



THE  
ETERNALLY  
YOURS  
DUET

# ETERNAL.

SJ LARSON

**Eternal**

SJ Larson



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To my mom for always pushing me to chase my dreams

## Content Warnings

This is book one of the *Eternally Yours* duet and leaves on a cliffhanger. This story contains explicit sexual content, murder, rape, violence, and stalking.

Please be mindful of these warnings, and enjoy to your dark heart's desire.

# Playlist

*Iris* by The Goo Goo Dolls

*twin flame* by Machine Gun Kelly

*Chasing Cars* by Snow Patrol

*The Reason* by Hoobastank

*I Don't Want to Miss a Thing* by Aerosmith

*Hey There Delilah* by Plain White T's

*I Won't Give Up* by Jason Mraz

*Good For You* by Selena Gomez, A\$AP Rocky

*Crazy In Love—Remix* by Beyonce

*I'm Lost Without You* by blink-182

*Scene One- James Dean & Audrey Hepburn* by Sleeping  
With Sirens

*Good Man* by Devour the Day

*I Get Off* by Halestorm

*Killpop* by Slipknot

*KILL4ME* by Marilyn Manson

*Eternally Yours* by Motionless in White

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## Part I





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# Chapter One

## Freya

*D*EEP breath in.  
DEEP breath out.

*You got this.*

I'm sure to anyone walking by, I look like a fucking idiot as I stand in the entryway of my father's skyscraper heaving in deep breaths. *How the fuck did I let Serena talk me into this?* Oh, that's right, I'm a great big sister, and I would do anything for her, including going to my father's business party to celebrate the company's 30th anniversary. And of course, she had to go and fuck her bodyguard and fall head over heels in love with him. Abe is a good guy though, it's just too bad she can't bring him as a date to events like this. I'm the only other person she trusts to come with her.

"Freya!" Serena rushes at me, arms open for a hug as she spots me stepping into the foyer, her stick-straight chestnut brown hair waves in the wind with each step she takes towards me.

A lump starts to form in my throat as hushed whispers feel like ghosts' creeping hands closing around my neck, suffocating me, as all attention falls on me. I close my eyes momentarily to untangle myself from their grip. I'm out of my element like a fish out of water. I hate parties, especially when everything is based on lies, mistreatment, and underground, illegal actions. It's a joke. This company isn't even real, the people aren't real, nothing but a shell masking the ugliness of our hidden society. I know other crime families will be here too. People I thought I had gotten away from this, thought I ran away desperate to escape this life. Yet here I am, and I'm afraid to be back in my father's clutches, but Serena knows I would do anything for her. I owe her.

Serena pulls me into a sisterly hug, one that leaves a warm, fuzzy feeling inside. The last time I saw her was under unfortunate circumstances. One I choose to never relive. If only I had such luck. I shake off the feeling as Serena pulls away and addresses me.

"I'm so glad you came. I was hoping I wouldn't have to do this alone."

"Yeah, well you're lucky to have caught me before I turned right back around and went home. I shouldn't be here. It's too soon." I know I sound ungrateful, and from the way Serena's shoulders slump, the time I have been away has been hard on both of us. "I'm sorry, Serena. I really am glad to see you. Thank you for the dress, it fits perfectly." I tell her, smoothing out the dress again.

I need to stay positive. Something good will come out of this, right? At the very least, I'm able to see my sister again. And God is it true how bad I've missed her.

She examines her handiwork for a moment, it's a simple black dress stopping mid-thigh, and swooping in the back, stopping just above my ass, and thin straps resting on my shoulders. It exposes a little more skin than I'd like, that's what I get for letting my sister dress me like a life-size Barbie doll.

"It does look really good on you. Come on, mother has been asking about you." Serena loops her arm with mine, leading me further into the lobby.

It's grand, and all glass. A reception desk now turned bar sits in the middle with a lounge area to the left. Stairs off to the right lead to a row of conference rooms that people reside in, seeking privacy from the bustle of the party. We pass by highly esteemed politicians mingling with members of other crime families, couples groping each other out in the open, huddles of women gossiping, and a small group of women surrounding a looming figure in the room. I try not to pay much attention to who is around, I just want to survive this party unscathed and unseen. Which more than likely will not happen, considering I'm already turning heads.

A man with women surrounding him, watches me for a moment, before pulling one woman along with him to the bar, leaving the other sulking faces behind. He's devastatingly good-looking. I'm only able to get a quick look at his long

black hair, and pressed suit before my mother invades my eyesight, leaving me hollowed out on the inside.

“My sweet, there you are. I was beginning to wonder when you’d arrive.” My mother greets me from the lounge.

Per usual, she’s surrounded by other bored housewives, all dishing out the latest rumor they’ve heard, or even showing off their latest boy toy among the crowd.

“Hi mother,” I greet her with a weak smile, feeling like I’m going to vomit up the snack I had on the plane ride here.

“You look so thin, good for you. Glad to see you’re finally losing some of that weight from your high school years.” My mother comments, holding me out at arm’s length.

It’s been five years since I’ve seen this bitch, and this is what she has to say to me?

Fuck her.

“Yeah, living through what I’ve been through will make you lose your appetite,” I deadpan.

The women in the group start whispering immediately, and my mother’s face drops. “Right. Your father is looking for you. He wants to introduce you to Luca Astor. Make sure you find him. And Freya, I expect your best behavior for the gala.” Her voice turns ice cold, emotionless.

“Yup,” I breathe out and yank Serena along with me to the bar.

“It’s been five years, Serena. Five years, and that’s what she has to say to me?” I hiss, flagging down the bartender who is pouring drinks for the man and woman from earlier.

“I know. I’m sorry, Freya. This is a bad idea. I— I shouldn’t have invited you.” Her voice is small with guilt.

I order our drinks. “It’s okay. I’m sorry, I shouldn’t have snapped at you. It’s not even your fault. Besides, I was going to be here anyway for the Gala, remember?”

Serena nods. “Do you have your dress picked out for that?”

I take a sip from my drink, the bitter liquor burns my esophagus. I don’t grimace. The pain dulls everything else, leaving a blissful burn.

“Yeah, I do. I’ll show you tomorrow, I say, leaning against the bar, scanning the sea of people.

Serena leans into me, “Don’t look now, but that guy with the long black hair keeps watching you like you’re gonna be his next meal. Do you know who he is?”

I look down at my drink to prevent myself from looking around for him, “The super tall guy with the woman standing off to the left?”

“Mhm.” She nods.

Finally, I give him a good look, and my heart stops. He’s dressed in a suit that looks ungodly expensive. Shaggy black hair frames his face, creating a stark contrast to his otherwise pale complexion and striking blue eyes. Waves of danger roll off of him, screaming for me to turn and run in the other

direction. But the same part of me that enjoys the burn of alcohol, also calls out to his darkness. A flirtatious grin dances across his face, as he says something to the woman with him. A hand comes up to comb his hair back, when his eyes flicker to me again, catching my gaze. I quickly look away, hoping he didn't notice me staring for too long. I suck in a breath, he looks like a facade. Perhaps he is. No one that looks like him or even oozes his kind of authority is good. He is gilded fucking perfection.

“That’s Soren Astor, Luca’s son,” Serena whispers as my eyes scan the crowd. “This is the first time I’ve ever seen him with my own eyes. He’s something like a fucking legend. A myth. Oh so beautiful, and dangerous.”

His eyes flicker up from the woman he’s speaking with, to meet my hard stare. He holds my gaze for a moment until he realizes the woman is trying to recapture his attention.

“Geeze, can the guy do anything but stare?” Serena says jokingly, bumping her shoulder with mine as we leave the bar area to join the crowd of people.

I scoff and take a large gulp of my drink, hoping it’ll hide the creeping blush trailing up my neck.

“I didn’t notice.”

That’s such a fucking lie and Serena already sniffed it out.

“Uh huh, well he doesn’t date. Or if he does, it’s casual, nothing permanent. But, from what I hear, Soren is known to treat women,” She trails off trying to find the right words,

“well. He’s like super fucking gentle with them apparently. He’d be a good option for you to let loose a little bit.” She murmurs as we part the crowd we are walking through. We are locked elbow to elbow as we seek a more secluded area.

“I’m not ready for that, Serena,” I whisper and keep my eyes glued to the ground. It’s not that I get nervous in crowds, but the whispers whirling around me are starting to get to me.

“That’s Freya Spencer, the eldest, next in line. She hasn’t been around for a while. Rumor has it she was abused by an ex. That’s why she hasn’t been around.” One woman with deep black hair says to another.

“Well, I heard she tried to run from her title. And had to have her sister save her.” The other woman laughs.

“How pathetic!” They both cackle amongst themselves.

That’s about where I stop listening, the truth of their words eating away at me. Tristan had done a number on me. And right now, I’d like nothing more than to inflict every ounce of the pain he did to me onto one of these assholes. Hurt them like he hurt me. They have no idea what I’ve endured. No idea what torture I went through when I was just trying to chase my dreams. Sure, I had abandoned my title as my father’s prodigy, but the truth is, I didn’t want to illegally sell weapons or make deals with scumbags like my father does.

I still don’t.

I want more for myself.

*I want to leave.*

Serena tugs on my elbow, pulling me further from them, as my body begins to shut down. I shouldn't have come. I shouldn't have left the safety of my tiny apartment in Seattle. I've made a mistake. My heartbeat increases in my throat, as our father approaches us.

*Frank Spencer.*

"Freya." He stops in front of us, his hands in his pockets, as he eyes me.

Would it kill him to embrace me just once, and say 'welcome home' or 'I'm so happy to see you after all this time'? It only serves as a reminder of why I left in the first place.

"Father," I respond, unsure what else to say. There really isn't anything else *to* say, I just want him out of my face.

"Come. I have someone I'd like you to meet." Father turns on his heel, heading in the other direction. Serena and I fall in step with each other and start following him. "Not you, Serena."

Serena stops in her tracks as her eyes meet mine. "I'm gonna go find Abe."

She squeezes my hand, as I keep trailing behind father. We are going to the other side of the impressively large lobby where there's lounging for those that don't enjoy the festivities.

"I'm surprised you made the trek here from Seattle. Figured you'd want to hole yourself away like always."

I glance over at him, “Not this time. Serena wanted someone to go with her, and who better than your successor?”

“We shall see if you’ll even make it as my successor, though I’m highly doubtful.” My father gives me a side-eyed glare. “You’re about to meet someone very important. Be on your best behavior. No snarky comments, no-”

“Be a submissive woman. Got it.” I deadpan.

My father shoots one more glare at me.

It’s true. All these men clad in the fanciest tuxes can’t handle a woman in charge or even one that’s not submissive. Women are to be seen, not heard. Submissive, soft, and quiet. Fuck that.

His hard expression softens when a man approaches us who I assume is Luca.

“Frank! Good to see you again. Happy anniversary to your company and cause. I wish you nothing but success, my friend.” The man firmly grips my father’s hand in a handshake.

*Okay, not Luca.*

“It’s good to see you too Matteo. I heard about your daughter. I’m sorry to hear about her disappearing.” The man’s expression falls into a sullen, hollowed-out look. “I just want you to know I’m doing everything in my power to help find her. I hope you can be reunited with her very soon,” My father murmurs.

Matteo clears his throat, “Well, thank you, Frank. That means a lot.”

My father pats the side of his arm before striding off, leaving me to play catch up.

“What happened to his daughter?” I ask my father when we are out of earshot.

“That’s Matteo Silva. His family runs the largest drug cartel between North and South America. His daughter was kidnapped a month ago, and rumored to be sold to human traffickers in Europe.”

I struggle to keep my face expressionless. Trafficking is taboo in this world. Sure, it exists in other circles, but in ours? Our hidden society has murdered entire families for it. Despite their hatred for women in power, selling humans is an absolute no-go.

My father snaps me out of my thoughts when he starts talking again. “Now, enough with the questions. This is Luca here.” My father approaches a lanky man with dark hair, and eyes that claw at my deepest, darkest secrets. “Freya, this is Luca Astor. He’s a long-time business friend of mine.”

A shiver runs down my spine, as I take in Luca’s dark presence. He sticks his hand out to shake mine, and I hesitate knowing mine are clammy from my nerves. Except he turns my hand over and presses a kiss to my knuckles.

“It’s such a pleasure to finally meet you, Freya.” His voice is edging on flirtatious.

It takes everything in my body not to vomit right here. I haven't decided if it's because a guy old enough to be my dad is flirting with me or if it's from the repulsion from a man touching me. Or perhaps it's both.

I manage a small, polite smile, "It's nice to meet you too."

"Your father tells me you live in Seattle." Luca tries to make small talk as my father excuses himself to get drinks.

"I didn't realize I allowed my father to speak about my personal life." I shot back but regretted it immediately.

"He cares about you. Of course, he is going to tell me about you." Luca retorts, irritated.

I nearly spit my drink out as I scoff.

"That's comical. He didn't care when I needed him the most."

My father reappears behind him, holding out a drink for Luca.

"What does she mean, Frank?" Luca asks as he plucks the drink from my father's hand.

My father visibly gulps as he's trying to figure out what I was telling Luca. What secret have I uncovered? My father looks at me as he responds, "Um— uh. I don't know."

His face turns red, as Luca questions him more. This Frank is so much different than the one just a little earlier. What about Luca makes him stand at attention?

I sip my drink, trying to hide my smile as my father is questioned a million times over by Luca. I choose to tune them out and focus on the bartender pouring a drink for the menacing presence in front of him.

The man pulls his wallet out, and hands him a crisp \$100 bill, before turning his attention to me.

*His eyes.* Standing closer, they're even more beautiful than they were before. His hair almost reaches his shoulders and is tousled nonchalantly. It's a different look than everyone else in the room with their clean-cut hair. He carries himself as if he doesn't answer to anyone. Like he's a god. There's a peek of a scar that runs across the top of his eyebrow, so faint it's easy to miss. He raises the glass to his mouth, takes a sip, and steps forward as Luca is trying to recapture my attention.

"Freya?" Luca is trying to meet my eyes, but his agitation is radiating off of him. He reminds me too much of Tristan.

My eyes snap back to him, and I find myself in the same headspace I was in when I just wanted to appease him.

"Yes? I'm sorry. I was deep in thought," I apologize. I'm afraid of what would happen if I'm snarky again as I realize there's burning rage in his eyes.

"I asked if you would follow me to somewhere more private." Luca enunciates each word.

He starts to reach out to grab my arm, when that menacing presence behind Luca is now, partially in front of me, towering over Luca and me. I barely reach his shoulders, but I feel his

darkness that follows him everywhere envelop me like it's protecting me.

I peer over at my father, wondering why he isn't doing anything. He's just standing there watching this interaction while a complete stranger is stepping in. He's doing everything in his power to not meet my pleading stare. What is it about Luca that instills the fear of god in him? What does Luca have over him? He's my father. He should be stepping in to save his daughter, not offering me up like a sacrificial lamb to the devil himself.

"What do you need with her alone?" Soren's voice is dangerous and cruel.

"Soren, it is extremely rude to interrupt a conversation." Luca scolds him, "Forgive my son, Freya. He has no manners." He attempts to brush off Soren.

There's a gut instinct to defend him immediately, "I suppose that'll happen if he's raised by parents who aren't present. The type that thinks children should be seen not heard."

Soren is grinning, watching as Luca's eyes widen, now realizing he's walked into a den of lions. His smile is wicked, filled with mischief and wonder.

Luca's jaw tightens, and he makes an attempt to reach out for me when Soren places me completely behind him, out of reach of Luca.

"That woman needs to be put in her place, Soren," Luca hisses, pissed blind and teeth baring with each word.

“If you lay a single finger on *that woman*, I will fucking kill you,” Soren growls, staring Luca down.

My gut clenches as I watch their staredown, Luca finally backing down and muttering something under his breath before leaving. His hand comes to grab my father by the shoulder dragging him away from Soren and I. His knuckles are turning white from the grip Luca has on him while seething in his ear. Luca is beyond pissed off, and probably scolding my father for not doing something about my mouth. I’ve never been one to conform to the rules of my family, so Luca’s efforts are for nothing.

Soren’s shoulders lower like he’s just taken a deep breath, before turning back to me. “I’m sorry about him. He’s a cockroach. Are you okay?” Soren’s eyes meet mine, and I can tell he’s holding himself back from reaching out to touch me.

My eyebrows furrowed together, why wouldn’t I be okay? I’ve heard worse from men frankly. It’s sad how desensitized I’ve become to men feeling like they own women.

“Yeah, I’m fine. Thanks for stepping in.” My voice sounds breathy as I take a closer look at him.

“Want another drink?” He offers to take my empty glass from me.

I nod and hand him my glass, but now I don’t know what to do with my hands. He’s intimidating, and if any of what Serena says is true, I need to run the other direction. My mind and body cease communication. Or perhaps they are in sync since I feel like I want to be closer to him. It terrifies the hell

out of me honestly. I should be. I never imagined I'd want another man touching me since Tristan. Never imagined wanting to know another man intimately. Yet, as his hand extends a new drink out for me, I can't help but catch his hands. How slender his fingers are, yet his hands are massive. I wonder how they'd feel running along my body. I shouldn't think like this. I don't even know him, but yet my body is reacting like I'm catching up with an old friend.

“Thank you for the drink,” I tell him as I attempt to leave. I am already awkward as fuck in front of an incredibly gorgeous man. I don't need to make things worse.

His mouth quirks up in a small smile, “You feel like you're out of place at this thing, huh? Don't worry, I do too. This is the first time I've come to one of these things in oh, I don't know, two years.”

I turn my attention to him and meet his gaze, there's amusement that dances in them. “I would be lying if I said I want to be here. Frankly, I'd rather be back at my apartment.”

“And where exactly is your apartment?”

*Damn, a man who is bold. I kinda like it.* “I traveled here from Seattle. I'm staying with my sister for right now.”

Fuck, why did I share more information than I need to?

Our conversation is interrupted by the emcee talking over the speakerphone. “Attention ladies and gentlemen, it is time for our silent auction!”

Soren leans over, “Would you like to go somewhere quieter?” His lips brush against the shell of my ear with each word. His cologne smells like eucalyptus and spearmint, and I want to encase myself in it. My mind is a haze.

He leans back again to give me more space. My brain is telling me I need to leave, join my sister again, but my mouth is telling him yes. He grabs my hand, and takes long strides, pulling me through the crowd, seeking solace in a lounge away from prying eyes. We start up the stairs, and Soren stops, mid-step pulling me to his side along the wall.

“Everyone in this room is watching us. Just keep your head down. I’ll try to block the view of you as much as possible,” Soren murmurs to me.

Warmth flows over me, his protective side starts to creep out again. And he isn’t wrong. So many people are watching, all just horrible people, looking for their next topic of gossip. It’s disgusting how bored everyone is, tearing everyone else apart is a favorite past time around here. Soren is a popular topic too, considering he’s the most attractive, wealthiest, and intriguing person in this room. It looks awfully suspicious we are going on our own on top of it.

Soren leaves the door open, allowing some noise to trickle in. It leaves me a little at ease knowing he doesn’t want me *that* alone with him.

“What made you decide to show up after all this time?” Soren is the first to break the silence.

I clear my throat, as I make myself comfortable in the armchair. “My sister begged me to show up. She didn’t want to be alone.”

“I think she’s doing just fine,” Soren says with a smirk.

I can’t help but mirror his smile, “What do you mean?”

“She was sneaking off with a security guard. Looked like he was pretty handsy with her.”

I blush, and quickly take a drink, hoping it’ll hide my red face. “Oh.”

“They like an item or something?” Soren starts to pry, but I decide to test him.

“Yeah, that’s her bodyguard and her boyfriend. No one knows about it though, just our family. They’ve been sworn into secrecy about it.”

Soren shrugs his shoulders, “I won’t share that information with anyone. I expect the same from you though. Anything we talk about isn’t to leave this room.” His eyes are sharp as if warning me. “Not that I think you’re the type to gossip. I’m just a very private person.” Soren adds on quickly.

“Yeah, not my cup of tea either to gossip. Serena on the other hand, she’s the one to watch out for. I understand how it feels to not have many secrets and to have everyone gossip about you.” I share with him, hoping I don’t come off as too vulnerable.

“I never formally introduced myself. I’m Soren Astor, by the way.”

“It’s nice to meet you. I’m Freya Spencer.” I met his eyes again. My insides melt at his stare, and I feel like I’ve been sucker-punched.

“Such a beautiful name. It’s the Norse Goddess of love and beauty, which matches you perfectly.” A coy smile plays on his lips, and when he looks directly at me, I know this motherfucker is going to ruin me.

But I would gladly let him ruin me.

I blush and retake a drink. Not responding or playing into his flirtation anymore than that. Not that I’d be able to if I wanted to. He’s stolen my breath.

“So, you mentioned you were from Seattle. Why make the move there? Isn’t it super rainy and cold all the time?”

“It’s personal. But, yes it can be very rainy and cold. Like eighty percent of the time.” I laugh.

“I respect that. What do you do for work?” Soren responds with a shrug of his shoulders.

There aren’t enough words to explain how grateful I am to him to not pry. I wouldn’t be surprised if he heard the rumors surrounding me, yet here he is wanting to know about me.

“I work part-time at a local coffee shop in Seattle, but otherwise I’m trying to write a novel. I just haven’t began it yet.” I trail off. I shouldn’t be giving him this much information about myself, but I can’t help it. I want him to know the ugliest parts of myself so I can watch him walk away just like everyone else has in the past year.

“Why haven’t you? What’s stopping you?” He asks, his eyes examine my figure as he tries to read into my soul. Hell, I think he’s already touching it, coaxing me to come out of my shell just a little bit. I feel as though I can. Just a little bit. But those questions knock the wind out of me. I feel exposed like I’m as naked as the day I was born.

*What’s stopping me?* Such a personal yet bold question.

I let out a shaky breath before I’m interrupted, “You don’t have to answer if it’s too much.” He reassures me.

“No, it’s okay. Honestly, I think I’m still too stuck in the past. I will start eventually, but writing isn’t something you can force. Not good work anyway.”

Soren’s eyes are soft, but there’s a simmering rage in there. “It’ll come eventually.”

I take a sip, and look at him through my lashes, “What do you do for work?”

Soren laughs.

Fuck, his laugh is so beautiful.

“Oh, I think you know the answer to that.”

I don’t, I’ve been away for the past few years, I’m not well versed in the politics of this world. He probably knows everything about me though. Neither of us are willing to admit that though, which is fine. It’s how this world operates. I do know his father is an assassin, so I know Soren was trained for that as well. From what I’m told he went off and did his own thing. Built a business around security, Astor Enterprises. I’m

fairly confident it's a front just like every other company is. My father's is a front for weapons dealing, Luca's is for hitmen, and the list just goes on.

"There you are! I've been looking all over for you." Serena huffs as she reaches the door. Abe looms behind her, taking in the scene of Soren and I having a quiet conversation when his posture straightens, and he watches Soren with sharp hazel eyes. "What are you doing all the way up here?"

I sit up straight and feel guilty like I've been caught doing something wrong. "We were just talking."

Serena approaches us, but Abe pulls her back as she gets closer to Soren. "He didn't hurt you, right? Didn't pull anything on you?" Serena whispers to me, not giving a care in the world if Soren is right here.

"Ouch," Soren grins, pressing a hand to his chest like he's been wounded. "I wouldn't dare hurt her. If anything I saved her from an otherwise pretty dreadful conversation with Luca."

"Luca Astor?" Serena turns her attention to me, her eyebrows knitting together.

"Yeah, his father. It got— weird. Towards the end anyway." I respond, standing to look up at her. Her once perfectly straight hair is now frizzy and messy, and her dress looks a little wrinkled. Abe's all black suit looks crumpled, and his tie is loosened now too. Some parts of his hair fall flat in comparison to his signature spiked up hair he arrived with. I smirk at her and Abe, making it obvious I am looking them up

and down. “Care to tell me where *you* were?” I ask, crossing my arms across my chest.

Serena looks stunned and her face turns red. “Oh, um, nowhere important. Anyway, we are ready to go. Come on.” She reaches forward to grab my hand and tug me along.

“Are you ready to go, Freya?” Soren’s asks, almost in a plea to not leave yet. Not just yet.

My gut and heart are telling me to stay, even if it is only for another twenty minutes. Soren’s shown me he won’t do anything so far. He’s kept me company for most of the night anyway and saved me from Luca’s terror. Not to mention, his shoulders slightly slumped when Serena told me it was time to go. Besides, if I pass up every opportunity to get past the shit I’ve dealt with, then I’ll be in the same boat years from now. Lonely and broken.

I turned to him, caught in between the two of them. “I’d like to stay a little longer, but I wouldn’t have a way home,” I say taking a step toward Serena.

“I can take you home. I drove here, and we can go whenever you’re ready. I’d like to spend more time getting to know you.”

Serena’s eyes widened. “Oh... that’s cool. We will see you at home, you still have the spare key, right?”

Abe opens his mouth to protest, but Serena clamps her hand over his mouth and shoots him daggers.

I giggle at their antics, “Yeah, I do. I’ll text you when I’m on my way, and knock when I’m home.”

Serena steps forward, pulling me into a hug. “Okay, please be safe. And I swear to god, Soren, if you hurt my sister, I will fucking torture you in a way you would be impressed.”

Soren becomes solemn. “I wouldn’t, I promise.”

Serena turns on her heel and walks out, dragging Abe with her, who is protesting about leaving without me. She keeps reassuring him that I’ll be fine as they trail down the stairs. The party seems to be dying down, leaving Soren and I standing in awkward silence.

I’m sure by now, it’s obvious to Soren that I have been through some shit. Why else would he be threatened by two different people about my safety and well-being? Serena may have directly said it, but Abe’s body and eye contact with Soren screamed it.

“Shall we go down and get another drink?” Soren questions, holding a hand out to me.

## Chapter Two

## Soren

**F**reya is *alluring. Intriguing. Dark.*

Darker than she probably cares to acknowledge or even realizes, but it eases a part of my soul. Comforts and caresses the darkest parts of myself. Something no other woman has ever done before. I'm captivated. I want to know her. The truest version. Not this watered-down, secretive self, but *her*. The ugliest, most vile parts of her.

I'm elated when her head agrees and her delicate blonde hair bounces with each bob.

"Just one more round." She confirms with a shy grin.

She stands, and I take in how gorgeous she looks in her dress. The way it drapes over her, seducing me to give in to her every whim.

I gesture for her to lead the way, and we start down the stairs. I can't help but want to touch her. I want to run my tongue along her curves and take all of her in. I can't stop myself from reaching a hand out to rest on her waist under the silky fabric of her dress that swoops down in such a teasing

way. She jumps just slightly, but relaxes immediately, almost leaning into the touch.

It was a risky move knowing she's been put through the wringer in terms of relationships. She's been mistreated, well, more like abused, in more ways than I really care to know right now. I will do better. Treat her like she should be treated. But truly, I need to slow down, this is just our first night. I don't want to scare her. I want to keep her safe, and tucked into my side for an eternity. Freya will never, I mean never, know what it feels like to have another man touch her like this. I'll kill any motherfucker who dares to touch her. I suck in a breath as I attempt to gather myself and reel myself back in.

She must've misjudged the next step, and trips just before the bottom of the stairs. The one hand I had on her tightens, and my other arm reaches for her, dragging her back to my chest.

"Jesus Christ, darling, are you okay?" I assess her, one arm wrapped around her possessively, while the other hand wraps around her jaw, forcing her head to crane up to look at me.

Her face is red from embarrassment, but she has no reason to be. I dare a motherfucker to make fun of her.

Freya's eyes flutter open to meet mine, and it takes everything in my being to not kiss her on the stairs in front of prying eyes. Her seafoam green eyes draw me in, hypnotizing me into submission. I would bend and become *anything* she needed.

"I'm okay," She whispers, nearly leaning into my touch.

I want her.

Badly.

Desperately.

I brush back her gorgeous blonde hair, “Good.” I hold her for a moment longer before releasing her. “Try not to fall again.” I tease her.

She rolls her eyes at me and makes it safely down the rest of the stairs. “See? I made it just fine.” Freya smiles over her shoulder at me.

I forget for a moment that we are in a room full of people. People who treated others’ lives as their own personal television show. Like we are the entertainment of the night.

We take a seat at the bar and order our drinks.

“So what’s the story with your sister and her bodyguard?” I question, wanting to know more details of her personal life.

She hums, as she sucks from her straw.

*Fuck me, she’s so beautiful.*

I shift in my seat and have to look away to stop myself from getting a hard-on.

“Serena was destructive in college, drank a lot, partied hard, fucked a lot. I mean a lot to the point where she almost died. So our father assigned her a bodyguard. They’ve been through a lot together. I don’t know all the details, since I was in Seattle, and dealing with some things. I just know she’s never been happier. Truly happy.” Her voice is longing.

“You say that like you’ve never experienced happiness before,” I comment, trying to bait her for more information. She stiffens, and I can tell her walls have gone back up. I need to practice my worst virtue; patience.

She grins at me like she’s up to no good, “I’ll tell you my story, when you tell me yours, Mr. Assassin,” she whispers.

Her face is flushed from the alcohol coursing through her, but that little comment shoots dread down my spine. Of course, she knows I’ve built a company entirely around torturing people. She’s not stupid.

I scoff, “Yeah, I’m not sharing that story.” I don’t trust her enough yet.

“Ha! Just like all the other men in this world.” She mumbles more to herself.

I don’t say anything else, perhaps she doesn’t know. She obviously knows her role in this world, but maybe she doesn’t know mine, doesn’t know how deep our families run together. Considering she just met Luca for the first time tonight, she very well may not know how deep this shit is. Not to state the obvious, but Freya is a woman. In this world, women aren’t meant to be leaders. They’re supposed to be quiet, and compliant to their husbands who do everything, simply a wet, warm mouth to fuck. Unfortunately for Frank, she doesn’t fit that bill. But women deserve to be heard, understood, and taken seriously in this world. Fuck the standards. Freya will be a force to be reckoned with. She will be a powerful woman, a

powerful leader. And I wish to be alongside her while that happens.

We sit in comfortable silence as we finish our drinks. She seems content just people watching, peering over at me on occasion. Our parents seem deep in discussion, and keep looking over at us. I try to ignore them, but I know they aren't up to any good. They can't be.

“Soren Astor, I was wondering where the hell you've been all night.” My lawyer struts over to Freya and I, making a grand show of it, as he does with anything in life. “And who might this be?”

“I'm Freya Spencer.” She holds her hand out to Sinner.

He grasps her hand, and his eyes flicker to me when he flips her hand over to, I assume, kiss her knuckles. But the death glare I send his way makes him think twice about that action.

“I see. Well, I'm Sinner Blackwell, Soren's trusty lawyer.” Sinner simply shakes her hand.

“Nice to meet you.” She trails off, and she looks to me an awkward silence blanketing us.

“I'll leave you two alone again. It was nice to meet you, Ms Spencer.” Sinner slinks away towards a group of ladies.

If only those women knew what they'd be getting into with him. He's even more fucked up than I am. Probably why we work so well together.

“Freya, are you ready to go?” I ask as she downs the rest of her drink.

She looks at me with wide, innocent eyes, “Yeah, what time is it?” She’s reaching for her clutch.

“It’s one AM,” I extend my hand out for hers. It engulfed hers, as I led her out the doors to my car, but there’s a warm familiar feeling when we are touching as if we were supposed to be doing this the entire time.

I look over my shoulder and watch as people are already whispering about us leaving together. Freya is not the woman who I brought with me, I had long since abandoned her, but she seemed content in the arms of Sinner who grins over his shoulder at me. .

Freya lets go of my hand to dig out her phone, I’m assuming to text Serena that we are on our way to her place.

“I’ll just need the address,” I tell her as I open the door to my Aston Martin.

She rattles off the address, and I know exactly where Serena lives. Same building as mine, not that Freya necessarily needs to know that. It’ll just make it much easier for me to get into their security system.

We drive in comfortable silence, and Freya’s hand creeps over to me, seeking the comfort of my hand. I clutch it and press a kiss to the tops of her knuckles.

“Thank you for the drinks and conversation tonight, Soren.” Her voice is small, nervous even.

“There’s no need to thank me, Freya. I just hope you can move on from the past.” I murmur to her. “I think you’ll make

an excellent writer.”

Her face twists up like I’ve gifted her the world.

“Thank you,” She whispers, resting her head back.

We drove the rest of the way in silence, her hand still clutched in mine. I don’t think she minds. I won’t do anything else to her. I refuse to. I park the car in an available spot and open her door for her to get out.

I take her hand as she leads the way to the elevator, selects the floor, and inserts the key.

Floor 18. P2.

I repeat it over and over in my head, needing to memorize it for security purposes of course.

We stop in front of the door, when she leans against the door, “Isn’t this normally the part when I invite you in and we fuck?” Freya asks, her face flushed from alcohol or embarrassment, I can’t tell.

My hand reaches out to caress her cheek, “Not for our story. Good night, Freya.”

I don’t even kiss her goodbye. I just turn and leave, walking back to the elevators. One day in the future, but now is not the time.

## Chapter Three

## Freya

I woke up the next day to Serena crawling into bed with me. “I’m sooo tired.” She yawns.

Her yawn is contagious, and I mimic her, humming my agreement as she climbs in to cuddle with me. My phone rings on the bedside table. It’s the day before the gala. There are many things Serena and I must do before the event with so little time. I roll over, groaning as I read the caller ID of my buzzing phone.

“Good afternoon, my sweet. Is Serena with you?” My mother’s cheery voice echoes through. It’s so fucking fake.

“Good morning, mother. Yes, she is.” I reply, my voice descending into a monotone whisper. Serena shakes her head vigorously, burying her head deep into the pillow. It’s too early in the morning for her. For both of us, actually.

“Put me on speakerphone, please.” I do as she says. “Good afternoon, my babies. Listen, tonight we have a dinner I’d like you both to attend. Freya, in particular, is required to go.”

Serena looks at me incredulously, and we talk through our eyes. Both of us wanted to know why *I*, in particular, was called out.

I start to protest when my father chimes in, booming on the phone, “No arguing with us. Just do as you’re asked, Freya.” His voice is so clipped that it almost puts the fear of god into me. *Almost.*

I close my mouth and glare at the wall. “Fine.” I suppose I can just use this as an excuse to wear my new Dolce and Gabbana dress.

“Good. Dinner is at seven PM, and drinks will be served at six PM. Please be here by six. See you soon, loves.”

With that, my mother hangs the phone up.

Serena and I exchange glares and groan in unison. Another fucking family dinner. How lovely. Serena sits up and yawns, “Let’s go to lunch and get mani-pedis.” She bounces up to get ready. Apparently, she’s not too tired to get treated at the spa.

I start to get ready when I catch my reflection in the mirror. The bags under my eyes are darker than usual, my blonde hair is disheveled from my slumber, and I look like I’ve gained weight in the past few days. Probably due to the stress I’ve been under with this gala. Events like this used to be our favorite times. We got to dress up like princesses and be treated like ones, too, from the pre-gala pampering to everyone fawning over being our father’s daughters. We loved it. Now, we could care less. Most people are only there to try to get ahead in life. To try to size up their competition. Though, I

think my sister still enjoys going to these events. Gives her an excuse to dress up fancy and get pampered.

I keep getting ready for the day, even though I'll have to stop back by for a change of outfits for dinner. My sister comes back in just as I'm applying my perfume. We are both dressed the same. Hair slicked back up high on our heads in a ponytail, biker shorts that go to the knees, an oversized crewneck sweater, and flip-flop slides. She takes one look at me and starts laughing hysterically.

"You have to change. We can't match like this." She manages between laughs.

I scrunch my nose at her, "No, you go change. I just got done putting my perfume on."

She wipes the tears from her eyes, mascara streaking down her face. "Fine. We will just match. Let's go." She loops her arm in mine as we sashay down the hall toward Abe.





image-placeholder

After lunch, we arrived at our usual nail salon. Abe takes up residence in the lounge, reading a People magazine looking out of place in such a posh girly place. Serena watches him from a distance while sipping on her wine. We are getting our pedicures done first.

“How has it been since you told our parents?” I ask, lulling my head to the side to look at her.

“It’s been weird. They’re accepting of it, but I just feel like I need to watch his back, ya know?” Serena shrugs her shoulders, “But we’ve been great. Never been better honestly, not like we could get worse than we were in the beginning. It’s been a dream. I want to marry him, it’s just a matter of timing. Father doesn’t want anyone else to know yet. I want everyone to know we are together.” She sighs, “There’s nothing more beautiful than to be able to lay claim to your man in front of the woman that’s flirting with him.” Her face twists up with jealousy.

I giggle. “You’re definitely not speaking from experience.”

She shoots me a glare, before turning her attention to her drink again.

Serena has been trying to get me to settle down and meet someone, but I haven’t found anyone that makes it worth my while until Soren. I try to shake him out of my head. He was a hot guy who happened to be a lovely person to speak with. It’ll never be anything outside of that. I mean, genuinely, he was a gentleman in a sea of sleazebags.

“Serena, I think you should announce it when it’s best for you two. Not when it’s best for Father. He will get over it anyway.” I shrug my shoulders, guzzling down the rest of my mimosa.

*Considering my track record, I don’t know why I’m offering her relationship advice.*

“You’re right. It’s just a matter of time. We can’t be apart like ever. I think he still feels an urge to protect me, just like he did when he was my bodyguard. Remember how he was?” Serena giggled recalling their earlier years, then her eyes widened as if remembering something. “How did I forget to ask? Did you get his number?” She is giddy, nearly shooting out of her seat. I shake my head at her abrupt change in subject.

“No, I didn’t. We just had a pleasant conversation and good drinks together. It was nothing more than that.” I shrug her off, gulping my wine down.

“Nothing more tha—? Are you stupid?” Serena nearly screeches at me. I give her my full attention, looking at her bewildered. “You spent a night with an incredibly hot guy. He makes straight guys question their sexuality. He bought you drinks, got to know you a little, and made eyes at you. He was into you. It was more than just a good conversation and drinks. Please, for the love of god, tell me he at least felt you up or that you at fucked in the bathroom?” Serena continues to lecture me.

“It was just a casual conversation, but my brain was short-circuiting. Besides, I have no way of contacting him. It’ll never go past last night.” I shrug her off again as an attendant comes to refill my glass. A part of me thinks that’s a lie. Why else would he act like that wasn’t the last time he would see me?

Serena’s nostrils flare. “You know what company he works for, right? Contact the company and try to get through to him that way. Duh!”

I sigh, turning my head away from her, beginning to regret telling her the contents of our conversation. *That’s a fucking ridiculous idea.* I’m not about to contact him through his company, that seems a little too desperate. Soren seemed to like the challenge I so gladly provided him. So I’ll do it again by not contacting him. If he wants something else, he will find me.

“Freya, look, I’m sorry. I just think there was something there that seemed a bit more than you were making it out to be. I haven’t seen you that happy since-” She cuts herself off, “well ever. I just want to see you happy.”

The sincerity in her eyes pries a small smile from my lips, and I nod, mouthing, ‘it’s okay.’

Serena turns her attention back to Abe, “I’m in love with him, the kind of love I can’t live without. It’s a love that goes neuron-deep. I can’t function if I don’t see him every day. I can’t imagine life before him or even after him. It’s eternal love. Have you ever loved anyone like that before?” She’s

zoned out, watching Abe's every move while she pours her heart out to me.

I shake my head. "No, Serena. I haven't."

I'm quiet the rest of our trip while my sister babbles on about her friends from college and what they're doing with their lives. I can't stop thinking about what she said about loving Abe. I've never loved someone like that before. Even with Tristan at our best, in the beginning of our relationship. Everyone else after that has attempted to fill the void but was always unsuccessful. I've built up a wall with bricks and barbed wire fencing. No one will get past me.

I remained quiet the rest of the day, stuck in my head. They say you are your own worst enemy, and I definitely am. These thoughts replay in my head as I sift through the closet for a dress to wear tonight. I settle on my tight white Dolce and Gabanna dress with graffiti written on it, in bold words, 'Amore' sprawls across it vertically. Another dress I've never worn before. Paired with a pair of heels that just have two straps holding them in place, one across my toes and the other around my ankle. I'm deciding on jewelry when my sister appears behind me. She agreed on flats tonight, so we are eye to eye. She's admiring my outfit and the pair of diamond earrings I'm putting on.

"Freya, you are so pretty. Just naturally beautiful," She says simply, sitting down on the bed behind me. Her face looks conflicted, and worry presses wrinkles into her forehead.

I genuinely smile at her. “Not as beautiful as you, little sister.”

She grins up at me, “Are you looking forward to seeing mother and father?” Her tone is almost sarcastic.

My smile starts to fade, “I suppose so, but I was trying to keep my visit with them around six hours total, including the gala. This is going to push us towards 10-12 hours. I might be the first case of human combustion,” I tease.

Serena rolls her eyes, “Whatever you say.”

I study her reflection in the mirror. She’s dressed in my brand new Prada dress; it looks like a button-down shirt unbuttoned to the middle of her chest and off the shoulder and a pencil skirt under the breast. Her flowing chestnut brown hair was straight across her back. She stands to be next to me in the mirror. My balayage blonde hair almost matches my mother’s but is not so color-processed, so it clashes against my sister’s darker head of hair. Her eyes are jade green, while mine is a seafoam green to match my father’s. We both shared the same full lips, but my stomach pokes out a little further than hers, and my curves are more apparent. She always had a place in haute couture modeling, whereas I’d be cast off as a “plus size” model. Both our noses are turned up at a curve to match my mother’s. We both are beautiful Spencer girls.

She hugged my side. “Ready?”

I nod and turn away from her grabbing my clutch. “Where’s Abe at?”

“Oh, he had to get the car around front to make it look better for our parents. He has to turn on his professional face again.”

I hum in understanding. He now has to act as though there are no feelings between the two of them. It must be hard for the two of them to have to constantly sneak around.

We meet Abe downstairs in the lobby and head towards my mother and father’s house. When we arrive, we are greeted with an oh-so-familiar row of palm trees leading up to the gate, where a guard sits outside 24/7. After being cleared, we are allowed in. Two other cars are sitting outside that I don’t recognize.

I asked Serena, “Did they say there would be guests?” I ask as we walk up the steps to the front door.

She frowns and shakes her head. Abe follows us up close. I raise my hand to knock when the door opens to our butler from childhood.

“Ms. Spencer, Ms. Spencer. A pleasure to see you again.” He gives a slight nod in each of our directions.

I can only offer a meek smile as my nerves start to tear at me from the inside. I hate coming back here. I don’t have many fond memories here. I can hear hushed voices from the living room. Serena shakes her coat off and hands it to the butler, exchanging pleasantries with him. There’s one voice I will never forget that rings out more clearly.

*Soren Astor is in my fucking house.*

## Chapter Four

## Freya

I gasp, grabbing Serena by both arms and dragging her into the bathroom right past the foyer. Yeah, I was just joking when I said I'll combust, but now it was looking like more of a possibility..

“Oh my god, oh my god, oh my god. Serena.” She panics as I start to collapse to the floor.

“Freya, what the fuck is going on?”

“Soren. Oh my god, Serena. It's Soren. This can't be real. This can't be fucking real.” I pull on my hair, trying to wake myself from this dream. Nightmare? I haven't decided yet.

“Who the fuck is Soren?” Serena stands me back up finally. My eyes blaze at her with ferocity. *Just remember, you dummy.* “Oh. Oh, fuck Freya. *That* Soren.”

I close my eyes, my hand resting on my forehead, and I begin to nod my head vigorously. “Yeah. Yeah, Serena, *that* Soren. Oh my god. How do I look?” My panic nearly escalates to hyperventilating. I check the mirror, my hair and outfit are

perfectly in place, but my cheeks are flushed, and I look crazed.

“Bitch, calm the fuck down before I slap you. You look stunning okay? Now, let’s get out of here, and go say hello to everyone. I’m sure it’s nothing.”

She talks me off the ledge, and I begin to take steady deep breaths. I nod again. “Okay. I’m okay.”

“Good, because someone is standing on the other side of the door.”

She rips the door open like a bat out of hell. Abe jumps back, alarmed. He looks between the two of us.

“Is everything okay?”

*I swear I’m going to have another meltdown.*

Serena answers, “Yes, we— she is fine.” She puts on a fake smile while trying to communicate with her eyes. Abe is a typical dude. He doesn’t get it.

She grabs my wrist and drags me out into the foyer. My heels click with each step, and I’m beginning to wish I wore flats to stay as quiet as possible. My mother appears from around the corner.

“Well, there you are, my sweets. Oh, you two girls look so lovely.” My mother pulls us in for a hug. “You’re fucking late.” She squeezes my arms tight, and I swallow a whimper down. My heart is still beating a million miles an hour. *Yup, I’m going to combust.*

I swallow hard as I can only hear Soren's voice, as he's in the living room around the corner from where we are. There are two other voices in the room, Luca, and I'm assuming his wife. Honestly, I can only focus on the way he's talking; he sounds more rigid and business professional than the first time I saw him. Serena tries to break me out of my trance by grabbing my arm and pulling me into the living room. My eyes are focused on the ground to prevent the meltdown from occurring again. I see my father's feet shuffle over to stand before me. His words were muffled, and I could only hear my breath and heartbeat.

My eyes focus on Soren. He's watching me with hard eyes. I watch him with eyes filled with fear. What is he doing here?

"Freya? I'm sure you remember the Astor family from last night?" My father's grip on my arm tightens, warning me to behave.

Soren takes a couple of steps closer, reaching his hand out for me to shake and offering me a small, kind smile. The softness in his eyes dies away, as he watches my father's grip tighten on my arm. He looks at his hand, and then his face. My father immediately lets go of me, taking a step back. My eyes stay glued to Soren as I try to gauge what is happening. But as our palms connect, everyone else falls away into the background. My father's muffled voice is lingering somewhere, but I can't hear it. Soren looks at my arms, and notices the half-moon crescent indents from my mother's nails left behind from moments ago. His jaw tightens, and his eyes narrow. I subtly shake my head at him. *Not here, not now.* He

holds my hand for a moment too long before clearing his throat and releasing me. My hearing finally comes back when our eyes disconnect. Soren looks to my father, who is announcing dinner is to be served.

We file into the dining room, where a long table with eight gray upholstered chairs awaits us. Serena sits to my left side, while Soren sits on my right. I know his moves are calculated, testing to see if it was the alcohol speaking for our spark last night. *But I know now it wasn't.* Dinner commences, and I can't eat, knowing my real dinner is seated to my right. Internal face-palm, *Jesus Christ, Freya. Get it together.* He does not attempt to speak with me directly but instead holds a conversation with my father and my sister. I remained silent throughout the meal until the table was cleared. Serena keeps looking over at me, but I don't return her gaze. I just want this dinner to be over as soon as possible.

“Well then,” my father clears his throat, and the parents sit up straighter giving their full attention, “We brought you, Freya and Soren, together to make an announcement. Luca and I have decided for the sake of our companies and their interests, something that involves you two.”

Soren and I turn to each other, equally confused. “In three months, on April 14th, you will be wed. To each other.” My father finishes as casually as possible.

I stare blankly at him. *What?*

“What the fuck does he mean to be wed?” An angry voice growls from my right.

Luca answers, “Just that. You and Freya are to be married on April 14th. This is a decision we made to benefit both of our business dealings. Besides, you two make a beautiful couple and will bear beautiful heirs or heiresses.”

Soren sits back in his chair, anger flowing through the air. “I don’t want this, and I can’t imagine Freya does either. She’s too young to be getting married.” Soren turns to me, waiting for me to express my frustrations.

“And you were supposed to be married by 25, but here we are six years later.” Luca bites back. “Besides, Freya here’s a little incentive for you to go through with it. If you do not marry Soren and try to escape like you did when you were 18, I’ll personally kill Abe.”

Serena’s mouth falls open and tears well up in her eyes. Her eyes immediately snap to Abe who stands in the entryway of the dining room. His face is pale, and he’s watching Serena like she’s the last thing he wants to look at when he dies.

“You can’t do that! He’s innocent!” Serena stands abruptly, throwing her napkin on the table.

“I can and I will, little girl. You best keep your mouth shut and stay out of this. This doesn’t involve you,” Luca hisses.

Soren’s hand reaches over for mine, which I pull away from him quickly. He fucking knew about this last night. I confided in him about their relationship. I allowed him in. I allowed him to know more of me than anyone else does, and this is what he does with it.

“No, you can’t,” Serena whispers, her voice breaking.

“Abe will be fine as long as your sister does what she’s told. She just needs to be a compliant housewife for Soren. He will take care of everything else,” Luca snaps, “Well, Freya, what do you say?”

I glare at Soren, hating him at this moment. He’s the reason I’m in this position. Fuck him. Soren says nothing, instead just huffing and sitting back in his chair. He looks at me waiting for my answer, but there’s nothing to add. I have just had my future taken away from me. How the fuck was I to react? I’m not surprised, though. This is how it’s been my whole life. I think deep down, I knew this would happen.

I look at my father. “You promised me I would still have control of my life regardless of my involvement in your business dealings.”

“Yes, sweetheart, I think I have let you make enough decisions. Not that you’re actually getting anywhere with your literature degree or your dreams of becoming an author,” He says, emotionless.

And that sentence knocks the wind out of me. That was such a low blow.

I feel Soren bristle beside me, and his jaw ticks, I can see it out of the corner of my eye. I shut down. I stare at my knotted hands on the table. More voices argue around me, but I can not react anymore. I don’t have any more fight left in me. What’s the point? My entire life has been dictated from the beginning. How I dress, when I can speak, who I was friends with, what

my future will entail, and now who I will marry. I should've seen this coming. Serena sits quietly beside me, frozen with tears streaming down her face. My mother gathers her up and they retreat to the other room as the men around me await my answer.

It's an easy answer for me. Of course, I will pick Abe's life over mine. Abe makes Serena happy. I've never known happiness like she does. So obviously, I'll pick her happiness over mine.

I clear my throat, stopping Soren in his argument, all attention is pointed to me. My voice comes out smaller than I intended, "I'll do it."

"I have your full compliance?" Luca questions and a disgusting grin graces his face.

"Yes. You do." I hold back my tears as I hand my life over to Luca.

Soren leans over and tries to make eye contact. "Freya? You don't—"

"No. I do." I shut him down, not even looking at him.

Soren looks put out but continues his argument with our fathers, but I can't stand being in this room any longer. I need a moment to breathe. Soren falters for a moment as I abruptly stand from the table, and walk out.

I make my way to my favorite room. My library. I sit on the bench in front of the crackling fireplace. My toes and hands are cold. My mind returns to our marriage's purpose and how

Soren reacted. Will our future ever be happy, or will I be damned to live a miserable life chained to someone who doesn't love me? My thoughts are interrupted when I hear the door click shut. I didn't realize I had been crying when I looked up and saw Soren looking down at me, a mixture of sadness and anger painted on his face.

“Do you mind if I sit with you?” Soren gestures to the seat next to me.

I shake my head and scoot over to make more room for him. We sit in silence, staring at the fire. He's the first to break the silence between us.

“I tried to reason with our fathers, and they won't budge.” He looks up at the ceiling with his arms crossed across his chest, shaking his head.

More tears spill down my cheeks, my mind is completely blank.

“Did you know when you met me last night?” I accuse him.

“No, Freya.” He looks exasperated. “I didn't know. If I had known, I wouldn't have introduced myself.”

I watch him as he loosens his tie, unbuttoning the first two buttons of his shirt. In the corner of his eye, he catches the bar cart next to the fireplace. He stands and pours a drink, turns his body to me, and holds up the bottle. I thrust my arm out as if to say just give me the bottle. He turns back to what he is doing and downs his glass, bringing the bottle back to the bench. He offers it up, and I take a long drink of whatever it is.

It's whiskey. It burns the whole way down, and the burn hurts less than knowing my future is being taken away from me. We sit silently, passing the bottle back and forth, watching the fire, and sneaking looks at each other.

“We don't have to do this, by the way. I can find a way out of it for us,” Soren says after taking a rather large gulp from the bottle.

I shake my head, “I can't risk it, Soren. Abe is more important than you realize. For Serena and myself. He's quite literally the reason why we are both still alive.”

“Yeah, but I can—”

“Soren,” I turn my body towards him, “I know you don't want to get married, or even be tied down to someone. Believe me when I say this, this is just as hard for me as it is for you. I never wanted to be chained to someone in the name of my father's company. I wanted to fall in love, and do it properly rather than become like everyone else in this world. But I can't risk my sister's happiness. She's achieved more than I have in this lifetime. She's found love, found her happiness, found her place in life. I'm still figuring all this out myself. I'm sorry, Soren. But I can't risk it. We have to go through with it.” I finish with a choked sob as tears stream down my face freely.

One of Soren's fingers comes to brush a tear away. “Okay. I understand.” His voice is hushed and strained, his hand drops back down between us.

Silence falls over us as we process our future. Surely we can find happiness, right? We can be different from everyone else.

We won't have to live in a loveless relationship with other people keeping us warm at night. But, where is he at? He's been obstinate this entire time.

“So what's next?” I ask, looking at him.

Soren shrugs, “I suppose they told us tonight so we can be prepared for tomorrow night at the gala. After that, there will be wedding planning, then the wedding. I don't know what will happen after that,” He snorts, shaking his head, “I never have wanted to be married, never wanted kids, never wanted to settle down with anyone or anything.”

Soren's words are not soothing to me. I start to cry more. My dreams are shattered, laying like shards of a broken mirror. I will never be in a marriage filled with love and happiness. I will never have children with the love of my life; if I do, they can inherit our wealth; I will never be happy. At this point, I'm sobbing, my whole body racking with sobs. Soren puts a hand on my shoulder, rubbing my back but sitting in the same place. He doesn't apologize for his words but continues.

“We will eventually find our happiness. Perhaps not together, but it's better than nothing. You can publish your book, we can have children, and you can find other lovers. All things to keep you busy from me. I'll be happy with my company, future companies, our children, and other lovers. We will find a dynamic that works for us, Freya. Just keep faith.”

I stand abruptly, no longer wanting him to touch me. He looks startled, but his eyes read cold and calculated. I shake my head, putting my hands on my hips. I look down at the

hardwood flooring, more tears spilling over. I can't stop the tears.

“What do you not like about that, Freya?” Soren questions me, wiping his hands on his expensive pants.

I look at him with tears and a lump forming in my throat. I want to tell him that I just want him and that I want him to only need me. No one else. I'm traditional when it comes to marriage. I've seen what this world looks like, how no one likes their spouses, they all sleep around with others. I wanted to be different from that. I wanted to be able to stand by my husband's side and say I truly love him. Look every motherfucker in the face and tell them we are co-leaders of our company. I bite my lips in trying to stop myself from crying more. The look on my face says it all to Soren. He sighs and runs a hand through his hair.

I smile softly as tears stream down my face. “When I was little, I dreamt I would meet my prince charming who would rescue me from my family. Take me away to a house with a white picket fence. Would love me deeply. We'd have babies and pets. And we'd live happily ever after.” I pause for a moment, swallowing the lump forming in my throat. “But that won't ever happen from the sounds of it.” I finish in a whisper and hang my head low.

“Freya, I can't promise you the life you wanted with the white picket fence and a marriage filled with love and happiness. I can promise that I will keep you safe, always be your confidant regardless of our happiness, and always will

care about you. It might not be love, but I will always care.” I turn away and walk to the bay window, looking up at the stars. “Freya, truth be told. I’ve never loved anyone. I’ve been in relationships with people for many years, and though I’ve said the words, they had no truth behind them. I want our relationship to be at least based upon the truth.”

I sniffle, trying to calm myself down. Soren stands and comes closer to me, stopping in front of me. He leans down and presses a kiss on the top of my head. “Goodnight, Freya.” He pauses for a moment, his lips lingering as he strokes my hair.

He turns and walks out the door, shutting it softly. I hear his footsteps trailing further away and the front door closing with a slam, shaking the whole house. The moment the door slammed, I started sobbing again. Head in my hands, and I let all my emotions out. A soft knock on the door breaks the tension of sobs and the crackling fire.

“Go away.” I bark.

Serena appears with Abe closely behind her. “Come on, Freya, let’s go home.” Serena softly tries to pull me to my feet. I’m too weak to stand at this point.

She looks at Abe and pulls her long coat over me, and Abe lifts me to carry me down the stairs and out the door. There’s an eerie silence between the three of us as we make our way back home. In the lobby of Serena’s apartment building, I can finally stand on my own, but Serena keeps her arm wrapped around my waist. She helps undress me, takes my jewelry off,

and puts me into some PJs while I continue to cry. Pushing me to get in bed, she pulls the covers over me. She gets undressed and walks out, returning with a glass of water. The other bedroom door shuts, indicating Abe is going to bed alone. Serena crawls into bed, spooning me from behind as I cry myself to sleep.

Even with everything I've been put through tonight, my haunting memories came creeping back for me still. Reminding me that I will forever be chained to their abusive thoughts.

*I woke up in my apartment in Seattle when I was still in college. Mentally, I know I am dreaming, but I can't control anything as I relive the painful memories. Tristan and I are cuddled on the couch, watching a movie I can't decipher anymore when his hand starts to trail up my inner thigh. I recall this moment very well. It was when we had been dating for six months before everything became terrible.*

*"Tristan, stop. I'm trying to watch the movie." I giggle, pushing his hand away.*

*I was still a virgin. I wasn't ready to have sex with him yet, because I was naive to think that relationships should be based on more than just sex.*

*"What? I'm not doing anything," Tristan replies playfully but keeps his hand firmly planted on the apex of my thigh.*

*He kisses my shoulder and starts to stroke my thigh more. I attempt to shift away from his touch as though to say no. He keeps me firmly planted where I am but kicks my leg out to*

*spread them a little further. His hand moves from my thigh to cup the outside of my covered mound. His middle finger dances along the nub in an attempt to seduce me into sleeping with him.*

*“Tristan, enough.” I huff but make no other attempt to stop him. I was too scared to. There was a darkness in him that made me afraid of him. He might not have done anything to me at the time, but I knew deep down that he was capable of something heinous.*

*He pushes my shorts and panties to the side, rubbing and circling my clit, dipping his fingers into my vagina. My chest tightens, and I’m afraid to tell him to stop. Since I don’t say anything, he takes it as though I want it to happen, but my body language and gestures are screaming no. He groans in my ear and pumps a finger into my core.*

*“So fucking tight, Freya. Just imagine how it’ll feel when my cock is deep inside you.” He continues and inserts a second finger into me.*

*There’s a sharp pinch, and I groan at the feeling of pain spreading. I attempt to close my legs to get him to stop, but his other hand firmly grips my thigh, “Hold still, Freya. It’ll hurt worse if you keep moving. It should feel good. I just want you to feel good, Freya. This is all for you,” He whispers into my ear, and I feel a spark of fear run down my spine.*

*This does not feel good, and I do not want this to happen. I open my mouth to tell him to stop when he pulls both fingers out of me. There’s blood dripping down his fingers. He puts*

*them into his mouth and groans, sucking on his fingers. “Fuck, you taste so good. I can’t wait any longer.” He lifts me and carries me to the bedroom.*

*He throws me onto the bed and starts to remove his clothing. He looks at me expectantly, but I can’t move. I am completely frozen in place. He shrugs and tugs off my shirt, shorts, and panties.*

*“Geez, Freya, lighten up a little bit. I’m not going to fuck you completely. Besides, you’re gonna like this a lot. I know you will.”*

*I can’t respond to the filth he whispers to me in the dark. I can’t see him as he crawls on top of me. His arms trapping and pinning me to the bed. I start to squirm and fight harder.*

*“Calm down, Freya. Just let me have a little taste of you.” He reaches one hand down and presses his tip to my entrance, and I jolt away from him.*

*“Ah, ah, ah, no, you stay right there. It’s going to feel good.”*

*“No, Tristan, I don’t want-” I whine.*

*“Shhhh, it’s just the tip. Nothing else.” Tristan puts a hand over my mouth and slides a little further into me, and it’s just the tip like he said.*

*Tristan groans over top of me, and my whole body freezes. He pulls back out and thrusts back in, but it’s half his length this time. It’s no longer just the tip. Tears start streaming down my eyes, forcing me to stare at the ceiling. My whole body is*

*going limp, and I just give in to this fate as his thrusts become deeper and faster. His groans ring in my ears, and I stare at the ceiling, and more tears slip out of my eyes. His final moan is louder, and his thrusts stop.*

*“Fuck, you felt so good, I couldn’t stop,” Tristan says above me.*

*He pulls out of me, looking down between my thighs. They’re caked in blood and a white substance. I close my legs and start to cry more.*

*“Why are you crying? You wanted it just as much as I did. You can admit it. It’ll feel better next time anyway.” Tristan starts to dress, and the nightmare repeats itself for the rest of the night.*

*I should have left when I had the opportunity.*

## Chapter Five

## Soren

Walking away from her crying figure has to be one of the most challenging things I've ever done. But my god, does she still look breathtaking while crying. I climb into my car and slam the door shut, taking off immediately so I don't go back in there and comfort her. I don't know if it's the arrangement or my words that made her cry, but it leaves an unsettling feeling in the pit of my stomach.

I just had to do it.

I am not worthy of her love, or anyone's love for that matter. She can never know that I lied to her at that very moment. It will only ever be her; I'll give her anything she asks for, including a baby.

I shake my head, trying to draw the thoughts back. It's be inappropriate for me to picture our futures so deeply, what our children would look like, how she looks when she comes on my cock, how it sounds when she says she loves me. I need to snap out of the trance she's placed me under.

I pull into the garage of my apartment building, and park. I quickly climb out of my car and head to the elevator, watching

as Abe's vehicle pulls into the garage. Entering my apartment, I go straight to my computer. I can dig further into who she is with her full name and address. The keys clack away as I imagine what she's doing at this exact moment. Perhaps I'll be lucky and be able to watch her nightly routine. As the security cameras open up, I watch her beautiful figure get undressed by her sister and tucked into bed. She's still crying.

Going to her medical records, finding information on her height, weight, medical issues, her birth control, and the medications she takes. It comes up pretty much empty other than she has an IUD. Her transcripts and school records show she was an all-around straight-A student. But dropped out between her sophomore and junior year. I turn my attention back to her figure on the security cameras.

I grit my teeth harder, jaw aching from my clench. But that pain is not near as deep as the pain she is feeling. I slam the computer shut; I can't watch anymore as she cries herself to sleep in her sister's arms. *That should be me holding her.* My feet carry me to my living room, opening a bottle of bourbon.

I've become entirely unhinged. I've slept with countless women, yet Freya is the only one that comes to mind. She's the only one that makes my world keep spinning, or rather start to spin. How the fuck did I allow her to get such a grip on my soul? Regardless, I have to snap out of this.





image-placeholder

Walking into my office, I have several employees kiss up to me with “Good morning, Mr. Astor.” I ignore all their efforts like I do every day. This morning, I am not in the mood for anyone’s shit. I open the door to my office that overlooks downtown Miami, but to my surprise, Luca is here, sitting in *my* chair, with his feet propped up on *my* desk. I take a deep breath, trying to regulate my breathing, but after last night, this is the last person in the world I want to see. Approaching *my* desk, I notice *my* computer is open to the view of Freya and the two others she’s staying with having breakfast. She looks like she’s had a rough morning. I can’t blame her; I’m in the same boat. But my attention is focused on why Luca is watching *my* Freya.

*Mine.*

Not his. He doesn’t deserve to be able to watch her during her most vulnerable, intimate moments. I made a mental note to update her security system. Make it so that *I* am the only one who can watch her.

“Wasn’t sure if you’d show up here this morning, Soren,” Luca says so casually as though he belongs here.

“What do you want?” I bark, “I don’t have time.”

“I was just coming to remind you to not fuck this up. This arrangement is merely a business transaction, and I’m sure I don’t need to remind you what is at stake with it either,” He growls at the end, and my patience starts to really wear thin.

I snort at his “business transaction” retort.

“Yeah, just like how mom was a business transaction, and I was the product of rape. I’ve heard it over and over. I don’t need this today.” I step aside, gesturing for the door, “And stay the fuck out of Freya and I’s relationship. You’ll only fuck it up for us anyway,” I snap at him as he heads for the door.

He turns around to spout out some unnecessary comment, but I slam the door in his face, cutting him off. My mood has dropped significantly since I arrived; not that I was necessarily happy this morning. For now, I need to focus on work.

My colleague knocks on the door shortly after I’m settled in for the day. Someone had tried to get into the database to destroy our ability to upload new content and gain the names of those who had been taken and who were their executioners. Thankfully, our system was built virtually bulletproof, but we find faults we can improve every time this happens. I’m stuck attending meetings throughout the day; each was like a broken record. Shit, that could’ve been consolidated into one meeting or just sent an email. But people feel better saying it over and over in person, so fuck it.

I allow my day to be consumed by work until one meeting gets so dull my mind starts to wander back to Freya. Discreetly, I pull up her cameras from my phone, only to find the apartment devoid of life. A small pinch of relief falls over me. At least she’s not crying in bed still. I turn my attention back to the meeting. Surely, I’d be able to give my attention during *one* meeting without my thoughts drifting back to her.

At the end of the meeting, I head for my office, now needing to put protection in place for Abe. Knowing my father, he'd be the asshole who would still kill him to assert his dominance over our relationship. I make a call to my closest employee, Derek.

"Boss! Whatcha need?" The sound of a chainsaw goes off in the background, and Derek is yelling at the other person for not doing it right.

"I need you to get security over to my apartment building. Amp it up as much as possible while staying discreet. The apartment we are targeting is on floor 18, penthouse two." My voice is calm, and void of emotion as I slip into my truest version of myself.

"Ooo, are we planning to take someone out?" Derek sounds like a giddy kid for candy. He's just as fucked up as I am, if not worse.

"No, I need protection for my fiance's brother-in-law, I guess," I respond, not sure how to describe Abe in relation to Freya.

"Fiance? How come you never told me about her? I bet she's got a killer body, you'll share right?" Derek's excitement and statements rake on my soul. If he were in the same room as me, he'd be dead.

"Fuck no. Don't talk about her like that again. She's mine, Derek."

Derek is quiet for a moment processing my words before getting serious again, “You got it, boss. It won’t happen again. I’ll get things in place, and let you know when I’m done.”

I hung up on him, not wanting to talk to him anymore. I know we’ve shared women in the past, but Freya is different. She’s solely mine. Besides, she’s not a one-night stand like the others were. I’m taking things slower than normal with her. I’m afraid of breaking her more than she already is.





image-placeholder

With my suit slung over my shoulder, I stare at a jewelry set in the window of some fucking store. My Freya would look gorgeous collared in diamonds. I go inside to have them purchased. Something gnaws at me that I'm making the wrong decision, but I suppress it. She was just wearing a necklace similar to this one last night, and she looked so beautiful in diamonds. It's too much of a peace offering, but I want nothing more than to spoil her. I'll have to think of more personal gifts for her, but these will have to do for now.

As I exit the store, I pull up the cameras again and watch her as she's getting ready for tonight. On occasion, she cracks a smile at her sister, and every time she does, it puts a crack in my armor. She's slowly slipping into my heart, and I can't stop it from happening. Freya talks about how her future has been stolen from her; for me, my life has a purpose for once. One day, she will understand. But we have forever for that.

## Chapter Six

## Freya

I wake the following day to the smell of coffee and pancakes. Voices softly flowed from the kitchen. I no longer have any tears to shed. I make my way to the kitchen, following the voices. They are talking about the gala tonight. My mind is racing as I try to think of a way to get out of going to this. I am not ready to face my future. Serena and Abe notice me and stop immediately. I look and feel like I've been hit by a truck. They both give me warm smiles.

“Would you like coffee and pancakes with us, Freya?” Abe offers.

I give them a slight nod. Serena glides around the kitchen, making my coffee just how I love it. A dash of zero-sugar creamer. She offers it to me, along with a smile. I give her a half-assed smile, zoning out their conversation as I sip my coffee.

My mind wanders back to what Soren said to me last night. A marriage of convenience; just what every girl dreams of. Abe draws me out of my thoughts when he asks if I want

anything added to my pancakes. I opt for blueberries and try not to allow my brain to drift back to last night.

The day goes by in a blur, hairstylists and make-up artists appear and disappear, masseuses visit, and estheticians stop by for facials for Serena and I. They do their best to cover the dark circles under my eyes and the overall puffiness of my face from crying. Serena never leaves my side throughout the day. We sit in silence all day, sipping on mimosas and peach bellinis. Still, Serena vibrates with curiosity wanting to know what Soren and I discussed.

Chugging the whole glass, I turn to Serena, half slurring my words, “Well, you want to know what Soren said to me last night?”

She clings to me as I barely let the attendant finish filling my drink before I slam it down again.

“Oh my god, yes, I have to know. I’ve been wondering—you know, it doesn’t matter. What did he say?”

I look her dead in the eye with no emotion, “He told me that he never wanted to get married, have children, or be tied down, and now he has to at least be married and tied down. Then proceeded to tell me that I would stay busy with the kids and become an author.” Serena’s face dropped further as I continued, “Oh, and we will both be happier if we have lovers. As in, I am not good enough.”

*I think I might turn into my mother, but I’ll personally slit the throat of any woman that touches Soren.*

Serena's face screws up in anger. "Not good enough? Bitch he better be fucking joking. Who else is better than you? No one. Literally no one. Oh my god, men are so fucking stupid." She holds a fist to her forehead and lightly bangs on it.

I giggle at her antics. "Well, sure, there are a lot of women better than me. There's uh, Kendall Jenner, Margot Robbie, Selena Gomez. I mean, the list goes on. They're not only fucking gorgeous, but they're also stinking rich and extremely talented."

"Bitch, are you fucking stupid? You are all three of those things. I can't believe you right now." Serena flops back onto the bed.

A knock sounds at the door, causing Serena to sit back up. "Come in, for fucks sake."

The door opens to Abe, holding two dress bags up so they barely drag on the floor, "Uh, I don't know who's who's, so here." He thrusts out the bags to Serena as I walk into the closet scouring for the perfect jewelry.

I settled on an iconic Harry Winston piece that reminds me of a piece that only royalty would wear. It's a collar necklace that has diamonds dripping down in teardrop shapes. Simple dress, iconic accessories. I pair them with a set of diamond studs gifted to me by my sister. Opting for no rings. My sister brought me the dress I had picked out the other day while shopping. It's a black off-the-shoulder velvet dress that cascades into black waves over my legs. I look at myself in the mirror, smoothing my dress a million times, trying to calm my

nerves. Giving up, I go to the living room, only waiting for Serena as Abe sits beside me dressed in his tux. We only have minutes before we have to leave. There's a firm knock on the front door that catches my attention. Abe stands to answer the door, turning back to look at me quizzically. I shrug and turn my attention back to the TV.

*If I focus on this one thing, then maybe it won't be so bad tonight.*

Abe answers the door and stands straighter.

He clears his throat, trying to act professional. "Soren, what do you want?"

My blood freezes at that name.

"I am here to collect Freya." He pauses, "It looks better if we arrive together."

Abe stands out of the way allowing Soren to move past him. We lock eyes once he passes over the threshold of Serena's home.

"Freya, you look beautiful." He stands with a hand in his pocket, the other holding a light gray bag.

As he comes closer, I notice his tie matches my dress's color and material. How did he-? It must've been Serena.

"Do we have somewhere we can speak privately?" He begins to look around the apartment.

"I'll go check on Serena," Abe grumbles, walking down the hall and leaving us alone.

“Would you like to sit?” I gesture to the couch.

He comes closer and sits a little closer than normal to me, his knee bumping with mine. “I got something for you.”

Soren places the bag on my lap and leaves his hand lingering between us. I give him a big smile and begin tearing into the bag.

“I hope you like them; I was out collecting my tux when I passed them in the window and thought of you when I saw them. I figured you need to have those in your closet.” He says with a shrug.

*Yes, because buying motherfucking expensive jewelry on a whim is such a simple thing.*

I continue to open the intricately wrapped jewelry. A chunky chain necklace with diamonds encrusted all around it, a bracelet to match the necklace, and a pair of earrings that are two ovals interwoven and again covered in diamonds. This must have cost him a fortune. My eyes widen more and more with each piece of jewelry. I reach behind my neck to unclasp the necklace and take my earrings out. I carefully put on each piece of jewelry, then turned my back to Soren.

“These are beautiful,” I whisper, but my stomach turns, noticing it’s a collar necklace. “Is there a dog to go along with this?” I almost tease. *Almost*. It’s a little insulting that he’d buy me a collar necklace right after I’m being forced to marry him.

“A dog? Why? Do you want a dog?” Soren’s eyebrows knit together in confusion.

“Someday, maybe. But never mind.” I brush him off. “Will you put the necklace on for me?” I ask meekly, unsure what to say other than thank you.

A part of me wants to decline the gifts. He barely knows me, and yet he’s buying me diamonds. But I can’t find the words to reject them. They’re so beautiful, and it’s a nice gesture.

Soren reaches for the necklace on my lap, his fingers grazing the outside of my upper thigh. I feel my body come alive. *I hope that feeling stays forever.* He clasps the necklace, and I turn back to face him. It’s taut against my neck, like a goddamn collar. *How fitting.* Soren examines me with the jewelry on before freezing.

“Oh. I can return them. Let me return them.” Soren stammers, “I didn’t mean it to be ownership of you, Freya. You are your own person, mind, and soul.”

I bite my lip to bite back my laugh, “You forgot body.”

Soren leans in, “I know, because one day, I hope to own it.”

My smile is immediately wiped off my face as I process his words. Yeah, maybe one day. No one has ever gotten me a just-because gift. Well, no one except for Serena. Here goes the awkward side of me again. Do I hug him? Kiss him? My brain ceases to function around him. I hope one day, it won’t be like that. He looks deep into my eyes, then at my lips.

I do the same to him and start to lean in.

“Are we ready to go— oh shit. My bad.” Serena appears in the hallway, seeing Soren and I almost kissing. She turns right back around, dragging Abe back in, whispering at him as he starts to protest.

I let out a breathy laugh. “I need to put away my other jewelry, then we can go.”

I stand to go to my room, Soren follows me. I allow him as he is probably just curious about the room’s appearance. It’s boring, with gray-stained hardwood flooring, white walls, and a light gray upholstered bed that holds a king-size bed, with two nightstands on either side. A bench with a TV on the wall is at the foot of the bed. Soren examines my room as I go to the closet where the jewelry cabinet is.

I suddenly feel Soren looming over me, my back to his chest. His hands run down my waist as he hums. I continue my task, then turn toward him. He brushes my hair away, running a hand along the strap of my dress that rests on my bicep. I breathe in sharply, as his left hand reaches up into my hair, pulling me closer to him. My hands rest on his chest. He leans in, and I do too. When we finally kiss, it feels like he was made for me. Starting as a soft kiss, Soren’s hand twists in my hair a little harder, pulling me in with more desire. His other hand gripped my waist with the intent of trying to compose himself. He pulls away and rests his forehead on mine. Our eyes were still closed, relishing in each other’s touch, breathing out breaths of passion. He pulls away from me and releases his vice grip on me, pressing a kiss to my forehead.

*Will he want other lovers when our bodies are like magnets, calling to each other?*

Taking a step back, he starts to smirk. “Hope I didn’t mess your hair up.”

I turn around and look in the mirror next to the cabinet. I smiled at him. “No, you didn’t mess it up. The jewelry fits my dress perfectly too. Thank you again, Soren.”

I kiss the corner of his mouth, then turn to walk out the door. He pauses for a moment before following me. For someone so beautiful, you’d think he wouldn’t be so shocked, almost shy of my affection. He must be the kind of guy that makes sure everything is on his terms, in his way. What’s that called again? *A dominant.*

“I suppose we should get going to the gala. We are probably already late.” Soren reaches for his phone in his pocket.

I nod, then gather my clutch, “Serena, are you ready to go?” Silence. “Serena?” Silence. “Abe?” Silence. I let out a breath, “Well then, it’s just you and me. You lead the way.” I gesture for the door.

I grab an extra key in case Serena comes home before I do. Who knows what the fuck will happen tonight. Soren reaches for my hand, which I oblige. He intertwined his fingers with mine, and we are on our way to the gala. We arrive to his car, and a driver awaits outside of it. The driver opens the door with a slight bow, to which Soren scowls at him, gesturing for me to get in first. Soren climbs in beside me in the back of his Rolls Royce. He still hasn’t let go of my hand. My hands start

to shake a little bit, and he notices. He kisses the top of my hand, looking at me.

“My darling,” My heart falters at his pet name for a moment. *My darling*. How precious. “It’ll be okay. You’ll have me by your side all night. Serena is already here. You’ll be okay.” He strokes my cheek with his other hand.

I want to believe what he says, but I struggle with it. We just found out about our arrangement last night. He told me we would just fake everything for people in public, but right now, we are alone with just the driver, and he makes it all feel... real. He won’t make this easy on me if he is so doting.





image-placeholder

We arrive at the front of the house, where a white carpet leads to the front door. A butler comes to Soren's side, opening the door. Soren releases my hand to get out of the car. He turns around and holds his hand out for me to grab. I do, and he doesn't release me as we walk up the white carpet. I take everything in, the lawn is perfectly manicured, and the sound of the fountain soothes my nerves only a tiny bit. Soren looks down at me as we approach the front door. I look up at him and nod, taking a deep breath. The door opens, and we are face to face with Laura, Soren's mother, and my mother standing at her elbow, both waiting expectantly.

"My sweet, you look so beautiful. The color suits you." She turns her attention to Soren, "Soren, honey, how are you tonight?" She reaches out for a hug from each of us.

Soren stiffens, and his grip on my hand tightens as she hugs him momentarily. He's uncomfortable with all this. The light chatter of people catches my attention, and behind Soren and my mother, a small crowd is forming. This is all an act. My stomach falls. She's doing this to paint the portrait that we've been together for a while. I feel like we are two caged animals at a zoo, and people are watching to see if we do something.

"My loves, please join Laura and I in my office for a moment." She gestures down the hall.

Soren and I stay connected as we move down the hall with Laura and my mother. She leads us into a small room with a desk, chair, couch, and a bar cart. My mother can be a bit of a lush, at the least to say. She typically uses this room for when

she spies on my father or plans a hit on one of my father's mistresses he takes too much of a liking to. She's a bit spiteful like that. She and Laura glide into the room, and Laura shuts the door behind us. Soren still hasn't released my hand.

My mother faces us. "Laura and I were entrusted with ensuring your stories and our stories were reflective. The eight of us there last night were the only ones who know the circumstances of your marriage. No one else can or will know. You both have been in a relationship for a long time but wanted to keep things separate given your history, Freya."

Soren glances over at me, but I can't help but grimace at the mention of my history.

My mother continues, "You both are to use this event as an opportunity to announce your engagement. It will not only pique the interest of family members but also help get more donations. Many people are excited to hear about your relationship, so you both need to be sure to continue that excitement until your wedding. Are we understood?" My mother looks at Soren and me expectantly.

The same look clouds both our features, cold and angry. His mother stands in the corner near the bar cart, watching the two of us. I almost roll my eyes at their further intrusion into our relationship. I'd like to make some decisions on my own too.

Laura butts in, "To be clear, I understand what you kids are going through. I do. But you both must pull this off without any issues."

Soren and I nod, and he speaks up, “Is that it? My *fiance* and I are parched and would like to be able to get the festivities going.”

“Yes, that is all,” My mother responds.

Soren mutters under his breath and stalks out of the office, dragging me along with him. Instead of going towards the festivities, he brings me into a bedroom a couple of doors down the hall. He releases me for the first time when he shuts the door. He groans and looks down at the ground. I huff out.

“My mother was put in the same position as us. She was forced to marry my father, but she was 20. They never found happiness or love,” Soren speaks in a strained voice. I’m not sure if he’s talking to thin air or to me.

I look down at the floor, understanding where he’s coming from. Then again, my parents married for love. Kinda. Eventually, it became a convenient thing for them. “We can be different, but it’ll require work. It won’t happen overnight, but I believe we can do it.”

Soren looks up and stalks toward me. “Perhaps. But nothing is guaranteed.” He takes a deep breath, grabs my hand, and drags me into the hall.

Serena and Abe giggle and embrace each other as they start into a different bedroom.

“Oh! Look who finally decided to show up. I see you two were having a little fun. That’s a little early, don’t you think?”

I roll my eyes and keep walking, ignoring her. She can be a bit of an ass when she's tipsy. Abe watches us with hard eyes, examining to see if we just fucked. Nothing is out of place on either of us to indicate that would be the case. Soren and I make our way to the crowd's noise when people approach us. I have no idea what their names are. I just know they are friends of my mother's and are huge gossips.

"Look at you kids, all dressed nicely. I was over the moon to hear you two are dating now. How long have you been together?" The woman asks.

"We've been together for just over a year," Soren answers. His voice is clipped; he's not happy with all the questions.

"Oh, you met Soren while you were still with Tristan?" The woman directs the question at me, looking confused.

"Yeah, kinda. We met as friends then, but shortly after Tristan and I broke up, Soren and I got together. We just had a connection we couldn't ignore." I try to reason. Soren had no fucking clue what I've been through, so I'm sure this is the first of many hiccups tonight.

The woman purses her lips and sips her drink. "Well, I am very happy for the two of you." With that, she walks away.

I let out a breath I didn't realize I was holding in; Soren looked down at me with darkened eyes. "Who is Tristan?"

The question I did not want to hear come out of his mouth. I try to think of something, anything to tell him.

“Um. He is my ex-boyfriend.” I say in a small voice. I’m definitely not ready to share that story with him.

He looks away and huffs out of his perfectly straight nose. “Okay, we can talk about this later.” If he means not for a long time later, then sure. That works for me.

We make our way to the bar across the room. More and more people approach us asking the same boring questions,

“When did you get together?”

“Do you live in Seattle with her then?”

Then the big question, “When are you kids planning on getting engaged?”

Soren’s hand rests on my waist as he answers, “Actually, we are engaged as of last night.”

The small group of people gasp and offer their congratulations and best wishes.

“Can I see the ring?”

I look down at my left hand. I never did get the cute proposal I dreamt about. Nor did I get the ring, either. Soren and I exchange glances.

“Well, he kind of did it as a spur-of-the-moment thing,” I answer simply.

“How did you propose?” A woman asks.

“She was making my favorite brownies last night. As we were watching a movie and eating brownies straight from the pan, I realized I wanted to do this for the rest of my life. I

wanted to spend the rest of my life with the woman who turned my life upside down in such a great way. So I asked her, and here we are.” Soren fabricates the story.

I smile fondly at it. *I wish that's how it went. But life had other plans.* The women ooh and awe over it.

“Now, if you’d excuse me, ladies, I would like to dance with my fiance.”

Soren’s hand moves from my waist to my hand, pulling me onto the dancefloor. “Iris” by The Goo Goo Dolls is playing over the speakers. A few other couples were dancing as well. Soren’s left hand grabs my waist, and his right cups my hand, pulling me in, so our chests brush with every sway. He and I lock eyes, never leaving each other as he leads the way for our dance. The world around us falls away from us, and it’s just us. Not a single other person was in the room. We stay in our embrace when Soren pulls away from me as the song ends. Immediately, I miss his closeness, itching to feel him again.

I shake my head, trying to dispel those thoughts. How is it that I just met him, yet it feels like I’ve known him for lifetimes? Physicality-wise anyway. I don’t entirely trust him yet with the secrets that are harbored within me.

“Come, it’s time for auctions and dinner.” Soren takes my hand and leads me to a table with our parents and Serena. Abe is to stay on guard, so he stands along the wall. His eyes never leave Serena, as if she is the most important person in the room.

The rest of the night goes without any issues. My family is ecstatic that the news of our engagement has brought in more donations for their foundation. Chatter erupts all over the room once the welcoming speeches are done. Serena turns to me during dinner, whispering.

“Abe and I are going to stay in a hotel tonight. You and Soren can have the house to yourselves.” She winks afterward.

I giggle, “I don’t think he will even stay the night, but I’m happy I don’t have to hear you two fucking again.”

Serena smiles and blushes. I’m just so happy she is happy. She deserves this paradise with Abe, and damn, it looks good on her.

My father and mother are joined by Soren’s parents and another man as they approach Soren and I. Soren is glowering at them as they approach us.

“Soren, Freya. Follow us,” My father commands.

Soren and I exchange glances before standing and following them into a more private room.

“Freya, this is Larry Morris. My—err— our lawyer.”

The man with gray hair and a stocky build sticks his hand out to me. He looks just as refined as my father.

“Freya, it is a pleasure to meet you. I’ve heard so much about you and you joining your family’s business. And this must be Soren, your fiance?”

My face scrunches up. They should not be telling people that I am joining the family business when I sure as hell haven't agreed to anything. Soren stiffens as I shake his hand, then relaxes again when I let go of his hand. I glance up at him, and he's shooting a glare at Larry. I nudge him a little bit, but he doesn't ease up.

"Yes, this is my fiance, Soren," I respond to him, bumping him to try to get him to shake his hand, but he regards Larry with a cool stare.

Larry gets uncomfortable under his piercing gaze, "Well, it's a pleasure to meet you both. I must continue, meeting up with people. But, Freya, here is my business card. If you need *anything*, call me."

He hands me a business card before turning on his heel and walking in the other direction. Luca looks like he's been eating lemons, as his attention is now pointed to Soren.

"You know, with all your years of running your business, you still haven't learned how to talk to people. Politely anyway." Luca says, his voice low like a grumble. "You can go, but she has to stay."

Soren wraps a hand around my waist and pulls me out of the room, ignoring his father, who is blocking the doorway.

"Leave her out of this, Luca., Soren snarls at his father, "She is not just another one of your puppets; she doesn't need your guidance."

He yanks me out of the room and back to the party. "Sorry," He whispers to me, pulling me into a hug, and burying his face

into my hair.

And I don't know how to react. We just learned yesterday that we are to be engaged; he tells me he doesn't want to be with me but is super protective and affectionate. This man is confusing the fuck out of me.

As the night ends, Soren leans over to whisper in my ear, "Are you ready to go home, darling?"

I look at him and nod. We say our goodbyes and leave to meet Soren's driver.

"Where would you like to go first, Sir?"

"Back to Ms. Spencer's first, please."

He nods, and we journey back to Serena's apartment. My heart pounds on the car ride back. So, he isn't staying the night. I haven't had someone else in my bed since Tristan. It's too intimate. I suppose that's for the better at the end of the day. It'll be easier for us if we don't get close. He already said he has intentions of having a mistress. And as I watch my parent's house go further from sight, I know I've been chained to this lifestyle again.

Forever stuck in my destiny.

## Chapter Seven

## Freya

The car pulls up to the apartment building, snapping me out of my thoughts. Soren exits and opens my door, offering a helping hand to get out. His driver stays in place as he walks me to my door. There's another blanket of silence that comforts both of us. It doesn't seem like Soren is the talkative type, which is fine by me. I prefer to cut out the small talk bullshit. While in the elevator, I stare at the business card Larry gave me, and Soren watches me from the corner of his eye. What is the purpose of giving this to me anyway?

Opening my apartment door, I turn to him to say my goodbyes.

“Well, aren't we going in?” Soren asks with that goddamn smile on his face again.

Shock and apprehension overtake my body. He's coming in too, but not staying the night? What's going to happen when he crosses this threshold? Just the two of us for the rest of the night. There's a lot that can happen. Surely he'd be respectful of my personal space and not push it.

*But maybe I want those things to happen tonight.*

I open the door further, and he follows me in, softly clicking the door shut. I start kicking my heels off in the foyer.

I make my way to the kitchen.

“Would you like a drink?” I call over my shoulder.

Soren appears around the corner, and when he’s back in the same room as me, my body feels like it’s come alive again. I relish the feeling but try to suppress it. We are never going to be in a happy relationship. That fate was stolen from us the moment our engagement was forced. The spark between us is hard to deny, though. He must see the same thing.

“Please,” He replies softly, looking around and taking everything in again.

I pour us two glasses of wine. He graciously accepts it, then leads us back to the living room. He throws his blazer over the armchair, along with his tie. He’s left in all black, with his shirt hugging all his muscles deliciously. I try not to stare, but damn does he make it difficult.

I set my wine glass on the coffee table and trek back to my bedroom. I hear the TV turn on in the other room, and I begin to remove my dress. I’ll have to remember to take it to the dry cleaners later. I stand in front of my mirror, with only my underwear and unbelievably expensive jewelry on. I admire the fine craftsmanship of the necklace first. It sparkles at every angle I stand. It’s symbolic of our relationship, though. I’ve had to vow to my family that I would be his and his alone. But a part of me likes what he suggested. Ownership of my body, yet I am still in control of my mind and soul. Not that there’s

much light left in my ever-darkening soul. Perhaps that's what I needed though. Maybe I needed Soren in my life to teach me the acceptance of my darker sides. Who knows. Only time will tell. My hand runs over it, still taking it in. For the first time, I feel a little more confident. I look at myself in the mirror, stuck in my little world, admiring every curve, faded stretch mark, and little dimples of cellulite that scatter across my thighs.

That's stolen away from me when I realize there's a looming figure standing in the doorway. Soren's arms are crossed across his chest, and he has a look of admiration in his eyes.

My eyes widen, and I try to cover myself up the best I can. The little world I was living in lies in ashes at my feet, leaving me with an impenetrable wall between us.

“What the fuck are you doing, Soren?” I bristle.

I'm pissed blind. His invasion of privacy and the look in his eyes haunt me. Nearly hurling me into a panic attack. One simple look from him slams me back to the reality that something might transpire that I wouldn't want to happen.

Soren cocks his head to the side and smirks, “I'm just taking in my future wife. You're so breathtaking. An angel from Heaven.”

He stays in the same position without moving a muscle. It loosens the knot forming in my stomach only slightly.

I stay in the same spot as well, covering my breasts. I'm not ready to bare myself entirely to him yet. There's too much of a reminder of Tristan when I bare it all. I swallow a lump forming in my throat. A flash of hurt crosses my face, and every thought of potentially sleeping with him fades. I am not ready for this. Soren notices and clears his throat.

"I'm sorry I intruded, Freya." He walks down the hall back to the living room.

I blink a few times, my mind wrapping around what just transpired. He went from loving to cold in a couple of moments.

*Maybe I made him mad?*

It was my fault that he even had the opportunity to look at me. I was the one who left the door open; it was basically an invitation for him to come in. I take off the jewelry that now feels like it's choking me, reminding me who owns me. I take a few deep breaths after breaking the confines of it. My mind is still racing.

*Everything will be fine.*

I return to the living room wearing sweatpants and an old t-shirt from my college. I hold a larger shirt and a pair of sweatpants to Soren like it's a peace offering.

"I found a pair of sweatpants and a shirt that should fit you. If- if you want to stay and get comfier." I offer a small, shy smile, pretending he didn't just see me naked.

“Thank you, are these from your previous lovers?” He jokes.

I shake my head, “The shirt is mine, and the sweatpants are from an ex-boyfriend of Serena’s from a few years ago.”

Soren offers a small smile, too, and looks at me like he wants to apologize for the discomfort he caused. I would shrug it off anyway. It’s partially my fault for not talking to my therapist about trauma from daddy issues to living with Tristan for all those years. I am not going to take that on right now.

Soren stands to change in my bedroom and returns, typing away about something with his phone in hand. He looks so hot in those sweats and my shirt, his bare feet padding along the hardwood floors. He looks up at me from his phone when he approaches the couch.

“Wanna watch a movie?” He asks.

I smile and nod vigorously. One of my favorite things is watching movies and TV shows, especially after an emotionally draining day like today. He sits on the opposite end of the couch and begins to search for a film to watch. We finally settled on a classic, ‘Misery.’

“I never took you as a fan of horror movies.” Soren casually suggests.

I turn to look him in the eye, “There’s still a lot of things you don’t know about me.”

“Yeah. I suppose you’re right, but I want to know you.”

I huff, “Just be prepared for it to possibly take a while.”

“What happened to you?” His voice is soft and caressing.

I look away from him, unable to face my past, “I’m sure you heard the rumors. Everything they said is true. But it was much worse than what everyone realizes.” Haunting images of Tristan flicker behind my eyes and I shake my head, trying to dispel those thoughts. “Can we just get back to the movie? I don’t want to talk about this anymore. I’m not ready to share it.”

He doesn’t say anything else. Guilt starts to gnaw at me. I shouldn’t have said that; he’s been trying to get to know me. He’s been trying to give me what I want in life. I turn to look at him again, watching his features react to the movie. I don’t want to watch the movie. I just want to watch him. I startle him when I move closer to him. I rest my head on his muscular thigh as I lie on the couch. He stiffens at first, unsure how to react, but relaxes after a moment. His right hand stroked my hair as we watched the movie. With each stroke, my stomach turns more and more. It’s one of the most comforting things someone has ever done to me. I have to stifle a smile as he continues. I fall asleep to the feeling of him continuing to stroke my hair.

I can’t tell if the soothing feeling is from his hand in my hair or watching Annie take a sledgehammer to Paul’s ankles that lulls me to sleep. I’d love to inflict that level of violence onto every motherfucker who has wronged me. Starting with Tristan. That darkness has always lived in me since I was young. I just never acted upon those desires. No, I’m saving years of rage for when Serena finds Tristan.

After the movie ends, I feel Soren carefully stand as though not to wake me. He lifts me and carries me to bed, tucking me in. He stands in front of me, bent at the waist, looking me in the face as he strokes my hair one last time.

Soren presses a kiss to my forehead, whispering, “Goodnight, my darling.”

He climbs into bed on the opposite side and cuddles me into his chest. His arm wrapped firmly around me. I feel safe and cared for for the first time ever. I drift into a deep sleep, but even Soren’s protective grip can’t stop the nightmares from coming to me.

*“Freya? Where are you? I have a surprise for you.”*  
*Tristan’s voice rings through the air of our otherwise dead townhouse. I stay in place and quiet, curled up under the covers of our bed. I squeeze my eyes closed, hoping he will just leave me alone just for one night. Three other voices ring out of the silence, mocking me for hiding.*

Oh. The most horrific night of my life.

*The bedroom door creaks open, and the steps of heavy feet surround the bed. Then silence. I stay in place. I can’t decide if I want to fight them or just lay there like a rag doll. The latter will probably be easier. The sheets and blankets that kept me temporarily safe ripped off me. Leaving me bared to all of them. I look at the foot of the bed and find three unfamiliar faces staring back at me, with Tristan sitting in the chair in the bedroom.*

*“She’s all yours, boys.”*

*Those four simple words caused a frenzy and my fight or flight instinct to break through. It's all a blur, the clawing at my clothes, the clinking of belt buckles coming undone, the sound of Tristan's voice giving me commands I can't fucking hear, the sound of my breath panting, heart beating so hard, I'm afraid it'll come out of my chest. With each rough touch, I attempt to fight back, only to be overpowered in the end. The last blow to my face forces me into submission.*

*It'll be over quicker if I just lay here.*

*A pinch, the pressure of fullness in my diaphragm, and three sets of hands roaming my body seal me to my fate. Tears track down my face, but I refuse to cry anymore. I stare at the ceiling as the first, second, and third one rape me.*

*And the only thing I can keep in my mind is the death of Tristan. But I'm ripped out of the dream before it can repeat. Leaving me at peace.*

## Chapter Eight

## Soren

I'm surprised that the buzzing of my phone on the nightstand hasn't woken Freya. I roll over to her and examine her for a moment before reaching over to my phone. Ten missed calls, 40 emails, and 22 text messages. *What the fuck happened?* I get out of bed and go to her living room before calling back my assistant.

As I open my mouth to bark at her, I realize I might wake Freya if I am too loud. "What is it, Robin?" I ask quietly, irritation laced in my voice regardless.

"Sir. There's a problem."

"There'd better be a fucking problem if you call me at two o'clock in the goddamn morning," I snarl.

"One of the caretakers was just killed while on the job."

My eyes widened. That's a new one. "Who died?"

"Carlo Sanchez. He was-"

"He was involved in the trafficking case. Fuck." I run a hand over my face and through my hair. "Okay. I'll be in shortly. I have some things I need to take care of first."

I hang up on her before she can get another word in. Not how I imagined the rest of my night going, and I don't think I can be back in time before Freya wakes up, especially since she's up at random times. I pad back to the bedroom and stand in the doorway, watching her sleep. Her face is scrunched up, and her breathing is a little heavier. I wonder if she's having a nightmare. I leave her be, despite my gut telling me to wake her. I don't want her to question me about my business affairs. It's not safe for her to know at the moment.

I bend over, grabbing my clothes, not even bothering to dress since my apartment is in the same building. I fumble around in the kitchen, looking for a piece of paper and a pen. I at least need to leave her a note explaining my absence. Perhaps I should leave my number. I grin at myself, the plan I have concocted is much better, so she doesn't need it for now. I leave the note on her nightstand and kiss her forehead, my hand resting on the deep incline of her waist. Her figure is something men can only dream of. But I have to refrain from touching her anymore. I head towards the door and relock it with her spare key. I'll find a way to put it back in her apartment once I can make a copy.





image-placeholder

Entering my otherwise dead building, the security guard sits ramrod straight when he sees my figure.

“Sir, who-” He starts, but when I just glance at him, he shuts up. “Have a good night, Mr. Astor.”

“More like morning,” I mutter more to myself. Still pissed that I had to leave Freya alone. I was hoping to wake up next to her, but that won’t happen for a while.

Robin meets me at the elevator. Her tiny figure pushes a cart alongside me, not uttering a word. She knows the drill. We head toward the basement, and I start to prep. I pull my hair into a semi-ponytail, but some hair still falls out of it, framing my face instead. It’s not quite long enough to tie it back completely. *I wonder if Freya likes my long hair, or if she wants me to cut it.* I shed my black raincoat, revealing my work clothes. A black long sleeve henley and dark pants. The cart she is pushing contains another set of clothing and a computer.

“Robin, I need you to find and purchase these things for me and have them sent to this address.” I slip her a piece of paper containing the apology gift for Freya and the address to her apartment in Seattle.

“Seattle? What’s in Seattle?” She asks, her face bunched up in confusion.

The elevator doors ding open, and I look over my shoulder at her. “My future wife.”

She freezes, jaw dropping, and I stalk my way to the room they are in. Somehow the bastard managed to get loose and used a scalpel to slit Carlo's throat. All of which streamed to our client via the cameras set up in the room. But our client isn't upset knowing I was called in to finish the job. Robin follows behind me, and I turn to the computer to see where he's hiding. My phone buzzes, but I just hand it off to Robin for her to deal with it. In the cameras, I see he's hiding in the corner of the room, right beside the door. Probably waiting for someone to come in. He's armed and ready to strike when necessary. I shut the computer's lid, and Robin slips a gun and knife to me.

I open the door and enter quickly. Of course, the idiot attacks me instantly and narrowly misses my face. We struggle for a moment as I try to take the scalpel out of his hand and wrestle him back into the chair. But I give up halfway through; it's too early in the morning to put on a show for our client. Usually, I'd make a big scene, make it almost theatrical as I take the man's life, but today I don't want to. Catching this guy resulted in a bigger task than we thought it would be. Plus, he just killed one of my men. A good one at that too. I do manage to finally grab the scalpel from him and pull my knife out. I stab him several times in the chest, and blood spurts each time, ceasing his defensive moves. He gargles on the blood that's invaded his lungs and falls to his knees. I pick him up by the back of his head and point him toward the camera.

"I'm charging you extra," I say to the camera, intending it to be for the client, as I repeatedly drive the knife into his

diaphragm.

The monster I keep locked up comes out, as memories of Luca watching Freya, kissing her knuckles, flirting with her, and simply being in her presence flood my vision. Primal, blinding rage fills my body as I take it out on him with each thrust of the knife into his torso. Blood covers my face as it takes force to pull it back out. The gargling from choking on his blood ceases, as do his other movements. I know he's dead. He's been dead. But I can't stop.

I need more.

Will Freya ever be able to accept this side of me? This inherent instinct to protect her, and keep her safe. I know this, when we move away, we are going far away, living almost off the grid. I don't want anyone to find her. She's mine.

I release the body that crumples to the floor as my reason starts to inch back in. I blink away the burning blood in my eyes, and spit a few times on the body, trying to get the taste of blood out of my mouth.

I leave the room with my arms and face coated in blood. Robin is waiting on the other side of the door. I walk past her towards the showers. She pushes the cart near one of the stalls before stepping back out of the room. I strip down and stand under the water as it runs over me. The blood is washed from me, and I turn to the computer, pulling up the cameras to Freya's place. She is awake but, from the looks of it, hasn't read my note. It sits in the same position as I left it. She's lying on her side, facing the direction where I was laying. For a

moment, I think she's asleep, but the moment I see her hand slip into the waistband of her shorts. My mouth gapes at her. Is she actually going there? She rolls onto her back and takes *all* of her clothes off.

A part of me wants to walk away and not watch, I know I'm invading her personal space, but I can't. My cock stirs to life as her legs spread wide open, and her fingers plunge into her pussy. I grip my cock, and run my hand along the shaft. One of her hands is half covering her face, and I can't make out what she's saying. Is she calling out my name as she brings herself to orgasm? *God, I hope so.* My eyes are glued to every one of her movements, and I memorize what her body looks like. I can tell she's getting close, and the hand covering her face comes down to tweak one of her nipples.

My eyes widened. I guess I didn't realize she would know how to bring herself to orgasm like this. Her eyebrows furrowed together, and her mouth widened more. I pump myself harder and faster. I want to come when she does. Her back arches off the bed and her muscles go taunt. Fuck she's hot. There's pressure building in my balls, and my hand jerks faster. Her face turns red, and her mouth drops open as she spasms. At the same time, the pressure releases as I groan, my hand getting covered in cum. I like to imagine it's covering her hand or her face. My eyes close for a moment as I steady my breathing. When my eyes open, they immediately go back to the screen, watching her. She looks relaxed now. Sedated even. I glance at the clock and realize it's four in the morning. She's probably going to sleep for a while longer now. I take several

steps back into the shower and keep my eyes glued to the screen, committing her body to memory.

## Chapter Nine

## Freya

When I wake the following day, Soren is still missing, and a pang of sadness takes hold in my chest, wishing he had at least said goodbye. I roll over to grab my phone on the nightstand when I find a handwritten note.

*I'm sorry I had to leave earlier than I wanted. An emergency came up with work. I had a wonderful night last night. I'll see you soon, my darling.*

*x Soren*

I reread the note. *I'll see you soon.* How? I'm scheduled to go back to Seattle tonight. He didn't leave me a phone number either. How am I supposed to reach him? I guess I won't be in contact with him until after the wedding.

The front door opens to Abe and Serena walking in. They tiptoe as though they're trying to quietly enter, to not disturb Soren and me from whatever activities they imagined were transpiring. I meet them in the living room, sipping on my coffee.

“Oh! Freya, I wasn’t expecting you to be awake yet.”  
Serena pauses to study my face to see if Soren hurt me,  
“Where is Soren?”

“He had a work-related emergency and left. I just don’t know when. I got up around four am, and he was already gone.” I barely recognize myself as my voice comes out monotone and with a touch of disappointment.

Abe stands behind Serena, looking a little more pissy than usual. He walks away and takes their bags back to their room. Serena goes to the kitchen for a coffee and then plops down next to me on the couch.

“Well, spill! How big was his dick?” Serena starts to gossip.

The coffee I had just sipped almost ended up on the white rug under our feet. I sputter for a moment, eyes bugging out.

“Nothing like that happened. Although he walked in while I was changing.” I trail off, wishing I could crawl into my coffee cup to hide.

“He saw you butt naked, and you didn’t fuck? Goddamn, he has a lot of self-control,” she mutters.

“No, it wasn’t like that. I had underwear on, and I covered my boobs. We watched a movie, then we went to sleep.”

“My god, you guys are acting like an old married couple. How boring. I was hoping to hear about your crazy sex stories with Soren.” She frowns.

“Honestly, Serena, I don’t think I’m ready to face that yet. Or at least last night, I wasn’t. When he looked at me, it

reopened many old wounds I didn't realize were still healing," I say, spilling my guts to her.

She looks at me with concern. "You should speak more candidly to your therapist."

I shrug my shoulders. Serena knows why we can't do that, considering our family. We sit in silence watching TV while drinking our coffees when Abe returns to the room.

"I should start packing," I murmur to her as Abe sits down next to her.

"Freya?" Abe's voice breaks the silence that falls over us.

I look over at him, his hair flat across his forehead in comparison to it usually being spiked up, and there are bags under his eyes today.

"Thank you. For choosing my life," Abe whispers.

I shrug again, "It's the least I could do for you both. I should be the one thanking you. Without you, I don't think my sister or I would be alive today. You've saved us both."

Abe nods as tears well in his eyes. I stand and walk back to the bedroom to pack.

He doesn't fully understand how important he is to us. Serena would've drank herself to death, and me? I was supposed to die. It was my turn to return the favor, but even then, it doesn't feel like it's enough.





image-placeholder

The rest of the day goes by slowly, and it's spent with me packing a couple of necessities for my trip back to Seattle.

When the three of us arrive at the airport, Serena is the first to break the silence. "Why can't you stay just a little longer?" She cries.

"Serena, I'll be back in three months, if not less. I have some business to take care of, and I'll be home in no time." I lie through my teeth. I have no idea what my future entails; I am now a puppet to my father and Luca.

I board the plane, saying goodbye. I slip in my headphones after plopping into an empty seat, and minutes later, I doze off. I wake to a flight attendant shaking me awake.

"Ma'am. You've arrived, and someone is here to drive you back home," She tells me softly.

I apologize and thank her. Descending the stairs, I get in the back of the car and head toward the heart of Seattle. I am greeted by a package placed on the floor as I open the door to my tiny apartment. I wasn't expecting anything in the mail, and it causes a spike of anxiety to flow through my body. What if it's a bomb? I shake my head. I sound ridiculous right now. I read the note scrawled on the brown packaging.

*For my darling bride to be.*

*Soren found my apartment?* How the fuck does he have access to that information? I did everything in my power to prevent anyone from being able to trace my background back

to my lineage. I never wanted my father's status as a dominating weapon dealer to define me.

A little irked, I opened the package sitting on the couch. It had significant weight to it. For a girl who could have anything in the world, I wasn't sure what I didn't have that could be gifted. Ripping into the package, I find three books in pristine condition. *The Shining*, *IT*, and *Pet Semetary*, all by Stephen King. Soren has given me such a kind gift. I opened the book to the first page, first edition, and signed.

Holy fuck.

I gasp audibly and carefully hold the books now. These are incredibly hard to find. My heart swells over the gifts. He was trying to make this marriage work for us. Both of us can be happy with time and work. I'll have to thank him for these the next time I see him. Who knows how long that'll be tough.

I pad to my bedroom area, where I have a small shelf of books next to my bed. I place them with care and stare back at my apartment. It mocks me. It's modest in terms of what I could find at local thrift stores and a coworker's pickup truck. There's a floral sofa plucked straight from Granny's living room, an oak coffee table, and a lamp in my living room. No dining room, no seats at the kitchen counter, and not even an entertainment center. The TV sits on the floor, just waiting to get kicked one drunken night.

It's nothing beautiful, but it's all mine. No one paid for this except for me, which made me proud. Otherwise, I had everything quite literally handed to me my whole life. It's

made me grow up a bit and changed me completely. But there's still a tumultuous turmoil within me as I take it all in. The collision of two vastly different worlds. This will all have to be left behind, as I enter into the role I was born to take on.





image-placeholder

The rest of my week goes by slowly as well. I had already finished the things I needed to take care of for my apartment, and one part of me contemplated going back to Miami to try to find Soren, but the other decided that if he wanted to get a hold of me, he could. He knew my address; he would know my phone number too. It's obvious he just isn't interested.

Monday, I finally managed to get myself off the couch and go to the grocery store for the first time in a while. I enjoy mundane things I never got to do in my younger years. There was always someone else doing it for me. I return to my apartment with an arm full of groceries, my chest heaving from climbing the two flights of stairs.

"You know it would be much easier to live somewhere with elevators." A familiar voice trails from behind me.

"Soren? What the fuck are you doing here?" I heave out of breath from the stairs, and now Soren scaring the fuck out of me.

He smiles, "I just wanted to see my future bride's life in Seattle."

Soren examines my apartment. He looks more relaxed than my mother when she first visited.

"It's very," He trails off, "simple."

I roll my eyes as I set my groceries down on the counter. *Everyone seems to have the same first impression of it.*

I call out over my shoulder, "Make sure you lock the door."

Soren pauses in his steps toward me, “Are you sure?”

I turn around to face him, “Yes, I want to keep the monsters out.”

He straightens at that retort, “And what if I told you I was a monster?”

I shake my head. He may be a danger to others, but I know he isn't one to me. I know he will keep me safe from *him*. “I know you won't hurt me. You don't scare me like you think you do,” I whisper back to him.

He presses his lips together but locks the door. “Don't say I didn't warn you.”

I roll my eyes at him, knowing he is trying to get me to leave him. I'm sure most other women would, but me? I can't. I want him closer. I didn't fully understand how much I missed our conversations until seeing him again.

He approaches me closer in the kitchen. A part of me wants to tell him off for leaving me for a week without contacting me. The other part of me wants to jump his bones. *Ah, fuck it. I'll yell at him later for it.* Before I can utter a retort to him, he's got me pinned up against the counter caging me in with no room to escape. This close, I have to crane my head up to look at him, while his hangs lower. It's especially obvious how much taller he is when I'm not wearing heels, and I'm not a short person either. I should want to run. I should want to seek the comfort of the public eye. But his gaze is beguiling, keeping my feet firmly planted on the ground.

“I loved the books you left for me. It means so much that you’d do something like that for me.” I look up at him through my eyelashes, giving into the temptation that he is.

“I’m glad you loved them, Freya. I thought you needed to add them to your collection.” He wraps his arms around my waist, pulling me further into him.

“They look great on my shelf. I’ve got a clear case for signed copies and first editions. They look amazing amongst my others. Would you like to see it?”

Soren grins, “Glad to hear it. You can show me later. I have dinner reservations for tonight, but perhaps you’d like to stay more low-key and order pizza for dinner tonight? I have to leave late tonight to go back to Miami for work. But you can have me the majority of the night.”

I soften at his touch like putty, wrapping my arms around his neck. I kiss him on the corner of his mouth. I’ve missed his touch, his eucalyptus and spearmint scent, his shining blue eyes, his black hair flopped over his forehead. *I missed him a lot more than I should have.* His eyes close, and he has a small smile as he enjoys my small kisses. He looks like he’s in his nirvana.

“So I remember you saying something about ordering pizza? Oooh, we could also watch a show tonight?” I start to get excited.

Soren chuckles at my antics, “Whatever you want, my darling, but first-”

He cuts his sentence off, slamming his mouth to mine. Our lips melded like they were made perfectly for each other. Things like this only exist in fairytales. And yet, this is my reality. My stomach flutters and I feel myself slipping down a rabbit hole. His hand reaches up to cradle my head, pulling me in closer. Soren's teeth bite at my lower lip, causing my mouth to part slightly. His hands roam down to my ass, squeezing it. Goddamn, he's a good kisser and damn good with his hands. I wonder what else he's talented at. *Maybe I can have just a tiny taste...*

His kisses trail from my lips to my cheek, then my jaw, and settle on my neck. The grip on my hair pulls my head to the side, allowing him better access to the spot between my neck and collarbone. He nips the skin, soothing it with his tongue, then sucking on the same place.

I let out a small moan, toes curling on the floor.

"Freya, let me make it up to you for just leaving you hanging for the past week," He says between kisses.

"Soren, you have more than made up for it. Please don't worry about it," I pleaded with him. My words might say one thing, but my body screams the opposite.

He lets out a groan before coasting his hand over my neck, chest, and in between the valley of my breasts in feather-light touches. I tense at those touches. He must feel that tension enter my body as he leans out of my proximity.

"Freya, I want you to know that I will always respect your boundaries. No matter how it makes me feel. Your safety and

trust mean more to me than anything else.” The pad of his thumb brushes along my cheekbone as his eyes bore into mine.

I nod my head, looking away from his intense gaze. “Thank you.” I offer him a small smile, hoping that will be enough for him for right now.

He mimics my actions before pulling away from me entirely. “How about we order that pizza, and maybe watch a movie tonight? I have to head back to Miami in a few hours, so we, unfortunately, don’t have much time together.”

“You can’t make this a longer trip?” I pout.

“No, my darling. I’m sorry. Work needs me tonight,” He says as he examines the takeout menu on his phone. “How does pepperoni sound?”





image-placeholder

The pizza finally arrives, and we start a show. Soren and I quietly eat dinner, eyes glued to the TV.

“Freya, I have one more thing.” He stands kneeling on one knee. He reaches into his pants pocket and pulls out a velvet box.

I gasp, my hand covering my mouth. I sit up straighter and examine Soren’s face. He looks concerned, but there’s a glimmer of happiness in his eyes.

“I know our relationship has been anything but conventional. It would be improper of me to not give you a ring if we are getting married. I might not be able to promise you everything you’ve dreamt about, but I’m willing to try for that happiness. I promise to keep you safe and always offer a shoulder to cry on. Someone you can depend on always.”

He flicks open the velvety box to reveal a beautiful engagement ring. It has a square stone in the middle, flipped on it’s side to look like a diamond, with marquise accents surrounding it vertically, altogether looking like an oversized diamond. It is massive but so breathtaking. Still speechless, I produced my left hand for him to place the ring on.

“I hope you like it. I had it custom designed,” He murmurs as he places the ring on my finger.

I remain stunned, staring at my hand, trying to decide if this is real. I launch myself at Soren, and he topples over onto the floor as I press kisses to his face holding him close to me.

“It’s so beautiful, Soren. I can’t believe you went through all the trouble for it. It’s just perfect.” I giggle, smiling in ignorant bliss.

He wraps his arms around my waist as I straddle his legs, “You are so welcome, my darling. I’m just glad you like it. I was quite nervous about the design.”

I kiss him again, sealing my thank you to his mouth.

## Chapter Ten

## Soren

Opening the door to my apartment, Robin stands from the seat she was in at the kitchen island.

“Sir?” Her voice is small.

My eyes flicker to her, “What happened now?” I stop in my tracks. I’m exhausted. It’s been a long day, and I just got back from Seattle. The only thing I could think of the entire flight back was Freya. Her laughter, her smile, her kindness. I already miss her.

“Nothing bad, I just wanted to drop off these things. Abe and Serena have extra security now, here is the chip for their cameras.” She holds out a small chip, a technology my company manufactures to allow easier access into people’s cameras. “There’s also new security detail at every entrance of the building, they won’t be noticed by anyone. I’ve also taken the liberty to assign a team to Luca to watch his every move. The best ones we have.”

I nod. “Good. Thank you. Anything else.”

“No sir.” She gives a curt nod, and walks out of my apartment, locking the door behind her.

I loosen the tie around my neck, as I pour myself a drink, and make my way to my computers. I need to make sure everything is working, I have to ensure nothing happens to either of them. As I sit, I pull my phone out, texting Freya.

*I've made it home. It was good to see you again. I'll see you again in a month.*

A response comes through almost immediately.

*You won't talk to me during that time either? Such a shame.*

I grin at her text, she wants to keep talking to me.

*Shouldn't you be asleep right now?*

It takes a moment for her to respond.

*I didn't want to go back into those dreams, so I'm awake.*

My heartbeat stutters for a moment. Is she going to open up to me? I pull up the cameras I installed in her apartment while she was away, and find her in her room with the lights off. She's laying on her side, staring back at her phone, the light illuminating her beauty. But there's so much pain and sadness written on her face.

I respond to her, not wanting to keep her any longer. She's waiting for my response. But I falter, not sure what to respond with. It takes me several times to type something out then delete it, and repeat until I land on it finally.

*I have dreams like that too. Are you okay?*

Mine probably aren't as bad as hers, but I still dream of the abuse I lived through as a child. How cold and lonely I was.

*I will be. It's only been a year since everything. I just hope they go away someday.*

I falter, wanting to ask the most personal question. I know I shouldn't, but I do anyway.

*What happened to you?*

Freya in the camera rolls onto her back, and she lets out a deep breath, throwing her phone off to the side. I overstepped. I should probably find an excuse to call her. She really deserves to know about the security we are putting on Abe, minus the camera part. I'll use that as an excuse to call her.

*Can I call you?*

She looks at her phone as my text goes through.

My phone rings with an incoming call.

“Hey.”

“Soren? I'm sorry. I just can't-” She starts and sounds guilty.

“There's no need to apologize. I'm the one who should be apologizing. I shouldn't have overstepped like that. We don't have to talk about that.” I rush to cut her off.

A small smile graces her face, from what I can see in the cameras.

“It's okay. I'm just fucked in the head, it's a personal problem, but I make it everyone else's problem.” She lets out a

breathy laugh, trying to make light of the situation.

“You’re probably not as bad as I am, Freya. I’m pretty fucked in the head too, you know.”

“Yeah, but you probably don’t imagine hurting people who have wronged you, or hurt your family.”

I fucking called it. I knew she had a darkness in her. I knew she was made for me. I fucking knew it. From the sounds of it, she doesn’t know what I do, or what my company is even, where I make my money from.

“You think I’m fucking crazy now, don’t you? I’m sorry, I shouldn’t have-”

“You really shouldn’t apologize so much. You shouldn’t apologize for being you.” I lightly scolded her. “And no I don’t think you are. I— I have the same thoughts too. I could give two fucks about my family, but I have a very small list of people I would do anything for.”

“Anything? Meaning?” She wants me to elaborate, but she sounds more comfortable knowing that she and I are cut from the same cloth. We are two pieces meant to be sewn together.

“Meaning, if someone hurt you, or your family, I’ll kill them.” I deadpan and let it out before I give myself a chance to take it back.

“Why my family?” She asks, and in the cameras, she’s sitting upright in bed.

“Freya, I care about you. More than I thought I would honestly. Therefore, if they’re important to you, then they’re

important to me. Which brings me to giving you an update.” The sound of her breath hitching, causes me to pause. “I ordered more security for Abe and Serena at their apartment here in Miami. There is security at every entrance, and throughout the building. I don’t want them to know, but I have people watching them. And Luca. I told you I would keep them safe. This is my way of doing it.”

“Soren.” My name falls from her mouth like a hymn.

“I don’t need any thanks, or scolding, or whatever. I just wanted you to know I kept my promise.” I finish, my voice almost in a whisper.

There’s a small part of me that hopes I’ve made her happy. Hopes that I’ve proven to her that she can trust me. Her approval matters more to me than anything else.

“Thank you, Soren. I know you said you don’t want any thanks, but I never listen. Thank you.” She sounds like she’s crying. She is, as she wipes away her tears, “I’ve been so terrified something will happen to them while I’m gone. That Luca would hurt them. I just don’t know what I’d do without Abe. He is Serena’s lifeline. Serena is mine. You’ve— you’ve given me some peace of mind I haven’t had in a while. Thank you.” She snuffles on the other end.

I watch her through the cameras, quiet for a moment. “Freya, I would do anything for you,” I whisper, and the next words slip out before I can stop them, “I wish I was there with you still. Thank you for confiding in me, your secrets are my

secrets. Try to sleep again, try to get some rest. I will talk to you tomorrow.”

“Okay, goodnight, Soren.”

“Goodnight, my darling,” I speak softly as she ends the phone call.

I lean back in the chair I’m sitting in, trying to steady my breathing again. I can’t be doing this. I can’t fall for her. We barely know each other, yet it feels like we’ve known each other forever. Like we’re traveling souls, always finding each other in the next life. But I can’t keep falling for her. It’s a danger for her. If people learned about my weakness, she’d be dead the moment I pissed someone off.

I start pulling together plans for after our marriage, deciding sleep is not as important as hiding my darling away.

## Chapter Eleven

## Freya

Soren and I made a vow to not see each other again until the wedding, which was only a month away. I moved in with Abe and Serena in Miami until the wedding. While Serena and I spent most of our time exercising and enjoying our time at the beach until the wedding, that time flew by in the blink of an eye.

My sister rips into my room, turns on the lights overhead, and jumps on my bed.

“Today’s your wedding. Today’s your wedding! Oh my god! I’m so excited. There’s so much to do! Let’s go, let’s go, let’s go!” She squeals excitedly, waking me from my nightmare.

I roll over onto my back and yawn loudly, “Get off my bed before you break something, you dork.”

Serena jumps off and does the same thing to Abe. A loud squeal and laughter erupt from the other room, and it sinks deep into my pores. *I wonder if Soren and I will ever get to that point.* I lay there trying to shake the nightmare out of my head as Abe brings me a cup of coffee with a bit of creamer.

I sat up and thanked him. He joins me at the foot of my bed.  
“How are you feeling about today?”

He’s severe, his body radiating with worry. He might’ve been Serena’s bodyguard throughout college, but he and I became close too. I take a deep breath, unsure of what to say because I don’t even know how *I* feel.

“Um. I’m ready to get this whole thing over with. I never imagined this is how my wedding day would be, especially with the threats looming over our heads.”

Abe offers a small, broken smile as he stands.

“I suppose that’s one way of looking at it. Serena said you guys are going to some spa soon, so I’ll leave you to get ready.”

With that, he shuts the door leaving me to my thoughts. But my phone dings, yanking me out of the downward spiral I was heading towards.

It’s a text from Soren.

*I hope you have the best morning you could be having.*

I gnaw on my bottom lip as I contemplate my response.

*I’m doing the best I can, considering it doesn’t feel right.*

Soren is quick to answer.

*I know, my darling. It’s for the best. I’ll see you later today.*

I don’t respond as I am sick to my stomach, nerves seizing my body. Serena bursts through the door again, and I turn to her, tears streaming down my face as I think more about the

fate of my future. Her face falls, and she looks guilty. She comes up to me with her arms open, pulling me in for a hug.

“I’m sorry, Freya. I just thought you’d be looking forward to it a little more since you guys have been happier together.”

She’s right. Soren and I have been happier and beginning to bond in our forced relationship. There’s still just so much I don’t know about him, and I wish I had more time to get to know him before I was hauled down the aisle. I wipe my tears away, only allowing myself to cry at this moment. The rest of the day, I’ll have to put on a happy face and pretend like everything is okay.

Serena and I leave shortly after to have breakfast and go to the spa. She rattles off the list of services I’m scheduled for; facial, massage, mani-pedi, and full body waxing. *Wait, what?* I start to pay closer attention. The names of private body parts get tossed back and forth between the receptionist and Serena until I butt in.

“Um, excuse me. Yeah, I don’t need a full body wax, thank you.”

Serena jumps in, “Okay, maybe not a full body, but definitely a full Brazilian.”

I blush, unsure of what to say next. Brazilian wax? I’ve never had that before, and I’m not so sure that’s necessary.

“Serena, I don’t think that’s necessary. I mean, it’s probably not worth the pain.”

Serena shakes her head and pushes me toward the masseuse waiting for us, “Believe me, Freya. It’s worth it. Besides, most guys want a silky smooth pussy over anything else. You want his first time seeing your pussy to be glorious, right?”

I turned red as the receptionist is stifling a grin as she shuffles papers on her desk.

Thankfully, the appointment is over quickly, and I limp out of the spa; while Serena cackles next to me. I almost slap the fuck out of her sadistic ass. Abe drives us to my parent’s house, where the wedding will be held.

Pulling up the driveway, it’s all hands on deck between florists, landscapers, and decorators. Abe opens the door for Serena and I, and we step onto the white carpet laid out for people to walk onto as they exit their cars. There are flower arrangements on the porch, and inside there is greenery hanging from the chandelier, with white flowers cascading up the railing of the split staircase. My mother is berating someone about a missing ice sculpture. Serena pushes me up the stairs trying to bypass her, knowing I don’t need that stress at the moment.

It’s a lot to take in. All the elegant decorations. Things I never would have picked out for my wedding. And an ice sculpture? Ridiculous.

We hear another car pull up, and Serena pokes her head out the door of our suite. I can hear Soren’s voice trailing up the stairs. My mother is next to him, keeping him engaged in a conversation. His voice is tense and draws closer to us as if

he's backing away from the conversation. My erratic heart rate lulls to a calm thus at the sound of his voice. Serena shuts the door and announces that Soren is here as the hairstylist curls my hair. I wasn't given a choice in my hairstyle or my makeup either. But, at least I got to pick out my wedding dress.

Serena pulls out a white shoe box embossed with gold lettering when we are done with hair and makeup. Sliding the box over to me, I recognize the combination immediately. It's something, Jimmy Choo. I smile over at her and rip into the box. Tucked inside is a pair of heels. And not just any pair, but the pair I've been scouring for. They're a satin white mule style with a crystal strap running along the foot's arch. I look over at Serena, my jaw slacks at the heels sitting in my lap.

"I thought it would be fitting to have new shoes for your wedding. It's a wedding gift from me." She giggles while shrugging her shoulders.

I gasp, "They'll match my dress beautifully." I pull her into a hug, a blanket of comfort enveloping me as Serena returns the hug. I abruptly yanked myself away from her, "Oh shit, Serena, did you grab the gift and letter I had on the table for Soren?"

She giggles, "Yes, I knew you'd forget, so Abe packed the car up last night."

Serena hands me the small box, but I don't take it. "Will you give it to him?" I whisper.

Serena nods and puts the box to the side. "Let's get dressed first, and I'll take it to him, okay?"

I gulp, nerves starting to rear their ugly head, but I agree. Serena and an assistant get me into my dress, buttoning me up along my back and placing the veil in my hair. After they're done, they stand back to examine me. Serena's hand covers her mouth, and her eyes start to water.

“You look so beautiful, Freya.”

I can't take my eyes off the mirror, studying every piece of tulle, crystal, and lace detail clinging to me.

“Will you take the gift to Soren, please?”

Serena wipes her tears and nods, turning to gather the little box and closing the door behind her. A knock on the door rings through the room moments after Serena leaves. Without a response, my father and Luca appear in the room. They don't even give me a moment to respond. I turn to give them my full attention,

“What are you doing here?” I question defensively.

I notice another figure behind the door, and they stay put. They are ensuring no one enters. My guard goes up even further, and alarm bells go off in my head.

“Freya, we are here to ensure you understand how important it is to go through with this.” My father starts but is interrupted by Luca.

“Yes, there is also an expectation that you will have your first child with Soren in two years. You will never be a part of the business your father deals in. Soren will step in and handle all work that is required of him. You are to stay at home and

mother your children. If you do not follow through with this, Serena and Abe will be killed. And *I* will make sure the deed is done. Do you understand?” Luca says, emotionless.

Tears well in my eyes. Who the fuck does this guy think he is? And what does he have over my father? Luca threatens my sister’s life, threatens to rape me, and he stands there. Doing nothing. The fucking coward.

I’m shaking, but I have to stay strong. He won’t hurt me. He can’t without facing Soren’s wrath. Not without a fight. I don’t let any tears spill over my cheeks, as I imagine carving him up like a pig. I will kill him one of these days. I refuse to let anyone dictate my happiness anymore. It’s my life. And I’ll take down anyone who threatens my dream for happiness.

Holding my head up a little higher, I cross my arms over my chest, “I’m kinda in the middle of working on your first favor.”

Luca’s face turned red, “Hey, don’t get smart with me, you little bitch. Don’t fuck this up.” He barks, his sausage finger pointed in my face. I flinch when it gets a little too close for comfort.

I glare at him but stand my ground as he flips the fuck out at me. Wavering between losing it on him or keeping my mouth shut, I decided it’d be better to keep my mouth shut.

He’ll get his one day.

“Good. Perhaps, you might be a good wife for my son.”  
Luca straightens out.

*Just wait till I tell your son about how you talked to me, motherfucker.*

My father stands to the side, allowing Luca to speak to me that way. I stare at him as if to ask why he isn't doing anything, but he just keeps his eyes on his shoes.

I look at him with a blaze in my eyes, "Get the fuck out. Both of you."

Luca smirks but obliges. My father is too cowardly to even look at me as they leave the room. What the fuck does Luca have over my father to have such control over one of the most powerful men in the country? I laugh at the ridiculousness of how my life is turning out to be. That laugh starts to turn into hyperventilating, and echoes of Tristan's voice haunt me, screaming that I will be nothing. I will achieve nothing in life without him. I am worthless without him. I refuse to believe that. I take deep breaths, trying to reel myself back in from panic as the door creaks open.

Serena comes back in, rushing to me, "What the fuck just happened?"

"Don't worry about it." I don't want to discuss this with her. She doesn't need to know how scary this is becoming. "Did you give Soren the gift?" I ask, trying to push past it. I can only handle one thing at a time. First, I need to get through this fucking wedding.

"Yes, and he wanted me to thank you for the gift, and-" She struggles to remember the second half of the message, "Oh-and that he is eager to see you."

I giggle, “Took you long enough to remember that.”

She shrugs, and there’s another knock on the door. Mother pops her head in the door along with Laura, and they keep it open.

“It’s time, my sweet,” My mother says softly, “Serena come with us. Freya has to do this walk on her own.”

My palms start to sweat, and I am now really petrified. The bliss I was in vanished as soon as Luca crossed through the room’s threshold. I could’ve handled my father alone, but Luca has an air about him that sets every nerve in my body on edge. My stomach is still in knots, tightening even more when I think about being forced to have a child. Serena hugs me and follows the other two out the door. I pace back and forth, waiting for the cue to start my walk to the slaughter.

Abe appears in the doorway a moment after, “Freya, it’s time.”

I give a slight nod, turn to check myself in the mirror again, then start my descent down the stairs and into the backyard where the ceremony is being held. At the bottom of the stairs, a woman has a large bouquet for me to carry. I pass through the house to the back patio door, where a butler holds the door open. I look down and take a deep breath.

*In and out.*

Lifting my head, I place my first step on the patio, and my eyes travel to the large group of people standing and watching as I begin my walk. Soren waits at the end of the aisle. His

newly gifted Rolex and black diamond cufflinks glimmer in the light. My eyes lock with his as he gives me a small smile, hands tucked behind his lower back. Deep, deep down, I'm okay with this. Realistically, I wish we would've dated after meeting, but for what it's worth. This is okay too. He's surprised me in the past couple of months. He's been devoted, caring, and passionate. Everything I was not expecting. And frankly, if his face is what I wake up to every morning, I know I will die a happy woman. He's perfect in every way. As his eyes scan the crowd, the smile disappears, like it's only reserved for me.

He offers a hand to walk up to the officiant when I reach him.

He bends at the waist, whispering into my ear, "I'm glad you are who I get to marry."

I squeeze his hand as the officiant starts talking. We exchange traditional vows but skip out on the love part. We don't want to say it unless we mean it. As he said, he wants our relationship to be based on the truth. Our eyes never leave each other. My breath is stolen from me as he places the ring on my finger. His hands are gentle with mine, placing a small kiss on my hand before he releases me. As I put his black tungsten ring on, he smiles slightly and looks down fondly at his hand. He's putting on a show for everyone here. It's almost convincing. But I know it's just for the guests. The officiant finally says the words I've been waiting for,

"You may now kiss the bride."

Soren lifts the veil from over my head, and my heart begins to beat even faster. His eyes are more transparent than before, and he passionately kisses me. This, between us? It's not for show. *This is real.*

Everyone else falls away from us again, leaving just us.

Eternally.

## Chapter Twelve

## Freya

I rush back to the bridal suite trying to catch my breath. I splash water on my face trying to calm down, not giving a fuck if my makeup is ruined. I just need to calm down. My heart flutters a million miles an hour. I clutch my chest staring at my reflection. Our souls are like magnets, wanting to connect as soon as they get close. I can't stop anything because when Soren and I are together, everything makes sense. But it terrifies the fuck out of me. I can't tell if it's the fear of how well we work together or if it's my past holding me back.

The assistant moves from the main room to the bathroom doorway. "Ma'am, would you like to change into your reception outfit?" She stands behind me, her head is lowered, and her hands are clasped below her stomach.

I turn towards her and brush past her.

"Yes, please." She gets started on the buttons at the base of my neck.

I can't wait to get this fucking thing off. It's so heavy and itchy. The tulle and the crystals, it's all suffocating. I shuffle

on my feet as I grow impatient and want her to move quicker. The door creaks open, and Soren appears in the room.

“Leave us.” His voice pierces the air.

My breath is stolen from my throat again. I open my mouth to protest when she nods and walks out immediately, keeping her head low and eyes diverted to the ground. He watches her leave, then turns his attention to me, striding across the room. His hand rests on my shoulder, and we stare at each other in the large mirror.

“Would you like some help?” His hands lift to finish where she left off on my buttons.

I take a step away from his hands, “No, I can manage, thank you.” I say through gritted teeth. I don’t know why I don’t want him to touch me right now, but I’m desperate to stay out of his reach. Perhaps it’s just the tension that crackles through the air, or maybe it’s because I *know* what comes next after the wedding. I reach to undo the buttons along my back, our eyes never leaving each other. I let out a soft curse when it proves more difficult than I imagined.

He gives me a lopsided grin, “Are you sure you don’t want my help?”

I sigh, frustrated, throwing my arms back to my side. I raise an eyebrow at him to say don’t try anything. He takes another step towards me, starting again. His knuckles brushing my spine with each button being undone. He’s moving painfully slow and on purpose, watching my reaction in the mirror.

*Thank god for the long sleeves to cover the goosebumps.*

His fingers hover over the last button, the one right above my ass. I let out a deep breath as he undoes it. I try to move to grab my reception outfit, but the top of his hand brushes along my spine, causing my whole body to seize up. It's like my body is coming alive at the gentle caress. He's taking all of me in and enjoying every moment of it. My breath quickens as my mind begins to race.

*Is he going to fuck me right here? Right now?*

“You're so fucking beautiful, Freya. And you're mine.” He possessively wraps the same hand running up my spine around my throat. The other hand is around my waist. My head tilts up to look him in the eye, breath hitching when our eyes connect. I'm *almost* afraid of him when he grabs my throat in this manner. It reminds me too much of Tristan when he would choke me to the brink of death.

He must have noticed me tensing because almost immediately he takes a step back and releases me.

“Who the fuck hurt you?” His voice drips with venom, anger rolling off him in waves. “I need his name.”

My eyes drop as tears start to well up and I shake my head. It's not that I am trying to protect Tristan, I definitely wish he were dead. I had just decided a long time ago that I want to be the one to end his life. I want to be the last person he looks at as he takes his last breath. As if I don't already have too many other things to worry about. I don't need this conversation on top of it all. *How am I going to tell him?*

I gnaw on the inside of my cheek as Soren steps forward and embraces me once again, his arms wrapped protectively around me.

“There’s no need to cry. No one will ever hurt you again. You’re safe with me.” He presses a kiss on the top of my head.

I wrap my arms around his midsection, melting in his warm hug. There’s something endearing about hearing him say I’m safe with him and the way he feels the need to comfort me. It makes it all seem more... real. *Like our marriage is real.* And deep down, I know he won’t hurt me. But I still love to hear him whisper reassurances into my ear.

Soren and I release each other, and I move towards the white satin jumpsuit hanging up on a hook next to the mirror. I step out of my wedding dress standing half-naked in front of Soren. He clears his throat and turns around, staring at everything except me. It’s awkward, but he respects my boundaries. Kinda.

I pull the jumpsuit most of the way on before I realize I need help zipping it. I turn to Soren, who is carefully trying to rearrange a slight bulge in his pants before I notice. I chuckle softly at the act.

“Soren, I need help,” I whisper.

His eyes snap to my face, looking at me like a deer caught in headlights when he hears his name. Without acknowledging what he was doing, he comes and zips me up, taking his time as his hands hover over my ass up to the middle of my back. As he does that, I pull an unnecessary amount of pins from my

hair. I had wanted my hair down for the wedding, but since when did anyone consider what *I* want?

He watches me silently, “I like it better when you wear your hair down.” He whispered the phrase so softly as he reached for a lock of hair and pinched it between his thumb and first two fingers. His head bends to place a gentle kiss at the end of the lock.

I stay frozen in place. My heart melts at the softness he is showing me. There’s something so tender about his kiss that I almost tell him to sweep me away for the rest of our lives, away from the mess, do *anything* else, just him and me.

I blink hard and continue getting ready; not much more left. When I’m finished, I turn around and we are chest to chest. I reach my hand up, brushing off one of the stray hairs that had gotten on his blazer. My eyes flicked up to meet his.

“I have something to tell you that won’t be easy to hear.”

Soren’s hand grips my elbow, keeping me plastered to him, eyebrows furrowing.

“What is it?”

I take a deep breath. “Luca and my father came to visit before the wedding, and told me we have to have a child within two years or Luca will kill Serena and Abe. He also said he’ll take it into his own hands.”

“Like he’ll fucking rape you?” Soren seethes, releasing me and taking a step back.

“I don’t know, but it seems that way.” I knot my hands in front of me, looking down to the ground then back at him.

He squeezes his eyes shut, but when they open cruel violence swirls in them, darkened to a storm grey. “I’m going to fucking kill him.”

“Soren, wait!” I rush after him as he takes large steps to the door.

“Luca! Where the fuck are you?” Soren is racing down the stairs, and guests have hushed down to a low whispered crowd. No one knows this is fake. Our marriage is forced.

I gape at Soren as his hands connect with his father’s neck, shoving him into the wall.

“You really to threaten my wife to have a child with me after everything you’ve put her through? Then you’re gonna rape her if she doesn’t have one with me within two years? Are you fucking serious? How about I just end you now? Get this shit over with, and end your miserable life.”

Luca lets out a dark chuckle, “I wouldn’t do that if I were you.”

I push through the crowd and lay a hand on Soren. “Soren. Let’s go.”

I try to coax him away, as Luca’s people have guns pointed at him. “Please. Soren, please. Let’s just go. It’s not worth it.”

Soren cocks his head to the side to examine me from the corner of his eye. His grip on Luca’s neck tightens to the point

where Luca lets out a couple of choked noises, then releases him.

“Freya, let’s go. I’m fucking done with everyone here.”  
Soren’s voice is shaky from the adrenaline.

As fucking psychotic as he is right now, he just threatened to take his own father’s life in exchange for mine. To keep me safe. He holds his hand out for me to take, which I do. I follow him step by step right alongside him. In the corner of my eye, Serena and Abe wait in the hall by the front door.

Tears cascade down Serena’s face. “Is that what they were in there for?”

I nod softly my mouth turning down at her tears. This day wasn’t supposed to end like this.

“I’m sorry I wasn’t there for you. But Soren will keep you safe. I know he will. I love you, Freya. Abe and I both love you. Please take care of yourself. Enjoy your honeymoon.”  
She pulls me in for one of her signature bear hugs.

“Honeymoon?” I question, looking to Soren.

“It was supposed to be a surprise,” He grumbles, glaring at Serena.

Serena gives him a cheeky smile. “Now, go before this turns into a bigger clusterfuck.”

“Soren!” Luca roars from the main area, finally coming back enough to come after his son.

“Freya, let’s go.” Soren is pushing me to the front door, and to a car, I don’t recognize. He opens the passenger door, ignoring all the berating he’s getting from Luca. With the door slamming shut, he flips off Luca the entire way to the driver’s side. He climbs into the driver’s side and takes off the moment his door is shut.

“Soren?”

“Hm?” He’s a lot calmer now, as he drives further and further away from the depths of hell.

“Thank you.”

He grabs my hand, pressing a kiss to my knuckles, “I told you I’d do anything for you. The only reason Luca is alive is because I didn’t want you to see that. Otherwise, he’d be a dead man.” He lets out a sigh, “How do you like the car?”

I wiggle a bit in my seat, sinking in a little further. “It’s really nice. It’s actually a dream car of mine.”

“I know. That’s why I bought it for you as a wedding gift.” Soren grins looking at me quickly before turning back to the road. “The honeymoon was supposed to be a surprise as well, but I’m still not telling you where we are going.”

## Chapter Thirteen

## Freya

When we arrive at the airport, I jolt suddenly, “Oh fuck. I don’t have a bag packed.”

Soren grins, “Don’t worry, I had your sister take care of it. Plus, we will probably do some shopping on this trip.”

I ease back into the seat, still nervous, but now it was simply about what my little sister had packed. She definitely packed some lingerie. Lord knows she probably did since she’s got a seriously lustful lifestyle. If a relationship isn’t founded on fucking, she doesn’t want it. Her relationship with Abe was probably the only one that didn’t start with banging; they were connected before they ever decided to sleep together.

Soren finally makes it to the private jet he owns. Airport employees around us grab our luggage.

“How long are we going to be gone?” I turn to Soren.

Soren is looking at his phone, his hand no longer on my thigh. His gaze meets mine, “I haven’t decided yet. It might be a day, might be three weeks. We’ll see how it goes.”

Is he referring to us getting along and spending so much time together? I just turned back to look out the car window. Reaching for my phone, I realize it's 2:00 am. *No wonder I'm so exhausted.* Soren's head rests against his hand, propped up on the car window, waiting for us to be told we can board the plane. Two extremely attractive flight attendants descend the stairs to stand at the bottom, waiting for us to board. Soren opens his door, and gets out, I reach for the door handle when it's suddenly opened by an attendant I didn't see.

Soren shakes hands with the pilot and copilot as I round the back of the car. Someone else gets into my newly gifted Lambo and starts to drive off. Soren turns his attention solely to me, while the flight attendants make eyes at him. As I approach him, he moves quicker than I can react, and I'm scooped up into his arms. Soren starts to walk up the stairs to the jet; his jaw is set and rigid. The interaction with Abe didn't make him happy, but he can get the fuck over it.

"I can walk, you know." I huff, but my heart flutters as his fingers flex against my upper thigh.

"I know you can. It was just too hard to resist." He grins at me.

I stare forward as we enter the plane. It looks like any other private jet I've been on. A bar on the left side of the entrance, followed by the captain's pit and a cluster of seats to the right. A couch lines the wall behind them and what looks like a back room towards the plane's rear. He sets me in one of the seats closest to the bedroom. The sitting area can accommodate four

people, two on each side with a table dividing them. I sit closest to the window. Staring at the landscape outside, Soren sits across from me. The attractive flight attendant brings me my purse, a blanket, and a pillow for each of us. She continues to make eyes at Soren, actively trying to seduce him as if I'm not sitting right here. I roll my eyes, and he notices. A small smile plays on his lips, but he's trying hard to suppress it.

Another flight attendant approaches, "Do you need a drink, Mrs. Astor?"

I don't respond at first, then realize she's talking to me. No one has referred to me as Mrs. Astor yet.

"Oh yes, a glass of Chardonnay, please."

She turns to Soren to ask what he wants, and he orders the same thing. She struts away, collects our drinks, and returns. I grab the pillow and lean it against the window, trying to get comfortable. I stare out of the window into the dark night sky as we take off. The windows are open throughout the plane, and I can see Soren in the window's reflection. I watch him instead of the city lights below us. He's staring at his hand, a look of pride and admiration on his face while he examines the ring I gave him. It's the most simple design, but he's looking at it like it's the most intricate ring he's ever seen. I stifle a happy sigh as my eyelids start to get heavier, and I finally allow myself to slip into dreamland. I feel a heavy blanket settling over me, and Soren presses a kiss to my forehead.

"Goodnight, my darling." With that, I drift into a deep sleep.





image-placeholder

When I awake, we are still in the air. Soren sitting adjacent to me, his legs stretched onto the seat in front of him. He looks peaceful.

“You know it’s rude to stare at someone when they sleep.” His deep gravelly voice breaks the air. I flinch, not realizing he’d awoken. “How long have you been awake?”

“I just woke up,” I say mid-yawn.

He sits up, peels the blanket off of him, and stretches. His muscles tense under the shirt he has on. I guess he ditched his button-down at some point during the night. The cufflinks I gave him rest on the table in front of his seat.

He nods and gestures to the attendant. “My wife and I would like breakfast.”

Her lip curls, but she covers it with a sweet smile. “Of course, sir. What would you like?”

“We will have a bagel with fresh fruit and yogurt.”

“And a cup of coffee, please,” I chime in. I just need some caffeine to get my brain kick-started.

She returns with our food quicker than I expected, and I drink my coffee, delighted by its warmth. The flight attendant refilled it for about the fourth time when the pilot finally announces we are 20 minutes from our destination. I continue to look out the window. It looks tropical. Jungle everywhere, then we get to the residential area. The pilot comes over the intercom.

“We have arrived in Bali, Indonesia. The weather is 80 degrees, and it is noon local time. We hope you both have a wonderful honeymoon.”

“Bali?” I question him.

He shrugs his shoulders. “Your sister thought it would be a good idea. She said you’ve always wanted to go.”

If it were physically possible to make heart eyes at someone, that would be the look on my face. It’s incredulous how he’s tried to paint himself as someone disinterested in our relationship when it has been the opposite so far. I doubt he’s even expressed any interest in going to Bali, but here we are, fulfilling a dream of mine.

When we land and are cleared to exit, Soren stands when the stairs open up, reaching for my hand. I gather my purse and take his hand. We leave the plane and meet people putting our bags into a limo. Someone reaches for my hand, standing at the bottom of the stairs.

“Welcome to Bali, Ma’am. Please, this way.” He leads me to the limo door, opens it, and smiles.

I smile softly at him. “Thank you very much.”

Soren doesn’t look at him as he enters the limo behind me. As soon as the door shuts, the man gets into the driver’s side of the limo and takes off. We drive for a while, entering a city, except the limo doesn’t stop as we enter a more rural area., The further we get, the more the worry builds, but finally, we hit a paved road and then reach a gate. The driver enters a

number into the pad and speaks with the guard. The gates open slowly and he continues forward, the gate sliding shut right behind us. The limo comes to a stop in front of a beautiful, contemporary home that looks like it was plucked straight out of Beverly Hills.

Two people are standing at the door waiting for us. Immediately, they go to the trunk and start to unload the bags, carrying them inside. Soren and I climb out of the limo, walk up the path that leads to the door, and enter the home. As I begin to take everything in, a worker pulls him off to the side.

I continue wandering through rooms without him. The house is a comfortable size; the living room, dining room, and kitchen are all open to each other. There's an office off the living room with glass doors and a hallway on the other side of the living room leading to a bathroom and spare bedroom. The dining room is almost all glass, where I see the breathtaking view. My breath hitches slightly as I take it all in. There's a large patio with two small tables and umbrellas, a couple of steps to an infinity pool. Off the pool is another deck, then stairs leading down to the beach. A private beach at that too. It's so beautiful. The sand is so blindingly white and a stark contrast to the blue ocean.

“I thought you'd enjoy it here. We have no reason to go anywhere, and we don't have to worry about anyone visiting us here.”

His voice startles me out of my wonderment, but it's the arms wrapping around my waist that make me jump out of my

skin. His words truly sink in as his hands trace invisible shapes on my ribs. We are completely alone on our honeymoon. And we have had crackling sexual tension between us since we met. *Oh fuck.*

“Go take a shower. I’ll take one after you. But I’d like to go swimming first. The pool is calling my name,” Soren says, placing a kiss on the side of my head as he releases me.

“Okay.”

It comes out meeker than I had hoped, but I wander away from him to the master bedroom where our luggage had been delivered. I opened the Louis Vuitton suitcase, and as I expected, I don’t find much in there. Two pairs of shorts, two shirts, five bikinis, and several lingerie sets that range from bra and panties sets to baby dolls and teddies. I gawk at them. Holy shit, there’s a lot of lingerie. What was I supposed to wear around the house? I’ll probably be naked with Soren if I’m not in the pool or ocean, but I suppose that’s not a bad thing. I pull what I want from the luggage before heading towards the bathroom to freshen up. I catch my reflection in the mirror when the reality of our situation crashes down on me like a wave.

Each realization zaps me, causing nearly heart palpitations. I’m alone with Soren in a romantic place after we just got married. Most married people fuck. Okay, can I do this? Can I bring myself to fuck him?

I turn the shower on and wait for the water to warm up before going in. Soren and I’s relationship has been

unconventional in every way. And he's not like most guys I've met before. He's not pushy. He understands and respects my personal demons, yet is wanting to help me heal. He ordered high-class security for the two most important people in my life, all for me. I stand under the stream of water, letting all my worries wash away. I can do it. I want to do it. If I keep clinging to this victim version of myself, then what's the point of any of this? Any effort myself or Soren put into our relationship? Tonight's the night.

I turn the water off and wrap myself up in a towel when I'm done. I quickly change into a bikini that's a thong, then look myself over in the mirror. The butterflies in my stomach will not stop fluttering, but at least my ass looks fucking mouthwatering in this suit.

I let out one last breath. It's now or never.

I return to the dining room where Soren is waiting. He looks bored as he scrolls through his phone. He looks up at first, then does a double take, mouth gaping a little. I get a little brazen when I approach him. He sits back in the chair, his hands resting on his lap.

I lean into him, but not quite touching. "Come cool off with me in the pool."

He licks his lips and starts to reach out. I lean back completely out of reach and head towards the pool.

## Chapter Fourteen

## Freya

**A**s I take the stairs into the pool, I put the sunglasses on my face. I only get up to my waist when I hear the sliding glass door behind me shut. Soren appears next to me, and he dives in. He pops back up, shaking out his hair.

He watches me as I recoil from the cold shock of the water's spray. He swims up to me and reaches down to grab my ass, lifting me further and pressing me close to his body as he takes us deeper into the pool. I cling to him, seeking warmth in this frigid water. He pins me against the wall, but more so to create stability for both of us. With my legs still wrapped around his waist, we turn to look at the view of the ocean. The sound of the waves soothes my nerves. My arms casually rest on his shoulders as if this was normal for us. In the corner of my eye, I spot slashes across his chest and a deep, circular scar resting right above his heart. I give him my full attention and reach to brush my hand across the scars littering his chest. But before I can even touch him, his hand snatches mine up, and I can feel his burning stare through his sunglasses. Keeping my hand clasped, he brings it to his mouth and presses a kiss to my palm. He's still staring at me, and my cheeks heat with

anticipation. *I know what's about to happen next.* He releases my hand and trails it down my body.

His other hand is still on my ass, and he begins to squeeze. He leans in and kisses my jaw, trailing down my neck. My breath stills as he begins to kiss me. I turn my face back to him. He leans back as if asking permission to continue. I press my hands flat to the back of his neck, pulling him in. He kisses me with such a need like his body has been deprived of water for days. I kiss him back, my lips molding to his like they were always meant to be there.

One hand reaches up my back to lightly tug on my bikini top, pausing for a moment to allow me to tell him to stop. But I don't want him to stop. My body needs him as much as he needs mine.

He tugs harder and pulls the bikini top off. Soren stops kissing me to lean back and get a good look at me. He reaches up to cup one, my breasts still below the water. They fit in his hand perfectly.

He lets out a breath, and a smirk falls onto his face. Running his thumb across the hardened peak, he lifts me further out of the water. My breasts are out of the water now, his heated eyes sweeping across my exposed flesh, admiring me. Leaning down, he closes his lips around my nipple, his tongue gently flicking across the bud.

I let out a groan, arching into his touch. I feel his cock pressing into me. If I had to guess, he's got quite an impressive

length. Girthy and long. Tristan had a tiny dick compared to Soren.

*Am I even going to be able to take something like that?*

I try not to think about my past or future as his mouth ravishes my breasts. Each nip, flick, and suck becomes increasingly urgent.

He brings his hands down to my waist, toying with the waistband of my bottoms.

*Right here? This is where our first time together is going to be?*

He lets go of my breast and kisses me again with more passion than before. He pulls my bottoms off halfway down my thighs, then lifts me onto the deck. Even when he stands all the way up in the pool, the water only reaches his shoulders. He peels the bottoms off and urges me to move closer to the edge, digging his fingers into my ass. His arms wrap under my thighs, his palms rest on the inside, and he peels my legs apart. My pussy glistening in the sun from the water and dripping from desire.

He stands back, taking me in for a brief moment before feasting on my pussy. My hands curl into his hair, my mouth falling agape, no longer able to hold my moan. His tongue flicks my clit, sending a jolt straight to my stomach. My grip tightens, pushing his face closer as I grind my hips against his lips.

“Oh please,” I beg, pulling on his hair a little harder than I intended.

“Please, what?” He mumbles, each letter vibrating against me.

“Please. I need to come.”

“Not until you beg for it.”

A pulse of pleasure radiates through my body at his command.

*He’s so fucking hot.*

My knuckles turn white, clinging to the pool’s edge as two fingers press into me, pumping hard.

“Ohh— fuck—. Soren, please let me come. I need to come. Please.” Desperation floods out in breathy pants.

“Then come for me, darling.” He growls.

The vibration of his voice massages my clit. His fingers picked up the pace. I throw my head back, my toes curl, and I come hard. Incoherent words come out of my mouth as my juices flood his.

I see nothing but white. My hearing going out. I fall back, unable to move.

He removes his fingers after I shudder a few more times under his touch. Soren chuckles as he licks his lips and wipes his chin. He grips both hands on the outside of my thighs. I finally come back down into myself and sit up. I see him sucking my desire off his fingers.

“You’re delectable,” Soren says, almost moaning.

I’m still trying to catch my breath when our eyes lock. My arms snake around his neck, pulling him in, and his eyes are level with my breasts. Without breaking eye contact, he kisses each one. We just drink each other in. His body looks like he’s been chiseled by a Greek god, as corny as it sounds. His abs are highly defined, and his arms are perfectly toned. He is ripped as fuck, and clearly doesn’t skip leg day. His jawline is so sharp it can actually compete with a knife. And the scars that litter his chest only add another layer of mystery to him, a mystery I’m becoming more desperate to solve.

I’m first to break the silence. “I believe I owe you one.”

He kisses my collarbone. “You don’t owe me anything. Besides, I need you rested and ready for tonight.” His eyes glimmer with excitement.

“What are we doing tonight? And please don’t tell me it’s a surprise.”

“Tonight, we have a chef coming at 6:30 to cook dinner. Dinner will be served at 8:00 on the dock, then we will enjoy a bonfire on the deck, and hopefully, I get to ravage your body properly.” Soren says, his eyes darkening.

I feel my pussy twitch at his words. “That sounds delightful. The only problem is my sister didn’t pack any clothing. She packed two outfits, swimsuits, and li-” I cut myself off, blushing, “And some other things.”

Soren smiles at me wickedly. “She packed lingerie?”

I blush, nodding.

His grin only widens. “If you need to cover yourself up more, you can use my clothes, but *only* when we have guests over. Any other time, I want you just like this.” His hand reached out to caress my breast again.

I scoot back and stand fully. “Well, I’m going to shower and get ready for the night.” I grab my top and bottoms and saunter back into the house. In the reflection of the window, I see him drinking me in. I smile to myself and keep walking. That was well worth the wait.

## Chapter Fifteen

## Freya

I stare at my closet full of lingerie and bathing suits. After a closer look, I discovered the two pairs of Daisy Dukes Serena packed. I pluck them off their hanger, only to realize my ass cheeks will be fully exposed. The shirts are not any better; they all can pass as bras. And we are trying not to give the house staff an eyeful today. We are about to have employees over, and as much as I'd love to see Soren's jealous side come out, I have more self-respect than that. I grab a pair of shorts, if you can even call them that, and one of his shirts, pausing to breathe in his cologne that lingers on the shirt.

Going back to the closet, I run my fingers across the lace and strappy material. I settled on a bra and panty set. The bra is made of black lace, with two straps aligning above the cup and another strap running up the middle to wrap around my neck. The bottom piece—a lace thong—perfectly matches the bra. Looking for a designer tag, I find a note pinned to the back where the tag should be.

*Handmade in Italy to fit your exact measurements. Hope you love it.*

*x Serena*

I get dressed and head into the living room, turning on the TV while I wait for Soren to return. I'm slowly lulled to sleep by its quiet croon playing in the background. As I drift off, I feel Soren stand in front of me. He pauses for a moment before bending down and lifting me, jolting me from my nap. But I quickly settle down, and I nestle into his chest. He stretches out under me, my head resting on his lower stomach as we get into a more comfortable position. His hands never leave me, and I start to drift off again.

I awake to voices trailing from the kitchen and sit up. Soren turns his attention to me, stroking my hair.

“Have a good nap?”

I give him a lazy smile and nod. He looks so relaxed and at peace. I lay back on him, one arm wrapping around his leg as I roll over to my stomach.

“They're working on dinner, but they should be done soon. After dinner, we can either have a bonfire or go out on the boat.”

I lift my head to pay better attention to him. “I remember you saying something about a bonfire but nothing about a boat.”

“They brought it to us during your nap. I had one we were expecting to receive, but it wasn't supposed to be until tomorrow.”

My jaw drops. “What other surprises do you have up your sleeve?”

Soren shrugs, “You’ll see.” He leans forward to kiss me, which I gladly accept.

Someone behind us clears his throat. “Mr. and Mrs. Astor, dinner is served.”

Soren sits up further, pushing me to my knees.

“Are you hungry?” He asks, brushing my hair out of my face, then rests his hand on my face. His thumb pressed against my bottom lip.

I take his thumb into my mouth, sucking. “Ravenous,” I say as I release his thumb.

His eyes darken at the gesture. “Careful. We don’t want our dinner to get cold.”

Soren stands and helps me off the couch. Holding my hand, he makes his way to the patio until we reach the dock. At the end of the pier, there’s a small table set up with two chairs and candles and flower petals leading up to the table. A butler is standing at the end with a bottle of wine that he is popping open once we get closer. Soren and I sit across from each other and wait as the butler pours our wine, then lifts the cloches, revealing a steak with lobster risotto and roasted tomatoes. My mouth starts to water, just from the sight.

Soren lifts his wine glass. “To our future.”

I smile and repeat the same thing, our glasses clinking together.

He examines me closer, eyes narrowing as he takes a sip. “You look damn good in my clothes, by the way.” He leans in after setting his glass down on the table. “But I think it will look better when they’re on the floor.”

I balk at his pointed comment. “Thanks,” I whisper, a blush creeping onto my cheeks as he starts to cut into his dinner.

We eat in silence, enjoying each other’s company and watching the sunset over the mountains. Soren stands when dinner is done and reaches a hand out to me. We walk hand in hand back to the patio. A fire started in the gas-burning bonfire pit, and a comfy love seat adorned with pillows and flower petals. He carries our empty wine glasses in his other hand, and there’s an ice bin with wine resting in it. I sit as Soren pours wine for the both of us, sitting next to me. His hand comes to rest on my thigh as we watch the fire and enjoy the calm night breeze in silence.

The wine keeps flowing, and I start to loosen up a little bit. “I have a confession to make,” I slur slightly.

He looks up from his wine glass, waiting expectantly. The fire draws out the golden flecks in his eyes, his own fire blazing brightly when he looks at me.

“Well, two things to confess I guess. First, I am wearing lingerie and waiting for you to take a peek. And second, I don’t want you to sleep with anyone else, *ever*.” I draw the word out, adding too many r’s to the end of it, but continue anyways, “It hurts my feelings.” I finish with a hiccup.

Soren stares at me like a deer in headlights setting his wine glass down on the table next to me, then turns his body to me.

“If you wanted me to take a peek, you just had to ask. But it’s okay. I won’t sleep with anyone else. I just have to warn you, my taste is a little darker. Think you can handle it?” He asks, his hand trailing up into my hair.

I nod my head, suddenly realizing I’m ready to please *him*. At *any* time. I marvel at my own realization, lost in thought before he cups my chin, yanking me out of the fantasy and back to the moment at hand.

“Good girl. Now, strip,” He growls, and shock and desire ripple through my body.

Standing, I tug at the hem of my shirt, watching Soren as he leans back, one hand holding his wine glass, his other arm draped on the back of the loveseat. I turn my back to him when I shimmy out of the shirt, throwing it onto the deck, out of the way. I give him my full attention when I notice a bulge forming in his shorts.

“Hurry up,” He directs.

I unbuttoned my shorts and leaned over a bit, my ass cheeks had already been hanging out of my jean shorts, but he’s got a better view now. Then pull them down to my ankles, bending over at the waist to pick them up, and throw them with my shirt.

Soren groans from behind me.

“What do you want me to do to you, Freya?” Soren’s voice is strained as he makes an attempt to compose himself.

I fidget with the straps on my chest. “I want you to fuck me.”

I watch him swallow hard, eyeing me up and down, looking at me as if he has been starved and I’m the only thing that could satiate him. “Then come here.”

I face him again, stopping in front of him. He sits further up, one hand clutching the wine glass and the other resting on his lap.

“Either remove your bra and panties, or I’ll rip them off you.”

I waiver for too long, I suppose, because he reaches up and pushes the unlined cups down, releasing my breasts from their hold. He looks down at my panties and looks back up at me. I decide quickly to remove those myself.

His eyes darken significantly to what seems like a cerulean blue. He caresses my breast, cupping the outside of it. I squirm under his touch. Even if he did just touch me the same way only a couple of hours ago, I’m still getting used to his touch. Especially since it’s rougher now.

He holds his hand in one place and looks me in the eye. We hold our stare for a moment, but it’s interrupted by a swift, sharp slap to my breast. My eyes screw close, and I gasp. My nipples immediately harden at the touch, and I get goosebumps over my whole body.

*I handled that a lot better than I thought I was going to.*

He sits back, resting in the same position as before, sipping on his wine as he admires me. His head cocks to the side.

“Well, what are you waiting for?”

My mind is foggy from the slap. I drop to my knees and run my palms over the top of his thighs, making their way to his zipper. I pull it down, tooth by tooth, teasing him. His one free hand grips my hair, pulling it in a warning. There’s something about his dominance and words of praise that sends sparks deep into my lower stomach.

I move faster and free his cock. It’s thick, long, and veiny.

*I don’t think I’ll be able to fit this in my mouth, but a girl can try.*

There’s a drip of precum dewing at the tip, and I scoot closer to him. The closer I get, the more intimidated I’m starting to feel. Nothing has prepared me for someone so well endowed.

I look to Soren, who watches with bated breath. My tongue darts out to clean the precum dripping from him. Taking him into my mouth, I bob up and down, unable to take him fully. My hand comes up to grasp what I can’t choke down.

But that only lasts a moment before Soren pushes me back onto the heels of my feet and stands, ripping me up with him. His mouth claims mine, and I moan against him. He forces me to walk back towards the house.

We have such a height difference; he's almost slouched down, while my neck is nearly craned up to meet his. He holds me as close as possible to him. I claw at his shirt, wanting it off after I've shed my bra completely. Soren breaks away to rip his shirt off, but when it clears his head, his mouth comes back to me like they're magnetic. He lifts me, and my legs wrap around his waist as he slams me against the patio door. I groan at the impact, and one of his hands releases me while he searches for the door handle. He fumbles for a moment, and then we fall through the threshold of the house.

## Chapter Sixteen

## Soren

*What the fuck was I thinking asking her for her hard limits? For slapping her breasts? For nearly forcing her to choke on my cock?*

This is our first time together.

I have to be a little more gentle with her. To test out the waters. She's got a dark past, one she's refused to share with me so far. I'll get it out of her eventually, but for now, I need to focus on calming the fuck down. I throw her onto the bed, and when she bounces and her legs spread apart, *I* nearly come apart at the seams. Seeing her spread out like that makes my dick that much harder for her.

"Such a pretty little pussy, so wet for my cock," I coo, snaking my hand up her inner thigh, fingers begging to connect with her soft pussy, and bring her to a euphoric high.

Freya throws her head back, her eyes rolling to the back of her head as my fingers connect to the little bundle of nerves, tweaking and rubbing so gently. Her body responds to me. She's eager to take any touch I'm willing to give her.

“Eyes on me,” I command.

I want her to watch me bring her closer to paradise. My other hand reaches out for her tit, pinching and flicking her hardened nipple, eliciting more moans from her dirty mouth.

Her eyes snap back to me, watching my face for a moment before looking down at my fingers buried deep inside her, pumping in and out, juices flowing like a waterfall.

“Are you going to come for me, my dirty girl? I want you to soak my fingers before I stick my cock in you,” I growl. I barely even recognize my voice; it’s thick and huskier from the lust coursing through my body.

My fingers rake up, finally catching a spot inside her that draws her eyebrows together, and her eyes roll to the back of her head again. I let it go this time, knowing my darling is on the edge of her orgasm. Freya’s legs tense, toes curling, as she lets out heavier breaths.

“Oh fuck. Fuck. Soren. I’m coming!” She cries out between labored breaths, and if I wasn’t hard already, I’m about blue-balling it when my name leaves her lips.

I pick my pace up, determined to help her chase her orgasm.

“Come for me, my darling,” I whisper.

She goes quiet for a moment, then cries out, back arching off the bed, legs ramrod straight and taut as it all comes in a crashing wave. I pump in and out a few more times before pulling away completely. I’m sure she will need a moment to collect her head before I start on her again.

And I need a moment to collect myself as my hand curls around my cock, pumping it a few times. I coat it with her juices, crawling over the top of her. I stroke her hair, as her breath begins to even out.

“I’m not going to wear a condom,” I murmur.

Probably a dumb decision considering her IUD, I know she has, isn’t one-hundred percent effective. But I’m not going to let Luca’s threats hold us back from anything. Not when he’s already controlled so much of our relationship. If she does happen to get pregnant, then we’ll cross that bridge then. But right now, in this moment, I only care about being inside my wife.

She nods anyway, not giving a single fuck in the world, still delirious from her high.

I lean back on my knees, watching her as her eyes peek open to see what I’m doing. She’s so gorgeous with her face flush, legs spread like a delicious meal, and her hair splayed over the pillow creating a halo effect. I’ll have to take a photo of her just like this when she gets more comfortable with me.

I scoot closer to her, gripping the tops of her thighs, positioning her exactly how she needs to be. Gripping the base of my cock, I slap her pussy with it.

Freya’s eyes pop open, mouth gaped. Perhaps she now realizes how big it is compared to her tight cunt. She already had it in her mouth, so she must know I am not small.

Sliding the tip of my dick between her folds, she tenses for a moment. There's a battle in her head right now, but I can only focus on how good her pussy feels on the tip of my dick.

*Gentle.*

I remind myself mentally as I prod at the entrance of her tight hole. Freya's body is tense, as though bracing for impact.

I slowly start sliding into her, collapsing over her rather than towering over her. Resting my elbows on both sides of her head, hands cupping the top of it. As I slowly thrust into her, she jerks away, gasping at the feeling of a real man taking her. When her cunt convulses around me, it takes every fiber of my being not to snap and allow my primal side to take over.

“Soren! It won't fit!” She squirms under me, clawing at my biceps to get away, but I don't move, pinning her in place.

I grit my teeth for a moment, reeling myself in. If I lose myself in my head, I'll hurt her.

I let out a low chuckle from deep inside my chest. “You're right, my darling. It won't fit if you keep squirming like that. So hold still.”

She stops moving, her tiny hands gripping my biceps with such force she might leave bruises on me. I dip my head into the crook of her neck, allowing her a moment to catch her breath before I continue. I'm only halfway in. I place small, breathy kisses along her neck to distract myself. Because, holy fucking hell, her pussy is so goddamn tight.

“Soren?” Her voice is quivering and small when my name is uttered from her lips. It makes my heart soften. My fragile, gorgeous Freya. I’d never do anything to hurt her. But here I am, on the brink of doing precisely that.

“Yeah, baby?” I lift my head, my eyes locking with hers, and I see they’re filled with tears.

“Go easy on me, okay?” She whispers, then goes completely limp under me. Like she is giving into the fight when there wasn’t a fight to begin with.

“Freya. I would never hurt you. I’m going to take care of you. You trust me, right?” I cup her face, drawing her face to mine.

I know I’m a stupid man for asking if she trusts me. She shouldn’t, especially since it’s been a very short period of time she’s known me. But when I feel her head nod, a swell of warmth fills my chest. I owe it to her to make this feel good. To make her forget about all the bad times she’s had. Tonight I’m not going to give in to all my dark desires for her. *No*. I’m going to give her the side she needs. The loving, altruistic side of me.

I hesitate for a moment. *Does she even want this? Was my judgment clouded by lust to notice that I’m forcing her into this?* I pull out, leaving just a little bit of myself inside her because I want to stay enveloped in her warmth for the rest of my life.

“Do you want to continue?” I ask, but I can’t meet her gaze; shame burns on my face. I forced her into something she

didn't want.

She freezes. I can feel her hesitation, and just as I'm about to pull out completely, her hands snake from my biceps to my ass. Freya grips me hard and pulls.

"Make me forget," She whispers. Pressing kisses to the side of my head, urging me to keep going.

I lift my head again and kiss her with force; our teeth clink for a moment as I thrust into her completely. At full hilt, she gasps, letting a moan escape into my mouth that I take in. I want to take her fear in and swallow it whole. I'll take all her pain and dissolve it completely. Make it mine.

*Because her pain is my pain.*

I groan out, relishing in the feeling of how tight her cunt is around my cock.

Freya's back arches, her breasts brushing against my chest. I want to keep her close to me. To inhale the same air she exhales.

I wrap my arms around her back, hoisting her to me, making her arms jolt to my neck, holding on for dear life as I lift her. Sitting up on my knees, her ass resting on the tops of my thighs, I run my hands across her body. Taking in all her curves, bumps, and imperfections on her smooth skin.

She rests her forehead on mine, her eyes closed.

I close mine too, losing myself in the feeling of her.

“Good girl, taking such a big cock,” I murmur, running my knuckles across her cheek before getting lost somewhere in her hair. And I’ll be damned.

My darling shivers at my comment.

*I knew she had it in her.*

I pull her in again for a passionate kiss. Pouring all the love I have for her into it because, goddamn it, I’m falling in love with this woman.

She pulls herself closer to me, moaning into my mouth.

I wish I could open my body up and stuff her inside me. Keep her safe and close to me. But this will have to do. She’s the first to pull away and vigorously nod her head. *She’s okay.*

I set her back down on the bed, knowing full well she’s acclimated and her pussy is wetter than before. I lean back, pressing a kiss to her collarbone, before taking her tit into my mouth, sucking, and letting it out with a pop. I’m still deeply seated in her when her hips start to rock back and forth. Instigating me into just pounding her pussy. But no. *Gentle.* Slowly, I slide out and back in. Her body was much more pliable compared to the first time. Her little pants and moan make the dark part of me rear its ugly head. But I can’t give in. This is for her.

*To heal her.*

I pick the speed up and reach one hand out to her breast, squeezing and pinching her hardened nipple.

Her hand comes out to run it along my chest, and while I'd love to pin it to the mattress and have my way with her, I let her get more comfortable. Nothing but the sound of skin slapping, Freya's pants, and my groans fill the room.

Her eyes open finally, and they trail down to where I'm fucking balls deep in her.

Her mouth parts open, eyes bugging out of her head.

"It fits," She murmurs incredulously, more to herself than me.

But I can't help but chuckle. "Yeah, it does. But your pussy is so fucking tight. I might have to stay here all night to break it in a little bit," I grunt.

Her face breaks out into a grin. "Make me come, and we shall see."

Now it's my turn for my eyes to bug out. Shocked at her sudden demand. But so be it. My Freya wants to come? Well, then. Make that three more times. Her hands that were roaming me are slammed down to the bed pinning her in place, as I pick up the pace. Her face contorts in euphoria, and her moans become louder. Especially when my fingers meet her throbbing clit. I can tell she's about to come, but I want to come with her. I pull out of her completely, and her eyes open again. She starts to protest before I flip her over, forcing her ass into the air.

I'll be taking that one of these days. But we have a lifetime for that.

I grip the base of my cock, guiding myself to her pussy.

“Soren, please. I want your cock in me.” She begs face half buried in the pillows, muffling the sound of her beautiful mewling.

I grin. I love the sound of her begging.

“Such a naughty girl,” I tut at her, then bury myself in her again.

She lets out a loud moan, and her hands grip the pillow, knuckles turning white as I thrust into her harder than I was before.

Maybe I can let out a little of my dark side. My left hand comes down on her ass cheek with a loud crack. Her body jolts at my touch, but her mouth falls open into another moan.

Her hips push back into mine; as if she’s begging for it again.

“You want more, my pretty little slut? I’ll give you more.”

*Pop.*

She starts to fall into rhythm with me, her ass coming back to meet my thrusts, burying myself deeper inside her. As if that was even physically possible.

Her moans start to grow louder, and I know she’s close.

I lean over, my chest pressed against her back, caging her to the bed. One hand making its way between her legs to bring her to orgasm.

And I’m following close behind her.

She quite literally stops breathing for a moment, forcing me to stop.

“Fre—”

“Don’t stop!” She cries out.

I chuckle, picking it back up again. Her breaths become sharp and quick, then she lets out a scream.

The sound vibrates through my bones, drawing a tightness in my balls. Her cunt squeezing the cum out of me. I groan over top of her. I collapse to my elbows over her, careful not to lay directly on her and crush her. We both breathe heavily, just enjoying each other’s presence.

“Ready for round two?” She asks as I pull out of her, watching my cum drip from her swollen pussy. A huge grin spread across her face; I know this woman was made for me. There is a god out there because I met her. I married her, well, I was forced to marry her. But she’s mine. Until death parts us.





image-placeholder

The next morning, I stir, sensing someone watching me, causing unease in the pit of my stomach. It's Freya. She watches me as I sleep, and she flinches when I open my eyes. I let out a low chuckle.

“You know pictures last longer, right?”

I close my eyes again, and I can see the wheels in her head turning.

“I like living in the moment.”

I give her a small smile and pull her closer to my chest — our naked limbs entangling each other. She lets out a content sigh and rests her head under my chin. I have absolutely no intention of letting her go, but my fucking phone won't stop ringing.

“You answer it. I'll go get started on breakfast.” She says as she peels herself away from me, slipping on her black lace thong on, along with the shirt I was wearing last night.

My god, I don't want to let her out of my sight. Breathtaking is an understatement. She's heaven on legs. And she's *mine*.

I roll over when my phone rings again for the fifth time. Freya slips out of the room, and the clatter of pots and pans erupts in the other room.

This had better be serious. Or I'm going to kill the motherfucker for bothering me. I gave specific instructions for no calls.

“What?” I snap into the phone; I’ve lost complete patience with the person on the other end.

“Soren, how’s your honeymoon going?” Sinner’s sadistic smile can be heard through the voice.

*Fucking Sinner.*

“Why are you calling me?” I growl, looking towards the door where the smell of bacon cooking wafts into the bedroom.

“Why so grumpy? I’m calling with good news! The offer on the facility was accepted, and construction on your home in Colorado will be done in two weeks. So hopefully you’ll be planning to stay in Bali for that long.”

“Alright. Is that all, you fucking asshole?” I grunt.

“That’s all. Hey, I’ll be out of town when you make it to Colorado, so don’t call me.”

I end the phone call there and swing my legs over the bed. I want to be with Freya. I leave my phone in the bedroom, ringer off. I refuse to be disturbed again, but the lawyer’s life is spared. It was important to hear about my offer being accepted.

I slip on my boxers and trek into the kitchen. Freya is licking batter off her thumb, and she peeks up at me as I make my presence known.

“Hi,” She whispers. Her voice is small and shy.

“Hi,” I reply, giving her a small smile. Pride surges, remembering my cum is still spilling down her thighs.

“What was the call about?” Freya asks, limping through the kitchen.

My chest seizes. “Are you okay?” I completely ignore her question because her well-being is now more important than telling her the contents of my conversation.

Her gorgeous green eyes widened at my brash question. “I’m okay. Why? Is something wrong?”

“You’re limping, Freya.” My voice trails off, “I hurt you.” I gather her up in my arms.

She giggles under me, “Soren, I’m okay, really. I feel excellent today.” She throws me a lazy grin, and I catch it.

Fuck, this woman is going to be the death of me. I can’t control myself around her or even think straight, for that matter. What the fuck is she doing to me?

“What was the call about?” Freya asks again, her attention pulled away from our embrace to the pancakes that are starting to burn. She curses under her breath as she flips them over. I don’t know why I’m nervous to tell her I’m moving us to Colorado. I don’t know how she’ll react.

“Well, I made a decision for us.” Her eyes snap to me, causing me to take a moment. “I’m relocating my business to Colorado and would like to move there. I’ve purchased a house already.”

“Oh, okay.” She sounds chipper like it’s not even a bother for her.

“Okay, as in, you’re okay with the move?”

She looks up at me, giving me her full attention, “Why wouldn’t I be? It’s just an adventure for us.” When she smiles at me, my heart flutters.

I don’t say anything but wrap her securely in my arms, scooping her up and carrying her away to the bedroom.

“Soren, the pancakes are going to burn!” She squeals, laughing as I plop her on the bed.

The woman is dangerous for me. She kills all rationality, and the only thing in the world that matters to me is her. I have to distance myself from her; if I don’t, I could risk getting hurt. But for now, I’ll enjoy myself.

*After the honeymoon*, I tell myself. It’ll be for the best.

## Part II





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## Chapter Seventeen

## Freya

Soren and I were honeymooning for two weeks, but we finally arrived back in the United States. As soon as we land, Serena calls, but I don't pick up. I'm still on cloud nine from our time together. Soren blindfolds me as we get into our Lambo.

I giggle. "Where are we going?"

I feel a grin growing on Soren's face as he leans in to tie my blindfold, his cheek brushing with mine. "We are in Denver but have some driving to do."

He kisses my lips, then leans back a little. "I think I might have to do this again when you're naked and tied down."

I press my thighs together, my body warming to the idea.

He places another kiss on my forehead before getting in on the other side, and we start our trek to wherever he's taking me.

At some point, I fall asleep but wake up to the feeling of the car stopping. Soren speaks with someone else as his fingers work on my blindfold's knot to untie it. It's sunset, and there

are mountains surrounding us. In front of us, there's an iron gate with the Astor insignia embellishing it.

I turned to Soren wide-eyed. "This gate is beautiful. Can we see the house, please?" I beg.

Soren's eyes darken, but he continues to drive on. We make it home, and it's my dream house. I scrambled out of the car and bound the steps through the front door. The smell of someone cooking radiates from the kitchen. I turn to face Soren and hug him.

"This house is so beautiful. I just love it so much," I gasp.

"I'm glad to hear it. Listen, darling, I have to go to dinner with Luca tonight. I won't be back until late tonight. A hairstylist is stopping by in about 40 minutes to do your hair as you requested. Enjoy the dinner the chef is preparing for you, and explore the house. I've deactivated your phone until I can get a new one for you. The only room you can not go in is my office, and it is locked. Also, do not leave the house." He turns and grabs a duffle bag sitting next to the door before walking back out. I couldn't even get a word in.

I frown, head spinning from the sudden coldness. I make my way to the kitchen, where a large island and a covered plate are sitting, a TV remote rests in front of it. Dread spikes down my spine as it all hits me at once. I don't have access to a phone, my husband immediately abandons me after our honeymoon, and I'm in a brand new home in a foreign state.

*Fucking great. Maybe tomorrow will be better.* I pick my plate up and make my way to the living room. I eat while

watching TV, the same way I would in Seattle, *lonely and sad*.

The hairstylist came at the time Soren had arranged. He's quiet and only seems interested in getting the job done. We decided on a rich chocolate color, something completely different that I'd never done. I can barely recognize the girl in the mirror when we are finished.

*Whether it's for better or worse, it's still to be decided.* I pour myself 3 fingers of cognac and return to my seat, bringing the bottle with me.

Now I understand why my mother is an alcoholic. If she was abandoned like this a lot in the later years of her marriage with kids, yeah, the bottle is sure to keep you company. At some point in the night, I fell asleep watching TV on the couch, bottle in hand.

Soren returns home and carries me to our bedroom, placing me in bed. He stops for a moment after bringing the blanket to my shoulders to play with my hair. He crawls into bed but even in my sleepy state, I notice that he doesn't attempt to hold or touch me.

## Chapter Eighteen

## Freya

**D**ay six, I wake to an empty bed with no note or anything from Soren again. It feels unreal.

*What happened to the honeymoon Soren?*

On the honeymoon, Soren and I discussed our ideal future in the haze of our post-sex bliss. He'd run his hand along my bare spine as I spoke about striving to be a bestselling author, and he told me he wanted to expand his company further overseas. Build it into an empire. We talked about our kinks; he has a thing for degradation, praise, pain play, and overstimulation. I don't know what I like. Everything he's done has been world-shattering, so I want to keep it as it is. Before Tristan, I would have never liked any of this, but now, I can't get enough of it. I probably should see a therapist.

We spoke about children. However, it was a short conversation. We agreed not until we are in love if that ever even happens. Truly, I should've told him about Luca's threat, yet I hesitated. Fear held me back. Not fear for myself, but fear for my future children. I couldn't put my kids through the same things I've been through. Hell, I'm sure Soren would

agree. Regardless, I expected us to be different from our parents. Yet, I am looking for Soren, who has shut me out since he dropped me off in our new home.

I've opened and closed every door of the house, searching for him. I know he's here. The cars he had brought here are in the garages. Soren has a collection of vehicles, from a Bugatti to an Audi and everything in between. *What the fuck does one guy need with all these cars?*

We have three other bedrooms, four bathrooms, a library complete with a desk and computer for me, a movie theater, an in-home gym, a four-seasons glass patio, and the final door is locked. I turn the knob again, putting more weight on the door. I knock, hoping to see Soren's face. I hear a shuffle of papers, but no one opens the door. I'm tempted to call out to him, yet I won't. If he doesn't want to speak to me, then why should I even bother putting in the effort for us? I shouldn't want someone who clearly doesn't want me. The problem is, I thought he did. I knock again, but silence follows.

*He's being a fucking dick.*

I go to my library and stare at the setup Soren already has for me. The latest technology money could buy, and a fairly large desk. It's otherwise rather empty. I sit in the desk chair and open up a blank document, hoping I can dredge up something to write about. Finally, inspiration strikes me. The words flow from me until I'm left glowing. I smile as I write, finding myself lost in the scene. At least these characters will be able to keep me company while my husband is MIA.

It's dark outside when I look up again from my screen. The smell of dinner wafting into the library, but I'm not ready to leave yet. I opened Amazon, buying every book I thought would look good to fill my library. Buying every piece of decoration I liked, even buying an expensive record player along with records to fill my little room with life. Bring it upon myself to find happiness in fictional characters and material items. Soren is going to have a heyday seeing that credit card bill. But he probably won't even care, unfortunately.

It's incredible that despite not seeing Soren for so long, my body and mind still crave his presence. It's been lonely being cooped up in this house in a new place without him. When I signed up for this, I imagined he'd always be around or show his face occasionally. I guess I'm just confused by his sudden withdrawal from me since we had gotten so much closer during the honeymoon. Was it all fake? It's beginning to feel like I'm just a pussy to fuck, and not a human with feelings. Fine. If that's how he wants it. What fucking difference does it make at this point?

The sound of someone working in the kitchen draws me out of my cave, and I make my way down the hall to just have someone to talk to. When I enter the kitchen, she looks up with a startled face.

"Dios Mio. You scared me." The woman clutches her chest, breathing a little heavier.

“I’m so sorry. I was just coming to say hi and thank you for dinner last night. It was fantastic.” I smile.

“It’s my pleasure, Mrs. Astor. It pleases me to hear that you liked it so much. I wanted to discuss your food preferences, allergies, and such.” She continues to flow through the kitchen with grace.

I watch in awe, realizing I don’t know her name. “What’s your name?” I ask.

“Luciana, but you can call me Luci.” She smiles, wrinkles creasing at the corner of her eyes.

“Luciana, I love that name. And please call me Freya. It makes me feel old when someone says, ‘Mrs. Astor.’” I chuckle.

“Not a problem, Freya.” She keeps her sentences short, but there’s a wisdom behind her almost black eyes that captivates me.

She finishes and sets down two plates. One for me, one for Soren.

*He’s going to have dinner with me finally?*

A moment later, a tall figure glides past me towards the dining room, sitting at the head of the ridiculously long table. Luci places a plate on either side, but I grab mine and sit next to Soren. He glances at me, examining my figure for a moment before turning back to his plate. I feel pathetic. He’s been pushing me away all week, yet I want to stay by his side. I was

hoping I'd be madder than this, but I think I'm just grateful to see him after all this time.

Luci turns around, startled that I have moved to be closer to him but continues bringing us silverware and glasses of water, then turns and leaves the room. Silence fills the house, and Soren barely acknowledges my presence.

I clear my throat, attempting to break the ice, "How did your dinner with your dad go?" I ask meekly.

He continues to stare down at his plate. "Fine."

I sit back in my chair, unsure of what's causing him to react so coldly. I attempted again.

"Do you want to watch a movie tonight? The basement has a nice projector an-"

"No."

I'm cut off again. I look down, utterly humiliated for falling for a man who treats me like this. Perhaps he had a rough day at work today. But fuck him. Even if he has been having a bad day or week, he has no reason to take it out on me. I take a few bites of my dinner before pushing my chair back and making my way to the bedroom. I reach the end of the bed and yawn. A bath sounds nice right about now. I start the water in our large bathtub, adding a bath bomb, oils, and salts. I begin to undress before I realize that I'm not alone anymore. I continue what I am doing before submerging myself in hot water.

"What happened to you?" I call out to the shadow looming in the darkness of the bedroom.

“Nothing. It’s just been a very tiring day,” Soren mutters, stepping into the bathroom’s light and leaning against the counter while watching me.

“How so?” I try to coax him into a conversation.

“It’s complicated, Freya.” Silence falls between the two of us as he lets his response marinate. “I like the color you dyed your hair. It keeps you more hidden in comparison to your blonde.”

“More hidden?” My face scrunches up in confusion.

“It keeps people from turning to look at you,” He deadpans.

Well, then. Maybe I’ll have to dye it back blonde to capture his attention again.

A buzz erupts from his pocket, and he pulls out his phone to look at the caller. Soren sighs and comes closer to the tub. His eyebrows are furrowed together. “How the fuck did that annoying bodyguard find my number?”

Ignoring the way his comment started to make my blood boil, I looked to Soren for confirmation, “Abe?” When he offers a small nod, concern ties knots in the pit of my stomach.

“Freya! Are you okay? Why haven’t you answered my calls or your sister’s?” Abe booms over the phone so loud I have to hold the phone back from my ear.

“Abe, things have changed since we came home. I—I just haven’t had the time to talk.” I look at Soren as I hug my knees.

“You’re a fucking liar, Freya. Where are you?” Serena’s voice sounds strained. Soren shuffles next to me, beginning to get impatient with our phone call.

“Serena, I’m fine. There’s no need to come to me. Soren and I have just been getting to know each other. It’s as simple as that.” I try to soothe her, but I know it’s not working. She knows I’m lying.

“You and Soren have been getting to know each other? That’s why you haven’t given Abe or me the time of day to talk. Freya, where the fuck are you? Why aren’t you telling me that? At the very least, you can just tell me where the fuck you are.” Serena starts to turn hysterical, and Soren shuffles on his feet like he’s growing impatient. He knows they can track phone calls.

“Serena,” I look up at Soren, deciding whether or not I should tell her where I am. “I can’t disclose our location. It’s for both of our sake. Please.” My subconscious tells me that it’s because of Luca. But I know Soren is hiding something darker than that. I know he’s hiding me away for other reasons besides his own father.

“I’m done. I’ve tried so hard to get a hold of you, and I don’t even recognize you. I’m going to fucking find you.” Serena seethes through the phone.

“I’m—” I don’t get to finish my sentence before it’s cut off by the phone call beeps.

I stare at the screen for a moment, then hold the phone out for Soren to take. I miss my sister. I miss being able to share

everything with her. I miss our shopping sprees. I just miss everything about her.

Soren looks at me with a pained face, like he's upset with my emotions.

I start to cry, hoping that, in some way, I will be able to pacify myself. That I will be able to do this on my own. Soren knows how close Serena and I are, yet it feels like he's isolating me from her.

“Darling, I know this is killing you, and I know you miss your sister. I wish I had told you about this place before the honeymoon, but you can't disclose our location over the phone. We never know who is listening in on us. Please trust me. It is for your safety.” Soren's hand comes out to stroke my hair.

I jerk away from his touch. “What the fuck are you not telling me, Soren? What the fuck are you trying so goddamn hard to hide?” I demand, becoming increasingly irate before continuing, “I should have fucking known you'd isolate me from the rest of the world. I should have fucking known you'd isolate me from my sister. I just hope that whatever the fuck you are hiding is so important. You're sacrificing your wife's sanity for it.” I pant.

I stand abruptly, getting out, splashing water over him, and reaching for my towel. As I walk away, Soren reaches out and grips my wrist.

“Don't you dare walk away from me,” Soren hisses.

“Let. Me. Go. Don’t ever, I mean ever touch me like that again,” I seethe, yanking my arm free from his grip. “Soren, let me make myself perfectly clear. You can’t just fucking talk to me in small sentences, expect me to be at your beck and call, and be okay with this whole situation. You can go fuck yourself.” I spit out at him. His eyes darken, jaw tensing as I yell at him.

“Let *me* make *myself* perfectly fucking clear. If I don’t tell you something *intentionally*, there is a fucking reason for it. Besides, you haven’t told me who the fuck Tristan is.” He begins to stalk closer to me, getting madder and madder.

I match each of his steps, backing up, before completely turning around when I know he won’t try to grab me again. Deep down, it reminds me too much of what Tristan did to me, but I try not to focus on it. We are both just frustrated at the situation. I reach the closet, and he sits on the bench in the middle of the large room. I drop the towel in the middle of the floor, then go to my lingerie chest, pulling out a black lace thong. I hear Soren suck in a deep breath as he watches me.

“So, when are you going to tell me who Tristan is? I think you at least owe me that.” He sounds smug and arrogant.

*Who the fuck does he think he is to think I owe him a single thing?*

I know I can’t run away from it forever. But my story with Tristan has nothing to do with what he’s hiding. This is where the rubber is going to meet the road. If I don’t tell him, then

where are we going to be in a week from now? Fighting again?

“Uh, well, I don’t really know where to start.” I sputter, trying to figure out how to cushion how our relationship was.

“The beginning, and don’t fucking hold back, Freya. I want to know every detail.”

I gulp and look down, suddenly self-conscious that I would retell this story naked. I start to get dressed, and Soren waits patiently.

“We started dating my freshman year of college after we met at a frat party. He was in his first year of medical school. Our relationship started perfectly. He was compassionate and showed me how to love myself for the first time in my life.”

I notice Soren holding a breath as I start to bare my soul to him. He nods in encouragement.

“It was about six months into our relationship when it started to change. His behavior, I mean. It started small, nothing in the grand scheme of things. Just emotional and mental abuse. Breaking me down even further when I told him I wasn’t sure I was on the right path in life. He convinced me to move in with him and take a break from school. The same night I agreed to move in with him, he took my virginity.... That was the first time he forced himself onto me. The only time I’ve ever had consensual sex was with you.” I took a shaky breath, eyeing him for a reaction, before continuing. “Every single time he raped me, it would get rougher and rougher, to the point where it was physically too painful for

me. He wouldn't come home until very late at night most nights. He started drinking heavily and started using cocaine. When he was high, he became violent. So there were many nights where he physically abused me.”

Soren starts to vibrate with anger, his hands clenched into fists, knuckles turning white. I continued; he wanted to know what happened, then he would hear every horrendous part of it.

“He would throw me down the stairs, give me black eyes, break my fingers, none of which you'll find in my medical records because he was in medical school. He was able to put me back to normal and continue using and abusing me. No one knew what was happening in that little townhouse of horrors because I never went outside, even before the abuse started. I was just an object, a plaything for him to use when he pleased. He'd offer up my pussy for a night to pay off his drug dealer. He forced me to sleep with his coworkers while he watched when he lost stupid bets, ” I trail off.

Soren starts to speak, but I raise a hand to stop him. He stops immediately.

I take a deep breath. “I lived through this for nearly three years.”

That knocks the wind out of Soren as he looks at me with vengeful eyes.

“Those years taught me a lot about myself. They taught me about the strength I have inside me and the fight too.” I pause for a moment, “I suppose it also taught me how much pent-up

rage I have in me. I want nothing more than to see him dead, but I want to be the one to do it. It'd be poetic justice if I was his reckoning, you know?" I give him a crooked, sad smile. "Serena found me after I had been roughly fucked, and left for whatever life would bring me next. She helped me into my apartment in Seattle and did her best to help cover up my past life. My parents took no action, but Serena says she still can't find him."

That gets his attention, and he leans forward. "What's his last name?"

I look to the side, deciding if I want to tell him. Soren *will* find Tristan. That's the difference between Serena's investigations and his.

I look back at him with sad eyes. "Bristol."

I *know* I've sentenced him to death.

Soren sits back and crosses his arms over his muscular chest. We just stare at each other, the trauma I've had to dredge up is suffocating me, and he knows it.

"Why didn't you leave him?" Soren's question comes out slowly like he's afraid to ask the question.

Tears well up in my eyes as I recall the first time I tried. How scared I was.

"I did. I attempted once and successfully escaped on the second try. The first time, Tristan found me as I was packing the important things to me, and he knew I was trying to leave then. I suspect it was the security guy he had hired who called

him saying there was more movement in the home than normal. It wasn't as simple as getting up and walking out of the door, Soren. I had too many eyes on me, and no one to turn to for help.”

“Your sister or family would've helped you.”

I shake my head, “No, she couldn't the first time. The first time—” I sigh, “The first time I tried to leave I was planning to escape on foot since I couldn't get a hold of her. I, later on, found out that it was because she had been put into rehab due to alcoholism. She was going down a dark path in her early college years. The second time though, she did help. Her and Abe were the ones who found me. Tristan left me chained to our bed when he was called in for an emergency at work.”

Soren stays quiet as he processes all the information I've given him. Pieces of my traumatic past that I can't seem to move past.

“What's your favorite color?” I ask softly.

I so desperately want to move past this conversation I dredge up the most boring question.

Soren's face changes, almost taken aback by my question. “Black. Yours?”

“Mine too.” I smile softly and sadly.

Then Soren asks the following question I wasn't prepared for. “Why didn't you turn him in?”

My eyes flicker up to the chandelier. “I was afraid of what would happen if I did. I was afraid of the retaliation from him,

his family, and what the cops would uncover about my family. I doubt any normal cop would do anything. They rarely do anything for cases like mine,” I say simply.

“What do you mean you were afraid of the retaliation of your family?” Soren sits forward, his elbows resting on his knees.

I shift on my feet. “I was disowned when I moved away. I was told I’d never see them again, nor would I have a part in my family’s company again. While I was going through what I was going through with Tristan, I did manage to call my parents to come to get me only one time. It fell on deaf ears. I never heard from my parents in those five years. That was until my mother showed up one day after I tried moving on, building a new life for myself, and she told me I couldn’t run even if I tried. She said the incident with Tristan was a life lesson to never turn your back on family because family is all that I had. All I would ever have. The first time I’ve seen them in years was at the party where I met you.”

Soren’s mouth is firmly lined, his eyes raging with revenge. He doesn’t ask another question. He knows I’ve hit my limit about answering questions about Tristan. I let out a shaky breath and try to hold back the panic attack that’s setting in. The tears threatened to spill over my red cheeks. He has no idea how much those three years haunt me. *Daily*.

Soren notices and leans forward, dragging me to his chest. He sits with me on his lap and gently strokes my hair.

“Freya, let it all out,” He whispers.

And I do. I let out my emotions and sob into his shoulder until I could hardly breathe anymore. Soren carries me into the bedroom and me into bed before climbing into his side, and while he doesn't cuddle me, he does keep a hand on my side.

"I'm sorry I grabbed you," He whispers into the dark.

"Soren, please don't ever do it again."

"I won't, I promise."

I fall asleep, lost to another nightmare.

*"You stupid whore! Do you think you'll ever amount to anything? I am the reason you are where you are. And you dare to leave me? You can never leave me. I own you for the rest of your life." Tristan screams in my face, gripping my hair so hard, I swear he's ripping the hair out of my scalp.*

The moment I was attempting to leave Tristan. The first time.

*"Tristan, let go of me!" I cry out, my hands clawing at his wrists to ease the ache in the back of my head.*

*"Oh, does this hurt?" He mocks my tears, but his grip tightens. He's lifting me at this point, dragging me to the stairs. "Let me show you how much you've hurt me." He growls menacingly.*

*My scalp gets relief for a moment until his foot connects with my abdomen, and I'm kicked down the stairs.*

*"Tristan! No!" I scream out, throwing my arms out in hopes of catching something that will stop my bruising descent down*

*the stairs. I come up empty-handed. With each stair I hit, another bruise forms, and I just wish for death at this point. Fuck, I might've even broken my arm.*

*"You deserve every bruise and broken bone, you fucking dumb whore. It's how I feel on the inside. So think long and hard about that." Tristan says, gripping the back of my head again, lifting me.*

*I'm so weak it hurts to breathe.*

*"Just kill me." I cry.*

*"Kill you? Do you think you'll get it that easy? No. You will suffer because if I'm suffering, you are too. Do I need to remind you of what you just told me?" He lands a blow on my face.*

*Blood smears his knuckles, and I give up. The pain was so unbearable. I hope some God will take mercy and just kill me. And the lights go out the moment his fist connects with my temple.*

*If only I were so lucky to be able to die so early on.*

## Chapter Nineteen

## Soren

“F<sup>reya.</sup>”  
“Freya.”

“Freya, darling, wake up.” I shake her awake.

Her cheeks are wet and flushed. Her breath ragged like she’s been running a marathon. Freya’s eyes fly open, and she starts wailing.

Her restless sleep is startling to me. She looks scared. I can’t tell if she’s afraid of me or of whatever dream it was.

*Has this happened during the nights I was gone?*

Guilt consumes me, as I start to regret leaving her alone for the past week. I tried hard to distance myself, but I can’t do it anymore. We can’t be separated like that anymore. It was as hard on me as much as it was on her.

“Freya, baby, it’s okay. You’re okay. I’m here. You’re safe with me,” I whisper words of affirmation, cradling her to my chest.

She fights me at first, as if the dream she was in still dances across her eyes, but relaxes as this reality sets in for her. The overwhelming instinct to protect her is taking over, and I can't suppress it anymore. I wish I could rip her memories of Tristan away, to only leave her with memories of us. We might not have too many of them now, but I'll make sure we create plenty.

But before I give her the life she deserves, Tristan Bristol will die. If not by her hands, then by mine. I can't even fathom how much she suffered at his hands if it left her this brittle.

I press kisses into the side of her head as she comes back to this reality. Her body relaxes slowly as I run my hands along her side, hoping to instill some comfort. She pats my chest and pulls herself out of my arms. A part of me wants to keep her velcroed to me, but I don't want to push her too far today. She's already had a rough morning. Besides, I did this to myself. I was the only one who drove a wedge between us; it'll be *my* job to get it back out.

Freya sits on the edge of the bed as I stand to take a shower and get ready for the day. I hope she will follow me there and seek solace in my arms. In reality, she won't. I've destroyed the trust we built when I left her alone for all that time. I just needed time to figure myself out. I don't know what there was to figure out because the only answer I found was that we belong together. We work better together. When she's around, my mind is... calm?

I turn the shower off and step out. She flutters through the room, stopping to watch as I dry myself off. Freya catches me staring back at her and moves out of view again. I walk into the bedroom to find her sitting on the bench at the end of the bed, her head hanging low, as I start to dress.

“Do you want to talk about it?” I ask softly.

I hope she says yes, because only then will I understand how deeply rooted her traumas run.

“No. Please don’t make me talk about it. I’m just trying to forget about it,” She responds, her breath ragged as I slip a black t-shirt over my head.

I choose not to respond because the only thing on my mind is finding that motherfucker and bringing him to his knees. After I’m dressed, I head towards the door. She stands quickly and clutches my arm.

“Where are you going?” She sounds panicked.

I turn my body towards her. Remorse for my actions eats at me again as she stands there looking even more small and fragile than she usually does. Her eyes cast downwards as I gaze at her. She keeps hold of my arm like it’s a security blanket.

“I’m going to make a cup of coffee. I thought maybe we could go out and spend the day together. I felt bad leaving you here alone all week.” That last part slips out before I can stop it.

She looks at me, and how her eyes light up makes my heart drop. I would do *anything* for this woman; that much is certain. She nods vigorously and moves to the closet to prepare for the day.

I lay back down in bed, watching her move across the room. I might've fucked up worse than I thought. She seems like she's slipped into a bad headspace during my absence. I should not have tried to back away from her like I did. Freya needs me just as much as I need her.

*Is she falling in love with me too?*

We slip into the car and make our way to the little downtown area of our new home.

“So, where are we exactly?” Freya asks as she takes in the striking scenery of the mountains surrounding us.

“Crested Butte, Colorado,” I responded, glancing over at her.

She's clenching her thighs together, forcing me to look away. I can't give in to her completely. I need to hold myself back from her still.

We park along the main street and start walking. She looks at my hand as we pass by antique stores and boutiques. I walk a little closer to her and grab her hand; perhaps this is what she's been wanting. Just a little contact. We entered one boutique with a dress that caught her eye in the window. She's shuffling along the racks of clothing while I loom over her. Another tall man, and a shorter girl, seem to be disguising

themselves. I watch him closely, trying to place where I've seen him before. They quickly leave the store when they realize I am also watching them. My attention is brought back to Freya, who has been talking to me the whole time, but I didn't hear a word she said.

*Where the fuck have I seen him before?*

A part of me wishes we hadn't gone shopping, but it's been soothing for her to get out of the house. I suppose it wasn't that bad.

"Thank you for taking me out to see the town, Soren," Freya says as we pull into the driveway. She looks at me with a soft smile on her face.

I have to grip the steering wheel much harder so I don't lean over and kiss her right here.

"You're welcome." I get out quickly and move to her side to open her door.

There's a pile of boxes towering over the front door. Freya's eyes widen, as well as mine.

Freya's hands knot in front of her as she peeks up at me. "I didn't realize everything would arrive at once."

"Did you do a little retail therapy?" I chuckle, watching her rush to the front door.

Her eyes are lit up like a kid on Christmas. She nods, and a mischievous grin is on her face. She can spend a million dollars, and I wouldn't even bat an eye. She deserves everything and anything.

I put my hand on one of the many boxes, not allowing her to lift them. She doesn't need to hurt herself.

"Leave it. I'll have someone bring them in. What did you buy anyway?" I ask, motioning at the security guard to carry these in. I mumble to him about where to leave them as we cross the threshold of our house.

"Books, records, movies, decorations. I wanted to breathe life into the house, fill it in with more character." Freya's voice trails off as she finishes her sentence.

She has changed a lot since we moved here. She's become meeker around me, almost desperate for my attention. It was cruel of me to drop her off in a foreign place and not speak with her. Perhaps I can get closer, but only when I find Tristan. Until then, my focus has to be on that.

## Chapter Twenty

## Freya

The library juts out from the rest of the house and is half glass, with paneled glass lining the wall, even replacing some of the ceiling. My long, white oak desk is on one side of the room, and the other has an armchair with an ottoman at the end nestled amongst my bookshelves. Along the glass wall is a shorter shelf that stretches with a record player and a small collection of records.

It's my favorite room in the house.

"I left it empty intentionally. I wanted you to have a little bit of paradise. I have one bookcase that's mine for my collection, but the rest is yours." Soren gestures to the shelving unit lined neatly with books. He looks down at me as I stand in the library, intimidated by the stack of boxes.

Soren separates them and takes a step back as I open them. He sits at the desk, watching as I breathe life into the room. I make my way around and still have *plenty* of room to fill with more books. I think three large shelving units filled with books are fine for now. I stand back admiring my work when there's a knock at the front door.

Soren sits up, immediately on alert. His hands gripping the arms of the chair when there's another knock on the door—more vigorous this time. Soren stands and makes his way to the door, he holds his arm back, signaling for me to wait, and I do, but I can't help but wonder who would be knocking so much.

With the third knock, Soren opens the door. I peek around the corner when I see Abe's arm, and I go barreling toward Serena as she stands in shock, pushing past Soren. We whisper to each other, saying we've missed each other when Abe moves to hug us as well.

“Don't touch her,” Soren says through gritted teeth.

Abe doesn't approach me, keeping his feet planted where he is, staring down Soren. Serena moves to Abe in an attempt to calm him down. Soren uses the opportunity to pull me back to him, hiding me behind him as though we are greeting some bad guys.

“Well, I just wanted to come to make sure you were okay. I just had to know you weren't going through another Tristan situation.”

Soren visibly stiffens and stands taller at the mention of Tristan. I can see a flash of intimidation cross Serena's face as she takes in how much taller he is than her.

She steps closer to him and almost whispers, “Because if I find out you have laid a single finger on her, Soren, I'll come back and cut your cock off and make you fucking choke on it.”

He stares at her for a moment before breaking out into a chuckle. He agrees, relenting, and inviting them in. Soren opens the door further, revealing our home to the couple.

Serena's jaw drops as she takes everything in.

"Freya, this home is something out of your dreams," She says breathily.

"Yeah, kinda crazy, huh?" I shrug, unsure of what to say.

Soren claims he bought the house before he found out we were to be wed, but the place has several elements that are straight from my Pinterest board, like my library. But I don't want to focus on that. My little sister is here in my home. I don't know how to act. I stand awkwardly in the living room with my hands twisted in front of me.

Soren puts himself between me and the others. He keeps a close eye on me the whole time while also keeping an eye on them. It's like he's calculating to ensure Abe doesn't make a move he doesn't like.

Luci appears from the kitchen. "Mr. Astor, will the guests be staying for dinner?"

"Yes. Freya's sister and... the bodyguard are in town," Soren responds coolly, not even looking at her.

Abe scowls at the name he's been given.

I turned my attention to Serena. "What did you do to the guard outside?" I ask.

Soren looks back to me, then to them, wanting to know the same answer.

“He’s not dead. He’s just asleep,” Abe answers casually.

I roll my eyes. “You could have said you were coming. How the hell did you find where I was anyway?”

“Freya, you wouldn’t even call me. Did you not think I would come looking for you? Besides, when we finally did get a hold of you, there were people to track your location, but we only got the town you were in. We saw you in a shop with Soren and then followed you. I got your address from your license plate,” Serena explains arms are crossed over her chest.

She’s pissy right now, but not as bad as Soren is after learning his shit isn’t as locked down as he was hoping. Thankfully the tension is broken with the announcement of dinner being served. Soren drags me by the elbow into the dining room and sits at the head of the table after pulling out a chair for me to sit next to him, on his right.. Serena and Abe sit across from me.

“You remember dad’s birthday is in like two weeks, right?” Serena questions over the dinner Luci had served us.

I swallow hard. I’ve been trying to avoid this subject for a while. Soren stills to my right.

“Yeah. I know. I’m not sure if I’ll be there,” I say, almost whispering.

“What do you mean? You have to be there. It’s his 50th birthday.” Serena gapes at me.

“I know, Serena. It’s just—”

“We will rearrange *our* schedules to be there.” Soren cuts me off, putting his hand on my leg, trying to calm me.

More like he will rearrange his schedule, but that’s beside the point.

Serena sits back in her chair, satisfied with that answer. Silence falls over us as we eat our dinner. Soren carefully watches Abe while Abe pins Soren with a harsh stare. It’s like they’re having a dick-measuring contest.

I clear my throat, reaching for my wine after I finish my plate. “So, when are you guys leaving?”

“We are leaving tomorrow morning. We just had to find you and make sure you were okay,” Abe replies, drinking his wine.

I nod. “So I won’t be seeing you guys tomorrow?”

Abe shakes his head but doesn’t say anything else.

Serena frowns and tosses her glare at Abe, who is utterly immune to it at this point. I excuse myself to the bathroom.

The bathroom door swings open and shuts again quickly, causing me to jump out of my skin. I must’ve forgotten to lock it.

“Jesus Christ, I thought they were going to pull their dicks and rulers out,” Serena mutters, leaning against the locked door.

I giggle, “I did too.”

“Freya, are you okay? Like actually okay?” Serena asks me with scrutinizing eyes.

“I promise, I am okay.” I look at my smile in the mirror and then back at her.

“Why didn’t you have a phone, and why were you so fucking weird over the phone?”

“Soren said he needed to get me a new one for safety reasons. He’s just being paranoid, I guess. When you called, I was in the bath, and Soren was standing there while I was on the phone,” I explain, “It’s just been... different. Like he’s constantly on the defensive to protect some sort of secret he keeps. I mean, today was the most I have seen him in a week. A week, Serena! I went a week without even seeing him. He wouldn’t even join me in bed most nights. And then last night, he magically reappeared, then made me spill my guts about Tristan, so now he knows about that,” I vent.

“Wait, wait, wait. He didn’t know about Tristan until last night?” She holds her hands up, trying to slow me down and reverse.

“No. There just wasn’t a good time to tell him.” I adjusted my ring thoughtfully.

“Did you tell him his last name?” Serena stares.

“Yes. And it feels like I told Soren to just kill him.”

Serena’s eyes widened. “Freya, you know what that means, right? That means he’s gonna find the motherfucker. I hope he

cuts his dick off and makes him choke on it.” She sounds giddy over the torture of Tristan.

*Her and her obsession with cutting a guy’s dick off and making him choke on it.*

“I’m sorry, Freya. I don’t think you realize how much you and I want him to suffer for everything he did to you.”

“Yeah, I know, Serena. I want to see him suffer too,” I whisper, hugging her in the middle of the bathroom.

We walk out together and find Soren and Abe in the foyer.

“Freya, take care of yourself.” Abe nods to me, grabbing Serena’s hand.

“I will, Abe. You take care of yourself and Serena.”

Serena hugs me once again and whispers her goodbyes in my ear. They turn to leave the house, leaving Soren and I alone again.

“Could you tell me about you and Abe’s relationship?”

“What? Are you jealous?” I smirk at him.

*This dumbass is jealous.*

“It depends. Why is he so important to you? You’ve alluded to him saving your life several times, but never really went into detail,” Soren explains as he guides us to the living room.

“Why am I the one to always spill my guts, but you never tell me anything about you?”

Soren lets out a breathy laugh. “I mean we can go back and forth on this, eventually one of us will have to crack. I’ll tell

you my story soon. I promise.”

He holds out his pinky finger with a smirk. I stare at the ring on his hand for a moment, before leaning over and taking his pinky in mine.

I clear my throat. “As you know, Abe was hired on as Serena’s bodyguard, because she was on a destructive path. But he found me the night I was dying.” Soren’s face darkens, not realizing how deep this gets. “He wouldn’t let Serena into the bedroom where I was because of bad it was. He stayed with me for the first three months after moving into my apartment in Seattle. He showed me that there are kind men in the world. After growing up with my father, then Tristan, I was conditioned for a while to believe men were horrible. I’m not going to get into any more detail than that. I was fucked up after, and Serena was a fucking mess still, so Abe pulled us both out of a dark hole.”

Soren’s lips are pressed together. “Thank you.”

“Still jealous?” I tease him.

“No. I feel like I have to thank him more than anything else now. I appreciate you making me feel like an ass towards him,” Soren mutters.

“Anytime,” I beam up at him.

Soren chuckles as he presses a kiss to my forehead before retreating to his office. I stand shortly after and trudge to the bedroom. Curling up the cold sheets, I wished Soren was here to warm me. Keep me company and keep my demons at bay.

Alone, again, I drift off.

*The beginning of the night had been exactly like how I'd want a date to go, the kind of date you dreamed of when you were young and in love. He brought home flowers for me, surprising me with an impromptu dinner and movie date. He was sweet, tentative. If only I was still in love with him.*

*To anyone looking from the outside in, he was the devoted, doting, picture-perfect boyfriend, the one girls prayed to have. But everyone conveniently missed the bruises lining my neck, lingering on my skin from the night before when he had me pressed up against the wall all because I had sighed. They miss how I choke on almost every little bite I take because my neck is too sore, they miss the way he's watching my every move, eyes glued, just daring me to step out of place.*

*They miss that this date is an apology for last night. Sort of.*

*It's the same vicious cycle over and over, and yet. Yet, I find myself staying. I can't find it in myself to return back to home. I don't love him, but there's nowhere else to go. Not like I have any way of contacting my family. Tristan hasn't given me a phone, or a car, and keeps 24-hour surveillance on our townhouse at all times.*

*Tristan's arm is wrapped around my waist like a vice grip as we navigate out of the theater. A group of teenage boys hang around the exit as they snicker and look around, ogling at the girls walking by. When we make it to the car, he opens the door for me, and the fingers on my waist dig in hard as he*

*shoves me into the passenger seat. The door slams shut just as my foot enters the car.*

*I could've screamed. I could've asked for help. I could've... I could've. But I didn't.*

*Tristan climbs into the driver's side and slams his door shut as well. His jaw is tight as he stares at the building in front of us.*

*I gnaw on the inside of my cheek, wondering if I did something wrong to upset him. Did I accidentally step on his toe? Did I speak to someone when I wasn't supposed to? Or perhaps it was the group of boys staring at my bare legs in this skirt. I wore it because he asked me to. Told me it'd be easier access later.*

*"Do you know what you did, Freya?" Each word comes out clipped.*

*"Yes," I answer by keeping my eyes on my lap.*

*"What did you do?" Tristan is challenging me.*

*"I wore a skirt that drew attention," I whisper.*

*His knuckles tighten on the steering wheel, turning white. "That's right. You wore a skirt that makes you look like a whore. I don't need anyone knowing I'm dating a whore, and I especially don't need anyone seeing any part of you."*

*"I'm sorry, Tristan."*

*"I'll just have to teach you a lesson to not be such a whore. Fuck your face up until you're grotesque. No one will want*

*you after I'm done with you."*

*"Please don't. I only-"*

*His hand snatches my hair and cracks my head against the glass in a lightning-fast reaction. Again and again. My head bounces off of the glass with each shove into it.*

*He lets go of my head, and specks of blood can be seen on the glass, windows fogged up now.*

*"Take off your skirt and clean the blood up."*

*I don't dare look at him, but I hesitate for a moment. His hand comes out to hit the side of my head.*

*"Do it! Now!" Tristan roars.*

*My hands shake as I unzip the skirt and remove it. I start wiping at the blood on the window and window sill of his car, trying to make it as good as new.*

*Tristan starts the car up when he's satisfied with my work.*

*"Keep that skirt on your wound. I'll stitch it when I'm done with you tonight. When we get home, I expect you to be on your knees at the foot of the bed completely naked within five minutes of arriving. Do you understand?" He is calm. So calm that I question if I got the Tristan from earlier in the night back. The version of him that is who I want. Not this monster.*

*"Yes, I understand." I whimper.*

*But luckily I'm ripped out of the dream before it can repeat.*

*I'm startled awake by the feeling of fingers brushing across my cheeks. I immediately fling myself to the headboard, and*

Soren's eyes darken at the fear in my eyes. I take him in as he stands with his hand out still, the other clutching a glass containing a dark liquor. He's shirtless, with his pants still on, slightly bent at the waist.

I gulp, my heart racing as I try to calm down from the nightmare that still runs rampant in my brain. His head cocks to the side, eyes narrowing, and the glass in his hand suddenly shatters. He stands to his full height as I yelp at the sudden noise. He mutters curses before storming out of the room, slamming the front door with a shake that startles the whole house.

## Chapter Twenty-One

## Soren

I storm out the front door and make my way into the woods off to the left of our house. I had a tunnel built out here to transport people in and out if necessary, and I'm glad it's already getting used.

Derek, my second in command, is waiting there with a man strapped to a hand cart, Hannibal Lector style, gagged, and with a bag over his head. He'd called earlier in the night informing me he had a gift for me. One that I didn't think we would get so quickly.

"You're gonna have to help me get him down here," Derek says as he grabs the bottom of the cart to start his descent down the stairs.

The room is simple. It's tiled with several drains and toolboxes lining one wall filled with my favorite toys. A chair sits in the middle of the room, with shackles on the arms and legs. My secret torture room.

Derek and I are coated in sweat when we reach the bottom of the stairs. At this point, he is squirming like a motherfucker, making it harder to carry him down. I'm half tempted to throw

him down the stairs like a sack of potatoes, but I can't risk him escaping. Not that he'd get anywhere anyway. Between myself and Derek, who is fucking massive, he wouldn't stand a chance.

Derek's dark eyes land on me, and there's a smile on his face. "Now this is a fucking torture room, boss!"

I lean against the wall, taking a moment to collect myself.

*Fuck, I need to start working out again.*

"You wanna see the ugly motherfucker?" He asks, and he's giddy like a kid in a candy store.

I stand straight and walk up in front of him. He's shorter than me, but then again, most people are. And he has an average build. Nothing spectacular either. His transgressions make him appear even smaller.

Derek grins wickedly as he rips the bag off his head. When his hazel eyes meet mine, I'm struck with pure hatred.

"Do you know who I am?" I question, circling him like he's a predator.

He tries to talk through his gag, but it's gargled.

"Derek." Derek stands straight at his name, waiting for his command, "Take his gag off, please. We want to make our guest more comfortable, right?"

Derek's eyes glimmer with excitement as he takes the gag out. He knows what tactic I'm using. Calm to berserk. A classic for cases like his.

“Ah, that’s much better. Thank you, Derek,” I say, my hands clasped behind my back, and I stay in front of him now. “I’ll repeat my—”

“I don’t know who the fuck you are or what you want, but I didn’t do anything, and I don’t have any money. Please let me go!” He wails.

I clench my jaw. I’m half tempted to shove the gag he was wearing half down his throat to just shut him the fuck up.

“Okay, I’ll introduce myself. I’m Soren, and this is Derek. But you probably already know him. Let me clarify, in case you’re confused. I’m not interested in getting any money from you. I’m interested in something else of yours, though, because you *did* do something. Any ideas at all? Perhaps a few years ago?”

This shuts him up. Thank fuck.

“Um, nothing comes to mind. Just please let me go.” He whispers, turning his head away.

He fucking remembers what he did. The fucking coward.

“You’re sure you don’t remember?” I question him again as I round his cart for the second time.

“Yes, I’m sure I did not do anything.” He won’t meet my soulless gaze.

I draw in a breath. This motherfucker thinks he did nothing wrong to my Freya. But I beg to differ; Freya does too.

“Alright, if you say so. I’ll teach you. But for now, would you like to sit? However, you’ll still have to be shackled down until we sort out this misunderstanding. I would choose to rest those legs if I were you. This could take a while.” I suggest stopping in front of him again.

“What do you want from me? I told you I didn’t do anything.”

Is this motherfucker so ignorant to think he did nothing? Did he think it’s normal to beat a woman, especially one like Freya? Rage flies through me, and I can’t control myself anymore. I lunge at him, toppling him over, and as we hit the floor, his head bounces back off the ground. He lets out a groan, and a pool of blood starts to form.

“You did something, motherfucker! You almost killed my wife. You raped her. You beat her. And for what? What was the point of all of it?” I roar at him, my hand gripping his hair so tight that my knuckles turn white.

It takes every fiber of my being to not just kill the motherfucker right here, right now. But I can’t. Freya already told me she wanted to be the one to do it, and I don’t want to take that from her like I’ve taken everything else.

He starts laughing hysterically. “Freya? That’s your wife?”

He can’t stop laughing, and for the first time in my life, I’m in the presence of someone much, much more evil than myself.

I stand and look at Derek, whose face is pressed like he's been eating sour candy. I didn't disclose to him how personal this was for my wife and me, so I can imagine it comes as a shock to him. He just figured it was any other regular case, someone who wronged me from the business world. It wouldn't be the first time I've killed someone who got in my way. It was almost standard practice through my early twenties.

I gesture for him to help me get him into the chair. The motherfucker fought us the whole time, but we managed to get him into the chair. Derek had to break a couple of fingers in the process to get him to hold still. Derek starts to work on his head wound, so we can keep him around longer. The sound of the staple gun and his yelps permeate the room, filling my soul with peace.

"Freya is my wife. And she will be your reckoning. Tristan, you are being sentenced to death. But I need an answer from you. What was the point of all of it?" I bend to look him directly in the eye.

"You're an amateur. If I never tell you, then I'll live. And guess what, Soren. I'll never tell you." A smirk plays at his mouth.

I smirk as well. "You know, I love when I get that response because they never know what they're about to go through. I mean, they don't know they're in the presence of someone trained to torture and kill since they were thirteen years old. I have many years of experience, so believe me, by the time I'm

done with you, you'll be begging for death. But we will start small and work our way up. I will be telling Freya the same thing, but of course, I'm referring to fucking her ass."

"I already did that." The bastard spits out at me.

And before I can even think through how I'll react, my fist flies out, connecting to his eyebrow bone. Mental images of him doing heinous things to *my Freya* fill my head, turning into blinding white-hot rage. My knuckle splits from the force, and he lets out a groan.

"She's not worth a fucking thing. She's just a whore, who claims to have been raped, but she came just the same as she does for you."

Again, I lose control and don't stop; a tooth ends up at my feet, blood splatters my arms, and my knuckles are split, bruises forming on my own hands.

"I will be your death," I whisper as I walk away from him.

I turn to the toolbox, pulling out a rag to wipe off the blood. I have to be done for tonight. I'll kill him prematurely otherwise. I pull up the cameras of the house and find Freya lying on the couch watching TV, stuck between sleep and alertness.

"Derek, I need your shirt and jacket," I say without even looking at him.

"Boss, really? My jacket?" He grumbles.

"Yes, really. Freya is awake, and she knows I left out the front door. And I can't go through the front door covered in

blood, can I?” I spit at him.

“Whatever you say.” Derek shakes off his jacket and shirt. They almost swallow me, but they’ll have to do, for now.

“See you tomorrow, Tristan. Have sweet dreams, and please think about my question.” I call back as I make my way back to where we entered.

I hear Derek’s voice, but I don’t stick around to pay attention to what he says. I make my way to the front door, and when I open it, the sound of some show plays, and occasionally Freya giggles quietly. I toss my keys into the bowl in our foyer before making my way to her. Her eyes are glued to me, but I’m not ready to look at her. Not when I’m covered in the motherfucker’s blood under this jacket. I just watch the TV for a moment before turning back to the bathroom to wash my sins away.

I don’t feel guilty for what I’ve done. If anything, the pressure to find him I’ve felt deep inside me is gone, leaving me craving more of his blood spilled. I put on some clothes and return to the living room to take Freya to bed. It’s late. And she needs to sleep in a bed. The couch is bad for her back.

I bend over and turn the TV off before picking her up. She’s so light. Lighter than she was when we left for our honeymoon. *She needs to eat more.* But it is my fault she hasn’t taken care of herself as she should. I rest my cheek on her forehead as I move down the hall to the bedroom. *I’ve missed her.* I tried so hard to keep us apart, but it seems we are worse off separate than we are together. I set her in bed and

cover her up before crawling over to my side. I move closer and pull her to my chest, keeping her safe. And for the first time in a while, I sleep.

## Chapter Twenty-Two

## Freya

I woke up alone again. I peek over at the clock on the nightstand. Twelve pm.

*Fuck I slept in late.*

A piece of white paper catches my eye alongside a fresh glass of water.

*Freya,*

*I have business to attend to today in Denver. I will join you for dinner tonight.*

*x Soren*

He could just text me if I had a damn phone. I made a mental note to get a phone by the end of the week. I've missed being able to connect with the outside world. After I get ready for the day, I decide to spend it in the basement, enjoying the movie theater-worthy setup. The only amenity I haven't used yet.

It's getting boring not being able to leave and not having anything to do is starting to get tedious. My little moment of inspiration is gone, leaving me with writer's block, yet again.

Maybe I can try the cross-stitching pattern I found on Pinterest, but that'll only keep me entertained for so long. And the further I find myself drawn into books, the harder it is to reconnect back to reality.

The day drags on, and I hear the front door shut. Soren must be home. I listen to him make his way to the bedroom, down the other hall towards his office, and then to the kitchen. The soft voices of Luci and Soren conversing bring life to the house.

I stay put, too lazy to get up and go to him. The smell of some excellent dinner wafts into the basement, and my stomach growls. Soren's steps retreat down the stairs.

"There you are," He mutters under his breath as he plops down next to me in his recliner. "What movie is this?" He asks with a genuine interest in his voice as the decapitated head rolls across the screen.

"*Hereditary*. It's a really good horror movie," I say to him, glancing in his direction.

He keeps his eyes glued to the screen, and I peer over at him from the corner of my eye. He's dressed in a formal suit today, but his tie is loosened around his neck. My eyes trail to his long fingers, examining his hands, remembering what I discovered yesterday. His left hand has minor cuts that litter the palm, probably from the shattered glass from last night, and his right... Well, his right hand's knuckles are destroyed. Worn down to what looks like bone on his middle finger.

*What the fuck did he do last night?*

I open my mouth to question him when he catches me staring at his hands. He quickly stands and stalks back up the stairs without another word.

*This man is going to be the fucking death of me.* I sigh, turning the movie off, and make my way up the stairs. We met again at the top of the stairs as if he was going to come back to me.

“I got you something today.” He produces a phone from his pocket.

I take it. “I was going to ask you about this tonight. Thanks.”

We make our way to the kitchen, Luci opting to seat us together this time; she pours our waters before excusing herself.

“It’s preprogrammed with all your contacts from your previous phone and the photos. I also had the security cameras set up as well, so you can view the entry points of our property and house.” He stands briefly, pulling his wallet out. A wince flashes over his face, but it disappears just as quickly as it appears. “Here are your new credit cards and driver’s license with your new last name.” He places them in front of me before fully turning his attention to the dinner in front of him.

He struggles to grip the fork with his left and cut through the steak with his right. I watch for a moment before putting my utensils down. “Let me, Soren,” I whisper while taking his plate.

“Freya. I’m fine. Leave it,” He hisses at me, urging me to stop.

I shoot him a glare. He quiets, letting me continue knowing it’s too much pain for him. I cut his steak like a child would need and returned the plate to him.

I casually cut into my steak, asking, “When will you tell me what happened last night?” I take a bite looking at him.

“I’m not going to tell you, Freya. For your protection, please don’t ask me again.”

“Why do you always feel the need to hide things from me?” I snap. “I’m not a child, you know. I’m your wife, and believe it or not, I do care about your well-being.”

Soren scowls at his dinner. “I hide things from you for your protection. I don’t want to let you in on some things quite yet.”

“Meaning you’ll tell me one day?”

“Yes. Meaning I’ll tell you everything one day. We are still trying to build that trust, right?” Soren glances over at me, his expression softening when I nod.

We eat the rest of our dinner in silence. Soren and I wash the dishes in the kitchen in silence after we finish eating. He kisses the top of my head, then makes his way to his office.

My body stiffens, and my eyes go wide at his kiss. He hasn’t bothered to touch me or kiss me since the honeymoon. *Why the sudden change?* It stirs alive a desire for him. I’ve missed him dearly. More than I care to acknowledge, my heart

palpitates as his lips connect to my body. Perhaps he's starting to feel the same way. *I fucking hope so.*

I retreat to the library, trying to dredge up some inspiration. The blinking cursor still continues to taunt me. Living in isolation like this is starting to get to me. I have no idea what's been going on with my family since our wedding day. Granted, Serena just visited, but it wasn't like we could talk with the other two in the other room. I doubt Soren would appreciate me telling my sister about our wild honeymoon. But I'm not interested in keeping him happy, considering he hasn't been here for me.

I open my phone and look for Serena's number. It's there like Soren said it'd be. I start to type out my message to her, asking her to call me when she has a moment. It's nearly midnight, so I highly doubt she'll call this late. Much to my surprise, my phone starts to buzz within moments of hitting send.

"Serena?"

"Yeah, it's me. What the fuck is going on with you and Soren? He's... different," Serena whispers the last word.

I let out a breathy chuckle. "He is a little much now, isn't he?"

"Is he hurting you?" She asks after a pause.

"No!" I sat up all the way. "No, actually, he seems a lot more protective of me. Just has a weird way of showing it." I

rub my forehead, recalling the shit he's pulled since we moved here.

"I noticed that. He threatened Abe's life because he just wanted to hug you. Does Soren realize he's been in our lives for a while?"

"I don't think he knows. He just is overly paranoid because.... I have no idea why."

"What do you mean you have no idea? He's your husband." Serena cries out, making me flinch. She won't ever understand our relationship because I barely understand it myself.

"I just don't. Can we talk about something else?" I huff out, displacing irritation onto her when it should be on Soren.

"Anyway, how is married life treating you?"

I suck in a breath, not wanting to answer this question either. It's incredibly complicated, and I don't think I want to go into all the details over the phone. "Um, it's fine, I suppose."

"What? Does he have a tiny dick?" I can practically hear her Cheshire grin over the phone. *The little shit.*

I gasp. "No, I mean, no! We just haven't seen each other since the honeymoon. He's been hiding out in his office or gone."

"I knew you were fucking lying to me when you said you were getting to know each other," She says in a mocking tone, "Why has he been avoiding you?"

Anxiety crashes through me in waves. Perhaps I'm not to his liking? Maybe I'm too stiff, too big, or not pretty enough? I try to wrestle down the perturbing thoughts. *One thing at a time.*

"I don't know, Serena. I just assumed he's been busy." I attempt to shrug her off.

"You're still fucking though, right?"

I groan, clenching my thighs. Since the honeymoon, I've been trying so hard not to think about that. I put my head on my desk, trying to focus on our conversation.

"No, we haven't since the honeymoon."

Serena gasps loudly on the other side. "You mean to tell me you have to look at that hunk of a man, and your hot ass self isn't getting fucked?" She tries to joke, knowing that it is killing me on the inside. I stay silent on the other side. "It's okay, Freya. As you said, he's been busy, and it's not like you see him all the time, right? It's no big deal then."

I nod to myself, trying to keep the intrusive thoughts down. She continues to ramble about how she and Abe have been doing and the vacation they are planning to Turks and Caicos. I check out at some point, and uneasiness runs through my brain again. It won't stop. Serena and I end the phone call when I trudge back to the bedroom. Soren is still gone. I change into my PJs and climb into bed. It's so cold and big; I guess I adjusted quicker than I should have to Soren sleeping in the same bed. I can't stop my brain long enough to be able

to fall asleep. I toss and turn for three hours before returning to the library with a cup of tea in my hands.

I curl up in the luxurious armchair sipping on Chamomile tea while reading when I hear a click and creak behind me. I freeze. There wasn't a door behind me before. I'm almost sure of that. Slowly, I turn my head to face the sound. The bookcase with Soren's books is pushed out like a hidden doorway. A sweaty, bloody Soren steps into the library, his eyes carefully trained on my figure. My eyes widened in horror, my fingers dropping the teacup I was holding. Tea pours onto the floor and down my legs, but I don't move a muscle.

*What. The. Fuck.*

Soren freezes, his hand holding the bookcase open, and his piercing blue eyes meet mine. Myself, dripping in scalding hot tea, and Soren, dripping in blood. My eyebrows knit together, trying to source the cuts and why he had so many of them. I clam up, struggling to find the words to ask him what the fuck is going on, but I choke on the air I breathe. The longer I examine him, the more I realize that it isn't his blood. It's someone else's.

I knew he was in the business of horrific things, but I never imagined he participated in the said things. I also *never* imagined he'd bring it to our new home. Did he build this house and never tell me? It's the only way to explain how it's done in a style I love and with a... torture room?

He shuts the bookcase, locking it in place, his back to me. I stand and move to put as much space between us as possible. *This is not the same, Soren.* As I step back, the floorboard creaks below me, and my heart stops. Soren sighs like he's disappointed and turns around, bounding towards me quickly. I gasp, not fast enough to escape his grasp, as he pins me against the desk. His eyes filled with lust, rage, and sadness. One of his hands reached up to caress my face, his eyes hypnotizing me.

Standing this close to Soren enhances his beauty. The blood on his face looks like war paint, as it slashes across his face in lines and splatters in dots. His hair is pulled back, except for some of it framing his face. Blood stains his otherwise inky black hair, creating a surreal illusion that he's dripping in paint. He is horrifically beautiful in the moonlight.

"You weren't supposed to be in here this late. I didn't want you to see me like this." His voice is haunting.

"I couldn't sleep, and you were g-gone." My voice trails off. Right now, I'm unsure if I should be terrified of how much blood he has on him or if I should be turned on *because* of the blood.

He chuckles slightly but becomes serious again. "You know I'll never hurt you, right?" The pad of his thumb brushes across my cheekbones, and I almost lean into his touch.

I look up at him with innocent eyes. "I know you won't hurt me. What happened to you?"

He pauses for a moment, looking away before his eyes snap back to me. “Some evil people were trying to hurt those I love. I put a stop to it.” He maintains eye contact with me.

Is he referring to loving me? Surely he’s not. *There’s no way.* I have had several nightmares, waking up covered in sweat. Soren is usually gone or asleep on his side of the bed, facing my direction. I didn’t think he had noticed, though. It was only that one time he’s seen me at my worst.

“Does that satisfy you?” He asks, his eyes narrowing and his head cocking to the side.

I slightly nod and swallow hard. I’m unsure if I want to ask if it was Tristan he just took care of. He looks like he’s leaning in to kiss me. I close my eyes and start to lean in as well.

He steps away. “Good. Now, I have things to attend to.”

My eyes fly open, and anger and resentment fill my chest. Why won’t he touch me? My pussy throbs and I have to clench my thighs to relieve that tension. I followed him back to the bedroom. I don’t turn the lights on as he pulls the shirt over his head, and goes into the bathroom. He shuts the bathroom door as he begins to wash away his sins. I turn towards the bed, frustrated at him and myself. I need to corner him and give him a piece of my mind. But anytime I get around him, I forget everything he’s done to me and become desperate for his attention.

Who was he to deny me after he’s kept me locked away like a princess in distress? I’m genuinely not in distress, just sexually. Since our honeymoon, I’ve been craving more of

him. He brought out sides of me that I didn't know existed, and a part of me hoped to explore those. But here we are nearly two months later, and he hasn't kissed me since.

I'm zoned out staring at the bed when the bathroom door creaks open, steam rolling out. Soren has a towel wrapped around his waist. A full display of wet hair, water dripping down his chest as he walks to our closets next to the bathroom. My mouth salivates at the sight of him, but I have to avert my eyes. He doesn't want me. If he did, then he would have touched me since that night.

I finally get into bed and face away from the middle of it. My mind is still racing. Soren reappears and climbs onto the mattress. His weight made the other side of the bed sink in. It's a comforting feeling knowing someone is lying next to you while you sleep. Except, Soren doesn't sleep on his side today. He lays closer to the middle, reaches an arm over my waist, and drags me back to his chest. He keeps an arm wrapped possessively around me. I close my eyes and finally fall asleep.

## Chapter Twenty-Three

## Freya

I'm struck with inspiration halfway through my day, drawing out my fantasies from Soren's sexual deprivation. I start somewhere in the middle of who knows what kind of story, and it begins with a sex scene. My headphones dragged me further into my fantasy. I close my eyes and let my fingers fly across the keyboard, but my body can't handle the stories consuming my mind. I open my eyes, and my surroundings pull me back to reality. My pussy throbs, dripping with a need for Soren. I look around the room and find myself alone still.

My fingers tease my lower stomach and slip into the waistband of my shorts. Making their way to my pussy, I run my fingers along the slit, collecting the slickness that's formed. I finally tease my clit, rubbing softly, and I let out a small moan. My head is tilted back, eyes closed. I lose myself in the fantasy of having Soren in front of me, eating me out, then fucking my brains out. I continue to let out little moans, and my other hand reaches up to play with my breast, teasing and pinching the nipple the same way Soren would have done. As I start to reach my climax, the familiar scent of eucalyptus and peppermint invades my senses. *My fantasies are getting*

*awfully realistic.* I can feel someone standing over top of me. The feeling forces my eyes open, yanking me out of the deeply rooted fantasy.

*Oh fuck.*

Soren stands next to me, his arms crossed over his chest, leaning against my long desk. I pull my headphones out and set them on the desk in front of me. I place my hands on my lap. I continue to look him in the eye, challenging him to see what he would do next. He reaches to caress my cheek, and I lean into his touch.

“Taste,” He commands.

*Taste what? Oh. He means my fingers...*

“No.”

“Did you just say no?” He growls.

I sit up a little taller and grip the arms of my chair. “I didn’t stutter,” I say, challenging Soren to come closer.

“I wasn’t meaning it as a suggestion, my little fucking slut.”

He smirks and then grabs my biceps firmly before I can react, pulling me to my feet and throwing me onto the desk. I have to stifle a smile. *Note to self, piss Soren off to get fucked.* Soren stands between my legs, gripping my wrist as he guides my fingers into my mouth.

“Taste,” He repeats.

I look him in the eye as I slowly open my mouth. He pushes the fingers into my mouth until I’m almost choking. The

saltiness of my pussy taints my mouth but only makes me drip even more with desire. My gag reflex starts to kick in, but he doesn't relent. I move to push him away, but his other arm traps mine, pinning my hand to the top of the desk. I try to break free from his grip, and I whine. Soren releases me, satisfied that my fingers are clean from my desire, and begins to trail his hand down my body to my pussy. Cupping the outside of it, I widen my legs and wrap them around his waist, drawing him further in.

“Such a pretty little pussy, eager to be fucked,” He croons in my ear.

“Only for you,” I purr, my voice coming out a breathy whisper.

I'm soaked at his degrading words. Mixed in with praise, they fill my head with an unbearable amount of hedonism. *Perhaps I should talk to my therapist about this.* My degradation and praise kink have to be connected to the trauma I've been through. But I don't have time to think about this shit. I'm about to get fucked by my husband. *Finally.*

His eyes flicker to me, and he lifts my body, pulling down my underwear and shorts. His other hand is still holding my hands behind my back. He squeezes them before releasing me as though to say not to try anything and drops to his knees. His nose nuzzled at my pussy, before pressing a kiss to my clit. I moan out, but he pulls back.

“Tell me what you want me to do.” His commanding tone sends shivers down my spine, and goosebumps erupt across

my skin. A hand skates over my thighs, making my heart go into a frenzy.

I throw my head back, eyes closing, building up the courage to tell him exactly what I want him to do to me.

“Tell me while looking me in the eye.”

I peer down at him, my mouth gaping open as he looks back at me. His eyes burn like blue fire, dancing with hunger.

“I want you to kiss me.” It almost comes out as a breathy moan.

“Where?” He asks, running his bottom lip along the inside of my thigh, teasing me so much it makes my head spin.

I blush, looking away.

“Don’t fucking look away. Where do you want me to kiss you?”

I feel warmth flowing through me and become wetter from his breath hitting my pussy. This act, and his words, are so fucking hot that I can’t handle him not touching me anymore. “I want your tongue buried in my cunt.”

Soren’s mouth connects to my pussy, and he grants me precisely what I want. He lets out a low groan as he pushes in with a harsh suck. “Good girl.”

Another wave of pleasure flows over me with those two words. His tongue flicks my clit, and I gasp out at the sensation. He moves his way slightly down while his tongue fucks me, and his hand comes up to rub my clit. He inserts two

fingers into me, not giving me a moment to adjust to the feeling of fullness as his tongue reconnects with the little bundle of nerves. I start to run my fingers through his hair, gripping it with all my might. Soren grabs my wrists, pinning them down to the edge of the desk. I moan out again, trying to break free from his grip, but it's no use. His grip only keeps tightening, and despite it nearing the point of being painful, it intensifies the other sensations across my body.

I start to lull my head backward, eyes closing.

“No. Eyes on me,” Soren commands, his eyes flaring with intensity. *He needs this as much as I do.*

His tongue and fingers work like magic giving me intense pleasure. *But I need more. I have to have more.*

“Is this what you wanted, baby?” He whispers.

“No,” I croak out.

“No? What did you want?” He says between licks.

“I want your cock,” I nearly whimper.

“Hm? What was that? I need to hear you,” Soren teases, his fingers grazing the outside of my thighs.

“I want your cock.” My voice trembles but comes out louder.

Soren suddenly rises to his feet, yanking my shirt above my head and removing my bra. He strips quickly as well before turning to throw everything off the desk.

I protest, but his lips crash to mine, stifling the nagging I was about to give him. I just organized my desk.

Soren places a hand on my chest, pushing me back, forcing me to rest on my elbows, slightly propped up to watch. He grips his dick in his hand, pumping himself a few times before lining up to my entrance. He teases my clit with the tip of his dick, and I groan. I buck my hips towards him, getting him to fuck me quicker.

“Are you going to take my cock like a good slut?” He purrs.

I nod vigorously, hoping he will give into his slow torture and give me exactly what I want.

“Good.”

Soren lines himself up again before plunging into me. I let out a moan, fuck I must have forgotten how big he is. He groans, stilling for a moment.

“Fuck, you’re so tight, Freya.” He digs his fingers into my hips.

I know I am going to have bruises there tomorrow. But Soren can do anything he wants to me.

*I am his.*

He pulls himself out, and I groan at the loss of fullness, but that feeling doesn’t stay for long. He slams back into me again and again. He doesn’t ease up, either.

I let out little pants and moans as he fucks me with such force; I’m surprised the desk hasn’t collapsed yet. With each

thrust, he brings me closer and closer to my climax. The hand on my throat tightens as he rubs my clit.

“Don’t fucking come, you slut,” He growls in my ear.

He continues thrusting harder, deeper. I try so hard not to come. I really do. My vision goes white as I sharply inhale and exhale; he’s let up the grip on my throat. His thumb flicks my clit, and I can’t hold it anymore. I come so hard, I black out. Completely unaware of my surroundings. It takes me a moment to come back to Earth when I realize he has stopped, and he looks at me with deadly intent.

*And that moment, I knew I fucked up.*

Soren grabs both of my wrists, dragging me up to him, so we are nose to nose. He’s still deep in me. I swallow hard, panting still, and trying to come down from the high he’s just given me. Or should I say I’ve taken? His eyes are on fire, and I just know that’ll be the end of me. I could just come looking into his eyes, blazing the way they are.

“I told you not to come,” He states, his voice void of all emotion.

I gulp. *What’s going to happen now?*

“Do you know what happens to naughty girls who come when they’re not supposed to?” He whispers, his nose brushing with mine like he’s leaning in to kiss me.

“No,” I whisper.

I truly have no idea. I’ve never been in a relationship like this before. Then again, it’s still not the healthiest, and I think

Soren could fucking kill me right now. But I doubt he will. His eyes still have a hint of passion in them.

“What’s your safe word?”

“Red.”

“When do you use it?”

“When I can’t handle it anymore,” I whisper.

“Good girl.”

He pulls out of me and lifts me, throwing me over his shoulder before bounding out of the library and into our bedroom. From this angle, his ass is so fucking nice. I could stay like this for a while. I start to giggle when a hand comes up and spanks me hard.

“Not a sound,” He growls.

I have to pinch my lips closed. Excitement radiates through me, and I can’t help but feel a little tension too. *Surely he won’t hurt me.* Looking at the bedroom floor, he slams the door shut before throwing me onto the bed like a sack of potatoes. I huff at the impact and get tangled up in the comforter. I free myself from the comforter to find Soren watching with a slightly amused look on his face. I get onto my knees, crawling to the edge of the bed, and reach out for him.

“Turn around, Freya.”

I do as I’m told, my back to him, still on my knees on the bed. I await his next move when his hand connects with my

upper back, pushing my chest down to the bed. Moments later, he pulls out a soft, braided rope, and I lay on the bed, ass in the air, as he ties my hands behind my back. I turn my head to try to watch what Soren is going next, and I see he's turned back to his dresser, pulling out a blindfold. He looks at me with a crooked smile, showing it to me before tying it behind my head.

"I told you that next time, I wanted you naked and blindfolded." Soren saunters over to me.

I start to breathe a little heavier, anticipating what will happen next. Soren caresses my ass, and his other hand plays with my clit.

"My baby wanted to come before? Hm?" He continues his soft strokes.

"I'm sorry. I couldn't help it," I whimper.

*He knew what the fuck he was doing fucking me like that, especially when his fingers started to play with my clit.*

"Ah, you couldn't help it," He sucks in a breath, "Well, if my dirty little wife wanted to come, then who am I deny that request?"

He slaps my ass, and I groan at the contact. Pain and pleasure mix together in my body like a perfect storm. He spanks me repeatedly while his other hand stays connected to my clit, rubbing and pinching through another orgasm. I feel that wave build up, and it consumes me again.

“Not a fucking word, Freya,” Soren growls into my ear as he’s hunched over me. I can’t see him, but I feel his hot breath on my ear.

I have to bite my lips to stop the scream from erupting from my throat, and just as I’m at the peak, Soren whispers into my ear, “Let me hear you.”

And I do. I convulse on the bed, my body trying to escape his touch as the overstimulation starts to kick in. Soren doesn’t touch me anymore, giving me a moment for him to shuffle. He moves behind me and runs the tip of his dick between my folds, teasing my clit again. I moan out.

Soren sinks into me and releases a groan.

“Fuck, you’re so tight, Freya. So fucking good,” Soren groans, thrusting into me at a wicked-fast rate.

I feel him lean over me, and he grabs a handful of my hair, pulling my head back. My chest leaves the bed on some of his thrusts and yanks of my hair. My scalp aches, but *fuck* does it feel so good. His other hand goes to my hip to start rubbing on my clit. As my orgasm looms again, I feel tears spring to my eyes. My body is building another orgasm, and it’s so overwhelming that I feel like I’m going to come apart at the seams.

Soren continues his rough quick thrusts into me before stopping completely but buried deep inside me still. He continues to rub my clit, and his other hand lets go of my hair, making its way to my breast. Twisting, flicking, and rubbing at my nipple. Beads of sweat drip down my forehead and back as

I feel myself dangling on the edge. This is just too much for me.

“Come for me, you dirty slut,” Soren commands above me.

With a pinch to my clit, I come the hardest I have in my life. I scream through my orgasm. Soren groans but starts to laugh maniacally, cruelly.

“Baby, we are just getting started. You wanted to come, so I’m making sure you come. Next time, you’ll hold it in when I say to.” Soren pulls out of me and moves to untie the binds that hold my arms behind my back.

I moan at the loss of him, and I realize he still hasn’t come yet. As Soren unties my blindfold, he uncovers that I’ve cried through orgasm number three. He chuckles again, mocking the tears that well in my eyes.

“We aren’t close to being done yet, baby.” With that, he flips me over onto my back.

I’m a heap of bones and flesh as he pulls me further up onto the bed. I don’t think I could move even if I wanted to.

I close my eyes as he gives me a moment to recover but maneuvers me into the position he wants. Arms above my head and legs spread. Then the cuff closes on my left wrist, and my eyes fly open. He looks calm as he handcuffs me to the bed, moves down to my feet, and does the same thing. I am entirely at his mercy. Panic overtakes my body, and I contemplate saying our safe word. But I know I’m not in danger when I’m around him. His eyes finally connect with

mine, and he sees the panic on my face. He lays over top of me and begins to caress my cheek.

“Darling, you’re safe. It’s okay. You remember your safe word, right?” Soren looks at me with a plea in his eyes.

He’s begging me to continue with this. I nod, my eyes not leaving his. He moves to stand and goes to a small chest beside the bed. He pulls out a white wand-looking thing, a small pink butt plug, and a bottle of lube. Turning back to me, he smirks as I take in what he has in his hands. I start to pull on the restraints, knowing my soul is about to leave my fucking body.

“No sense in squirming or fighting it, baby. You’re not going anywhere. I expect three more orgasms before I’m done with you.” His voice flows over me.

I should have listened to what he said. He is going to rip my soul from my body and send it straight to Hell.

I look up at the ceiling, coming to terms with what’s about to happen. It’s not necessarily that I don’t want it. I never imagined overstimulation would be a form of punishment; then again, I can see how it is. Suppose it’s better than the whips or chains I could be getting beat with right now. I look to Soren, who is now crawling onto the bed.

“Are you into the whole whips and chains thing too?” I ask.

“I can be if it is the appropriate time. This is not the appropriate time, though. I’m not sure if you’d like that

anyway. It's a much harsher punishment if we go down that road." He is deadpan in his response.

Soren squirts lube onto the pink plug that has to be the size of a large baby carrot. His eyes flicker to me, and he sees I'm watching his every move.

"We are going to start small and work our way up. If we start too big, it'll be nothing but excruciating for you, Freya. While it might seem as though this is all for me, it is also about your pleasure. We will work our way up to being able to take my cock. Just don't expect it to happen immediately." He pulls my legs up so my knees are bent and lifts my hips onto his thighs.

"Relax, baby." He says as he inserts it into my ass. My eyes screw shut from the sensation. "You have to relax, Freya. It will hurt worse than it already does. Focus on my voice."

I focus on his voice as he speaks. It just sounds like vibrations that soothe my soul. I relax a touch more, and he slides it all the way in. I exhale hard, and he looks back at me.

"You did good, baby. Now, shall we have some more fun?" He holds up the wand and presses it into my clit.

We lock eyes, and he waits a moment, then turns it on to the highest setting. I arch my back and groan at the feeling. Panting, I feel two of his fingers slip into me, and he pumps in and out hard and fast. The butt plug heightens everything in my body. All feelings and touches make me feel like I'm having an out-of-body experience. I scream out as my orgasm rips through me, and even though Soren knows I'm coming,

he won't relent. He keeps the vibrator pressed to my folds, and his fingers keep pumping in and out of me.

Another orgasm roars through me again, and as it does, he removes his fingers and quickly replaces them with his cock. I groan at the feeling, already extremely sensitive to all senses. My pussy gripping him, milking him for everything he's worth. He keeps the vibrator in place as he thrusts, his pace quick and sharp. His other hand comes up and slaps my breasts. I let out another scream as my orgasm came through me again. This orgasm makes my body feel like it's on fire. I'm convinced he's lit a small fire in the pit of my stomach that explodes like an atomic bomb. Liquid squirting out of me and onto his pelvis. Soren smiles brightly and starts laughing. My mind is blank, only able to think of him, and desperate to keep going.

"That's it, baby." He mutters, and he, too, starts to chase his high.

Tears stream down my face as he doesn't let up on me. A squeal comes from deep inside me, and another orgasm rips through me yet again. He groans above me, and I can feel his dick throbbing as he comes before removing the vibrator and collapsing.

A sob racks through my body, and I can't help but start to cry. I feel humiliated, exhausted, and relieved. Soren lifts himself to look at me.

"Darling, you're okay. Don't cry. It's done now." He strokes my hair and presses a kiss on my forehead. "You did so well.

Such a good girl.”

I feel him move to undo the cuffs restraining me and the butt plug still firmly in me. When he removes all of them, I curl into the fetal position on my side and start to bawl. Soren sits back, astounded that I am crying this hard.

“Baby, are you hurt?” He asks, placing a hand on my waist. When his hand connects to my body, I jerk away from him, throwing myself off the bed.

His eyes widened at my aggressive reaction to his touch. I keep going backward until I’m up against the wall. Soren keeps his distance from me as I continue to lose it. I sit there until he comes up and lifts me. I don’t fight his touch; I know he’s carrying me to the bathroom. I hear the bathtub water running, and he sets me on the edge of the counter, his hands reaching to grab my face.

“Freya, look at me. Are you okay?” Soren’s eyes search my face, analyzing for any sort of distress. And I am. It’s deep within my bones. But I can’t find the words to explain to him why I feel like this. My eyes meet his, and he visibly melts. “Jesus, Freya. You should have said something. I wouldn’t have-”

He cuts himself off as I shake my head. “I just feel humiliated. You have been so cold and distant since our honeymoon, and at the first opportunity to sleep with you, I took it. It’s shameful of me.” I take a deep breath before looking him in the eye, “And it’s shameful of you to treat me that way. How dare you be so hot and cold with me. You can’t

treat me like a piece of shit most days and then fuck me harshly anytime you want. You don't get to have a hold on my life like that, Soren."

He closes his mouth, and I jump off the counter, getting into the bathtub that's been treated with a bath bomb and bubbles. Soren looks down at me as I attempt to relax in the bathtub. I have a hard time with it, especially after he did seem worried about me. He steps in behind me and cradles me with his legs on either side, pulling me closer to him. The water soothes my aching body, but it only lasts a moment. I stiffen at his touch, not wanting to budge at our argument.

"You're right, Freya. I'm sorry," He whispers into my ear, his hands flattening on my stomach, drawing me closer to him if that's even physically possible.

I pause for a moment pondering his words. We just had a mind-numbing fuck-fest, but he still doesn't have the right to be so hot and cold with me. I can handle having several orgasms in a night, but I can't handle being emotionally neglected like I have been. My parents and Tristan did that, and I'm not allowing anyone close enough to me anymore to let that happen.

I don't respond to him, and he doesn't say anything else. Slowly, I melt into his arms, and my mind starts to calm.

"I'm not going to say it's okay because it's not. But we aren't going to do this halfway," I say, turning to face him, but he doesn't let me go. "We are going to be in this marriage either completely where you talk to me more often, we fuck,

and you take me on dates. Or we are just roommates with no sex and only appear as a couple in the eyes of our families.” I break away from his grasp, allowing him to stew with that. I wrap a towel around me, and he’s still sitting there, just watching me. “The ball is in your court, Soren.”

Climbing into bed, my mind just continues to race. *Will I be able to handle the rejection if he says we should just be roommates?* I swallow a lump in my throat, trying to suppress the sob that wants to break free. I won’t. It is going to hurt like a motherfucker if he decides he can’t be anything slightly romantic with me. I’ve fallen for him too much, though I’m not sure if that’s the same Soren I fell in love with. The one at the beginning, where he tried, even if it was in his own weird ways. Then it dawns on me. I don’t know his history. I don’t know him enough to say he can even give me what I’m looking for. *How can I truly love him?*

The door creaks open, and light floods into the room, illuminating my silhouette. I feel eyes burning into me, and I know Soren is watching me. My skin flushes at everything we just did in the same bed, and with that, the lights are cut out. Soren climbs in behind me but doesn’t completely lie down. He lays on his side, elbow propped up, and begins to stroke my hair. He leans down and kisses my hair, cheek, and lips. I stay still, eyes closed, not moving. *He thinks I’m sleeping.*

“I might not be able to love you as you deserve, but I will do everything in my power to do so. You can’t just slip from my grasp that easily, Freya. Not without a fight, at least,” Soren whispers so quietly I have to strain to hear.

He kisses my forehead and lays down completely next to me, wrapping me in his arms.

The only thought my brain is stuck on is what he said. *Does he love me?*

## Chapter Twenty-Four

## Soren

*“Soren, you need to do it,” My mom whispers into my ear, “She’s trying to destroy our family. She wants to replace me. You don’t want that to happen right?”*

*I stare down at the trembling woman gagged and bound to a chair. Mascara is smeared all over her face, but it’s hard to tell with the frantic shaking of her head.*

*“You can do it, Soren. You’re old enough now. Just take the tip of the blade, and slice her neck open,” My mom murmurs, urging me to do the dirty work for her. Her jealousy reigns through, and it’s her best quality. The only real emotion she has.*

*I clutch the blade’s handle harder as my mom’s hand covers mine.*

*“You’ll earn my love if you do this for me.”*

*My biggest weakness. I just wanted her love. Someone’s love.*

*“What did she do?” I ask.*

*“She was sleeping with your father. She’s nothing but dirt, Soren.”*

*I shake my head, trying to tame that monster. “I can’t do it. I can’t. It’s not her fault,” I cry.*

*My mother rushes towards me, gripping my hand holding the blade, urging me towards the woman. Her muffled screams drown out all other senses. I pinch my eyes closed as I feel the tearing of her skin under the knife’s edge, and the gurgling on her own blood. My mother releases me with huffs as I collapse to the ground watching this woman slowly die in front of me.*

*“You were always useless.”*

I jolt awake, drenched in sweat. Freya stirs for a moment, and softly whimpers in her sleep. I heave in deep breaths. *It was just a dream.* Just like Freya, I’m plagued by my past. That woman was the first person I killed at the age of thirteen. Staring at Freya’s sleeping figure reminds me of my future. One where I don’t have to be the monster for her. Not like I had to for my mother. I had to kill all my father’s affairs for her. But I always hated killing women. Especially now having to relive them. They remind me too much of Freya. The goodness she brings out in me.

I scooch closer to Freya, seeking the comfort of someone else’s body after a dream like that.

I don’t understand how she’s gone through what she’s been through, yet stays good. She draws me back to reality, bringing me to my knees. I love her for it. I mean it. I already love Freya. I know I do. She consumes my thoughts even when I

am gone. It's just too early to tell her. I don't know how she'd take it. Besides, my love is twisted. It hurts like a rose with thorns. I think hers is similar though. Just further proof that she was made to be mine. I brush her hair back from her face as I look at her again.

I feel horrible. I shouldn't have done that to her. I should've been more gentle with her, especially since I know what she's been through. But when she asked about using chains and whips, the darker parts of BDSM, I refuse. I would never use those on her. I knew that the moment I met her. I wouldn't want to dredge up those memories again, especially if I enter that headspace; I become cruel. Unable to differentiate between the woman before me or a man who just raped a child. I become cruel. Sadistic, finding pleasure in their cries and screams of pain.

Freya has shown me who she is on the inside. All her ugliest parts. I love her more than I did before. I said I wanted to know her. Now I truly do. I doubt she feels the same way. Leaving her alone for all that time did more damage to our relationship than good, and I vow to never do that to her again.

She stirs for a moment as if I'd woken her while running my fingers through her hair. There's never been a woman in my life that's put me in my place like that, successfully, anyway. My heart shattered seeing her crying afterward, ashamed of herself for fucking me again after I've been the distant one. She has no need to be ashamed, especially with me. Never again do I want to make her feel like that again. She doesn't deserve that. She deserves so much more. More than I can

offer. I just hope the love I can give her is enough. I don't know how I'd react if she rejected it, rejected me.

I hold her close to me, and rest my head on the same pillow she's using. I can't help but bury my face in her hair, wanting to be enveloped in her. Only her.

## Chapter Twenty-Five

## Freya

The next morning I woke up to Soren gone from my side. I make my way to the kitchen when I smell bacon and something... burning? Luci hasn't ever burnt anything, as far as I'm aware. Plus, she doesn't arrive until the afternoon. I pull the covers back and walk down the hallway toward the smell.

“Fuck. Fuck. Fuck.”

I grin, realizing it's Soren, not Luci. I turn the corner and find Soren glaring at the bacon that is burnt and the eggs that are pretty dark looking. He's dressed in sweatpants and a loose band t-shirt. I realize it's the same shirt he put on me after our first-time love—not lovemaking—fucking. We barely know each other, this can't be love.

I lean against the doorframe of the kitchen, just watching him work. It's clear he hasn't cooked before. He glances at me with a scowl pressed onto his face.

“I burned breakfast,” Soren mutters, throwing the pan's contents into the trash.

I giggle and move closer to him, starting to make breakfast with him. Though, it primarily consists of him standing back and watching me work. Finally, we have breakfast whipped up and enjoy it on the kitchen island.

“So I have to run an errand today, but I’d like for us to just spend the day together,” Soren speaks up while cleaning the dishes.

I pull a knee up to my chest, sipping on coffee as his words seep through me. He wants to spend the day with me after his errand. Perhaps he is taking into consideration what I said to him. Will he change and start to be more present in our relationship?

I nod and give him a small smile, trying not to let my excitement reflect too much. He finishes the dishes as I work on my second cup of coffee. After placing the last plate in the dishwasher, he grasps my face with both hands towering over me. My eyes meet his, and they are filled with adoration and contentment. Like there’s peace in his deeply scarred soul. Soren places a kiss on my lips, kissing me hard and passionately, pouring his emotions into it. He pulls back and rests his forehead on mine; I lean into his touch, eager for more than his gentle kisses. He kisses my forehead before returning to the bedroom and getting ready to leave for his errands.

“I’ll be back in a couple of hours; think of what you want to do today,” Soren says, grabbing the keys to whatever ungodly expensive car he chose today and leaving.

What seems like days have passed, and even though it's only been a few hours, Soren returns home. I had spent the time constructively, writing in our library, telling a simple story of a girl who fell in love with a guy. The world around me disappeared as I got lost in words.

The next thing I know, I hear what sounds like my name over my writing music.

"Freya?" I pulled out one of my earbuds.

"Freya!" I'm ripped away from that world and brought back to reality by Soren's voice traveling through the house.

I get up to meet him in the hallway, a little bewildered at his yelling.

"There you are. Go sit on the couch and close your eyes," Soren says, wrapping his arm around my waist, drawing me into his side, and placing a kiss on the top of my head.

I do precisely that while Soren goes back outside. He's only gone for a moment when he calls out. "Are your eyes closed?"

I giggle. "Yes, they're closed." My fingers curl into the edge of the couch in anticipation.

The sound of two sets of footsteps enter the house completely and stop in front of me. I feel someone kneeling in front of me and the sound of bags being dropped behind them while the second set of feet goes back outside.

"Put your hands on your lap, palms up," Soren commands.

I do what I'm told again when a wet little nose brushes against my fingers. My eyes flash open, and I'm greeted by a sweet pair of brown eyes that belong to a Dobermann Pinscher puppy. I take her in my arms and set her on the floor. I hunch over, running my hand along its velvety coat. She licks my face, and I start to laugh, pushing her off me as she gets excited, jumping up and tackling me with kisses. In the corner of my eye, I see Soren standing amongst bags, with his hands in his pockets. A very rare smile reaches his eyes as he watches me interact with the puppy.

"Is she ours to keep?" I ask, hoping Soren wouldn't be so cruel as to take her away.

"Yeah, darling, she is. Do you like her?" Soren asks. I nodded several times before turning my attention back to her. "What are you going to name her?"

"Um. I don't actually know. Do you have any ideas?" I look up at him.

Soren sits on the floor next to me, still not petting her. "What about Bella, or Dixie, or Storm, or-"

"Storm. I like that," I whisper.

Storm stills in front of me, looking me in the eye, and I know deep down that's supposed to be her name.

"Storm it is then. Would you like to open your other gifts?" Soren asks, pulling some of the bags in front of me.

My eyes widened. "What is the occasion?"

“There isn’t one. I just wanted to spoil you. Am I not allowed to do that?” Soren’s mouth twitches up in a crooked smile.

I stammer to find the words for him. Storm walks around exploring the house, and I begin opening my gifts.

Several books, jewelry, clothes, luggage, and a set of keys all sit in front of me. I’m overwhelmed with everything, especially the house keys.

“Why the house keys?” I ask.

He takes them from my hand, examining them, “Well, everything I purchased for you today is for a trip we are going on when I come back from Miami. Err—after your dad’s birthday party. I forgot about that.”

Come back from Miami? What? I feel a prickle on my scalp as it sets in. He got me Storm to help with the loneliness and the gifts to make up for leaving. Is Soren just fucking with me?

“Why can’t I come with you to Miami?” I ask softly.

“Because you need to get ready for the trip we are going on. Besides, you wouldn’t even see me when we are there. I have business to take care of with our fathers.”

I cross my arms across my chest. “You’re not going to tell me what exactly you’re doing there, are you?”

He shakes his head and walks into the kitchen. I suppose I’ll be fine with being on my own for a few days. I don’t understand why he’s so secretive about the trip to Miami. *Baby*

*steps, Freya, he's at least told you ahead of time that he's leaving.*

I follow him into the kitchen, watching as he fills a water bowl for Storm and sets it on the ground. She scampers up to it and sloshes water all over the place before exploring more of the house. Soren looks calm, almost happy, making me wonder if he was never allowed to have a pet.

I clear my throat. "Thank you for the gifts and for Storm, Soren. It means a lot to me."

Soren's eyes soften, looking at me. "It's no problem, my darling. I'm just glad you liked them."

"Where are we going when you get back?" I ask, wrapping my arms around his torso.

"My family is originally from a town in Germany, on the border of France. We are going to a cottage I own for about 2 weeks," Soren says, running his fingers through my hair.

"Germany? I've always wanted to go. What's the town called?"

"Strasbourg. It's a perfect combination of France and Germany."

I have no idea where that is, but the name he spoke clicks in my head. He pronounced it like a fluent speaker.

"Soren, do you speak German?"

He pulls away a little from me. "Yes, amongst other languages. It was important to my mom for me to know the

language since that's where the Astor lineage follows.”

My eyebrows furrowed together. How did I never know this? “What other languages do you speak?”

“Italian, Spanish, French, German, Russian, and I've been learning Japanese.”

My eyebrows fly to my hairline. How did he learn so many languages? Was it forced upon him as a child, or did he learn it because of his line of business?

“That's enough with the questions for now, Freya. Did you want to go get things for Storm? And perhaps get lunch?”

I agree and put Storm's collar and leash on, following Soren as we all pile into the SUV. He casually rests his hand on my thigh as we ride to the local pet store.





image-placeholder

After a hefty shopping spree, spoiling our new puppy, we sat on the patio of a restaurant for lunch. Soren and I discuss plans for our trip to Germany. Storm has a tough time controlling herself from drooling all over my lunch. Little does she know it's only a salad, and I doubt she would enjoy it.

“When do you leave, Soren?”

“Tomorrow morning, very early. I'll be back in a few days. So on Friday, we will leave for Miami for your father's party, then we will leave Sunday for Germany. Just make sure you have a bag packed for that too.” Soren says, then shoves his sandwich into his mouth, taking a small bite. Rather than chewing, he takes it out and feeds it to Storm, who gladly gobbles it up. Soren gives Storm a small smile, “You are going to be one spoiled dog, aren't you?”

I can't help but feel a swell in my chest watching the two of them interact. He cares about her, even though he has a hard time showing it. I continue with my salad, watching the two of them interact, but Storm is smart enough to know he won't give her any more, so she returns to me. I giggle and give her some pets, and she huffs that there's no food in my hand to give her. With time, we will slowly turn our house into a home and knit ourselves a small happy family.

The rest of the night is spent watching movies and cooking dinner together, with little said between us. But it's a comfortable silence that blankets us.





image-placeholder

I woke the following day to no one next to me but a note.

*I didn't want to wake you. I will be back in 3 days. Call me every night.*

*x Soren*

I look down at the note, and it feels as though he's written me a love letter with every note he leaves me. I date the back of them and store them away in a locked box I hide in the back of the closet. It's a little reminder for me that he does care. Any other guy would have just left without saying anything or just texted. He makes a point to find a piece of paper and pen to write me these notes. There's "care" placed in each of them.

Storm jumps off the bed, stretching as I make my way to the kitchen to make myself a coffee. The house is tranquil, but the silence bothers me. Turning on the TV, Storm settles down at my feet to stay on guard for me, any slight movement and sound causing her to jump up in protection. Luci has been given the next month off, which is probably best since Storm might take her arm off if she enters.

Night finally comes, and I call Soren as requested in his note. He answers the phone on the last ring, and the loud booming of music assaults my ears.

"Freya, I can't talk tonight," He shouts into the phone.

My cheeks flush. He's at a club? What business does he have doing there?

“What’s with the blaring music?” I ask, but there’s a likelihood he can’t even hear me.

“Freya, I can’t hear you,” He yells into the phone.

“I said, why is there blaring music? Are you at a club? I thought you were on a work trip,” I scream into the phone in hopes that he can hear me.

“I can’t hear you! Give me—”

I end the phone call, cutting him off mid-sentence.

Why the fuck would he have me call him every night, then the first night go to a nightclub?

My palms clam up, hoping he won’t be mad at me for abruptly ending our phone call. Maybe the wine is just getting to me, but it shakes me to the core that he’d be there after telling me to call him every night. It’s fine. He can go out and party with others without me being there. Besides, he wouldn’t do anything with anyone. *Right?*





image-placeholder

I didn't call him the next day. I didn't want to be a burden to him, more than I already feel like I am. My cheeks flush, remembering our honeymoon when I told him it hurt my feelings that he'd want to be with other girls besides me. I shouldn't have said that. It was selfish. He is in just as bad of a position as I am now, and for me to dictate his life just isn't right for me to do.

On the third day, I got a call in the afternoon as I was running on the treadmill. Soren's name flashes over the screen. I eye it down as I gnaw on my cheek, but swipe to answer the phone.

"Hello?" I answer, winded, as I stop the treadmill.

"Why didn't you call me last night?" Soren barks through the phone with a hard edge to it. He's pissed.

My mouth opens and closes like a fish out of water. But only heavy breaths come out. He wanted me to call him still? I needed a break from that first night and the angst that has filled me since then.

"You hung up on me the first night. Why are you out of breath?"

I stay silent as the clacking of keys on a keyboard rings through on my side. I look up at the camera in the corner of our gym. I bet he's looking for me right now. That's ridiculous; he wouldn't do that.

"Freya, are you okay?" His voice softens.

I nod but remember he can't see me. "I'm okay, just been bored."

"Why didn't you call me?" Soren questions again, his hard edge not entirely faded away yet.

"Um, I just thought you'd be busy like the first night." I start to fiddle with the hem of my shorts. If he is watching, he'll at least be able to get a good show since I'm only in a sports bra and shorts.

"I was busy the first night, but I went to a quieter area to talk to you when you hung up on me. You know it's rude to hang up on someone, right?" I don't respond; not sure what to say. He continues for me, "Why did you do that? Why didn't you call me yesterday?"

"I just didn't want to be a burden to you," I blurt out. *I shouldn't have said that.* I want to facepalm at my word vomit.

There's a long pause on his end, and my heart is in my fucking throat. My hands start to shake because, frankly, I am not sure if I can handle hearing that I am a burden. I can't handle the rejection. I might not know him well, but I have fallen for Soren. His softer, caring sides, hell, even the sides that want to spank the shit out of me for my mouth. I know deep down that he is a good person with good intentions. He just has a hard time showing it.

"You're not a burden, Freya. You're my wife. I want to make sure you're okay." He speaks more softly like he's saddened by my words. "Did you at least have a good last couple of days?"

I don't have the heart to tell him I've been utterly miserable since the first night. How can a person become so attached to someone they know nothing about? "Yeah, Storm and I have been writing and watching TV. We played B-A-L-L." I giggle, looking down at Storm, who vigorously attempts to rip the stuffing out of her toy. "She's learned the word and takes it very seriously."

Soren chuckles on the other side. "Well, I'm glad, my darling. My trip has been extended another day, so I won't be returning until tomorrow night."

"How has your trip been so far?"

Soren sucks in a breath and deeply exhales. "It's been stressful, honestly. Between the first night of having to go out to a club so my dad can rail some 20-year-old, the arguments between our fathers, you not calling, and not being here overall, I think I'm going to lose it. It's been stressful."

I blush at his admission. He's missed me. "I've missed you too, Soren. Are you alone?" I question as I make my way to the bedroom. Losing all my clothes in the process.

"Uh, yeah." He falters for a moment. "Why do you ask?" I switched the phone call over to a FaceTime call. "Freya, are you trying to FaceTime me?"

"Just answer it."

I stare back at myself until Soren's face finally pops up. He's sitting in his hotel room with just a lamp on, and the blinds are drawn. His eyebrows are furrowed together,

confused at my sudden change. Then his eyes widen, and he brings the phone closer to his face. He moves to remove what I assume is his laptop, setting it on the bed next to him.

“Are you naked?” He questions.

I set my phone on the dresser and took a few steps back until my knees hit the bench at the end of our bed.

“Yeah.”

A mischievous grin grows on my face. I want him to know I’ve been thinking about him. I want to show him what he does to me. I don’t know who this new Freya is, but fuck is she sexy and fierce.

He watches me with fire in his eyes as I climb onto the bed. I rest my feet on the bench, before widening my knees and showing him my glistening pussy. I dip two fingers in and trail them through my wet center. When I pull my fingers away, I show him, then stick them in my mouth, sucking on them hard. The saltiness from my arousal invades my senses, and I let out a moan, imagining these are his fingers he’s sticking in my mouth. I’m going to put on a fucking show for him. He’ll regret leaving me here on my own.

His lips part as he continues to watch, but he sets his phone down. I pause for a moment, allowing him to take his pants off. He loses all his clothes and shows me his erection. It sends a spark through my body. *What I wouldn’t do for that to be inside me right now.* His camera turns back to his face.

“What do you want me to do to myself?” I ask as I pinch my nipple, teasing myself.

“Finger yourself, baby.” His voice is strangled, and I can see his arm moving as I do as I’m told. I begin to finger myself with two fingers when I’m interrupted again, “I know you can take another finger, Freya. Add another,” Soren growls through the phone.

I follow his lead, pumping three fingers in and out of me, and I let out little moans and pants. He moans, watching me still. “Rub your clit. Play with yourself as if I weren’t even here.”

I struggle to keep myself propped up as I begin to rub my clit. A pool of warmth builds up in my lower stomach, and I pick up the pace chasing my orgasm.

Soren watches me with his face screwed together as he does the same. His hand strokes over his erection in jerky motions. A bead of precum drips out of the tip of his dick.

“Fuck Freya, you are so sexy like this.”

Pride swells in my chest, and my pussy just gets wetter with his words of praise. My body starts to involuntarily rock into my hands, and the pool creates waves throughout my body.

“Oh fuck yeah, baby. Come for me.” Soren calls out, stroking himself faster and harder, dragging him closer to the edge of his release.

On his command, I come, my legs shaking as I come down hard. A ringing in my ears and a blinding white light flood my

eyes. I can hear Soren groan as he comes too. I lay back on the bed, my hands falling to my sides. Trying to catch my breath, but I just need a moment.

“That was so hot, Freya.” He’s heaving for a breath too.

I start to laugh, a genuine full-belly laugh. Soren starts to chuckle too, and his smile reaches his eyes. “You’re going to be the death of me. I’m coming back tonight. Whether it be late at night or early in the morning. I have to have you tonight. The real thing.”

I sit up and move to get my phone. “Don’t you have another meeting tomorrow?”

“It’s an emergency. I have to go home,” He says playfully.

I giggle at him. “If that’s what you want. I’ll ensure I have your prize wrapped up nicely for when you get home,” I tease.

“Yes, please. I need to call the pilot and get my schedule shifted around. I’ll let you know when I’m boarding.”

I nod, giving him a small smile. “See you soon.”

I end the call and throw my phone onto the bed. As if I needed a push further off the cliff, I have fallen even more for him.

## Chapter Twenty-Six

## Freya

A few days later, Soren and I are boarding a plane to go back to Miami for my father's birthday party. Storm immediately goes and sniffs everything on the plane. It's the same plane we took to go on our honeymoon, but we have different flight attendants this time. Two males instead of females. I stifle a smile as Soren and I sit in the same seats we did on the way to Bali. I set my purse next to me when Soren and I were served the drinks we ordered on the way in. Storm jumps onto the seat next to Soren, and he reaches over to pet her.

"I see you got new staff," I comment.

Soren shrugs, "Thought it would be for the best. Besides, you still have to worry about the flight attendants trying to fuck me now. Which could still be a possibility if they play their cards right."

He winks at me and I nearly spit my drink out at his frankness, charming me with his glowing smile. "I think I'll take that risk."

I nap once we are in the air, and Soren follows me into the bedroom. He watches a movie next to me, keeping his hand on my ass as I sleep on my stomach. I drift off to the sound of whatever movie he's playing.





image-placeholder

“Freya,” Soren whispers into my ear, now cradling me to him, but he sounds far away. “Freya,” He repeats.

I lay motionless, trying to remain in control of my dream.

*Pop.*

I jolt awake at the feeling of his hand slapping my ass.

“Finally. Fuck.” He runs a hand through his hair, standing to redress. “Get dressed. We land in 30 minutes. Here, put these on.” He tosses a pair of heavier panties in my direction.

“Why do you want me to wear these?” I ask, holding them up with one finger. I arch an eyebrow in his direction.

Soren smirks, buttoning his shirt back up. “Because I said so. Now put them on.”

I stand, slip off the panties I was wearing, and throw them in his direction. Soren’s hand flies out to catch the discarded pair, his eyes locked on me as he pockets them.

“You’re such a perv.” I laugh at him and slip on the new pair he so kindly asked me to wear.

He shrugs at me, “Only when it comes to you.” He picks up a remote on the nightstand, holding it between his two fingers. “Behave tonight, and you will be rewarded. If not, then, well. You’ll see. The only rule is, don’t come.” He shoots me a wink and smirks, putting the small remote into his dress pants pocket before leaving the bedroom for the main cabin.

Soren and I pull into my parent’s driveway when there’s a click in his pocket, and a sudden vibration assaults my

sensitive clit. I nearly jump out of my skin when the vibration starts. The driver looks back at us in the rearview mirror, catching Soren's cutthroat, cold gaze, and focuses back on the road. I grip his arm, knuckles turning white. Then, it stops just as it begins. I'm fucked. I won't be able to follow his one rule. I'll do my best, but it's almost impossible with high vibrations ripping through me. I feel my cheeks grow hot, and I let out a soft pant. The only rule was to not come, but he didn't say anything about being discreet.

The driver puts the car in park and opens my door. Serena is waiting on the porch, more than likely for me, as she glares at cousins passing by. She spots the car and runs to me as I exit the vehicle. She hugs me with all her might. We giggle uncontrollably as Serena sways us back and forth before pulling away and examining me.

"I love this dress, Freya."

"Thank you, Soren gave it to me for tonight." I blush, looking over at him through my lashes. It's a simple short black dress with long sleeves.

Soren stands stoic and shows no emotion while watching Serena and I interact. He moves to shake my father's hand, and my mother pulls him into a hug. Every time she hugs him, he turns as stiff as a board before quickly retreating and clinging to me. The grip on my hand tightens as her hug becomes as tight as a boa constrictor. I can't tell if his discomfort comes from another woman touching him or if it's just because it's my mother touching him.

“I’m so happy you were both able to come to join us for Frank’s birthday. Please, let’s all go inside.” My mother releases Soren and gestures for us to enter the house.

Soren grabs my waist, pulling me to him as we enter. It looks the same as it did at our wedding, but it’s not covered in flowers anymore. People bustle around, laughing, drinking, and smiling. Luca and Laura approach us, and as Luca reaches his hand out for mine, that *oh so fucking* tingling vibration begins again.

My face twists up, fighting to keep my face as emotionless as possible as my legs start to tremble. Soren holds me closer to his side and leans down to whisper into my ear.

“Be a good girl.”

I clutch onto his blazer after his father shakes my hand. The group walks off, joining everyone else partying, leaving just Soren and me.

“Please. S—Stop. I—I’m gonna—” I plead with him, my thighs clenching together as I try to keep my shit together.

Soren smirks, looking down at me, practically having to hold me up as my whole body starts to tremble. He shows me some mercy and switches it off again just as I am about to come. My face must be beet red at this point, and I gasp for breath, trying to regain my surroundings. He places a kiss on the top of my head.

“Let’s join everyone else for the party. Wouldn’t want to disappoint anyone that we didn’t socialize, hm?” He keeps a

firm hand on my waist, with the other in his pants pocket.

We head straight for the bar, and Soren orders for us as Serena approaches.

“So, how is married life treating you two? Finally fucking again?” Serena is a little tipsy at this point and already gives no fucks when she’s sober, let alone drunk.

I turn to face her, my back against the bar. I flush at her question, recalling our conversation a couple of weeks ago. I should remember to not tell her when I’m getting railed to help prevent incidents like this.

“Serena! That is not appropriate to ask,” I shout at her, “But yes, we are.” I lean in and whisper, giggling. “I think Abe is looking for you.” I point in the direction Abe is standing, who is beaoning her from across the room.

“Excuse me. I have some business to attend to.” She giggles, strutting toward him.

He leans closer, pressing a kiss to my hairline. His arm wraps around my waist, pulling me closer to him as heat flares in my stomach. We are still pressed up against the bar, leaning against it as we face the room. His left hand on my waist snakes its way to the hem of my dress. He lifts it and plunges his fingers into my dripping core, and with his right, there’s another click. The vibrator buzzes back to life, and his fingers move in and out of me.

I grip his blazer like my life depends on it. “Are you trying to make me come, so you have to punish me?” I say through

grit teeth.

I start sweating, doing my absolute best to get my shit together. Why is this so fucking erotic? I'm staring at my family, suppressing an orgasm, and somehow that thrill is even hotter to me than anything else. A wave starts to crash through me, and I hitch my breath. My orgasm is starting to build, and then Soren removes his fingers, switching the vibrator off. My clit throbs as the orgasm pulls away.

He smooths out my dress, trying to hold face that he did not just have his fingers in me. Soren lifts those fingers to his mouth, sucking them clean like he just had a delicious meal.

“So fucking delectable.” He groans.

I gape at him, my eyes begging him to just fuck me. At this point, I'd be willing to fuck in front of everyone if that means his cock is in me. Goddamn. We are just as bad as Serena and Abe. However, my thoughts come to a crashing stop when family approaches us, noticing we are hiding by the bar.

“How is married life?” His aunt Margaret questions, sipping on her martini glass.

“Are you guys trying yet?” Her daughter asks on top of it too.

“You know we were already pregnant by 6 months after being married,” His aunt chimes in again.

A whole barrage of questions and comments about our relationship is thrown at us. I lean into Soren, hoping he would be willing to answer the questions.

I listen to Soren about our honeymoon and our picturesque living situation, embellishing all of it. Because the reality of it is, it's been hard for both of us to adjust to the new living arrangements. I miss the question but perk up at the mention of children again.

“We are waiting for a while before deciding to have kids. We enjoy our married life and want to keep it that way,” Soren answers with little to no emotion on his face.

He gets like this around family or other people in general. Cold. Emotionless.

“Freya, how do you feel about this? I mean, you are in your prime. It's a perfect time to have children. It won't get any easier, plus given your age difference, Soren should have kids when he's younger rather than in his forties,” His aunt comments again.

“Um.” I draw a blank as it dawns on me; I don't even know how old he is. Does he know how old I am? “We want to wait, both of us. We know it won't be easy, but given that I am younger,” I emphasize younger while I side-eye Soren, “We think it'd be best to let me live my life a little longer before locking in with babies.” I say sullenly.

I want this conversation to end so badly, wishing I could retreat, but that would mean leaving Soren's side. Why do people always feel the need to comment on how we're supposed to live our lives? Soren notices my change in behavior and pulls me away into a separate area, excusing us.

“How much longer until we can leave?” I ask Soren, but I’m interrupted as my mother approaches us. *Just when I thought we would get a few moments alone together.*

“There you are. I saw you at the bar, then you disappeared. Come on, it’s almost time to sing happy birthday to your father.” My mother pulls Soren and me back into the crowded living room.

Serena appears from the kitchen with a cake in her hands. “Happy Birthday” erupts through the air, and so does the delicious buzzing against my clit. I try to sing through it, focusing on Serena carrying the cake. When he switches it off again. I breathe out, but just as quick as he turns it off, it comes to life again. Everyone’s clapping around me, but I can’t hear them over the thumping of my heart in my throat. My vision starts to turn black, and I begin to nearly pant.

“Come,” He whispers in my ear.

And I do. My knees buckle underneath me, and he wraps his arm around me tightly. Earth-shattering waves crash through me as I come on his command. I put my hand over my mouth and close my eyes. I do everything I can to not draw attention to us. Fireworks dance across my eyes as I squeeze them shut. It takes a moment for my body to come down from its high before I can open my eyes again. I look up at Soren with a dazed look on my face. He looks down at me and presses a kiss on my forehead. My cheeks are flushed at this point, and I still feel weak in my knees.

Another family member approaches us, his cousin, I believe. “My dear, are you okay? You don’t look like you’re feeling well.”

I open my mouth to answer that I’m okay when Soren speaks up, “We are just exhausted from the flight and the events of tonight. We are going to bed now. Good night, Margaret,” Soren says dryly, dragging me up to the stairs.

I stare up at the stairs when Soren picks me up.

“Thank you, I don’t think I’d be able to make it.” My brain is still in a fog from that orgasm.

Soren chuckles. “You’re in for a long night. You did so well following my rules. Learned your lesson from the last time, huh?”

I suck in a breath but feel myself start to drip with desire again.





image-placeholder

We woke the following day tangled in each other's limbs in my old bedroom. Storm lies down by our feet and looks at us in disgust as we wake her from sleep with our movement.

“Good morning, my darling.” Soren yawns next to me. He pulls me closer to him as if it were even possible. “Did you sleep well, Freya?”

I hum a yes when we're interrupted by a knock on the door. Soren jolts quickly to pull the covers over us. A thin white sheet would expose us to a whole lot that the other person probably wouldn't want to see.

“What?” I bark out, upset that someone stomped all over our bubble.

“It's breakfast time,” My mom says from the other side in her sing-songy voice. Rarely does she sound anything but happy.

Soren groans, pulling the blanket down a little more. I get a good look at his body stretched out next to me, and I drink him in.

“Like what you see, baby?” Soren smirks.

I snap out of my thoughts before looking away, blushing. He looks like something out of someone's dreams, and I get to have him for the rest of our lives. Then the vision of him holding our child flashes through my eyes, and I can't help but almost want that. At the end of the day, I'm sure he will be a wonderful father, considering how he is with Storm. Does he want kids sooner rather than later? But if we have children

now, it'll feel like it was ordered by Luca rather than our decision. Our relationship has been dictated enough by others. Children are something we can decide for ourselves.

Soren shuffles out of bed next to me, and I bookmark those thoughts for later when I can ask him. We dress and join everyone downstairs. Serena and Abe have two seats next to them, and we join them in the breakfast array.

Everyone is making small talk when Serena turns to me, wagging her eyebrows and whispering, "So, did you guys have as kinky of a night as Abe and I did?"

I balk at her question; we are in front of family. Not to mention, I *know* Soren is straining to hear our conversation, and based on the huge grin plastered on Abe's face, he heard it as well.

"Serena. Not now." I give her a side-eyed glare.

She pouts, turning back to her breakfast. "When can I visit you? But like a planned, expected visit?"

"*Please* plan a visit. The guard had to go to the hospital for a broken nose," Soren mutters next to me, and I can't help but giggle a little at his statement and Abe's shenanigans.

"It will be this time, as long as you let me see my sister," Serena says casually, cutting into her sausage, "Otherwise, you'll be greeted with more than a guard's broken nose."

Soren can't help but let out a teeny tiny smile. He likes Serena and her feistiness. She's always been that way. My

heart melts a little at his smile; he seems more at ease today than yesterday.

“When do you fly back?” Abe asks.

“Today, shortly after breakfast,” Soren answers before I get the opportunity to speak.

Soren’s always in a pissing contest with Abe; he doesn’t like me talking to Abe. I swear it’s because it’s another dude, and Soren is possessive. But at least he isn’t possessive in the same way as Tristan was. In fact, they aren’t even comparable.

“That’s a bummer. Well, I’ll just call you to schedule something, okay, Freya?” Serena and Abe walk away from the table, leaving us with my parents. They’re deep in a conversation with Soren’s parents; they don’t even acknowledge us, which is fine by me.

I continue pushing my food around my plate, not wanting to eat right now. Soren stares at me, “Two bites of everything, and we can go.” My eyes widened at him. “If you think I’m joking, we will sit here all day and night.”

He talks to me like I am a child. I look at our parents to make sure they aren’t paying attention, and they aren’t, except for Luca. He’s watching us like a hawk and even looks pissed. Soren told me at one point that Luca thought it’d be best to not get close to me, but he couldn’t help it. *Oh well.*

“Soren, I’m full. I’ve already had my fill of breakfast.” I bat my eyelashes at him.

He grins. “Cum is not sufficient breakfast.”

“Maybe not to you, but it is for me. I’ll take a little more of that if you’d like.” I offer up to him.

He shakes his head. “You better hurry up. I’m pretty sure your parents will talk to you next.”

My eyes widened at him. We have a staring contest for a moment, but I cave first and take two bites of everything. I only did it since he was probably right. We were going to be the next victims of their conversation.

“See. How hard was that?” Soren questions, wrapping his arm around my neck as we walk back to our room.

I roll my eyes. “I still would much rather have your cum,” I grumbled to him.

He pulls me closer to him and presses a kiss into my hair.

Welcoming us back to our room, Storm immediately runs to us, jumping up and licking kisses on any available surface for Soren and me. I kneel in front of her as she kisses my face. I giggle and pet her vigorously.

“Let’s start to pack so we can leave. I’m ready to have you all to myself again.” Soren comes up from behind me, wrapping his arms around my middle.

I smile genuinely, and for the first time in a while, I’m excited about being on our own.

## Chapter Twenty-Seven

## Freya

When we arrive at the cottage in Germany, I take in the picturesque setting. No one was around for miles; a pond, plenty of trees, and ivy trailed up the house. It looks like something out of a fairytale. Storm sits between us and shakes with excitement as she knows we've arrived at our destination.

"Do you like it?" Soren asks as we get out of the car.

"It's beautiful," I whisper, staring at the house. Storm starts to pull on my arm, wanting to chase the squirrel climbing up the tree.

"You can take her off the leash. The property is completely fenced in, and her collar has a GPS tracker in case she gets lost," Soren says as he opens the truck to pull the luggage out.

I let her run free, knowing she will also have the time of her life. Storm takes off in the direction of the squirrel. Barking and jumping when she reaches it, just narrowly missing it.

Soren's arms are packed with the luggage as he makes his way to the door. I attempt to take them from him, but he fights me on it, so I help by holding the door. As soon as the door

opens, Storm comes barreling into the house, not giving a flying flip as we were walking in simultaneously.

“Crazy ass dog.” Soren mutters after he is almost taken down.

I follow him in and take in my surroundings. It’s a cozy little cottage that’s warm and inviting, with natural wood everywhere. It’s quaint, with a small kitchen and living room open to each other. The stone fireplace seems more prominent than the entire home. The stairs off to the side of the front door open up to a loft up above, overlooking the living room. Soren trails up the stairs and sets the luggage out of sight. He walks up to the railing of the loft staring down, taking everything in.

“I used to live here when I was 16. I haven’t even seen it since the decorator and designers transformed it. When I lived here, there was only one bed. Not a single other piece of furniture. Looks nice now, like a home.”

“It sat empty for that long?” I ask, watching his towering figure descend the stairs.

“No. It hasn’t. It’s been used as a home for families in need. We are between families, so I decided it’d be a good time to visit. Haven’t been back in a while.” Soren leans against the kitchen counter, looking down as though in deep thought.

I approach him and grab his face. “That’s so kind of you to help those in need.” And I mean it genuinely.

He looks away, a taint of a blush on his cheeks. “It’s nothing. Besides, as you said, it would be sitting vacant.”

I don't respond, knowing he's slowly breaking down his walls, and I don't want to push him too far. Lord knows I have that same problem as well.

“Well, it's almost night. Are you hungry?” Soren changes the subject.

I nod and follow him to the fridge full of different options. I begin to cook when Soren decides to light a fire. Storm lays down in front of the fire and soaks in its warmth. I could get used to watching the two of them as I cook dinner. Then children running up and down the stairs as Soren chases them dance across my eyes. I immediately shut those thoughts down, knowing that it could never happen. Children will never happen for us. Not with Luca looming in the background, trying to control our relationship. That should only be decided by Soren and me. We haven't discussed having kids yet. I'm sure we will at some point, but I'm not that concerned with it. Especially if our children fall victim to the same fate we lived. Well, that I lived. I know nothing about what his childhood was like. But it seems terrible, considering his teenage years were spent here.

Alone.

Poor Soren. *My darling, Soren.*





image-placeholder

A few days into our trip, Soren and I are having a picnic by the pond under a tree in the backyard, enjoying the gorgeous day. I took the opportunity to get to know him deeper than we did before.

“What were you doing here when you were 16? Did you live on your own here?” I begin after Soren refills our wine glasses.

I can tell Soren is having an internal battle with himself about whether or not he should get into this tonight, but the side I’m hoping for wins.

“I moved around a lot growing up and was on my own. Living in Germany only lasted from 16 to 19 when I decided I was done with my parent’s bullshit. I was here to learn the language and to establish the Astor name again. There hadn’t been a male heir to the name between my aunts and uncles until me. It was a name that was envied at one point in time. Now, it’s just a myth around here.”

“What’s the story of your last name?” I whisper.

He gives a ghost of a smile to his glass before continuing. “To be an Astor meant power and money beyond anyone’s wildest imagination. My great-great-grandfather owned a castle not far from here, where he started the family business.”

“And what exactly does your family specialize in?” I question, sitting back with a wine glass in hand. I fully intend to get every piece of information I can from him.

“We are best for carrying out hits. Your family is best in weapons, and I am specialized in security. But not like bodyguards, it’s more like,” Soren trails off for a moment, trying to find the right words, “Like stalking. I have people on my team who have access to top-secret information and can watch from any camera anywhere in the world. Many people are willing to pay a lot of money to be able to watch over their lovers, family, enemies, whatever their heart desires.”

I swallow hard. *Has he done that to me before?* I’m sure he hasn’t. He would have no reason to; he’s home most of the time. I speak up again when I realize he won’t continue until I ask another question. “Surely there are darker sides to your business.” It’s more like a statement than a question.

“Uh, there are.” Soren looks down, not giving much more away.

“What would that be?” I lift my head higher. I know I can take it.

“Freya, please.” He looks over at me, pleading with me to stop.

I return the same look, begging him to continue. “Soren. I need to hear this,” I speak softly, almost vulnerable.

“We offer rooms for people to purchase. They pay millions to watch people get murdered.”

The blow hits me harder than I thought it would. “Oh.”

“It’s a tiny portion of our business, but it’s still there. Your mother met my father and me when she approached us about

being able to track your father.”

I snort. “Yeah, him and his mistresses.”

Soren stays silent, and it’s all I need to hear. She might be all cheery and happy around people, but deep down, she is a cold-hearted, hateful bitch. Always has been since childhood. Serena and I had each other only. Raised each other for the most part.

“Don’t worry. My mother did the same thing to me too. Except she made me do it when I would visit them. I was always the quickest and cleanest about it. She didn’t trust anyone else with it, but me.” Soren tries to offer some comfort, but it doesn’t help. “What was it like growing up for you?” Soren asks, leaning back onto his hands, and stretching his long legs out.

“Um. It was mainly my sister and me. My mother was more concerned about her wine glass being full than being a real mother. We had nannies our whole lives.” I trail off, take a deep breath, and continue, “When it came to school, I was required to be homeschooled since it was considered more ‘dangerous’ for me to attend. Now looking at it, I’d been groomed my whole life to be this picture-perfect wife. I honestly know very little about my family’s business. But my sister went to a private school. I didn’t have any friends growing up; I had Serena. Not a single other person. When I turned 18, I wanted out desperately. So I moved to the furthest place possible, Seattle. At the first party I went to in college, I met Tristan there, and we hit it off at first.” I feel myself

rambling, but I continue regardless, “You know the rest of that story.”

“How long were you out of college when I met you?”

“About nine months after. It took me a little longer to graduate since there was about a year I couldn’t even leave the house.”

Soren shutters at the thought, and I zone out for a moment as I reflect on my life and how much I have been through in such a short period. Tristan was the worst that had happened to me.

“So your entire life was based around your family. They dictated every decision you’ve made, controlled your life from childhood to now.” Soren watches Storm chase a duck into the pond for a moment before continuing. “My family did the same thing to me too. To my father, I was nothing but the receipt of a business transaction. There are reasons why I am an only child. I know my father forced himself upon my mother several times until she had me.

My father forced me out of the house when I was ten, and I attended a boarding school in Russia until I was thirteen. My mother would visit occasionally, but only when she could escape my father. Perhaps it was a good thing because, between 15 and 16, I lived at home. I found it was easier to live on my own than to live with my parents. Then when I was 21, I started my business from the ground up. It helped to have your father’s backing and mine financially, but I put the work in to get it to where it would be beneficial.”

“Wait. My father owns a portion of your business?”

“Not anymore. Frank did for a while until I could buy him and my father out.”

“And you knew my father before? How were you never told about our marriage?”

Soren shrugs. “I have other people to communicate with my father if it’s necessary. It wasn’t until a month or so before the announcement that he started reaching out to me. My mother wasn’t allowed to speak to me unless it went through my father. I think they were planning our marriage for a while.”

“Soren, how did you end up in the business of hosting these... Torture rooms?”

He sucks in a breath, “I moved around a lot because I was training since I was 13 to be a hitman. My father had me groomed to be the picture-perfect killing machine, another tool in his toolbox. But I developed my own ideas for the skills I was taught and never fit into his toolbox. Probably for the best, anyway. I was more so my mother’s tool to use. She had me dispose of my father’s mistresses. She made me into a monster. Made me feel as though this was all I was good for. That I was not worthy of love.”

“Is that how you got your scars?” I whisper as my heart breaks, hearing him say he is not worthy of love. Soren is more than worthy of love. Hell, I’m not worthy of loving him. But I do, anyway.

He sucks in a breath. “Yeah. I should’ve died several times with the blood I’ve lost. This one is from a fight I got into when I was 20.” He points to the scar running across his eyebrow, starting on his forehead right above his eyebrow and ending at his temple. It’s faint enough that I always forget about it, but I’m sure he doesn’t. “The bullet wound above my heart was the first time I was shot. I was 17. I was with my trainer on a job when the person we were going after pulled a gun out, it was aimed at my heart, but somehow he missed anything vital by half an inch. The other one in my stomach was my most recent one. One of the people in the room we had got a hold of my gun and shot me with it. He didn’t escape, but that was only a year ago. The other slashes are from various petty fights or someone’s piss-poor attempt at killing me. I forget the stories of each of them.” He lets out a dry chuckle, “I’ve always wondered why I have met death on multiple occasions and lived to tell the tale. Why I was chosen to live again, but good people don’t have the same luxury. I understand now, though. I was supposed to meet you. You are my reason for being brought back all those times.”

Soren continues, “For what it’s worth, I wouldn’t change anything that’s happened, Freya. I wouldn’t want to turn back time and try to find someone else to marry. Everyone else who has been in my life was superficial. They couldn’t look past the wealth and power I carry, but none of that matters to you. I know what I said when we first found out, but I take it all back. I want the family, the love, the white picket fence, the happiness. I want all of it with you, Freya.” He scoots closer to

me, his forehead now resting on mine. “There is not a single other person I want. It’s only you, Freya. I don’t want another man’s hands on you, to kiss you, to cherish you, to love you. Unless it’s me.” He trails his hand up my outer thigh, placing small delicate kisses on my cheek and down my neck.

My breath hitches and our eyes connect. “I want this, Freya. I want you. Even if I have to follow you to the ends of the Earth. I will love you, eternally.”

He slams his mouth to mine, kissing me with so much love and passion it’s different from any other kiss we’ve shared. It’s slowed, as though this will be the last time we will ever be able to be connected. He pulls away for a moment, ripping his shirt off and pulling the top of my dress down, exposing my breasts to the cooler breeze. He pulls me on top of him, and it’s foreign to us. He’s allowing me some control over him. My body vibrates with excitement, my lips disconnect, and he groans from the loss. I pepper kisses from the corner of his mouth to his jaw and down his neck. I nip at the skin between his neck and collarbone, sucking and nibbling, leaving a hickey in its wake. Soren groans and moves his hands from my thighs to my ass, grinding me down onto his dick.

“I can’t wait anymore, baby. I need you now,” Soren pants out.

Desperation laced his voice, and his hands ran along my sides as if he were trying to memorize every inch of my skin. He unbuttons his pants and pulls his cock out, sitting up so we are nose to nose, and he guides himself to my entrance.

He bites at my lower lip. “No panties, I see. Such a naughty girl.”

He teases us for a moment, running the tip of his dick along my slit before plunging himself into me. I sink further down, fully taking him in. I let out a deep breath at this angle. Wow. I don't think I've ever been on top before. It takes me a moment to adjust, and I start to rock back and forth. I must be doing something right since Soren lets out another groan as I come back down on him. His arms wrap around me, guiding me as I start to get the hang of it. Fuck, this feels so good. He suddenly hits the spot in me that causes my eyes to roll to the back of my head as I moan. He lays back completely, his hands never leaving my body. I lean back, my hands resting on his knees, and I continue to ride him like my life depends on it.

“Fuck, baby, you feel so good at this angle. But you look even better. You look like a goddess,” Soren groans.

He pauses and sits up so we are nose to nose.

“Do you trust me?” He grunts.

“Yes. With my life,” I moan out.

With that answer, he snakes both of his hands up to my neck, squeezing hard, and starts to bounce me up and down by gripping my neck. I nearly come at the sensation.

“Let go.” He bores his eyes into mine, nodding his head as though to say, ‘trust me.’

And I do.

I grip my hands onto his arms as he cuts circulation off completely. I feel my face turn red at the loss of oxygen, but continue to bounce with his help. The lack of oxygen going to my brain increases the euphoria flowing through my body. He releases a little bit, allowing me to take deep breaths before tightening his grip. Again and again, he tenses and loosens his grip on the throat, and it brings me closer to my climax.

When he releases his grip, I croak, “I’m gonna fucking come.”

“Come on my cock, baby,” Soren groans.

At this moment, I know he will be my key to start healing. His grip on my neck is similar to Tristan’s but this one. This one makes me feel empowered. I know I can tell him to stop at any point, and he will. Fuck, I would do anything, be anything for this man.

I bounce a few more times before finally finding my orgasm. I start to gasp as it hits me harder than ever.

“Fuck yes!” I cry out, stars dancing in my eyes.

“Just like that, baby,” Soren says, his hands moving down to my ass and continuing to bounce me on his cock. I am physically unable to move after that orgasm. I wrap my arms around his neck and hold onto him, so I don’t fall over.

His rhythm becomes more erratic, and he groans into my neck as he comes. We sat there for a moment. Both of us are still catching our breaths. His head rests on my chest as I rest mine on his head, holding him as close as possible. Soren pulls

back, and his hand connects to the back of my neck, the other wrapped around my body, keeping my body trapped to his. Soren's eyes connect with mine, swirling with deep unconditional love.

“I love you, Freya.”

My heart swells, but I choke to get the words out. I never imagined he would be the first one to say those words. I always thought I would be the first, but hearing him say he wants my dreams, too, makes my head swirl with rapture. *But why am I having such a hard time getting the words out?* He leans back, eyebrows furrowing together. His eyes search mine, looking for some explanation, but he won't find one.

He sits there for another moment before pushing me off of him. I struggle to keep a hold of him. I love him. I'm just choking. Tears start to well up in my eyes as he gathers his clothes and redresses. Then in the blink of an eye, he's back in the house, slamming the door shut. I shutter. I may have broken his heart completely after opening up to me as he did. He trusted me with his stories and his love, but I just squashed them down. I've ruined a perfect moment.

## Chapter Twenty-Eight

## Soren

I jerk my suitcase onto the bed and start stuffing the clothes I brought with me into it when Freya comes rushing into the house.

“Soren,” Freya chokes.

I glance over at her figure, as she tries to sloppily dress with tears clouding her eyes. She’s fine.

I keep packing and move on to pack her clothing as well.

“Soren, please. Let’s—”

I clench my jaw to stop myself from snapping at her, but it happens regardless. “Freya, enough. I don’t want to hear it. Here’s your bag, a car is waiting outside for you to go back home. I need some time.” I stride into the bathroom, slamming the door shut before I say anything rash.

“We need to talk about this. It’s not that I don’t-”

I rip the door open, and she staggers backward as if I’ve scared her. *Goddamn it.*

“There isn’t anything we need to discuss right now. You need to listen to what I’ve told you. Get into the car, and go home. Leave me be,” I snap.

Her bottom lip wobbles, and I so desperately want to reach out for her. Kiss that lip, and her tears away. Make all this pain go away. But I stand as still as a statue.

“I—” She hiccups.

“No. Go home.” I turn back to retreat to the bathroom and lock myself in it. I hear her moving to the bed, then still silence.

I don’t hear movement for a good two hours, but she comes to the realization I won’t back down. Not right now anyway, not until I know she will need to eat something.

“Soren, I’m leaving.” Her voice is thick as she attempts to speak. “I’ll meet you back at the house. Can we talk about it then?”

I stay silent for a moment, running a finger over my mouth.

“Yes. Travel safely.”





image-placeholder

I fucking hate pedophiles.

Seems like Germany has a plethora of them, as well as high-paying clients to witness the heir to the Astor name work with their own eyes. But the only client I take on is one that's supported me since my start.

The man in front of me groans and screams at me in German. Something about how I'm a pig fucker or something to that effect. I'm barely registering words as my knife slices and slashes over his body. Sparks of adrenaline flood me with each one and every thought washes away with his blood in the drain.

"Alright, I'm done with you toying with him. End him. I have a lunch date to go to," My customer instructs, crossing his arms over his chest.

I grit my teeth, plunging the knife into his chest over and over until I'm covered in blood.

"Good. My assistant has already wired the money over to you. By the way, I heard you got married. Congratulations. But something tells me your dickhead father had something to do with it." Walter states as if he's already heard Freya and I's story. We start walking towards the exit of the room.

I let out a curt laugh. "Yeah, something like that."

"What? Are you not happy in your marriage?" Walter stops in his tracks right before the door.

“I mean. Would you be?” I retort.  
Truth is, I’m the happiest I’ve ever been in my life despite not hearing my wife tell me she loves me.

Walter’s eyes soften to one that I would expect a good father to have when he’s about to give advice.

“You know, Barbara and I were an arranged marriage. Actually, she was engaged to someone else when we were told we were to be wed.” Walter informs me. “It took about a year for us to not scream at each other anytime we had to communicate.” He laughs.

My eyebrows furrow together, “Can I ask you a personal question?” I ask slowly.

“Anything,” Walter responds immediately.

“How did you get her to fall in love with you?”

Walter looks down at the floor pensively, “It wasn’t easy. It was a lot of work, for both of us. We argued every time we were in the same room with each other for the first year until I just got sick of it. I was the first to cave, and actively make changes in our relationship. I didn’t want to be like the other couples in our world. I wanted to be married to my best friend. I wanted a relationship with someone that I knew I could trust, and they would trust me. But how did I get her to fall in love with me? Erm. I communicated every emotion, thought, and everywhere I went. I brought her gifts, and showed her kindness she’s never really received before. That trust turned into love. You, kids, have only been married for what? Two months tops? I’d say if you aren’t screaming at each other

every day right about now, you're in a much better spot than my wife and I were then." Walter finishes.

I nod my head, "Thank you."

He offers me a curt nod, "I'm sure we will be in touch soon. Just think about what I said."

With that, he walks out the door swiftly, leaving me alone.





image-placeholder

*The only two people who have ever shown me kindness and love are on their knees with black cloth bags over their heads. My tutor and caregiver since I was sent away.*

*My dad must smell the fear rolling off of me in waves as he lets out a dark chuckle. “You know why they’re here, don’t you?”*

*My eyes shift over to him, “No.”*

*“No? Huh. Dumber than I realized. Seems that they haven’t been doing their job.” He rips the bags off of their heads.*

*They’re gagged, and start sobbing when they look at me.*

*“In our line of work, the target will do anything to sink their hooks into any weakness you have. Emotion of any kind is dangerous. Especially love. Love will get you killed.” My father circles them, “It’s unfortunate you grew too soft. They softened you too much. Therefore, you have to kill them. Slowly. Go grab that rope.”*

*My hands start shaking and tears spill down my cheeks. “They didn’t do anything. I can’t.”*

*“You will. They ruined you. Look at those sissy fucking tears. Weak. Pathetic!” My dad bellows. “You’re too old for those fucking tears. Look at you, wah!” He mocks me.*

*The shake in my hands calms, and they curl into fists. I want to kill him. I want him to die.*

*“Fucking kill them. Look, see, it’s easy!” He produces a gun from his jacket and shoots my tutor in the head without a*

*single blink.*

*“No!” I wail, but he points his gun at me when I rush toward her.*

*“Stop! This is exactly what I mean. Look at you, you’re fucking crying while a gun is pointed at you. You’re fucking useless,” My father shouts. “Grab that rope and strangle the other one. I want to watch the life leave her eyes.”*

*I shake my head aggressively. “I won’t. You can’t make me.”*

*“You’re right. But I will break you.”*

Pop

*The taste of metallic adrenaline fills my mouth, as I stare at their disfigured faces on the floor.*

*I don’t register my father leaving until the lights are flicked off, and the door slams shut behind him. I struggle to get to my feet to escape, but the sound of a lock sliding into place deafens the sound of rushing blood in my ears.*

*It took 5 days until he broke me at the age of 15.*

I wake myself up with a start before that memory can play any further. I whip my head around, trying to decipher where I am, but settle down when I realize I’m still on the plane heading back home. I rub my eyes, as I pull the cameras up in the home.

Freya is standing at the kitchen sink staring out into the backyard, unmoving. I press my lips together wanting to know

what's bothering her so badly, but I think I know the answer to that.

Having this time away from her has given me a chance to think semi-rationally. If she really didn't have a shred of care in her body for me, then she wouldn't text me every day two to three times a day. She wouldn't have sought my attention when we moved to Colorado. She wouldn't want to sleep with me. Freya has been through a lot. We grew up under the same circumstances. Plus, I'm sure Tristan fucked her up in more ways than she's even told me. It's probably new territory for her to navigate through just like it is for me. Realistically, how easy is it to fall in love with someone who has practically been MIA for the majority of our relationship? I failed her as a partner. I failed her as a friend. I failed her as a husband. I am the one to blame. This displaced anger shouldn't be taken out on her. I shouldn't have punished her like this. I should've talked to her about it before. But, Freya loves me. I know she does. And even if she isn't I'm perfectly fine with living with the delusion that she is. She is mine. Has been since I laid eyes on her, and always will be now that she's bound to me.

Freya recaptures my attention when she's digging through the kitchen drawers and produces a butter knife.

The flight attendant approaches me, "Sir, we will be landing in approximately a half hour."

I smile as I watch her produce a bobby pin from her hair standing at my office door.

"Perfect."

## Chapter Twenty-Nine

## Freya

It's been four days since Soren left. Despite Serena paying a visit to relish in my idiocracy, I'm bored out of my fucking mind waiting on my husband to return from where ever the fuck he came from.

And I have a *stupid* idea.

I hold a bobby pin, a credit card, and a butter knife in my hands as I approach the locked door leading to Soren's office. He's never allowed me into this room, and has told me several times to stay out. I want to know what he's hiding. I'm going to break in and find a way to get a hold of him, or in the least try to find cameras of his location just so I can know he's okay. He has security cameras everywhere, surely he has some where he's at too. I look down at Storm, who already knows her job. Stand guard in case he does come home. After some much-needed research, I attempt to break in by picking the lock. It seemed simple enough, but after nearly an hour of trying, I almost gave up, that was until I heard a little click and suddenly turned the knob.

My heart starts pounding in my chest. Is it going to be Soren's torture chamber? But sadly, it is not. He has a bookshelf, and a desk, with three computers on it. The computers are password protected, and I won't try to get in. *Maybe he has a notebook on his desk with the password?* No, that doesn't make any sense. He's the CEO of a tech company. He'd have his password memorized. Besides, I'd like for him to never know I was in here.

A single photo on his desk catches my eye. It's a photo of him and me at our wedding, right after we said I do. I would love to be able to redo that moment. Even if no one from our family is around to see it. The door on the left side beckons me to open it. Flipping the light switch on, my jaw drops, my stomach hits the floor, and my knees become wobbly.

It's photos of me. The night we first met, me in the hallway of the apartment in Miami with Serena, me undressing after we met, me sleeping that same night, me at my apartment in Seattle discovering the present, me coming to my orgasm while he's knelt on the ground, there are so many photos of me. I start to rip all of them down, examining each one. It's photos of me from every day since we first met. Even before we found out we were to be wed. After we moved here, and I was masturbating in the library while I was in the shower, bathing Storm, my vision became blurred as it's all becoming too much for me. I start to panic.

*Why the fuck does he have these? What would have happened if we weren't an arranged marriage?*

I start to back up when I hit a wall. Except the doorway is supposed to be there. My hand reaches out behind me when it touches a thigh.

It's Soren.

He stands with his hands behind his back for god knows how long.

I slowly turn around and freeze. I know this is an invasion of privacy, but he has been invading mine since we met. I don't say anything, but I kneel to pick the photos up and turn back to him. I'm unsure if I should feel angry, scared, flattered, or turned on. I feel a combination of all these feelings.

I hold the photos up and begin to speak when he raises his hand to stop me. I let out a breath I didn't realize I was holding.

"I'll explain everything, but first, you have been naughty. You've broken the one unspoken rule I've given you." He leans down, his nose almost touching mine, as he grasps my chin. "You broke into my office."

His eyes are cold and void of emotion. It makes me shiver. At this point, I'm desperate for any type of attention, even if it comes as the result of punishment. Soren starts to collect the photos from my hands and throws them onto the floor behind me, never breaking eye contact with him. Then he lifts me and throws me over his shoulder, bounding out of the office and into the bedroom. He sets me down before taking a step back.

“Strip. Then get onto the bed, legs spread apart with your arms above your head,” Soren says over his shoulder, now standing in front of his dresser.

I hesitate for a moment, then move on it, doing exactly as he says. Watching his every movement. He’s very calm. Scarily calm. He peeks over his shoulder, ensuring I’m in place and then approaches me. He’s holding a pair of metal handcuffs, a short stick with restraints on the ends, and a bottle of something. Perhaps lube. He begins by squirting the liquid over my stomach, chest, and pussy, and starts to spread it evenly across my skin. His hands dance across my skin, rubbing the liquid all over, making my body shiny and soft to the touch. It’s oil he’s rubbing into my skin. What the fuck does he have planned?

He says nothing and displays no emotion as he handcuffs me, weaving the connection between the headboard bars. Moving down to my feet, he ties each of my ankles to the bar, and for the first time in a while, he looks me in the eye. Soren smirks as I look at him in confusion, then the bar extends out and spreads my legs open. Leaving me completely exposed to the cool air. I gasp at the feeling, and there’s no sense in moving as he secures the restraints to the bed, leaving me completely unable to move. He crawls over top of me, his hands cradling my head. I lean into his touch, wanting more than just that innocent touch. *I want him to fucking defile me.*

“What’s your safe word?”

“Red,” I whisper.

“Louder.”

“Red,” I say louder for him.

He doesn't want me to repeat it. Soren abruptly stands, removes his button-up shirt, and walks to the door. I lift my head to watch him better. Is he about to just leave me here like this?

“I hope you're not afraid of the dark.”

Then leans over and flicks the light switch off. Leaving us in the absolute pitch black.

## Chapter Thirty

## Freya

It takes me a moment to adjust to the dark, but it heightens all my other senses. Very clearly, I can hear Soren pad across the room and return to his dresser. Unbuckling his belt, the material of his pants drops to the floor. He returns to the bed and straddles me at my thighs.

“Freya?”

“Yeah?”

“It’s crucial that you remember your safe word if it gets too much,” He says, his voice strained.

I can’t tell if it’s from desire or regret. Either way, he doesn’t give me a chance to respond that I know when to use my safe word when the sound of a match is lit. My jaw drops; not sure what he’s planning to do. I start to struggle against the restraints when he lights the blood-red candle stick in his other hand. I freeze. His face is illuminated by the small fire, and he is breathtaking at this angle. The tick in his jaw from irritation, his hooded eyes full of desire, his full lips wanting to be connected to my body somehow, his straight nose taking in the smell of baby oil.

I want all of him.

He throws the matches elsewhere and leans over me a little more, the candlestick tilted as the wax begins to collect at the tip. The drip falls, hitting my sternum, instantly burning and hardening.

I cry out at the sensation. I'm not sure if I should be turned on or scream out my safe word. I writhe against the restraints as another drip lands on the bottom of my breast, rolling down the slope before hardening.

“Why am I doing this, Freya?”

It takes me a moment to register what he said when another drip lands on my nipple. I gasp and arch my back.

“Answer me,” He commands over top of me. His face is dark.

“Because—” I falter when another drip hits the top of my other breast. Who would have known that pain and pleasure could be wrapped up in a drop of wax?

“Come on, Freya. Answer the question,” Soren growls.

“Because I broke your rule,” I stammer out between the drips of wax.

“What rule did you break?” He questions, an eyebrow arching in response.

Another drop hits my other nipple. I squeal at the feeling, pain starting to overcome the pleasure that was there.

“I broke into your office,” I pant out.

“You did. And it’s why you’re being punished. You shouldn’t invade people’s privacy,” Soren says coolly.

I choke out a laugh as a drop hits the top of my stomach, rolling down my rib cage.

“That’s ironic coming from you,” I blurt out.

Soren immediately pauses and leans over me. The candlestick is now closer to my skin, and I can feel the fire burning inches away. He has a dark smile on his face.

“Oh, darling. I was being nice to you.”

And he was because as the wax connects to my skin, it doesn’t harden as quickly as before. I nearly scream at the sensation. The burns it leaves on my stomach, I swear this motherfucker is going to scar me. But I still don’t say my safe word. Somehow I know the pain is going to be worth the pleasure that will follow.

Soren reaches over and teases my nipple, pinching and rolling it in his hand. Another bead of wax hits my skin; the sensation is too much for me. I can feel an orgasm building, and he hasn’t even truly started to touch me. The whole time, he’s studying my face and leans back, bringing the candlestick with him, now hovering over my pussy. He’s at least brought it back to its original height.

“If I touch you right now, Freya. Are you going to be wet like the filthy girl you are?”

I pant, sweat beading at my hairline. A hot wax drip falls onto my pubic bone, and I combust. I start to writhe against

the restraints, going into full-blown hysterics. Tears rolled down my red cheeks. Then his hand connects to my pussy, and he dips two fingers into my dripping core. I gasp at the feeling of fullness, knowing that's what I've wanted the whole time. Another drip of wax is about to drop, and the anticipation makes me lose my fucking mind.

“Have you learned your lesson, Freya?” Soren whispers.

“Yes!” I cry out, and tears continue down my face. His face is no longer dark but filled with disappointment.

Instead of the drip landing on me, he brings it to his chest, and the bead connects, rolling down his body. Slowing as it hits his belly button. He grits his teeth, then blows the candle out. Leaving us in the pitch black. Nothing but the sounds of our heavy breathing fills the room. He leans over and flicks on the lamp, filling the room with a soft, romantic light. Soren works to undo my handcuffs. The metal was biting my skin, but not as bad as it was when I was having wax dripping onto my skin. Then he undoes the ankle restraints, and as he turns to walk away completely, I catch his wrist. I can feel his eyes watching me as I look away from him. Need and embarrassment overtake my body, and I lead his hand to my dripping pussy. I don't want the night to end so soon.

His thumb brushes over my clit, and his fingers plunge into me, pumping in and out a few times. But I'm the one to stop him, as I sink to my knees in front of him, tugging down his boxers.

His breath hitches in the back of his throat as I grip the base of his cock. It's big enough around that my fingers don't connect. I look up at him, and I can barely make out the outline of his face as he looks down at me.

My eyes connect with his as they adjust, and I stick my tongue out, licking the tip of his dick, cleaning the precum dripping from his tip. His hand immediately connects to the back of my head. Then I take the plunge, sucking him further in.

He lets out a hiss from above, and his other hand grips my hair too. I pull back, and his hands push me back in, gently pushing for more. I oblige and take him in further, hollowing my cheeks and bobbing up and down on him. This is the second ever blowjob I've given. Willingly anyway. I look up at him, and his eyebrows are furrowed together, watching me with pure love and contentment in his eyes.

"Fuck, Freya. You work wonders with your mouth," He says, his head falling back, allowing himself to fully enjoy it. Then snaps back to me. "Touch yourself. I want to see you touch yourself while I fuck your mouth."

I hum around him, and he lets out a growl in response. I do as he says, the other hand fondling his balls comes down to tease my clit. Saliva now coating my chin, taking him nearly to his base, but I can't go any further.

"Relax your throat, and let out a breath before you go further. It makes it easier to deep throat that way." Soren whispers from above.

I do just that and can take all of him in now. Excitement blossoms in my chest, and I feel pride that my mouth can bring him such pleasure. Soren moans above me, and the grip on my hair tightens.

“Fuck, baby. You’re doing such a good job. It feels so good,” Soren grunts.

I let out a small smile, his words motivating me to go harder. His groans ring in my ears, and I almost can’t handle it. I rub a little more vigorously on my clit, then finger myself the best I can. I want the feeling of fullness back in me. Soren pulls my hair, and I release him with a pop. Looking up at him with confusion, he pulls up on me, signaling for me to stand.

“I had no intention of fucking you tonight. But I can’t resist. You did such a good job. I need to reward you,” Soren whispers against my lips. My body buzzes with desire as Soren pushes me onto the bed. “Ass up in the air, face down.”

I crawl onto the bed, and the wax starts to crack and break off me as I jostle around, getting into position. I still when I’m comfortable, and Soren’s fingers plunge into me. I moan out.

“Let me hear you, my beautiful slut,” His pace quickened as I let more moans out. My eyes roll to the back of my head as his fingers curl, hitting the spot in me that makes me see stars. Then the feeling of emptiness pulls me back to reality. My eyes open, and I look back at him to question why he’s stopped. I untangle myself from him, and flip over on my back and wrap my legs around his waist, drawing him into me. I lift my hips, grinding on his hard cock.

“Please,” I beg, creating friction for us. I want him to just fuck me already.

“Do you want my cock?”

I whimper, nodding my head.

“Use your words.” His hand cups my cheek, his thumb pressing into my bottom lip.

“I want you inside me, Soren. Please,” I pleaded with him.

He grips the base of his cock, pumping himself a few times before rubbing his tip along my slit. “I suppose you can have it,” Soren says, then thrusts into me, completely sheathing himself.

He pauses for a moment, a deep groan escaping from his throat.

I cry out, my back arching into his touch. Stars dance across my eyes, and it takes me a moment to register that Soren is going easier on me tonight. He’s gentle in his touches and kisses me more than usual. I’m snapped back to reality when his lips brush across the shell of my ear, whispering in my ear. I can’t hear any of it over the rush of blood in my ears. He’s pulled back already and hovering over me at a distance. He continues the same pace, lifting one of my legs to the crook of his elbow. This hits the spot in me that immediately brings me to my orgasm.

Soren follows shortly after me before releasing my leg and laying over me. But he refuses to put his whole weight onto me.

“I love you, Freya,” He whispers into my neck, panting to catch his breath.

Tears well up in my eyes. We didn’t just fuck; we made love. No one has ever done that to me before. The feeling puts my heart at ease, and tears slip out of my eyes. This is the perfect time to tell him, but I’m frozen again.

“It’s okay, darling. I know you love me. It’s just not time. And I’m okay with that,” He says, stroking my hair, trying to soothe the ache I have in my heart.

Soren gets up, goes to the bathroom, turns the faucet to the bathtub on, and lights a few candles. He returns to the bed and drags me to the edge, sitting up before running his hand along my chest. He’s hunting for the remaining wax stuck to me, and there’s not much more left. He places my arms around his neck, which I gladly draw him in, placing kisses along his cheek and neck.

“You better be careful,” He jokes, and heat rises to my cheeks as he lifts me to bring me to the bathroom.

“You know I can walk, right?” I say, clinging to him as he walks to the bathroom.

“I know. I just love to have you as close as possible. Even then, this isn’t close enough,” Soren says softly into my hair.

I grin into his neck as he sets me onto my feet in front of the bathtub. He hands me a scrunchie, knowing I don’t like to wash my hair in the bathtub. His hands ghost across my body, and I can see the marks left behind by the wax for the first

time. The areas where he was closer to my skin pinker and raised in comparison to the others where he was further away. Soren holds a hand out for me to hold onto as I climb in. Sinking further in, I hit where my burns are and have to grit my teeth to not make a noise. The water makes them sting again.

Soren comes in behind me, his legs straddling me, and the water level rises again, coming up to my breast. I can ignore the pain. I just want answers now.

“Soren, why did you have all those photos of me?” I ask, my voice small as suspense tightens in my chest.

He clears his throat, and I can feel him stiffen at the question. “Do you remember the first night we met?”

I smile and think fondly of that moment. “Yeah, at my father’s party.”

“I felt an immediate connection with you when our eyes met. It was over for me at that point. I knew it. I tried to put a wedge between us, but my heart led the way before anything else. I wanted to see if you’d approach first, except I knew that wouldn’t happen. You were too far out of your element. I felt this instinct to protect you when Luca was talking to you, touching you. I wanted to lay him out right there, but I didn’t want to scare you. Something deep down told me that you’d be a perfect fit for me. Not many people have the balls to try to put Luca in his place, especially women, but you were different. It wasn’t getting to know you that made me fall in love; the simple connection of our eyes made me fall in love.

Getting to know you just made the roots stronger and deeper. It eventually turned into an obsession for me.

When we left and went back to your apartment, I thought there was a God for once. I had an apartment four floors above Serena's. It was easier for me to get into the cameras that way. I had to know more about you. I had to know *you*. The night we were told we were to be married, I wasn't angry, and I wasn't going to ever touch anyone else. But loving you has become a necessity to keep me moving. It's become more essential for me to love you than to breathe air. You are intoxicating. And I am sorry that I may have overstepped a few times while watching the cameras. Well, I was constantly overstepping because I was watching the cameras all the time."

I turned to face him, bewildered. "You didn't have anyone else watching me, right?"

Soren shakes his head. "You are for my eyes *only*. If anyone dares to look at you, I'll fucking kill them."

I take all of it in, and I am perfectly content with that answer for some deranged reason. The idea of him watching me flatters me, oddly enough. Perhaps, he's my perfect brand of fucked up. I settle into his body more.

"Thank you for telling me, Soren."

He presses a kiss into the crown of my hair, and we enjoy the silence and feeling of our bodies touching.

## Chapter Thirty-One

## Freya

Soren's limbs are tangled with mine when my phone starts to ring the next morning. We simultaneously release a groan as the call ends and starts up again.

"You should probably answer that," Soren mutters into my hair.

I lean over and pick up my phone looking at the caller ID. Why the fuck is my father calling me so early in the morning?

"Hello?" I answer, groggily.

"Freya, good morning. I'm calling you to schedule a meeting with you and your sister sometime this week."

"Why do I need to schedule a meeting?" I ask, sitting up in bed.

Soren rubs his eyes and looks at his phone as well.

"Because it's important that I speak to both of you. We have things we need to discuss."

He's being so fucking vague.

“Okay, well whenever just text me the location and time,” I snip at him before ending the phone call.

Soren’s already out of bed when I flop back down into the pillows.

Soren emerges from the bathroom dressed in black sweatpants. “What did he want?”

“He wants to have a meeting with Serena to ‘go over things’.” I gesture with air quotes.

“That’s not weirdly suspicious at all,” Soren remarks. “Want some coffee?”





image-placeholder

A week later, Soren and I are arriving at my father's skyscraper for my mysterious meeting. Days had gone by since the phone call and my father had continued to be extremely vague. My nerves heightened as we pulled up outside, not wanting anything to do with this meeting. I take a deep, steadying breath, as we get to the door.

Soren reaches his arm around me to open it for me, letting me go in first. My father's personal secretary is waiting near the front door, as we step into the building. She's dressed in a pristinely pressed dress, and her blonde bob is cut to her jawline in sharp edges. A soft, emotionless smile is plastered on her face as she takes in our appearances.

"Mr. and Mrs. Astor, it's a pleasure for you to be joining us. If you would, please leave all personal belongings with Mr. Astor. The meeting will begin shortly."

I turn back to Soren, leaning into him as the coil in my stomach tightens. Soren presses a kiss to my hairline as I prepare for my meeting with Serena and my father.

"It'll be fine, Freya. You have your sister with you, and it's the two of you against him. You know your sister will have your back at all times." Soren strokes my hair as he attempts to sedate my nerves.

"It's not that, Soren. It's a lot of other things," I mumble, not able to make eye contact with him.

Serena and Abe pass through the front doors and scowl at every employee around them. She's always doing her best to

put her best foot forward. But her eyes soften when she makes eye contact with me. My father's secretary attempts to greet them, but she's shut down when Abe tosses her a challenging glare.

"Are you ready to go in?" Serena asks while shuffling on her feet and fidgeting with her leather-bound notebook.

I take a deep breath. "Yeah, let's get this shit over with."

Soren lets go of me, whispering, "Go raise hell."

I smirk and turn to walk side by side with Serena. She holds her head up high like she's not terrified to go into this meeting. I try to follow suit, but it doesn't come across as powerful as Serena's.

My father and Larry Morris stand outside of the conference room doors, waiting expectantly for us to arrive.

My father glances at his watch, "You're late."

"Only by 15 seconds. You'll survive." Serena defends us both.

She's always been able to say shit like that and get away with it.

*Me?* Ha! I'd be a dead woman if I said that to him.

We all file into the conference room and take our seats. Serena and I were on one side with the other two on the opposite side. My father pushes a button, and the see-through glass walls become frosted.

I marvel at it for a moment, before my father's voice snaps my attention back to the meeting.

“Now, I'm sure you're wondering what was so urgent for you to join me today. I wanted to discuss what I want to do with the business in the event of my untimely death.”

Serena's mouth opens like an atomic bomb has been dropped on us. This was bound to be a conversation at some point. I have a husband now, so of course it would happen.

“Larry will go over all the legal documents, and what I wish to see for my company moving forward.” My father finishes and leans back in his chair observing us as if we are lab rats.

Larry clears his throat and starts sifting through a pile of documents. He pulls out a packet, an envelope, and a pen.

“Right, well, Frank has requested that Freya Alice Astor and Soren Philip Astor will be the acting CEO, the chairman, and leader of Spencer Corp. Serena Mavis Spencer has been requested to be the Vice President, co-chairman, and second-in-command of Spencer Corp.”

“Let's just cut the bullshit,” Serena interrupts, “What do you want us to do with your weapons dealings? I'm doubtful Soren and Freya will want to take that on as well, and I don't want a part of it.”

“Then, it is your responsibility to hire people to fill those positions. It'll be the only way you'll make any money, Serena. Freya has Soren to lean on for financial support, but Abe doesn't seem to know what he wants to do with his life.”

Serena's mouth snaps shut and is stunned into silence.

"There's also the matter of important information." Larry opens the envelope he pulled out, and shows us a hard drive. "This will be given to Freya and Soren at the time of Frank's death. This will explain everything. No one else is to see it. No one else is to be told what this hard drive contains. Is that understood?"

"Not even Serena?"

"Not even Serena. No one except for you and Soren." My father chimes in.

I sit back in my chair and nod, looking down at my hands.

What the fuck is on that hard drive? Whatever it is, he's intentionally making Soren and I the bearers of that burden, wanting to protect Serena in the process.

"What's on there that's so bad I can't even see it?" Serena's lips are pressed together.

"It's none of your business. For yours and your sister's sake, don't force her to tell you either." My father scolds.

"Does it involve Luca?" I ask.

My father's eyes shift to Larry then to me. "Yes."

I sit up, and cross my arms over my chest. "What does Luca have over you?"

My father's face twists. "You'll find out soon enough."

Serena mimics my actions, "You know, Freya, Luca does seem to have our father by the balls."

“You watch your mouth, young lady,” My father snaps.

“Ha! You have no idea, Serena. In fact, why didn’t you do anything about Luca forcing Soren and I to have a child?” I deadpanned.

Serena’s eyes widened. “That motherfucker said what?”

“I just didn’t see the need to.” My father pretends to pick off an invisible piece of lint from his dress pants.

I huff. “You didn’t see the need to? I’m your daughter. You do understand that it’s your job as my father to stand up for me on occasion?”

“Freya, what’s the harm in all this anyway? You’ve always wanted a family, this isn’t any different.” He responds, stoic as ever. His face reddens with each question hurled at him.

“This is a lot different. How can you not see that?” I screech.

His face turns into a tomato as he stands abruptly, towering over my figure. “Enough, Goddamn it! I didn’t do anything because this was an arrangement Luca made. I was finding out about this at the same time you were, Freya! I chose not to do anything because you’ve always wanted a family. Not like it would really change anything anyway! I was certain you wouldn’t have an issue with it!”

“How could I not have an issue with this? I wanted children organically, father. I wanted children when it was right for Soren and I. Not when Luca wants us to have kids. We’ve

already been forced into enough as it is. I didn't need this on top of it."

My father sits back down. "Well, Freya, I don't know what to tell you. If that's what Luca wants, then that's what he will get. You can fight this all you want, but just like every other woman in our world, you'll have to fucking deal with it."

My eyes narrow. "What does Luca have over you?"

"We're done here." My father abruptly stands from his chair and leaves without another word.

Serena and I stare at each other.

"Why would he call us here, only to have it be so brief? Plus, why is he going over this information all of a sudden?" Serena questions.

"I don't know," I whisper, staring at the door they just left out of.

He did it with purpose, that much I do know. But it certainly felt like he is anticipating his demise any day now.

## Chapter Thirty-Two

## Freya

It's been a week since my meeting with my father, and one week since I exposed the truth of Soren's obsession. With everything else that had been going on, I forgot that there was still one simple question I need to answer.

*Where is he disappearing every night?*

I sit in my library with the lights off, waiting for him to appear. If he exited this door once, he's bound to do it again. I hear a creak and the bookshelf reopens. Soren steps through the doorway and freezes spotting my silhouette in the armchair beside the fireplace. He stands taller and holds the bookcase open.

"What is down there, Soren?" I question, holding my ground as I demand an answer from him.

"It's not what is down there, but who is down there," Soren replies casually.

My blood runs cold as his sentence washes over me. "Who is down there, Soren?"

He exhales deeply. “Freya, you will never come back the same. Just drop it.”

I stand, rushing at him. “No. You do not get to do this to me. Who. Is. Down. There?”

We stand off with each other, waiting for one of us to budge. “Fine. I’ll show you,” Soren grunts, turning back and leading me down the staircase.

As we start to descend, I hesitate momentarily.

“Are you sure?” Soren asks again.

I stare at him. “Just show me who the fuck is down here.” I huff and continue walking.

He moves out of the way, allowing me to walk down the hall first.

“It’s the door at the end of the hallway.” I take larger steps, my fingers itching to reach the door knob. And when they do, Soren’s voice echoes again, “Just remember. I’ll never hurt you.” Then the door swings open to a gruesome, bloody scene.

But my eyes are drawn to the figure slumped over in the chair.

“Already back for more?” The bloodied, beaten figure says. He’s missing fingernails, teeth scattered across the floor, and deep cuts run along his skin. My hands fly up to my mouth as I gasp, taking a step back. I cannot move as Soren stands behind me, pushing me further into the room so he can shut and lock the door.

“I brought a guest this time,” Soren answers, almost amused with the sight in front of him.

“Ah, you brought back your bitch boy?”

“No. Someone else.”

The figure lifts its head, and they take a moment to look at me. But I’m immediately slammed with horrific memories. It’s been a year since I had seen those eyes. A year since those hands have hurt me. The whites of his eyes are blood red like blood vessels have been broken, similar to how mine looked after he hit me in the temple, his teeth missing as he grins like the cat who ate the canary, just like how he smiled at me as I was being raped by his coworkers. His cheeks were battered with bruises, just like how I looked when he threw me down the stairs when I told him I was leaving him. The first time. His neck resembles something like he’s been strangled a few times, just like how he made me look when he fucked me with such violence; it would make Ted Bundy proud.

*Tristan. In the flesh.*

Tears start to well up in my eyes, but I turn to look at Soren, who is devoid of all emotions. He’s never looked like this before. Soren’s eyes meet mine, and they shift to seek approval. From me.

“I found him,” He says.

I swallow down the lump forming in my throat, and my tongue sticks to the roof of my mouth as I feel his gaze on me.

Soren sees my visible discomfort and turns his attention back to Tristan.

“Stop looking at her, fucker. She’s disgusted by the sight of you,” Soren snarls, standing behind him, a hand on the back of his head, pushing it back down.

“She is just taking everything in. I think she misses the feeling of my fingers on her, my cock buried deep inside her, my tongue running along her dripping cunt—” A blow lands on Tristan’s temple, and Tristan just chuckles. His head lifts a little, and he spits blood out toward me.

“You always loved it when I spit on you, didn’t you, Freya?” Tristan’s voice pierces my ears, and something deep inside me snaps.

Rage, fear, and deeply rooted hatred flow from me. All the years of torment he brought upon me are now being channeled toward Tristan, and I feel enough anger to hurt him. It pleases me to see the blood splattered across the floor and his missing body parts, but suddenly it’s not enough.

“Soren?” I turn my attention back to him as he studies me. Gauging if this is too much or enough.

“Yes, my darling?” His eyes flicker to me, and a glint of fear and excitement is mixed in them.

“My darling? Fucking disgusting. Whore is a better name.” Tristan spits out.

Soren opens his mouth to berate him, but I beat him to it.

“I want his index finger,” I say, looking at Soren, cocking my head to the side slightly.

Soren freezes, completely caught off guard by my change. Then smiles his beautiful, dazzling grin.

“As you wish,” He says, quoting a favorite movie of mine.

He moves across the room, gathering a few things before returning to him.

“Pulled off or cut off?” Soren asks, his perfectly fucked up side shining like a diamond.

“Your choice,” I responded, my hands clasped behind my back, mainly to hide my shaking hands.

I can’t tell what I’m feeling now, but I am going with it. Perhaps it’s better to not feel any emotions than to feel *something* at this moment.

“Did you hear that? I get to choose if I pull your finger off or cut it off.” He hums for a moment deciding. Tristan’s eyes meet his, daring him. “I think I’ll just take your whole hand.”

Before Tristan can open his mouth to spout out some shit, Soren’s hand comes down with a meat cleaver. And Tristan’s screams ring through the air.

“Oh, bummer. I couldn’t get it all in one go. Guess I’ll just have to try again,” Soren says, sarcastically.

“No—no—no, wait, please—” The knife comes down again, severing it completely.

Tristan's screams echo, bouncing off the walls of my skull. Soren picks the hand up, flinging it around like a limp noodle. A sinister smile etched on his face.

"Would you look at that? That's your hand." He waves Tristan's severed hand directly in his face.

"Just kill me, you crazy motherfucker. That dumb slut isn't worth this. She was worthless, to begin with anyway," Tristan cries out, his head falling back completely.

I stay silent, watching Soren do what he does best.

"No, no, you have it wrong. She is worth more than life itself. The pain and horrors she's had to endure have made her strong. And there isn't enough blood I could spill from you to make up for everything you've done to her."

"I didn't do anything she didn't want. She begged for everything I gave her. Sometimes she just had to be taught a lesson because she just didn't fucking listen worth shit," Tristan chokes out.

I shake my head but don't allow the nightmares to resurface. Tristan's eyes connect with mine and fear no longer runs along my spine because I know Soren will protect me with his life if anything happens.

"See, Tristan. This is what I meant. You fucking raped her, didn't you?"

Tristan's eyes connect with mine again, but Soren realizes it this time. A blow lands on the side of his face, causing blood to spray out, hitting my face. I close my eyes and grit my

teeth. It doesn't hurt that he's being punished. It feels good to see him suffering. And I kinda want a turn at it. God, what the fuck is wrong with me?

“I didn't say you could fucking look at her. I should gouge your eyes out for that.” The tip of Soren's knife traced Tristan's eyes. “But that would be too easy, wouldn't it, Freya?”

My eyes flicker to him, and he has a look in his eyes I can't identify. A mixture of desire and hatred dances in them.

And before I can process the words, I answer. “Yes. It's too easy.”

Soren smirks. “Tristan, I want you to admit you raped her and beat her senselessly because *you* are the one who is a failure.”

Tristan pants and I can tell he's about to pass out from the blood loss.

“Soren, do you have anything to keep him awake? He's going to pass out.”

Soren turns back to the cart and returns with a needle, sticking him in the neck with it before breaking it off in him. He takes a step back and admires his handiwork, waiting for the medicine to kick in. Approaching me, Soren pulls me into his arms. The darkness dancing in his eyes, now softening as he holds me close to him.

“Are you okay?” He asks, stroking my hair, smearing blood into it.

I nod. "I'm okay." He presses a kiss to my forehead and holds me closer to him. "I want a turn still too, you know," I murmured into his chest.

"Frey—"

"No. I need this, Soren. I need to let it out." I pull away from him.

Dismay is spread across his face, but it slowly becomes a smile. "Together," He whispers, pressing his forehead to mine.

And for a moment, I forget Tristan is there with us until he lets out a groan. Soren moves to him, wrapping his stump of an arm up to help the blood loss. To keep him alive for just a little longer.

I pick up a pair of channel locks and clamp down on his index finger.

"I want to play a game, Tristan," I whisper into his ear.

He's delirious from the blood loss and the medication keeping him alive. "What's the game?"

"It's called *Mercy*. Remember this game as a kid?" He doesn't respond. "I'll bend your finger really far back until you scream mercy. And when you do. Well, let's see when we get there."

I suck in a breath, standing this close, and the taste of blood that lingers in the air hits my tongue. It's vile. I bend his finger up, his finger bending to the point where it takes more force to push it back.

“Mercy! Mercy!” Tristan screams out.

I pause for a moment. “That’s where it is for you? Okay. How about here?”

I push further down, and he screams as his finger turns to a 30-degree angle. The wrong way.

“You psychotic cunt! Mercy! Stop!!” Tristan is squirming. Hard.

I grin and look at Soren as he leans against one of the many toolboxes lining a wall. “Psychotic cunt. That’s new.”

“Do you want me to cut his tongue out, darling?” He asks, holding up a scalpel.

I flash him a smile. “No, I want to play a little longer.”

“As you wish, baby.”

I turn my attention back to Tristan’s form. He’s crying now.

I get in his face and mock him, fake crying. “Awe. Does that hurt? Did you want me to stop? I’ll stop, but you need to do one thing.”

“You’re fucking crazy.” He spits in my face.

Anger rolls through me like a tsunami, and I’m about to wipe him out. In retaliation, I bend his finger all the way back, bone popping out of place and breaking through his skin.

The scream he lets out this time brings a smile to my face. I repeat the process for the next finger.

“I want you to admit you hurt me.”

Tristan snorts, “I never did anything you didn’t want.”

“You hurt me. You raped me. You... broke me.” I start to tear up as every memory resurfaces at once, “But no more. You can’t have a hold on my life like that anymore. I’m not a victim anymore. I refuse. No. I’m a survivor. I survived your sadistic torture. But you will not survive mine.”

With that, I pull up on the tool’s handle, bending his finger backward. Each snap of his fingers sends a tingle running down my spine, and I relish the feeling it brings me. The strangled screams that erupt from deep within his throat give me pure joy. I throw my head back as he yells more insults and smiles. My soul and mind are calm and quiet for once. Soren watches me work my magic with a rare, genuine smile playing on his face.

“It’s so mesmerizing to watch your methods, Freya,” He murmurs, approaching me, and smearing the blood that paints my face further into my skin.

The metallic taste stains my tastebuds, and I desire more. I want him to feel the pain he inflicted on me for all those years, and even then... There isn’t enough time in the world to torture this man to make up for how mentally fucked-up he left me. But this gift Soren has given me is better than anything I could have ever given him. And it’ll take years of gifts and many blow jobs to compensate for this. But for now, I’ll continue recreating the infamous ‘Misery’ scene on his miserable ass.

“Want to recreate the famous scene from the first movie we watched together?” I ask sweetly.

He pauses for a moment, trying to recall what it was, but he has a lightbulb moment. A smile erupts on his face as he walks away from me, gathering the things he needs.

Soren approaches me again with an end table and a smaller toolbox. Setting the table down, he straps his legs down, resting the box between his legs, right above his ankles. Tristan’s eyes widened, recognizing what was about to happen, especially when he was being approached with a sledgehammer. Soren drags it on the ground for a touch of theatrics but swings it onto his shoulder.

“My darling, will you give me the honors of one ankle? ‘Misery’ was always my favorite book.” Soren pleads a manic smile dances on his face, and I can’t help but fall further in love with him.

“By all means.” I gesture with a hand, arms crossing over my chest, and Tristan’s eyes trail to my chest. Even when he knows I will be his demise, he can’t help but ogle what he lost. “Make sure it hurts.” My eyes stay trained on Tristan, but I see Soren make a couple of fake practice swings to ensure his angle is correct.

“What are you talking about, darling? It’ll feel like butterfly KISSES!” On the final word, he lands his blow, the sound of bone splintering, and Tristan’s screeches send a vibration of pleasure over my body again.

I don't even recognize myself anymore. Maybe I'm in my element? Regardless, I want to embrace this new me. She's strong. A survivor. And a fucking badass. Soren doesn't seem to mind, either.

"My turn!" I smile, skipping over to him.

Unlike Soren, I don't give Tristan the mercy of theatrics and opt to just take a blow to his ankle as soon as my fingers connect with the handle. Soren made it look easy to achieve the 90-degree angle of his leg. I didn't get that; it's broken but not splintered. Pouting, I look at Soren.

"You made it look easy."

Soren smiles and chuckles. "It's okay. It will just take a couple of swings to achieve the perfect angle. I'm sure Tristan doesn't mind waiting." Tristan opens his mouth to say something, but Soren is behind him in a flash, forcing his mouth shut. "Continue, baby."

I swing again, and this blow does get me the 90-degree angle I was hoping for. I drop the sledgehammer, and my body is full of pleasure. I rush to Soren, and he releases Tristan, who screams and screams.

"Can I kill him now?" I ask, resting my cheek on his chest, holding him to me.

"I want to torture him one more way, then we will do it. Together," Soren says before claiming my mouth with his.

He pulls away from me for a moment to unstrap Tristan's legs and set them back on the ground, the sides of his feet and

ankles resting on the floor. Soren is immediately behind me again, pulling me to stand directly in front of Tristan. He pulls out *my* knife, slices my shirt open, and reveals my breasts to Tristan. Despite the fact I've mutilated his body, his gaze still stays trained on my breasts.

My body freezes as the permeating air of blood and despair clings to my skin as my shirt becomes useless.

Tristan's gaze is glazed over, as though he can barely process what is happening to him. Not that it matters to me. He can no longer hurt me. The tables have turned, and it's my turn to hurt him. Blood pools at my feet, and I know we don't have much more time before he's dead.

Soren palms my breasts with his bloody hands, smearing blood over my stiffened nipples.

"Doesn't she look breathtaking with your blood painted across her body?" Soren says into my ear, but talking to Tristan.

"She looks like a whore," He shoots back.

Soren works his way to my shorts, slipping them down and tossing them to the side. "On your knees," He commands into my ear.

I do just that, resting my elbows on Tristan's lap. Not giving a fuck in the world. The amount of evil this man can do will far surpass anything Soren and I could ever do to him. Soren kneels behind me, and I hear the unzipping of his pants. My hands rest on Tristan's knees as he bends me over, thrusting

himself into me. Immediately, I screw my eyes shut and let out a moan.

“How does it feel to watch me get fucked in front of you, Tristan? You look upset. Remember when you did this to me? Then allowed your coworkers to rape me for *losing* a fucking bet?” I say, panting with each of Soren’s harsh thrusts.

“I remember that. But you enjoyed it like the whore you are. You were never raped. You gladly took their cocks. You only claimed rape because you were embarrassed by how good it felt.”

Anger boils in my chest as Soren continues his assault. I spot the knife next to him in the corner of my eye. I grab it and bring it to his face, cutting across his mouth, hoping that that’ll shut him the fuck up. As fucked up as Tristan is, he laughs. I start to protest when Tristan spits blood at me, red covering my breasts.

“You lost, and I want the last thing you see to be the pleasure she gets from me. Never from you. Ready, baby?” His face is inches away from me, the distance is closed when his ear is pressed against mine.

I wrap my hand around the knife’s hilt as Soren’s hand envelopes mine. “I’m ready.”

He tilts his face, lips pressed to my ear, “Together,” He murmurs.

“Eternally,” I reply.

Soren slashes the knife's tip across his throat, blood spraying onto both our faces and my body. It takes me a moment to register that he's choking on his blood. Not a single part of me cares that I have his blood on me or that a man is dying in front of me, and I don't understand this side of myself either. Perhaps, it's due to all the pain I've been through my whole life. Maybe, it just took loving Soren to draw this out of me. Either way. I'm okay with it. He deserved this. And I can feel the darkness in my trauma leave as life fades from his eyes. There's still a way to go, but this is a start.

"Are you okay?" Soren asks.

I nod and turn to face him, who is now standing over me. We are bonded in blood, and I feel at peace for the first time in my life. Like my soul is finally at peace.

"I love you, Soren."

He bends over, pulling my face into his hands, "What?"

I start to stand and repeat myself. "I love you, Soren. I have for a while. I was just struggling to say it."

Soren smiles, resting his forehead on mine. "Come." He pulls me back up the stairs, and blood trails through the house as we stumble into the bathroom. Kissing me with such passion, it would bring people to their knees. He pulls away for a moment to turn the shower on. I start to work on unbuttoning his shirt.

"Say it again," He commands.

"I love you, Soren," I say between breathy kisses.

He's in a rush to get his clothes off as I step into the shower. Tristan's blood flowed into the drain, and water cascaded over us. He lifts me, my legs wrapped around his waist and his cock at full attention. He lowers me just slightly, sinking into me. I cry out at the connection between our bodies. It hits the spot in me that makes me immediately see stars.

"Again!" He groans, burying his head into my neck, biting and sucking at my skin.

"I love you, Soren."

"I love you, Freya," He growls, picking up the pace.

At this rate, I know we won't last much longer. I cry out as he thrusts one last time, sending me over the edge as he comes deep inside me.

"Fuck. I've been waiting so long for you to say that," Soren says between kisses as he sets me back down on my feet.

## Chapter Thirty-Three

## Freya

One Year Later

My shaky hands smooth out my dress as I draw in a deep breath and exhale. My nerves are entirely shot now, and I can't help pacing back and forth. Serena sits on the sofa of the bridal suite watching me have a mini meltdown.

She huffs, "Freya, you need to calm the fuck down. You've already been married once. It's just a vow renewal. Besides, wasn't this your idea anyway?"

I stop for a moment, thinking back to when we decided we would renew our vows.

"No, it was Soren's," I whisper, a ghost of a smile on my face as I'm drawn into the memory.

*I had just finished signing what I thought was my last book when Soren approached the table, clutching my newest release in his hands. Pride is evident on his face as he sets the book down on the table.*

*"I need your signature again, my darling," Soren says, with a smile on his face.*

*It's a tradition that he comes along at every book signing I go to and gets a copy of one of my books for me to sign. Each is dated with the location and strategically placed on his bookshelf in my library. This particular title is number two in his collection.*

*I smile down at the book and flip it open, but instead of it simply being the title page, a little note is left on the top.*

*Will you marry me?*

*I stare at the page. Oh shit. Did he accidentally pick up the wrong book? Was this meant for someone else's proposal? I glance up at him as he stares at me with a pensive look.*

*"Soren, I think you ruined someone's proposal." I shut the book and push it back towards him.*

*His fingers come back to push it back toward me. "No, I'm pretty sure it's for you." His brows are drawn together in worry.*

*I let out a giggle. "We are married for real. We were married in front of the pastor, vows and rings were exchanged. Did you already forget, old man?"*

*Soren rolls his eyes at me. "No. We got married because we had to. I want to marry you again because I love you and want to spend the rest of my life with you."*

*I freeze. "Oh."*

*I never thought we'd be here nearly a year later. In the beginning, Soren made it perfectly clear he was not interested in a romantic relationship, yet here we are. He's asking me to*

*marry him in the most romantic way possible. My heart swells with the love I have for this man. Something I never thought I'd be capable of.*

*“We don't have to do it. It—it was dumb anyway.” He reaches to pull the book back when my hand snatches it away from him.*

*I pull the book up to my face and write the word yes in it, signing, dating, and putting the location down. I sneak a grin, close the book, and slide it back to him. He watches me cautiously before grabbing the book to read my answer. His ice-blue eyes flicker to me, and he reaches over the table to wrap me in his arms.*

*“You'd marry me again?” He asks, his voice shaky.*

*“Soren, I'd marry you every day for eternity. You are the love of my life, and I can't picture being with anyone else but you,” I whisper, holding him tightly.*

Here we are two weeks later, at a cabin somewhere in the Midwest on a lake with a breathtaking view.

A knock raps on the door, “Can I come in?”

Abe pokes his head into the room, taking in Serena first then turning his attention to me. His hazel eyes sparkle as he examines me in my wedding dress.

My dress is a simple white silk dress with 3/4 sleeves, scoop neck, and an A-line cut. Simple yet elegant.

“You look beautiful, Freya,” Abe murmurs and draws me into a hug.

He pulls away from me after a moment when Serena pipes up. “How was Soren doing?”

Abe lets out a shaky sigh, “The motherfucker is nervous as hell. He’s ready when you are, Freya. Serena and I will be waiting downstairs.”

Tears well up in my eyes as I recall the last year of our lives. It’s been hard at the least to say. The fights, make-up sex, the hurt, tender kisses, dates, vacations, and immense love all hit me at once. And I can’t help but feel overwhelmed by the amount of love that I have for Soren. It almost physically hurts to let it all hit me at once.

“The bride is not allowed to cry. Don’t want your makeup getting ruined,” Serena murmurs, handing me a tissue.

I dab at my eyes, not allowing the tears to flow down.

“Okay, we gotta go,” Abe whispers, pulling me in for another hug and pressing a kiss to the top of my head. Serena follows suit, and they both leave me alone to my thoughts.

I take another breath and start my descent down the stairs. The aisle isn’t long since it’s just the four of us. Serena sits by herself, clutching her hands as the anticipation comes to its peak. Storm lies on the floor at Serena’s feet, not caring about any of what is happening.

Soren is standing in front of a large stone fireplace with a fire raging as bright as our love. *How symbolic.* Our eyes meet, and everyone else falls away. It’s only him and I. *Just like the first time we did this.* I walk toward him, all my nerves

fading as I get closer to him. He's my beacon of light in all the darkness. I'm like a moth drawn to the flame. When I get to the end of the aisle, Soren takes a step closer, holding his arm out for me to grab, and I do. Together we walk the rest of the way to Abe, who stands with a huge grin. He's holding onto a piece of paper and begins to speak.

Frankly, I don't hear everything he says. I don't hear the sweet words he speaks because Soren's eyes are telling our love story. It's a beautiful love story of two people who lived in darkness and loneliness and somehow managed to find each other. They lifted each other out of the darkness and into the light, where they remained.

Soren starts to speak when I realize it's time to exchange our vows.

"I, Soren Phillip Astor, promise to love and cherish you for the rest of our lives. I promise to protect you no matter the cost, guide you through hard times, and pick up the pieces when you are no longer whole. I promise to provide the best life you can live, no matter the consequences. I can't wait for the continuation of our eternal love. I love you, Freya Alice Spencer. With everything I am."

"I, Freya Alice Spencer, promise to love you. I promise to be patient, understanding, and kind. I promise to explore, laugh, and smile through our adventures. I promise to accept you for your faults and perfections. I promise to believe in you, always, to believe in the person you will grow to be, and believe in the couple we will be. And I promise to love all of

you, including your darkest parts. I love you, Soren Phillip Astor.”

I choke through my vows; all the love pours out of me and into those words. Soren looks moved, soaking it all in.

Abe smiles his brilliant, dazzling smile, “By the power vested in me, I now pronounce you husband and wife. A second time. You may now kiss the bride!”

Soren’s hands snatch me by my waist before I can even react, pulling me in for a deep kiss. Claps erupt from our tiny group, and everything is perfect for us. Soren pulls away, resting his forehead on mine.

“I love you, Freya.” He whispers.

“I love you too, Soren,” I responded.

We turn our attention to Abe and Serena standing off to the side. They seem to be sharing their own intimate moment as well. Before we know it, they’ll be getting married as well. I am sure of it.

“Come, let’s have dinner.” Soren approaches the server waiting near the dining room, plucks two glasses of champagne off his tray, and hands one to me.

## Chapter Thirty-Four

## Soren

I may be in over my head, but she's so fucking worth it. All the memories we've collected together flash behind my eyes as she takes her first step toward me. I want to engulf her in my arms and whisk her away from everyone. I thought she embodied beauty in her first dress, but no. She's alluring now. I can only see her. The way the scoop of her dress dances is just low enough to showcase her delicate collarbones. The way her sleeves stop at the elbow makes me itch to see more skin. The way the top bodice hugs her curves almost makes my dick go hard, but I doubt Serena and Abe would appreciate that. She is my darling, my life, my wife, my bride, my partner in crime, my *everything*. Everything starts and stops with her. And I'd give anything up to keep her by my side even in the next life.

I grasp her waist, and pull her along with me to the dining room table, sitting her down in one of the four spots available. The private chef we hired, approaches along with servers to deliver our food, before bowing and returning to the kitchen.

“So, when can we expect your wedding?” I teasingly question the other couple.

Abe tenses like I’ve just stabbed him, while Serena blushes.

“We’d have to get engaged first before that happens,” Serena quips.

Freya leans in, “You say that like you’re wanting it to happen sooner rather than later.”

Serena shrugs and hides behind the wine glass she’s brought to her face. “Perhaps,” She mutters.

“How long have you guys been dating anyway?” I ask, not remembering if Freya’s told me.

“It’s been four years, so perhaps it’ll happen soon.” Abe not so subtly hints to Serena.

Freya casually cuts into her dinner, “You better not fuck up her engagement ring.”

Abe starts on his dinner as well. “Noted.” Abe chews pensively before turning his attention to the table. “Where do you see yourselves in five years?”

Serena and Freya share the same blank stare as they think hard about it. It’s daunting, thinking about the future like that.

“I don’t know,” I’m the first to respond. “I never imagined Freya would come into my life, nor did I imagine myself ever settling down. In five years, I’d like to imagine Freya and I would live somewhere off the grid with children. We wouldn’t have to deal with the stress of running a business or answer to

anyone else. We'd have two children with a third on the way. But who knows what the future entails."

Freya looks at me with a hollowed look, and concern eats at me. Does she not want to have children with me? I know we were threatened by Luca, but that doesn't mean it should hold us back from what we truly want in life.

Serena picks up on the tension between us and clears her throat. "I propose we make a toast to the couple of tonight. May all your dreams come true. I wish for nothing but happiness for both of you."

We raise our glasses and clink them together.

As the conversation winds down, Freya wraps her hand around my bicep, making my heart flutter.

"I'll be right back. I need to use the 'restroom,'" She whispers into my ear, pressing a kiss on the shell of it.

I shiver and watch as she saunters up the stairs, but she looks back at me. Her eyes seduce me into joining her. I'll need to come up with another excuse. "Well, I am going to head to bed. It's late. Thank you both for today." I stand and offer both of them one of my genuine smiles.

I follow Freya up the stairs and pull on my tie. I'd rather skip the foreplay and jump right to the good stuff today.

As I push it open, the door squeaks, and I start speaking before I'm even in the room completely.

"Freya, I don't care about what my father told you. I want to have kids with you, and we shouldn't let that asshole hold us

back from anything.”

“Soren.” Her voice is strangled and quiet.

My eyes snap up to where she is, only to stare down the silhouette of a lanky, familiar man holding my beloved in a chokehold, a knife pressed to her neck. A glare is plastered on her face, and her body sings with a want for bloodshed.

“Where’s my grandchild, Soren?”

The sound of Freya’s pained scream rings through the air, waking the monster that lives deep within me.

## Acknowledgments

I never thought I'd be writing an acknowledgments page. I thought this was going to be written and sit in my Google Drive for the rest of my life. Yet, here we are. My 13 year old self would be so proud, hell I'm proud ten years later!

There's really one person who has pushed me this whole time. My mom. Without her, this book wouldn't exist. This dream would never be fulfilled. Most authors would say, they'd never let family read their work, but I can confirm my mother has read this novel five times. Scouring for issues, providing constant feedback, and cheering me on. We laugh, because she was hesitant to read it (probably because I'm an amateur), yet this has turned into one of her favorite books ever read. So to my mom, thank you. Thank you for pushing me to fulfill a dream of mine. Thank you for raising me to be a strong, independent woman. Thank you for always encouraging me to push, push, push.

To DG Brasfield, girl, where do I even start? I had a firm belief that my book sucked. Even after my mom read it, I was still convinced it sucked. Then I met you. You encouraged me,

provided me amazing feedback. Helped me overcome my fear of publishing. I owe a lot to you. Thank you for being there to help and support at anytime. PS. Go check out her debut novel *Winter Sunflowers*, and stay tuned for her upcoming novel, *The Python Nook*. She's an incredibly talented writer!

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To my readers, thank you. From the bottom of my heart, thank you. I am eternally grateful for you all. Stay tuned for book two and other novels I've got brewing. Much love to you all.

It's okay to not be okay.

Suicide Hotline Number: 988

If you or someone you know needs help, please call this  
hotline.

National Domestic Violence Hotline: 800-799-723

No means no.

National Sexual Assault Hotline: 800-656-4673

## About Author

When SJ isn't writing like a madwoman at her laptop, you can find her curled up with a smut book or bickering with her fiance over a board game. She lives in southern Illinois with her fiance, her OG demon cat, and her other cat she's convinced is a stuffed animal.