doesn't fit on me.

“Dante,” Sugar whines, placing a hand on my arm. “Shouldn't we go to bed soon?”

Since she tried to suck me off at Dirty Diamonds, I've spent every night with her. Paying handsomely for her company, and she's even made me come—mostly when she keeps her mouth shut and the lights are off, but it still counts. I'm trying my hardest not to acknowledge that it's making me feel like I'm betraying Caitlin, because I have no right to feel like that. Nothing can come of my feelings for her.

“On that note,” Baz says, giving me a smirk before emptying his beer. “I should say goodbye.”

When I offer that he can stay here, he says something about his cousin living close by.

I’m so surprised I stare for longer than what’s necessary. “You have a cousin that lives in Briarwood?” I ask, not sure if I heard him correctly.

Surely I didn’t... I’d know if that was the case, wouldn’t I?

“I do,” he solemnly says. “But we don’t speak about that, so let it go.”

With a sigh, I rake a hand through my hair. I’m fucking itching to ask all my questions, but out of respect for him, I won’t. I get the feeling he didn’t mean to say it, and I’m not going to give him a hard time about it.

Instead of giving me the chance to ask more questions, he thanks me for tonight and then he walks over to Caitlin, presumably saying goodbye. My eyes watch her like a hawk when she gets up and sways unsteadily, clearly she’s pissed—too pissed for my liking.

“Well, I think we should let them shut this party down,” Baz says, pointedly looking at Mike.

My niece nods like she’s in complete agreement, which is definitely not what I expected, but I’m glad the lad will be out of here soon.

It takes less than ten minutes for the guys to be on their way, my mate promising to make sure Mike gets home safely.

When I close the door after them, Caitlin sits on the sofa, her long hair falling like a curtain around her face. Even though I know I shouldn't, I need to talk to her, so I send Sugar upstairs, promising to be right behind her.

“Are you going to shag her?” Caitlin crudely asks, lifting her head so I can see the thinly veiled anger in her eyes.

I shrug like a bloody bastard. How do I tell her I need to shag her out of my system, and Sugar is it?

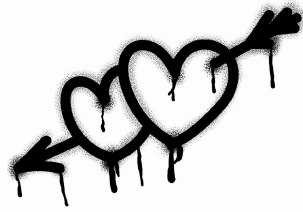
Lifting her chin, she says, “I'll sleep down here. I don't need a play-by-play of what you're doing.” I quirk a brow at her words.

So she's heard me the other times I've brought a woman into the house?

Because I'm a special kind of prick, I shrug again and ignore my niece and the hints of hurt in her voice. “I don't know what has your panties in a twist. It's not like you're single either,” I snarl, my temper getting the better of me.

Rather than rising to the bait, she laughs. “But I didn't lie, did I? You knew about Mike and I've been honest about what I want, which is more than I can say about you.” She narrows her eyes at me, and I bloody hate that it makes me want to rear back from her.

Caitlin is right, though. I did lie about Sugar—who definitely isn't my girlfriend.



“Where did you go?” I grunt when Sugar slides back into bed.

I thought she was out of here when she got up, and I pretended to be asleep so I didn’t have to deal with her. Tonight, I didn’t even fuck her—much to her dismay, I turned away and went to sleep.

The mattress dips as she makes herself comfortable, draping one leg over my hip. Her naked body is flush against mine, her tits pressing into my chest every time she inhales. Then she wordlessly slides her hand down my body. When she reaches my boxers, she palms my cock that’s awake now. A groan slips free, and I lift my hips to get more friction.

Rather than the cheap perfume she usually reeks of, she smells of soap and honey. Her hair is wet, so maybe she took a shower. That would explain why she smells like Caitlin, which I should be angry about.. and I am... but I’m also incredibly turned on.

Sugar’s grip on my cock is too slack, so I place mine over hers and squeeze tighter. “Afraid you’re going to hurt me?” I taunt, my voice still thick from sleep. “Hold me like you mean it, and—” I grunt my approval when she tightens her grip,

squeezing my pierced length until it's almost painful. Like, fifty percent painful, but one hundred percent awesome.

She still doesn't speak, which I have to admit is making things a lot more interesting. In the darkness, she's faceless and I can easily imagine she's someone else.

There's something off about the way Sugar is working my cock. Her touch isn't as fluent as normal, it's almost as though she's testing different ways of stroking me, and she's yet to spit on my rigid length as she usually does. I like it, though. I like the fumbling, it makes it feel like she's inexperienced, which is a much bigger turn on.

I slide my hand down her back and squeeze her ass, and then I chuckle to myself when it feels bigger. Clearly, I've had more to drink than I thought. As I reach her core, which is surprisingly wet, I slide a finger inside.

"I like this new side to you," I rasp when she doesn't moan like a pornstar in heat.

That's the thing about getting a woman from Dirty Diamonds. They're so used to sex, and it's a job to them, so they don't get wet this easily, and the sounds... blimey, don't even get me started on how fake and off-putting they are. But this... the slight change in her breathing, the muffled whimpers, and cunt that's squeezing my finger like a virgin pussy is amazing.

"Your pussy is squeezing my finger so good. Do you think my cock will even fit?" I ask while I pump my digit in and out of her scorching heat.

Sugar undulates her hips to the same rhythm as she's moving her hand up and down my thick, swollen shaft. I work a second finger into her heat, impatient to bury my cock inside her.

I'm not sure why she's muffling her small whimpers, but they sound so addictive I want to swallow each and every one. I don't, though. Kissing her would be too intimate.

When I'm sure she's ready, I reach under my pillow for the foil packet. After rolling the rubber down my thick shaft, I turn us so she's on her back, and she immediately wraps her legs around my hips. As I work my cock inside her, I lean down and capture one of her erect nipples with teeth. Sugar isn't moaning anymore, hell, she isn't even responsive. She's completely rigid as she breathes deeply like she's in pain.

"Are you okay?" I ask, concerned I'm hurting her.

This isn't the first time I'm fucking her in the missionary position, and the last time she was rotating her hips and begging to be filled. Why is she acting like she isn't even into it now?

"Am I hurting you?" I demand, staying still.

When she lifts her hips like she wants to take me deeper, I begin to pull out. "Don't!" She whispers, her voice muffled by the arm she's splayed across her face. "Keep going."

I frown, but fuck... she's saying she's okay, and I really, really want to be inside her. I allow my dick to do all the thinking, and I continue to slide into her heat. Her cunt is

gripping me like a vice, and it feels like my tip is nudging against something. A... no... I don't know what it could be. The only other time I've felt something similar to this is when it's been a virgin. It's been years since I've had one, but it's a feeling you don't forget. Sugar isn't a virgin, though. I know that for a fact.

When Sugar is still breathing like I'm hurting her, I roll us over so she's on top. "Lower yourself," I command. "Take my cock like a good girl."

She freezes, but before I can say anything, she wraps her hand around me again and guides the crown to her opening. Rather than easing me inside her, she slams herself down so I'm buried to the hilt inside her.

I groan and grasp her hips. Unable to let her have complete control, I thrust up and into her, moaning as her cunt continues to squeeze me so hard it's almost painful—like I'm too big for her. I know I should give her time to acclimate to me, but I can't. I can't just lie here, I need to fuck her, to feel her.

"Let me make you feel good," I rasp, moving one hand between us so I can reach her swollen bundle of nerves.

Since she's still not saying anything, I take her silence as the go-ahead, and I roll her clit. Her breathing changes almost immediately, small whimpers leaking out of her mouth. Her sounds are so intoxicating I can't hold myself back any longer.

Unable to pound into her like I want, I change our position again. I get her on all fours, then I spread her arse cheeks and slam back into her cunt. Sugar almost falls forward, clearly not

expecting the thrust. So I wrap her hair around my hand to keep her upright. As I thrust into her, I barely register that her hair seems longer, and I'm pretty sure she's...

"Fuck! You're squeezing me so hard. I'm going to come soon," I groan, losing my train of thought as my balls tighten.

I pound into her over and over until I empty myself into the condom with a roar.

When I come down from my natural high, I realise she didn't come. "Lie down on your back," I pant, after pulling out of her.

Sugar scrambles to do as I say, and I waste no time spreading her thighs. Then I kiss, nip, and lick my way down her throat and all the way to her exposed cunt. As I rub my nose across her clit, I frown in confusion when hair tickles me. I've never gone down on her before, actually, I've never really paid any attention to her cunt, but I'm pretty sure she's bare.

When I kiss my way across her mound, it becomes obvious she only has a landing strip. Maybe I just didn't notice it during our other encounters.

As I shake my head and lick her from top to bottom, a metallic flavour explodes on my tongue. Disgusted, I jump out of bed and reach for the lamp on my bedside table. Sugar makes some whispered protests which I ignore and I switch the light on.

My eyes widen as I try to process what's in front of me—or rather, who's in front of me.

“Caitlin?” I ask, even though I don’t need any confirmation when I can see her lying completely naked in my fucking bed.

She looks back at me through wide eyes and reaches for the white sheets. That’s when I notice it... the blood. There’s blood on the sheets... and I...

“Fuck!” I roar, making her cringe. “You just... I just...” I’m rambling, unable to complete a sentence.

I fist my hair and pull as I fall to my knees. The direness of the situation crashing in on me. I just fucked my niece... a girl I’m supposed to protect, and... she is—*was*—a fucking virgin.

“What did you do?” I whisper, horrified, as the walls begin to close in on me.

OceanofPDF.com

XII



OceanofPDF.com

Dante

“Surprise,” she squeaks.

I sense her move, but I don't get up from the floor—I can't. My mind is hazy, thoughts and emotions assault me from all angles. I'm disgusted with myself, with Sugar for leaving, and with Caitlin for tricking me. Then there's the other part, the darker side, the twisted side—the one whispering to me that it was always meant to be me, that her virginity and her body could never belong to anyone else.

“Dante?” She sounds nervous, and her breath hitches when I jerk back from her as her hand touches my shoulder.

“What. The. Bloody. Hell. Did. You. Do?” I clench my jaw so hard I wouldn't be surprised if I crack a tooth. “How the fuck could you do this to me?” I roar, betrayal and lust burning through my veins.

“I-I...” Her fright is palpable in the air, and when my eyes shoot open, I pin her with my gaze. Whatever she sees in my sockets is enough for her to take several steps backwards, not stopping until she's pressing her back against the wall.

Slowly, I stand up and stalk towards her, levelling her with a dark look just as I wrap my hand around her throat, keeping her in place, before she can put more distance between us. “Is this what you dream about? Forcing yourself on me whether or not I want you?” I want to take the words back as soon as they

leave me, yet I don't apologise. Instead, I take pleasure in the way her eyes widen in surprise, and her sharp intake of air.

“N-no... I...”

“Y-you, what?” I ask, mocking her stutter. “What did you think would happen, Caitlin? That I'd welcome you into my bed with open arms? That I'd make love to you?” I laugh darkly, shaking my head at her naivety.

I'm surprised when she laughs and before I can stop myself, I flex my fingers around her throat. “At least I'm not lying to you, or to myself,” she wheezes. Her eyes are wild with anger and if I'm not mistaken, a hint of panic. “If you had switched the light on right away, you'd know it was me and I was willing to run that risk. I'm tired of fighting and pretending. I lo—”

I cut her off with a guttural growl. “Don't you bloody dare say that to me.”

This time, she doesn't so much as flinch at my outburst. She's fucking lifting a brow, which I'm pretty sure is her way of issuing a challenge. As her face turns red, I realise I'm still holding her by the throat. I let go and rest my hand on the wall, caging her in while I pin her with my hips. *She isn't going anywhere.*

A part of me is wondering if she's acting like this because of the amount of alcohol she drank at the party. The fact she isn't slurring her words or even appearing unsteady has me reconsidering how much she actually had, because she seems sober to me.

Looking down her body, I notice the blood on her thighs. My cock immediately hardens and I lick my lips. I wasn't gentle at all, so it's not surprising she was bleeding. While looking at the aftermath, I feel a sick sort of satisfaction spread through me, knowing that Mike never claimed this part of her.

I run a finger between her folds and lift it so she can see the blood. "Is this what you wanted me to have?" When she nods, I pop the finger into my mouth and lick it clean. Now that I know what—more importantly, *who*—it is, I crave the taste. "I should say thank you—"

"You're welcome." Her tone is nothing more than a weak croak, and dammit if it doesn't turn me on even more to know I'm the reason she's struggling to speak.

"But I won't." I finish what I wanted to say before she interrupted me.

When she turns her head to the side, refusing to acknowledge me, I chuckle. I love how bloody feisty she is, even when she knows she's in the wrong. What she did was beyond fucked up, but it's equally messed up that I didn't realise it was her.

The signs were all there, yet I kept rationalising them. Maybe the truth is that I didn't want to know because if I knew, I don't think I could go through with it no matter how much I wanted to. At least that's what I'd like to believe. But as my need for her grows, I'm not so sure.

"What do you want to happen now? This is your game, right?" My voice is thick with lust and I know she can feel the

evidence of what her naked body does to me against her stomach.

Why am I even asking? She's pushed me so far there is no way to go back or turn away. I can't. I won't.

When she doesn't answer me, I banish all thoughts of doing what's right and drop to my knees. I ignore her surprised gasp and turn my head to the side, licking up her inner thigh, all the way to her wet opening.

The taste of blood is strong, but not enough to hide how fucking sweet she tastes—and mixed together, it fucking tastes divine. Impatient to really taste her, I swipe my tongue across her folds and lap at her opening.

“Dante... I...” The sweet moan makes my cock jerk and I wish she was touching it. That will have to wait, though. Because the only thing I want right now is her taste exploding on my tongue.

Caitlin squeals when I quickly stand and throw her over my shoulder, carrying her back to bed. I smack her luscious ass, loving the way it jiggles, before I throw her on the bed. I follow her, lying on my back.

“Sit on my face,” I rasp. When she doesn't move as quickly as I want, I growl. “Fucking come here. I need you to ride my face.”

Now that she's coaxed the monster out of the cage, I can't hold back. There's no stopping, no leash strong enough to restrain the fucker. I don't know what comes next, and I refuse

to think about it. All I know—all I *want* to know—is that right now she's mine, and I'm going to give us both what we've been longing for.

It's almost comical to watch the way she scrambles to do as I say, and it's clear that she doesn't fully get what I mean. Instead of smothering me with her cunt, she's hovering just above me. With my help, which is basically me gripping her hips and forcing her down, she's finally where I want her.

Moan after moan spills from her, and her thighs squeeze around my head as I tongue fuck her. I groan loudly and fist my cock. She tastes so fucking good, I think this might just be my new favourite meal.

Using my hold on her hips, I urge her to move, making her grind that delicious cunt against my face, and I don't let go until she doesn't need my help anymore. I squeeze, knead, and spread her arse cheeks while fucking her with my tongue. Pre-cum leaks onto my stomach, and I feel like I could come just from the addicting sounds she makes while I'm eating her out.

"Dante!" she screams my name as she comes. "I need... I need..." With a cry she cuts herself off, her entire body shaking with the force of her orgasm—and I greedily lick every drop of her release from her, loving the way she shudders and cries out when I swipe the tip of my tongue across her clit.

When Caitlin tries to move, I squeeze her arse so tight I know my fingerprints will be visible on her skin. "Don't!" That growled word is the only warning she gets.

“Oh, God... I... I...”

I laugh. “There’s no God here. There’s only you and me, and you don’t get to move until I say you can.” She shudders at my words, but she doesn’t move again.

“O-okay,” she sighs with a reluctant lilt to her tone that has me frowning. This is what she wanted, so she doesn’t get to act differently.

I want to tell her that this is why you need to be careful what you wish for, because you never know what you’re going to get. She has my attention now, I see her clearer than ever. But this can’t possibly be the outcome she wanted. There’s no way my naïve and inexperienced niece could even comprehend what I’m going to do to her.

If she thought she would get hearts and flowers, she was sorely mistaken—emphasis on sorely. That’s not what I do, blimey, I don’t even know if I’m capable of that. Tonight I’m not, though. Tonight she’s unleashed the beast I’ve kept at bay for so long, and now that I have her ready and willing, there’s no way I’m letting her go until I’ve had my fill.

“Shite... Dante...” She cries out when I slide two fingers into her drenched heat. “I don’t think I can... please, not again.”

I curl my fingers inside her, and I know the exact time I hit that spot that’s going to make her see stars because her moaned protests turn to mewls. “Is this no longer what you want?” I ask. I wait until she whimpers her agreement. “You

started this, baby. Now I'm going to finish it. If you don't want to continue, all you have to do is say stop."

"No!" There's so much vehemence in the word I can't help chuckle. "Don't stop. I want you, I just... I haven't done anything like this before," she pants.

Hating the thought of Caitlin doing anything with anyone that isn't me, I move my fingers in and out, getting her attention back to what I'm doing. I stretch my arm and close my hand around her tit, massaging and squeezing the globe.

"Tell me, Caitlin. What have you done? Has that prick Mike been able to satisfy you?"

"W-what?" she asks, and I pinch her nipple hard between my thumb and index finger. "We've umm... not much."

I know I should leave it alone, but I bloody can't. I crave the knowledge of what he's done to her body, and what she's done to him. It's ridiculous, and I most definitely shouldn't be jealous of a fucking eighteen-year-old, but he has touched what's *mine*, and I don't fucking like it.

When her breathing becomes ragged and her body shakes while nonsensical words tumble from her lips, I urge her again to tell me. I don't relent, instead I keep fingering her and alternating between her taut nipples.

"Why do you want to know?" she gripes, confusion and irritation clear in her tone.

"Because," I growl, moving my fingers in and out of her. Every time I pull my fingers out, I lick them clean before

thrusting them back inside her heat. “I need to know, and you’re going to tell me.”

She relents and with her husky, lust filled voice she tells me they’ve only done the usual teenage petting. “He never... Christ, don’t stop—”

“He never, what?” I ask, needing to know more than I need my next taste of her. “Tell me, or I’ll stop.”

“We only... it was only ever above our clothes.” Her panted words make male pride swell in my chest.

Bloody hell, why am I even asking? I don’t want to hear her talk about other men. Yet there’s something satisfactory about it when I’m the one making her writhe with need.

“Did he ever make you come?” I demand.

“N-why the hell do you want to talk about Mike now?” I smile at the hint of frustration in her voice.

It’s a good question, though. I don’t and I do at the same time, because I need to know that no one else has seen this side of her.

“Don’t worry about the ‘why’ and just answer the question,” I growl, unable to keep my frustration at bay. “Tell me, or we stop right now.”

It’s an empty threat, and if she calls my bluff, I’m done for. But fuck, I can’t allow her to question me, not now. Not when my control is only barely held in place. Besides, I don’t have an appropriate answer. I just know that I want it to be me, and only me that’s made her scream out in ecstasy.

Caitlin huffs, “No, Dante. No one else has ever made me come.”

Those words have me smiling in satisfaction—loving that I’m the only man to ever have her like this.

“And how many orgasms have you had tonight?” I grunt. Then I move my thumb to her clit, circling the nub.

Moaning out loudly, she trembles even more. “I-I don’t know.”

I smile and increase my efforts, needing her orgasm to roll over her so I can lick the cum from her cunt before I take her again. “That’s the right answer,” I rasp.

It doesn’t take long before Caitlin comes again. While she writhes above me and screams out my name, I continue to pluck at her nipple, roll her clit, and I curl my fingers in a beckoning motion when I’m as deep as I can get inside her.

My name sounds so fucking amazing when she calls it out in the throes of passion, and it makes me wish this night would never end.

As soon as she comes down from her high, I easily lift her off my face and into my lap. Her wet heat is pressed against my cock that’s begging for relief. But instead of letting her ride me again, I spin us around so she’s on all fours.

“Are you too sore to take my cock again?” I ask. Without waiting for her answer, I lean down to kiss and nip at her shoulder.

In answer, she pushes her amazing arse back against me, moving it up and down so my hardness is nestled between her arse cheeks. “I want to see you,” she moans, looking over her shoulder as I move my hands to her tits, finally palming both.

Grinning, I shake my head, and reply, “Not yet.” I wrap my fingers around her nape and force her to face forward so she can’t see the grin on my face.

“At least let me touch you then,” she whines, arching her back when I pinch both her nipples.

Instead of answering her, I reach for another condom and roll it down my length before lining my dick up against her opening, slowly easing inside her. Even though I’m going as slow as humanly possible, she gasps in pain, and I move a hand back to her clit and roll it leisurely.

Her cunt squeezes me like a vice, her heat enveloping me, swallowing me. It feels so fucking good I have to concentrate so I don’t blow my load into her already. I breathe deeply before I move, thrusting into her.

“Fuck!” I growl. “You feel so bloody amazing around my cock.” She moans in response.

I continue to swirl her nub, timing it perfectly with each thrust of my cock. Her arse jiggles when I pump into her, and her cunt makes the most delicious noises. It’s becoming more and more difficult not to come yet, but I’m determined to wait. I’m not even close to being done with her.

Ignoring her protest, I pull out of her and flip her to her back. Caitlin immediately wraps her arms around my neck and squeezes me to her like she's afraid I'm going to move away from her. If only she knew that even if I wanted to, there's no way I can leave her right now. I'm about to fulfil every—well, *almost* every—fucked up fantasy I've ever had about her. For tonight, and tonight *only*, I'll allow us both what I've denied us so far.

As we kiss, I grind my aching cock against her wet folds while I swallow all her moans. “Can you taste yourself?” I rasp.

“Of course I can,” she half-moans. “It's not the first time either.” She shoots me a wink before letting her eyes shut.

A surprised chuckle escapes me at her admission. Bloody hell, imagining her licking her fingers clean after rubbing one out is fucking hot.

Trailing a hand down to her cunt, I again focus on her bundle of nerves, swirling the bud around with the pad of my finger until she's shaking once more. When she pleads for more, I pull back, wanting to watch her face as she falls apart.

Caitlin moves her hands to my back and digs her nails in, eliciting a growl from me at the delicious sting. “Look at me,” I command huskily. “Is this what you want? For me to use your body until you cry for me to stop?” I don't know why I need reassurance, but I do. I need to know I'm not taking it too far for her.

“Y-yes...”

My laugh is almost maniacal. “Hmm, is that so...” I pause and rub her clit harder while plunging two fingers into her dripping sex. “Are you that desperate that you’ll let me do anything?” She frowns, like I’ve said something she doesn’t like, but I’m beyond caring. Caitlin started this, and I’m sure as fuck going to finish it.

I wring another orgasm from her with my fingers before slamming into her, sheathing myself with one thrust. She lifts herself up onto her elbows, looking at me through hooded eyes.

“Wait,” she gasps, and I still inside her. “You said I could touch you.”

With a shake of my head, I deny her plea, and capture her wrists so I can hold them above her head. “I don’t think so,” I scoff. “You haven’t earned the privilege. Tonight you only get what I’m willing to give you.” Her eyes widen and she bites down on her lip like she’s holding back from saying something. The thought of her showing restraint now is bloody laughable.

Waiting a few minutes, I give her the chance to speak up, but when she doesn’t, I push further inside her.

“If you don’t like it, you can tell me to stop, and I will,” I remind, needing her to know she doesn’t have to finish this.

“Don’t be daft,” she spits. “I’m the one that started this. If I was scared of a little pain, I would have stopped you when you shagged me so rough it felt like my insides were on fire.” A smirk plays on her lips like she’s proud of herself for taking

what I dished out, and I guess she's earned the right to be. "I might not be one of your usual slags, but I can take whatever you have to give." Determination shines in her eyes as she lifts her chin.

I laugh at what I think is jealousy, and rather than offering her any reassurance, I roughly command, "Spread your legs wider." Caitlin immediately does as I say, and I work myself the rest of the way inside her, groaning as her inner muscles squeeze me so tight it's almost painful.

"Fuck! I don't know how much longer I can last when you squeeze me like that," I groan.

She urges me on with her desperate moans, begging me to fuck her harder, and I'm happy to oblige. Caitlin writhes and bucks so hard her back comes off the mattress, and it's a fucking beautiful sight. With her hands above her head and her legs around my waist, she can only really move her hips, but she works it to her advantage.

I lean over her and bend my head, capturing one of her nipples between my teeth, eliciting moan after moan from her as I pump in and out of her greedy cunt.

Getting lost in my niece's body is better than I ever could have hoped for. Reality puts every dirty, depraved fantasy to shame. By the way her cunt squeezes me, and the insatiable moans falling from her lips. In record time, I feel the familiar tingle along my spine, and my balls draw up, ready to shoot my cum into her.

"D-Dante... go slow, please."

Releasing her nipple, I do as she says, slowing the thrusts of my hips. “Does it hurt?” Fuck me, my dick twitches, liking the idea of Caitlin being sore.

The look on her face is pure pleasure and wonder as I fuck her slowly, bottoming out with each stroke. Shite, this feels too bloody amazing. While the furious pace was amazing, it’s nothing compared to the slowness.

Now I get to really see and appreciate how beautiful she is when squeezing her eyes shut in pleasure. When she bites into her bottom lip in an attempt at quieting her cries.

“Not more than I can handle,” she moans.

Something about her words has my heart swelling, and before I can stop myself, I reach for her hands and use them to pull her up. Then I move us around so she’s in my lap. She’s so close her breath ghosts across my lips, our foreheads are touching, and it feels like I’m staring right into her soul.

“Fuck,” I groan as she moves her hips without prompting, working me as deep as I can go. “That’s it. Keep doing... Christ... do. Not. Stop.”

Caitlin winds her arms across my neck and pulls at the small hairs back there. Knowing what she wants, I relent, and crush her lips with mine. While our hips work in tandem, our tongues snake around each other. Her pretty cunt flutters around my dick, letting me know she’s right on the precipice.

“Come for me, my perfect storm.” The husky command and endearment falls from my lips, and I’m startled by how perfect

this all feels.

“Co-come with me, Dante.” Unable to deny the breathy moan, I move my hands to her hips and squeeze as I thrust up as hard as possible. “Look at me,” she pants, cupping my cheek.

I don’t know when we stopped kissing, or why it suddenly feels like it’s very important to keep my eyes closed. So instead of doing as she says, I bend my neck and palm her tits, lifting the nipple into my mouth so I can suck and bite the tender skin.

Caitlin’s breathing is laboured, and her back arches, pushing her tit further into my mouth, as her pleasure erupts again.

“Dante... oh fuck... more...” Thrusting up and into her with reckless abandon, I give in and let my orgasm consume me.

As soon as I pull my cock out of her, all-consuming guilt rams into me, almost paralysing me as I fall down next to her. What the fuck have I just done?

“Are you okay?” Caitlin asks, turning to her side, so she’s facing me.

Much too ashamed to look at her, I get up and suggest we take a bath. A plan is taking form, and when she agrees, I tell her to run it while I go get us something to drink.

I’m just about to leave my bedroom with my phone in hand when she comes back into my bedroom. “I-I...” The bashful look on her face is so at odds with her actions tonight I get the

urge to laugh, but the solemnity of her voice has me swallowing the need. “Thank you for tonight,” she says.

At a loss of what to say, I gruffly reply, “You’re welcome.”

Before I can say anything else, she throws herself at me, locking her legs and arms around my body. “I love you. This was always meant to happen. I can feel it in my heart,” she whispers the words against the crook of my neck.

“Caitlin...” Trailing off, I lock my arms around her middle and hold her with a desperation I hope she can’t feel. “You really are my perfect storm.”

Tangling my fingers in her hair, I gently pull at the long strands until she’s looking up at me through her dark lashes. Ignoring the unshed tears in her eyes, I fuse our lips together. I try to let the kiss say everything that I can’t. That I’m sorry and... that I love her too, even when I can’t say it because we can never be.

I lower her to the floor and tell her to get in the bath, and that I’ll be there soon. The lie tastes bitter on my tongue, and my throat thickens with how much I don’t want to leave her. But when she does as I say, I don’t waste a minute. I run down the stairs and grab my emergency bag from the cupboard beneath the stairs. It has everything I need, fresh clothes, money, credit cards, and a spare passport.

After getting dressed in record time, I head out the door without looking back.

part II



“Passion. It lies in all of us. Sleeping... waiting...
and though unwanted, unbidden, it will stir...
open its jaws and howl. It speaks to us... guides
us. Passion rules us all. And we obey. What other
choice do we have? Passion is the source of our
finest moments. The joy of love... the clarity of
hatred... the ecstasy of grief. It hurts sometimes
more than we can bear. If we could live without
passion, maybe we’d know some kind of peace.
But we would be hollow. Empty rooms, shuttered
and dank. Without passion, we’d be truly dead.”

—Joss Whedon, *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*

XIII



OceanofPDF.com

Storm

2 years later

“Storm,” Beth says, sounding surprised. “Did we know you were coming?”

I hold up one finger so she knows to wait. Then I turn to Clara, the girl that’s hosting this elaborate tea party. “May I have some more tea?” I ask, holding out my empty cup. Clara pretends to pour me some, and her belly-laugh rings throughout the room as I stick my pinky out and put my lips to the chipped cup. “Deeeelicious,” I say, dragging out the word for her benefit.

The little girl runs her hands down her white and blue ‘*Alice in Wonderland*’ inspired dress. “You may be excu... ecxu...” Her cheeks turn flaming red as she struggles with the word. “You can go with Beth.” I hate how dejected she sounds.

“Come here.” I hold my arms out to her, knowing she needs reassurance. “It’s a tough word. Did you know I couldn’t say carrot until I was twelve? And squirrel, don’t even get me started on that. I’m still not sure I’m pronouncing it right.”

Clara snuggles closer to me and giggles. “You didn’t. It’s squir-rel.” She proudly enunciates each syllable slowly.

Even though Beth is waiting, I take my time, not moving until I know Clara is going to be fine. The months she’s been here hasn’t been enough to ease the poor girl’s fear. Whenever

she makes a mistake, she gets this look like she's steeling herself for punishment.

I shake my head, not wanting to think of her past while she's sitting in my lap.

Reaching for the drawing she made earlier, I point at the moose she's drawn in Ave's dorm room. "You found Ontario on the map all by yourself," I say, kissing the crown of her head. "I've only shown you once and you've memorised where my sister lives. I'm sorry to say, but you might just be a genius."

Clara giggles. "Why are you sorry to tell me that?"

I lower my voice and say, "Because that means people will have expectations. Like if my GPS app stops working, you're going to have to go on rides with me to tell me when to turn right."

This makes the little girl laugh even harder, and I hum under my breath, enjoying hearing her laughter.

"How about Storm and I go make some proper tea? And then we can watch a movie? I just need to speak with her for a few minutes first." Beth smiles encouragingly at the girl in my arms, who in response squeals right into my ear.

"Inside squeal," I chide her lightheartedly, bopping her nose. "Okay, off you go, monster."

Clara laughs and climbs out of my lap. Both Beth and I watch as the girl drags her favourite teddies over to the TV,

proudly declaring they want to watch *'Shrek'* with us. Given the choice, that's the movie she picks every time.

I once asked her why and I still remember her answer. *"Because the hero looks like a monster and the monster looks like a hero."* The answer shocked me to the core and moved me.

At first I thought maybe it was something she'd heard someone older say, but one look into her all too understanding brown eyes told me that wasn't the case. While I hate she knows just how cruel people can be, I admire her strength and ability to move on. Honestly, the eleven-year-old girl has taught me more about courage than anyone else.

I clench my hands at the memory of what she's been through, my nails digging into my palms. "Come on." Beth lightly strokes my arm and nudges me towards the door. I go willingly, knowing I need to hear what she has to say and... well, I need a few moments to collect myself so Clara doesn't sense my tension.

We walk to the small kitchenette in silence, and I lean against the counter while Beth fills the kettle for tea. The sound of the water slowly boiling soothes me, and once my hands are no longer shaking, I reach for the biscuits. Chocolate ones with a smiley face, both mine and Clara's pick.

"Do you have any updates for me on Alan?" Beth asks, and I shake my head dejectedly. "Don't worry, Storm. These things take time. Are you sure you're fine to continue the mission? I know we're putting a lot on you, and—"

I spin around and interrupt her. “I’ll keep going until Clara is safe,” I hiss. My anger isn’t aimed at Beth and she knows it. “I won’t have her losing her sister in vain. And... and—” My voice becomes thick with emotions as I think about what she’s been through.

She’s only eleven years old and has already been to hell and back. Groomed and abused by her dad and brothers, who are the owners of a child sex trafficking ring—one so vile they’re not even sparing their own blood. They kept Clara and her sister Jasmine together as an incentive to keep each other in line. When Clara cried for her mummy, the men would whip Jasmine until both girls just learned to not show emotions.

We still don’t know how Clara got away. When I was walking home from work late at night in July, I found her crouched behind a bench, with a newspaper held above her head to spare her from the rain. It took a lot of coaxing to get her to come to me, but eventually she did and I took her home.

Apart from her malnourished and unkempt state, her inability to sit down was one of the first things I noticed. When I got her to change clothes, I saw the blood on her bum, the sight filled me with rage and despair like I’ve never felt before. That’s when I called Beth, who I knew was fostering children, and she asked us to come over straight away.

She wanted to keep Clara with her, but the girl clung to me like I was her last hope and I just couldn’t let go of her. So I ended up staying at Beth’s for the weekend. Not a minute was

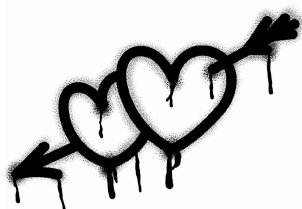
spent without the small, trembling girl in my arms, and it wasn't until then I noticed her missing teeth.

At first we didn't think too much of it since it's not uncommon for kids at that age to be losing their milk teeth, but that's not what had happened. Without tears, the girl herself told us the evil men had pulled some of them out because she misbehaved, and had bitten one of them when he put his willy in her mouth—that was also the action that got her sister killed. According to Clara, they slit her throat and placed her body so the sisters could watch each other while Jasmine's light slowly got snuffed out.

I shake my head as though I can banish the horrors from my mind. "How is she doing?" I ask, needing to think about something else.

"She's doing really well," Beth says kindly. "She's making friends with some of the other girls, and she has even invited Ingrid to one of her tea parties.

Tears gather in my eyes as I'm once again overwhelmed by Clara's strength and ability to move on. She's such a bloody inspiration, and I'm honoured she's calling me her best friend.



“You’re late, Storm.” My manager shouts at me as I rush into Dirty Diamonds, the very club I followed Dante to a few years ago.

I immediately start rambling one rushed apology after the other as I hurry into the dressing room I favour so I can get changed. “I’m sorry, Glen. Really... it’s been a bloody day,” I say with a grimace before quickly shutting the door so I can get away from his beady eyes.

Glen is... well, he’s nice enough I suppose. But there’s something about the way he always devours my body with his eyes that makes the hairs on my arms stand at attention.

The taste of copper assaults my taste buds as I bite down on my tongue, stopping myself from babbling on about why I’m late. It’s none of Glen’s business. However, this is the third time this week I’m late, and I can’t keep expecting him to be lenient—so I need to do better.

Dirty Diamonds is one of those clubs where it’s almost impossible not to curb the sexual appetites of the clientele. There are strippers, prostitutes, and backroom poker players. It’s like Fight Club, you don’t talk about what’s going on—and that goes for the employees as well. I can’t tell anyone that I work here, which is perfect since I never want Ave to find out. And so far I’ve kept it a secret for two years.

I curse mentally when I go through my bag, only to notice my mask is missing.

“Glen?” I call, opening the door so I can peek out. “Do you have a spare mask?” I ask as soon as he looks in my direction.

“Really, Storm?” he smirks in that obnoxious way I’m sure is reserved for me and my ability to mess even the unmessable up. Instead of answering him, I nod to confirm that I’m indeed not joking. “Look, I’ll level with you. I need someone to cover a shift in booth five this weekend. If you can do that, I’ll find you a mask and forget your tardiness.”

The booth? No, surely I didn’t hear him correctly?

Those extra shifts will help both me and Ave so much—but the booth... I still haven’t forgotten the last time he made me go in there. I know Beth doesn’t want me to go back there either, but I can’t alert her every time something goes awry with the plan. Before I can talk myself out of it, I agree. I’m not sure how I’ll find the will and courage to go through with it. It has to be better to suffer for two nights instead of risking everything I’ve worked so hard for, right?

“The entire weekend?” I ask.

Any hope of it only being Saturday is deflated when Glen says, “Saturday and Sunday.” As he looks up and sees the unhappy expression on my face, he smirks like he’s happy to see me like this. “Hurry and get ready, Storm. I’ll go find a mask for you.”

The black and gold masks we wear look like you’re on your way to a masquerade ball, rather than working in a sleazy sex establishment. Okay, maybe that’s not fair. Dirty Diamonds isn’t exactly sleazy... the work is, though.

Back inside the room, I curl some random locks of my hair before painting my lips blood-red. The false lashes are usually

a pain in my arse, but tonight they go on smoothly. Since the mask covers most of my face, I don't bother going all out with my makeup. A dab of concealer and a smidge of foundation, and voilà.

The fancy red lingerie I have to wear is anything but comfortable. I don't care what anyone says, pearls do not belong in your arse crack. Although it's pretty, it's extremely uncomfortable. Since beggars can't be choosers, I suck it up and fasten the push-up bra in the front.

"Crikey," I mumble as my boobs almost spill out.

I knew Glen wasn't happy with the previous bra they gave me. According to him, it covered too much of my boobs. But this is just beyond ridiculous. If I bend—which I'll have to at some point—I risk a nip slip.

After stepping into the mile-high stilettos I have to wear, I take one last look at myself in the mirror. Even though I would have chosen none of this myself, there's no denying it looks spectacular. I twirl and shake my arse just for the hell of it.

As promised, Glen is waiting outside with the item that's going to complete my ensemble. The outlines are golden, but the mask itself—and the feathers—are a deep red. This is the best part of working here, the anonymity. If I didn't have that, I don't think I could do the job. Even though most of my job is behind the bar, I still have to walk onto the floor occasionally.

I've worked at Dirty Diamonds for a little over two years now. At first I was *only* serving drinks, but after I found Clara, about four months ago, and made it clear to Beth that I wanted

to help bring the girl's family down, she offered me another job—the one that led me to my boyfriend—or rather, fake as hell boyfriend because that's all he is. Nothing has made me miss Mike like having a douchebag second boyfriend.

When I was with Mike, I was too obsessed with Dante to realise what a good thing I had. I know that's a cliché, and the story for so many people. But in my case, it feels extra. The best thing I did for Mike was set him free.

Two days after my eighteenth, I called him up and asked to meet him. When he walked into the Pizza Hut where I was already waiting, he was wearing a look of trepidation, the one where you know what's about to happen, but you're still going to let things play out. If I had any doubts that he knew, they waned when he didn't kiss me, and deliberately took a seat across from me instead of next to me as he used to.

Not only was that the day I broke up with Mike, it was also the day I learned the internet can't be relied on. I tried Googling the best way to break up with someone, which was a gigantic waste of time. So instead of relying on the experience of strangers, I got straight to the point. While it seemed harsh to not beat around the bush, I think Mike appreciated the direct approach.

“I'm really sorry, Mike. You've been an amazing boyfriend, and I don't want you to think you've done anything wrong. The thing is, we're just not a good fit for each other.” Those were the words I spoke, and they're one million percent true.

Being the kind person I knew him as back then, he nodded and accepted it with no questions. *“Thank you for being honest with me, Caitlin. I’ll miss you.”* The hurt in his eyes was all too easy to see, even if he did his best to hide it. And honestly, I’m glad I saw it, because I don’t deserve to be spared from how I made him feel.

Ugh, even now, two years later, those words still make me feel horrible.

I haven’t seen Mike since he went off to backpack across Europe eight months later. Since I haven’t kept up with his whereabouts, I don’t know whether he’s back or found a place to carve a life for himself far away from here.

“Earth to Storm,” Glen says, clearing his throat.

I blink, and heat rushes to my cheeks as I realise I got lost in my thoughts and haven’t heard a word he’s been saying. I quickly place the mask over my face.

“Off you go,” Glen shoos me away.

I take a deep breath before making my way to the bar.

“Hey girl!” Olivia greets me without pausing the drinks she’s pouring.

Liv has worked here for almost three years, and she loves it. To her it isn’t just a job, she calls it practise. Allegedly, it’s helped her with her shyness, and apparently she’s even used her newfound confidence to find herself a fella.

I’m not judging, though. Good for her.

“Hiya,” I say awkwardly.

Then I get into position, squeezing between my friend and another woman who’s lining shots up on the counter. Turning to the next customer in line, I take his drink order, squeezing my boobs together as much as possible while I rest my elbows against the bar.

Even though it’s a normal weekday, the place is packed, and everyone seems to be in an extraordinarily good mood, which is good for the tip jar. Since that means no time to talk with the others, I’m not complaining.

When our time is up, I walk back to the dressing rooms with Liv. She’s happily telling me about her upcoming date night, and just how fantastic her beau is.

“He’s just so... it’s like he really listens,” she chirps with a dreamy look on her face. “He finally agreed to go on a double-date. Is that something you and Alan would be up for?”

Liv sounds so excited I can’t make myself say no outright. “Maybe,” I say, nodding. “I mean, I’ll have to ask.”

I already know he won’t want to, and if I’m completely honest, I don’t particularly fancy it either. With Alan, I have a reputation to uphold, a plan to follow—both are much easier when it’s just him and me around.

Alan doesn’t know *everything* about my past, and I like that he never prods. For him, it’s all about the future—*our future*—and he’s even said that the past has no place in our relationship. Something I wholeheartedly agree with, because

there are definitely certain areas of my past I don't want to relive, fake relationship or not.

I tried the take-charge approach, and while it got me the best bloody night of my life, it was also my worst. Despite what Ave says, I know I'm the reason our uncle fled across the Atlantic. Not wanting to remember how I messed everything up for me and my sister, I force those thoughts to the back of my mind.

"So, do you want a lift or not?" Liv asks. The impatience in her tone making it clear this isn't the first time she's asked me.

"Sorry, Christmas is coming up, so I was trying to decide on a present for my sister," I say, forcing a smile. "I would love a lift if you don't mind."

After assuring me she doesn't mind at all, we get changed and leave.

XIV



OceanofPDF.com

Storm

“I don’t care.” A huff escapes me as Ave nonchalantly throws her long, dark brown hair over her shoulder. “I won’t let him pay for your tuition.” The steel in my voice is meant to signal that it’s non-negotiable, but of course my sister doesn’t care about that.

She sighs dramatically, rolling her eyes for good measure. “Bloody hell, Cait. Why is this so important to you?”

It’s a valid question, unfortunately. If it was a stupid one, it would be easier to sidestep it and... I don’t even know. The days where I could win arguments purely because I’m older are long gone. Right now, I miss those days.

“Ave, please,” I say, deciding to change tactics. “It’s important to me. Can’t you just humour me?”

She sighs and pins me with her gaze. “Tell me why.”

Now it’s my turn to sigh. Breaking our pointless stare-down, I pinch the bridge of my nose, already regretting this call. “Because I want to.”

Ave’s answering laugh is mocking, and I know she isn’t buying what I’m trying to sell. “Bloody hell, you’re twenty. Now’s the time to fuck up and do stupid things, not be shackled by my cosmic tuition bill.”

“I’ve already messed up enough to last me a lifetime. You might not understand, and that’s fine. But don’t make it out to be something it isn’t,” I volley. My palms hurt from how hard

I'm digging my nails into the soft skin, and I don't need to look to know I'll have crescent moon-shaped patterns.

This argument is so been-there-done-that, and I really don't enjoy lying to my sister. But I have to because if she finds out the truth, she'll abandon the swanky uni in Ontario for brainiacs such as herself just to come back here and stay at my side and I won't let that happen. Or worse... disown my deceitful arse for shagging Dante and scaring him away with my evil vagina powers.

"Oh my God, is that..." My sister cackles and leans closer to the screen. "Is that a hickey on your neck?"

I curse under my breath while wrapping my scarf tighter around myself. Just fucking kill me now. Ave was not meant to see the parting gift from my date with Alan.

Schooling my features, I try my best to look like there's nothing to tell. Guilt surges and I feel terrible that there are so many things I'm keeping from my sister. We were once close, but I ruined that bond. How could it remain intact when I keep adding fissures and cracks to the foundation? I know that all my lies are the reason we've grown apart, and it's a bitter bloody pill to swallow.

A part of me wants to break down and confess everything, even beg for Ave's forgiveness. But I can't tell her—not now, not ever. Especially not about Alan, Clara, Dirty Diamonds or... or what I did with Dante. No, all my disturbed baggage needs to stay locked down.

Obviously, my sister knows something is up. But when I asked her to help me start over and make it look like Caitlin Hayton had left Briarwood, she never asked questions. I guess to her it was a worthy challenge, and I swear it disappointed her when it took her less than a day.

She came into my room late at night, wearing a triumphant smile as she told me the challenge was complete. *“Miss Emmerson lives in a rundown motel at the outskirts of town. She graduated from one of the London colleges and moved here to find herself. She’s a loner, and never took part in group activities.”*

And just like that, Ave had created the opportunity I needed back then to get a job at Dirty Diamonds. I still rent the motel room, but now, after two years, I only go there twice a week to check in, pay the bill, and just make it look like I’m coming and going.

“Hello! Earth to Cait.” Ave snaps her fingers. “You know you don’t have to tell me, right?”

I can’t make myself look at Ave as I expel a relieved sigh. “He’s... umm... it’s new,” I say. I know it’s a useless answer. The constant lying—or selective truth—doesn’t sit right with me, but I don’t know what else to do with the corner I’ve backed myself into.

Alan is a regular at Dirty Diamonds. I’ve known him, as a customer, for over six months. For all that time, he’s been chatting me up and asking me out, but it wasn’t until a week

after I waved goodbye to my sister at Heathrow Airport in June that I said yes.

Apart from Dante, he's the first guy that ever made me look twice, let alone to stir something inside me. Part of the draw was that he never seemed interested in the strippers or scantily dressed women who walked the floor.

When I agreed to go out with Alan, my interest was genuine. And for a brief time, we dated like a normal couple. He never complained that I wanted to take it slow, and he always held doors open for me. It was... amazing, and it helped soothe the part of me that wondered if I was unlovable. After all, my uncle—my protector, my Dante—left me without a word.

It wasn't until Clara came into my life that I learned what a piece of shite Alan and his entire family is. As soon as Beth found out Clara's last name is Potter, part of the same family as my boyfriend, she filled me in on what little she knew.

According to the woman who hired me, the Potters are prominent in the child slavery scene. I know little about the family, apart from the fact that Beth wants to take them out. Since the truth came out, I only feel revulsion and deep-rooted hatred when I look at him, and let his hands and breath touch me. The only thing that keeps me going back is that I want justice for the little girl, and I need to find out what Alan's involvement is before anything else can be done.

Since my sister needs to be kept as far away from my world as possible, it makes these conversations bloody hard. I can

never let my guard down and just talk, every word needs to be considered and dissected before I can say it out loud.

“Have you thought about my idea for Christmas?”

Bloody hell, not this again.

“I want to celebrate with you and Dante in the same room. I’m feeling like I’m in the middle of a bloody divorce.”

As I flinch at her words, I curse myself for video calling her. It would be so much easier if I’d stuck to voice. I didn’t though, because I’m as dumb as they come.

Buying myself some time, I look around the house that feels too big and too empty now that I’m the only one living here. If it hadn’t been for Ave, I would have left the day after my eighteenth, or when she moved to Canada. At least that’s what I’m telling myself. I blame the fact I haven’t moved out on paying for Ave’s stay abroad, but I know it’s nothing more than convenient lies to stop myself from delving deeper and admitting the real reason I’m still living here.

If I truly wanted to leave, I would have found a way. I just can’t. This house is my last link to Dante, and I can’t make myself give it up.

“You know it’s not like that,” I say, replying to my sister’s accusation.

It’s been over two years since I’ve seen Dante, and for all that time, I’ve tried to maintain the ruse that nothing’s wrong. I don’t even know why I bother. Ave is beyond smart, so

essentially I'm just lying—badly—instead of owning up to my shite.

I take a deep breath to steady myself. “I don't know what Dante has said—”

“Is this you finally admitting there's something to say?”

Pinching the bridge of my nose, I look towards the ceiling, noticing the cobweb that's gathered. “You're right, something happened. It doesn't matter what it was, but I can't see him, Ave. Please don't make me...” Tears gather in my eyes and I hate that my voice quavers.

“What did you do?” Her features soften, and there's no accusation in her tone. “Actually, let's talk about it when you come visit me for Christmas.”

I sniffle and quickly swipe my finger beneath my eyes. “You're not taking him up on his offer to celebrate with him in Santa Cruz?”

“You know me better than that,” Ave says, sounding offended. “It's you and me, sis. Fuck him.”

Even though I smile, the tears keep falling. She's right, though, I know her better than that. Ever since Dante tucked tail and fled, she's been by my side for the big events. My birthday, her birthday, Christmas, Halloween... you name it, we celebrated together.

The few times she's visited Dante, she always made sure I was okay with it, and it was never during a memorable season.

She really is like a child caught in an ugly divorce, having to split her time between us.

“No matter what you did, he still left us. He wasn’t here for my eighteenth or your twentieth birthday. Not even for Christmas and... the anniversary of mum and dad’s death. Nothing can make up for that, and you can’t have done anything to warrant that level of absence.”

Taking a deep breath, I steady myself. I don’t want to defend Dante, but it isn’t right that Ave is so upset with him when I’m the one in the wrong. I’m the reason he’s gone, and my sister shouldn’t be paying for my mistake. If I was a better person, I’d call him and set him straight. But... I’m not a better person—in fact, I’m as selfish as they come.

Where most women *give* their virginity away, I forced mine on my uncle. What kind of bloody lunatic sneaks into a relative’s bed, cloaked in darkness, and forces them to have sex with said mad woman?

Me... that’s who.

As much as it hurt to have Dante leave without even saying goodbye, it was nothing compared to the aghast and horror-stricken expression on his face when he switched on the bedside lamp and saw me in his bed.

I still remember the pain in my heart when I realised that he really didn’t know it was me. My naïve mind thought he knew—hoped he’d recognise my body, I guess. I know I had no reason to expect that, but I did.

While I can forgive that... I can never forgive what he did next. Showering me in intense pleasure and love, only to skip out on me while I was waiting for him in the bathtub. I told him I loved him, and in response, he didn't just run, he abandoned me—discarded me like yesterday's trash. So yeah, I'm content ignoring his existence, but I still don't think it's right for Ave to hold a grudge against him.

When my sister makes an impatient sound, I realise I've allowed myself to become lost in my thoughts, and I refocus on her.

“I was eighteen, Ave. He didn't need to look after me anymore—”

“Stop it!” she shouts, which is very uncharacteristic for her. “I was sixteen, Cait. He bloody left me to be your burden. There's nothing—and I do mean *nothing*—you could have done to deserve to be stuck with me.”

I frown as I take in my sister's words. Rather than replying right away, I take my time to study her. She looks... different. On the surface, there isn't anything wrong with her appearance, but she's hiding something... something big. It's concealed in the depths of her sockets, and although I desperately want to uncover what it is, I don't have the right to demand answers from her right now.

“Avery,” I say her name slowly, making sure I have her full attention. “I want you to listen to me carefully. At no point was I *stuck* with you. You better get that through your thick skull right bloody now. You're not just my sister, you're my

people. I love you so damn much, and I never want you to think you're some kind of unwanted load. Do you hear me?"

Although tears gather anew, I don't blink until she slowly nods.

"I am, though," she hiccups. "I know you're not using Dante's credit card, which means you're the one paying for my school and everything else. But I'm eighteen now, I can get a job—"

"Absolutely not," I say, interrupting her. "I want you to focus on your studies. That's all that matters, Ave. If you want to do something for me, then live your best life."

My sister sounds choked as she says, "You sound like mum," and just like that, we stop discussing our current circumstances, and reminisce about our parents.

One of her biggest fears is that she'll forget them, so she loves when we talk about the little things like how they smelled, sounded, and their favourite colours. Even though I don't have the same need to recall every little detail about them, I love doing it with my sister. It makes me feel like we aren't growing apart despite the physical distance between us.

After hanging up with Ave, I get changed and gather some cleaning supplies. The talk has left me feeling emotionally drained and... I quickly stop myself from thinking too much about it. Instead, I begin cleaning the living room, not stopping until I've scrubbed every inch of the room and sweat has soaked through my sweater.

Regardless of how much I try to ignore my broken heart, there's no escaping the pain. To Dante, I was temporary. To me, my love for him consumed me.

As I get out of the shower, I hear the first thunderclap, and it feels serendipitous that thunder rumbles across the sky. Where the girl from two years ago would hide and simper in fright, the woman I am now tilts her head back and laughs maniacally as another thunderclap sounds.

After Dante stripped me of any sense of pride, safety, love, and belonging, I embraced my nightmare and forced myself to relive the accident over and over until I didn't just become numb. I took it a step further, set fire to the rain and danced beneath the rumbling sky. Then I took the last step and changed my name.

No more Caitlin... now, I am what Dante called me. I am the bloody storm.

OceanofPDF.com

XV



OceanofPDF.com

Dante

“You know you can’t put it off forever, right?” Baz asks with an indulgent lilt to his voice.

I shoot him an incredulous look. “Really? You want to talk about that right now?”

“Why not? It’s not like you make it easy to find a time to bring it up. In fact, I was wondering if you’re avoiding being alone with me,” he counters, placing his hands on the back of his head. The fucker proceeds to lean back against the wall, looking casual as shite. “It’s only us here.” As his eyes dart to the guy hanging from the ceiling, he chuckles. “Sorry, I meant to say, we’re the only ones who’ll walk out of here alive.”

As he laughs to himself, I roll my eyes before walking over to the chap who sounds like he’s about to wake up. Fucking pussy fainted before I could do much damage.

When Baz makes an impatient sound and reminds me of our dinner reservations, I’ve had it. I stalk over to him and snarl, “What the fuck is your problem?”

“I’m not the one with a problem. For the last two years, you’ve had a stick so far up your arse I keep looking for the tip when you yawn.”

Much to my annoyance, he shrugs, appearing completely unaffected and, as always, he doesn’t even bother arguing or insulting me. Since Baz has no problem calling me on my shite, yet won’t give me the fight I desperately need, I’m left

to take my frustration out on the guy who's now groaning in pain.

“Hurts, doesn't it?” I ask, conversationally.

The only reply I get is some garbled noises. Since he's no longer gagged, he has no excuse not to use his words, and I remind him of that.

“I-I... why are you doing this?” As he yowls, spittle flies from his mouth and his face scrunches up in a mask of pain and rage.

Since the anger stage is my favourite, I perk up, but I'm sorely disappointed when he doesn't even bother to make some unoriginal threats. Even though I'm sure I've heard them all, they never stop being entertaining.

Torturing someone is a bit like the five stages of grief. First comes denial, which is quickly followed by anger, bargaining, depression, and, finally, acceptance. Whenever someone is at my mercy, I always do my best to let them reach all the stages so I can revel in their misery.

“L-look, I have money. I'll pay you double what you're being paid to do this,” he whimpers, flinching when he moves too much and the pipe wedged in his ass sways.

There we go, hello bargaining.

“Do you want to know a secret?” I ask, looking around and lowering my voice like I really am about to confide in him. “No one is paying us.”

“Then why—”

As always, Baz can't just hang back. He joins me and looks at the piece of shite with so much anger I wouldn't be surprised if he incinerates him. "Have you ever heard the saying 'an eye for an eye'," he asks, tilting his head.

The fucker at our mercy whimpers again.

"Only, in this case it's more like an anal tear for an anal tear," I say, feeling the need to point out the poetic justice. "Of course we had to even the scales. You did it to a twelve-year-old boy, so it seems fair that you get the bigger item shoved up your arse." As I mention the boy's age, my voice hardens.

The guy pales, beads of sweat pooling on his face as he opens and closes his mouth. No sound comes out.

I scrunch my nose in disdain as he pisses himself. *Again.*

It's not like I'm not used to urine and faecal matter being released during torture, it's an unpleasant part of the job. But this one hasn't even reached the point of true terror yet, and I'm not pleased he's already a sobbing mess.

"I have a question," I say, looking straight at my captive. "Does it feel just as good when the tables are turned?"

Trembling worse than a bloody leaf during a storm, he clenches his jaw. "I-I..." He allows fear to take over and says nothing else.

Pathetic.

"Answer me," I demand, keeping my tone calm and my voice low. No matter how much I despise him, I can't allow my personal feelings to take over completely. Let them drive

my actions, absolutely. Use them to get creative, definitely. But I can never lose sight of why I'm doing this, because that would probably cause me to end it prematurely.

He takes a deep, rattling breath. "Will you let me go if I answer you?"

Both Baz and I snicker, and in unison, we reply, "No."

Feeling unsatisfied with the almost resigned expression on the captive's face, I get an idea. "I'll make you a deal." Out of my peripheral vision, I see Baz's gaze swing to mine. "If you can take me in a fight, I'll not only let you go, I'll pay for your hospital bills."

My mate's face breaks into a smile. "You're so fucked up," he chuckles, looking so amused I can't hold back my own smile.

"W-what?"

"Did I fucking stutter?" I ask, my tone cold and unyielding. "Hell, I'll even let you decide whether you want the pipe to remain in your arse or not. If you ask me, it's a pretty generous offer."

As my mate walks back to where he was sitting, he adds his two cents. "I wouldn't think too long about that offer if I were you. And just to sweeten the deal, I'll give you something as well. If you win, I'll make sure you get a new identity and protection from both the Marx family and the Crimson Angel."

My head snaps towards Baz and I lift a brow, silently questioning him. This is the first time he's officially confirmed any connection to the Crimson Angel—who I'd started to believe might not even be real.

When Baz just shakes his head, I grind my teeth together and let it go. Right now, it might sweeten the deal enough for the guy to take it, and I *really* want him to face me.

Since the sick prick still doesn't accept the deal, I give him my last offer. "You'll also gain the protection of the Diamond Crew, and I'll even give you a weapon of your choice. So what's it going to be? You have to answer in ten... nine..."

"How do I know you're not trying to trick me?"

The question lets me know he's considering the deal.

"Five... four..."

"Take the deal," Baz growls.

"Two..."

"Fine. Fucking fine, I accept."

I can't decide if I'm slightly disappointed he didn't even try to negotiate. It wouldn't have helped his case, but I would have loved to see him try. As I eye the pool of blood beneath him, I consider whether it is better to leave the pipe in his arse. I don't want to risk him bleeding out on me. That would make his death too quick, and he hasn't deserved that.

"Tomorrow," Baz says before I finish thinking it over. "Tonight you'll get patched up, get to have a shower, and even

some decent food.”

On cue, the fucker’s stomach growls, which is unsurprising since he’s been at our mercy for the last three days—and we’ve definitely not fed him.

I smile and chuckle coldly, loving this game. A night of pure luxury will make tomorrow hurt all the more. To say I’m looking forward to it is an understatement.

While Baz calls for some guys to come get the chained fucker, I consider how far I’m willing to go here. It’s not like I have any morals left, and this is something I’ve never done before. When someone ends up at my mercy, their crime dictates the punishment, sure. But it always ends with their death, and me feeling like I’ve made the world a little better.

This, however, this gives me new possibilities. Why rush it? I could set him up to live like royalty until the weekend, lure him into a sense of security—even make him believe he’s avoiding his punishment.

Yes, I like the thought of that... it seems... fitting.

When the sick fuck—whose name I refuse to use even in my thoughts—came across young Joseph in the supermarket, he found the boy looking for his mum. He assured Joseph he’d help, and when the boy followed him, hoping to be reunited with his mum, the bastard kidnapped him. He raped Joseph countless times, and even let his buddies have a go. If it wasn’t for Baz’s secret connection, or angel, as he calls her, we wouldn’t have known he’d fled from England to America.

Blimey, why am I only now realising he must have meant the Crimson Angel?

Luckily for us—unluckily for him—we intercepted him at JFK three days ago, and since then... well, I've become well acquainted with his howls of pain. And since he's abducted kids only two towns away from Briarwood, it feels personal.

Even though Avery is far away from her hometown, I quickly text her, needing to know that she and—no, no 'and' just her—is okay.

Me: How's it going? Is Ontario everything you wanted it to be?

Am I feeling like a fucking dick for not asking about Caitlin, or even reaching out to her? Yes, absolutely I am. Just not enough to do it. Instead, like a bloody coward, I've been checking up on her from afar. Apart from general reports about her wellbeing, I know nothing about her life, including how she's supporting herself and Avery. Obviously, I'm aware she's stopped using my money, and that worries me. Especially since Avery's tuition was returned to my account, which can only mean Caitlin paid that as well.

Even after all this time, I don't know how to feel about what she, I—*both of us*—did. I do, however, know how I feel about what I did afterwards. The only word that can describe it is ashamed. I feel fucking ashamed that I left without even saying goodbye to her. I hid out at Dirty Diamonds for a couple of days, then I left with Baz.

Before leaving, I dragged Avery out of school to say goodbye—but I never said the word to Caitlin. I fucking left her without saying anything.

“Let’s go.” Baz’s words slice through my thoughts, and I’m glad for the distraction.

Since the man is still chained, I see no need to wait for the guys to come join us. What I need to say to Baz needs to be out of earshot. As soon as we’re in the elevator, I press the emergency button to stop it and turn to my mate. He throws his head back and laughs boisterously while I explain my plan, and by the end, he’s crying from laughter.

“Bloody brilliant,” he gasps.

Even though I don’t need his okay on anything involving my crew, I like running shite like this by him when he’s here. He’s my mate, and what’s the point if we can’t share ideas?

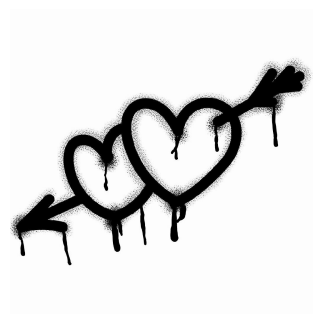
I hit the button to start the elevator, and once we are back upstairs, I go to find my second—or rather third—in command. The dynamics are atypical, since my natural second in command would be my Aussie mate. However, since his ultimate loyalty will always be to his family, he isn’t officially a part of the Diamond Crew.

If I was to give him a title, it would be liaison, I guess. This shite hurts my head, and that’s exactly why we’ve never delved too far into the nitty gritty of it all. Baz has his own stuff going on, and even though it’s more often than not that our jobs overlap, there are moments where we need to negotiate who the onus belongs to.

“So, steak dinner?” Baz says after I’ve explained my plan to my actual second in command.

“You’re fucking crazy, boss,” Cain says. “Go have your fucking steak. I’ll make sure we carry your plan out. I’ll even pay for some pussy myself, as long as you promise to let me watch when you make him pay.”

And that’s why Cain is me when I’m not around. He’ll run even with the craziest of plans and build on them instead of tearing them down. What can I say? He’s an entrepreneur at heart.



“Spit it out already,” I sneer at Baz.

We’re at his favourite restaurant, just finished a glorious meal, so I should feel sated. But the look on my mate’s face makes it clear he intended to wine and dine me before dropping some sort of bomb.

“You need to go back.”

My heart plummets and my breath saws out of me. In an attempt at masking my genuine reaction, I slam the tall wineglass down on the table, spilling some of the red substance onto the white tablecloth.

“I don’t fucking think so,” I growl.

The calm look on his face pisses me off, and I’m itching to wipe it away with my fist.

“It’s time,” he calmly states, looking at me with something akin to pity in his eyes. “Since you won’t tell me what happened, I can’t help you. But having both you and Cain here is bad for business. *Your* business.”

I open my mouth to tell him I’ll send Cain to fucking Briarwood, but before I can form the words, he holds up his hand.

“Cain is needed here. You know he’s working on his own shite involving... never mind. Besides, it’s your hometown. Are you really telling me that you want to send someone who’s never been there?”

A growl-like sound escapes me. “And what gives you the right to make me do anything?” I volley.

Baz’s calm expression finally disappears, replaced with a mask of thinly veiled anger. “I would never *make* you do anything you don’t want to, Dante. Don’t fucking forget who you’re talking to.” He sighs and empties his wine before continuing. “You’re my best mate, and because of that, I’ve been patient with you. But my angel doesn’t want to work with Cain, and you very much need her on your side. Who do you think has helped while we’re all here?”

There we go... the talk about this bloody person who I don’t know. That can only mean one thing. It’s his family, it *has* to

be. Those are the only people he'd never reveal to me, and I'm glad. Because it gives me hope that if push comes to shove, he won't hand me over to them either.

Baz Marx is the only one in his family I've ever met face-to-face—at least as far as I know. My thoughts settle on a memory from so long ago, one I never questioned. Didn't he say at Caitlin's birthday that he'd go stay with his cousin or some shite? Ahh fuck... it's all making a stupid kind of sense. How the bloody hell did I not connect the dots sooner?

The Crimson Angel... it has to be her.

It doesn't really matter, though. I don't know exactly what it is Baz does for the family business, and I don't want to. All I know is that he can speak on their behalf in international matters, which means he knows people everywhere. His connections are the only reason I allowed Avery to apply to the gifted uni in Ontario.

“Are you ever going to tell me what happened?” Baz asks.

I'm about to give him my usual bullshite of 'don't ask and I won't lie' but I think better of it. “Yeah, I'll tell you. But not here.”

XVI



OceanofPDF.com

Dante

I don't bother greeting anyone as we return to the American Dirty Diamonds, a sex club exactly like the one in England. The similarities are many, the differences are few. After all, I mirrored the English club after this one.

Baz isn't just my best mate, he's my mentor, and he's taught me everything I know. While I was working my ass off to establish my name in the surfing world, he helped me establish and recruit people for the Diamond Crew. Even though we're the same age, Baz grew up on crime politics, probably had it served with his milk and biscuits.

I'm not too proud to say that without him at my side, I would have failed spectacularly. Baz is the one who taught me to always think bigger. The bastard even made me draw up three and five-year plans, and then he'd meticulously tear it all apart and redo it for me and make it better.

He's the reason I created Dirty Diamonds, a glorified front business. It might be a seedy establishment, but it's a business that pays taxes and gives out employee benefits. On the front, it's squeaky clean. And it takes someone as knowledgeable as Baz to unravel it.

Behind closed doors, it's not pretty. We do the usual stuff you'd expect; underground fight rings, sell drugs, but again, that's mostly to pay the bills and because it's the price the Marx family demands to let Baz be connected with my business. The cut is fifty-fifty, which is more than fair, and I

suspect my mate had to push hard for that with his family since it's their product we sling. That was the only reason I agreed. We don't sell to anyone underage, and Baz personally guarantees the shite is up to snuff.

None of us do drugs. In fact, no one in my employment does. It's one thing to sell it as a necessary evil, and I understand that those who want it will get their hands on it regardless, but I won't have my people tainted with that crap. If people have addictive vices, they become a liability, and that's something I won't tolerate.

I created the Diamond Crew to get revenge, and that's what separates us from our front business. The people I employ there know nothing about what goes on within the organisation. They might have heard hushed whispers and exaggerated rumours, but they're not in the know.

My crew consists of about fifteen people, ten in America and five in England. It's a small group, and I prefer it like that. Each and every person has lost someone to the cause we're fighting, and that makes them loyal and fierce. They understand the need for what we do, and they thirst for every kill as much as I do.

So what do we do? Well, we gather intel and supply proof where needed. And when justice needs to be served outside of the public system, we're there. Do you suspect your neighbour favours kids? Call us. We'll systematically and thoroughly go through their life, and if we agree with the suspicion, we'll tip the scales and make sure there's evidence.

In America, Sally is our go-to person for these kinds of jobs. She's eighteen, and she's a bloody champ at entrapping the sick pricks through online chats.

When Sally was fifteen, her paedophile dentist almost raped her. Luckily, she got away in time, but her best friend wasn't as lucky. We found the dentist too late. Since Sally doesn't have any family, Cain took her in. From the beginning she wanted to work with us, and in time, my second convinced me to take her on—a decision I've never once regretted. She might be young, so to some, it's reprehensible to have her as part of this operation. That was how I looked at it at first, which was wrong. Who the fuck am I to deny her a piece of the justice pie when she's lived the very nightmare we're trying to save others from?

On the other side of the pond, Beth used to fill this role. But since she turned twenty-five this year, she started having trouble passing herself off as a teenager. Luckily, she recently found a replacement, and since I wasn't there, I trusted her instincts and let her control the operation.

“Right, it's time to spill the beans.” Baz empties and refills his glass with his favourite whiskey.

We're in my office, the only place I feel completely safe discussing what I'm about to tell him. Don't get me wrong, I'd prefer to never speak the words out loud. But I have to, and if I can't tell him, who the fuck can I tell? Maybe I'll get lucky and he'll punch my head in, giving me the justice I know I deserve.

Following his lead, I empty my glass, revelling the burn the bourbon leaves behind. After repeating the motion three more times, I finally say, “I shagged Caitlin.”

Baz says nothing, he just looks at me and waves his hand in a ‘go on’ motion. When I don’t immediately elaborate, he says, “And?”

That one word makes me bristle. What the ever loving fuck does he mean ‘and’? What more does he need? Sure, it wasn’t a fucking underage crime since she was eighteen, but I’m her uncle and I was her legal guardian—I bloody raised her. There are plenty of factors making it beyond messed up.

“And, what?” I volley, my hands shaking with pent up anger that I’m trying to keep a tight leash on.

“I thought it was clear what I meant,” Baz says, calmly. “But let me rephrase. And what else?”

A low growl leaves my throat, and I stare daggers at my mate. “What else, what? I fucked her, and then I left.” I try not to flinch at the crude words that don’t really feel like they truly encompass what happened.

“I don’t buy it,” he simply says. “I’ve known you for long enough to know that either you’re bullshitting me or not giving me the full story. So, once again, I ask... and?”

My breathing slows down as I realise what he’s doing. It’s not that he’s taking it lightly, Baz wants to get to the bottom of it. I guess I should be happy my mate isn’t condemning me,

but I'm not. I'm fucking furious, because I deserve his ire, his loathing, and even hatred. Not this calm... whatever it is.

When I don't answer, Baz carves a hand through his dark brown hair and narrows his eyes. "I can wait all night, Dante," he says, baiting me. "I know there's more to the story. You've cared for your nieces for too long to just randomly bed one of them as soon as she turned legal. Plus, I've seen how she used to look at you, and don't forget, I've been around when she's called you way more than what's considered appropriate, always insisting on video calls. So, yeah, you'll excuse me for not just buying into your simple explanation."

I nod slowly, letting his words really sink in. Of course, he knows me better than anyone, so he's aware it's not that simple.

"She tricked me," I finally say, expelling the last breath in my lungs with those three words. Finally, meeting my mate's gaze, I inhale deeply. "I didn't know it was her. At first, I thought it was Sugar that came back to bed, and..." I bark out an unhappy laugh. "I should have fucking known. She didn't act, feel, or even smell like Sugar, but I shrugged it off. Then I unceremoniously shagged her in my bed. When I switched the light on..."

Guilt gnaws at my insides as the memory unbidden comes to mind. I've locked that shite down and not allowed myself to even think about it for the last two years. But there's no stopping it now that I'm finally talking about it.

“She was a fucking virgin,” I roar. “Not only did I shag and leave her, I bloody hurt her.”

Baz leans forward and places a hand on my arm. “You didn’t know,” he says, the words so soft I almost miss them. “Look, mate, I’ve known for years that Caitlin was into you. And I think... if you’re honest with yourself, you knew, too. Didn’t you?”

I gulp and let his words wash over me. I knew, didn’t I?

“I-I...” The words are stuck in my throat, my mind refusing to acknowledge it.

My mate isn’t looking for my confession, though. I know he’s trying to help me, and as much as I appreciate it, I don’t deserve it.

“So Caitlin tricked you into taking her virginity. How did she take it when you calmly, rationally, talked to her afterwards?” Baz’s wolfish grin lets me know he’s already aware *that* didn’t happen. “Surely, you took the time to sit her down and explain why it was wrong, and that it can never happen again? Maybe even added something about how she should have saved it for someone special—”

“You bloody well know I didn’t do that,” I spit through clenched teeth.

“And that’s what makes you a superior arsehole,” Baz says, conversationally, his Aussie accent strong as he clearly pronounces each word. “You’re not to blame for what she did,

that's on her. Should you have guessed? Maybe, but who can fault you for that?"

I stare slack-jawed at my mate as he calmly refills our glasses.

"But you left her. Way to give her a complex."

I pick his glass up and hurl it at the wall, waiting for it to shatter. "How would you know?" I roar. Anger makes red bleed into my vision, and I'm breathing heavily.

"Call it a hunch," Baz smirks. "How about you drop the prissy attitude, remove the chip from your shoulder, and tell me what actually happened without paraphrasing?"

Inhaling deeply, I finally let go. I tell Baz everything, without holding back. I don't even bother trying to paint myself in a better light as I explain how I gave in to what we both wanted, and had her multiple times. As I lay myself bare, I can't stop thinking how wrong it feels. Not because it's illegal as fuck, but because it's something that should be private between me and Caitlin. And... well... because it's something I still treasure.

Baz remains quiet through my story, only nodding and grunting now and then. His face is set in a mask, one I know too well. It's his game face.

"Well as incredible as that sounds, let's just skip ahead to where you recognise *your* fuck up, and then we can move on from there. Your mistake was fleeing and leaving an eighteen-year-old to deal with her shit on her own—one who's heavily

burdened with trauma. Her parents died, and you became the centre of her universe in every way that counts. Come to think of it, it would be odd if she didn't fall for you."

I gulp. When he puts it like that, yeah, I guess it makes sense. And fuck... he's right. I left her... and I didn't even say goodbye.

"She acted on her desires instead of thinking rationally. Does that remind you of anyone?"

No words come to me, so I just nod. I get it... I did the same thing when I was younger.

"But here's the real kicker," Baz continues. The tone of his voice is the only warning I get that he's about to deliver his final punch. "The one person she put all her trust and love in after her parents died, upped and left her. No goodbye, no closure. There one minute, gone the next. Just. Like. Her. Parents."

Why isn't he shouting at me? Punching me? Telling me what a piece of shite I am? The person he just described is a bloody prick. Honestly, if it was someone else, and I'd been told all that, I'm not sure I'd be able to even give them the benefit of the doubt. I'd want to hunt them down, and hurt them for behaving like that.

Only... this is me. I did that.

And what's worse is, I never bloody drew the parallel to Caitlin and Avery's parents' death. For over two years, I've

been completely focusing on how it affected me, instead of looking at what it could do to her.

“What do I do?” I eye Baz, trying to beg him with my eyes to give me a plan of action. “I-I...” I don’t even bloody know what I’m trying to say.

“So you finally get it?” he asks, not unkindly. “This isn’t about you, man. It’s time to stop acting like a teenage girl who thinks it’s all about them.” I snort at the comparison. “Whether or not you’re still their legal guardian, you have a responsibility to your nieces. Man up and be what they need.”

All I can do is nod. “You’re right,” I say. “It’s time for me to go back home.”

We stay in my office for the rest of the night, talking about... well, everything. Baz admits he’s missing home, Australia, and he wants to go back to see his family the first chance he gets. That’s the thing with the Marx family, it’s complicated as shite. It’s not like he isn’t welcome, he assured me of that when I asked. But it’s duty first, and as the one in charge of international connections, he travels a lot—mainly North America and Europe, but even Asia from time to time.

“Is there anything I can do to help?” I ask, hating the longing I hear in his voice.

Baz isn’t an emotional fella, not at all. So for him to be this vulnerable is rare, and it shows just how much he misses the people he’s left behind.

“If you want to do me a favour, then stop taking family for granted. You have the luxury of being able to live and work close to yours. Don’t mess it up for some kind of misplaced sense of guilt. If you feel guilty, own it. Don’t make it their problem.”

I bloody hate how wise he is.

“One more question, and then I promise to let it rest.”

“Shoot.”

Baz clears his throat and sits straighter. “Is there something you haven’t told me about your current feelings for Caitlin?” When I open my mouth to interrupt, he hurries on. “I’m not judging you, but I want to know.”

“You’re not judging me?” I ask, my eyebrows almost meeting my hairline with how surprised I am.

My mate chuckles. “Why would I? Not even all fifty States can agree. Did you know consenting incest between adults isn’t illegal in Rhode Island and New Jersey? And in Maryland only vaginal intercourse is off the table, which leaves room for—”

I throw one of the glass coasters at him, hitting him in the middle of his forehead.

Bullseye.

His lips twitch in a barely there smile as he flips me off.

“Why the hell do you know that?” I ask, incredulous. Those are some bloody awkward facts to just randomly be that

familiar with.

Sure, he's like a sponge, sucking up almost everything he reads. But that's still... odd knowledge to have.

"Maybe because I've long suspected Caitlin's feelings weren't entirely unreciprocated," he answers with a shrug. "But I don't think you're ready to admit that to yourself, let alone to me. However, do me the favour of not denying it unless you're absolutely certain you aren't lying." As I contemplate Baz's words, I clench my jaw so hard I'm surprised I don't chip a tooth.

Do I have feelings for Caitlin? I mean, of course I love her, she's my niece. But... beyond that? No. No, of course, I don't. That would make me as sick and twisted as the people we dispose of.

But then again, it's not like I think of Avery on a daily basis, and it's never her smile, or stupid jokes I miss. When I think of my youngest niece, I don't have trouble breathing, and I never wonder if she thinks about me. It's certainly not for her benefit that I have a weather alert for when it's storming in Briarwood—and it's not her I think about as soon as I wake up in the morning.

Am I in love with her, though? I snort at the thought because I'm pretty sure I have no fucking clue what love even is. I've been with plenty of women, but apart from getting my dick wet I've never kept them around.

Is it love when you can't get someone out of your head? When they haunt your dreams? When you can't ever make a

bloody purchase without considering them, even if it's irrelevant? If so... then, maybe. All I know for certain is that even without physically having her in my life, she's living rent free in my head.

Oh, fuck me...

"I'm in love with her." The words leave my mouth before I can even process them, but as soon as they're out, I want to take them back.

Baz chuckles. "No shit. Goodness me, this is a surprise I never saw coming. You could knock me over with a feather, and..." His eyes are comically wide, and his voice keeps rising in mock surprise. "I can't keep going, mate. But yeah, it's about time you own up to it."

Rolling my eyes at his antics, I only grunt a reply, my mind busy catching up with my heart. Yeah, I can't deny it to myself anymore. I did for so long, but I won't keep doing that. I'm in love with Caitlin. My niece.

May God have mercy on my twisted soul.

When there's no more alcohol in my office, Baz gets up. "I think you should cut your game short with our captive. Give him two days to rest, then take your aggression out on him and finish it."

"Why?" I ask, even though I already know the answer.

"Because you need to be back in Briarwood to get your girl. So why not be there this weekend?"

XVII



OceanofPDF.com

Storm

I laugh out loud as the man at the post office stares at me like I'm insane.

"Can you repeat that?" he asks, a dumbfounded expression clouding his features. "You want me to stagger the parcels so they're sent every other day next week?" He scratches his head.

"Did you go to university away from home?" I ask. When he shakes his head, I continue. "Neither did I, so I can't claim to fully understand it myself. All I know is that my sister misses Galaxy chocolate and Jelly Babies."

He nods and taps away at the screen. Once done, he confirms he'll be able to do it, and I try not to gasp as he gives me the price. International shipping is a bitch. "So this is what I can look forward to when my eldest leaves next year," he mutters under his breath. I don't answer since it sounds more like an observation than an invitation to carry on our conversation.

After paying the full amount, I take off.

Back at Alan's place, I'm met with his disapproval. "Darling, was that really necessary?" He winds his arms around my middle, pulling me flush against him.

I sigh and wrap my arms around his neck. "She's my sister."

Of course, I know I'm going overboard, but I can't help it. When it comes to Ave, I want her life to be magical. If I could

train woodland creatures to sing for her and make her clothes, I'd do it in a heartbeat.

He harrumphs and buries his face in the crook of my neck. "She's not a child, Storm. Why don't you make her get a job? Then she can have all the English sweets she wants."

Annoyance builds in the pit of my stomach. Normally, Alan is at least somewhat respectful of my relationship with my sister.

"I'm sorry, darling." He presses a kiss to my skin with each word. "I just don't want you to be held back in life. I know you're beyond capable of taking care of yourself, but Avery's whimsical ideas are always expensive. Your sister is eighteen, and maybe it would help her feel better if she wasn't living off you. I bet she wants you to have a bright future."

Fake coughing, I swallow down the retort on my lips. Bloody silver-tongued prick. His words are as pretty as the meaning behind them is heavy. Does he honestly not know I see right through him? That I can spot the bullshit?

Knowing I need to play my role, I sigh contently. Manipulative words or not, he's right, I know he is. My sister is only begrudgingly taking my money, but that's how it should be. It's too late for me to have a great life since I've signed mine away, so hers has to be—that's just the way it is.

"If we still want to buy a house instead of having you live in that..." Alan pulls back and scrunches up his face in distaste. "Motel room, you need to save for a mortgage."

This is exactly what I need to hear, to be reminded of. I've played my role so well that Alan believes we're working towards a shared dream of owning our own house within the next year.

"You're right," I concede. "I'm sorry, Alan. I wasn't thinking."

His hands move to my arse, squeezing the cheeks so hard I gasp. "Don't call me by my name," he scolds, sounding disappointed. "What have I told you?"

I giggle, "Darling. You want me to call you darling."

It's so cute that he wants us to use the same term of endearment for each other—so freaking sweet I might just vomit, or get a cavity.

"That's right." He captures my lips with his, biting my lips when I don't immediately open up for him. "Give me what I want." The command isn't sexy or playful.

While I enjoy this double agent stuff, it's starting to get to me. A side of me recognises the evil that's potentially living inside this man, at the same time, if it wasn't for Alan's appearance at Dirty Diamonds, I'd still be a mess, licking my wounds after Dante's disappearance.

It sounds like I'm giving him undue credit, and maybe I am. I might not be that girl anymore, and that's all because of Alan. As much as I loathe to admit it, it's because his presence gave me a purpose, and just as I promised Beth, Clara, and myself, I'll see it through.

“Don’t hold back from me,” he snaps.

When I part my lips for him, he pushes me until my back hits the wall behind me. The movement is so forceful I let out a small “Oomph” sound.

“Don’t. Ever. Deny. Me.”

As I apologise, Alan unwinds my arms from around his neck and holds them above my head. His hand is wrapped around my wrists, adding pressure until I whimper. When his eyes flash with anger, I wish I could take my actions back.

“Why do you make me angry?” He shouts, mirroring my thoughts. “God, Storm. You know how much I love you and care about you. So why do you have to be like this? Do you think it’s easy for me knowing you’re about to go off and show your body to strangers?”

‘Yes’ my mind screams at me. Rather than voicing my real thoughts, I shake my head and try to look contrite. Try, being the operative word. Whenever I look at the piece of shite in front of me, I have a hard time connecting him to the sweet guy he appeared to be in the beginning. BC. Before Clara. That guy is long gone, though. I can’t exactly put my finger on when he changed, I supposed it happened gradually.

He stopped doing the small things like holding the door. I never questioned or missed it, though. Because the worse Alan acts, the easier it is for me to remember he’s a mission and nothing else.

“Are you too stupid to answer?” Alan taunts, clearly unhappy I haven’t replied yet.

Tears gather in my eyes, burning as much as my embarrassment. “I don’t know,” I murmur, answering his question. “I’m sorry, darling.”

Alan studies me while sobs make my body shake, and it feels like an eternity passes before he finally takes pity on me. “I just want what’s best for you. You know that, right?”

I nod.

“And you don’t know what’s best for yourself, do you?”

I shake my head.

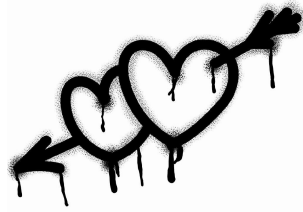
“You need me to tell you. To help you be the best you so people won’t leave you, right?”

Again, I nod.

“Good.” Alan kisses the tip of my nose and swipes away my tears. “Now go shower and get ready for work. You look gross and you won’t be making any tips looking like that.”

As soon as he releases me, I head towards the bathroom. Just before I vanish from his line of sight, I turn around. “Thank you for being so good to me,” I say, swallowing the bile in my throat.

He nods curtly before reminding me about the dinner we’re having with his dad after my shift tonight.



As I walk the small distance from the dressing room to the booth on shaky legs, I see Glen is waiting for me.

“Ahh, it’s nice to see you on time for once,” he guffaws, even slapping his thigh like he just told a hilarious joke.

I straighten my back and stare daggers at him from behind my black and gold mask. “I’m sorry for my previous tardiness,” I say. That’s not what I really want to say, but it is what it is.

My lateness is the reason I’m back in the booth, a place I never wanted to be again.

“You promised to wipe my attendance record if I took this shift,” I remind him, and he nods.

Then he opens the door behind him, pushing me inside the small cubicle. The air smells stale, and when the overpowering scent of vanilla hits me, I want to throw up. Instead, I swallow the bile down and walk into the middle of the room.

“Right, you know the drill. You’re to keep your legs spread at all times, even when there’s no one on the other side. And when the black screen rolls up, you’ll do exactly as the visitor wants. Try to make his requests take as long as possible. We want them to keep feeding those twenties into the machine.”

I nod to show I understand.

“The only thing you don’t have to comply with is any requests for anal play. We’ll leave that for our more experienced girls.” Glen laughs heartily. Then he gestures to the wall behind me. “Everything is brand new and unused, so don’t get caught up in any weird thoughts about hygiene.”

I swallow audibly and nod again.

The back wall is lined with a glass display cabinet, showcasing every single toy. There are dildos in every imaginable size and colour, nipple clamps, clit clamps... hell, I’d dare anyone to name a sex toy and not be able to find it. It was all daunting the first time I was in here, but this time I feel more numb. I’m here to do a job and nothing more.

After making sure I know everything, Glen leaves and some weird ambient music plays through the speakers. Even though I should have my legs spread, I don’t. The position is beyond uncomfortable in these heels, and since I have a long shift in front of me, I’m opting for comfort.

I don’t have to wait for long before I hear the whirring of the machine, signalling money has been put into it. Then the black screen slides up a few inches. From experience, I know it’s only enough to show my feet and legs. If they want to see more, they will have to put even more money into the machine, and only when they can see me completely can they make requests.

“Good afternoon, Bambi.”

I try not to snort at the stage name Glen has given me for when I'm in the booth. At first, he insisted I didn't need one, but when I was adamant he named me after a freaking cartoon character. Bloody hell. Talk about your ruined innocence.

Even though the microphones are distorting our voices somewhat for privacy, the man on the other side of the glass has a high-pitched voice, and I want to giggle at how much it sounds like someone that's just hit puberty.

"Hi there," I greet him.

I still haven't spread my legs, so I slowly slide one foot up my opposite calf.

"Are you going to be a good girl for me?" he asks.

He must insert more money because the screen is almost all the way to the top.

"That depends," I say coyly. "Can you handle me?"

The man grabs his junk, squeezing it before he undoes his pants and frees his already hard cock. "Bare yourself to me. I want to see your... your pussy."

I resist the urge to roll my eyes as he seems to be shy about voicing what he wants.

The black screen is completely gone now, meaning he can see every inch of my body—well, up to my shoulders. That's as much as they'll ever be able to see of me, and me of them. Despite knowing that, I've kept my mask on. You never know if there'll be some kind of malfunction, or if they find a way to

see more. And I, for one, don't want to be caught out and have my identity revealed if that happens.

Before removing my underwear, I pull a chair up. Then I step out of my Brazilian knickers and sit down on the chair, spreading my legs as wide as possible. I try not to look at his unimpressive length as he tugs at it like he's in a race.

OceanofPDF.com

XVIII



OceanofPDF.com

Storm

My legs tremble even though I'm sitting on the chair.

Throughout the day, I've faked so many orgasms, I've completely lost count. While none of the customers seemed to mind my over-the-top moans, my throat feels raw and sore, making the sounds of pleasure that are escaping me now hurt. But oh my God, it hurts so good.

"Pinch your nipple... that's it, roll the taut bud like a good girl," the guy rasps.

While my job is to give them the show they want, I never even considered that it could feel good for me. Although his voice shouldn't affect me, it's like he's connected to my body through only his voice. He opened his mouth before the screen was even slightly lifted, and the "hi" sent electricity through my body.

"Now, move your hand to your slit."

I immediately obey, sliding a finger through my wet folds.

His growl is low. "I said to move your hand to your slit. I never said you could touch."

Before I can swallow it down, I whimper in frustration at being denied. But I do what he says, and move my hand so it's hovering close to my entrance instead of touching my sensitive flesh.

The man praises me again, and it feels like his voice is cocooning me in a blanket of appreciation and worth. Then he proceeds to give me instructions, finally allowing me to slide my finger into my dripping heat.

“That’s an interesting tattoo you have,” he says. His casual words make me tense up.

Shite, I covered the tattoo with makeup before going in here, but I haven’t given a single thought to it getting smeared. Knowing there’s nothing I can do about it now, I force a laugh and angle myself so the ink on my left middle finger is concealed by my pussy lips. A ring of fire stretches around the digit, and it serves as a reminder to the harshest lesson I’ve ever learned—of the inferno Dante unleashed when he up and left me at my most vulnerable.

“Thank you,” I moan. “It’s a... reminder...” I trail off, feeling confused as I look at the glass and notice the guy isn’t even touching himself.

I frown in confusion, wondering what his game is. The only parts of him I can see are covered in what looks like a dark suit and a light grey button-up shirt. Even though he isn’t showing even an inch of skin, there’s something about him. I can’t quite pinpoint it, but he... I swallow as I admit to myself that I like the way he’s affecting me.

It’s not just his sinfully dark voice I like, it’s also the fact that he isn’t wanking. He exudes restraint, and it makes a part of me want to push him to see what happens. It’s like a personal mission I want to complete.

Mission... that word has my mind conjuring up Alan's face, making me feel like a bucket of cold water has been dumped on top of my head. Whatever desire the stranger awoke in me is gone, and I feel disgusted with myself.

Knowing that I can't just leave yet, I continue to follow the stranger's orders. I finger myself, pinch and roll my clit. I breathe heavily, moan here and there to make him think I'm still into it, and gyrate my hips like I'm wanting my fingers deeper inside me.

I think I'm doing a good job, until he says, "If your acting is for my benefit, there's no need. These are not like the real whimpers of pleasure you were just making." I immediately stop moving, worried I've upset him.

Without another word, the stranger gets up. With a gloved hand, he pushes a wad of notes through the slide at the bottom of the glass, and then he turns his back on me and saunters out of the room.

Not five minutes passes before Glen walks into the room with an odd expression on his face. "You're done in here, Storm." Despite his calm and almost aloof tone, I notice the way his hands clench and unclench.

"Did I do something wrong?" I ask, needing to curb my curiosity.

Even though there are no clocks in here, I'm pretty sure all eight hours of my shift hasn't passed yet. Glen reassures me I have done nothing wrong, but that's all he can—or will—say on the matter.

“Enjoy your evening. Oh, and when you come in on Monday, we will talk about your work from now on.”

Bloody hell, that doesn't sound good at all.

“Am I...” I swallow, hating how sore my throat is. “Do I still have a job?” I ask.

His answering nod doesn't ease my nerves, and I hate the thought that I might find myself without a job.

Glen ushers me out of the room, and just before he leaves me, I say his name and place my hand on his elbow. “Please don't fire me,” I beg. “I... I can't be without a job.”

The manager rolls his eyes and repeats that I'm not getting fired. “You're still getting paid for today and tomorrow,” he says with a shrug. “It seems you've caught the eyes of one of the higher-ups and he didn't want anyone else to see you.”

“Oh!” That's all I can say because I don't know what to think about it.

Glen scratches the back of his neck and mumbles, “You could say that. Now get out of here. We'll talk on Monday.”

I have no idea how I feel about this unexpected turn of events. Everything I know about Dirty Diamonds revolves around what goes on around my level of work. I don't even know who owns the business. I'm pretty sure all I've heard is that the owner is supposedly some big business mogul in America, and he only comes here when his presence is needed.

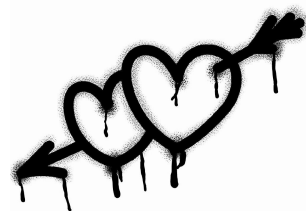
Most of the people I work with haven't been here for more than a few months. In fact, I think me and Liv have been here

the longest. The only rumours I've heard about the owner is that some think he's local, others think he's a spy sent by the Russians... so, in short, he's the boogie man. No one's seen him, and everything you hear needs to be taken with a grain of salt.

Obviously, I don't know if it was the owner who I just... performed for. All I know for certain is that it's someone with some serious say if they can send me home with full pay.

When I finally reach the changing room, I text Alan to let him know I'm done, and that we can head to his dad's earlier. His reply is almost immediate, letting me know he's already there and to just come over.

I sigh as I pull the frilly, white dress from the locker. It's so not me, but it fits the role I play. Alan's dad sees me as this demure, proper woman who's been dealt a tough hand in the game called life—and he isn't wrong. Am I overplaying it? Absolutely. It's easier this way, because even though Alan can be rough at times, he never oversteps. His daddy has laid down the law, and like a good boy, Alan obeys. That means we, thankfully, haven't had sex, because according to the Potter patriarch, I'm wife material, meaning I'm there for the long haul, and not somewhere to stick his dick in when he's randy.



“Ahh, Storm. It’s so good to see you.” I barely manage to shrug my coat off before Peter leans in and kisses both my cheeks. “And you look wonderful, darling.”

It’s hard not to recoil from his cigar-breath, especially when he uses the same pet name his son has given me.

I do a little twirl, making the stupid dress ride up while smiling at Alan’s dad. “You don’t look too bad yourself,” I say with a wink. “If you were younger, Alan might find himself with some competition.” Peter laughs boisterously, and his eyes twinkle.

After taking the paper bag with the wine I brought, he nudges me towards the living room. The closer we get the more apparent the other voices become and I immediately want to baulk, retreat before I’m exposed to even more people.

Beth has told me over and over to keep a low profile, and I’m trying—really, I am. But it’s bloody hard to infiltrate a family without being exposed to their immediate circle.

“Who else is here?” I ask, looking up at Peter.

There was a time in my life where I thought bad people would stand out in a crowd. While I never expected them to wear masks or an enormous neon sign, I naively thought you’d be able to tell. You can’t.

Peter looks like a normal father. He’s older, his salt and pepper hair is thinning, and he’s kept himself in good shape. He laughs easily, and he’s always respectful and nice towards

me. With his sons, he's very stern, and he doesn't have much patience for them.

"Almost everyone," Peter says. When I ask if his wife, Bernadette, is joining us, he sadly shakes his head. "I'm afraid not. This pregnancy is really hard on her, so the doctor has told her to stay in bed as much as possible."

Bile rises in the back of my throat at the reminder that the head of the Potter family is already busy either creating new heirs to his vile business, or products for said sick business. I wonder if he decides his children's role by their gender. Is that why his three eldest haven't been sold?

Forcing my hands not to clench, I nod and ask him to tell her I said hi. I'm not sure if I sound as relaxed as I'm going for, but he says nothing to make me think differently.

As soon as we reach the rest of the party. He eyes his eldest son, Richard, with disdain as he sniffs some white powder from the table. Letting go of my arm, Peter excuses himself and walks over to him.

"We were just having some fun," Richard mutters, not once lifting his eyes from the table.

Peter's lips curl in a sneer. "Is that how you behave in front of ladies?" He points at me, and even though it should be laughable to see the big, brawny guy squirming under his dad's gaze, it's far from it. "What have I told you about bringing that toxic shite into my house? You disgust me."

“I tried to stop him,” John, the middle brother, says, sounding extremely smug.

Even though I don’t like any of these people, John is the only one that can make me uneasy with nothing more than a look. There’s just something about him... it’s nothing specific, but everything about him makes him someone you don’t want to encounter while walking home alone late at night. Luckily, he isn’t around a lot. Come to think of it, I think this is only the third time I’ve seen him.

Without warning, Peter curls his fist and punches his son right in the face not at all caring about the blood that spurts from Richard’s nose. Then he turns to Alan, telling him how disappointed he is that he allowed that behaviour in front of me.

“This is your home,” I say, feeling too awkward watching it unfold without saying anything. “Please don’t change your ways on my behalf.”

Peter nods, and his eyes soften when he looks at me. “Gracious as ever, Storm. What you see in my son I’ll never know, but he’d be a fool to let you go. You have beauty and brains, and that’s exactly why they shouldn’t have to be told to behave like gentlemen in front of you.”

Since I don’t know what to even say to that, I sit down next to Alan and peck his cheek. “I missed you today,” I say.

He shakes his head. “If you didn’t insist on working at Dirty Diamonds, you wouldn’t have to miss me. I don’t understand why you’re willing to let strangers look at what’s *mine*—”

“That’s enough!” Peter interrupts. His tone is eerily low, and the hairs on my arms stand at attention as though my body can feel danger coming. “How dare you speak to her that way? If it wasn’t for my money, you’d be living on the street, probably dying in a pool of your own vomit. So you have no right to judge her work.”

“But dad—”

Scoffing, Peter looks away from his son. “Darling, please excuse my son’s lack of manners. While I can’t say I understand why you do what you do, please understand I’m not judging you. You’re doing what you can to survive, and I admire that.”

No one says anything now that the Potter patriarch has spoken.

The rest of the evening is rather uneventful. Alan softens, even apologises for being jealous, and Richard takes me aside to say he hopes I’m not offended by the drugs. It’s all so surreal that when we finally reach the end of the evening I’m glad, because I honestly don’t know how much more I can take.

Just before we leave, Peter reminds Alan that until we’re engaged, it’s not prudent for us to spend the night together. It’s a rule I’m so happy with that I want to throw my arms around Peter and thank him for being a no-nonsense dictator that’s sticking his nose where it doesn’t belong.

I accept his offer to get me a car, and I snuggle into Alan while we wait outside for the two Ubers that are currently on

their way. One for him, and another for me.

As soon as I'm home, I change into a pair of jeans and a hoodie. Leaving my phone so I can't be tracked, I sneak over to Beth's so I can be there when Clara wakes up in the morning.

OceanofPDF.com

XIX



OceanofPDF.com

Dante

It's only my second day back in Briarwood, and I'm already itching to leave again. I'm standing outside the house—*my house*—but with no lights on it feels too empty, too big, and too cold. When I came back, I was too much of a coward to come straight here. I don't know for certain if Caitlin still lives here, and I needed to prepare myself to see her again.

I'm not proud to admit that my preparation included visiting the booth at Dirty Diamonds, but it did. Then again, it's not like I've been a monk for the past two years. Yet the thought of shagging someone there seems... wrong.

Rather than going inside the house that was once my home, I decide to show the good people of Briarwood that I'm back by going to the supermarket. I'm sure I can think of something to buy, like a new charger for my phone. The US pins won't do here, and I can't keep using Beth's. I could... of course, I could. But focusing on this gives me a purpose, ridiculous and non-essential as it is, it still counts.

Since all I brought with me when I left here was my emergency rucksack, I haven't brought a lot back with me either. I'm a simple man like that, which is great since it means I don't have a lot to take with me.

The brisk walk to the local supermarket doesn't take long, and on my way I bump into some old acquaintances and nosy neighbours. They all get a lukewarm smile and insincere greetings, which is just about all I can muster up right now.

As I round the third aisle in the local supermarket, my mood is beyond bad. “Watch it,” I snarl as someone bumps into me. When I look up, I come face-to-face with none other than Lily Bennett. “Oh, hi. I didn’t know it was you.” I carve a hand through my blond hair as I rein in my temper.

“Hi Dante.” Even though she’s smiling, she doesn’t sound happy. “I didn’t know you were back.”

I’m so not in the mood for small talk, but I can’t really avoid it unless I want to be rude to the woman who’s helped me so much throughout the years.

“Yeah, just got back,” I say. “How are you and Alexander doing? Getting used to the thought of the twins moving out as soon as there’s something available on campus?”

Avery’s tendency to update me, even when I haven’t asked, is the reason I know that Camden and Connor were late in the housing game, which meant that everything was gone and they’re still living at home while driving daily to the university.

“Actually,” Lily says, pulling me out of my thoughts. “It’s just me and the boys in the house now. Alexander and I are...” she trails off and lifts her left hand and shows me her naked ring finger.

So much for bloody small talk. What am I supposed to say to that?

“I’m sorry to hear that.” It’s not exactly my most original response, but what else can I say? There isn’t really a reason

for me to tell her I never cared for her husband.

Lily shrugs, giving off strong *'drop it'* vibes, so that's exactly what I do.

“And how are you doing back in the house?” she asks, and I'm happy for the change of subject even if I wished she hadn't brought that up.

“You know,” I say noncommittally.

She nods thoughtfully. “Have you seen Caitlin yet?”

There's something in her words that I don't like. It sounds like... no, Lily doesn't know that I abandoned my nieces, does she? Surely it's just my guilt playing tricks.

“No, not yet. She hasn't been home.”

Since I'm standing in the middle of aisle six, I ignore the way my stomach plummets as I wonder where the hell Caitlin has been spending her time—or who she's been spending it with. Blimey, I can't be thinking about this shite here, I need to focus on getting away.

“It was lovely seeing you again. Maybe we can catch up one of these days,” I suggest.

Lily tosses her long copper hair over one shoulder and smiles. “I'd like that,” she says.

Before I can think it through, my mouth opens. “Are you free tonight?”

Oh bloody hell, this sounds like I'm asking her out, doesn't it? That's so not what I'm getting at.

With a laugh, Lily suggests she comes over around eight. After looking into my mostly empty basket, she suggests she'll bring some food if I take care of the wine. Knowing that I need to keep myself busy, I say, "I'll cook us something."

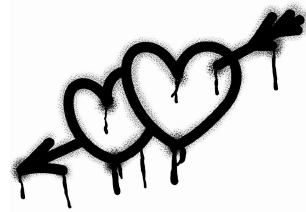
"Hmm, if you're sure?" she says, sounding like she's only reluctantly agreeing. Then she shrugs her bag off her shoulder and digs her phone out. After making sure we both still have the other's number saved, we part ways. She heads towards the seasonal aisle while I go back to the butcher area.

My mind keeps whirring, focusing on the fact that I haven't seen Caitlin yet. If she's found someone new, I should leave again rather than disturbing her life. Why the fuck did I never think to ask Avery if Caitlin has a boyfriend? When I left she was with Mike, but I heard she broke up with him two days after I left.

As I consider the actual possibility of someone new in my oldest niece's life, my breathing turns ragged and my fists clench, I know I won't be able to do that. I'm much too selfish to allow her any scrap of happiness that doesn't involve me. My mind hisses at the possibility, and I have to clench my hands so I don't pick something up just to throw it at the wall.

This just goes to show how much distance I've unwillingly created. While I've still been in touch with Avery, and she's been to visit a few times over the years, things have changed. They irrevocably did so the day I upped and left like a pathetic prick.

Even though Avery hasn't shown any outward signs of being upset with me, there have been enough slight digs to let me know she isn't happy that I left like that. I don't blame her. It was a shitty thing to do, and all I can do now is look forward and try to make up for my mistakes. I suppose that starts with accepting that my eldest niece has moved on.



After I finish the most random shopping I've ever done, I get an Uber back to the house. The driver helps me inside with the plastic bags, all while he keeps talking to me like we're old mates. It's bloody annoying, especially since I don't remember him at all.

Luckily for me—and him since every ounce of my patience is gone—he disappears relatively quickly, and I hurry unpacking. Everything, except the items that belong upstairs, get put in their rightful place. But I can't make my feet take me up there. Not yet.

Instead, I take in the downstairs, immediately noticing how clean the place is, and the plants are still alive. That must mean that Caitlin still lives here. I fight a smile as I realise I won't have to chase her down, she'll come home eventually, and then... crikey, I don't know. I just know I need to see her.

Since it's still early, I call Beth and ask her to meet me at Dirty Diamonds so we can go over a few more things. According to what she's told me so far, business is booming. The underground fighting has really taken off, and apparently people now have to apply—resulting in some being turned away.

I couldn't care less about the money. Don't get me wrong, it's nice that I don't have to worry. But I never started the Diamond Crew because I was a slave to the zeroes on my account balance, and the extra money isn't just mine. It'll be split between everyone working here, and some goes into caring for those we rescue.

Many people think our job is over once the scum are dead or handed over to the police, but that couldn't be further from the truth. These people need professional help, and not every family can afford that. That's why Baz has set up a foundation that's deeply hidden within the Marx family's many businesses. Every single person we save receives what they need to live with what's happened to them.

Some need more than others, it all depends on what they faced at the hands of their assailants. The ones who only need therapy are the lucky ones, if you can call them that. But compared to those who might have also suffered dismemberment or disfiguration on top of that, I guess it's the lesser evil.

Walking into my office where Beth is already waiting, I shake my head, banishing my morose thoughts. The point is

that we do what we can to help, in all areas.

“There you are. I almost thought you’d skipped town again,” Beth chirps. There’s a hint of a bite in her tone, letting me know she’s still holding a grudge for my disappearance.

“Here I am,” I say, dryly. “And I’m not going anywhere.”

She shrugs like it’s no big deal. “Let’s just get started,” she says impatiently. I raise my eyebrow, wordlessly asking her what the rush is. “I have a birthday this afternoon. It’s the pink giraffe’s birthday, and I promised we’d celebrate with cake. Storm, the girl I told you about, is busy helping them bake, but I don’t want to leave them alone for too long.”

Storm... Storm... wait, wasn’t that the *actual* name of the woman I watched in the booth? I grin as I recall Glen telling me Bambi was her stage name. What kind of bloody loon chooses a name like that? I have to admire the irony, though. Her real name is as fierce as her stage name is ridiculous. That’s her, though. The woman I had Glen pull from the booth.

Hmm, I need to find out more about this person.

Knowing now isn’t the time, I keep my smile in place as Beth tells me about her life with the girls, and how amazing this Storm is at helping her. As hard as Beth’s voice gets when we’re talking business, it becomes just as mushy when she talks about her girls. She’s like a proud mother hen, and it really suits her.

“You like looking after the girls, don’t you?” I ask even though I don’t have to.

“I love it, Dante. Don’t get me wrong, it’s bloody hard at times. Especially at night when they have nightmares, but it’s... it’s my calling.”

Leaning back in my chair, I smile warmly at her, asking more questions about how she manages and her plans for the girls under her care.

“Well, I’ve hired a private tutor for those who need it. But I really want them to go to school, they need to socialise and not be hidden away. I know we’d need to make some changes but...” She trails off and wrings her hands in front of her.

“I wish it didn’t have to be this way,” I say. “But what if someone recognises them? Just because we’ve taken care of the ones who had them at the time, doesn’t mean we’ve cleaned up the streets. Some of these girls are from different parts of England, one even from Scotland you said.”

Without warning, Beth shoots out of her chair so fast it falls to the floor. “I know this,” she shouts, clenching her hands. “But what’s the alternative? Keeping them hidden forever? They might be okay with that for now, but one day they’ll have questions. We need more people, Dante. Looking after these children is a full-time job in itself. We’re stretched too thin.”

Not wanting to upset her further, I just nod while mulling it over in my head for the millionth time. The fact of the matter is that some of these poor children were bought for sizeable sums of money. That means whoever purchased them had something more important than wealth, connections.

“What about Clive?” I ask, referring to the guy who’s been with me almost as long as Beth. “And where are the others?”

Pinching the bridge of her nose, Beth sighs loudly. “We’re all stretched too thin, Dante. Every one of us is working multiple cases, and I’m afraid shite is slipping through the cracks.”

With everything I’ve heard and read so far, that seems likely, and it’s something we can’t afford.

“Do you really believe that the Potters are the big players here in the UK?” I ask, my mind still a million miles away.

“I think so,” she says, nodding. “Look, I know you have a lot to catch up on. But do you remember my idea of having someone get close to Alan Potter and gather intel? Well, Storm is doing that for us. She’s new and hasn’t had a lot of training, but I think that’s beneficial in this instance.”

“How so?” I gruffly ask, not liking that Beth has sent someone inexperienced in to carry out this important task.

“Because that allows her to act curious instead of underhanded when she’s asking questions. I know you haven’t met her yet, but when you do, you’ll understand. She has this quality... I don’t know what to call it, Dante. You just have to trust me. So far, Storm has managed to take pictures of most of the family, which makes it a lot easier for Clive and me.”

Christ, how haven’t I realised until now how much I’ve missed this spitfire? Her passion for what we do is unrivalled.

“This all sounds good,” I say. It does to a certain point. “You’ve done well, Beth.”

Lifting her eyebrow she gives me a look that clearly tells me she knows a *but* is coming, and she isn’t wrong.

After I left the booth I had a quick look at the schedules for the coming weeks, and something isn’t adding up. “If she’s working the Potter case, why is she also in the booth and behind the bar?”

I wait while Beth sets the chair right and sits back down. Her eyes flash with anger, as she hisses, “She’s not supposed to work the booth. The bar, yes. That’s how she met Alan Potter, and it helps sell her alibi of struggling financially.”

“Where did she come from?” I ask, feeling even more curious about this woman.

Beth pulls some papers out, always preferring to have prints of everything that’s also stored digitally. “She’s from London, but moved to Briarwood after finishing high school. She doesn’t have any family to speak of. She lives at the Shack, you know, the rundown motel near Milford Junction.”

“Right—”

“Don’t start, Dante,” Beth says, sounding like she thinks I’m about to argue about something. “I’ve done my due diligence on the background checks. Storm checks out completely.”

Feeling bad for putting Beth on the defensive, I soften my tone as I say. “Beth, I’m not questioning you. You’ve done

amazing work while I've been gone. I merely wanted to know if there's a reason she was in the booth because I had Glen pull her off the public rota."

"You what?"

I run a hand down my face. "What can I say, I liked what I saw," I smirk. "I obviously won't mess with your plans. So feel free to put her where you want, she's yours," I grin.

"This is what I mean, though. I don't have time to check where she is as often as I should, and that's risking a lot."

"Alright, I get it," I say as soon as Beth finishes. "I'll talk to Glen and make sure he knows you're in charge of her—"

"No!" I cock my brow at the command. I might be happy to let Beth run the show to a certain extent, but that doesn't mean she gets to tell me what to do. "Let's leave it for now, and see what else he does. We've never caught him breaking any of the rules. Bending them, yes, like with Storm's schedule, but not more than that. I want to see what he does if he's given the opportunity."

I cup my chin and eye Beth warily. "You don't trust him." It's not a question, it's a statement.

"He hasn't given me any real reason not to," she sighs. "It's more of a gut feeling. Like I used to get about Clive, and he turned out to be perfect."

Beth is naturally distrusting of men, and while I'll never discard her feelings or opinions, it's harder to act when there's

no proof. Then again, this isn't worth arguing about since Beth knows a lot more than I do about what's going on, I relent.

"I want to meet Storm." I deliberately don't phrase it as a question, because this is something I won't give in on.

"Does Monday work? She's scheduled to come in, so it won't look odd that she's here."

OceanofPDF.com

XX



OceanofPDF.com

Dante

I spend a few more hours in my office at Dirty Diamonds, going through the paperwork Beth's left for me. Nothing seems out of the ordinary, and I trust her, so I quickly moved on and focused on the open cases. The one with the Potter family immediately catches my eyes.

There's nothing in here that Beth hasn't already told me, it's all very run-of-the-mill info for our line of business. Beth is currently fostering Clara Potter, who was found by the new girl, Storm. And according to the file, she's dating Alan Potter to gather intel on the family.

Remembering she mentioned Storm had taken some pictures, I duck into Beth's office, using the keys to unlock and remove the fake wall hiding her murder board. I grin knowingly as I come face-to-face with the clues she's worked out. There are pictures attached to some names, but not all of them.

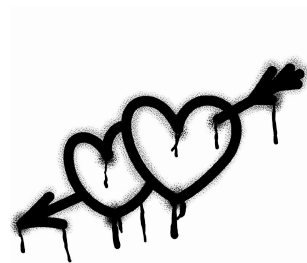
Alan, his oldest brother Richard, and their dad, Peter, all have a picture—the only faceless one is the middle brother, John, but there's a description. Then there's an arrow down to Clara and a lot of question marks. I'm guessing that means that Beth still isn't completely sure how the little girl fits into the family tree.

Carving a hand through my hair, I take a step back and look at the other names on the board. There's no picture of Storm next to Alan, only a yellow line below her name. If I hadn't

worked with Beth for years, the way she's piecing information together would thoroughly confuse me. However, after all this time, I can interpret every line and dot perfectly.

Bloody hell, Beth has gone all out here. There's even a picture of Glen, and some hurriedly scribbled words that hint to a possible involvement. I would love to outright dismiss the suspicion, but I can't—I won't. If Beth thinks there's something up, well, let me just say it like this, you'll never catch me betting against her.

Taking in a huge gulp of air, I close my eyes. Next week I need to have a proper talk with Beth and... and apologise. When I left without warning or explanation, she stepped up big time. While I've been away, the student has become the master, and I can't let my pride impede recognising that.



I've just finished mashing the potatoes when the doorbell chimes, and after wiping my hands on the tea towel slung over my shoulder, I rush to open the door and let Lily in.

As soon as I got back from Dirty Diamonds, I texted her to check if she still wanted to come over, and she did. After a shower I began on the food, trying not to think about where

the bloody hell Caitlin is, and why she hasn't been back here at all.

“Everything looks the same,” Lily says, handing me her long, dark grey coat as soon as she's inside.

My breath hitches when I see what she's wearing beneath it. The long-sleeved, dark-green dress looks like it's painted on her, perfectly displaying her curves. That's not what has me grinding my teeth together while wishing she was wearing something else. Caitlin has a dress just like it, and my mind picks the reminder as an excuse to assault me with pictures of my niece writhing on top of my face, below me... reminding me of her perfect and addictive moans. My cock jerks in my slacks, as everything about my night with her comes back.

“Are you okay?” Lily asks, and I nod curtly.

“Can I get you something to drink?” I ask, my voice low and gravelly.

With a hair toss worthy of L'Oréal she looks back at me and raises a perfectly shaped eyebrow. “Whatever you're having.”

Lily is a beautiful woman, so why is my cock becoming flaccid when I look at her? She's practically sex on legs. Even her sultry tone should make it move... just a little. I keep willing my appendage to react to something—or someone—other than memories of Caitlin.

In the kitchen I pour two generous glasses of wine and hand one to Lily. While I plate up our dinner, she lights the candles

on the table and sits down. Even though it isn't the first time she's been here, I think it's the first time we've been alone.

After bringing the plates over, I sit down across from her. Right now I'm bloody regretting that I didn't remove the candles, because they give the illusion that this is a date. Yes, Lily is a very attractive woman, but she's not for me. I've never once thought about her as anything more than the twins' mum, and a friend. I owe her for the countless times she's helped me, that'll never be forgotten. But beyond possibly a friendship, I have no interest in her.

It doesn't take long before the conversation changes from superficial to personal. Lily tells me all about how lonely she is now that the twins have one foot out the door. They may technically still live there, but apparently they spend more time out than at the house. Luckily, The Chic Strand is as busy as ever, which keeps her more than busy.

"I guess I just miss my family," she says. There's a wistful lilt to her tone as she answers my question about how she's really doing. "I come from a big family that's thick as thieves. Growing up, there was always a cousin, uncle, or sibling around, so it's weird to know my days with my family are numbered. Camden and Connor will find something closer to campus soon, and when they do... I'll be alone for the first time in my life."

Her words make me remember she isn't originally from around here. I guess she met her husband when she was travelling here in England when she was younger, and then she

decided to stay in his hometown, Briarwood, when she became pregnant with the twins. Now, after a few glasses of wine, her Australian accent is leaking through more and more, and she even uses slang I only know because of Baz.

“I was so angry I threw my thong at him,” she seethes, making it clear I’ve just missed whatever she said.

A laugh bubbles to the surface, and before I can swallow it back, it breaks free. “Your thong?” I ask, lifting an eyebrow. “As in your knickers or your flip-flops?”

I’m pretty sure she means the footwear, but at least she looks more relaxed as she laughs at my question. “Shit, yeah, I forget you call them flip-flops.” She laughs some more before spearing me with her ocean blue eyes. “How do you know what thong is slang for?” Her tone is almost accusatory, which is weird.

I mean, she met Baz at Caitlin’s eighteenth birthday, and I’m pretty sure they’ve at least been in the same room once or twice throughout the years. She eases up when I remind her of my Aussie mate, but there’s a weird look in her eyes I can’t quite decipher.

“This is nice,” Lily says, polishing off the rest of her food. Without taking her eyes off mine, she licks her lips suggestively. “When did you learn to cook?” She quirks a brow, and I can’t help laughing.

Throughout the years, most of the home-cooked meals I’ve had with my nieces came from Lily’s kitchen and not ours, making the question fair.

“I learned when I moved to the States at sixteen. Without a lot of money, I had to get creative in the kitchen.” A smile spreads across my lips as I remember all the times I burned even the simplest of dishes.

Lily shoots me an incredulous look. “Why all the pizza and takeaway while Caitlin and Avery were growing up if you knew how to cook?”

I run my index finger around the rim of the wineglass while contemplating the question. Truthfully, it was easier to accept Lily’s food and do takeout than finding the time to run Dirty Diamonds and the Diamond Crew, go shopping, pick the girls up, entertain them, bathe them, cook, tidy up, and get them ready for the next day.

Thinking back on it now is changing my perspective, and all my reasons are nothing more than shitty excuses. Lily did all those things while also making enough food to bring us leftovers the next day. I’m feeling embarrassed as I realise I took her generosity for granted.

I clear my throat and meet her gaze. “It was easier,” I admit.

Now it’s Lily’s turn to laugh, and she does until unshed tears make her eyes gleam. She leans forward, placing her small hand on top of mine. “I’m just messing with you,” she hiccups, swiping one finger beneath both eyes. “I get it, Dante. You didn’t plan for a family, and you definitely didn’t grow into it with them. One day life handed you those two beautiful girls, and life as you knew it changed forever.” Her laughter

dies more and more with each word, and towards the end she's almost whispering.

I swallow harshly as I remember what it was like. But no matter how hard I try, I can't remember a single time where I didn't love having them around—especially Caitlin. That girl never liked being away from me for too long, and the more attached she became, well... I guess the truth is, I did as well.

Once I picked her up from school before her day was over simply because I missed her. And every time she wasn't with me, I considered her potential reaction. Blimey, I let her become my true north. Caitlin never liked white because it reminded her of the lightning streaking across the sky, so I spent a week practically sleepless to paint the entire house after Caitlin and Avery picked the colours. Caitlin hates boiled vegetables, so we never had vegetable soup. In short, if Caitlin didn't like it, I kept it out of our house.

A warm feeling spreads in my chest as I take my mental trip down memory lane. Bloody hell, how can I have been so blind? Everything I've done since moving back to Briarwood all those years ago was with my beautiful, forbidden niece in mind.

I'm pulled out of my thoughts as Lily slowly slides her foot up my leg. "Are you seeing anyone?" she asks, her voice low.

While I like that Lily isn't playing any games—the benefit of being the same age—it still doesn't feel... right. I'm pretty sure that if I lean towards her, she'll close her eyes and kiss

me. Hell, she might even come up to my bedroom and give me an epic night to remember.

“It’s not a trick question.” She licks her lips slowly, deliberately. “We’re both adults, so why not help each other out?” She slowly stands up and walks to my side of the table.

Reaching me, she places her hands on my shoulders, and I feel my Adam’s apple bob in my throat as I swallow harshly. “Lily,” I rasp.

Her touch isn’t repulsive or anything of the sort, but it’s unwelcome, and it’s wrong. Blimey, I never should have invited her over. Or maybe I should have made it clearer that this isn’t a date, and that I’m not looking for anything beyond casual conversation.

“I don’t think this is a good idea.”

Lily laughs huskily. “In that case, let’s do something really stupid.”

XXI



OceanofPDF.com

Storm

My eyes flutter open as I stretch in my bed. My bedroom is completely blanketed in darkness, and I curse under my breath as I reach for my phone. The brightness of the display feels like it's stabbing my eyes, and I'm surprised to see it's 10 pm. Crikey, I've slept for almost six hours straight.

Awesome as it is to be around Clara, it's also draining. That girl has too much energy on a normal day. Now, factor in the sugar from the cakes and sodas we had so we could celebrate her teddy's birthday... well, the girls were all bouncing off the walls when I said goodbye while smiling slyly at Beth who was left to handle them alone.

As soon as I came home, I went to lie down, but I only meant to close my eyes for an hour or so—definitely not for six hours straight.

With a groan, I force myself to get up and change into my PJ shorts. The jeans I've slept in have left a judgmental dent on the skin of my stomach, I even have a round mark from the button. Feeling too hot I strip out of my sweater, but keep the top beneath it on. After ridding myself of my bra, I try and fail at putting my socks on in the dark.

My eyes water as I switch the light on, the brightness hurts. "That's what you get for sleeping the day away," I say admonishingly. Then I put the socks on, careful not to slip again.

I wiggle my toes, loving the feel of my black, fluffy, comfy socks. When I'm just me, I enjoy dressing down. Between my job at Dirty Diamonds and dating Alan, this is one of the few times where I feel I can truly be myself—messy hair and all.

As I exit my room, I immediately notice that Dante's door is open, and I frown in confusion. I usually keep the door closed so I don't have to look at the emptiness. However, I go in there from time to time... looking around and... well... yeah, sometimes I sleep in his bed. When I feel like I'm going crazy, or need a reminder. I always regret it afterwards, but that doesn't stop me from coming back for more.

My blood runs cold as I reach the top of the stairs, voices carrying up here. Shite, I'm not alone. I suck my bottom lip between my teeth and bite into the tender flesh, contemplating what to do. The only weapon I have is a pocket knife, which, ironically, is not in my shorts pockets.

Fuck!

I look back at my room, mentally calculating how long it would take me to go back to look for it. With a head shake I abandon that plan because no matter how long, it's too long. If someone has broken in, I don't have a lot of time, and the element of surprise might be my best friend.

As quietly as possible I sneak down the stairs, stopping and waiting with bated breath every time there's the slightest creak. Listening as intently as possible, I feel confident whoever has broken in is in the kitchen. Only... all the lights

are on, and soft music is playing. Those aren't really things you'd consider typical for a burglary, right?

Curiosity gets the better of me, and instead of running out of the house I creep closer to the kitchen. I'm practically crouching as I peek around the alcove, and... Dante... my breath falters, my body running hot and cold at the same time.

He's back.

My bloody uncle is sitting at the dining table. I'm so surprised it takes me a few minutes until I notice he isn't alone. Between his legs is none other than my former boss Lily Bennett herself. Dante's hands are resting on her slim waist, and she's leaning against him, steadying herself by holding onto his shoulders.

“What the fuck is going on here?” I scream in outrage. Anger surges as I take in the scene in front of me.

They both turn to me, their jaws slack. “Caitlin!” As if they've rehearsed it, they say my name at the same time while wearing twin expressions of shock. If anger wasn't pulsating through my veins, while my poor heart pounds so fast it feels like it might break through my ribcage, I might have found it funny. I might even have laughed—but it's not funny, and I'm definitely not laughing.

When the hell did he get back?

What's he doing here with Lily?

Is he... are they... while I was upstairs, sleeping.

Standing, I cock my head to the side, unable to tear my gaze away from their intimate embrace. Before I can stop myself, my feet carry me forwards, right towards the loved up couple.

“Get out!” I snarl, pointing right at Lily. “Get the fuck out of my home you slag.”

The stricken expression on her face doesn't awaken my sympathy, if anything, it makes my rage burn brighter. How bloody dare she come into my home and... and... I don't fucking know.

“Caitlin!” I'm not oblivious to the anger in Dante's voice.

“What's the matter with you, Caitlin?” Lily gasps, her hand on her chest like she's steadying herself. “I-we...” Shaking her head she looks between me and Dante with a contemplative look in her wide, blue eyes.

I curl my upper lip in a wordless snarl, not looking away from her. I've always looked up to Lily, but right now, I don't harbour any warm or fuzzy feelings for her. As I watch her gather her things while mumbling words I don't pay attention to, I do feel a sliver of guilt for speaking to her like that, but it's not enough to apologise or avert my hostile glare.

When Dante gets up and takes one step towards her, I hiss, “Sit the fuck back down.” Surprise that he listens to me shoots through me, but I do my best to not let it show.

I wait until the front door is slammed shut, and I hear Lily drive away. Then I spin on Dante, baring my teeth in a not-so

pleasant smile. “Welcome back,” I see the. “I trust you noticed I’ve had the door fixed.”

Dante looks at me like he’s seeing me for the first time, and his intense stare makes goosebumps appear on my skin.

“What are you talking about?” I hate that my nipples pebble, responding to his gruff tenor.

Throwing my head back I force a laugh. “Oh, I’m sorry. Did you forget you fled so fast there was a *you* shaped hole in the door?” I wipe my palms on my black PJ shorts, hating how clammy they are.

I’ve lost count of how many times I’ve imagined what it would be like to see him again, and as he’s sitting in front of me, in the flesh, I can’t remember any of the witty or scathing things I’ve thought up. My mind is a black hole, and all I can recall is what it felt like to have his hands on my body. Have his tongue worship me, bringing me pleasure beyond anything I thought was possible.

“Listen—”

“No,” I say, interrupting whatever he was about to say. Being this close to him is what I’ve dreamt about, however now that it’s reality, I can’t handle it.

Spinning on my heel, I sprint up the stairs without another word. Beyond knowing I have to get away, I don’t have a plan in mind. Though it’s pretty clear what I need to do—I need to get away. Out of this house and away from the one-sided magnetic pull I feel as soon as I’m in his presence.

While I'm screaming on the inside, I force myself to swallow the sob that's threatening to spill free. I've already cried an ocean of tears over him, he doesn't deserve more.

Fuck!

He left without saying goodbye. Why am I surprised he's now back without letting me know?

I barely take one step into my room before I'm being shoved all the way in. I whirl around and come face-to-face with a furious Dante.

"Excuse you," I seethe. I deliberately don't look at his face because whenever I do, the butterflies in my stomach flutter up a typhoon all over.

"What game are you playing this time, Caitlin?"

I gasp in surprise at his forceful tone, and forget my plan to not look at him. "W-what?"

Dante doesn't answer my question. Instead, he looks down his nose at me, like I've done something wrong. His nostrils flare, and his hands are balled into fists. He takes a step closer to me, and on pure instinct, I take one back.

This continues until my back hits the wall, and he wastes no time caging me in with his arms and body. As he bends his neck, his face is so close to mine I can feel his breath fan across my cheek. My heartbeat thunders in my ears, and my body is practically humming with the electricity he's exuding.

"I'll ask you *one* more time," he says so low I almost don't hear him. Then he pulls back so he can look into my eyes

while the tip of his tongue darts out and moistens his lips. “What. Game. Are. You. Playing?”

His growled accusation makes my temper flare, and I push as hard as I can against his chest, miffed when he doesn't budge the slightest. I huff in frustration. “What game am I playing? I'm not the one who's pinning *you* against the wall.”

The smirk that spreads across his lips makes me even angrier. How dare he find this amusing? And how bloody dare he do this to me after what happened last time we were alone in this house? As the memory unbidden plays like a movie in my mind, my knickers become damp and my breath falters. My body remembers all too well what it was like.

Dante chuckles knowingly as I look away from him, and hate that he knows what I'm thinking about.

“Why did you kick Lily out?” he asks, his voice deceptively soft.

“Why was she here?” I want to slap myself for asking because I have a feeling I don't want to know the answer.

Dante makes a noise in the back of his throat. “I needed her here, so I'd stay away from you.”

His words might as well have been a punch to the gut for the effect they have on me. My gaze snaps to his, and I open my mouth to... I honestly don't know. But before I can get any words out, Dante moves down and captures my lips with his.

XXII



OceanofPDF.com

Storm

The kiss is bruising, painful as our teeth clash, and everything all wrapped into one. His tongue delves into my mouth, and I moan when he wraps a hand around my nape and squeezes.

I lose track of time as he slowly devours me, all I know is that when he pulls back and rests his forehead against mine, it's too soon and an unhappy sound escapes me.

“Fuck!”

My heart plummets to my stomach at his angry-sounding curse, and I try to prepare myself for his rejection. I will not be taken off guard again. In fact, I contemplate kneeing him in the goods and retreating before he can leave me *again*.

“I know I shouldn't...” The words are the verbal equivalent of having a bucket of cold water thrown over my body that feels entirely too hot.

The feeling of rejection disappears when he kisses and licks his way from my earlobe to the corner of my mouth. I tangle my hands in his blond hair when his lips are back on mine, holding him firmly against me while our tongues stroke each other.

One of Dante's hands is on my arse and the other around my throat, keeping me in place. His hips dig into mine, making sure I can't move away from the wall. My inner muscles squeeze around nothing and my folds become slick with need,

responding to our kiss and his hard cock that's digging into me.

Even if he wasn't holding me in place, I'm too weak to move away from him. And I don't mean that physically, nope, as soon as his all too familiar scent invaded my nostrils, I was done for. Smoke, citrus, and him... that's my kryptonite. I want to bathe in it, roll around on top of him until his scent is as much part of me as it is him.

While our tongues battle, I wind my arms around his neck and arch my back, pushing my boobs against the hard planes of his chest and my arse is crushing against his hand. Dante groans and squeezes my arse harder while moving his hips in a grinding motion against me.

"Dante..." I'm unable to keep my answering moan locked down.

He stills for a moment, then he makes a sound deep in his throat and pushes me harder against the wall. Releasing my arse, he moves his hand to my front and cups one of my tits. With deft fingers, he finds my nipple and squeezes the tight bud through my clothes.

Feeling the clear evidence of his reaction to me, I boldly take his hand and move it to the apex of my thighs. My heart hammers in my chest, nerves and arousal warring, as I say, "I want to feel you inside me."

I tell myself it's okay if he pulls back. Even though it isn't, it's what I mentally chant for the excruciating minutes where nothing happens. Well, almost nothing. As he pulls back, I

slide a finger across my swollen lips and cheeks that feel raw from his beard.

“Look at me, Caitlin.” I don’t know when I closed my eyes, but my eyes fly open at his raspy command. “Are you sure?”

I nod and bite down on my lip to stop it from trembling.

Dante moves his hand to my face and gently cups my chin, then he pulls at my lip until I release it. “No one gets to bite this plump lip but me.” The gravel in his voice makes my folds slicker, and I squeeze my thighs together to ease the pressure. “I want to hear you say it. Tell me what you want me to do to you.”

I inhale sharply, finding the demand so bloody hot it takes me a moment to remember how to use my words. I wrap my hand around his wrist, tugging until he lets go of my face. Then I guide two of his fingers between my lips and let my tongue snake around them.

Without taking my eyes off of him, I say, “I want these...” I lick around the two fingers again. “Inside me. You need to feel just how wet I am.”

It’s so not like me to be this brazen, and I can’t say I know where the words are coming from. As Dante growls in approval, I preen under the carnal sound. Then I move his hand beneath my sleep shorts and knickers so he’s touching my bare pussy.

“Crikey, Caitlin...” Interrupting himself, he slants his lips to mine again.

He spreads my pussy lips wide with two fingers, using the pad of his thumb to circle my clit. I whimper into his mouth and gyrate my hips, impatient to feel him inside me again. Dante doesn't make me wait for long before he eases first one and then another finger into my wet heat.

I moan into his mouth while he fingers me so fast it doesn't take long before I feel fire building in my lower stomach. When he kisses his way across my face and down my neck, I reach for his pants, but he stops me from undoing them.

Dante chuckles at my disgruntled disapproval. "Not tonight Caitlin. Please just let me make you feel good." When he swirls my needy nub after each word, I'm unable to deny him.

With a bite to the shell of my ear, he thrusts his fingers back into my pussy, and I'm high on his groans and the wet sounds he creates every time he pumps his digits back into me.

I move my hands beneath his sweatshirt and dig my nails into his back as my legs shake. As I moan his name, his lips descend on mine again, keeping every sound private between us.

"Oh... God..." I bite down on his lip to muffle my sounds as he creates an inferno between my legs, and if he wasn't keeping me upright against the wall, the magnitude of my orgasm would make me fall to the floor.

As I come down from my high, I realise two things. The first is that Dante has pulled back and is watching me through dark, hooded eyes. The second is that I penetrated his lip with my teeth, and iron assaults my taste buds. Unthinkingly, I run

a finger across my lips when I see the small pebble of blood on his, and before I can stop myself or really think about what I'm doing, I lick the blood on the pad of my finger.

Dante growls low in his throat. "You're so bloody beautiful when you come." Without blinking or looking away, he brings the fingers that were just inside me to his mouth and sucks my wetness from them. "And now you've marked me."

I shudder at the intensity in his gaze and words. "Marked you?" I squeak. "I-it was an accident."

"Next time I'll mark you back." Even though I should feel self-conscious, I let the promise wash over me and a lazy smile spreads across my lips. That was definitely something else, and so much better than I could have imagined. No one else has ever made me feel like that.

No one else...

Bloody hell, what am I doing? This shouldn't have happened, and there definitely won't be a next time.

I try to make the thoughts vanish as Dante's lips are once again pressed firmly against mine. But I can't make out with him like this—not when... no, scratch that—not *ever*.

Once abandoned, twice shy!

My body wars with itself as I simultaneously try to pull away while also attempting to deepen the kiss. It's like I'm drowning and have lost sense of what way is up.

It's not until Dante pulls back with a horrified look on his face, one finger reverently swiping beneath my eyes, that I

notice I'm crying.

“Fuck, I'm so sorry,” he says, anguish palpable in every word. “Caitlin, please...” He cuts himself off before verbalising what he's pleading for.

My heart contracts painfully as I look at him. He looks almost as horrified as he did after... “It's my fault,” I whisper.

I close my eyes so I don't have to see him run from me again, but to my shock, he gently palms my cheek.

“No!” The one word carries so much weight. “It was never your fault. If you want to assign blame, it was mine.” He swallows audibly. “I need you to know that the only thing I regret about that night is that I didn't know it was you at first. That's not how your first time should have been. And I regret nothing about tonight.” The last part is said with such force I can't help but believe him.

I sob in response to his words. What the hell is he trying to say? Even if he has forgiven me for forcing myself on him, that doesn't make tonight—or his disappearing act—okay.

The words should lessen the pain in my heart, but they don't. They bring on the possibility of *'what if'* and I can't have that metaphorical door open.

“I have a boyfriend,” I say, bringing us back to the present. “I-we can't do this. You're too late,” I choke out, trying to keep the regret and longing out of my voice.

When I push him this time, he lets me, and without looking back, I almost run to the bathroom, slamming the door after

me.

I sink to the floor, hiding my face in my hands. There's no hiding my sobs, though, and much to my shame, they tumble out of me. Tears streak my cheeks and obscure my vision. What the bloody hell just happened?

It's not the physical act I'm questioning, that's the only part I'm sure about. The rest... I don't know what to think or believe.

Why is he only back now? And what does he want? A small part of me is wondering if he came back for me. I shut that shite down before the thought can properly take root, because that's beyond wishful thinking.

He may feel the same pull I do, but that changes nothing, does it? He still left me high and dry, completely uncaring about what would happen to me. Wham bam thank you ma'am. I know it's not fair to think like that, but I can't help it. The lacerations he left in his wake are more than skin deep, they're soul-deep.

I ignore Dante's knocks that quickly turn to pounds and kicks against the bathroom door just as I pretend I don't hear his pleas for me to open said door. It saddens me, and even though I want nothing more than to go out there and throw myself at him, I can't do it.

Because one thing is clearer than ever before. We can't do this. It can only end in heartache and I'm honestly not sure I can survive losing him a second time.

XXIII



OceanofPDF.com

Dante

“All I want is some bloody coffee,” I snap at the insufferable woman who’s lounging in the employee kitchen at Dirty Diamonds.

I know my foul mood isn’t her doing, but she’s not making it any better by constantly checking me out—and pressing her tits against my arm certainly didn’t help.

“Are you sure there’s nothing else you want?” she asks for the fifth time, batting her eyelashes so much I’m almost worried she’s having a bloody stroke.

Is excessively opening and closing your eyes one of the signs?

Carving a hand through my blond hair, I sigh and reach for the coffee pot. Deliberately turning away from her while I pour the dark liquid into my thermos cup. Giving up, the woman spins around and leaves me, but not without muttering some choice words under her breath.

Crikey, it’s not even been a week and I’m already putting the people around here on edge. I shouldn’t even be in the employee rooms. I should stay in my office and wait for Beth to show up with the tempting Storm.

What are the odds that the only woman I’ve felt as attracted to as I do to my niece is working on a secret operation? It’s just my damn luck. Maybe the spell will be broken when I

officially meet Storm instead of looking at her through the glass. One can only hope.

I walk back to my office and open my laptop, it's no use, though. My mind keeps replaying the events with Caitlin, and... I swallow thickly when I recall the way she bolted and hid away from me. She was into it, I know she was. So why the bloody hell did she cry? And run like I'd hurt her?

No amount of cajoling or begging could make her come out. It wasn't until I went to my room and passed out from exhaustion that she ventured outside the bathroom. She wasn't in her room when I woke up—or anywhere else in the house.

My fists ball as I consider for the millionth time that she probably ran to that boyfriend of hers, and I hate the jealousy that stirs to life.

I know I don't deserve Caitlin's forgiveness, especially not without asking—*begging*—for it. But how the fuck can I do that if she hides from me? Fuck it. When the meeting is over, I'll track her down and make her listen to me whether or not she wants to. My cock twitches in approval as I contemplate all the ways I can force her to listen to me, and I...

The knock on my door interrupts me.

“Dante? Are you in there?” Beth's soft voice reaches me, effectively shutting down any and all thoughts of what I want to do to my niece.

Blimey, I really am mad.

“Come in.” As soon as I say the words, Beth marches into my office—alone. “Where’s Storm?” I ask, raising an eyebrow.

“Good morning to you too,” Beth chirps, looking so happy I might just vomit.

I curb the need to ask if the beaming smile is caused by a good fucking. Considering her past and the fact she’s never touched anyone like that, it wouldn’t be a good idea. I might be in a foul mood, but that doesn’t mean I should be that cruel just because my misery wants company.

“She’ll be here soon. Clara was especially needy, so Storm wanted to read her a story before leaving.”

I mumble something, I’m not even sure what and when Beth asks me to repeat it I’m half convinced it was just random words. I really need to get my bloody head in the game.

Meeting Storm is about more than satisfying my curiosity. I need to make sure she’s able and loyal. It’s not that I don’t trust Beth’s opinion, but for my own sake, I want to know it’s a choice I feel good about.

“So, are you going to interview her when she shows up?” Beth asks.

I chuckle. “Something like that,” I say, acting like she didn’t just read my mind. Straightening, I look at Beth and decide I need to be completely honest. “You’ve done a great job while I’ve been gone—”

Beth smiles warmly. “I had an excellent teacher.”

Holding my hand up, I silence her. “This isn’t about our past, Beth. I want you to know that I’m immensely proud of you, and just as impressed. I think I’m caught up on everything, and your attention to details as well as newly developed strategies is... well, it’s admirable.”

Blimey, I sound like a bloody formal prick. It all sounds over-rehearsed and insincere.

“What I’m trying to say is, I’m not here to question Storm. You trust her, so I do too. That doesn’t mean I don’t want to meet her, though.”

If the grin on Beth’s face is anything to go by, she’s thoroughly amused.

“That’s mighty nice of you to say, Dante. I dare say I even appreciate it,” she says, sounding as formal as I did. Then the mask breaks, and she laughs loudly. “Chin up, soldier. It’s nice to hear...” A genuine smile spreads across her face. “But as much fun as it’s been learning the ropes by not having another option after you left, I’m glad you’re back now.”

Guilt slams into me as I listen to her words. Sure, she’s careful not to sound accusatory, but the tinge of hurt is still there.

“I’m sorry, Beth.”

“Did you have a good reason to leave like that?” she asks.

I bark out a hollow laugh. “I wish I did, but no. Not considering what I left behind.”

She nods curtly, all traces of amusement wiped from her face. It makes me feel like I just hit a new all-time low. What the bloody hell was I thinking? Beth hasn't trusted many people in her life, and every single one has let her down eventually—myself included.

Looking at her, I make a vow to myself, I will make this right sooner or later. Not for me—okay, maybe a little to lessen my guilty conscience—but she deserves better, and dammit, I will give it to her.

Beth's phone vibrates on my desk where she placed it, and I watch as she lifts it and says that Storm is here. Getting up, she turns towards my door, and I tilt my head when she spins back around to face me.

“One more thing, and this wasn't in the reports I gave you...” she pauses, and swallows nervously. “I didn't know how to handle it, and you were never available on the phone... but... the Black Orchid has returned.”

My face doesn't betray the shock I feel at her words, and neither does my voice when I tell her to get Storm and we'll discuss this later.

The Black Orchid... the hacker that likes to leave her calling card in the systems she breaks through. A shiver runs down my spine, which is very unlike me. Not knowing what the person wants is alarming, and I bloody hate being so clueless.

Whoever it is, they have skills I can barely comprehend. I know that they've breached our security, and even Baz's

encrypted messages, which should be almost impossible. Yes, I know that for every alarm or security system there's at least one person who can circumvent it, and I'd probably be less worried if the person had made a claim. However, all they do is leave their calling card and... even help.

Once one of my guys couldn't get in to turn a security camera off. The Black Orchid could, though. Proving in the process he or she knew exactly where we were. I know I should probably be relieved the person has so far only acted like an ally. But how much can you trust someone who's faceless? Someone who knows who you are, where you are... but you don't know them.

I pull myself from my thoughts and nod at Beth, her hand hovering over the door handle. As soon as I give her the 'okay' she opens the door, and in walks...

"Caitlin?" I gasp, shooting out of my chair so fast it falls to the floor.

My niece pales in front of me, immediately tensing.

Beth looks between us, her eyebrows furrowed, but I can practically see the gears and cogs turning in her head.

"D-Dante?" Caitlin croaks. "I-I..."

Have I gone insane? It's entirely possible I've lost my bloody marbles and am seeing things. Because Caitlin can't be here. She. Can't. Be. Storm.

No!

No!!

“What’s going on here?” Beth asks, suspicion and uncertainty clear in her tone. After closing the door behind my niece, Beth leans against it, making it clear no one is leaving. “What am I missing?”

Caitlin looks like she can barely stand, and there’s a sheen of sweat covering her forehead. The dark sweater she’s wearing makes her look paler than usual... crikey, I shouldn’t be checking her out. The semi I’m sporting in my pants is the epitome of bad timing, and I discreetly lean across the desk to hide the evidence of what just being in the same room does to me.

That and the fact I want to bend her over the table, and spank her ass until my handprint is burned into her skin and she can’t sit down for at least a week. I shake my head in an attempt at banishing the thoughts I really shouldn’t be having right now. After clearing my throat, I look at my niece and lift an eyebrow.

“So she doesn’t know?” I growl. Even though Caitlin’s horror-stricken face tells me all I need to know, I still want to hear her say it.

A pregnant silence falls across the room, blanketing us all. I’m still locked in a battle of wills that’s being played out via eye contact, and Caitlin isn’t looking away, just as she isn’t speaking up. Slowly, her expression morphs from shock to shame, and then... there we go. Hello rage. I have no explanation as to why her rage makes me smirk, but it does

and I can't conceal it. My lips pull back, slowly revealing my teeth.

“What are *you* doing here?” Caitlin spits, fire shooting from her eyes. “Here to shag more whores and burn...” She slaps a hand over her mouth.

I watch silently as her eyes widen, and she slowly takes one step after another backwards. Shaking her head, she keeps muttering ‘no’ over and over, like she doesn't want to believe whatever conclusion she's come to.

While watching her, I frown. What the bloody hell does she mean I'm here to shag anyone? And burn what? None of it makes sense. Unless... does she know Sugar used to work here? Is that who she's referring to?

“Let me out,” Caitlin says. Her back is to me so I can only imagine the pleading look she must be giving Beth.

However, the other woman doesn't move. In fact, she looks as furious as Caitlin did just moments ago. “I'll ask one. More. Time,” Beth grinds out. “What the hell am I missing here?” Looking between us, she narrows her eyes, and I can see the exact moment the penny drops. “Caitlin?” she gasps, sounding like she doesn't believe it.

My niece's shoulders sag and she makes a strangled sound that makes my heart hurt for her. Blimey, I don't want her to be in any kind of pain, yet I can't let her go. I need to understand just what the fuck is going on here.

The two women haven't seen each other since Caitlin was eight, so it's really no wonder neither of them remember the other. I've always done my best to keep the Diamond Crew and Dirty Diamonds away from my nieces, and that includes everyone I work with.

Once in the past, I had to leave urgently in the middle of the night, and I called Beth to come to my house and stay until I came back. Unfortunately, my business took longer than I'd liked, and when Caitlin woke up in the morning, it wasn't me that was there to greet her.

OceanofPDF.com

XXIV



OceanofPDF.com

Dante

“Leave us,” I growl. Even though the words are meant for Beth, it’s Caitlin I’m looking at.

The way her chest is rising and falling rapidly has me hard as a bloody rock, and I need to be alone with her now. If not, I’m honestly not sure I can be held responsible for my actions.

Wrenching my gaze away from my niece, I force myself to look at Beth. Her face is one big question mark, her chin is lifted and I know that the ‘*no*’ I don’t want to hear is right on the tip of her tongue.

“I need to speak with... Storm.” I smirk at how perfect that name is for her, and I make a mental note to ask why she picked that as her alias.

“You’ve got to be joking,” Beth huffs. “I’m not going anywhere—”

Interrupting her refusal to leave, I spit, “It wasn’t a bloody question, Beth. This is between her and me.” Out of the corner of my eyes, I notice Caitlin steeling her spine. “Do you have a problem being alone with me?” I only ask to appease Beth, I know she’ll fight me before leaving someone she perceives to be unsafe.

“N-no.” Caitlin sounds anything but sure of her answer as her voice cracks, nerves getting the better of her.

“Storm—”

This time it isn't me interrupting Beth, it's my niece. Assuring her she'll be okay with me, and hearing her say that does something to me. My heartbeat picks up, and I get the urge to hug her—squeeze her against me. Not only to feel her luscious and generous curves, more so I can make sure she's okay.

How the bloody hell did Caitlin get caught up in all this shite? It's a question I want answered, and she's not leaving my office until I know.

My cock is still awake, throbbing beneath my slacks. So when the women huddle together I don't move away from the desk, but I do lower my head to give them a sense of privacy. Honestly, I don't care what they're talking about. All that matters is that Beth buggers off, leaving me alone to talk with my niece.

Less than five minutes later, Beth walks out of my office. Though, not before giving me a few choice words, and making me promise to call her tonight or she'll hunt me down. I can't help smiling at the last part because I know she'll stay true to her word.

It's just me and Caitlin—or rather, Storm—in my office now. I finally straighten as the door closes behind Beth, no longer needing to hide the tent in my slacks. I lick my dry lips and roll my shirt sleeves up.

“So...” I say, trailing off and leaving the one word in the air as bait, hoping she'll bite so I can finally get some answers.

Ca—Storm nervously shuffles her feet, but surprisingly she doesn't avert her gaze either. Her sharp, green eyes bore into my blue ones, making me feel like we're the only two people on earth. When she lifts her left hand and cups her chin as though she's thinking long and hard, I throw my head back and laugh. Like, really laugh.

Blimey, the answer was right there... in front of me and I didn't notice it this weekend. On her middle finger is the tattoo I admired on the woman in the booth.

“What?” She snaps, watching me through narrowed eyes. “Why the hell are you laughing?”

The fact that my amusement seems to piss her off further makes it impossible to contain my laughter. She's right to question me because there's nothing funny about this at all, yet I can't stop myself.

“It's not funny,” I agree through hiccups. Rolling her eyes, she turns around and makes for the door. The action has my laughter subsiding. “No, you don't,” I growl, following her. Just as she pushes down the handle, I slam my palm against the door so she can't get out. “You're not going anywhere until we talk.”

“I'm not your bloody prisoner, Dante,” she hisses, venom coating her words. “The day you left, you lost the right to ask me anything, let alone make demands.” While laughing scornfully, she pulls, still trying to open the door.

“So you go by Storm now.” My tone is deceptively soft, and it has the desired effect when she lets go of the bloody handle.

“It’s fitting. You always were my perfect storm.” I manoeuvre myself so I’m between her and the exit.

“Let me go!” Despite the defiance on her face, the statement lacks the punch from before so I simply shake my head.

“Not until we talk.”

I don’t know how long we stand there, no words spoken as we simply look at each other. I’m content waiting her out if that’s what it takes to get her to talk, and I don’t miss the way she’s subtly checking me out—or the way her nostrils flare as her eyes run down my body.

She might not *want* to want me, that doesn’t change the desire burning in her eyes. And I bloody love knowing I’m not too late. At least, I hope I’m not.

“Cait—”

“It’s Storm now. My. Name. Is. Storm.”

Something about the way she says it makes me think it’s not just her work name. Blimey, has she really changed her legal name? And why pick... oh! Pride fills me as I realise my girl—*wait, my girl?*—has reinvented herself, taking the name of the very thing she used to fear.

I lick my suddenly dry lips, hating that I wasn’t here for her—hating how shortsighted I was. No longer able to stomach the distance between us, I take her hand in mine and pull her flush against me.

Gently cupping her cheek, I finally say what I should have said two years ago. “I’m sorry. I’m so, so sorry for leaving like

that.” Tears gather in her green eyes, and when one falls from her dark lashes, I bend down and capture the salty water with my lips. “So, so sorry,” I repeat.

Storm makes a strangled sound, but she doesn’t pull away. Instead, she buries her face against my chest while her body shakes against mine. Wrapping my arms around her, I hold her while she cries. Even though each sob is like a stab to my heart, I don’t try to stop her. She needs to get this out, and I need to be here for her this time.

“I waited for you for hours,” she croaks when she’s no longer trembling.

Knowing this is going to take a while—the rest of my life if that’s what she needs—I pull us to the floor, positioning her so she’s sitting sideways in my lap, her face resting against the wet patch she’s created on my chest.

“Even when the water turned cold, I didn’t get out. I kept telling myself you’d be back soon. At first I tried to pretend I didn’t hear the front door slam, and when that didn’t work, I convinced myself you went to get something from the shop. But you didn’t, did you?”

I feel like bloody scum as I say, “No, I didn’t.” I can’t lie to her. Not now, not if I want her to be honest—and I very much want that. Guess it’s time for me to man up and do the same.

“You literally ran away from me.” Her voice cracks, her bottom lip wobbles. When she bites down on the plump flesh, I move my thumb to her mouth. I gently tug at her lip until she releases it.

“I did,” I confirm gruffly.

Crikey, sitting here and listening to this is harder than I ever could have imagined. That’s not the worst part, though. Oh, no. As much as it guts me, the toughest part is imagining the pain I’ve caused the woman in my arms. She’s still so affected that it’s hard to imagine a time where she might not even be able to get out of bed, let alone think about me. Then again, maybe I’m giving myself way too much credit.

I press my lips against the crown of her head, loving the way she shivers against me at the small action. Even though I shouldn’t let it, it feeds my ego. Knowing that she reacts to me so easily is addictive, and I have every intention of making Caitlin—Storm—my drug of choice.

We stay on the floor until her breathing evens out, and her body becomes lax. The more she relaxes in my arms, the more I tense. Knowing that I can’t put the talk off forever, I mentally try to prepare myself. Despite knowing I’m back for her, I still have no clue how to approach it. It’s not like I can just apologise for my not-so elegant disappearing act.

Then there’s the other thing... the one I have to stop myself from forcing her to talk about. How the hell did my niece get involved in the very world I’ve done my best to keep her shielded from?

“What now?” she asks. All bravado is gone and I hate that she sounds unsure. “I meant what I said the other night. You’re. Too. Late.”

I fail at swallowing down my growl of disagreement. I'm not too late, I can't be. The years apart have taught me something important, something I'm a fool for not realising earlier. In the past I grew accustomed to her presence, her touch. It was as vital a part of my life as breathing, which has to be why I didn't know how much it meant to me until I no longer had it.

The fact that I'm the one who ruined what we had doesn't even matter to me anymore. All I can focus on is that I want it back, and that she's mine whether or not she knows it. Although it would be amazing if she wasn't fighting me, I'm more than willing to change her mind. In fact, I'm looking forward to it.

"Do you want to talk here or at home?" I ask, and I'm celebrating on the inside when she says she wants to go home.

Scooping her up, I carry her all the way out to my car. I don't care about the looks we get, or the way Beth pinches her lips together. None of that matters when I finally have Caitlin back in my arms.

On the short drive home we don't speak, but I squeeze her knee through most of the ride. It might be my imagination, but she seems to like my reassuring touch.

"Let's go back to where I fucked up," I say as soon as we're back in the house and I'm carrying her up the stairs.

I sit her down on my bed while I go run the bath, ignoring her weak protests and reminders of her boyfriend. She doesn't know yet that I'm aware it's a faux relationship, so I let her

ramble on. We'll get to that eventually, but first I need to right an old wrong and that begins with a bath.

OceanofPDF.com

XXV



OceanofPDF.com

Storm

Is this even reality?

Is Dante really running a bloody bath, intending to get in it?
Or is he going to scorn me again?

Laughing bitterly under my breath, I shake my head. Watching him like a hawk from the open door, I wait for the right time. I impatiently wait until he's at the other end of the bathroom, and as soon as he ventures there for the bath bomb I spring into action.

As quickly as possible I sprint from his bedroom, ignoring his shout when he realises I'm bolting. My heart hammers in my chest as I run the short distance to my room, pumping my arms and willing my legs to move faster. Right now I wish I'd taken up track running. Surely the ability to run sprints is something that's taught, and I should have paid attention.

I cry out in disappointment and anger when a hand closes around my hair, effectively forcing me to stop. Even though I know I've been caught, I try to break his hold. I'm so desperate to get free that if I had a pair of scissors in my hand, I'd cut my own hair just to get away.

"Let me go," I scream, outraged he's doing this to me.

My heart twinges in pain, and I hate the sappy organ for acting like this. My brain doesn't trust that Dante is really back. I've tried pinching myself to see if I woke up, but I

didn't. All it left me was crescent indents in my skin, so I guess I'm awake. But he has an agenda, I just know it.

Right now I can't even focus on the fact that he was at Dirty Diamonds, sitting behind that desk. The air around him pulsed with power like he's... you've got to be shitting me. My uncle, the mysterious owner. Yeah, I suspected I was there to meet the owner, but despite the prior knowledge my brain is only connecting the dots right now.

Bloody hell!

Even though I know it's important, I can't focus on that now. I need to get away, I need to gather myself and regroup. Once I'm away from Dante, I can allow myself to think about what this all means. Or maybe not... maybe I'll just do like him. Vanishing into thin air might be exactly what I need, and I'm sure Ave would welcome me to Ontario with open arms.

"Stop trying to get away from me. I won't let you." The menacing growl pulls me from my panicked thoughts and back to reality.

"No!" I try to match the vehemence in his tone, but it comes out sounding breathy and pathetic.

I dig my nails into the hand wrapped around my hair, huffing in frustration when he doesn't so much as flinch when I draw blood. His indifference stokes the embers that have laid dormant inside me since he left, and a wild feeling I don't know how to describe comes over me.

Twisting, I try to break his hold but all it does is bring me closer to him. I lift my knee, having every intention of slamming it into his junk. I smile saccharinely, but said smile is wiped away when he easily pushes my knee away, causing me to lose my balance and stumble even closer.

“You bastard,” I seethe through clenched teeth. I don’t know exactly what’s making me this angry.

It could be because he’s back and has no right to be. Or that I let him bring me to orgasm the other night. Maybe it’s caused by the fact he’s basically manhandling me to get what he wants. I don’t think that’s it, though. If I’m completely honest, it’s aimed at myself for not just wanting his touch again—I crave it.

Even while falling apart in his arms at Dirty Diamonds, my mind was busy thinking up ways to make him touch me. Fine... bloody fine. He wants this, and my body does as well. He can have my body, but he’s not getting my heart or my mind. I’ll learn to distance myself, and that way we can both have what we want.

Making myself limp is harder than I imagined, and I hate that I’m depending on him to catch me. If he doesn’t, I’ll literally face-plant into the floor. I smirk victoriously when Dante catches me, pulling me flush against his hard chest so he can support my weight.

“What are you doing?” he asks, suspicion heavy in his voice.

Instead of answering, I remain immobile, solely relying on him to hold me up.

He huffs in annoyance when I don't answer him or make any move to support my weight. "You want to play it like that?" I don't answer his question, my silence and inaction is enough to confirm that's exactly what I intend to do.

I shriek in surprise when he throws me over his shoulder like I weigh nothing, and I try not to think about how close my arse is to his face. Closing my eyes, I let him carry me to the bathroom. I don't even open my eyes when he places me on my feet, I simply make my knees buckle.

His hands on my waist steady me, stopping me from bashing my head against the hard tiles of the floor. While mumbling very creative curses, he scolds me for acting like a brat. The accusation has me smirking again, and I don't even bother to hide it. I'm pretty sure he's only saying it to get a rise out of me, so I promise myself this is all I'll give him.

"If you don't get undressed, I swear to God I'll rip the clothes from your body."

While rolling my eyes at the threat, I inwardly cringe. If he's serious, I will bloody knee him in the balls—and connect this time. He doesn't get to disappear just to come back and act like he's deserving—nay, owed—my enthusiasm and submission.

I gave him everything I had two years ago, and he threw it back in my face. After shagging me like a common slag, he left me. Having to pick the pieces of my broken heart and soul

back up, taught me a valuable lesson, one I'm not about to forget any time soon, or ever.

Dante can't be trusted with my heart, and I can't be trusted around him.

Out of my peripheral vision I see him slowly stripping out of his clothes, and no matter how much I tell myself to close my eyes, I can't seem to make my lids obey. Butterflies take flight in my stomach, and I barely notice my head turning so I can drink him in. If it's possible, Dante has become even more handsome in the time we've been apart.

His blond hair is as shaggy as ever, and he's sporting a big scruffy beard. Have his blue eyes always shone this brightly? Right now it feels like I'd be able to see them even if we were standing in pitch black. I try not to drool as I let my eyes drop, taking in his heavily defined torso.

My eyes roam over his body, not missing anything. He has a few new tattoos, one of which is the roman numerals for thirty-nine on his left biceps, just below the black ace of diamonds. The XXXIX looks good the way it's interwoven into the other designs. I wonder what that's all about, last time I saw him I'm sure he only had XXIX—which is twenty-nine.

Shaking my head, I snort in disgust at the genuine possibility that the number represents all the lasses he's shagged. I can't decide if I hope I am or aren't one of those numbers if that's what they mean.

“See something you like?” Dante asks with a taunting lilt to his tone.

I flush scarlet, embarrassed of being caught unashamedly ogling him. “Not particularly,” I say, trying to sound unimpressed. Then I purse my lips in annoyance as I remember my mental promise to not say anything or react at all.

However, as I notice his smile that doesn’t show any hints of smugness, I give in and stand up. Without looking at him I remove my clothes. I stop when I’m left in my knickers, bra, and tank top. I won’t get in with him naked. Hell, I might not get in at all. There’s still a slight chance I’ll opt to remain on the side.

The choice is taken away from me when Dante lifts me up and cradles me against his naked body. He is careful not to jostle me too much as he gets into the bathtub, placing me between his legs.

I sit there for all of ten seconds before I scoot to the other end and turn around so I’m facing him. The tub isn’t big enough to avoid his touch completely. Even though I’ve pulled my legs up so my face is resting on my knees, his legs are still on either side of me. This is a lot more tolerable than being cocooned in his embrace, feeling his hardness nestled against my bum, though.

Looking at him, I fully expect to be hauled back, and I’m prepared for it. What I’m not expecting is that sad look in his blue eyes, and once again, I curse my sappy heart when it plummets into my stomach. I won’t allow him to guilt trip me into moving back. No. No way—I’m staying put.

“You’re very quiet for someone that wants to talk,” I say, breaking the silence that was threatening to suffocate me.

I don’t trust myself around him. Being this near to Dante is making my body want to do stupid things, and I’ve already used my quota of reckless behaviour for a lifetime.

“Where would you like to begin?” he asks. “Do you want to talk about you whoring yourself out at Dirty Diamonds?”

Even though the words sting, they make me laugh. Dante’s shocked expression doesn’t help, and I’m quickly finding myself clutching my middle while laughing so much my entire body shakes, making the water splash from the tub and onto the floor.

“What’s so funny?” he barks, clearly not as amused as I am.

I don’t answer him until I’m all laughed out, and no more tears are leaking from my eyes. Blimey, the few times I’ve been around him since he’s been back have ended with me crying for one reason or the other.

Pathetic.

“Oh, I can think of a few things,” I deadpan. “It could be the fact that the pot is calling the kettle black. Or maybe it’s because you seem to think you’re owed something from me. Take your pick.”

Shrugging, I follow the path of some bubbles floating on top of the water. As one after the other bursts I feel a sense of dread, as though I’m about to burst as well. Maybe not burst...

like Dante is about to break me. The thought makes a shiver run down my spine, and I hate feeling at his mercy.

“I’ve never sold myself for money.”

Rolling my eyes, I shoot back, “Neither have I. Don’t you bloody dare accuse me of being one of your slags.”

His answering chuckle is dark, cold, and completely detached. “I saw you in the booth on Saturday, Cait-Storm. If that wasn’t selling yourself for money I clearly don’t know the meaning of the words. You happily spread your legs, even showed me your beautiful, glistening folds. And you didn’t shove the money back at me, so I can only assume you kept it.”

My head snaps up, my eyes drawn to his. I open and close my mouth, at a loss of what to say. With everything that’s happened since that shift, I completely forgot about that.

“That was you?” I whisper while my mind slowly pieces it all together. Dante has to be the last client that stopped by right before Glen ended my shift early. “You went to Dirty Diamonds before seeing me? Before your date with Lily?” My voice rises with each word, and as I voice the last question I’m almost screeching at a decibel I’m sure only dogs can hear.

Dante’s silence is all the confirmation I need. He isn’t here for me. I don’t know why he’s back, and right now I couldn’t care less. I feel beyond humiliated that I even dared to entertain the possibility he’d come back to... to... nope, not going there—not even thinking about it.

“You’re a special piece of shite,” I hiss. “I... no, you know what? I’m done.”

I carefully climb out of the bath, throwing open the bathroom door. As I look back over my shoulder, I wish I hadn’t. Dante’s naked body is now on full display while he’s looking at me, easily stepping over the edge of the tub and onto the tiled floor.

“Ca—Storm... I...” Trailing off, he swallows thickly, and I hate that I feel bad for him.

Why can’t my bloody heart understand he deserves nothing from me? Not my sympathy, empathy, or anything else pathy.

OceanofPDF.com

XXVI



OceanofPDF.com

Storm

Tired of fighting hard to keep my composure, I let him have the very last thing I have to give. After this, I'm all out, I'll become nothing more than a shrivelled up husk of my former self.

Turning around, I face him head on. "Don't!" I warn, holding up my hand. When he stops moving, I let out a relieved sigh.

I close my eyes and inhale deeply, then I let it all go. The years of insecurity, the feeling of rejection, the burning humiliation, and the lies to my sister. Hiding in the darkness my eyelids give me, I let it all out. Tears fall from my eyes, but I make no move to hide them or even wipe them away as I bare everything I've hidden. His sharp intakes of air are the only sign that what I'm saying is affecting him a fraction of how much it's affected me.

A long time ago I read that if you feel that someone has wronged you, you should write them a letter. Some suggest you send it, others that you burn it and let go of the emotional baggage you've carried around. This is my version of sending the letter, as well as my swan song. Because when I'm done, I'll go. I can't stand to look at Dante ever again.

I'm so busy talking that I don't hear him move, and before I know it, I'm swept up in his arms. My legs automatically wrap themselves around his waist as he squeezes me to him like he *needs* to hold me.

A surprised whimper escapes me as Dante slants his lips to mine, and try as I might I can't stop myself from kissing him back. I wind my arms around his neck, holding him to me as hard as I can while our tongues tango. Our kiss isn't clumsy, it's as if our bodies have remembered how the other one moves, and picked up where we left off like it was yesterday.

Dante's large hands knead the soft globes of my arse, and I moan into his mouth. Rocking my hips against him, so my centre is touching, rubbing against his hard stomach and...

"Oh!" I gasp as I feel the head of his cock against my panty-clad pussy.

My anger and humiliation are forgotten, instead I burn. I burn everywhere he's touching me, and freeze everywhere he isn't. I swirl my hips faster, seeking the friction I need to douse the inferno he's creating.

"Please don't run from me," he croaks, taking me by surprise.

I pull back and open my eyes, shocked that his eyes have a glassy quality to them. Unthinking, I experimentally move a finger beneath his eye. I stare stupefied at the tear that gleams on the pad of my finger.

Dante is crying?

More importantly, Dante is crying because of me... I made him cry...

As though the tears are as hot as the pits of hell, they thaw the ice that was running through my veins only moments ago.

A hunger unlike anything I've felt before awakens inside me. An all-consuming need, and I know beyond the shadow of a doubt that he's the only one who can give me what I want.

Since I haven't been with anyone apart from him, I'm still inexperienced and I'm not sure I'll be enough for him. Shaking my head, I banish those thoughts. This shouldn't be about him, it's about me. I'm *owed* this.

"Take me to bed," I whisper, loving his answering groan.

"About what I said—"

Ugh, why is he suddenly wanting to talk now? I have nothing left to say, and I don't want to hear it from him either. I just want to feel—switch my brain off, and let our bodies do the talking our mouths are too clumsy to do.

"Don't ruin this," I whisper, hoping he can hear the soul-deep plea in my voice. "I want you inside me. Now." As though my words were spoken directly to his hard cock, it twitches and I grin at him.

Luckily for the both of us, Dante knows what's good for him, and he quickly moves us to his bed. This time he doesn't throw me on it, he places me on the edge. The look he gives me makes me think he's silently asking for my permission as his fingers close around my soaked tank.

Nodding, I raise my arms above my head and wait patiently while he pulls it off me and discards it on the floor, where it lands with a thud. Next, he skilfully unhooks my bra, which follows my tank top. Taking my hands, he pulls me to my feet

and hooks his thumbs into my lacy knickers. His lips descend on mine in a slow, languorous kiss while he pushes my panties as far down as he can reach. Without breaking the kiss, I push them the rest of the way, before stepping out of them and kicking the lace away.

Then I wrap my arms around his middle, loving how his skin burns me where we touch. My nipples are like small rocks poking into his torso, and my boobs feel heavy with need.

“I’ve missed you,” he rasps as he licks and nips his way across my cheek.

Tilting my head, I give him better access to my neck, loving the burn from his beard against my soft skin.

I don’t answer or acknowledge the statement. I’m too scared to trust it, and I don’t want to question it either. This is why he needs to shut up. Every word he speaks, my mind files it away for me to dissect later. But I’m so sick of thinking, of wondering... he’s here with me right now, why can’t that be enough?

“I need to taste you—”

“No,” I say, interrupting him. I almost laugh at his shocked expression. “You haven’t earned that yet, and right now I want you to fuck me.”

Feeling brazen, I get on my knees on the floor, and wrap my hand around his pierced cock. This isn’t the first time I’m seeing it, obviously. But it is the first time I really have the

chance to study it. A Jacob's Ladder, I think that's what the piercings are called. Eight silver barbells protrude from the silky skin, and it looks... magnificent and animalistic.

I shudder as I contemplate how much it must have hurt. I can't even imagine getting one piercing down there, let alone four... or is it eight? Right now isn't the time to think about the logistics. Remembering how Dante wanted me to squeeze him harder the night of my eighteenth birthday, I do just that.

"Does it hurt?" I ask when he groans, nervous I'm squeezing too hard.

When I look up at him from beneath my lashes, I immediately feel stupid for asking. The look on his face isn't one of pain, but of pure, intense pleasure.

"No, baby," he rasps.

I don't know if he's aware of what he just called me, but I am. My heart beats faster, louder, and I can barely think straight.

Dante thrusts into my hand, reminding me of what I started, and I move my hand up and down his hard length. The feel of the barbells is strange, but not in a bad way. It's intoxicating to know that I have the power to cause him the same immeasurable pain as he's caused me—at least that's what I'm imagining he would feel if I pulled hard at any of the barbells.

I run my thumb across the crown of his cock, spreading the pre-cum down his shaft and using it as lubrication. He groans and continues to thrust into my hand, but not so much he's

ruining the pace I'm setting. It's a small thing, yet it makes me smile widely.

"Oh... God..." he groans louder when I squeeze him tighter, and move my hand even faster.

His heavy breathing is my guide, my compass steering me towards his climax. The sounds he makes stroke my desire, sending wetness through my core and I know there's a wet patch beneath me.

My sex clenches and throbs, but I do nothing to alleviate it. Right now, I'm too entranced by his reactions to my touch. I move my other hand to his sack, gently cupping and rolling his balls as I've seen women do in porn. Dante's reaction doesn't disappoint. Throwing his head back, he growls low in his throat, and closes his eyes.

Without opening his eyes, he too drops to his knees, immediately finding my boobs. Palming them both and squeezing until I moan in pleasure. Then he swipes his thumbs over my peaked nipples before pinching them, rolling both between his thumb and index fingers.

While stroking his hardness, I stare mesmerised up at him, studying his facial expressions.

Dante bends his neck, and still with his eyes closed, he moves his face so close our lips are almost touching. A need to taste them comes over me, and as I lick across his lips, his eyes shoot open.

"You're toying with me," he rasps, almost accusingly.

I nod, because he's right—well, kind of. I'm not toying as much as I'm testing. At first, I wanted to see if he'd let me touch him this time, and now that he is, I'm curious. I want to know how far he'll let me go... for how long he's content with letting me have my fill of touching him.

“You wouldn't let me touch you before,” I murmur.

Dante lets go of my tits and palms my face, bringing our heads so close his lips move against my skin when he talks. “I'll forever regret that night.” My mouth drops open, but before I can say anything, he clarifies, “Not because of you, or what we did. Because of me, baby. I didn't treat you right. I didn't realise what I had until I was gone. Do you think you can ever forgive me?”

I swallow, my throat feeling like it's clogged. “I don't know,” I say so low I'm not sure he hears it until he nods. “But I want to.”

It's bloody hard to admit the last part to him. I'm still wounded by his actions, and I honestly don't know if I'll ever be able to move past it. That doesn't mean I don't want to try, though. With everything in my heart, I want the past to be as far away from my present as possible.

Dante's lips crash into mine, his tongue delving into my mouth. He kisses me until I have no air left in my lungs, until I can barely remember my name.

“I won't stop trying,” he vows with so much vehemence that I can feel it in my bones.

Not wanting to dwell on past hurt and potential empty promises, I get up and move back on the bed where I shuffle back until I can reach the bedside table. Pulling open the drawer, I use my hand to search for the condoms I know he keeps there. Once I close my hand around one, I move down until my arse is only just perched on the end.

After rolling the rubber on, I point his cock towards my heat. For a few minutes, Dante looks at me like he's trying to figure something out, but then he finally takes the hint and moves so close the bulbous tip touches my pussy lips.

Dante moves his hands to my hips, guiding me until I'm perched so precariously it almost feels like a trust exercise.

“Are you ready for me?” he rasps, and I don't need to ask to know that he wants to know if I'm wet.

I move a finger between my folds, brazenly parting them so he can see for himself since I don't want him to touch me. He has to earn that right, but if he continues like this, my resolve will be shattered in no time.

After wrapping my legs around him, I move the finger with my pussy juice to his lips. Remembering how he seemed to like how I taste, and I selfishly want him to crave what I won't give him.

He slams into me at the same time as he licks my finger clean, sucking it into his mouth and holding it between his teeth. The small bite makes my clit throb, and I moan loudly. My pussy feels like it's on fire as it stretches around his large cock, and my breath hitches.

Picking up on my discomfort, Dante stills and rests his head in the crook of my neck. While kissing and licking the skin, he apologises, making me frown.

“Don’t apologise,” I pant through the pain. “I just... I need a minute.”

I wrap my arms around his neck, clasping him against me as I breathe through the pain. It’s not a bad pain, far from it. It’s delicious, and each tingle makes my clit throb, demanding to be touched.

Letting go of my hold on his neck, I move a hand between us, slowly circling my clit. My inner muscles clench around him, and delicious, toe-curling pleasure quickly replaces the pain. Proving he can read my body, Dante starts moving inside me. The short, quick pumps make my entire body shake in no time.

A light sheen of sweat is covering my entire body, and my boobs are heavy with need as I meet Dante thrust for thrust. Our lips are fused together, our tongues dancing a slow erotic dance, and I’m so lost in the moment.

I can’t help but think that this is what my first time should’ve felt like. Wanting to rewrite our history, I decide the past doesn’t count—this is our first time, and in many ways, it is.

XXVII



OceanofPDF.com

Dante

As I watch Storm sleep, I ignore yet another call from Beth. I texted her the night I found out my niece is Storm, but that's all the communication we've had. For the last two days I haven't strayed from my niece's side at all. I want her to know I'm here, that I'm not going anywhere. So even though my stomach rumbles for food and my bladder begs to be emptied, I stay put.

I'm rewarded when she turns towards me, and runs a hand across my chest. "Dante?" Her voice is groggy with sleep, and her eyes are still closed. She snuggles closer and throws one leg across my hip, the movement causing her perfect cunt to embrace my growing cock.

Although I hate doing it, now that she knows I'm here I can finally move. Getting out of bed, I practically run to the bathroom. After taking care of business, I take a quick shower and throw on a pair of boxers. Then I make my way downstairs, looking for something—*anything*—edible. When my eyes land on the bunch of bananas, I get a wicked idea.

Back in my room, Storm is asleep again. The covers are bunched around her middle, so her perfect tits are on display. Her nipples are peaked, and my mouth salivates at the mere thought of sucking on them again.

I kick my boxers off and tear two of the bananas from the bunch before climbing back into bed. When she doesn't as much as stir, I feel a sense of pride. I lost count of how many

times I had her yesterday, but clearly enough to make her coma-like.

The only downside is that she's still not letting me touch her. While I'm not happy about that, I'm allowing her to be in charge—for now. But that doesn't mean I can't try to persuade her to change her mind.

She's fine with me fucking her, and I probably shouldn't complain. But apart from my cock inside her, and my hands on her tits, I'm not allowed to do anything. She, on the other hand, has been taking her fill of my body. I'm pretty sure she's licked, kissed, and nipped close to every part of me, and I've loved every minute of it.

Even so, I'm determined to get her to change her mind today, because I'm dying to get a taste of her sweet pussy, and to get my hands on her.

“It's time to wake up,” I murmur, stroking the hair from her face.

Storm groans and tries to bat my hand away, but I chuckle and tickle her face with the ends of her long strands. “Stop it,” she hisses while squeezing her eyes shut so tight that small lines appear on her lids.

Letting go of her hair, I push her onto her back and pull the sheet all the way off her. Ignoring her mumbled protests, I slide between her legs and position myself on top of her. My arms are on either side of her face, holding my weight so I don't squash her.

“You need to wake up,” I repeat, bending my neck so our lips are only a breath apart.

“I need to brush my teeth,” she complains, making me huff.

Does she really think I care about morning breath when she’s naked underneath me?

Showing her just how little I care, I capture her lips with mine, impatiently coaxing her lips open and slipping my tongue inside. Tangling my fingers in her hair, I deepen the kiss as much as possible. I roll my hips against hers, and a guttural groan builds in my throat as my cock slides through her already slick folds.

Christ, she feels amazing.

“You’re going to let me touch you today, aren’t you, baby?” I pull back so I can look at her.

Storm inhales deeply before opening her eyes. “I don’t know,” she whispers. Then she bites down on her lip, making me groan as I remember just how good it feels to have those lips wrapped around my cock.

“What’s holding you back?” I ask, genuinely curious.

I growl low in my throat when she turns her head to the side, but I don’t let her shut herself off from me. I get that we’re not where I want to be yet, and I’m fine working my ass off to show her I’m here. That doesn’t mean I’ll allow her to move backwards, though.

“You can tell me,” I croon as I kiss her neck.

Tilting her head she looks at me from under her long, thick, black lashes. “I don’t want to miss your touch when you decide to leave me again.” The tinge of pain in her whispered admission goes straight to my heart.

“Oh, baby,” I whisper. Taking my time I kiss up and down her neck a few times, wanting her to relax before I say the next part. “I don’t know how this is going to work, Storm.” I hate admitting it, but I promised her honesty. “All I know is that I’m not going anywhere. I’m here for as long as you’ll have me, no matter how short a time it turns out to be.”

Throwing her arms around me, she squeezes me to her, and says, “I’ll never tire of you.”

I want to believe her pretty words, I really do. But I know better than most how much one’s fancy can change suddenly, especially when she’s so young. There’s also the not-so insignificant fact that our relationship isn’t just forbidden, it’s illegal. None of that seems to matter when we’re together, but I know reality will catch up to us, eventually.

Instead of pointing that out, I ask again if I can touch her, and as soon as she nods, I reach for the bananas.

“Here you go.” I hold one of them out, smiling wickedly when Storm takes it from my hand. “You know I’ve always said breakfast is the most important meal of the day.”

“And what are you going to eat?” she asks, blushing when I chuckle at the question.

Without answering, I kiss and lick my way down her body. Paying special attention to her tits and hard nipples—sucking each one into my mouth, and swirling my tongue around before letting go with a pop.

Reaching the apex of her thighs, I look up at her. “You better start eating, baby.” I watch as she slowly peels the fruit, licking the tip while she grins at me. “Bite it,” I rasp.

Storm’s smile widens. “That’s not what you said last night,” she quips, making me chuckle. Said chuckle turns into a groan when she takes a bite, and keeps her green eyes on me as she chews.

“My turn.” Now that I know she’s eating, I can finally focus on my feast.

I shuffle until I’m perfectly positioned between her thighs. Turning my head, I bite into the sensitive skin on her inner thigh before blowing on it. I repeat the motion on her other thigh before licking my way to her pussy.

“I can smell your arousal,” I groan, nuzzling her clit with my nose.

Storm moans loudly when I part her cunt lips with my tongue, licking the delicious wetness from her hole.

“Fuck... Dante...” Her throaty moans turn me on even more, and I lap at her cunt like a man starved for every drop of her nectar.

As I flick her nub with my tongue, I easily slide two fingers inside her. I pump them in and out of her at a pace I know is

too slow for her liking. And when she complains, I slow down even more.

“I don’t enjoy eating too fast,” I say before nipping at the plump flesh.

Her body is trembling, and when she tries to close her legs around me, I remove my fingers from her heat so I can hold her open.

“None of that,” I admonish her, ignoring her protests.

When she’s right on the precipice, I pull back, denying her the release I know she’s desperate for.

“What the bloody hell was that for?” She’s no longer writhing, trying to lift her hips to get me deeper.

Smiling, I take the second banana. “Do you remember all the times you teased me in the kitchen? Do you have any idea how torturous it was to watch you basically make love to the fruit with your mouth?”

Her self-satisfied smirk tells me she knows exactly what I’m hinting at. “Maybe,” she says, not giving anything away.

“Well, since you like bananas so much...” I trail off and focus, placing the one in my hand against her opening.

“What are you... oh my God...”

I smile against her leg as I pump the fruit in and out of her cunt. Her moans go straight to my cock, and I feel pre-cum leaking onto the mattress below me. I briefly consider turning

this into a 69'er, but decide against it. As much as I want her gagging on my cock, this isn't about me—not yet.

With fast pumps I fuck her with the banana, pushing it inside her until she mewls nonsensically. My thumb is rolling her clit so slow I know it isn't enough to make her explode yet. Every time she's almost there, I stop until the release fizzles away so I can build it back up.

“You bloody prick,” she sobs frustratedly. “Let me come. Dante, I need to come.”

I laugh darkly as I rob her of yet another orgasm. “Patience,” I simply say. “Trust me, baby. This will be the best orgasm of your life.”

Her body stiffens, and she hurls a few insults at me, reminding me that trust is earned. I pretend her words don't matter because I know she doesn't mean them—at least I hope not.

“Prepare yourself,” I growl. Then I fuck her in earnest with the banana.

I thrust it in and out of her heat, pretty sure I'm hitting her G and possibly A spot with each pump. My thumb swirls her clit harder as well, and this time I don't pull back when she cries out in pleasure. I continue until she's screaming my name so loud the neighbours must be able to hear us.

“Dante... shite... Dante... fuck!”

Storm lifts her hips off the mattress and her hands grip for the headboard of the bed. Her body tenses completely while

she pants, moans, and mewls through her release. Although she doesn't squirt, there's still a lot of her release for me to greedily drink down.

When she becomes limp, I peel the banana and rub the tip against her cunt before I eat it. I repeat this, coating the fruit in her essence before taking my next bite.

Deeply focused on my task I barely notice Storm's gasp. "Are you..." She swallows, her eyes widening as she looks down at me between her legs.

"I'm coating it in my favourite flavour," I confirm unperturbed. When I'm done I kiss my way up her body again. "Are you ready for my cock, baby?"

Her eager nod makes me laugh, I love how ready she always is.

"I want to be on top," she says. Then she places her hands on my chest and I allow her to roll us over. "I like looking down at you."

Ever since I came back, this is her favourite position, and I can honestly say that with her it's also one of mine. That doesn't mean I don't want to fuck her other ways, but for now I'm content giving her this. She just allowed me to eat her out, so if this is what she needs that's barely a sacrifice.

After covering my length in the bloody rubber I loathe, Storm wraps her hand around my throbbing cock and guides me to her opening. Slamming down she sheaths me perfectly inside her, making me groan at the tightness. My hands are on

her hips, only resting there. It takes every ounce of self-control to keep my hold lax, and not try to dictate her rhythm.

She's beauty incarnate when she rides me like this—all wild and free, completely uncaring about anything but chasing her pleasure. She tilts her hips so her clit rubs against my pubic bone, and she's squeezing her tits. I groan out her name when I'm close, and much to my disappointment she slows down.

“I'm not ready for you to come just yet,” she pants. “I want to try something first.”

Before her words can penetrate my lust-filled brain, she lifts herself and spins around. Then she takes me back inside her, and blimey, the look of her sizable arse as she works herself up and down is divine.

“Fuck!”

Unable to contain myself, I move my hands to her arse cheeks and knead the soft globes. Her puckered hole winks at me when I spread them, and I trail a finger down the cleft.

“Dante?” She falters, but when I place a hand on her back and add some pressure she bends willingly.

I lick one of my fingers before pushing it against her tight opening. “Are you untouched here?” I groan.

“I'm... I mean... no one but you has ever touched me like this,” she admits, sounding bashful.

The admission makes both my cock and heart grow. Fuck, knowing I'm the only one that's ever had her is... wait a second...

“Don’t you have a boyfriend?” I ask.

We still haven’t discussed the other guy—well, technically I guess I’m the other guy. I’m pretty sure Beth said... ahh, I can’t think about this now. All I can focus on is the way her cunt is squeezing my cock, and how amazing she feels.

Letting it go, I urge her to move faster, praising how amazing she feels. While she bounces on my cock, I work my finger into her ass. I match the way I slide my digit in and out with her moving up and down my hardness.

“Baby,” I rasp. “I’m going to...” A guttural groan is ripped from me when she squeezes me tight as another release hits her.

This one forces me to follow, her cunt squeezing the cum out of me. I shout her name while filling the condom, and she moans mine while her inner walls flutter around me.

When my breathing is under control, I lift her off me and carry her into the bathroom. We shower together, and I resist the urge to take her against the glass.

The more time I spend with her, the more I’m reminded of all the things I’ve ignored over the years. Not necessarily ignored, but things I didn’t act on—as well as the ones I did. Like when she caught me wanking in here and she touched herself. The mere thought of that day has all my blood running straight to my dick.

“Are you ready to go again?” Storm purrs.

My resolve breaks, and instead of getting us clean, I get out to retrieve a condom. As soon as I'm back, I push into her tight channel again.

OceanofPDF.com

XXVIII



OceanofPDF.com

Dante

After our shower we wordlessly get dressed, each of us lost in thought. I wish I knew what she's thinking. While I know I should focus on all the shite we still need to sort through, all I can think about is how right this feels.

With Storm I don't feel the need to get away, or count down the minutes until she leaves. I constantly want to touch her, and when she smiles, I want to be the reason. Our being together is new in some ways, yet so comfortable and known in others.

Downstairs, Storm pulls things from the fridge, insisting she's going to cook us a fry up. "And then we'll talk," she says, giving me a stern look. "No more distractions."

Instead of making empty promises—I did say I wouldn't lie to her—I clear the table where the plates, cutlery, and glasses from my time with Lily are still sitting. I pretend not to notice Storm's glare as I place the items in the dishwasher, and scrub the stuff I used for cooking.

When I turn my back on my niece, intending to take out the garbage, I can feel her eyes bore into my back. Doing the domestic chores with Storm is just like old days, and even though I know she's upset, I smile widely.

No matter how much things change, they also stay the same.

Back inside I wrap my arms around Storm's middle, and rest my head on her shoulder. "Do you want to talk about it?" I

softly ask.

“What’s there to talk about? You brought yet another slag into our home, and I had to watch her fawn all over you. Same old, same old,” she snaps.

Now really isn’t the time to take pleasure in her jealousy, but it’s bloody hard not to when she’s so bent out of shape at the prospect of what I might have been doing with Lily.

“Nothing happened,” I say, trying to reassure her.

She lifts her chin stubbornly. “I. Don’t. Care.”

“Of course you don’t,” I chuckle. “I guess the eggs had it coming.” I’m referring to the forceful way she’s moving the scrambled eggs around in the pot.

With a sigh, I let go of my niece, and start making us some coffee. So far, nothing has gone the way I thought it would. I’m not regretting anything, and frankly, I care little about the rest of the world. As long as I have Storm in my arms, and Avery is safe and happy, that’s all I need.

Yeah, I can tell myself that until I’m blue in the face, and maybe then I will believe it. I already know I can’t just walk away from all my responsibilities, and if my niece is still half the woman I once knew, she will not up and leave either.

Once everything is done, we carry it into the living room. Instead of eating at the dining table, Storm wants to sit on the couch and I’m fine with that. We eat in silence, well, I eat, and she just nibbles on a piece of bacon.

Just as I'm about to repeat that nothing happened with Lily, she says, "I don't want her to come over again."

I nod.

"And I don't want you to see her alone."

Pushing the plates away, I pull her close to me and bite the shell of her ear. "I like that you're jealous."

"I'm not jealous, I'm being practical. Ave is still best mates with the twins, and I don't want you to make it awkward for them," she huffs.

It's a fine speech, I'll give her that. Of course, I know she's full of shite, but I'm refraining from pointing that out. Agreeing is nothing to me, and, honestly, it's not a big ask.

"Will you do the same for me?" I ask.

It's not a fair question considering our circumstances, but that doesn't mean I'll play second fiddle to anyone. Storm. Is. Mine.

Pulling away, she turns on the couch and faces me. "What exactly are you asking me?"

"You said you have a boyfriend," I remind her. I don't bring my conversation with Beth up yet. That's something to cover later. "Are you going to break up with him?"

I know the answer before she can verbalise it. 'No' is written all over her face, and it makes anger stir to life inside me.

Without giving her a chance to say anything, I press on. “So that’s how it’s going to be? You get to shag around while I can only be with you?”

The words come out all wrong, but I’m too upset to take them back. Right now I don’t care about the way she pales, or that she’s scooting away from me. I can only see the red coating my vision at the thought of someone else touching what’s *mine*.

“It’s not like that,” she mumbles, wringing her hands in front of her. “I need... it’s not for me.”

I bark out a laugh. “Not for you? Oh, do tell. Enlighten me.”

When she reaches for me I consider slapping her hand away, but of course I don’t. I welcome her touch, even lean into it.

“We’re not really together. I’m... it’s for Clara.”

“Who’s Clara?” Again, I don’t mention that I already know all this. I want to hear it directly from Storm’s mouth.

Storm beams like the name alone makes her happy. “She’s my friend. You’re going to love her.”

I listen intently as she explains how she found the little girl, what she’s been through and how Beth offered her the undercover operation when Storm made it clear she wanted to be part of Clara’s life and see her family brought to justice.

It’s clear that my niece is beyond invested, and I know that there’s no way I can talk her out of continuing to gather intel on the Potters. I swear, it’s my own personal crossroad from hell. If I force Storm out of the situation she’s landed herself in

she might never forgive me. But... does she even know what she's involved in?

Child trafficking rings aren't run by the do-gooders of this world. They're the scum even Lucifer himself wouldn't want to deal with. They're the people whose souls are blacker than the darkest of nights.

"This isn't a game or some romantic notion," I say, keeping my voice soft. "These people are dangerous."

Storm's face twists into a mask of fury. "Oh, really? So you mean to tell me it wasn't ketchup or stage blood smeared on her? Yeah, I know it's bloody dangerous."

Snorting, I say, "Let me get this straight. So because you've come across one girl, heard about one family, you're now fully trained? How many weapons have you mastered? What about self defence? Surely you're good enough to take me, right?"

The look she gives me has unease spreading through me. "I can't claim to be as knowledgeable or skilful as you, Dante," she says saccharinely. "After all, I've never left blood-soaked clothes in this house, or brought them to Dirty Diamonds."

Memories of a night from years ago surge to the forefront of my mind. It was the night she'd walked in on me in the shower... the night in the alley. Afterwards I went to Dirty Diamonds, and...

"Bloody hell!" I clench my fists as the penny finally drops.

I'm the reason Storm went to Dirty Diamonds for a job.

Storm looks too smug for comfort, and I can't decide if it's getting me hot and bothered, or just hot-headed.

“You mean to tell me that the big bad Dante didn't know an eighteen-year-old civilian was spying on him?” She smiles saccharinely and swipes some strands of hair over her shoulder. “Imagine that... leading a poor, defenceless girl to the maw of depravity without even knowing it.” Pursing her lips, she tuts and gives me a disapproving look.

“So you snuck in, meaning you're now solely responsible for those at work losing their job. What else?”

Now it's my turn to look smug as she fidgets, clearly not expecting me to turn the tables around.

“Congratulations, baby. You got yourself a job, yes. Hell, you even changed your name.”

When I woke up before her yesterday, I was desperate for some answers, so I went through her purse. Finding her driver's licence confirmed Storm isn't just her alias, it's her legal name now.

“And now you're playing a game of cat and mouse with some of the worst people to walk this earth. What do you want your cake to say? Congratulations on being—”

“Stop it,” she cries.

I've been so focused on my tirade and anger that I haven't even noticed her tears, or that she's now standing up instead of sitting here with me.

“Unlike you, I don’t run from things.” She angrily swipes away her tears. “Helping Clara is the right thing to do, and I…” I watch as she bites down on her lip, stopping herself from saying whatever else she needs to get off her chest.

“Don’t stop on my account,” I spit, unable to soften my tone. “Let it all out.”

I can only describe the look in her eyes as pure unadulterated loathing, but I refuse to give in.

My heart feels like it’s breaking when she screams, “You left me, Dante. You cast me aside and left me with nothing. I know you, so I know you didn’t just expect me to continue letting you pay for things after you shagged and trashed me. So yes, I got a job. Sure, I didn’t tell Beth the truth about who I am. But I swear to you, I never knew exactly what your connection to the place was, so it had nothing to do with you. I needed a new start, and I got it, along with a new name and identity.”

When I get up and move towards her, she all but jumps away from me. Holding her hand up, she says, “I need to clear my head.” Hating the overly polite tone she’s using, all I can do is clench my jaw and nod.

I don’t want to let her go, far from it. But I know that if I keep her here against her will, there’s no chance she’ll forgive me. And, if I’m completely honest, I need to clear my head too. Shite, I can’t even get through a conversation without succumbing to my anger, and I can’t continue this asshole’ish behaviour.

“Tell me where you’re going,” I spit through clenched teeth as she opens the door. Without waiting for her answer, I stalk towards her. “This isn’t just for you, Storm. If you want to play this game, I need to know where you are at all times. Beth should have taught you the importance of teamwork by now.”

The reluctant realisation in her eyes is enough to let me know she understands. I’m not just saying it to be an arse, what good is someone you can’t trust to make good decisions even when under emotional pressure?

Sighing, I soften my voice. “We may have our own issues to work out, I can agree to that. But if you let your emotions get the best of you, you’re no good to Clara.” When she opens her mouth to argue, I add, “I’m not saying it to be a dick. But what if something happens? You need to be smart, baby.”

Huffing, she crosses her arms. “I don’t know exactly where I’m going. Like I said, I need to clear my head, and then I need to go see Beth and Clara. I’ve lied to Beth for two years, she deserves an apology.” Despite the hint of guilt in her voice, I can’t help smiling.

Even after all this time, my Storm still doesn’t like dishonesty.

“Be careful,” I say. Then I cup her cheek and kiss her before ushering her out the door.

Back inside the house I hunt down my phone, scrolling through my contacts until I find Beth’s name. Yeah, I know I’m in for another verbal arse kicking when I call her, but that

doesn't change the fact that Storm is right, Beth deserves an apology.

Although a part of me wants to wait until Storm has seen Beth, I don't.

OceanofPDF.com

XXIX



OceanofPDF.com

Storm

Tears burn behind my lids, but I refuse to let them fall. I'll never again cry because of the prick I'm related to. I take a deep, shuddering breath as I turn down another street, only too late realising where I am. I'm right outside The Chic Strand, the place where I once worked for Lily to get work experience.

That seems like it was another lifetime, one I miss and hate in equal measures.

My stomach is in knots, my head is filled with more thoughts than I can decipher, and my heart is both heavy and light. In short, I'm a mess, and I don't know what to do or how to act. A part of me wants to go back to the house and shag Dante's brains out, give him what he obviously wants. That's it, isn't it? He wants my body... is it some kind of sick fantasy for him?

I already know that isn't the answer, there's more to it. If I'm completely honest and allow myself to look at the past few days without allowing past hurts to cloud my vision, I know he's as drawn to me as I am him. He might even love me.

Is it possible we keep butting heads because we simply don't know how to talk? There's so much going on that every time it's brought up, it turns from sweet nothings—or rather, sinful sex—into declarations of war.

“Hi Caitlin.” I stiffen as the voice registers, and my hackles are up before the woman can even take a step closer to me.

“Lily,” I hiss. I don’t return her smile, and I know it’s bratty and rude of me, but I just can’t find it in me to care.

She sighs, and I’m feeling a sick satisfaction when her smile drops. “I think we need to talk,” she says.

Shaking my head, I say, “I don’t think so.” Then I clench my fists and take a step towards her. “I want you to stay away from him. Do you understand? You’re not welcome at our house.”

“We need to talk,” she insists. All friendliness is gone from her face as she links her arm with mine and drags me along.

I try to wrench my arm free, but Lily’s grip is like bloody steel and unless I want to cause a scene, I’m not going anywhere. Deciding against doing something dramatic, I let her haul me along, scowling all the way.

Who the bloody hell does she think she is? She’s just a... part time house-wife. There’s nothing special about her, and for some reason that makes me even angrier about the entire situation. When I feel my phone vibrate in my pocket, I immediately pull it out, hoping it’s Dante.

“Hello?” I say, answering it before the device is pressed against my ear so Lily can’t stop me.

“Cait, what are you up to?” I’m taken back by the panic in my sister’s voice.

Scowling at Lily, I answer, “Oh you know, catching up with Lily.”

There! If she turns out to be more mad than a Hatter, someone will know I'm with her. Isn't there a saying about redheads being infamous for their fiery temper? I guess it's good to err on the side of caution.

"Don't go with her," Ave begs, making me frown. "Just... listen, just stay somewhere public."

Wait... what?

"Are *you* okay? What's the matter with you?" I ask while mentally trying to work out if my sister has somehow learned to read minds. "It's just Lily, I'll be fine. Look, I'll talk to you later."

Despite my sister's protests, I hang up.

"Who was that?" Lily predictably asks.

Flashing my teeth, I tell her it's none of her business before once again telling her to let me go. Which, she of course, doesn't.

As we reach the intersection the light changes to red, so we hang about waiting for the green light to show we can cross. After almost ten minutes the lights haven't changed at all, which is weird. Lily drags us to the opposite crossing section, but just as we reach the footpath the lights change.

I laugh as Lily becomes flustered, dragging me back and forth three more times. Upon the third attempt all the lights turn red.

"I... what's going on?" I'm pretty sure the question isn't meant for me, but I answer her anyway.

“Seems today isn’t your lucky day, Lily.” When I pull at my arm again, she lets me go, and I stumble back from her.

“Listen, Caitlin... look, it’s none of my business what is or isn’t going on in Dante’s house—”

“Got that right,” I mumble.

Ignoring my input, she carries on. “The other night was not as it looked. I don’t think it was a date, and nothing happened. I’m not even interested in your *uncle* like that.”

Now, this captures my interest and I finally look at her. Shite, if I’d done so earlier, like *really* looked at her, I would have noticed she doesn’t look as hot as usual. Through the grapevines I’ve heard about her divorce, and while I don’t know the ins and outs, she looks like she got the short end of the stick.

“Are you okay?” I ask, feeling like I need to rectify my behaviour. This is Lily, after all. In many ways, she’s been like a surrogate mum to Ave and me. That still means something, even if I want to punch her for putting her hands on Dante. “Do you... umm... do you want to get a cup of coffee or something?”

When Lily agrees, we walk back to where we came from, and take a seat in the coffee shop next to the salon. I’ve been here so many times I’ve lost count, yet I can honestly say that I’ve never noticed the colour of the drapes before—and the neon green really is hard to overlook. We don’t speak before the steaming, hot beverages are placed in front of us, and I

find myself longingly staring at the small piece of chocolate Lily hasn't touched.

“Are you going to eat that?” I say brazenly.

My words shatter the awkward silence, making Lily throw her head back and laugh so loud everyone looks at us. “Have at it, Caitlin,” she hiccups, using the napkin to wipe under her eyes.

Not willing to risk her changing her mind, I snap the small piece of goodness and eat it in one bite. They really should double the sizes if they want them to last as long as your coffee. “Mhmm,” I moan appreciatively before washing it down with my cafe latte. Remembering she still calls me Caitlin, I say, “I go by Storm now, by the way. I changed my name...” Trailing off, I run the pad of my finger along the rim of the cup.

Lily smiles and leans closer to me, “We're fine, Storm. I don't hold a grudge against you, and I hope the same can be said for you.”

I nod slowly, not sure I like where this is going.

“Just promise me you'll be careful, okay? Again, it's none of my business, but if there is something going on, it's illegal for a reason.” When I sputter in outrage, she holds her hands up. “I'm not trying to pick a fight with you, I'm only looking out for you. It's clear from your reaction that you see Dante as more than your uncle. And I *am* sorry for... well, I'm just sorry that I overstepped. But you still need to be careful.”

Without confirming or denying anything, I thank her for the advice and apology. I even apologise for how I've acted. "You didn't... overstep." Even though it's the truth, the words taste bitter on my tongue. I'm woman enough to admit that Lily did nothing wrong, Dante did. That doesn't mean I'll ever be okay with them being on an honest to God date, especially not in *our* house. But it means that Lily is off the hook with me, and even more so now that I know she isn't interested in him.

We only stay until our coffee cups are empty, and regardless of not a lot being said, I feel like we've reached a comfortable understanding—a mutual agreement, if you will.

"Are you happy?" As we're hugging goodbye, I want to know if she is okay. I'm not surprised when she shakes her head, the bags under her eyes tell a story of sleepless nights and worries. "I want you to be happy, Lily. Promise me you'll tell me if I can help."

When she just nods I know it's all I'm going to get, and I can't say I blame her. I don't even know if there's a way for me to help her, all I know is that I want to because if anyone deserves happiness, it's her.

As soon as we've parted ways, I call Ave back. The call doesn't take long, and even though my sister denies anything being up, I know she's lying. I don't press her though, because I really don't have any high ground to stand on. Not when I'm shagging our uncle.

Crikey, things really are messy.

Before hanging up, we talk about Christmas and for the first time I agree to go with Dante so we can all three be together. Now I just need to talk with him about it, and see if he's even up for it.

OceanofPDF.com

XXX



OceanofPDF.com

Storm

After talking with Ave, I'm still not ready to head home, so just like I told Dante I would, I drop by Beth's to see her and Clara.

"Get in here, now," Beth snaps, throwing open the door before I can even finish knocking.

"Umm, is this a bad time?" I ask, swallowing thickly.

Narrowing her eyes at me, Beth points to the phone in her hand. "I don't bloody care, Dante. Look, she's here now and we have things to talk about without your input."

I can't hear Dante's reply, but when Beth rolls her eyes and pinches the bridge of her nose, it doesn't look like it's a good one.

"I get you didn't know, and I'm not holding you responsible. That's between me and... Storm. But you need to think about what you're doing, and yes, I'll fucking ask her. You don't get to dictate where I stick my nose, not when you act exactly like the pricks we rid the world of—" Dante's angry roar cuts Beth off.

"Do. Not. Go. There, Beth. If that's how you really think of me, don't show your face at my establishments again. Any of them." This time I have no trouble hearing him.

My blood runs cold, and my hands become clammy as I stand here listening to them.

Beth pales, opening and closing her mouth several times, but no words come out as Dante continues his angry tirade.

To say I feel bad doesn't even begin to describe my emotional state. My lies are catching up with me, and I hate how content I've been spewing them left and right, creating a web that only the truth can get me out of. It's ironic, to say the least, that I hate lies and, where possible, I've always done my best to avoid lying. Yet, here we are.

I did this... my dishonesty is the reason everything is blowing up right now.

"Enough!" I yell, needing them both to hear me.

I came here to talk to Beth, and I can't do that while Dante's shouting at her. So I walk over to her and snap the phone from her hand.

"Dante," I say to get his reaction. "You need to back off." I don't know where the words are coming from, I just know it needs to be said. "Can I please have some time with Beth so she and I can talk? I promise I'll come home right after."

He agrees, albeit reluctantly. "Fine, but you're coming straight home when you're done." The words are a stark reminder of when my obsession was one sided, of when I had to do as he said. The rough and demanding tone has wetness coating my panties.

"I promise," I say, my voice low and throaty. When I notice Beth moving in my peripheral, I'm reminded we're not alone, and I clear my throat. "I'll be home as soon as I can."

After ending the call I hand Beth the phone. “Are we alone?” I ask her. Considering the shouting going on, I’m pretty sure the girls aren’t here. She wouldn’t allow raised voices if they were here to overhear it.

“We are,” she confirms. Then she takes the phone from my outstretched hand, and gestures towards the couch. “How could you lie to me like that, Storm? Or should I call you Caitlin?” Wasting no time, Beth gets straight to the point. “I gave you a job. I’ve looked after you, and when you wanted to be involved, I didn’t just allow it, I took you under my wing. Do you understand how much is at stake here?”

My breath saws out of me, and I can’t find the words to express how sorry I am.

“I’ve trusted you with everything, and you lied to me. Look, I understand the omission when you first started working at Dirty Diamonds. I...” Beth trails off and cocks her head to the side, giving me a contemplative look. “You weren’t there by accident two years ago, were you?”

Still not able to form words, I just shake my head.

“Don’t tell me you followed Dante to the club?”

I nod.

Beth lets out a huffed breath. “Okay, I can concede it’s fair enough you didn’t tell me you’re Caitlin Hayton when I hired you. But later on... why wouldn’t you tell me, Storm? You know how important our mission is. When I included you, you should have told me.”

“I didn’t know Dante was involved.” My voice shakes, and I don’t need Beth’s scoff to know it’s a shitty excuse.

“No, you didn’t. But even if we leave your *uncle* out of it, I still thought we were close enough to be honest with each other.” While rubbing her eyes, Beth sighs. “Why didn’t you tell me, Storm?”

Unable to meet her gaze, I look down at my hands. “I was scared,” I admit. “At first it was just as you said, I followed Dante to Dirty Diamonds. And when I needed a job, well, you know, I had your business card and used it.”

“Right, but Storm—”

Knowing I need to get everything off my chest, I talk over her. “I needed to be self-sufficient so I could take care of me and Ave, and I was desperate. But I also wanted to be here because I... I felt closer to Dante. I might not have known his involvement, and I’m still not sure I do. But I still felt a closeness since he’s the reason I was there in the first place. And then when Clara came along, the mission became my sole focus.” Finally looking up, I let Beth see the tears in my eyes. “I know I shouldn’t have lied, and that I should have told you everything. But I was already in so deep, and I couldn’t risk you getting so angry you wouldn’t let me see Clara.”

At my words, Beth moves closer and hugs me. “Oh, Storm.” She says nothing else, she just hugs me.

Taken aback, it takes me a hot second to return the embrace, but when I do, I finally let the tears fall. “I-I’m s-so s-sorry,” I sob into her shoulder. “Beth, I never meant to lie, I truly

didn't. It just kind of happened, and... and then I was too scared to speak up."

Pulling back, she pins me with a look, and asks, "Did you ever consider telling me the truth?"

I immediately shake my head. "I never allowed myself to think about it," I say, needing to clarify. "Do you know what happened to my parents? Dante's brother and sister-in-law?"

Beth nods.

"When Ave and I were in the hospital waiting for Dante, the nurses lied. They told us everything was going to be alright. But it wasn't, and since then I've hated being lied to as much as I hate lying. I'm not telling you this to get you to feel sorry for me, I'm just trying to explain why I couldn't let myself think about how dishonest I've been in the last two years."

Again, Beth nods, though her eyes have softened. Even though I feel like fidgeting, I sit still while she looks me over. I don't know what she's looking for, or if she's finding it. Her brows furrow and she tilts her head to the side, like she's suddenly thinking of something.

"I did a thorough background check on you, Storm. How is it you don't just have a different name, but a new life complete with a National Insurance Number, passport, and even files at the doctor and dentist?"

Damnit, I naively hoped we'd skip past this part of the conversation.

“Umm... my sister is great with this kind of stuff,” I say. I know it sucks that I’m being vague, but my story doesn’t involve Ave, even if they’re linked. I deliberately never asked what all she’d done or had to do to give Storm a background. Not only did I not want to know, I knew it might be illegal, and I don’t want this to come back and haunt her.

“Impressive,” Beth says, whistling. “Does Avery do this kind of thing often? Hack into businesses, I mean?”

I only shrug, not wanting to talk about Ave and her activities. Not that it matters because I don’t have the answer.

“And what about you and Dante?” The questioning has me bristling and I immediately look away. “I’ve known your uncle for a long time, Storm. I want you to know that it pains me to ask this, but has he ever... did he... what I’m trying to ask is if he ever did anything to you that you didn’t want.” Beth’s voice is steady as she talks, but I see the flash of uncertainty in her eyes.

Even though I hate it, I have to come clean and tell her what I did to drive Dante away. With her line of work, I know she’s asking me if Dante is the one who started—maybe even forced—our relationship, and I don’t want her thinking less of him.

“He’s done nothing wrong,” I say, making sure she can hear the truth in my words. “Dante fought this every step of the way. I’m the one who started it. I’m the one who pushed it, and I’m the reason he left two years ago.”

“W-what?” Beth sounds confused, and I don’t blame her.

It's never easy to explain your wrongdoings to another person, and it's downright painful and mortifying to confess what I did. While I don't give her all the gory details, I explain I snuck into his bed, pretending to be someone else under the guise of darkness. I also tell her that he literally fled from me afterwards, and that until he came back, I hadn't heard from him or talked to him at all since he left.

"Wow," Beth says incredulously as soon as I'm done with my story. "Bloody hell, you don't kid around do you? You really go all out when there's something you want." That makes me laugh.

"Life is too short," I say, shrugging. Then I turn serious again and take her hand. "Look, Beth, I understand I've broken the trust between us, and I'm more sorry than you know about that. And I will do everything to repair it—"

Interrupting me, Beth says, "I'll hold you to that."

"But," I press on. "Don't hold Dante responsible for what I did. I'm not trying to protect him, I think you know me well enough to know I wouldn't paint myself in such a terrible light if I didn't have to."

Rather than answering me, Beth stands up and walks over to switch the light on. We've spent the entire day talking, and I was so caught up in our talk that I didn't notice the room turning dark.

"I believe you," she says in her no-nonsense kind of way. "I can't say I understand, but I guess I don't have to. Just know I won't come between the two of you, and I won't keep Clara

from you, either. As for the mission, I won't remove you. But I want you to understand that the biggest reason is because it would set us back since you're dating Alan. Because when it comes to you and me, I'm not entirely sure where we go from here. I'm big on trust as well, Storm. So it's going to take time for me to get over this."

Even though Beth is being more gracious than I had a right to hope for, I still feel crestfallen. I know I have no right to expect her immediate forgiveness, but that doesn't mean I wasn't hoping, though.

Since there's nothing more to say, I might as well head back home. I've said everything I came to say, and I think Beth has got what she needed off her chest as well.

Before I leave, she pulls me in for another hug. "I'm not disowning you, Storm. I really care about you. Just... give me some time here, okay?" I nod against her.

OceanofPDF.com

XXXI



OceanofPDF.com

Storm

Walking through the front door of our house, I'm surprised to see the tea candles on the floor. On the kitchen counter there's a note.

Don't switch on the lights.

Get naked, and put the blindfold on—no peeking.

Wait for me.

Dante xx

My heart skips a beat, my nipples harden, and my clit is throbbing with excitement. All thoughts of demanding we sit down and don't leave the living room until everything unsaid is out in the open vanishes completely. Without wasting another minute, I strip out of my clothes and tie the red velvet around my eyes.

I wait with bated breath for what feels like forever before I sense any movement near me. My nipples peak, and my core weeps in anticipation of what's coming.

"It's time we have that talk." Dante's whispered words are the verbal equivalence of cold water.

Even though I want to dispute his words, I get the feeling that talking would be really bad for my health right now, so I

remain tightlipped.

Before I know what he's doing, he sweeps me off my feet and carries me in a fireman hold. His movement is graceful like that of a predator, and I barely feel us moving. It makes it harder to guess where he's taking me, and my excitement sparks to life again.

“Where—” The question dies on my lips when Dante shushes me and pinches my arse cheek.

Even though I don't mind, I huff theatrically. He isn't completely off the hook just because I've come to my senses and understand why he was being a douche this morning.

“Was that a huff of impatience? Or are you still cross with me?” he rasps.

There's an undertone of desperation that I like because I don't want him to think a lot of orgasms and one scribbled note is all it takes to make up for everything he's put me through. Maybe I'm reading too much into his tone, but since I can't see anything but blackness, feel anything but him, I'm relying on my hearing even though it isn't really giving me the answers I want.

“A bit of both,” I reply. His answering chuckle is as unfair as it's sexy, and my clit throbs in perfect symphony.

Saying nothing else, Dante lies me down on my back. The surface beneath me is cold to the touch, and I involuntarily arch my back. As soon as I relax and lie myself flat, drops of something that smells like coconut oil hit my skin.

“Relax for me, baby. Let me take care of you.” His mouth is so close to my ear I can feel his breath fanning across my heated skin.

I nod, and say, “Okay.”

Is it too dramatic saying I feel like I’ve found nirvana under his hands? Because that’s how it feels as he rubs the oil into my skin, adding pressure everywhere but the areas that throb for him. Despite that, it feels amazing and... intimate. Like he’s really caring for me.

“Move to your front for me,” he says, and I do so with zero hesitation.

Then he gathers my hair and braids it, making me giggle. When I was a little girl, Dante used to braid my hair for school when I wanted it. Reliving the memory through my mind’s eye is surreal and extremely funny. My big, tattooed uncle braiding my hair. I don’t think I ever told him just how bad he was at it, or that I always redid my braids in the school’s bathroom.

When he asks what I’m laughing at, I just shake my head. Lily’s warning unbidden comes to the forefront of my mind, and I don’t want to put him off his plans by reminiscing about our kinship. Obviously, it’s something we’re both aware of, but I don’t know how much of an issue it is for him now, and I’m not about to find out while lying naked and exposed in front of him.

After braiding my hair he gathers it on top of my head, using one of my hair clips. Then he pours oil on my back, butt, and the back of my legs. I can’t help moaning in pleasure as he

massages it into my skin, making me as relaxed as I can possibly be.

There's some quiet music playing in the background, and... wait, it's not music. It's one of those weather sound machines. Now that I really pay attention I can hear the rain pelting down, the wind whooshing and—*oh my God*—thunder rumbling.

It's a storm track.

While it might not seem like a big deal, it is to me. Growing up, Dante was my haven, my anchor in the storm. Now, I'm the storm, but it feels like he's still keeping me tethered.

I sniffle, overwhelmed with everything I'm feeling.

"Are you okay, baby?" Dante asks, pausing his movements.

"Don't stop," I beg, already missing his touch.

He continues to massage me everywhere, and despite touching my buttocks, it doesn't feel sexual. It's caring, reassuring—it's loving.

Although my heart soars from the gentle touch, I don't let myself revel in it as much as I could have. I'm naked for a reason, and I want to get to the point of that. If this was just about getting a massage, Dante could have covered my modesty. Yes, I love the way he looks at my body when it's on full display for him, but with the blindfold I can't soak in his heated gaze.

Like he so often does, Dante acts like he has a direct line to my thoughts, and his hands spread my arse cheeks. Eager for

his touch, I lift my hips and spread my legs.

“You make me so angry. You drive me insane,” he rasps while kneading the soft globes. “I have tried to deny my feelings for you, but that didn’t work for either of us.”

My breath saws out of me as I listen to his words, and no matter how much I mentally scream at my brain to just listen, the bastard clings to each syllable for hints of where this is going.

“I know I hurt you before, and I can never express how sorry I am.” He slides a finger between my folds, moving it slowly towards my nub. “I’m embarrassed that I ran like a coward, instead of staying like a man should.”

He thrusts a finger into my waiting heat, making me moan when he curls it and hits my G spot perfectly. Adding a second finger, he moves them in and out of my dripping pussy so slow I’m about to beg for more.

“But I’m here now, Storm. And I have questions... so many questions. If you answer them, I’ll let you come.”

I try to slam my legs shut, not interested in his mind games.

“Ahh, ahh, don’t do that. I’m not done.” Like his admonishing tone wasn’t enough, he roughly pinches my clit, making me cry out. “If you agree to this game, I’ll answer a question right after you do. How does that sound, baby?”

“I-I...” Bloody hell, I can’t talk, I can barely think as his fingers skilfully work me into a frenzy. “O-okay,” I gasp when

he curls his fingers and my pussy weeps onto his hand. Unable to help myself, I ask, “What happens if I say no?”

“Then we’ll find a way to restore the family dynamic. I’ll always be in your life, Storm. But your answer right now determines what role I’ll play.”

I open my mouth, intending to curse him out for putting all this on me. But before I can utter another word, his words fully register. If I’m deciphering his words correctly, this is him saying he wants me—but that the choice is mine.

If I say no, he’ll walk away—metaphorically—and we will find a way to become a family again. However, if I say yes... does he mean I can have him?

“Spell it out for me,” I beg. When he replies that I already know, I shake my head. “Don’t leave me guessing... please.”

The feel of his rough beard against my buttocks is all the warning I get before he bites my bum cheek. “I came back for you, baby. I’m not going anywhere unless you decide you don’t want me. Although I don’t want to walk away again, I’ll find the strength to do it if you really don’t want me.”

Tears pool in my eyes at his guttural admission. Bloody hell, I was right... he’s giving me all the power. So I guess the question is, am I brave enough to dive into the deep end again? Shite, it’s hard to think straight while his fingers slide in and out of my slick opening.

“I-I...” I squeeze my eyes closed, not easing until stars dance before my eyes. Then I take a deep breath and say,

“Yes.”

Dante wraps a hand around the nape of my neck and slants his lips to mine. The kiss is hungry, desperate even. And I think... Oh my God, I think he was nervous that I would say no—no to the game, no to him. *Silly man*. Even at my angriest, I don't think I could say no to him—no to a possibility of *us*. I try to tell him all that and more with my kiss.

“Thank you,” he murmurs after letting go of my lips and the words make me smile.

Said smile is wiped from my lips as he pumps his fingers harder into my pussy, and I cry out in pleasure. I try to tilt my hips to get him deeper, but he stops me by placing one arm against my ass and adding so much pressure I can't move. I'm not complaining, though. Now that I think I understand his intentions, I can even take comfort in the sensory deprivation.

“First question, baby. Why did you get a job at Dirty Diamonds?” His gruff timbre makes my core clench around his digits, and I shiver in pleasure.

Okay, time to be a big girl, I can do this—I can answer him honestly.

“It... I...” Ugh, it's harder to get the words out than I thought it would be. But when he caresses my lower back, adding just the right amount of pleasure, I get the strength I need to say the words out loud. “It made me feel closer to you.”

The blindfold feels like a frenemy right now because I both love and hate that I can't see his reaction. Is he pleased? Angry? I have no idea and it's... thrilling.

“What's your connection to Dirty Diamonds?” I ask, needing him to answer this since it's been nagging at me for so long.

Rather than answering, he curls his digits so far inside me I see stars. I'm teetering on the edge, when he finally answers me. “I own it.” He is playing my body like an instrument and I can't process his words.

I'm too focused on the release I crave, and when it crests, I scream his name. “Shite... Dante... yes, right there. Don't stop... don't. Stop!” I try to buck, but his hand is back on my lower back, making it impossible.

As soon as I'm down from my high, he moves his thumb to my clit and rolls it lazily while asking the next question. He wants to know what my life has been like since he left, and I tell him. Then I ask him the same thing, secretly loving that he's been as miserable without me as I was without him.

Feeling the new and improved connection between us helps me, and I give him everything I have—that I am. I describe the hell I've been living in, how it felt like I've been cold without him.

Even though it feels wrong to talk about my sister while my uncle's fingers are buried inside me, I mention that she's been my saving grace. If it wasn't for Ave, I honestly don't know what I would have done with myself.

No, I don't mean that in a teenage emo way, but with her around I had purpose, and I couldn't drift too far. She was the anchor in my personal storm. Giving me a reason to get out of bed, and to find a way to go on when all I wanted to do was succumb to my broken heart.

Apart from Dante's shocked inhales, he gives nothing away, and it's oddly comforting. If he's struggling with my words—my truth—he's keeping it on the inside. I'm glad because I don't think I can handle defending myself, not like this.

I whimper in protest when he removes his fingers from my pussy, but my whimpers turn to moans when he focuses all his attention on my clit. In record time, I explode again, calling out his name, begging for him to stop when it becomes too much.

He continues this game, asking me questions and rewarding every answer with pleasure until I'm putty in his hands. My pussy is sore, and the prospect of yet another orgasm is nerve-racking. I honestly don't know how much more I can take.

As he does so often, he acts like he can read my thoughts when he rasps, "We're almost done, baby. And it's not a moment too soon, because I don't know how much longer I can wait to be inside you."

The thought of finally having his cock inside me makes my centre clench, and I moan into the empty room. Before I can prepare myself for what comes next, he spreads my legs and I feel his hot breath on my folds.

“You’ve made quite the mess.” His chuckle is low and throaty. “I think I need to clean you up before we proceed.”

Dante licks me from top to bottom before parting my folds, his tongue lapping at my entrance. I writhe in pleasure, allowing him to build me up even though I know he won’t let me come. He hasn’t asked the next question yet.

“Dante…” I moan his name, reaching back so I can wind my fingers into his blond, shaggy hair.

“Yes, baby?” The smile I can’t see is palpable in his tone, and I imagine his blue eyes glint with excitement.

Gah, he really is too sexy, especially when he’s between my legs. Even though it’s only been a few days, it feels like I know him better than I ever have. He might not have said much, but he’s shown me more than I’ve ever dared dream of.

Now I know what he looks like when I worship him, when I’m denying him, and when I’m toying with him. But I know what he looks like when he thrusts into me, and his expression turns serene like it’s his favourite place to be.

“Ask me the next question,” I moan and tug at his hair. As he laughs his breath hits my exposed pussy in small puffs.

So far he’s asked me about my job, making me elaborate on how I feel about working at the bar. He’s also asked what I’ve told Ave, why I never contacted him—*that one I felt was bloody self-explanatory*—and about Clara. I know there have been more questions, but I can’t remember them for the life of

me. All I remember is the toe-curling and earth-shattering pleasure that follows my answers.

“Have you ever killed anyone?”

I still as the question registers, and a shiver works its way down my spine. What kind of question is that? Of course I haven't bloody killed anyone.

“No.”

He stills between my legs and moves his head so he's no longer worshipping me with his mouth.

“Why not?” The deep timbre of his voice sounds almost... shite, I don't know. I can't read his tone so I have no idea where he's going with this.

“Because I'm not insane,” I huff, immediately regretting my words.

I'm not stupid, and I'm not forgetful either. Even though I'm pretty sure Beth has shielded me from most of the gory details, I still know she's killed before. And if Dante is her... boss—*is that the right word?*—anyway, if that's the case, then he's probably taken someone's life at some point. The bloodied clothes he carried into Dirty Diamonds those years ago certainly lends credibility to that conclusion.

“Hey!” I protest when Dante slips from between my legs. When I hear him shuffle around to the side, I get so annoyed I sit up and rip the blindfold off. I'm on the dining table as I expected, and the only light around us is from the tea candles so it doesn't take me long to get used to seeing again. “That's

really not fair,” I huff accusingly as I watch him reach for his pants.

OceanofPDF.com

XXXII



OceanofPDF.com

Dante

“What isn’t fair?” I ask as I pull my wallet from my pants.

Turning my head, I watch Storm looking like she’s caught between anger and fear. “You’re bolting,” she breathes. “You’re getting ready to leave me again.”

Straightening, I frown in confusion. Then I look down at the pants in my hand, and, yeah, I guess I understand her conclusion. She’s wrong, dead wrong, but I still understand.

“No,” I say, walking over to the table. Then I sit down next to her and show her the pictures I carry in my wallet.

It’s Lydia, the first girl I ever helped save. The first picture is of her after she got adopted by an amazing family in Colorado. The next ones show her every year, right until she became a nurse and got married. The last I heard, she had twins and is still with her husband. I haven’t kept in touch since then, knowing my job is done.

“I wanted to show you this,” I say, pointing at the first picture. “She’s one of the few stories that has a happy ending. I keep the pictures as a reminder. The shite we deal with often gets terrible, and I enjoy reminding myself what we’re fighting for. What the ultimate goal is. To give them happy, healthy lives.”

Storm leans her head against my shoulder. “She’s pretty,” she says as I shuffle through the ID sized pictures. “Oh my God, she got married?”

It's a redundant question since the last picture is of her getting married in her scrubs. But I still say, "She did. And she has kids of her own now."

Taking the pictures from me, Storm studies each one multiple times. Once done, she hands them back to me. "So you really weren't leaving?"

I snort. "Of course not, baby. I've told you, I'm here to stay. You're mine, and a few words won't change that."

Nuzzling into me, she mumbles, "I'm sorry. I didn't mean —"

"You meant it," I say. "And it's okay. I would love to live in a world where my hands weren't dirtied by killing scum. I don't regret it, though."

Storm hums in the back of her throat, and I feel like she's really understanding me. If we lived in utopia, it would be a different story. We don't, though. Which means that I neither have nor want the luxury of closing my eyes to those that need my help.

"Will you tell me how you got started?" she asks, giving me a hopeful look.

Nodding, I answer, "One day I will."

"Oh." Disappointment is palpable in her tone.

Needing to clarify, I say, "I don't just want to tell you, baby. I want to show you everything, share it with you. I've told no one else the full story. Baz was there, so he doesn't count."

“Really?” Her tone is hopeful, but the look on her face shows me she still doesn’t fully believe me.

Aside from the fact that our relationship is bloody illegal, I really don’t want to drag her down with me. Staying here makes that inevitable. Maybe not today, tomorrow, or even this year—but it’ll happen eventually, and I want more for her. When all that’s said and done, I—we—just have to find a way to deal.

I want her—my niece, my perfect Storm—too much to let go, ever. She’s it for me. Just because I’ve refused to acknowledge it doesn’t mean I didn’t know, I’ve known since before I took her virginity. That night just sealed it.

Taking her head between my hands, I tilt it so she’s looking up at me. “When have I ever gone back on a promise I made you? Sure, I can’t pretend I haven’t acted like a coward and hurt you. But if I made a promise, have I ever broken it?”

“N-no—”

I slam my lips to hers, moving one hand to her side and slowly sliding up until I reach her tit. While devouring her mouth, I squeeze the flesh, not stopping until she’s panting and moaning into my mouth.

“And why’s that?” I ask.

“I-I don’t know.”

I growl with annoyance as she takes the easy way out. “You know, Storm,” I press on. “But if you insist on playing this game of denial, I’ll just have to show you.” Excitement coats

my words and truthfully, I don't mind one bit. The thought of showing her the truth via our bodies has my cock standing at attention.

Without warning, I let go and push Storm down so she's sprawled out on the table. "Show me how wet you are," I rasp. "Spread those gorgeous, plump lips of yours, and show me what's *mine*."

A devilish smirk spreads across her lips as she parts her legs, sliding two fingers between her glistening folds. "Is this what you want to see?" she purrs.

I stare transfixed as her digits disappear into her tight, scorching hole. Fuck me, that's so bloody sexy. She spreads her legs even more so there's no chance I can't see what she's doing. It's hot to watch her play with her cunt, and I love the sounds she's making.

"I feel so empty without you inside me," she whines.

Swallowing thickly, I rasp, "Are you going to let me help you, baby?" My cock rests against my abs and pre-cum leaks onto my stomach. I swipe my finger through the clear moisture. Then I trail my finger across her gorgeous lips. "Open your mouth, baby. Taste me."

Her tongue darts out, and she greedily licks the pad of my finger.

"More," she demands, making me groan at how desperate she sounds. "I want to suck you off while you eat me out." Blimey, there's no way I can resist her.

I climb onto the table and position myself so my cock is nudging her mouth while I bury my face in her delicious cunt, using my legs and arms to keep my weight off her. As I swirl her clit with my tongue, she wraps a hand around my base and guides my cock into her mouth.

“Fuck! Baby!” I groan and lap enthusiastically at her entrance as her tongue slides around the bulbous head, sucking the pre-cum from my slit.

Christ, she tastes sublime, and I growl in approval when she pumps her hand up and down while sucking at the head. There’s no way to describe what it’s like to have her work my cock like this while I feast on her pussy.

“Use your fingers,” she moans around my hardness.

I slide two digits into her heat, using them to stretch her and prepare her for when I can finally shag her again.

Storm’s moans turn to mewls when I add a third finger, and she eagerly takes more of my cock into her throat. She gags around my length, but when I try to pull back, she complains and I stay where I am.

Her lips and tongue feel insane, and it doesn’t take long until I feel the need to shoot my seed down her throat. I try to hold back, but she still won’t let me pull away.

“If you move, I’ll never forgive you,” she warns breathlessly. “I want to drink your cum.”

The words go straight to my cock, and while I thrust my fingers hard into her heat and suck on her nub, I come.

“Oh, baby. Storm... yeah that’s it.”

True to her word, she drinks it all down while succumbing to her own orgasm—screaming my name around my length.

While I wait for her to gather her breath, I get off and move to the end of the table. Feeling impatient, I grip her hips and pull her with me so she’s perched at the end. Even though I’ve just emptied my balls down her throat, my dick is still hard, and I want—*need*—to be inside her.

“Dante—”

“Shh! I need to be inside you,” I rasp. Bending, I reach for my pants, digging around the pockets for the foil package.

“Dante,” she says my name more forcefully this time. “I don’t want you to use a condom. I want to feel you.”

Christ, I’d love nothing more. “We can’t,” I say regretfully. Tackling the giant elephant in our relationship, I add, “I would never forgive myself if you became—”

Storm interrupts me with a snort. “I’m randy as hell, not stupid. I have an implant, and I’m clean.” She points at the spot in her arm, lifting her eyebrow. “Are you?”

I chuckle and answer her honestly. “I get tested frequently, baby. Yes, I’m clean.”

When she reiterates she doesn’t want me to use a condom, I drop my pants. Then I line the tip up with her drenched opening, and before she has time to wrap her legs around my waist, I slam into her. I groan in pure pleasure as her cunt gloves my cock, her inner walls squeeze me so hard that if I

didn't know for a fact she isn't a virgin, I'd be tempted to think so.

Fuck, it's impossible to describe how much better it feels to be inside her without a condom. It's like a blind man seeing for the first time, as I feel everything that the latex has previously dulled. Now, though, now, I feel *everything*.

"Relax for me baby," I croon. "Your cunt is squeezing me so tight."

I bend over her body and capture her lips with mine. My tongue delves into her mouth as soon as she parts her lips. I move my hands to her tits, squeezing and kneading the soft flesh.

Ending the kiss, I bow my head and capture one of her pebbled nipples between my teeth. As I nip and suck at the peak, she arches off the table and I wrap my arms around her. Then I lift her off it completely and move us to the wall.

While I fuck her so hard I wouldn't be surprised if her back burrows through the wall, a few family pictures fall down, making both of us laugh.

"Oh, no. I liked that pic... shite, yes. Keep fucking me." Her moans turn throaty, and I bet it's from all the screaming she's done tonight.

Her nails rake across my back, leaving a delicious sting in their wake.

I move my hands to her delectable arse and part her cheeks. Pushing us more against the wall, I prod at her back entrance,

while pumping into her cunt hard and fast. When my finger slips past the tight ring, she screams my name again, and I groan hers.

“One day,” I rasp. “One day I’m going to fuck this tight hole as well.”

“Yes. Yes.”

I don’t know if her words are in answer to what I said, or if she’s too far gone to register anything but her pleasure. It doesn’t matter, though. One day I will claim her arse, just as I’ve claimed her cunt and mouth. Her entire body belongs to me.

“Come for me,” I demand as I feel my own orgasm nearing rapidly. “Squeeze the cum from my cock with your pussy, baby. I want to feel you come on my cock.”

She cries out and digs her nails deeper into the skin on my back. “I don’t think I can come again,” she protests.

I chuckle because she won’t have a choice. I crave her orgasm as much as my own, if not more. With my finger in her arse and my cock in her cunt, she is going to. Canting my hips, I bottom out with every thrust, knowing I’ll be hitting her A spot like this.

By now, I’m pretty sure I know her body better than she does. She’s beyond pliable when she’s like this, but I’ve yet to make her squirt once. I’m not sure if she knows it, but she came close when I fucked her with the banana. The thought has me thinking about the bottom corner of my mattress which

still smells of her arousal, and I hope the smell never goes away.

“Scream for me, baby. Tell me how good it feels to have me inside you,” I grunt.

“Dante... oh my God... it hurts. It’s too much. I can’t... DANTE!” Storm throws her head back.

“Look at me when you come,” I growl, not happy she’s denying me a look at her beautiful eyes and the way they roll back in her head when she climaxes. “I want to see everything.”

Storm tenses, her holes gripping my fingers and cock in a vice. Her moans turn nonsensical and that’s when I feel it, the liquid spilling from her cunt. I smirk, knowing my perfect Storm just squirted for the first time.

“Oh my God,” she pants, a blush creeping across her face. “What was that?”

Pretty sure she’s talking about the liquid, I chuckle knowingly. “That was my dessert you just spilled on the floor,” I rasp.

While my pleasure crests, I keep my eyes on hers. Loving how dark her eyes are, and the way her mouth is parted in an O. I groan her name over and over as I empty myself deep into her pussy.

When my cock is no longer pulsating inside her, I pull her torso flush against mine, and whisper, “I love you, baby. You *are* my perfect Storm.”

Her eyes widen, and she wiggles. “Put me down.”

I frown, because that wasn't the response I was hoping for—or expecting, if I'm completely honest. Still, I do as she says, and lower her to her feet.

“You love me?” she huffs, resting her hands on her hips. “You bloody love me?”

“Y-yes...” Blimey, it's hard to concentrate when my cum is running down her inner thighs. “Yes, I do.”

Her eyes soften, and she reaches for me, and I go to her willingly. Taking my hand she places it on top of her racing heart, and I frown in confusion.

“You did this,” she murmurs.

Feeling as confused as ever, I just nod. I mean I've just spent hours making her come, so it's not unexpected that her heartbeat has increased.

“You taught me what love is. You taught me what it means to feel saved and loved. Sure, you broke my heart along the way, but now... now you've put it back together.” Her voice cracks at the last part, and I'm not too proud to admit my throat feels thick and my own eyes are misty. “I love you too, Dante. I always have, and I always will.”

XXXIII



OceanofPDF.com

Dante

It's been almost a week since I finally admitted out loud how I feel about my niece. I know it's unconventional, I know it's twisted, and I know it's wrong—but this is one time where I don't want to be right. We're both consenting adults, and we're not harming anyone. Society can go fuck itself.

“What do we do?” Storm asks sleepily.

She's lying half on top of me with her leg sprawled across my waist. Her sweet breath tickles the hair on my chest with each exhale. I'm turning into a bloody sap, because I could write freaking poetry about how it feels to have her in my arms.

“About what?” I ask. When she moves her head, I open one eye so I can look at her. “Beth? Lily? Or...” I growl under my breath, annoyed I have to bring the fucker's name up when in bed. “Or Alan?”

Storm has already told me that both Lily and Beth know about our relationship, and I know she's scared they're going to ruin our happiness. I doubt it, but I don't want to sweep her concerns away either. She's no longer my ward, she's my equal—actually, she's my more, my everything.

“Fuck Alan,” she mumbles, repeating my earlier words.

The prick called her earlier tonight, asking when he could see her again. Apparently she's told him she's sick, but I guess

she's out of time and reality is knocking on our door before we're ready.

"Christmasss," she slurs. I chuckle as she fights to keep her eyes open. "Not... funny." It takes her way longer than it should to get those words out.

I wrap my arms around her and hold her tightly against me. Then I kiss the top of her head.

"Go to sleep, baby. We'll figure it out in the morning."

She nods and puckers her lips, kissing my chest before mumbling something about needing more covers. I grin widely because we don't need more, she just needs to learn to share. Every night I wake up without one, and she's cuddling one while the other is turned the wrong way. I don't know how she manages night after night, but she does.

This last week has been bloody amazing. We've talked with Avery, who's beyond giddy that we're coming to visit her for Christmas. I'm sure she's already planned every minute of every day in her head.

The current plan is for all of us to be together for five days, and then I'm flying to see Baz in Santa Cruz. Storm will stay with Avery for a few days before joining me.

I don't like that she's insisting on telling her sister about us without me there. I understand it, but I don't think I'll ever like it. It feels like something we should do together. Mostly because if it goes wrong, I don't want Storm to have to deal with the aftermath alone. However, I know my girl is worried

being with me will cost her relationship with Avery, so I have to respect that she wants to break the news in private.

I smile as Storm snores lightly. One of these days I'm going to record it because she keeps telling me she never snores. *Liar.* When she turns to her side, I turn with her, not willing to let go for even a second unless I really have to. It's only partly because I can't get enough of how amazing her arse feels against me, but mostly it's because I *need* to touch her.

When I came back to Briarwood, I don't know what I expected, but whatever it was, it can't have been as good or as perfect as what I found. I know it's a miracle that she's forgiven me, just as I'm aware I'm walking on thin ice.

She wasn't kidding about not wanting me to see Lily if it can be helped, and I don't have a problem with that. There are no natural reasons for me and Lily to be around each other. But knowing that she's aware of—or at least suspects—our relationship doesn't sit right with me. Eventually we're going to have to confront it.

I grind my teeth together as I'm reminded that officially, my niece is dating someone else. Speaking of the prick, Storm is under the impression she's going on a date with him the day after tomorrow. So far I haven't been able to talk her out of going, but that doesn't mean I'll allow it.

Would it be going too far to tie her to my bed? No, I don't believe it would. Because there's no way I'm allowing my perfect Storm to see someone else—fake or not.

She. Is. Mine.

OceanofPDF.com

XXXIV



OceanofPDF.com

Storm

Talk about your hollow victory!

Yes, I won the argument with Dante, which is why I'm in Alan's car. We're on our way to his dad's house for dinner with the entire family. While he's babbling about one thing or another, I try not to feel too guilty about going. But it's bloody hard not to when I know Dante is seething about the thought of me pretending to be all lovey-dovey with another man.

There's also the other reason, the one that isn't driven by jealousy, but his need to protect me. Or maybe they go hand-in-hand. I don't know, and it hardly matters. I shut both down and stood my ground.

Hollow victory indeed.

"Dad's looking forward to seeing you," Alan says. When I don't reply immediately, he squeezes my knee to the point it's painful. "I expect you to answer me when I talk to you, darling."

I shake my head, trying to banish all thoughts of Dante, and how upset he was. The look of betrayal on his handsome face isn't something I can forget, though. Although I tried to reason, I'm honestly not sure I buy my own excuses.

Yes, I'm doing this for Clara, and because I believe deep in my soul that it's the right thing to do. But maybe I should have been more understanding, more amicable. Dante knows more than I do about these things, so what am I really doing here?

Waiting for the Potter family to talk about family secrets? Or hope I, by pure happenstance, come across something that'll condemn them?

“Storm!” Alan snaps.

I make a show of running my hands down the stupid dress I'm wearing, smoothing the fabric. “Yes, darling?” I try to appear aloof, like I've just been lost in thought. “Sorry, did you say something? I've been so busy, and—”

“Enough.” Alan doesn't shout, instead, his tone is deceptively soft. “What's with you? You haven't been showing up at work. You've barely had time to see me, and now you're not paying attention. What's going on with you?”

I smile weakly. “I told you my uncle is back, and that I was poorly.”

Alan looks thunderous but says nothing else, and we drive the rest of the way in complete silence.

When we pull up to his dad's estate, Peter is waiting for us in the driveway. As soon as I exit the car, he rushes to my side and kisses both my cheeks.

“You look lovely as always, Storm.” His eyes twinkle, as he takes my arm and escorts me inside.

After giving him my coat, the three of us walk into the dining room where Richard, the oldest brother, and Bernadette, Peter's girlfriend, are already waiting.

“Look at you,” I gush when I hug Bernadette hello. She's eight months pregnant and huge as a house. “You look

amazing.”

The sad smile I get in return makes me frown. Sure, it’s been a few months since I last saw her, but back then she was so excited about the pregnancy she couldn’t talk about anything else. Now that I look at her, she’s changed a lot.

Her cheeks are not as round, her hair is chopped like someone went crazy with a pair of scissors, and... oh my God, is that... something that looks suspiciously like friction burns covers her wrists.

“Are you okay?” The words are out of my mouth before I can stop myself.

Peter is immediately at my side, wrapping his arm around Bernadette. “You’re so sweet for noticing.” Taking his girlfriend’s hand he holds it up so I can see the patterns. “My Bernie is just getting too big to wear her bracelets,” he guffaws and slaps her arse.

I don’t miss the way the woman flinches, but I say nothing else. I need to watch what I’m saying around these people. Bloody hell, have things like this been going on underneath my nose the entire time, and I’ve just been too blind to see it?

After mentally filing the information away for later, I say hello to Richard before taking my seat between Peter and Alan.

“Where’s John tonight?” I ask, trying not to appear relieved that the last brother isn’t here tonight.

“He had some business to take care of,” Alan answers dismissively.

Although I want to ask more questions, I leave it at that. I can’t be too eager to get answers.

“So dad,” Alan says, giving me a look I can’t decipher. “Dante, Storm’s uncle, is back in town.”

As I look between father and son, I feel like I’m watching a silent movie play out on their faces. Well, almost silent—Peter spits his wine out at the mention of Dante. But other than that, they say nothing at all.

“How interesting,” Peter finally says, after a lengthy silence. “You must be happy to have family around you for this time of year, darling.”

The thought of celebrating Christmas with the two people I love most in this world makes it easy to put all my warm and fuzzy feelings into my tone as I say, “It is.”

“Well, we might as well get to why we invited you over tonight. We’re going for a trip, and we won’t be back until after New Year’s Eve.”

I get the feeling that this is news to the rest of the family because everyone turns to their patriarch, who’s sitting at the head of the table, smiling like he doesn’t have a care in the world. And maybe he doesn’t, but I do.

Why announce something like this when I’m present? Travelling during the holidays is usually something that needs to be planned, especially for a large group of people. Even

Dante and I had problems getting tickets to Canada this late, so we have to change flights in Denver.

“Oh?” I try to not sound eager. “Are you going out of the country?” My eyes dart to Bernadette’s enormous stomach. I can’t claim to be an expert on pregnancy, but I’m sure I’ve heard you shouldn’t be flying in your third trimester.

While Peter explains they’re going to visit family, Alan and Richard exchange eager looks. No one mentions whether it’s in England, or if they’re travelling abroad and I don’t ask. Instead, I grab my clutch from the table and excuse myself.

As soon as I’m in the loo and have locked the door behind me, I fish my phone out of the blue clutch that matches my dress, and text Dante.

Me: I’m sorry xx

Not five seconds pass before his answer comes through.

Dante: Look out the window!

Baffled, I do as I’m told, and at first I can’t see anything. But then I see what looks like the light from a torch.

Dante: I’m here, baby. I love you!!

My heart literally skips a beat as I realise he’s here... he somehow followed us, and knowing my uncle is close makes me feel safe.

Me: Thank you for being here. xx

Dante: In five minutes you’ll get a call. Answer the phone and delete these messages!

Although I don't know how clearly he can see me from where he's hiding, I wave and blow him a kiss. Then I pull the blinds back down, and flush the toilet for good measure. I even wash my hands in case anyone is listening.

Five minutes later on the dot my phone rings, and when I try to excuse myself again, Alan insists I answer the phone at the table. It's someone I've never talked with before named Cain that wants me to come in and cover a shift.

I half-heartedly try to decline, but when he keeps insisting, Peter encourages me to leave. "If duty calls, you have to answer. We understand all about work obligations." The Potter patriarch flashes me a wolfish grin that makes my skin crawl. "Let me drive you there, darling. That way I know you've arrived safely and I don't have to worry."

Despite my unease, I'm glad for his meddling since Alan won't fight me on it now that his dad has approved it.

The drive feels like it's taking for-bloody-ever. It's not because Peter is going slow, in fact, he's driving faster than I like. But being alone with him like this is making me uneasy. It's not from anything he's done to me or while I've been present, but knowing you're alone with a known child trafficker is scary.

"You know, I've always liked you, Storm," he says as we near Dirty Diamonds. "You're a good girl, and those are hard to come by nowadays."

I swallow nervously. "Thank you."

He nods, looking deep in thought. “Have a nice Christmas my dear, and I hope you’ll be ready to give more of yourself to our family in the new year.”

The words are innocent enough, but something about the glint in his eyes has me feeling like there’s a double-meaning—maybe a warning even—that I’m missing.

“Sure,” I say, cursing internally when my voice wavers. “Merry Christmas, Peter.” I lean across the gearshift and kiss his cheek.

OceanofPDF.com

XXXV



OceanofPDF.com

Storm

“Ave!” With a squeal that’s so loud several people around us turn their heads, I drop my carry-on and rush over to my sister.

“Cait, it’s so goo—” I cut her words off by squeezing her as tight as I can.

Now that we’re finally together, I realise how much I’ve missed her. I let go of her and move back so I can really look at her, and then I frown. There’s something off about her, but I can’t put my finger on what it is. Yeah, she’s lost some weight, and her hair is dull. But apart from that, she looks like herself, but I know deep in my gut that something is wrong.

Picking up on my scrutiny, my sister’s eyes harden and she whispers, “Not now.”

Even though I hate letting it go, I do. I won’t leave Canada until I know my sister is okay, but I can drop it until it’s just the two of us. After all, I have quite a few secrets of my own, so it’s not like I can claim any moral high ground.

Feeling overly giddy at seeing my sister again, I don’t let go of her arm while she hugs Dante. Instead, I cling onto her like I’m afraid she’ll vanish if I let go. Honestly, after travelling for so long, I’m not even completely sure I’m standing here. There were no direct flights, so we flew from London to Denver, and then to the country that invented Trivial Pursuit. It

might not be the most logical route, but it's the only available one.

Then there's the time difference on top. We're now five hours behind our normal time zone, and we've been travelling for nine hours, and then the delay... you know what, I give up. All I know is that it's allegedly the same day, not that I care at this point.

"I've missed you so much," I croak as we walk arm in arm out of the airport.

Dante leaves the luggage with us while he goes to pick up the car he's rented.

"I want to know everything. Have you become a hockey-loving, polar bear-riding, maple syrup lover now? Are you scared of the dark?" When she doesn't even shoot me half a smile, I continue. "Do you say *'eh'* a lot? Come on, Ave... you have to give me something."

Giving me one of those grimaces that never bodes well for me, she says, "How about I tell you that I know you're shagging our uncle. Is that the 'something' you're after?"

Even though her tone is completely void of any malice—in fact, she's practically deadpanning those condemning words—I drop my arm from where it's linked to hers, feeling like her touch is burning me.

"W-what did you say?" I ask, my eyes darting left and right to see if anyone is listening.

Ave clears her throat. "Do you deny it?"

Heat creeps up my cheeks as I shake my head. Don't get me wrong, I *want* to deny it until I turn blue in the face, but I don't lie to her.

"No... but... I mean... Ave?" Words keep falling from my mouth, and I'm pretty sure none of them make sense.

In typical Ave fashion, my sister tells me to calm down. Then she surprises the hell out of me by hugging me. "I'll tell you everything once it's just the two of us. For now, I just need to know if you want this..." She swallows thickly. "Tell me if you're really an item, because if not, I'll get you out of it."

Too stunned to reply to her hushed but demanding whisper, I shake my head again.

"Words, Cait. Damnit, I need you to tell me." Ave is no longer whispering, and I know she's two seconds from losing it.

"I love him," I whisper. "I know it's wrong, but I can't help it. He's it for me, Ave. He's always been."

Even though it's bloody hard not to fidget under my sister's hard glare, I hold steady. I don't want her to think I don't want it. At the same time, I'm scared to think of what her reaction will be. I know mine and Dante's relationship is wrong in the eyes of society, yet I can't make myself think of it that way.

In this day and age where souls are born into bodies that don't fit the person, is it really so hard to believe the same cosmic error can bring soulmates into each other's family? I don't bloody think so.

“Are you truly happy?” she asks me, and I nod for the third time. “Then I’m happy for you.” Ave’s entire demeanour changes, going from scrutinising to relaxed.

Wait a second... what the bloody hell does that mean? Is she...

“Does that mean you’re okay with it?” I ask. Then I wait with bated breath while she takes two insufferable minutes before she beams at me.

“If he’s what you want, I’m happy for you,” she says.

Something about her reaction is... off. She’s acting like... “How long have you known?”

With a sly smile, my sister tells me she’s known since before something happened between me and Dante. “Why do you think I texted Mike to come over when we had that movie night years ago?”

I pull her into another tight hug, unable to contain my tears. Now that I know I won’t have to choose between my sister and my uncle, I can finally admit how scared I’ve been. With the weight removed from my shoulders, I finally feel like everything might work out.

“Stop it. You’re making my coat wet,” Ave faux complains, making me laugh.

The spell is broken, though. And when Dante finally brings the car around, I know he can see the difference in me.

After loading the car, we get in. Ave insists I sit in the front passenger seat, while she gets into the back. I’m a little miffed

by that, but only because I'd hoped we could talk during the three hour long drive. However, it's not like I'm put out by having to be this close to the man I love.

We're on the motorway when I finally gather enough courage to reach for Dante's hand. He gives me a puzzled look and checks the rearview mirror.

"I already know you're shagging, so some lame hand holding won't scar me," Ave quips.

While I burst out laughing, Dante slams the brakes and curses. Luckily no one is right behind us, and nothing happens. However, the atmosphere in the car changes completely, and he doesn't speak for the next hour.

Ave uses that time to chat away about this or that, telling me about some of the things she's seen and done.

When we were arranging the trip, Ave insisted we rent a cabin instead of staying near where she lives. Even though I was disappointed, I understood where she's coming from. While this is all new and exciting to me, campus is her normal. So it makes sense she wants to experience something different. It could even be the reason she used public transport to get to the airport instead of her car.

Turning in my seat, I say, "You know I'm not going back home without seeing where you live, right?"

"Yeah, yeah. We'll go stay there when it's just the two of us." I nod, satisfied.

After two hours on the road, we make a stop at one of those petrol stations that have everything you could want while driving. Food, loo, and best of all, you get to stretch your legs. Before eating, Dante wants to put more petrol in the car, and I stay with him while Ave goes inside.

“Are you cross she knows already?” I ask as soon as my sister is gone. The plan was to tell her on this trip, but I wanted to tell Ave while she and I were alone so we had time to talk it through.

Cupping my cheek, he says, “No, baby. I’m confused. I thought you wanted to wait, so what changed?”

“She already knew,” I grumble, still trying to wrap my mind around that. “In fact, she’s the one who *told* me that she knew, I never brought it up. Nosy git.” Even as I say it, I can’t help laughing. This is just so Ave, to know everything.

“Well then. It does give me the chance to do this.” Dante closes the distance between us and claims my lips.

It feels amazingly freeing to kiss him like this in public, and I bask in the feeling.

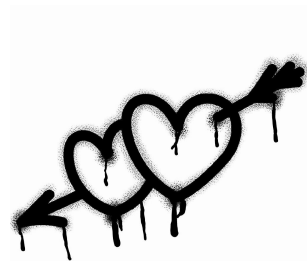
“What a shame I can’t do what I really want to do to you.” His tone is gruff from not being used, and the timbre goes straight to my clit that throbs in response. I gasp, and Dante smiles knowingly. “Are you going to meet me in the bathroom later so I can take care of you?”

I laugh and throw my arms around his neck, forcing him to bend until our lips are fused together. It’s not until I pull back

that I realise I just did that without thinking, and here it's okay. No one knows us, which means no one can judge us. How haven't I given this benefit more thought?

Now that my relationship with Dante is out in the open, I feel more relaxed. With all the things that I still don't have an answer to, it's nice that Ave's reaction to our relationship is no longer something I need to worry about.

When I'm alone with Ave, I'm going to demand answers, though. Like how the hell did my sister already know? It's just one more mystery to add to my list of things only my sister can answer. The next item on the list is the weird phone call the day Lily dragged me down the street. I've played that over and over in my mind, and the more I think about it, the more confused I become.



It's the day before Christmas, and Dante and I have the cabin to ourselves. Ave had something to take care of on her computer, and she was very insistent it needed to be done from home. When we offered to go with her, she told us to stay here and enjoy some alone time.

Although I hate to be without her when we have so little time together, I can't stay upset about it for long. Especially

not when Dante is standing in front of me, only wearing the bow around his glorious cock.

“Is that for me?” I laugh, smacking my lips. “Whatever could it be... is it a hat? A pony?” My laughter dies when he walks towards me, his hardness bobbing with each step.

When he reaches me, I immediately fall to my knees and lick the head where pre-cum is already gathered. I moan as I savour the flavour exploding on my tongue. No, it’s not the best thing I’ve ever tasted, but the heated look in his eyes and his growls of pleasure makes it... I don’t even know how to describe it. All I know is that his reaction makes it sexy, and it makes me eager to swallow every last drop of his cum.

Much like I did the first time I held his cock in my hand, I study it—it really is a thing of beauty and contradictions. Veiny, yet silky smooth. Hard, yet pliable. Is it any wonder I can get lost in my admiration?

“We don’t have all night,” Dante rasps. “It’s time for you to get to work, baby.”

I nod and open my mouth, careful to shield my teeth with my lips. I love the feel of the barbells as they run over my lips, and I lick the pattern of the Jacob’s Ladder. Then I move my tongue to the tip, swirling around it before I move along the tip to his slit.

Making a sucking motion I take him further until the head reaches my gag reflex. When my eyes water and I’m desperate for air, I pull back. I repeat this over and over until I can take him further down my throat.

Dante groans in appreciation and tangles his long fingers in my hair. “I’m going to fuck your mouth, baby. Are you ready?”

I move my hands to his backside and nod. A moan slips out as he thrusts into my mouth. It makes me feel so naughty... so filthy to sit on my knees like nothing more than a glorified hole for his cock.

My clit throbs, my pussy weeps, and my boobs feel heavy and constricted. Unlike Dante, I’m not naked yet, but I bloody wish I was.

Much to my disappointment, Dante stops before he shoots his cum down my throat. He chuckles at my disgruntled sounds, but when he reminds me that Ave is probably on her way back, I’m eager to get to the part where I get his cock inside me.

“Get on all fours,” Dante growls after ripping my clothes off.

Eager to get his rigid length inside me, I scramble to do as he says. I get down on my hands and knees, wiggling my arse inviting him closer. His harsh breathing is bloody music to my ears, and I’m more than ready for him.

Despite knowing that, Dante slides his fingers through my folds, coating them in my juices. I smile knowingly, but that smile dissipates when I feel his fingers press against my tight hole.

“Are you... tonight?” I moan.

He chuckles. “Not tonight, baby. When I claim your arse, it’ll be when we have more time.”

Since he always finds time to play with my arse when he’s shagging me, it doesn’t take long before he penetrates the ring. Even though it still stings, it’s a feeling I’m growing to love. And when he thrusts into my pussy until his cock is buried to the hilt, I moan so loud I’m glad Ave isn’t around.

While Dante shags me with long and hard thrusts, I move one hand down so I can reach my clit. I swirl the nub, and it doesn’t take long before my body is shaking, and both my holes squeeze him.

The feel of his hardness in my pussy is beyond exquisite, I’m pretty sure it’s enough to turn anyone into a nympho. He hits every spot inside me perfectly on every thrust, and the feel of his barbells only heightens everything I’m feeling.

“Dante!” I scream his name as my orgasm crests, making it hard to stay balanced.

He wraps one hand into my long hair and forces my head back. Then he slams into me once, twice, groaning my name as he comes deep inside me.

Since we don’t know when Ave will return, we shower individually to not scar her if she comes back sooner than expected. Something tells me it’s the opposite, though. That she’s going to return later than she said.

My sister has been careful to act as normal as possible, and it’s not gone unnoticed. Where she’s still not the best at

peopling, she's usually a far cry from the robotic girl she's clearly been body swapped with.

"What's on your mind?" Dante asks as I walk into the living room and join him on the couch.

Gnawing on my bottom lip I contemplate how best to answer. "Something is wrong with Ave." My mouth blurts out the words before my brain settles on the best way to say it. When Dante quirks a brow and moves his hand in front of him in a go on motion, I continue. "I can't quite put my finger on it, but something has changed."

He nods thoughtfully. "Are you sure something is wrong, and it's not caused by the natural changes that come with moving out?" When I shake my head, he gets a sad look in his eyes. "Do you think it's because we're together?"

I cup his cheek with my hand, turning his head slightly so our gazes are locked. "No, it's not because of us. She would have told me at the airport if she wasn't okay with it." He makes a sound that clearly shows he doesn't believe me. "I know my sister, Dante. She's hiding something, and it's something big. The more she tries to act normal, the more I suspect... well, I don't know what I suspect, actually. I just know it's bad."

He wraps his arm around my shoulder and pulls me to his side. "Is there anything I can do? Should I try to talk to her?"

Remembering Ave's words from the airport about waiting until we're alone, I shake my head. "You're doing everything

you can.” I sigh contently. “Holding me and listening to me is all I need.”

OceanofPDF.com

XXXVI



OceanofPDF.com

Storm

Time passes so fast, and in the blink of an eye, it's time for Dante to leave us. I feel torn because while I'm looking forward to the alone time with my sister, I don't want him to go. Being able to act like a proper couple has made me realise how much I've missed that, and I already know it'll be hard not to have that when we're back home.

It's the small things I'll miss the most. Taking Dante's hand when we go for a walk and kissing him in public. Yep, those mushy things will sadly have to end. I try not to think about it as I watch him drive away.

"Come on. We'll freeze to death if we stay out here," Ave says, pulling at my hand.

I discreetly swipe a few tears away, and squeeze her hand. "Okay, show me where you live."

She rolls her eyes while reminding me that I've just seen it, and she's right. Of course, Dante wouldn't leave without getting the tour, which I tagged along for. But that's not what I'm referring to. I want to see the things she didn't show our uncle. The small things like where she does her laundry, where she goes shopping... I want to know everything, I'm greedy like that.

"Show me a day in your life. Do you cook lunch or do you get it from somewhere? Where do you go for a late-night

snack?” I keep bombarding her with questions as she walks us across campus to a small cafe.

The smells coming from there can only be described as divine. The coffee, the pastry, it’s enough to make my mouth water.

When we enter, we’re greeted by the guy behind the counter. “It’s been a while, Avery. I almost thought you’d forgotten about me,” he jokes.

Ave barely returns the greeting, in fact, she looks downright uncomfortable with the attention he’s giving her. And after asking for two coffees and two cherry danishes to go, she looks into space like she’s lost in her thoughts. At no point does she show she notices he’s checking her out, or the sad smile he gives her when she doesn’t react to anything he says.

Feeling awkward about just standing here, I introduce myself. “Hi there. I’m Avery’s sister,” I say while giving him a wave.

When he immediately bombards me with a million questions about my sister, I regret the small act of kindness. Is this why she isn’t interested? Is he too eager for her? I’m pretty sure it’s not his looks that’s turning her off. For one, he’s extremely handsome. His dark, wind-ruffled hair and scruff is like it was taken out of a movie, and his deep brown eyes would be easy to get lost in. For two, I’m pretty sure Ave hasn’t even noticed that he’s good looking.

Though I probably shouldn’t, I can’t help but find the situation absurd. That is right until he hands her the order, and

when their hands touch my sister jumps back. Literally. Jumps. Back. My lips curl in a wordless snarl. Has this prick hurt her?

I'm forced to rethink my conclusion when they both apologise profusely, acting like they did something heinous and didn't just drop coffee and a pastry. Then again, wasting those deliciously smelling pastries should be a crime.

While he re-makes the order Ave makes a big show of not looking at me, and I know she knows I'm onto her. I was going to give her until tomorrow before demanding a heart-to-heart. But now she's lucky I'm waiting until we get out of here.

"Spill it," I demand as soon as we're back outside in the biting cold. "What the bloody hell is up with you?"

I regret my harsh words when I turn my head and see the heavy tears glistening on her eyelids. I link my arm with hers and rest my head on my sister's shoulder while we walk back to her dorm room.

We've barely made it back inside Ave's dorm room before a keening sound erupts from her. I whirl around and stare slack-jawed while she hurls the coffee and pastries at the wall. I don't have time to say anything, before she picks up random items, throwing those as well. Glass splinters, and anything that doesn't break gets stomped on all while she wordlessly screams.

I'm so taken aback I can't do anything but watch as she tears the living room apart with her bare hands. Red wine is

running down the walls, picture frames are shattered... nothing is spared the wrath of Avery Hayton.

With a glass shard clutched in her hand she falls to her knees, looking up at me through her long, dark lashes. “It wasn’t my fault,” she sobs. “Or maybe it was... I don’t know anymore. But I had to do it, had to allow it to happen.” Her words make me feel cold, and I pull my cardigan tighter around me.

Unthinking, I fall to my knees and pull her into my embrace. Since I don’t know what to say—or even ask—I just hug her as tight as I can while stroking her hair and back.

“I couldn’t stop it—” When another scream cuts her off, I can’t hold my own tears back.

“W-what happened, Ave?” My voice is shaking with the myriad of emotions I’m trying to keep in check.

Right now I can’t remember a time where Ave has ever lost it. Not just on this scale, but at all. She’s not the tantrum throwing kind of girl, she’s levelheaded and rational. To her, everything comes down to numbers and probabilities, not something as messy as feelings—definitely not losing control of emotions.

My heart breaks over and over as my sister sobs into my chest. Every time I think she’s done, a fresh wave of tears comes over her, and with that comes more words I don’t understand. It’s clear she’s blaming herself for something... and... that she’s tried to protect me from one thing or other.

But I can't make enough sense of anything she says to fully understand.

By the time Ave calms herself enough to speak, my butt is numb, and it's dark outside. The front of my cardigan is completely drenched by her tears, and I've considered calling Dante half a million times. I can't do that, though. My sister has held herself together, waiting for us to be alone. Whatever she's going through, I'll be here for her.

"He said it was me or you," Ave croaks, her voice completely void of any emotion. "At the time, I didn't know how he found me, or how he even knew who I was... but he knew, Cait. Do you know what that means?"

Tears still burn behind my eyes, but I refuse to let them fall. If Ave can pull herself together, then so can I.

"Why don't you tell me?" I say soothingly.

When Ave pulls back and looks at me through empty eyes, I shudder. While I wait for her to speak I have to stop myself from shaking her, but the dead look in her eyes is scaring me.

"They know who you are, Cait. They're biding their time and..." She trails off and licks her lips.

A sick feeling spreads in the pit of my stomach, and I'm scared to hear the answer when I ask, "Who knows, Ave? Who found you?"

It feels like I'm waiting for hours for my sister to pull herself together, but it's probably only minutes before she gets up and grabs her laptop. While she sets herself up in the living

room, I look through the fridge and freezer for anything to eat. Mum always used to say that an empty stomach is no good for big conversations, and right now I feel the weight of those words.

The only thing I find are some pre-made meals in the fridge that I absentmindedly plate up after only a few minutes in the microwave. Then I carry the food to where Ave is sitting. As soon as I place the plate in front of her and tell her to eat, she does so with such gusto I'm worried she'll burn her mouth. It's such an insignificant thing to even think about, so I say nothing. Instead, I eat my food quietly.

"This is good," Ave says as she swallows the last bite. When she looks at my half-full plate, I push it over to her, smiling as she finishes that off too. "Thank you."

I hum non-committedly, caught between feeling impatient and not wanting to rush my sister. As I look around at the carnage left in the wake of Ave's meltdown, I mentally start a checklist of what can be repaired, what needs replacing, and, yeah, the best way to clean it all up. Right now, we're sitting at the only place that isn't completely ruined or soaked, so it's not a pressing need, but I like to keep my mind busy.

"Look, Cait," Ave says, pointing at her precious laptop. "It took a lot of digging after he left, but I found the connection, eventually." The rattle in her chest when she breathes is so loud it's hard not to focus on it.

I feel like I'm coming in halfway through a conversation, without knowing what has been said or done before I showed

up. “What am I looking at, Ave?” I ask softly. Even though I try to focus on the spreadsheet on the screen, it’s hard not to be swept up in the million thoughts running through my mind.

While my sister does an electronic version of show and tell, she morphs back into herself. She’s laying out facts, explaining common denominators, abnormalities, and... “Why is Clara there?” I gasp, pointing at the column for the girl, and a picture of her hugging one of her teddies with a lollipop between her lips.

“She’s the reason.” My sister looks warily at me as I feel the colour drain from my face. “Cait, it’s all because of her.”

I blink, confused by the words that make no sense at all. My mouth opens and closes as my mind is reeling, trying to grasp the connection between Ave’s meltdown, the destroyed living room, and an innocent girl that’s far, far away from here.

“Ave, I don’t understand,” I croak. “What does Clara have to do with anything? And how do you even know about her? And what happened to you?” I’m seconds away from losing the tenuous hold I have on myself.

This is all messing with my head, and I can’t keep track of the explanations. Ave might think she’s helping, but right now I can’t follow at all. I’m pretty sure I’ve never told my sister about the little girl. I haven’t, have I?

Shaking her head, Ave fists her hair and pulls at the strands with such force I’m surprised she’s not pulling it out at the root. “Listen to me, Cait. Really listen.” I nod and look away from the laptop so I’m not distracted by the sheet with all the

Potters, Dante, Beth, the Diamond Crew, Dirty Diamond employees, and even Lily. “John Potter came here, wanting to leave a message for Dante. He said, and I quote, *‘We know about your bitch sister and what she’s doing. No one is safe. You tell that to Storm.’*” When her voice cracks and the haunted look is back in her eyes, my stomach fills with ice.

This has to be why he was missing from the last family get together... and if so... wait, didn’t Alan say his brother had business to take care of? Was Ave that *business*?

“What did he do?” I hiss, clenching my hands so hard my nails dig into my palm. “What the fuck did he do to you?”

“That’s not important,” Ave says, brushing some loose strands of hair off her shoulder.

My eyes widen as I look at my sister. “The hell it isn’t,” I say, trying and failing at keeping my temper and fear in check. “Avery Hayton, what did he do to you?”

When she looks at me her eyes are filled with vitriol and so much heartache I have trouble breathing. “I don’t want to talk about that.” When I try to argue, she shakes her head. “I’ll tell you when I’m ready, Cait. Please don’t make me. Not now...”

I take a deep breath to steady myself. As much as I want to pump her for answers, I won’t. I know firsthand what it’s like to carry a secret you want to disclose in your own time, and Ave gave me that respect. She could have confronted me about Dante years ago. Hell, she could have blamed me for his absence. Instead of doing that, she stood by my side and had

my back while allowing me my secrets. Whether I like it or not, it's time for me to do the same.

“Okay, Ave. But... promise me one thing.”

She gives me an unimpressed look. “What?”

I soften my tone as much as I can. “When you're ready to talk, call me. I don't care where I am or what time it is.”

A small smile grazes her lips as she nods. “I promise.”

“One more thing, and then I'll let you tell me whatever you want to share.” I try to force a merry tone, but I don't think I'm fooling anyone. “Are you safe now, Ave?”

Nodding, Ave says, “I won't be taken off guard again. I promise you I'm safe.” Her tone is all the reassurance I need.

I'd like to think that she would tell me if she wasn't safe so I can help, or rather, so Dante can help. But I also know that Ave is more than capable of taking care of herself, and that I can't force her to want my help.

Knowing that I need to let it go, I watch as she again focuses on the spreadsheet.

“Okay, here's the deal. John came to see me just a few days before you and Dante arrived. He delivered his message, and then he left.” She winces slightly as she says the last part. If it's because she's mentally reliving what he did or because we both know she's lying, I might never know.

My stomach churns, threatening to expel the dinner I just ate, while bile creeps up my throat. My breathing becomes

laboured and ragged as endless possibilities of what John Potter did to her plays as a movie across my mind.

“I didn’t know about Clara until I started looking for a connection,” Ave says, her voice monotone now that she’s moved on to the next part. “But I’ve done a lot of digging, Cait. I think... I think I know everything. The Potters set Clara free, deliberately put her in your path. They know who Dante is, and they know you’re his niece. It wasn’t a coincidence that you found her. I don’t know why, or what they’re holding over her head, but she’s feeding them information.”

“How?” I gasp, shocked by this revelation.

Ave shakes her head. “I don’t know,” she grumbles, and I know she hates not having the answers.

OceanofPDF.com

XXXVII



OceanofPDF.com

Storm

We don't sleep at all that night, instead we stay up and look over the spreadsheet so many times I think I know it by heart.

When it's close to the time Dante said he'd call, I send him a text from Ave's secure phone and call him instead. The call is short and straight to the point. I don't mention what happened to Ave, even though I want to. But when she asked me to keep that part quiet for now, I agreed.

Pinching the bridge of my nose, I sigh into the phone. "I can't tell you how I know, Dante. Please don't make me..." My voice wavers, and I truly hate not being able to tell him.

I understand why, it still sucks, though.

"Okay," he says, sounding like he has to force himself to remain calm. "So you're saying that Clara is feeding intel back to the Potter family?"

"Yes."

"And they know who we are?"

I gulp. "Yes."

"But you won't tell me how you know or how Clara is giving the Potters information?"

Yeah, I can see why it sounds like I *won't* even though I've kept repeating I *can't*. Then again, I can... I'm choosing not to, which is very much making it a *won't*.

You know that annoying feeling of being left out you get when the people around you all seem to share a secret you aren't privy to? I don't think I'll ever be annoyed about being left out again. Why is it only now that I have all this knowledge that I can appreciate how much easier it is to be clueless? I'm bloody longing for the days where my biggest concern was what to wear.

Though, I'm not sure we've ever been that carefree. Maybe before the accident, but that's so long ago I barely remember what that was like.

Bloody hell.

"It's not that I won't," I say for the fifth time. "Please, Dante. You have to trust me. I'll... I'm so sorry." Tears threaten to spill, and I feel like I'm caught in an impossible situation.

I look around at the destruction we need to clean up. Of course, it's nothing compared to the mess that is our lives, but sometimes it's easier to focus on the tangible things in life.

Right now, I can only be honest with one, my sister or Dante, not both and that sucks more than I know how to describe.

"It's okay, baby," he murmurs softly. "I'm not happy about it, but I understand loyalty. I trust you'll tell me when you can. In the meantime, I'll get a hold of Beth and see what she can figure out."

We only stay on the line for a few minutes after that, though nothing is being said. We just listen to each other breathe, and maybe, like me, he's hating all the unsaid things between us.

"I love you," I say as we end the call.

Dante chuckles, "I bloody hope so because you're stuck with me. I love you too, my perfect Storm."

My head feels like it might explode from everything Ave told me, and I honestly don't think I've processed even half of it yet. It's like the punches just keep coming, and no matter how much I dodge or fake a move, I keep getting hit. Is it wrong that a part of me wants to roll over and play dead? Or beg for someone else to take over?

Right or wrong doesn't matter, it's simply not an option. I need to be here for my sister, and that starts with cleaning up while she's in the shower. As soon as I hear the water running, I snap into problem-solving mode and get to work.

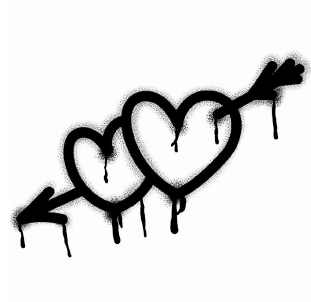
I bought my sister some new shoes for Christmas, so I use the box from those for the glass. Once I'm relatively certain I've got all the glass, I Hoover around the wet areas as much as possible.

Avoiding the spillage isn't as easy as I would have liked, I'm practically playing that children's game where you can't touch the floor with your feet by myself as I jump around. But before Ave is out, I manage to make the living area look presentable. I've wiped the walls and mopped the floor.

I wish I'd taken it slower, because now that I'm no longer focusing on a task, my mind runs wild again. Anger burns in my veins for what my sister has been through. I don't need to know the specifics, I'm pretty sure I have a good idea and that's inspired a single thought to keep running on repeat in my head.

Revenge.

I want it. I crave it. I'm owed it.



On Ave's insistence—which means she only had to ask once—I make a shepherd's pie using the recipe from mum's favourite cookbook. I even add the dark chocolate and red wine she would put in the part that was just for her and dad. While I cook, my sister sits on the counter, merrily eating the ingredients that I don't move away from her quick enough.

The new TV we bought today plays a Michael Myers marathon, Ave's go-to movies when she's sad or upset... and apparently also for now, when she wants to burn the entire world down.

“You won't tell him who I am, right?”

It wasn't until after my phone call with Dante I that I learned of my sister's... extracurriculars. Shocked doesn't

even come close to describing how I felt when she told me, yet I still can't decide if I'm more surprised by what she does, or that I didn't see it coming.

“Cait? Did you hear what I asked?” Ave's question pulls me out of my thoughts, reminding me I didn't answer her.

I don't need to ask who she's talking about, and my reply comes out before I can contemplate any potential repercussions. “Of course not,” I assure her. “This will stay between us for as long as you want.”

Obviously, it won't be easy to lie to Dante, and I can't say I revel in having to do so. But she's my sister, and I'll never betray her trust, not even for him.

“Your secret is safe with me, Ave. But I have to give him something.” I suck my bottom lip between my teeth and bite the tender skin. “I can't go back and tell him nothing. Not when I... when you...” I force myself to stop talking and take a deep breath as my voice rises.

What the bloody hell do I do?

According to Ave, Dante is looking for her, only, he doesn't know it's her—and she's not ready for him to know yet.

“He's going to wonder how I knew about Clara,” I say. “I need to give him an answer. We both owe him that.”

Ave is keeping an eye out for everything and everyone, and she has answers to questions I hadn't even known to ask yet. I can't go back and do what she wants me to do without giving Dante at least something to go by.

“I know,” Ave says coldly.

I watch as she rolls her shoulders back, transforming in front of me. Her sadness is gone—well, not gone, but it’s not visible—her eyes are dark and her posture rigid. It’s not in the way you’d expect from someone refusing to deal with their shite. No, the darkness clinging to her isn’t caused by avoiding the light, it’s from her swallowing it and silently promising to wreak havoc on anyone that’s wronged her.

Anger is practically rolling off of her in waves, making me shudder and choke on the surrounding air. She’s like one of those creatures born from death and destruction, and while I’m sad for her, I can’t help the pride filling my chest.

“Tell him who the Crimson Angel is, if you must.” It sounds more like a challenge than an option, and I shake my head. Not only because I want to protect her identity, but mostly because it won’t help. “Well, what do you want to tell him then, Cait?” She sounds exasperated.

“Ave,” I say her name softly. Moving the food off the stove, I turn my back to her as I pour the water from the potatoes, and mash the fuck out of them. I can feel her despair hit me like a freight train. “You know that won’t answer the questions he’ll have.”

I’m startled when she jumps off the counter and spins me around so quickly my head becomes fuzzy. “No,” she seethes. Her jaw is clenched and her eyes are wild. “Dante can’t know. I don’t... please don’t make me say it’s okay to tell him.”

“It’s the only way,” I whisper.

Tears stream down my face and my heart breaks for my sister. Something truly horrible happened to her, something I'm not sure she's properly dealt with yet. And on top of that, I'm now standing here, asking her if I can tell our uncle.

Is this shite even real?

"Cait!" My name is a broken sob, and I immediately wrap my arms around my sister and hug her as hard as I can.

"We'll find another way," I whisper, trying to assure her. "I'm so sorry, Ave."

Her legs give out and she sags to the floor, I follow her without letting go. I'm squeezing her so tight my arms ache, but I can't let go. Not yet. I hold and rock my sister while she cries and sobs, screams and curses, letting her anguish out instead of bottling it up. My mind is still reeling, trying to catch up.

When she's all cried out, we get up from the floor and while I make sure the food is ready, she sets the table. We eat in silence, but it isn't uncomfortable. It's not like we're actively avoiding talking, we're just both caught up in our thoughts.

I keep pondering the best way to go about this. There has to be a way to tell Dante without betraying Ave, or keeping her secret without lying to him, right? No matter how hard I try to identify the lesser evil, I keep coming up short, though. Because no matter what way I look at it, it's all so messed up.

For this, I don't see a way out. I have to choose.

If I pick Dante and tell him the truth about how I got all this info, I'm leaving Ave with no one in her corner. If I choose her, I'm pretty sure Dante will forgive me when he eventually learns why I wasn't forthcoming.

As inspiration hits me, I say, "Sometimes the best place to hide is in plain sight."

"What do you mean?"

I laugh as I explain. "What if I simply tell him I got the information from the other you? And then we let him work it out himself. I won't confirm or deny anything, but that way it's not a lie."

Ave looks at me like I'm insane, and maybe I am. "You still hate lying?"

Nodding sharply, I say, "I think I've done enough of that to last me several lifetimes." Then I wince because I know some of my lies involve her. "Look, you already know why I wanted a different persona, and I've never asked how you felt about doing that. I'm sorry."

Waving me off, Ave smiles. "It was fun, and I always knew why. Well, I found out why when you started working at Dirty Diamonds."

There she goes again, my sister the all-knowing. I can't believe she's known about all of this for years without once saying anything.

Knowing just how much she's been on my side for all this time, I make a final decision. "Forget what I just said. I won't

tell him. It's your secret, and I'm sorry for trying to make you share it before you're ready."

"You can tell him about the umm... visit from John," Ave croaks, tears welling in her eyes again. "But I don't want him to call me, and I never want to hear anyone but you bring it up."

"Thank you," I breathe.

Ave grimaces. "Don't thank me yet, I need you to do me a favour when you get back home."

"Anything," I agree.

Pulling back, she wipes her tears away. "I need you to bring the twins their Christmas present and tell them to forget about me."

I gasp, "Ave—"

She interrupts me and continues. "I've thought about it since... well, since the incident." I try not to flinch at her word choice. "And I can't deal with them or anyone right now. I want to stay here, and I promise I'll be safe. But I don't want anyone but you contacting me."

"Are you sure?" I ask, hoping beyond all hope that she'll change her mind and say something like *'gotcha, I'm only kidding.'*

"It's how it has to be." Her eyes are steely with determination, and I know there's no changing her mind.

A part of me is scared to agree, because what if I'm next on the chopping block? I can't lose my sister. I just can't. If I have to be the grim reaper in her other relationships and deliver the devastating news, so be it. But I can't stomach the thought I could be next.

I feel like an utter self-centred cow as I ask, "Am I next to go?"

"Never," she spits the word with so much vehemence my doubts are silenced. "It's you and me, Cait. That will never change."

OceanofPDF.com

XXXVIII



OceanofPDF.com

Dante

I've been a miserable bloody git these past few days without Storm around. That's the thing about having someone around all the time, you don't miss them until they're not. And I miss her so badly it's hard to feign a good mood. Cain and Baz are beyond fed up with my grumpy arse, and I can't say I blame them. They're probably celebrating now that I'm finally on my way to pick up my niece.

While she's been staying with Avery I have heard little from her, and the few times we've talked I had to stop myself from getting on the next available flight. Something is wrong with my perfect Storm, I know it in my bones just as well as I heard it in her voice. At first I thought that maybe the girls were missing their parents, but now I know that isn't it. If it was, there'd be no reason not to tell me, and Storm is definitely keeping secrets.

I refuse to entertain the thought that maybe she's changed her mind about us. Not because I'm too conceited to think it can happen, but because that's not an option. Not anymore. The *'if you love it, let it go'* doesn't apply here. Storm can bloody soar all she wants, as long as she knows she belongs to me.

After parking, I rush to the arrival area, loving that I get to greet her in more privacy than if she was flying commercial. Baz agreed to have one of the fancy Marx private jets fly her, which made me feel more at ease with having her travel alone.

What can I say, sometimes it pays off to keep the prick around.

I watch as the plane lands and wait with bated breath until she exits. As soon as my eyes land on her, my cock wakes up. That fucker has been a pain without her as well. Let's just say that blue balls haven't helped my mood.

As soon as she spots me, her entire face lights up and she runs towards me. Unable to wait another second to have her in my arms, I shrug at the security guard before busting the door open and sprinting towards her.

“My perfect Storm,” I growl and nip at her ear.

She squeals and wraps her body around mine. “Dante,” she moans. Then she threads her hands in my hair and pulls until our lips are crushed against each other.

Squeezing her luscious arse, I kiss her, hard. Our tongues tangle, and I'm bloody panting into her mouth. When she wiggles, I moan into her mouth, and my cock grows uncomfortably in my jeans.

“Bloody hell, I've missed you.” She swallows my words with her mouth, not caring about the audience we're getting.

“I don't care how, but you're never leaving me again,” she almost hisses, making me chuckle.

Crikey, I love hearing those words.

“I wouldn't dare,” I smirk.

When the security guards close in on us, I put her down on her feet, keeping an arm around her shoulder. I get her luggage, and then we make our way out of there. As we walk past the bathrooms, I notice her gazing at them longingly.

“Do you need the loo?” I ask.

A mischievous smile spreads on her face. “I need *you* in the bathroom,” she purrs.

The idea crossed my mind, but I decided against it. I need her in a place where she can scream the bloody roof down, because I’m going to take my time with her. When I tell her that she pouts, but agrees it’s probably for the best.

After stashing her luggage in the SUV we set off, and luckily the drive to mine and Baz’s house here in Santa Cruz shouldn’t take long. I’m excited to show it to her, and see what she thinks. It’s very different from our house in Briarwood, but in some ways it’s more of a home to me.

When we’re halfway there, Storm unclips her seat belt and removes her coat. I give her a puzzled look. It’s not exactly hot here. My facial expression morphs into a knowing smile when she reaches for my belt buckle and makes quick work of that and undoing my pants.

“I can’t wait for a taste,” she says brazenly.

Before her words register, she’s pulling my cock out and bending so she can suck it into her mouth.

“Bloody hell,” I groan. She swirls her tongue around the tip while cupping my balls. “Fuck! Storm!” I lift my hips and

thrust into her hot, wet mouth.

Wrapping my fingers in her hair, I try to take control, but stop when she lets the points of her teeth graze my throbbing shaft. “You need to focus on driving. Be a good boy for me,” she quips.

I move my hand back to the steering wheel, trying my damndest to focus on the traffic while she sucks me off. It isn't easy, though. Not when she's making me squirm while worshipping me with her mouth.

A guttural growl leaves me when she takes me further into her throat, and it's becoming harder to focus on driving. Even though I badly want to pull over, rip her pants off, and bury myself in her warm cunt, I keep driving. I'm enjoying this side of her and the game she's playing too much.

When I feel my balls draw up, I rasp, “Don't you dare swallow. I want you to keep it in your mouth until I say differently.” Storm doesn't stop fucking me with her mouth, only hums around my hard shaft to let me know she's heard me.

Trying to stave off my impending rapture for as long as possible, I think of anything else but her amazing mouth as I take the exit we need. We're barely off the highway before I come with a roar, gripping her hair with one hand and choking her on my cock. It feels like I keep coming forever, my dick pulsating in her mouth and I wordlessly groan.

As soon as I'm done, I pull her off my spent dick. “Did you swallow?” I ask.

When she shakes her head instead of using her words, I grin. A plan has formed in my head, and I need to get us home right bloody now.

“That’s my perfect Storm,” I praise while cupping her cheek.

Some of my cum has leaked out of her mouth, and when we stop at a red light, I dart my tongue across her lips. My niece’s eyes widen, making me chuckle. I don’t mind the taste of my cum, definitely not when it’s coming from her sinful mouth.

“Careful you don’t spill more,” I warn her. “I need it for later.”

When we finally pull up to my house, the car is barely parked before I’m out. Originally, I’d wanted to take this part slow, and watch her take it all in. That plan went out the window when my cum went into her mouth, though.

“Later,” I rasp, when she’s taking too long looking around.

Ignoring her luggage, I pick her up and carry her inside in a fireman’s hold. Wasting no time, I carry her straight to the bedroom, where I immediately begin to undress her. When the zipper on her hoodie resists, I pull the fucker until it rips.

“Do you trust me?” I ask, looking right into her beautiful green eyes, and when she nods, I pull a pocket knife from my jeans pocket.

Though her eyes widen, she remains still. My perfect Storm doesn’t even flinch as I cut her clothes from her body, too impatient to remove them the traditional way. As soon as she’s

naked in front of me, I slide a finger through her perfect cunt lips. She's so fucking wet I groan in anticipation of what I'm about to do.

She whimpers in the back of her throat, and I smirk. "Here's what's going to happen..." I step closer and close my hands around her perfect arse cheeks. "This is the only hole I haven't claimed yet, and we need to change that. So I'm going to kiss you, and you'll give me my cum. Then you'll get on the bed. I want you on all fours with your arse in the air. Nod if you understand me." Without hesitating, she nods.

Cupping her face I fuse our lips together, taking my cum from her mouth. The salty flavour of my cum mixed with the sweetness of her saliva isn't half bad. I wish I could get lost in our kiss, but I can't.

I pull away and tilt my head towards the bed, watching her arse jiggle as she sashays over there. As soon as she's perched on her hands and knees, I strip naked. My cock is resting against my abs, coating my stomach in pre-cum. Although I badly want to fist myself, I refrain. I don't want to come until I'm balls deep in her arse.

Once I reach her, I spread her bitable cheeks and let some of the cum from my mouth leak onto her puckered hole. Using my index finger, I rub it around the tight ring. I continue this motion until my finger easily slides into her, and she's moaning in pleasure.

Then I pull my finger out and suck both my index and middle finger into my mouth so I can coat them in the rest of

my cum and spit. I don't bloody care one of my digits has just been inside her arse, one day I'll fuck her back entrance with my tongue.

Storm pants and moans unashamedly, moving her arse backwards to get my fingers deeper inside her. The sight is so bloody delicious I wish I'd thought of taking a picture. Her arse is hot and tight, and I can't wait any longer.

I pull my fingers out and reach for the lube on the bedside table. After generously lathering up my dick, I nudge my head against her small opening.

“Are you ready for my cock, baby?” I ask. When she moans and moves her arse back against me, I tsk. “Use your words.”

“I'm ready,” she pants. “I want your cock in my arse, Dante.”

Bloody hell, this woman.

Adding pressure, I don't pause until the first bar is through her tight arsehole. As soon as it's through, I add more lube to the rest of my shaft.

“Oh... that's...” she trails off, breathing heavier.

Taking it slow, I let her breathing steer me, making sure I pause when I push another bar into her puckered hole, immediately adding more lube. As I'm about halfway in, she hisses in a breath, and I pause so she can get used to the size of my cock.

“It hurts,” she whimpers, her tone strained. “Bloody hell, it stings...” Storm cuts herself off and pants loudly. Her pain

shouldn't make me feel good, but fuck me, it does. Her sounds of pain almost make me empty my balls right on the spot.

Moving one hand to her front, I find her clit. "Deep breaths, baby," I rasp while swirling the nub. "God, you look so pretty, Storm. Your arse is bloody art, and I love watching you stretch around me."

"M-more," she pants. Since it sounds like she's in pain, I don't immediately feed her more of my shaft. Turning her head, she looks at me over her shoulder and hisses, "I said more. I want you all the way inside me, Dante."

Grinning, I do as she says, easing the rest of my cock inside her. "Christ!" I groan, loving the way her arse squeezes me so bloody tight.

I pause to give her time to acclimate, pinching and rolling her clit until she comes around me. "Dante!" She screams my name as her body convulses around me, and it takes everything in me not to come inside her arse.

Coming down from her orgasm, she moves her arse back, fucking herself on me. It's a beautiful sight to see the woman I love use my cock, and I don't begin moving straight away. But when she turns her head again and pins me with a stare, I pump my hips against hers.

"Don't look at me like that, baby," I groan. "With my piercings, I need to take it slow."

Remembering about one of the presents I have for her, I grunt, "Look under the pillow, baby."

I follow her as she leans forward and reaches under the pillow, and I love that she's laughing as soon as she pulls the item out and sees what it is.

"Really?" she says, laughter palpable in her breathy voice. "You got me a banana shaped toy?"

Since this was a spur-of-the-moment purchase, it's not wrapped. Right now that's a good thing, because that means I've already made sure it's ready for use.

"I want you to fuck your cunt while I take care of your arse," I rasp.

Storm is all too eager to follow my demand, and she spreads her legs wider before placing the bright yellow toy against her opening. I wrap one arm around her waist to help support her, and when she has a rhythm going, I thrust into her arse again.

Fuck, I can feel the toy through the thin membrane separating her arse and cunt.

"Storm," I groan, doing my best not to come yet as her tight opening squeezes me so good, making it almost impossible not to let go and fuck her harder.

While her cunt is pure perfection, her arse is something different. The vise-like grip she has on my cock is unreal.

"I-I'm so full," she moans. "I can feel you everywhere."

Fucking Storm is everything. No matter how dirty or vanilla, it always feels like more. Like I'm home when I'm inside her body.

Before long, she cries out again as another climax tears through her, and I know I won't be able to hold back.

When she turns her head, I finally claim her lips. Our tongues stroke each other, and I groan into her mouth as she continues to come. Her arse contracts, milking the cum from me. As I shoot my seed into her arse, filling her to the brim, I let go of her lips so I can roar out her name.

“Welcome to Santa Cruz, baby,” I smirk lazily before pulling out of her.

OceanofPDF.com

XXXIX



OceanofPDF.com

Storm

It's dark outside when I wake, alone in Dante's massive bed. His side is cold, so he must have been gone for some time. I stretch and reach for the bedside lamp, blinking against the stark light. My mood is soured by the fact I'm alone. Not because I need him at my side at all times, but seriously. It's not even been a full day, and now I'm alone in a country I've never been to before. Is it really too much to ask that he stays close?

Grumbling, I sit up and clutch the sheet around my body as I yawn out loud. When my eyes land on his pillow, I notice a piece of paper.

I'm so sorry to leave you, baby! Something urgent came up and I couldn't avoid it.

Hopefully, I'll be back before you're awake, but if not, feel free to look around.

I've made reservations for a late dinner tonight, and I want you to wear the dress and shoes I've laid out for you. If you wear underwear, you won't like the outcome.

Love you my perfect Storm!

XX

I can't help smiling goofily as I read and re-read the note. It makes me feel better to know he didn't want to leave. Instead of wallowing I get up and head for the massive, adjoining bathroom.

Standing under the sprays, a thought hits me. Is Dante loaded? Because this house sure shows he is. It's not something I've ever given much thought to, but the private jet and a house almost on the beach... I'm pretty sure that's not something the average person can afford.

While drying off, I decide it's time to get some answers. When Dante is back, I won't let him distract me with his amazing body and mind-blowing orgasms. There are things I need to know, and, well... I also have things to share.

I still haven't completely figured out how to do that without including my sister, but maybe I'm overthinking it. In the end, Ave said I could tell him everything but her alias. Hell, she even mentioned he'd probably make his own conclusions and that I just needed to keep quiet. Yeah, that's what I'll do.

The dress Dante has picked up for me is stunning. It's forest green and feels so smooth on my skin I never want to take it off. It only comes to my knees, and the skirt is full. Standing in front of the floor mirror, I do a twirl just for fun, and the skirt flares up around my hips. I smoothe the fabric back down, admiring the way it accentuates all my curves.

The bodice is a work of art, truly. There's a gap in the design that makes it so the skin between my boobs is visible,

but it's not in a trashy or revealing way. It's more like it's playing peekaboo and teasing what's hiding beneath the dress. The top wraps around my neck like a choker, and I like how it feels.

Back in the bathroom I'm surprised to see the drawers are filled with some of my favourite products, even my preferred shades and brands of makeup. After brushing and braiding my long hair, I take my time with my makeup. Since I don't know where we're going, I decide on a somewhat neutral palette. Grey smokey eyes, a thin eyeliner, plenty of mascara, and nude lips.

As I finally put on the gorgeous but painful-looking black stilettos, I take a last look in the mirror and gasp as I come face-to-face with my reflection. Granted, the dress does most of the work, but I feel like the woman in the mirror belongs next to Dante. Maybe something in my eyes has changed, because there's no doubt. Only determination.

I find my phone, and the second I look at the notifications, I remember why I buried it under my pillow. Since wishing Alan a Merry Christmas, I have actively been dodging him. And after knowing his brother did something to my sister... nope, I'm not even going to think about that until I have to. The clusterfuck is too big, and I don't think I can go back to pretending nothing's wrong.

Before I can become too self-conscious or overthink all this, I leave the bedroom. As I walk through the house, I'm constantly reminded about the obvious wealth behind all this.

The paintings, over-the-top sculptures, state-of-the-art appliances and technology are... well, frankly, it's daunting. It makes me want to leave greasy fingerprints everywhere, while I'm simultaneously afraid to break something.

Though, it should make me excited to see this other part of my uncle, it's having the opposite effect on me. The more I snoop, the more I feel like I don't know him at all. In Briarwood he's driving a beat up old car that wouldn't fit here at all, and I can't reconcile the two homes with the man I love.

After helping myself to a bottle of water from the fridge, I continue my exploration. The house is vast, so far I've come across four bedrooms, two living rooms, the kitchen, and a dining room—each as lavish as the former—and I'm still not done.

As I turn a corner after exiting the second living room, I hear Dante's voice and I pursue the sound to another closed door. Without thinking, I barge through, calling his name.

"Dante, I wondered where you—" I stop talking the moment the door is fully open, because he isn't alone.

He's sitting at a table with Baz and three other guys I don't know, but they look scary enough to send a shiver down my spine.

"Hi Ca—Storm," Baz greets.

The other two men turn in their seats and eye me. The older looking one flashes me a grin and says, "Hey there pretty girl."

Before I can reply, Dante shoots out of his chair and growls at the man with such menace, I take a step back and try to close the door.

“Get in here,” my uncle commands, making me swallow nervously.

“Umm... I didn’t mean to interrupt, I’m so sorry.” I feel like a bloody fool as I stand here.

It’s clear I’ve disturbed something important, probably business related. Shite, I hope I haven’t ruined anything for him by just bouncing in like I have a right to be here.

Dante stands up and comes over to me, placing a finger below my chin. Then he tilts my head up so I’m looking into his brilliant blue eyes. “You’re interrupting nothing,” he rasps. “You’re always welcome no matter where I am or what I’m doing.”

After pressing a soft, close-mouthed kiss to my lips, he takes my hand and drags me over to the table. Once he’s sitting down in the chair again, he pulls me onto his lap.

“Let me introduce you to everyone. You know Baz.”

He points at his Aussie mate sitting to his left, and I smile tentatively at him.

“This is Cain.” He gestures towards the guy on his right. “My second in command.”

I turn to look at the guy, and he inclines his head towards me.

“The two at the end are Rocco and his second, Grayson.” I look at the two men, who are wearing what looks like the leather cuts bikers wear over their black hoodies, and give them an awkward wave. “Rocco is the ugly one with a face only his mother loves.” My back becomes ramrod straight at Dante’s crass and insulting words, and now it’s impossible not to focus on the scars across his face.

“You’re one to talk,” Rocco shoots back, grinning like a maniac. “Seems you had to rob the cradle to get anyone to follow you home. Tell me, Dante. Did you have to promise her unicorns and lollipops? Because I have something here she can suck.”

Holy shite, did he really just say that? I gasp in shock at the crude words, confused when Dante only laughs and it’s Cain that snarls. “Show some fucking respect.”

I swallow nervously, but then I remember myself. I might not know as much as I should about Dante’s world, but with the way they’re all sitting, it’s clear Dante is in charge. That means I should look confident, doesn’t it?

Straightening my back, I meet the gaze of all the men and do my best not to shrink under Baz’s scrutiny. Bloody hell, facing him is harder than I thought it would be. He knows I’m Dante’s niece, and that... well, that we’re blood related.

“So she’s your Old Lady?” Rocco asks, quirking a brow.

Dante chuckles darkly. “She’s mine, that’s all you need to know, Rocco. *Mine.*”

Old lady? Really? Yeah, I've watched Sons of Anarchy and know what it means, yet something is bristling against the term. I'm irrevocably Dante's, there's no doubt about that. But I'm no one's *Old Lady*.

Not privy to my rising annoyance, Cain, Baz, Rocco, and Grayson laugh boisterously like my uncle just told them a joke.

I move around in Dante's lap until I'm comfortable, then I spear the guy... Rocco, with a look of my own and sniff. "I'm right here, and my hearing is just *fine*. If you have questions about *me*, I'd prefer you ask me directly."

The men all shut up at once, and the room is so quiet you could hear a pin drop. I worry for a moment that I've overstepped, but before I can panic, Dante nuzzles into the crook of my neck and licks the tender skin.

"You heard her," he says, amusement in his voice.

I'm honestly shocked when the two bikers bow their heads at me like I said the right thing. Feeling more relaxed, I study them while they continue to talk like it's natural for me to be here. Hell, maybe it is.

The meeting both satiates my craving for answers while also causing new ones to form. Rocco and Grayson belong to an MC called the Cruz Kings. They're not a part of Dante's operation per se, more like a sister club.

From their conversation, I gather that Rocco and Grayson were once part of Dante's Crew before striking out on their

own. Apparently, they still do dealings and work together, which I guess is a good thing.

Then there's Baz... I feel like I'm seeing him in a new light now that I, thanks to Ave, know his background and family history. Who knew there were Marxs in Briarwood? My sister, that's bloody who. My head is spinning with all this new information as I slowly piece it all together.

Rocco and Grayson are in the middle of explaining some issues when I feel Dante's hands on my knees, forcefully prying them apart. Then his hand skims up my inner thigh, and when he reaches the apex his breathing becomes ragged.

"You're not wearing any underwear," he groans into my ear.

I try not to squirm on his lap as he runs a finger between my folds. My pussy clenches in anticipation, and my clit throbs with need. "You told me not to," I whisper back, biting down on my lip so I don't accidentally moan out loud.

While the men talk around us, Dante bites the shell of my ear and slides two fingers into my slick core. Need hits me, and I know I'm soaking his fingers as he lazily pumps his fingers in and out of me. Using his thumb, he rolls my clit, sending sparks down my spine.

I try to remember where we are, and that I need to keep quiet. But it's bloody hard when he's torturing me like this. Need is building rapidly inside me while Dante replies to the concerns of Rocco and Grayson, but even while talking, he doesn't stop fingering me.

When he curls his fingers inside me so he hits my spots perfectly, I can't hold back a moan. I try to cover it with a cough when all eyes turn to me, but I know my flushed cheeks are giving me away. I know I should be embarrassed, however, with the way need is building rapidly inside me, I just can't find it within me to really care.

Much to my dismay, Dante pulls his fingers out of my drenched pussy. If we'd been alone I would tell him off. We're not though. I wrap my fingers around his wrist and move his hand back, swallowing back another moan when he roughly shoves three digits into me. My orgasm isn't far away, and right now I crave the release more than I want to keep up pretences.

"Having fun?" Cain asks, quirking a brow when I look at him.

"Mind your own business," Dante growls.

Baz looks annoyed when he drily adds, "We are, mate. You're the one who added a show."

I'm surprised when Rocco says, "Aww come on, Baz. Don't tell me you've never conducted business while being serviced or servicing someone. I know you're from down under, but sex and business goes hand-in-hand on every continent."

Something about Rocco's words makes me laugh, like actually laughing out loud. With Dante's fingers buried deep inside my pussy, with my juices soaking through his pants, I laugh so hard I get tears in my eyes and almost push his fingers out. My reaction has the rest joining in, and before I

know it, everyone is laughing—their loud and gruff laughs drown my husky and panted amusement.

“Hide your face in my neck when you come,” Dante grunts directly into my ear. “No one but me gets to watch you shatter.”

He continues his delicious assault on my pussy. His fingers pump into me at a furious pace, and I feel my orgasm build once again. Knowing how close I am, I turn my head and do as instructed—hiding my face in his neck. Unable to control myself, I bite into his skin and suck it into my mouth so I don’t scream out loud when my pleasure crests in violent waves.

“Dante!” I moan his name around his flesh, completely uncaring if anyone else hears me.

Now that I’m no longer driven by a primal need for the man whose lap I’m still sitting in, I wish I could get up and leave. Just because the men talking with Dante didn’t see my face as I reached my climax, doesn’t mean they didn’t hear. The thought of them knowing exactly what he was doing to me is making me self-conscious, and I wish they’d hurry up and finish their meeting.

I barely pay any attention to the discussion going on around us. The best I can tell is that Grayson and Rocco are having some issues with the other MCs in the area, and that they might need backup.

When my stomach growls, Dante clears his throat. “We’ll have to finish here. From now on we’ll all be on the lookout and get in touch if we notice anything.”

No one argues with him basically ending the meeting because my stomach decided it can't wait longer for the promised dinner reservation.

OceanofPDF.com

XL



OceanofPDF.com

Storm

A few days later, on New Year's nonetheless, I'm startled awake by Dante's angry timbre. "I don't want to hear it, Baz." I clutch the duvet around my naked body, as I try to hear more.

Groaning, I reach for my phone, not happy that it's only 7 am. For me, that's practically the middle of the night, and my body isn't ready to wake up yet. However, when the shouts don't lessen, I sluggishly put on some clothes, yawning and cursing the two men. I don't even care what they're arguing about, I only care that it woke me up.

As soon as I'm dressed in a pair of jeans and one of Dante's hoodies, I throw open the bedroom door and stomp towards the heated voices.

"Come on, Dante. You have to see reason." Baz's pleading makes me come to a crashing halt.

I know it's wrong to eavesdrop, but right now, it seems equally wrong to make my presence known.

"Let it go," Dante growls. "I told you as soon as I found out, and I've listened to your concerns daily since. Bloody hell, Beth has been looking into it, and just because she hasn't found the answer doesn't mean she won't. But I'm not condemning anyone until we have all the facts, and maybe not even then." The last part is so low I almost don't hear it.

"She's a danger to everyone. What about your precious niece? Don't you care that the girl has been spying on

Caitlin?”

“Storm,” Dante corrects, like my name is of importance right now.

Shit, they’re talking about Clara, they have to be.

This is what I get for indulging, and procrastinating. I did exactly what I promised myself I wouldn’t do. I let Dante distract me with filthy words and earth-shattering orgasms, instead of talking about Clara’s role.

Apart from when I told him on the phone while I was with Ave, we haven’t talked about it at all. I didn’t need him to say it out loud to know he’d share the info with his team, and I’d expect nothing less. But that doesn’t explain why Baz is losing it now, all these days later.

“Her name is of little importance to me,” Baz roars. “All that matters is Clara. You’re not the only one with loved ones in Briar—”

Unable to just standby anymore, I step into the kitchen. “You’re not touching her,” I seethe, pointing a finger in Baz’s direction.

“Storm, she’s—”

I cut Baz off with a scoff. “I know who she is and what she’s been ordered to do, but it changes nothing. Clara is innocent, and she’s... she. Is. Mine.”

Bloody hell, I have no idea where that bold claim comes from, but as I say it, it feels right. I’ve bonded with the girl, and I can no more hand her over than I can cut off my arm.

She's been to hell and back, forced to see and do things way beyond her control.

"Storm," Dante breathes, capturing my attention. "No harm is going to come to Clara." My uncle turns his icy-blues on his mate and calmly says, "She's under my protection, old friend."

Baz snarls under his breath and throws his hands up in the air. "So what's your solution, hmm? She knows too much."

Maybe I was wrong when I assumed Dante told Baz days ago.

"Exactly," I answer, smiling widely. My smile morphs into a snicker when both men stare at me like I'm mad. "She knows too much on both sides, wouldn't you say? She can also tell us exactly what information she has relayed to her family, and more importantly, how." Coldness spreads down my spine as I'm forced to realise I'm the reason John Potter flew to Canada and... well, did whatever he did to my sister.

The bloody prick will pay, I'll make sure of it!

No one hurts my family and gets away with it.

"Okay," Baz says, looking like he's reluctantly conceding as he drags the word out. "So what's your plan?"

Dante walks over to me and hugs me from behind. "Good morning, baby," he rasps. "Did we wake you up?"

Ugh, now I feel bad, and guilty—neither is something I wish to feel this early in the morning. He's being so sweet, and I'm keeping secrets. The saving grace in my mental turmoil is that I didn't intend to keep this from him. I had all intentions

of bringing up John's trip to see Ave, but as always, Dante distracted me with his talented fingers, pierced cock, and wicked tongue.

I'm just about to answer Dante when Baz pinches the bridge of his nose. "We don't have all fucking day," he barks like we need a reminder.

He's right, though. Tonight it's New Year's Eve, and Dante has a surprise planned for us. Sadly, the end of the year also means it's back to reality in just a few short days, which is a rather unpleasant thought. If I could, I'd stay here forever.

It might only have been a few days, but I've grown used to it here. I couldn't care less about the luxury, but there's a vibe that I love. It's hard to explain... but the weather is better, the people freer, and, most importantly, Dante and I don't have to hide. There's also the added bonus of being closer to Ave.

The more I think about it, the less it makes sense to live permanently in Briarwood. Sure, there are loose ends to tie up, cold revenge to dish out. After I've evened the score, though, there's nothing keeping either of us there. At least I don't think there is.

Baz repeats his question, and Dante shrugs while nudging me with his hips. "What's the plan, baby?"

The feeling of being shoved onto the stage and under the fluorescent bulb of a spotlight perfectly describes how I feel. Sweat gathers at my back and on my forehead, enhancing the not-so nice metaphor. Surely he isn't really asking me, right?

Shaking my head, I say, “I don’t know. All I know is that I don’t want Clara harmed. She didn’t have a choice, and aren’t kids like her why you’re doing... whatever it is you do?”

I know the time for being kept in the dark is rapidly ending. The crossroad in front of me has two options, give up Dante and remain oblivious, or really embrace what’s going on around me and start asking questions of my own.

Turning to Dante, I softly say, “It’s time.”

Even though I only say those two words, Dante knows what I mean. I feel bad as I watch him tense up and swallow so hard his Adam’s apple bobs in his throat. The look of uncertainty is wiped away so quickly I almost second guess if I saw it, and there are no traces of doubt as he leads me and Baz into the living room.

“Sure you want me here for this?” Baz asks, raising an eyebrow.

Dante nods. “Yeah, mate. A lot of this involves you, and...”

“And the infamous Marx family, I presume.” I slap a hand over my mouth, but it’s too late. Both men turn towards me with matching looks of shock.

Baz’s expression quickly morphs into a stone mask. He straightens and takes a step towards me, prompting Dante to growl his mate’s name, and step in front of me.

“How do you know about my family?” he snarls, all traces of friendliness and familiarity gone.

When Ave first told me about all her findings, and the encrypted messages and calls she's unveiled, I had a hard time matching my uncle's best mate to the guy she described. I don't have that problem right now, though. The man standing in front of me is a trained killer through and through.

He's tense, as though he's holding himself back, while his eyes are pinning me in place and it becomes increasingly difficult to breathe. Bloody hell, I just angered a bloody murderer.

"Baz?" I speak his name softly, trying to convey that I'm not a threat. And, really, I'm not. I'm a bloody moron suffering from verbal diarrhoea. However, I'm not about to leverage my knowledge, I'll give it freely.

I swiftly move around Dante, dodging his arm when it shoots out to hold me back. Even though my heart is beating frantically, I walk right up to Baz and take one of his hands in mine. This seems to shake him out of his stupor, and he shakes his head before refocusing on me—luckily with a lot less intensity this time.

"You asked me how I know about your family, and I can't tell you that." I sigh, hating that I have to ask him to trust me without giving him anything in return. "Do you trust me?"

He laughs coldly, and replies, "No."

It's the answer I expected, and it's more than fair.

"You trust Dante, though. Right?"

“With my life,” he answers immediately. “But that will not help you, little girl. Men much more powerful than Dante have been bewitched by pussy before.”

He’s right again, which is rather annoying.

“Are you saying I’m not capable of thinking for myself?” Dante growls, stalking closer. “Careful, Baz.”

Pinching the bridge of my nose, I do the only thing I can think of, which is babble. “I only recently found out that Clara is working for the Potters. They’re her family, so I guess it makes sense. But I know it can’t be completely voluntary, because she’s terrified of them. Like, have you ever met Clara? She cries and hides when she spills milk because she’s afraid she’ll get beaten...” Biting down on my bottom lip, I force myself to shut up before I say something I shouldn’t.

“And how did you find out?” Baz asks, sounding like he’s torn on whether or not to believe me.

“It was the only thing that made sense,” I say, squaring my shoulders to look more confident.

I want Baz to know he can trust me, which seems stupid when I’m standing here telling him half truths. There’s no way I’m telling him I got the information from Ave, just as I won’t tell him that John Potter came to see her. I still have every intention of telling Dante the last part, but I’m hoping I can save that for when we’re alone.

“What if I tell you I don’t believe you?” Baz asks, quirked a brow.

The coldness of his voice has me shivering, but I stand my ground. “Beth and I could never find out how she got away from her family. Whenever we asked, she always changed the subject or started crying hysterically. She also always asked a lot of questions, and some of them just seemed... off.”

What I’m saying isn’t a lie. I never noticed it until Ave told me of her discovery, but thinking back, Clara has asked questions I shouldn’t have brushed over.

Anger surges inside me as I remember how easily I told Clara where Ave is. Hell, I helped her spell the address, and showed her where Canada is on a map. I literally handed my sister to those sick fucks. Even though I stand by Clara being innocent, I can’t help feeling betrayed.

“Hmm.” That’s all Baz says, and I don’t like that I don’t know if it’s a good or a bad *hmm*.

“And how do you expect to get her to tell you anything about her family?” Dante asks, finally joining the conversation with more than snarls and growls aimed at his best mate.

“Confront her with the truth,” I say. “She isn’t a bad kid. She’s traumatised and scared, but maybe if she knows we’re on her side...” I trail off because there isn’t much more to be said. It’s all I got, and I just have to hope it’s enough.

“And then back to how you know about my family,” Baz thunders, acting like a dog with a bone. Not that I can blame him.

“I honestly can’t tell you,” I say, using my most soothing tone. “What does it matter, though? It’s not like I can or want to do anything with that information. If anything, it’s guaranteed to make me keep my mouth shut.”

He studies me for what feels like forever. His dark brown eyes bore into my green ones, making it feel like he’s staring directly into my soul. I do my best not to fidget or avert my gaze, but it’s bloody hard.

Finally, he says, “Okay. Just one more question.” I let out a relieved breath. “Do you know who my cousin is?”

“Which one?” I say, and I immediately know it’s the wrong thing to say.

Baz’s face slips into a mask of nothingness, his eyes darken so much they look black, and there’s zero emotion hidden in the depths.

When Dante pulls me behind him, I go willingly. My heart pounds so hard it’s making my breathing ragged. Shite, I can’t just stand by and let Baz do... well, I don’t know what he’s going to do, however, if the way Dante is puffed up in front of me is any indication, his mate isn’t looking to hug me.

“Let it go, mate,” Dante says. “I don’t want to fight—”

The ring tone from my phone interrupts whatever he wanted to say, and without thinking it through, I pull the phone from the hoodie and answer it.

“What are you doing, Cait?”

“Umm...” I stammer.

“It sounds like you need some help. Say *‘I’m in the middle of a conversation, can I call you back later’* if you need my help.”

Without missing a beat, I say, “Hey Ave. Yeah, I’m good. Look, I’m in the middle of a conversation, can I call you back later?” I try not to cringe at how robotic I sound.

“Right, now say that Dante is right there and that he’ll call me back.”

My eyes fly to Dante, and I try to smile. “Yeah, Dante is here. Can he call you back later?”

His eyes dart between mine and the phone at my ear. “Is Ave okay?”

“This is good,” Ave says, sounding like we’re all being good little puppets in the Avery show. And hell, right now that’s exactly what we are. “Now, tell me you’ll put me on speaker and then do it.”

“Umm—”

I spring into action when my sister sighs loudly, knowing that this isn’t the time to second guess her. “Ave wants to talk to you,” I say to Dante. Then I put her on speaker.

Without looking away from me, Dante says, “You’re up early, Ave.”

My sister snickers, which is so unlike her. “Not really. It’s noon here. I’m three hours ahead, remember?”

Bloody hell, has it already been two hours since I woke up?

“So, what can I do for you?” Dante asks at the same time as Baz speaks.

“Do you guys need some privacy?”

I almost laugh when Ave asks, “Who’s there with you guys? Is it Baz?”

“Yeah, Avery, it’s me,” the man in question answers.

Knowing that her call isn’t coincidental, I discreetly look around. Imagining where her view angle is, I come up empty, though. I don’t have the mental capacity to work it out, and, honestly, not the knowledge either. My sister’s particular skill set is a mystery to me, which is probably for the best.

“Look, I know you guys most likely have plans for tonight, so I wanted to call and wish you Happy New Year now.”

Dante gives me a confused look. “Okay...” It’s clear that he knows there’s more to the call. “Well, Happy New Year to you, too, Avery. Are you celebrating with anyone tonight?”

My sister snuffles and tears are evident in her voice when she stutters, “I-I...”

“Ave?” I say, knowing it’s weird if I don’t speak at all. “Ave, are you okay?”

“Cait...” With the way she’s saying my name, I don’t know if it’s a question or a statement. “You were right. I have to tell him.”

Stunned at my sister’s game, I listen while she tells them that John attacked her, and that he boasted about knowing who

Baz and his family are. She glosses over the nitty-gritty, making it sound like she received the information from John, and then told me.

Even though I already know the story she's telling, I'm hit by everything all over again. I'm stuck between feeling bad that Ave is suffering alone, and overwhelming hatred for John Potter. I vow then and there that even if it's the last thing I do, I'll make him tell me what he did to my sister—and then I'll make the prick pay.

“What the fuck?” Baz roars. “How did John know?”

Dante shoots his mate an angry glare. “Why didn't you tell me when I saw you?”

I'm surprised both men stayed quiet while Ave told them. Apart from flexing their jaws and clenching their fists, they both remained calm. Sure, they were wearing matching expressions that promised murder and mayhem, but they still let Ave talk with no interruptions.

“It's just... it's New Year's Eve tonight, and I want a fresh start. I asked Cait not to say anything, but I needed to come clean. I don't want to start next year burdened by secrets.” If I wasn't standing here with Baz and Dante, I'd applaud my sister for the performance of a lifetime.

I know damn well that those tears are either forced or fake, because Ave wouldn't be crying while telling them what happened. After her meltdown, I'm pretty sure she has no more tears left, and only her anger remains.

“Do you need us to come back?” Dante asks, snapping into protector mode.

While she declines the offer, telling us she just wants to focus on moving forward, my mind again lands on moving here. If we did, I’d only be a few hours away compared to the distance between us now. It would make it possible to drop by for a weekend, and she wouldn’t have to be so alone.

I only half listen while the men talk with Ave, but the bits and pieces I hear make it sound like she should have been protected. Like Baz had guys in place to look out for her. My blood runs cold when my sister says she’s never seen them, because if she hasn’t seen them... they weren’t there. I can’t say that, though. Although Baz mentions that his guys were meant to not be seen, it does nothing to ease my fear. As I said, Ave would have spotted them if they were really there.

The call only carries on for ten more minutes, most of which she spends repeating that she’s okay and convincing Dante and me not to fly there. As soon as the call ends, Baz looks at me with admiration in his deep, brown eyes.

“You were right not to tell me,” he says, looking like the words pain him to say. “Family comes first. Always.”

With those words he leaves, mentioning he has a lot of calls to make.

XLI



OceanofPDF.com

Dante

“It’s done,” I say, smiling at Storm as I throw my phone to the side.

Smiling, she stretches and kisses my jaw, letting her tongue run against the grains of my scruff. “Thank you.”

The smile she’s wearing right now, that’s the very definition of perfection. It’s a mixture of exhaustion and unabashed happiness. I want to see her smile like that every day for the rest of our lives.

“I think I’ve corrupted you. Instead of going out for another lavish dinner, you want to see me work.” It’s meant as playful, but my voice turns darker towards the end.

Storm moves, throwing a leg across my hip before straddling me. “I need to see what it is you do,” she says. I feel a shiver working its way down her spine, and when she rocks her hips, I don’t know if it’s caused by desire or nerves. “I love you, Dante. Nothing can change that.”

“But?” I ask, knowing it’s coming.

Laughing, she takes my hands and places them on her arse. “You want to touch my butt?”

“Storm,” I grunt.

This woman is going to be the death of me, but what a way to go.

“Fine, fine. There’s no but.” She wiggles in my lap as if to contradict her words. “I still need to see it for myself, though. After all, seeing is believing.”

I can’t deny how true her words are. It’s more than that. A part of me is thrilled that she’s finally asking the questions, and seeming like she’s *wanting* to know more as opposed to feeling like she has to because it comes with the territory.

“Right...” Trailing off, I try to figure out what the tightening in my chest is.

Why does it feel so... wrong to talk about this with her?

Storm’s noticed as well. “Are you not ready to share it with me?”

Gripping her hips, I flip us over so she’s on her back and I hover above her. “I’m beyond ready,” I grunt as I grind my thick length against her wet folds.

And then it hits me why I’m acting like this.

“But?” Storm says, laughing when she digs her nails into my arse.

I rest my forehead against hers, loving the way our breath mingles, as I rasp, “I’ve spent longer shielding you than we’ve been together, baby. Old habits die hard. I’ve never wanted this life for you, and if there was a way to keep you without you being a part of all this shite, can you blame me for wanting to pick it?”

Yeah, this isn’t about any sense of misplaced chivalry or a battle of the sexes. This is about Storm wholly and irrevocably

being mine—and my need to protect what’s mine.

I’m reminded exactly why the woman beneath me is my perfect Storm when she rakes her nails up my back and says, “I feel the same way, Dante. If it was an option, I wouldn’t want you living in this world either. But if my choice is between embracing this fucked up vigilante lifestyle or not having all of you, then my choice is you. Every. Single. Time.”

“Storm.” Her name is a guttural plea. Then I crash my lips to hers, nipping at her bottom lip before licking her tongue. “I love you so fucking much.”

“You better,” she purrs playfully. “Wait, I have more questions.”

I exaggerate my annoyed groan. Really, I’m loving all her questions.

“So Baz originally bought this house, does that mean it’s owned by the Marx family?”

Turning my head, I lick and bite my way up her long, slender neck. “I can’t tell you anything about Baz, baby. You know that.” Right now I bloody hate the limitations, but certain things aren’t mine to tell.

Considering she never told me how she found out Clara is a mole, I’d wager my perfect Storm understands better than she’s letting on. Does it mean we don’t trust each other? Fuck no. It just means that some stories need to be told in their own time. Like why Avery called at the perfect time earlier today.

For now, I'm content to pretend I didn't notice the timing, or the way Storm barely looked at me.

"Okay, okay," she moans as I bite down on her shoulder. "I think we've talked enough." There's no mistaking the husky quality of her voice, and I wholeheartedly agree.

I laugh as she wraps her long legs around my hips and pushes to the side like she's trying to flip us over again. When she huffs in annoyance, I'm not budging at all, I have to bite the inside of my cheek not to laugh at how adorable she looks.

"Need a hand?" I ask, and when she nods, I turn us so she's on top of me.

After making herself comfortable, she parts her hair in the middle and moves it so it hangs down her front, Lady Godiva style, hiding her amazing tits.

I growl low in my throat. "Storm!" Her name is a warning because right now, I'm not happy she's robbing me of the beautiful sight. "Why are you hiding your tits from me?"

With a salacious smile, she gets off of me and sits down on her side of the bed.

"If I want to be in charge, will you let me?" she asks, looking right into my blue eyes. "Or would that not be... good for you?" I grin as she swallows nervously.

"Baby, I've never let anyone else be in charge. I sincerely doubt it wouldn't be hot when it's you, though," I rasp.

I lick my dry lips while I watch her removing the curtain of hair, revealing her amazing tits to me, and I instinctively lick

my lips at the sight of her hard, erect nipples. Storm's hands drift down her body. One stops at her tits, pinching and tweaking her left nipple while the other continues further south. She moans breathlessly as she parts her pussy lips, showing me her pretty cunt. I groan low in my throat, the sight enough to make my cock jerk and throb painfully.

Storm's hand slowly moves down her body. One stops at her tits, pinching and tweaking her left nipple while the other continues further south. She moans breathlessly as she parts her pussy lips, showing me her pretty cunt. I groan low in my throat, the sight enough to make my cock jerk and throb painfully.

"Move down the bed," she huskily commands, and I hurry to do as she asks.

Then she props herself up against the headboard. Her long legs are spread so wide I can see wetness coating her pink folds and inner thigh. I groan as I realise some of it is my cum from earlier.

Forgetting that she wanted me further down on the mattress, I crawl towards her. With a saucy smile on her lips, she moves one leg, resting her foot against my shoulder. "Stay there." Of course I don't listen and try to move closer. So she moves her foot to the middle of my chest and adds pressure. "Don't come closer, Dante."

Despite promising her she can be in control, I huff in irritation at being denied. My irritation dissipates when I realise what she's doing. I think it's about all the things that

are happening outside her control, so this—us—is one of the few things she has a say in. And if that's why, I'm happy to let her be in charge, to give her this. Even if it kills me that I can't touch her until she lets me.

Completely oblivious to my thoughts, Storm reaches for the banana shaped toy I got her, and I watch as she slides it into her drenched sex. "Not as good as your cock, but still good." She winks at me.

Fisting my dick, I slowly stroke my hand up and down the hard shaft. While I love watching Storm pleasure herself, I'm impatient. I want to get to the point of all this so I can get to the part where I get to fuck her. I can't bloody wait until I can sink my hardness inside her and make her pay for this.

When she doesn't let me move closer, I throw my pride aside. "Let me touch you, baby. I need to be inside you so badly." Despite the gruffness of my tone, I know she can hear how desperate I am.

She continues to thrust the toy inside her cunt, and I'm parched for a taste of the wetness coating it. "No," she moans.

"No?" I parrot, incredulity lacing my tone.

What the bloody hell? A growl builds in my throat, and I'm two seconds from wrapping my hands around her ankles and dragging her towards me, willing or not.

"I want you to jerk off while watching me, and then I want you to shower me in your cum." Fuck, those words take me from hard as rock to painfully hard.

Without taking my eyes off her wet pussy, I stroke my hand up and down my pierced shaft. It doesn't take long before I'm lost in a rhythm that matches hers perfectly, and I squeeze my cock harder while imagining I'm thrusting into her instead of my hand.

"That's it, Dante." My name sounds amazing when she moans it. "Come closer."

Doing what she says, I shuffle closer, and she doesn't stop me again until the tip almost touches her folds. Ah, fuck me, this is both hot and bloody frustrating. I can feel the heat from her sex, and when she pulls her fingers out she grazes my tip.

I force myself to look away from her entrance and my gaze slowly travels up her body, all the way to her face. Her head is tilted back slightly, her lips are parted, and she moans my name over and over like a chant she's compelled to repeat. The hand not buried in her cunt is squeezing her tit, kneading the soft globe.

When Storm comes, she screams my name, and I follow her over the edge. Moving closer, I spray my cum onto her taut stomach, generous tits, and around her neck, groaning her name while I empty my balls on her exposed skin.

"Feed it to me," Storm moans, her eyes unfocused like she's still caught up in her pleasure. "I want to swallow every last drop."

Until my vivacious and perfect Storm, I'd never really been into cum play, or fantasised about all the ways we can utilise my spend. At first, when I told her not to swallow after she

sucked me dry in the car, I wanted to see it drip down the corners of her mouth and onto her milky skin. Using it as lube the other day was a spur-of-the-moment decision—and what a decision that turned out to be.

I run my fingers through the pearl necklace I've created. After making sure my fingers are covered, I show them to her. "Is this what you want?" I rasp before slipping the digits between her lips.

"Yes. Give me more, Dante," she moans.

Frowning, I pull my fingers out of her mouth. "You didn't say please or thank you," I reprimand. "And I know *I* raised you better than that." Storm's lust-filled eyes find mine, and I love the way her nostrils flare as I say the last part.

"Please, may I have some more, Dante?" she pants, obviously liking the reminder of who raised her.

It feels... liberating to not toe around the taboo aspect of our relationship, and even though it's such a small moment, something clicks into place in my chest.

Gathering more cum on my fingers, I feed it to her, and Storm's tongue eagerly snakes around my fingers, licking them clean. Then I repeat the motion until it's all gone.

Wrapping Storm's hair around my hand, I pull her until our noses are touching. "You need to get dressed," I grunt. "If you stay here like this for another minute, we won't make it to see Cain."

After a kiss that's so hot it has me reconsidering staying here, we both get out of bed. Heading for the bathroom, Storm sways her hips in that exaggerated way she does when she wants me to watch her arse. And fuck, I want to squeeze those soft globes so hard my fingerprints are forever etched into her skin.

I opt not to join her in the bathroom since I know it'll inevitably lead to me fucking her, and we don't have time. Since Cain is already at Dirty Diamonds, I know we don't have time to waste if we want to get there before he finishes the Father himself.

"Are you sure you're ready for this?" I ask, when Storm comes out from the bathroom. I'm already dressed and have found something for her to wear.

"I'm ready." That's all she says. No questions, just her cold affirmation.

"I don't just want him dead, Dante. I want him to pay. When the time comes, John needs to feel the same level of helplessness my sister did."

The words she spoke earlier today rattled me more than I care to admit. Well, the words didn't, but hearing them from her in such a cold and determined tone was not what I expected this afternoon. I don't know what she's cooked up in her mind, but taking someone's life isn't a romantic notion. It's an act that stains your soul, something you need to live with forever. Then again, that's exactly why she needs to know what it entails before going after her own revenge.

“Cain and Grayson tracked down a guy that’s been... actually, you were right earlier. You need to see for yourself. They brought him in last night, and it’s up to us to make sure justice is served.” I try to soften my tone, but I can’t hide the bite and anger I feel.

Since she was there when Cain called this afternoon, she already knows this, but I repeat it anyway. This time, I don’t shield her from any details as I explain what the guy is guilty of—only leaving out the things that make it personal to Cain. Storm will find out what that is soon enough.

After showing her some pictures on my phone, I pull up his website that shows pricing for children as young as five. Tears gather in Storm’s eyes, but she says nothing. She blinks them away and angrily swipes at her eyes to catch the few that escape.

“The Cruz Kings have already shut the business down. They did so in the beginning of December, but this guy eluded us until now,” I say, hoping it will make her feel better.

“He needs to pay.” Storm’s tone is uncharacteristically cold, almost alien-like in its lack of emotion.

I don’t know whether to be horrified or impressed, maybe both. For years I worked so hard to keep her and Avery out of this shite, which makes it even more ironic that it was my absence that got them sucked into my world.

Life really is bloody ironic.

Taking her hand, I pull her flush against me, using a finger to lift her chin until she looks me in the eye. “He will. He is.” I bend down and softly press my lips to her forehead. “Let’s go.”

OceanofPDF.com

XLII



OceanofPDF.com

Storm

I can't help but giggle as we walk through the original Dirty Diamonds. Everything is so similar, the differences are subtle, and it's odd to look at the familiarity without knowing a single face. Well, there's one face I recognise, but I wouldn't say it's familiar. Rocco is holding court at the bar, surrounded by no less than seven scantily clad women.

Walking through the crowd I'm not oblivious to the women swarming around us, many of them making one excuse or another to touch Dante. It makes my blood boil, and I squeeze his hand harder. It's not that I blame them for wanting a piece of him, my anger is from their clear disregard of me—the woman who's hand he's holding.

“If one more slag touches you, I'm not responsible for my actions,” I hiss, only getting moodier when Dante dares to laugh and turn his megawatt grin on.

As we wait for the elevator, one woman approaches us. “Danteee,” she purrs, dragging the e out for-bloody-ever. “It's been too long since I've had you in my bed.” She pouts and puffs her chest out.

Wait, he's shagged her? He's actually been with her, and yet he isn't pushing her away. Anger like I've never felt before rushes through me, making me see red. Before I can stop myself or even realise I'm moving, I've pulled my hand from his and pushed the woman away.

“Don’t touch him,” I seethe.

She staggers but unfortunately she catches herself before falling on her arse. Pity.

“What the hell is your problem, little girl?” She lifts a perfectly groomed eyebrow and unsuccessfully tries to stare me down.

Yeah it’s difficult to look down on someone who’s taller than you. *Slag.*

Flipping her off, I mouth, “Sod off.”

I know I’m being a bitch, just as I know I’m misplacing my anger. Sure, she has no right touching what’s mine, but she isn’t the issue. If the pawing and ooh’ing so far is any indication, my uncle has fucked his fair share of the employees. Yet, he never bloody warned me. That’s not on them, and I will have words with him about this later.

Literally pulled from my thoughts, I yelp as a burning sensation explodes on my scalp, and I belatedly realise the cunt has wrapped my hair around her hand. Dante shouts at her to let me go, and at me to get away, so naturally I ignore him.

My experience with fighting might be close to zero, but I don’t reckon I need much finesse to slap the bitch. I let her pull me closer, then I lift my hand and with as much force as possible I slap her across her heavily powdered cheek. Before she can recover, I slide a leg between hers and push her again, grinning as she falls on her pert arse.

“I. Said. Sod. Off,” I grind out.

Dante comes up behind me and says something I don't hear. I can barely hear the music over the pounding of my heart. A shadow falls over us, and I instinctively take a step back.

“You better come with me,” a gruff voice says, and when I crane my neck, I see Rocco's scarred face.

I watch with a smirk as he pulls the woman up and drags her with him kicking and screaming. Because I'm feeling extra petty, I flip her off again and blow her a kiss. Then I turn around and walk into the elevator without waiting for Dante.

When the doors close, he makes a big show of adjusting himself. “That was hot,” he rasps.

I give him as cold a look as I can muster, and when he reaches for me, I slap his hand away. “Don't touch me,” I hiss. “You let me walk in here without a single warning. Did it never occur to you it might be a good idea to tell me I'd be walking into a club filled with women you've shagged?”

He scrutinises my face, and when I give him nothing he hits the emergency button. I don't have time to say anything before he grabs my shoulders and pushes me against the metal enclosing us. “No,” he says deceptively smooth. “You're all I can think about. You're my perfect Storm, so why would I be thinking about other women?”

My resolve slips at the words, and I look into his eyes. The sincerity in his depths steals my breath away, and before I can

remember to stay angry, I wrap my arms around his neck and fuse our lips together.

“You’re. Mine,” I moan and bite down on his lip, not letting go until I taste blood.

He groans and grinds his erection against me. “I have something I want you to wear,” he rasps. Then he digs his fingers into the soft globes of my arse, kneading them.

I watch as he pulls a black velvet pouch from his leather jacket, and when he reaches for my hand, I hold it out with the palm up. I snicker as he empties the contents into my hand, it’s a bloody banana butt-plug. My breath becomes laboured and I can only nod, answering the question hanging in the air.

Dante roughly spins me around, and as soon as he’s pulled my jeans and panties down, I spread my arse cheeks for him, moaning out loud when I feel the tip of his finger pressing against my puckered hole. Shite, this is so bloody dirty, and I want it with every fibre in my being. I might not know exactly what to expect when we get downstairs, but I know I shouldn’t be aroused thinking about Dante making someone pay, while my arse is being filled. Yet, here we are.

“Is your tight cunt wet?” he rasps. “Is it pulsating? Begging to be filled by my dick?”

Words are beyond me, I can’t even answer him. All I can think about is being filled by him, and I’m almost regretting I didn’t let him fuck me before we came here because right now, I want nothing more than his huge, pierced cock inside me. Stretching me, filling me, making me see stars.

Dante runs the toy between my pussy lips, coating the butt plug in my juices before slowly nudging it inside my tight hole, making my pussy clench and my clit throb. Once it's all the way inside me, he bends down and roughly bites both cheeks before pulling my jeans back up.

When he reaches for the elevator buttons, I say, "Wait." Then I drop to my knees. I need to taste him.

I'm disappointed when he chuckles and moves away from me. "No way, baby. You had your chance earlier, and you didn't want my cock." He palms himself, squeezing the bulge in his pants while huskily denying me.

A dissatisfied whimper slips out of me as I consider begging. I know we're on a mission but my mind and body just don't care. Everything in me is screaming for Dante to take me, reassure me that he belongs to me and none of the skanks here.

"Please," I beg, hating how small my voice sounds. Standing back up, I put my hands on his face and turn until he's looking right at me. "I need you." His answering growl is guttural, almost feral in its ferociousness. The primalness goes straight to my core, making my knickers completely soaked.

Wrapping one hand around my throat, he pushes me back against the wall and I let out a strangled purr on impact. Seriously, my body is acting on its own volition, and it doesn't care about timing or pride, only that it wants to welcome my Dante, glove his cock as he thrusts into my wet heat.

While holding me in place he undoes first his pants, then mine, pushing both down. “This is going to be quick,” he groans, fisting his magnificent hardness. I try to nod, but the hand still around my throat stops me. It doesn’t matter, though. Dante isn’t waiting for my permission.

Letting go of my throat, Dante tells me to grab the handrail and the second I do, he grabs my hips and lifts me into the air. My legs are both perched in the air against one of his shoulders. It’s an awkward position, but when he slams into me I stop caring, because it works and that’s all that matters.

Our breathing becomes laboured, we’re both panting and moaning in pleasure while he fucks me so hard my head bounces off the wall behind me. His eyes are squeezed shut and I inwardly preen at the way he’s chanting my name.

“Dante... bloody hell... I need...” My words cut off and turn to sounds as his cock hits my G spot perfectly with every thrust.

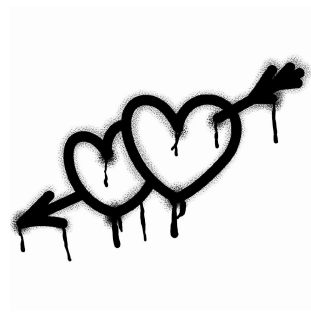
He’s so deep and with the plug in my arse I need no more stimulation. My body convulses, and I scream nonsensically as my pleasure crests. My vision goes black, and I feel as though I’m suspended outside time and space as wave after pleasurable wave claims me.

Dante groans my name like he’s in pain and slams into me twice more before following me over the edge.

When I open my eyes and look down, I’m surprised to see a pool of water. “What the—”

Chuckling, my uncle interrupts me. “It seems you really like a rough dicking. If I wasn’t questioning the cleanliness of the floor, I’d get down on my knees and lick it up.”

Oh... wow... now I’m a bit miffed we’re in the elevator because I’d love to see Dante lick my cum up.



The room I’m standing in with Cain and Dante is small and funny smelling. The musty scent clings unpleasantly to my nostrils. Even though I really want to cover my nose with my sleeve, I don’t. I’m the one who wanted to be here, so I won’t let my fragile senses get in the way.

“And you’re sure you want this?” Cain asks, his gruff timbre not helping my growing anxiety.

“Y-yes,” I croak. After clearing my throat, I repeat the word, hoping it sounds more convincing.

The thing is, I am sure. I’m not just ready, a part of me I never knew existed until I found Clara, demands it. I have to see this firsthand, because I know that no amount of words can truly prepare me for what this all is. Hell, I’m still having a hard time wrapping my head around it. Seeing is believing, so until I do I can’t be sure of anything.

“It won’t be pretty. We’ve already started the work,” Cain says.

When Dante opens his mouth to say something, I shake my head. “Don’t,” I warn. “I need to do this.”

Without further attempts at swaying me, Cain opens the door that leads into a brightly lit room. If I thought the scent in the room we just vacated was bad, it’s nothing compared to in here. The smell of burned flesh, urine and shite hits me so hard it makes my eyes water.

The uncleanliness polluting the air is a stark contrast to the clinical design of the room. A tarp sheet covers every inch of the floor. It’s see-through, so it’s impossible not to notice all the dark red stains covering the concrete. The light is so bright it hurts my eyes after coming out of the dark room.

My eyes slowly take in everything, including the two taps hanging from the ceiling, just above the man that’s crucified to a wooden cross. A. Bloody. Cross—literally. Blood flows from his hands and feet where nails protrude from the skin. Bile coats my tongue at the grotesque sight.

“Cain’s specialty,” Dante murmurs from behind me, making me startle. “He’s working through some... personal issues.”

My uncle’s second turns and flashes me a psychotic grimace that might have been meant to be a smile. “What can I say,” he says, shrugging. “I take issue with people abusing faith and preying on the weak and gullible.” From Cain’s tone I deduce that there’s one hell of a story behind his words, but I don’t ask.

Unsure of what's going to happen, my role, and... well, honestly, all of it, I move to the corner and plop my arse down on the white desk, wincing and then adjusting so the plug isn't hurting. I can see and hear everything clearly from here, which is all I need.

Dante looks over at me and cocks his head to the side, almost like he's asking me if I'm ready and I nod. Then he nods at Cain, who rolls the sleeves of his shirt up before backhanding the man on the cross so hard he literally slaps the spit from his mouth.

“How are you feeling today, Father?” Cain's tone is taunting and filled with a promise of pain. “Do you feel better now that you're sharing the same fate as the man who died for the sins of humanity?”

The man on the cross moans but says nothing.

Cain continues to taunt and punch him, making sure his fist connects with every inch of the man's body. It doesn't take long before his moans of pain turn to screams, making the hairs at the back of my neck stand at attention.

It's like watching an accident. No matter how much I try, I can't make myself look away. My macabre curiosity forces my eyes to remain on the man—Father, apparently. Blimey, this sick prick is a man of the cloth?

“We have a few visitors tonight,” Cain says, conversationally. “Why don't you tell them what you've done?”

When the guy doesn't answer quickly enough for Cain's liking, he wraps his hand around one of his fingers and bends it until it snaps. The man's howls of pain reverberate in the room, making my stomach churn. Or maybe it's the squelching sound of his hand moving up the nail keeping it in place.

I gag and retch, thankful I didn't eat before coming here. Even though I feel Dante's eyes on me, I don't meet his gaze. If I look into his piercing blue depths, I'm not sure I can remain strong, and I'm not ready to give up yet.

"I-I..." The man whimpers, cutting himself off.

"Speak up," Cain croons. "Tell my boss and his woman about your misuse of confession. Tell them how you made a note of which families were really struggling, and then approached them with the offer to buy their kids. And don't forget to mention what would happen if they declined your offer."

I can barely believe my ears, is this shite even real?

"W-we killed them," the man says, panting heavily. "Took the kids and killed the parents."

Cain nods. "And what happened to them? The chosen few?" As he spits the last part I notice how much his hands are shaking.

When Dante asks Cain to step back, I know I'm not the only one who's noticing how distressed he is. It's not like I imagined they wouldn't be affected when torturing someone, but Cain seems almost unhinged.

With a sharp nod, Cain punches the man once more before joining me on the desk. His breathing is laboured, his chest rising and falling rapidly. I scoot over so there's more room, and he gives me a grateful smile.

"I believe Cain asked you a question," Dante says. I barely recognise his tone, it's so cold, a shiver runs down my spine. "If I were you, I'd answer."

"I sold them to the place you used to call home. The place you used to love and cherish before you turned your back on it." The man—Father—lets his chin drop to his chest.

I jump up from the desk and move over to join them. "What do you mean?" I ask, not caring about anything but answers. "What happened to the kids?" I scream the last part, needing to know that what my mind is telling me is wrong.

Shrugging Dante's hand off my shoulder, I move closer to the disgusting man. "What are you not saying?" I demand, fury lacing my tone.

"It's a religious—"

Cain's barked laughter interrupts him. "My former home is a religious cult that promotes..." He pauses and swallows. "It's a place where no one is safe."

I can't be sure, but the way he says it gives me the impression it's a place he's familiar with on a personal level. I repeat my question of what happens to the children, and when the man tells me they're sold into servitude, I wish I hadn't pressed for an answer.

A sense of hopelessness fills me, because this is... what kind of world is it we live in? This world needs people like Cain, Dante, the Cruz Kings, and everyone else involved. Sure, they're not noble people, but they're the ones facing what everyone else wants to hide from.

In this world where we host charity events and have a celebrity act as a spokesperson for humanitarian causes, who's looking after the normal people? My uncle, that's who. Pride swirls in my chest, and I know without a shadow of a doubt, that I'm in. I'm all in. I don't care what it takes, this might be wrong in the eyes of the law, but it's right on so many other levels.

"Have you ever touched any of the children? Or forced yourself on anyone regardless of age?" I don't even recognise my tone as I ask. When he gives me a slight nod, I take a step back. "You make me sick."

Closing his eyes he mutters under his breath, and it takes me a few minutes to realise that he's praying. Oh. Hell. No.

"There'll be no mercy for you," I hiss. Then I turn to Dante and look straight at him. "Take his eyes. If there's an afterlife, I want him to stumble around. He's taken something precious from those who blindly trusted him, so he doesn't deserve the gift of sight."

The look my uncle gives me is a mixture of disbelief and pride. Before I can react, he bends down and claims my lips in an earth-shattering kiss. "As you wish," he rasps against my lips.

I take a few steps back and watch while Dante rolls a cart over to us. The top is covered by some black fabric. I gasp as soon as he pulls it back to reveal a lot of different tools. Even though I can only name a few, like the scalpels, my sister's horror movie obsession comes in handy and I can all too vividly imagine the use of most.

Picking up one of those lighters for tea candles, my uncle lights it and holds the flame under a knife with a wooden handle. "Has Cain told you that we're aware which of the mutilated bodies you're responsible for?"

The Father shakes his head and whimpers.

"No? Hmm, that's sloppy of him," Dante says conversationally. Walking over to the Father, he gives him a chilling smirk. "You always remove the nipples." The words are barely out of his mouth before he presses the hot blade to the prick's left nipple.

The man screams so loud I cover my ears, not that it does me any good. The high-pitched sound can't be lessened or ignored. Taking his time, Dante doesn't burn the right nipple until the Father stops screaming, and then it begins all over again.

"Serves you right, motherfucker," Cain snarls. Turning my head, I'm surprised to see him next to me. I've been so focused on Dante that I didn't hear or notice his second moving. "Not so fun when you're no longer in charge, is it?"

I gag as the sweet stench of burned flesh becomes impossible to ignore, and I move my arm so it's covering my

nostrils. Despite the fabric softener clinging to the fabric, it's not enough to drown out the other smell.

"Are you okay?" Dante asks, his tone soft and filled with concern for me.

Nodding, I say, "I'm fine." Even though I don't sound like it, I am. This is... I won't try to play it off or deny how much it's affecting me, but it's a necessary evil. When Dante looks unsure, I wave at the cart and add, "Continue."

Feeling a hand on my shoulder I look quizzically at Cain. "Even though you'll never not be affected by it, it becomes easier when you know all their sins." His tone tells me he's speaking from experience, and I like knowing he understands. "When Dante found me... well, let's just say I'd already seen how brutal and disgusting religion can be. Your uncle gave me a purpose and an outlet, and for that I'll always be grateful."

"She's your niece? You're a sinner. Your soul will forever burn in hell," the Father exclaims, spitting on the floor in front of him.

My spine becomes ramrod straight at his words. How dare he condemn us? Fury takes over, and I scream at him. "At least it's consensual. Dante would never hurt me."

I feel as though I'm in the passenger seat while my body reacts, and all I can do is watch as one of my hands closes around the scalpel on the cart. I'm silently cheering my body on as it stalks towards the man on the cross, and slices his cheek.

Hands close around my shoulders, roughly pulling me back while I scream for them to let me go. It's only when Dante growls Cain's name that I realise it's not my uncle touching me.

“Don't touch her.”

“Dante—”

Interrupting his second, he says, “That's your first and last warning. Do. Not. Touch. Her.” Much to my surprise, Cain smirks and lets me go.

When Dante pulls me flush against him, I welcome his embrace, and I clutch him to me as hard as I can. The men have a silent conversation with their eyes, and I'm happy when Cain takes over so Dante doesn't have to let go of me.

Even though I want to, I don't look away while Cain removes the man's eyes. Nothing can touch me while I'm with Dante, and a sadistic part of me feels a sense of satisfaction that the man is suffering.

I don't know how long we're here before Dante slices the man's throat, but when his screams turn to gurgles I feel lighter than I ever have before. One less evil walks this earth now.

XLIII



OceanofPDF.com

Storm

After the Father is dead, Cain stays behind to clean up, while Dante takes me to his office that has an adjoining bathroom. It's small and quaint, but it has a working shower, which is all that matters right now. "Do you still have the plug in your delicious arse?" Dante rasps when we're both freshly showered and dressed in clean clothes brought to us by someone named Sally. "Of course," I smirk. Dante claims my lips in a scorching kiss that has my toes curling. "Good. I have one more place I want to show you, is that okay?" When I nod he takes my hand and doesn't let go until we're back at the car.

Then he drives us to the Santa Cruz Wharf. The drive isn't long, but it feels like it since neither of us speak. While Dante is running his hand through his light hair every two minutes, I'm trying to digest the events of the night so far.

I think what bothers me most is that I'm completely unbothered by what happened. It was justice, no one can convince me otherwise. The Father was evil and one thousand percent deserving of everything Dante and Cain did to him. Sure, I might end up having nightmares of the smells and sounds, but it hasn't changed my love for my uncle.

When we're parked and out of the car, Dante eagerly drags me to the end of the pier. There's music all around us, and on our way we stumble into several people, all of them dressed to the nines as they're celebrating the end of this year. I'm

starting to feel extremely underdressed in the leggings and oversized hoodie I'm wearing.

"This is where I met them the first time," Dante says, pointing down at the water.

"Who?" I ask, not following.

Dante pulls me into his embrace, holding me so tight breathing becomes hard. "Luke and Baz." I search my memories for any mention of Luke, but if I've ever heard his name before it hasn't stuck with me. "Luke was the son of a politician. At the time I didn't know Baz was here to protect Luke, to keep the relations between his dad and the Marx family intact. I only found out about that after they killed my mate in the most horrific way." Tears gather in my eyes at the rawness in Dante's voice.

"What happened? Who are 'they'?" I ask. I can only assume it's okay to ask since Dante brought it up.

"I'll spare you the gory details," he laughs hollowly. "Let's just say that what the extremists did to Luke, his girlfriend, and his sister... it's what propelled me into this life. I wanted revenge, I wanted the scum to pay for what they did. Luke was a good man, a kind man. He did nothing wrong. He didn't litter, he gave money to those less fortunate... he judged no one. When he found out I was struggling here, he took me in. He and Baz looked after me, made sure I didn't have to return to Briarwood without experiencing everything I wanted."

Can a heart cry? Mine feels like it does as Dante—despite his previous words—gives me all the gory details. The more

he talks, the clearer it becomes that when Luke died, so did a piece of the man I love.

Even though I shouldn't, I can't stop wondering what Dante was like back then. Only a couple of years older than I am now, consumed by grief and rage, he set out to burn the world down. It would destroy a lesser man. Which begs the question, how deep is the damage to Dante's soul?

I shudder as I realise Baz might be the only reason Dante was able to take care of me and Ave—and no, I don't mean financially. I mean it in every sense of the word. If my uncle's mate hadn't given him a purpose, a focus for his rage and wish to bring destruction upon those that deserve it, my sister and I might have been left with no family at all.

Before I can stop myself, I sob, "I could have lost you." As soon as the words are out, I want to take them back. Making his tragic past about me is so not cool, yet it's all I can think about.

I could have lost what we have, living a lesser life without ever knowing better.

"My perfect Storm," he murmurs, pulling me impossibly closer.

Dante places a finger beneath my chin and tilts my head so I'm looking up at him. Without warning, his lips descend on mine in another toe-curling kiss. I can taste the ash of sorrow on his lips, and I vow then and there to do what I can to never make his kisses taste like that again.

Breaking free of his hold, I take his hand, wordlessly leading us back from the edge of the pier. Dante follows me silently, the pressure of his hand the only way I know he's following me as I wind us through the throng of people who are all merrily celebrating. When I hear people talk about the new year only being twenty minutes away, I pick up my pace.

“Storm, wait. Where are we going?” I ignore Dante's question. Partly because I honestly don't know, but mostly because I'm embarrassingly out of breath just from the brisk walking.

When our feet are firmly planted on the sand, I see what I need, and I steer us towards the pier furthest away. It's cast completely in darkness, making it the perfect spot. As soon as we're alone in the dark, away from prying eyes and people partying, I throw myself at Dante.

“Storm!” My name sounds like a prayer as he catches me.

Wasting no time, I fuse our lips together. Our mouths move together in perfect tandem while I rub myself against his growing length.

Pulling back, I look into Dante's brilliantly blue eyes. “You'll never be alone again. I'm here. I'll always be here, Dante.” He groans and rolls his hips upwards so he perfectly hits my clit.

“You're my home, my everything.” The words are strained as though it hurts him to speak them, and a part of me thinks it does.

I think I understand Dante better now, or rather, why he left me on my eighteenth birthday. Honestly, I have to own my part of the fault as well. I forced him across a line that obviously scared him, and that's never okay. If our life was a story, people would condemn him if he'd done what I did, and I can never let myself forget I took his choice away.

It doesn't mean I'm excusing him or have forgotten what it felt like, but I can appreciate how he must have felt.

From what he's shared tonight, it sounds like Baz, Luke, and Dante were living the perfect life. Hardly any worries, just fun and camaraderie—his chosen family. He couldn't prevent the horrible actions that shattered the idyll, much like I left him without a choice. I know the situations are nowhere near the same, but I also know they can still feel like it.

"I want to start the new year with you inside me," I whimper when he rolls his hips again.

Dante slants our lips together, massaging my tongue with his. While our panted breaths mingle, I move my hand between us and snake it beneath the elastic of his trackie bottoms. When I find him commando, I moan as I wrap my hand around his pierced length.

"Baby, I have to put you down." I love that he sounds as disappointed as I feel. But since I'm wearing leggings, there isn't any easy access—not unless...

"Just bloody rip them," I say.

Dante frantically pulls at the fabric until it tears, causing me to moan as the cool wind hits my heated, wet flesh. When he moves two fingers between my folds, I bite down on his shoulder to muffle my sounds.

“You’re always so ready for my cock,” he groans, working his fingers in and out of my slick heat. “So wet. So tight.”

“Dante...”

“I’ve got you, baby. Now, hold on tight because I’m going to let go completely.”

I barely have time to clamp my legs tighter around his waist, before I feel his other hand sliding between my arse cheeks.

“There we go,” he groans as his digits close around the plug. “How did it feel to have this inside you while dealing with the Father?”

His words and what we’re doing shouldn’t mix well, yet it makes me wetter to remember I had this inside me while losing control, while seeing someone being tortured. It’s not what we did that’s turning me on, it’s knowing that Dante always does his best to make my life better.

When the sound of people counting down reaches my ears, I repeat I want him inside me before the next year in our life begins.

“So impatient,” he chastises with no heat. Despite sounding like he has all the time in the world, he lines himself up against my opening and easily slips inside me.

Perfection.

Pure perfection.

I bite down on his shoulder again as he pauses, letting me adjust to the size of him before he slowly moves in and out of my drenched pussy. Dante drops his head to my shoulder, his hot breath glides across my exposed skin.

Stars dance across my eyes when he picks up the pace, pulling almost completely out before thrusting all the way inside me, while doing the same with the plug in my arse. With nothing more than a few thrusts, he has reduced me to a whimpering, needy puddle. The noises he makes are going to be my undoing. His guttural groans, the way he's moaning my name like I'm his salvation and undoing all wrapped up in one moaning, writhing package.

I lift my head from his shoulder and recapture his lips, eagerly biting his bottom lip and savouring his answering groan.

"Touch me," he begs. "I need you to touch me."

Knowing that I've made this powerful man beg does something to me, it kindles a fire deep inside me. I move my hands beneath his hoodie, running my nails up and down his spine. Dante shudders, but doesn't stop what he's doing between my legs. His fingers dig harder into my arse, eliciting more whimpers from me while he continues to pump his hips.

"I'm going to... Dante... I'm—" I moan into his mouth as my body takes over.

“Come for me, Storm,” he growls as I convulse around him, squeezing him, milking his cock with my orgasm.

I love feeling him come inside me, it always takes my pleasure higher. Knowing that I’ll be walking back to the car with his cum dripping out of my pussy—in ripped leggings no less—bloody hell, the thought prolongs my orgasm. Dante continues to move through his release, pushing his cock so far inside me I can feel him everywhere.

He continues to ravish my mouth, kissing me so deeply I can feel it in my soul. “I love you,” he says breathlessly.

“I’ve always loved you,” I say. The words feel like more than a declaration, they’re like a binding promise.

OceanofPDF.com

XLIV



OceanofPDF.com

Storm

My plan to stay awake during the entire flight from California to London proves to be harder than I thought. Especially when surrounded with all the luxuries that come from once again borrowing Baz's private jet. But since I don't want to miss any of my precious time with Dante, I fight the need to sleep. As soon as the wheels touch the English tarmac, time will be up, and it's back to reality whether I like it or not—and for the record, I don't like it. Not. One. Bit.

My head is chock filled with everything that's happened in the short time we've been gone. Despite the dream it's been to not be held back by having to hide our relationship, I can't let myself forget the nightmare.

As if to remind me, my phone pings with another message from Alan. Because of his own holiday I have heard little from him, and the few times he's messaged it's served as an ugly and unwanted reminder of my life back here.

Darling: Am I going to see you today, darling?

I should be relieved he obviously isn't aware that I know what his brother did to my sister, and that... shite, I'm honestly not entirely sure what I do or don't know. It's all so convoluted and my head can't make heads and tails of all of it.

While it's clear he and his family are aware of who I am, Ave didn't know if they're after Dante or me... or both. I know it can be argued that if it wasn't for Dante, they wouldn't

know about me. But I have forcefully inserted myself by thinking I was a cool double-agent, and I'm having a hard time thinking that's something they're just willing to forget.

Either way, I need to stay clear of them.

Squeezing my phone, I can't help but sneer at the offending message and even worse contact name.

"What's the matter?" Dante lifts my hair away from my neck and kisses his way up to my ear. I shiver as he bites the lobe. "You look like you want to throw your phone out of the window." I don't know why his words make fire erupt in my lower stomach, but they do. An inferno is building, and my need for him skyrockets.

"I don't want to talk about it," I whisper. Then I twist so I'm on top of his naked body. "No more talking." Before he can answer, I slant my lips to his.

A moan slips free when he opens his mouth and his tongue delves into my mouth roughly stroking mine. The kiss isn't sweet, which is perfect. Right now, I need him to take me, dominate me, make me forget anything that doesn't involve him.

"Storm," he rasps, and I know he's about to ask me again.

Shaking my head, I repeat I don't want to talk. "Please, Dante. I need you to take me."

He chuckles darkly. "Take you where?" His raised eyebrow and blasé attitude are making me angry. It's like he's deliberately not understanding what I'm saying.

Okay, I guess I'm not actually saying much, but we've been so in sync I shouldn't have to. He's my other half, isn't it his job to know what I need? When Dante moves his hips and thrust upwards so his thick length moves between my folds I'm reminded I haven't answered him yet.

"You promised to mark me," I moan, rolling my hips to better feel him. "I need you to do that. Now. Before we land." My tone is breathy and extra needy.

Dante's eyes widen, and he moves his hands to cup my face. "What's going on in that pretty head of yours?" he asks, concern coating his words.

The truth is that I'm not okay. I thought I could do this, that I was strong enough. Spoiler alert, I'm not—far, far from it. I don't want to go back, and even thinking about it scares me. Am I selfish for not wanting to be apart from my uncle again? Maybe. It doesn't change the fact I want us to face everything together, and not apart.

"I just..." Trailing off I swallow thickly, fighting the tears threatening to spill.

Dante wraps his muscular arms around me, and when I turn my head I look straight at the Roman numerals tattooed into his flesh. "What do the numbers mean?" I ask, letting my index finger run across the numerals.

When he doesn't answer me immediately, I almost think he didn't hear me. But as I look up at his handsome face, I know that's not the reason for his silence. His eyes have darkened, and there's a look of insecurity in his sockets.

“It’s the number of people I’ve killed,” he says.

Oh... I don’t know what I expected, but that definitely wasn’t it. I once thought it was the number of women he’s slept with, and, honestly, I’m glad it isn’t.

“It’s not as many as I tho—” I don’t get to finish speaking before Dante interrupts me.

“The ones I’ve killed alone, with no one else being involved,” he clarifies gruffly before looking away, which annoys me further.

Blimey, is he worried I’ll judge him? I’ve seen what he does—I’ve seen him at work, and it didn’t bother me one bit. In fact, I was incredibly proud.

“Hey,” I say, tugging at the arm he’s thrown over his face. “Don’t hide from me.”

I follow the tip of his tongue as it darts across his lips, wetting the flesh. “I know it’s a lot.” He pauses, and swallows so hard his Adam’s apple bobs. “But I promise you, every single fucker deserved it. I’ve never purposefully harmed anyone who hasn’t committed unspeakable acts.”

“Dante...”

“I need to know you’re not scared of me. That this changes nothing between us.” His rough tone makes goosebumps spread across my flesh.

Seeing Dante like this is making me feel high, and I secretly like that I can make him feel like this because Lord knows he

has the same power over me. With just a look, he can basically make my body react and obey unspoken commands.

“It changes nothing,” I say, hoping beyond hope he can hear the sincerity in my voice. “Never forget, I know your heart, Dante.”

I barely get the words out before he rears up, claiming my lips in a kiss that’s both desperate and reassuring. Loving and demanding. It’s wild, it’s unhinged—it’s us.

Pulling back, I let my fingers trail over the black ace of diamonds. Most of his tattoos make sense, but this one and the numerals was something I never understood. Now, though, I feel like I’ve unlocked every piece of the mystery that is him.

During our time together he has told me everything, and I do mean *everything*. From how he got into this life, how much Baz has helped him, and I want to be a part of it all so much it hurts.

“I want a tattoo like this,” I say softly, kissing the diamond. “But I want it on my hip.” Don’t ask me where the words are coming from, because it’s not something I’ve thought about until now. Now that they’re out there, I feel them in my soul and I know it’s the mark I want.

“Does everyone have it? Or is it just you?” I keep asking questions to draw Dante out of his head.

He removes his arm and looks down at me, taking my breath away with the intensity in his eyes. “Everyone in the crew has it.”

I nod and bite down on my bottom lip. “Then I definitely want it.”

“Are you sure?” His tone has grown husky, his eyes darker. “Once it’s on your body, there’s no going back.” I roll my eyes at the warning.

Every time he’s mentioned something about this—us—maybe not being permanent, I’ve ignored it. Especially since it’s usually followed up by mentioning his age and our family relation. Having had enough I bend until our mouths are only a breath apart. Mirroring what he’s done to me so many times, I wrap my hand around his neck.

“Are you going to tire of me?” I hiss, letting him know exactly what I think of this possibility. When he shakes his head and protests, I say, “Because I can promise you that I’m thinking forever. We belong together, Dante. I know you feel the same way.”

I can feel his Adam’s apple move against my hand, and I tighten my grip as much as I can.

“If this is about the fact we can’t get married, I don’t care. I don’t want marriage and children. Bloody hell, while we’re at it, I don’t want a white picket fence either. I want you. You. Dante. I’ve loved you all of my life, and I know I’ll never change my mind—”

He cuts me off with a growl and spins us around so he’s perched on top of me. “Goddamnit Storm,” he pants. “How can you speak like that and not expect to get fucked?”

I grin up at him, because I didn't just expect to get shagged—I crave it. But first, I need to know we're on the same page. "Tell me you understand," I say, making sure my tone portrays how serious I am.

His face falls, and I can practically see the cogs turning in his head. "I don't want to be the one to deny you anything," he sighs. "But we can't have children."

Sighing, I roll my eyes again, exasperated he's clearly not hearing what I'm trying to say. "Not every little girl grows up dreaming of having children," I spit. "I've never wanted any, Dante."

"Maybe you'll change your mi—"

Having had enough of his thoughts that are so far off it should be funny, I rear up and capture his lips to silence him. As soon as he opens up for me, I delve my tongue into his mouth. Our kiss is hard, and I'm pouring all my frustration and love into it.

"Maybe I will," I allow. "I'm not a seer so I can't foresee what the future holds. All I can do is tell you what's in my heart, and that's you. You, me, and our life together. If I change my mind, we can look into adoption. Why do we need to plan everything today? Why can't it be enough that we love each other?"

Dante growls low in his throat, and when I look at him I know he has finally heard me. Well, about bloody time. That leaves only one more thing for me to bring up before I finally give in to him.

“I still want you to mark me.” Rocking his hips so his cock is grinding against my pussy makes me groan, and I almost forget what’s on my mind. *Almost*. “I’m serious.”

When he asks what I have in mind, I smile slyly before explaining that he needs to be the one to tattoo the ace of diamonds on my skin. Of course he tries to argue he doesn’t know how to, but I don’t let that deter me. There are ways to learn, and besides, I know Cain knows how to.

“Fine,” he groans, lining himself up so the tip of his cock is perfectly positioned outside my entrance. “Once this is all over, I’ll make it happen.”

Despite how wet I am, it still hurts when he rams into me like that, and I bloody love it. Love the feeling of my pussy stretching to fit his thick, long, pierced cock. It’s impossible to describe how much it turns me on. Succumbing to the feelings he stirs, I close my eyes and lift my hips so I can meet him thrust for thrust.

Dante’s hands dig into the flesh on my hips, gripping me so hard I know he will mark me. The thought has me moaning louder while my inner muscles clench around his length.

“Fuck. Storm...” I love hearing him groan my name while thrusting into me with wild abandon. The carnal sounds coming from him are as addictive as the feeling of being thoroughly fucked.

“Play with my arse,” I moan, needing him to claim as much of me as he can.

My eyes fly open when he pulls me up and turns me over, slapping my arse so hard the sound ricochets off the walls in the bedroom of Baz's private jet. I sway my back and wiggle my arse, hoping for at least one more slap.

Dante doesn't disappoint. With a deep chuckle he brings his hand down over and over, alternating between my butt cheeks until I can't form words. My pussy is so wet I know I'm dripping, and the thought of my juices being wasted is unacceptable.

"Either get inside me or eat me out," I moan, turning my head so I can look at him over my shoulder. His wicked grin only strokes the inferno inside me, making me hyper aware of every touch.

"You know I love eating you out," he groans while running two fingers between my folds. "But for now, I'm going to fuck you so hard I'll have to carry you off this plane." I shiver in anticipation.

Spreading my arse cheeks to reveal my puckered hole, he moves the fingers covered in my slickness to my arse and pushes them roughly against my ring until it gives, allowing him inside.

"Bloody hell," I cry out, arching my back and clawing at the bedding.

As soon as his fingers are all the way inside my tight channel, he slams his cock back inside my pussy. Dante works both my holes in perfect tandem, making me mewl and scream

for more, for him... for... I don't even know what I'm asking for, only that I want and need it.

I try to move with him, but the pleasure building is making it hard to think about something as basic as movement. Instead, I let my front drop to the bed, screaming into the sheet.

“Your. Cunt. Is. So. Tight.” Dante sounds like he's in pain. “The way your holes are gripping me... Jesus, baby.” I know what he means, I feel it too. My body is squeezing him, trying to milk the cum from him and I don't mind one bit.

It only takes a few more pumps of his hips and hand before my orgasm washes over me—the tidal wave to the wall of fire consuming me. Instead of dousing the fire and making it go away, it swallows me and I come so hard I can't do anything but scream his name over and over.

I barely feel him reaching his own climax, and when he groans, “Fuck. Storm. I love you baby,” the words sound as though they're coming from far, far away.

OceanofPDF.com

XLV



OceanofPDF.com

Dante

“Absolutely not,” I growl, annoyed that she’s even suggesting it. Storm sighs dramatically and leans back in the passenger seat.

We’re on our way back to our house, and the car is thick with tension. Where I’m of the opinion that everything can wait until tomorrow, she wants to go see Beth and Clara.

“The longer we wait, the longer the Potters will continue to use Clara,” Storm argues, making me chuckle.

She’s out of her bloody mind if she thinks bringing the girl up is going to sway me. Sure, I agree we need to rid the world of the Potters and make sure Clara is safe, but I won’t do it at the expense of her. Never.

“Doesn’t matter,” I state. As soon as the words are out of my mouth, I know I said the wrong thing.

Turning in her seat, Storm pierces me with her cold, green eyes. “Doesn’t matter?” She parrots in a shrill tone. “Of course it matters. That, and making John pay is all that matters.”

My attempt to reason that we need a plan falls on deaf ears, and I already know that if I don’t take Storm where she wants to go, she’ll make it there by herself. And that’s the last thing I want, especially since there’s a good chance Alan—or anyone from his cursed family—is going to be looking for her. He can’t have her, though. None of them can. *She. Is. Mine.*

“Fine,” I say, my tone clipped and my control slipping. “Text Beth and have her take Clara to Dirty Diamonds.” When Storm opens her mouth to argue, I growl, “Either we meet them there or not at all. The choice is yours.”

While mumbling under her breath, my Storm texts Beth, and I can honestly say I’m surprised when she replies with a thumbs up almost immediately. I was totally prepared to argue with her as well. Whatever, this just made my life much easier, and I appreciate that since I’m hit with jetlag.

As we’re almost at Dirty Diamonds, Storm turns to look at me again. “I think it’s best if I talk with Clara alone.” Her voice shakes, and I hate knowing she’s nervous to tell me this.

I grunt my agreement, and we drive the rest of the way in silence. Although I can feel my niece’s eyes on me and can hear her shifting in her seat constantly, I say nothing until we’re parked around the back.

“Come here,” I say as soon as we’re no longer moving. I hold my arm out to her, feeling a pang of guilt as Storm looks nervously at me. “Please.”

I force myself to sit still while she climbs over the middle and into my lap. But as soon as she’s there, I wrap my arms around her and hold her as tight as I can.

“Dante,” she gasps, sounding surprised.

“I never want you to be nervous to tell me no, or to voice your opinion,” I murmur. “We’re a team, baby. We won’t always agree, and that’s okay. But don’t ask me to put you in

danger, because I'll never compromise if I think your safety is a concern."

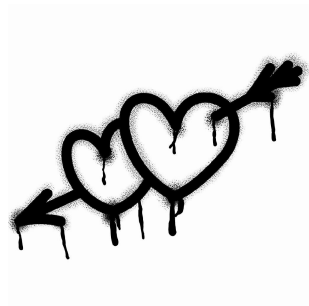
She says nothing, but I feel her nod against my chest.

"You're the single most important person to me, my perfect Storm. I can handle anything but losing you. Never forget that."

Storm isn't one of those women who just shuts up and takes what life or people hand them. On her eighteenth birthday she revealed to me what—who—she wanted, and I'd be a fool to lose sight of how beautifully strong she is. That doesn't mean I don't worry, it means I worry even more.

"I need you to understand something," she half-whispers. "I couldn't live with myself if anything happens to Clara because I'm worrying about myself. She's been through so much, and I promised I'd never let her down. Don't make me break that promise."

While pinching the bridge of my nose, I beg for a solution because I can't see one. Even though I nod, I'm not agreeing and I never will. Storm doesn't have to like it, but I'll never cave on her being my number one priority.



Inside the club, I immediately take Storm to my office and ask her to wait there while I go to fetch Beth. “I’ll lock the door behind me, baby. Don’t open it for anyone.”

Licking her lips she nods, my concentration slips. I need a taste of her mouth before leaving her. After slamming the door closed, I kiss her hard until we’re both panting. With a regretful sound I pull away and leave without looking back. If I do, I’m not sure I’ll be going anywhere regardless of her begging or reasoning.

As I’m on my way to Beth’s office I run into Glen. Bloody hell, I’ve been so caught up in Storm that I’ve completely forgotten about him. Crikey, not just him—honestly, while we’ve been gone I’ve barely thought about anything but my perfect niece.

“Dante,” he says, sounding too happy for my liking. “I didn’t know you were coming in today.”

Of course the bloody tosser didn’t know, he’s purposefully not being told anything. The only reason he’s still working here is because I’m a bloody git who hasn’t done what I should have done. As soon as I came back and Beth mentioned she wanted to monitor him, I should have sacked him. With what we do, we can’t afford disloyalty, and we lost sight of that. Instead, I focused on what degree he was being disloyal.

But I didn’t, so here he is.

“Yeah, well,” I say, shrugging noncommittally. “Change of plans.”

He nods like he understands. “Hey, if you’re looking for Beth or Clive, they’re in her office.”

“Cheers.” I don’t even know why I’m bothering to answer him. I have places to be, and it’s not here to make small talk with someone I couldn’t care less about.

“No problem. I just saw her less than five minutes ago,” Glen beams. When I go to walk away, he steps in front of me and says, “Do you know when Storm will be back to work? I know you took her off the rota, but I need to sign her payslip and since she’s barely been working, I wasn’t sure if...”

Breathing heavily, I try to look like his every question isn’t annoying me. But come on, what kind of thing is that to ask now? And why ask me? I’m not the one in charge of pay. Okay, technically, I’m in charge of everything, but that doesn’t mean I’m the one people usually go to. Come to think about it, it’s rare for anyone who isn’t part of the Diamond Crew to even seek me out, let alone stop me to talk.

“Just sign it,” I growl, running out of patience. Without saying goodbye I continue the way I was already heading, namely towards Beth’s office.

Out of respect for the woman who’s put up with my shite for years, I knock rather than just barging in. But when there’s no answer after my fifth knock, I throw all pretences away and try the handle. The door is locked, which is nothing more than I expected. I quickly pull my keys out and single out the one I want. Unlocking the door, I’m surprised to find Beth’s office empty. Didn’t Glen say she and Clive were here? Blimey, did

he say when he saw them? I really should have paid more attention.

After ten minutes I call her, frowning when the call goes straight to voicemail. Bloody hell, I hate leaving those, but when neither she nor Clive pick up after seven calls I leave one, telling her we're going home, and asking her to call me back.

For good measure I check the employee lounge and any other place they could be. When they're still nowhere to be found, and everyone I bump into hasn't seen her, I decide to sod it and just take Storm home. I get her concern for Clara, but it'll just have to wait.

Back at my office, I curse as I try to unlock the door, only to find the door already unlocked. Crikey, I told her not to unlock the door. Both Beth and I have a key, so there's literally no reason for her to do so—unless Beth didn't have them on her... it doesn't matter, what's done is done.

My blood runs cold as soon as the door swings open revealing... "Storm?" I shout, beyond caring who hears me.

Shouting makes no difference, she isn't here. What's left is clear signs of a struggle. Furniture is on its side, papers are strewn all over the floor and... bloody hell, is that blood splatter on the carpet?

Despite knowing it'll do me no good, I keep roaring her name, hoping she'll climb out from the debris and tell me she had a meltdown or a tantrum, I'd be okay with either. Anything but the deafening silence and emptiness.

“Have you lost something?” I spin around at Glen’s smug tone.

I grab him by the shoulders and slam him up against the wall. “Where. Is. She?” I grind out.

“Not here,” he answers smugly. “But if you answer your phone in...” As soon as my phone rings, he frowns. “Huh, I thought I’d have more time.”

“Storm?” I bark, already knowing it isn’t her.

“Ahh Dante, it’s nice to talk with you finally. My name is ___”

“I don’t care what your name is,” I roar. “Where is she?”

The man on the other end tuts. “As I was saying before you so rudely interrupted me, my name is Peter Potter. I think it’s about time the two of us have a chat, don’t you?”

I don’t even register letting go of Glen, but I do notice his smug expression. “I’ll bloody kill you,” I snarl, looking straight at the traitor.

Something clicks into place in my mind, and I put my phone on speaker. “Is Glen important to you?” I ask.

“Of course I’m important,” Glen says.

“Not at all,” Peter Potter says at the same time.

Letting the phone fall to the floor, I tell Peter I’ll be with him in a few minutes, all while grinning savagely at the man that’s going to pay for his betrayal with his life.

Before he can run out of the door, I grab him by the scruff of the neck and throw him into the middle of the office. In less than two seconds I'm on him, punching into his face so viciously he can barely groan in pain. My vision goes black, and I can't focus on anything other than beating him to a pulp.

Punch.

Groan.

Punch.

Groan.

He might as well be melted butter, his cranium splinters under my ruthlessness, and still it's not enough. Each punch feels better than the last, and I take great pleasure in caving his face in. I don't stop until he's no longer twitching—and even then, I punch him some more.

“I take it you're done?” Peter's voice pulls me out of my frenzy. “Betrayal is such a distasteful business, and I apologise for stooping so low.”

“Where is she?” I roar, not interested in his morals. “I swear to God if you touch her—” I'm interrupted when a scream comes through, and I recognise that voice all too well.

“Now that I have your attention, let's discuss your options.” Even though I want nothing more than to reach into the phone and grab the man by his throat, I force myself to agree and listen.

XLVI



OceanofPDF.com

Storm

I scream again, needing an outlet for the outrage, disgust, and anger I feel as Peter runs his hands down Clara's back. "You've been such a good girl," he croons.

"Do. Not. Touch. Her." Snarling like a wild animal, I fight uselessly against the ropes binding me to the chair.

I don't know how I got here. One minute I was waiting in Dante's office... shite, why did I have to be so bloody stupid and unlock the door? Sure, the door wouldn't have kept them out, but maybe I could have escaped out the window before they broke it down.

That's not how it played out. As soon as I heard Clara call my name, I assumed it was her and Beth on the other side, and I stupidly let them in. Fuck! Dante is right, I'm not thinking clearly when it comes to the girl. This mistake isn't just one of those you can brush under the carpet and shrug off. I'm tied to a bloody chair, Peter is pawing at Clara—who's silently weeping—and Dante... Dante is on his way here. *Alone.*

Even though I can't claim to know the level of the Potters' reach, I know there's no way my uncle will risk my life. Peter told him to come here alone and unarmed, which is exactly what he'll do, and it's all my fault.

Bloody hell!

"You said you wouldn't hurt her," Alan says, rushing towards me like my screams have summoned him.

“And I haven’t,” his dad volleys. “As soon as Dante gets here, you can have your whore.” I roll my eyes at the insult.

I’ve never slept with anyone but Dante, and it’s in large part thanks to Peter that I never had to shag his son, so the insult seems repugnant. I know it shouldn’t matter, but it does, and I’ve never been happier that the head of the Potter family laid down the law regarding me dating his son.

“This will all be over soon, darling.” Alan crouches in front of me, cupping my face in something that feels like a mockery of a reassuring gesture. “Once your uncle is taken care of, you and I can finally be together. That’s what’s been holding you back, right?”

Is he actually a bloody loon? What the fuck is he going on about? Wait... does he think my feelings for him are real? No. That’s not possible, is it?

I decide to test the theory, after all, it’s not like I have anything to lose. “What makes you think I want to be with you?” I seethe. “You kidnapped me, you git. And even if you hadn’t, after what John did to my sister...” I cut myself off with a huff.

Alan sighs like I’m being unreasonable. “You started this game, darling. You’re the one who thought you could spy on me and my family.” His tone is heavy with disappointment like I’m the one who has misbehaved.

Is he actually for real?

“Sod off,” I hiss. Then I spit at him, grinning when I hit him right in the forehead. It’s with great satisfaction that I watch my saliva slide down to his nose.

Jumping to his feet, Alan shouts at me, and I don’t even have time to react before he punches me in the face. I feel my nose break and blood gushing down my face. It hurts so much I can’t hold the howl back, but when I notice him smirking I clamp my teeth together.

“That wasn’t smart,” he says menacingly.

Not wanting him to think my tears are caused by an emotional reaction, I blink them away. Then I deliberately gaze over his shoulder, refusing to even look at him.

“Look at me.” I ignore the growled demand, keeping my eyes on his dad.

“This is all very disappointing,” Peter says. “You can’t even control your whore while she’s tied to a chair. This is making me rethink your involvement in the family business.” The hollowness of his voice makes me shudder.

Alan is one thing, he’s hot headed and predictable. His dad is something else entirely, and I don’t think I’m wrong for thinking he’s evil incarnate.

Peter focuses all his attention on the trembling girl, crouching down so they’re on eye level. “You played your part perfectly,” he says almost adoringly. “You did more than we asked for or expected from you. Did you know you helped us

find her sister?" Pointing at me, he gives me a sadistic smile that makes my blood run cold.

My heart breaks for her, and I pick up my attempts at getting free. The fact that I can't even move my wrists has anger surfacing, and I want to scream in frustration. Suspecting and knowing are two very different things, which I'm learning right now. Yes, I suspected Clara had given them directions to find Ave, but now... knowing for certain makes me gag as reality sinks in.

"I-I..." Clara cries so hard words aren't coming out, only soul-deep sobs. Lifting her head, she looks directly at me. "I-I'm s-sorry."

As she turns her tear-streaked face towards me and stutters those words, I lose my fight with my own tears. "It's okay. I love you, Clara," I say, trying my best to stay strong for her.

I narrow my eyes at Peter as he pulls the girl closer. Despite wanting to hurl insults at him and demand he lets her go, I say nothing. I'm afraid that if I speak up, he'll either take it out on her or leverage her safety against me.

"Do you remember what I promised you as your reward, Clara?" The Potter patriarch asks, his tone deceptively soft, friendly, even.

She nods, wiping her eyes and nose on the sleeve of her white shirt, one I bought for her when she saw it in a magazine and told me she liked it. "Y-yes," she whispers. "You said you would allow me to see my mummy and daddy again."

Peter isn't her dad? I don't know why I'm surprised, I really shouldn't be. Upon learning that Clara was being used by the Potters, I should have done everything in my power to find out how much of her story was the truth.

"And so you shall," Peter says.

Even though I watch him, I don't realise what he's doing until Clara screams and the front of her white shirt turns a deep, dark red. Before I can process what I've just seen, her body becomes limp. I stare, caught in horror and... I don't bloody know—but my reactions are delayed, and I don't fully understand until Peter pulls the knife embedded in her small chest out and throws her aside like she's nothing more than a rag-doll.

"No," I screech, thrashing in the chair confining me. "No, you bloody monster. Let her go. She's innocent. Don't do this." While screaming and pleading for her life, I refuse to acknowledge it's too late. I close my eyes so I don't have to watch her lifeless body, but continue my chant like I'm compelled to carry on.

"Will someone shut her up?" The voice has me halting, and when I force my eyes open, they land on none other than John Potter.

Baring my teeth, I snarl wordlessly at him, enraged when he winks and holds two digits up. "Ahh, I see you've heard about my accomplishment," he boasts. Then he parts his middle and index fingers, sticking his tongue out and wiggling the tip. The crude gesture has bile rising in the back of my throat. His eyes

are manic, and his smile is smug. “Just let me know if you want a ride as well, it would be my honour. And then afterwards I can compare notes on the Hayton sisters.”

Before I can stop myself, I lunge as far forward as I can—which isn’t far enough—and throw up all over myself. Focusing on my breathing, I try to drown out the voices of Alan, John, and Peter but it’s like nails on a chalkboard, impossible to ignore.

“Get her cleaned up,” Peter commands.

Alan cuts me free and pushes me none too gently towards a bathroom where he sprays me down, standing as far from me as the shower hose allows. When he demands I strip I scream at him, threatening to cut his balls off, which makes him laugh.

“You’re not in any position to make threats, darling,” he reminds me as though I could forget the precarious situation I’m in. “If you play along, I might be able to convince dad to let me keep you. It’s not too late for us.”

If I hadn’t just thrown up, his words would do the trick. “There was never an us,” I say, my tone monotone as the fight leaves my body. “I don’t want to be with you.”

Alan closes the distance, throws the showerhead to the ground before pushing me against the cubicle wall. “There is if I say so,” he seethes, wrapping a hand around my hair and pulling at it so hard my scalp burns. “I know you tried to play me, but now that you know you’ve lost, we can start over.”

My heart pounds so hard in my chest it's all I can hear.

“Or...” Alan trails off and licks his lips. The look in his eyes becomes downright hateful. “It’s because of *him*, isn’t it?”

No way. There’s no way he knows.

“So you’ll only fuck your uncle, is that it? You disgust me.” Using my hair, he bashes my head against the cubicle so hard my vision fades.

I don’t know if I’m crying out or not, I don’t even know if I’m still breathing. Blackness threatens to consume me, and I have to fight it. I need Dante.

“Answer me, whore.” Alan’s angry bellow brings me back, and after blinking a few times I can see his face that’s contorted in a mask of fury.

“I-I...” No words come out, and I’m at a loss of what to even say.

The illusion of control, of knowing what I was doing, is not merely crumbling—it’s been shattered into so many pieces I doubt it can ever be put back together. Why did I think I could exist in this world and not make things worse? In my own warped mind, I saw myself as some kind of saviour—I even imagined what it would feel like to save Clara, make sure she could grow up in a loving environment.

Clara... no, I can’t think about her now.

“You. Make. Me. Sick,” Alan spits, knocking my head against the cubicle wall with each word. “I could have given

you the world.” Without warning, he throws me to the side.

The howl coming from me sounds inhuman as I fall face first onto the hard floor, my broken nose now throbbing even more. Since he didn't let go of my hair, I think some of the chunks have been ripped out. I don't open my eyes to look, instead I remain immobile.

Hopelessness settles over me, and I don't think I've ever felt this alone. I don't know how much time has passed, but surely Dante should be here by now.

Pain radiates throughout my body as Alan kicks me, and I do my best to curl up. He doesn't stop until the sounds of commotion reach us. Men are shouting and... shite, is that gunfire?

The noises distract Alan, and as soon as he turns away I get to my knees. Using what little strength I have left, I shove my shoulder into his leg, causing him to falter. I pull at the showerhead, and cackle maniacally when he falls to his arse.

Without pausing to think, I launch myself at him, wrapping the hose around his neck. When he tries to fight me, I punch him several times in the head with the showerhead until his eyes close. I barely notice his skin changing colour, or his gasped, panicked breaths. I'm too focused on tightening the damn hose as much as possible so he can never pollute my world with his vile words again.

I don't even stop when the door is slammed open.

“Storm, stop. You have to stop.” Beth’s voice penetrates my all-consuming grief and I slow my attacks.

“B-Beth?” I mumble, not understanding why she’s here. “Did they get you too?”

Instead of answering me, she turns the water off and pulls me to my feet. Looking down at the lifeless lump that is my ex, I spit on him again. My gaze strays from his caved-in cranium and down to his hand that holds several clumps of my hair. I don’t know why I bend down and rip the hair out of his grasp, all I know is that it’s mine, and I want it.

I don’t know if I’m moving too quickly or if the prick has given me a concussion, regardless of the reason, I fall to my side and can’t get back up. I open my mouth to speak, yet no words come out as darkness dances at the edge of my vision and my eyelids grow heavier by the second. Beth is calling my name, but I can’t answer her.

XLVII



OceanofPDF.com

Storm

Peeking around the tree, I see them. They're here, both smiling and calling out to me while patting the red and white picnic blanket.

"Come join us, Caitlin," my dad says, beaming at me.

"Oh, honey, we're so proud of you," mum sing-songs.

My mouth falls open. "Mum? Dad? What are they doing here?"

Wait, what am I doing in this meadow? I was somewhere else, I think.

"What do you mean?" mum laughs. "This is our annual picnic so where else would we be?"

Oh yeah, how could I forget?

As I make my way over to my parents, I keep looking around. It really is beautiful. The tree tops are closing above us, making it so we're almost completely in our own world. Light streaks come through here and there, making it look almost otherworldly. The birds are chirping, and I even spot a squirrel stealing something from the open wicker basket before quickly climbing up the nearest tree trunk.

Looking down, I'm surprised to find I'm wearing the leather pants I got for my eighteenth birthday. Why can't I remember who gave them to me? I laugh to myself because it doesn't matter. It's a ridiculous picnic outfit, though. Especially paired

with a dark green top I got for Christmas from... huh, I can't recall that either. A sparkle on my finger catches my eye, and a gasp slips from me as I notice I'm wearing mum's ring. Where did that come from? Did I... did I take it this morning?

After hugging my parents, I sit down between them. "Where's Ave?" It feels wrong that my sister isn't here. "Isn't she coming?"

Dad shakes his head and says, "No, bunny. Your sister isn't ready to join us just yet."

Mum's eyes mist over and she sniffles softly. "You shouldn't be here either," she chastises. "You still have so many things to do. So much life left to live." I frown at her words, looking at dad but he doesn't elaborate. He just nods along like mum is making perfect sense.

I stretch my legs and let my bare feet touch the soft grass, laughing as it tickles my arches. Meanwhile, my parents unpack the food, pulling one dish after the other out of the basket. My mouth is salivating at the thought of biting into one of mum's pastries.

"My brother did a good job," dad says before eating his tuna-melt sandwich.

At the mention of Uncle Dante, my ears perk up. "What did he do?" I ask. Then I close my eyes and savour the taste of the steak pastry.

When I open my eyes again, mum furrows her brows and looks genuinely confused. "Why, he looked after you and your

sister, of course.” Her words make no sense at all. No matter how much I try, I can’t recall a single time where he looked after us. “And don’t worry about that other stuff,” she adds, giving me a meaningful look.

“Yeah, we’re proud of him and if he makes you happy, we want you to know we approve,” dad says, sounding serious. “Do me a favour though, bunny.”

“Anything,” I promise.

“Always listen to your heart, and you’ll be okay. Look after your sister, she needs you more than she’ll ever admit—”

My gaze darts to my mum as she interrupts. “We’re so proud of you, Caitlin. And we love you so much.”

Through our conversation, I keep feeling like I’ve forgotten something. But I shake those thoughts away as dad pulls out his guitar and plays some music while mum sings along. If only Ave and Dante were here, then this would be perfect.

Ave...

Dante...

Wait...

“This isn’t right,” I mumble to myself as I remember a hospital ward.

I’m clutching Ave’s hand, refusing to let go. No one is answering our questions until Dante bursts through the doors. His blond hair almost looks like a halo, and as soon as he sees me he scoops me into his arms.

Dante...

Gasping, I awkwardly resemble a crab as I scurry away from my parents. “You’re dead,” I say accusingly, pointing from one to the other.

Reality comes crashing down, and I now understand what mum meant when she said it wasn’t Ave’s time yet. My sister is still alive. That should make me happy, shouldn’t it? Yet, the tears rolling down my cheeks aren’t caused by joy.

“We are,” dad says solemnly. “But you’re not—”

“Not yet,” mum adds, interrupting again. “You’re unconscious and in shock. Your mind is reeling, trying to protect itself.”

I’m not dead? I ask the question out loud, needing my parents to confirm it again, which they do with wide smiles. “How do I get back?”

They both look at me with soft expressions as they explain that I just have to want it. “If you really want it, you need to go over there and pick your ruby slippers up.” I burst out laughing at mum’s words because I don’t have any ruby slippers and my name isn’t Dorothy.

“It’s not a joke, bunny. You need to pick up your shoes and focus hard on how much you want to go back home.”

Dad’s barely finished speaking before they get up, pulling me with them. Mum insists I eat at least one more pastry before they follow me over to a part of the meadow that’s cast in shadow. They stop walking at the very edge of the sunlight.

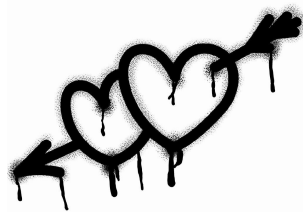
“This is as far as we can go,” mum explains, looking as though it pains her to hang back.

I hug them both, unable to stop crying even though I know I’m doing the right thing. “W-will I see you again?” I ask before I walk into the shadow.

“You will, bunny. But hopefully not for many, many years. When you get back, tell my brother I love him, and I approve of everything.”

Mum cries, “And tell your sister we love her and we’re so proud of the person she’s turning into.”

Before I can second guess my decision to go back to Ave and Dante, I take the last two steps into the shadowed area. Even though my heart feels heavy when I look back and notice my parents are gone, I still bend down and reach for the ruby slippers. As soon as my hand closes around the pair, I fall and my eyes close.



“Baby come on. You have to wake up, Storm.” My eyelids flutter as I’m caught between wanting to obey the voice I’d recognise anywhere despite the hoarseness, and wanting to stay in my dream. “You can’t leave me like this. I need you too

much to let you go..." His voice cracks and I feel something warm and wet land on my forehead.

"Dante?" I croak, still trying to open my eyes. Bloody hell, my entire body feels as heavy as lead.

"Oh, thank God," he shouts, relief palpable in his tone. "You scared me."

Finally, making my eyelids work, I open my eyes to find I'm squeezed against his hard chest. After blinking until my eyes are used to the light, I notice the body lying in the other end of the room. It looks like... wait... I remember. My hand darts to the back of my skull and I wince as memories of Alan slamming my head into the shower cubicle come rushing back.

Everything else falls into place, and I silently sob into Dante's shirt as my mind tortures me with images of Clara's lifeless body. She was innocent, and she didn't deserve the shite hand life gave her. I meant what I said, I held none of it against her—I forgave her, even when there was nothing to forgive.

Dante rocks me and makes comforting sounds. I appreciate he isn't asking questions yet, and just allowing me to fall apart. I don't know how long I've been out, or how long we've been sitting here after I woke up. It's not long enough, though. And if it wasn't for how badly my body hurts, I would be content remaining right here.

"W-what happened? How did you get here?" My voice rises and it becomes difficult to breathe. "Oh no," I wail. "Did they

get you too?” Surely that can’t be why he’s here, they wouldn’t allow him to cradle me.

My heart slows down, and I relax as Dante explains. “As soon as I was out of Dirty Diamonds, I got an email from Beth. She was out with the other girls, but Clara had a stomach ache, and wanted to stay at home. While Beth was out, the Potters came for Clara. But when she came home, she had an email from the Black Orchid, telling her to get Clive and wait for me at the Potters’ estate.”

“But... did she not have her phone with her?” I ask, confused.

Dante growls, “It wasn’t Beth who answered. They must have cloned her phone.”

Knowing that I can’t break down now, I ransack my memory for this Clive person instead of focusing on Clara. I think I’ve seen him at Dirty Diamonds, and I’ve definitely heard Beth mention him. But that’s it, that’s as much as I know. However, if he’s one of Dante’s guys—one of the ones he’s handpicked—then he has to be a good person.

“After meeting up with Beth, I learned the only people here were you, Clara...” My heart breaks and I let out another sob at the mention of Clara. She was only a child... an innocent. And now... “Bernadette, Alan, John, and Peter.” A low rumble in his chest accompanies the last four names, and I can feel his anger in the air.

Clearing my throat, I ask, “Are they dead?”

Dante growls low in his throat. “Peter is dead, and I see you took care of Alan.” Dante says, smiling viciously as he looks over at the corpse of my ex. “John is still alive, but he isn’t going anywhere. If you still want to be the one to kill him, he’s ready when you are.”

“And Bernadette?”

Carefully, he moves me so I’m more upright. Even the slight movement makes me flinch, and I regret not schooling my features better when Dante apologises.

“She’s with Beth,” he says.

Needing more time to wrap my head around all this, I snuggle closer to Dante. I’m careful to keep my head to the side so my nose isn’t touching anything. Shite, now that I’m thinking about it, the pain is all I can think about.

Since I know I need to get this over with so I can get to the hospital, I say, “I want to kill him.”

Without questioning me, Dante gets up from the floor, keeping me cradled against his chiselled chest. Then he carries me into the kitchen where John-bloody-Potter is tied to a chair. I can’t help laughing at the reversal in our positions, and when he sneers, I hope it’s because he knows I’m the one who’ll walk away from this.

I barely have to move before Dante puts me down, steadying me with his big hands on my hips. Crikey, I’m only now realising I’m still in the drenched, vomit covered clothes.

I'm suddenly glad for my broken nose because I can't smell anything.

"How do you want to kill him?" My uncle murmurs, making me realise I don't have a clue how to do this.

Alan was my first kill, and that wasn't exactly planned. Hell, if I'm completely honest, I don't know if I did actually end his life or if he died at the hands of Dante or Beth. Everything after wrapping the hose around his neck is hazy at best, which doesn't really make me feel like I did it.

"I don't know," I admit in a hushed whisper. "How should I do it?"

"Just shoot the bastard." Craning my head, I see him—Clive.

Yeah, I've definitely seen him before, I just didn't know who he was. We've never talked, at least not to my recollection. But I know I've seen him at the bar in Dirty Diamonds. Blimey, these guys really do blend well. One day, I'll have to ask Dante about who his crew is because this is awkward.

I nod at Clive's suggestion. "That's not a bad idea," I say, immediately wanting to take the words back when I remember I don't know how to use a firearm.

"Will you let me help you, baby?" Dante asks, clearly reading my hesitance.

Is it lunacy that I'm melting at the question? Of course, the answer is yes, we're in this together.

Dante pulls a gun from his back and puts it in my hand. Then he tells me to put my finger on the trigger, and as soon as I do, he places his hand on top of mine.

“You hurt my sister,” I say, hoping John can hear my hatred for him in my tone. “I’ve been planning and preparing for this moment since I learned you paid her a visit. I wanted to torture you until I knew exactly what you did to her.”

I’m pleased when he visibly flinches and tries to speak, but the rag in his mouth makes it so only nonsensical sounds can be heard.

“That was then... the reality is that I need to hear it from her. I have no right demanding answers from anyone. Ave will tell me when she’s ready. Besides, I don’t want you to think you have any leverage or hold any value. You. Don’t. Matter.”

I wish I could give an epic speech, one of those you always see in movies that actually moves the villain. But this isn’t a movie, it’s real life. And what I’m realising is that nothing I say will make a difference.

John still did something to Ave, and Clara is dead. There are no words to change or lessen the vile outcome. Besides, I don’t want one of those dialogues where we banter and trade insults. I want his life, that’s all there is to it.

“I’m ready,” I say to Dante.

I let him move so our aim is perfect and then he removes the safety. “Couples who kill together stay together,” he says, and together we pull the trigger.

OceanofPDF.com

get epilogues



Do you want more of Dante & Storm?

You can subscribe to my newsletter and read their epilogues
for **free** below.

GET THE FREE EPILOGUES.

OceanofPDF.com

blurb



The scandal isn't in the secret, it's in those unwilling to accept that love can be unconventional, dark, and depraved.

As a child it's normal to love your uncle. So what happens when the line blurs? Is there a certain age where it's no longer appropriate to seek comfort in his embrace?

I might be taking advantage of the long hugs and lingering stares. Definitely the fact that he lets me sleep in his bed when it thunders. But is that really so wrong? I know he wants me the same way I ache for him, and all he needs is one little push, then we can both have everything we want.

What I thought would be our beginning turned out to be the end, and the direct reason he abandons me and my sister. Leaving us on our own, all because he can't look at me after what we did.

Fuck that!

Instead of letting the rejection bring me down, it becomes the reason for my transformation. Not wanting to accept his money, I got a job at the sex club Dirty Diamonds to care for me and my sister.

Dirty Diamonds opens my eyes to a brutal reality I never even knew existed, let alone in small, quiet Briarwood. Child trafficking and abuse is all too real, and I'm quickly learning that Dante might not have been the man I thought him to be.

The girl Dante left behind doesn't exist anymore, and when he returns to Briarwood, he'll learn that I haven't just spent my time pining. I've built a new life, one where I've turned my heartache into a purpose and a need for revenge.

In a bid to silence my nightmares, Dante used to call me his perfect storm. I'm not sure he's ready to meet the new me... the Storm of Briarwood.

PLEASE NOTE: Dante's Storm is book 1 in the Scandalous Secrets series. The series is a shared-world with three standalone books written by different authors. Each book features a different couple.

These books are intended for mature audiences, and reader discretion is advised. They contain, but are not limited to, violence, profanity, reference to abuse, and explicit scenes.

Scandalous Secrets is set in a fictitious town in England, and the books are written with British spelling, slang, and grammar.

triggers



C ontent warning:

Due to individuality, it's impossible to list all the potential triggers.

Your mental health comes first. Read responsible!

Potential triggers:

Abuse

Child trafficking

Child abuse (mention)

Death of a child

Foul language

Graphic sexual situations

Graphic torture

Kidnapping

Non-con (not H & h)

Past trauma/PTSD

Sex work

Sexual assault (implied)

Taboo/forbidden (uncle/niece)

Unaliving

Violence

OceanofPDF.com

author note



I hope you enjoyed Dante & Storm's story.

Even though their story has come to an end, Briarwood still has plenty of unconventional relationships within the city borders.

Are you curious about the Crimson Angel and Black Orchid?

Don't miss the other books in the Scandalous Secrets series.

OceanofPDF.com

Lily's Ash

Avery's Fall

OceanofPDF.com

follow



OceanofPDF.com