

My little gift.



HER CHRISTMAS

Surprise

LUCY DARLING

HER CHRISTMAS SURPRISE

I'm not the sort of man who deserves a happy ending, not after the life I've led. But when I see Eve, I know I'll need more. She lights up the world for me, like twinkling Christmas lights glinting off fresh snow.

When I hear she's being auctioned off to raise money for charity, I won't allow anyone else to win her. It has to be me, and when I win her, I whisk her away to my cabin and keep her all to myself.

But when my past comes knocking, Eve will have to decide if my sins are too dark for her to ever find her happily ever after in a man like me.

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*“One friend in a storm is worth more than a thousand friends
in sunshine.”*

—Matshona Dhliwayo

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Chapter 1

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*T*ake a breath as I stare at Snow Hills Town Hall. This whole town is lit up brighter than any Christmas tree I've ever seen in my life. Every year, they win some silly award over it. I know this because I make it a habit to be aware of everything that's going on in my surroundings. I might live out on the edge of the town of Snow Hills in my secluded cabin, but I keep up on things that happen in town.

It has absolutely nothing to do with my need for control or the mayor's executive assistant that moved here three years ago. I'm pretty sure she came here just to drive me insane. Eve with her dark silky hair surrounding her heart-shaped face. A face that I know and have memorized every detail of. I've never seen eyes as green as hers. Or lips that look so soft and kissable.

I toss that thought from my head. This town is getting to me. Kissable lips? Fuck me. No, fuck her. That's what I want but deny myself from having because the reality is a girl as beautiful as Eve has dreams and goals in her life.

She's in politics, for christsake. I've offed a few politicians and some judges in my hay day. I have no guilt there. I only started to question my past life because of Eve. What would she think of it? Not that it matters. She'll never know about any of it.

I'd never be a man she glanced at twice except for the fact that I stand out in a room by mere size. Not to mention the scar that

cuts across my face. The town runs with different speculations of how I got it. They'll never know. The only person who knows is the man who gave it to me, but he didn't live long afterward. That was my past. Now my life is consumed with Eve.

We have shared a few words over the years. But the mere sight of her does things to me that invoke irrational thoughts and ideas. *Emotions.*

I don't care for that one bit. Something about her pulls me back to the hunt, with her being my prey, but I don't want to harm her. I want to take her for myself.

I came to Snow Hills for peace and quiet five years ago. I was able to drop off the map here. That peace had lasted for all of two years. The day Eve walked into this town, it went out the window. I've been unsettled ever since then, no matter how much I try to deny it. Each day, I become a bit more possessive and cross lines I shouldn't.

It has been somewhat easy to avoid what she does to me since I don't live in town. But this time, she's gone too far. My feisty little Eve has lured me out of my cabin and straight to her. In the three years since Eve has been here, she's become best friends with the mayor's daughter Liza, who runs the town's library. Liza is the reason the town looks like a holiday bomb went off inside of it.

The two of them are always together. Neither of them are known to date. At least I've never heard of them dating anyone. If I had, I'm not sure how that would have ended for the other man. Not good. I know that much.

The mere thought of Eve going out with someone boils my blood. If anything, one would guess them to be a couple as much as the two hang out. I know that's not the case, though. They are somehow oblivious to the lure they hold over the single men of Snow Hills.

Eve and Liza are night and day when it comes to their personalities. Everything about Eve appeals to me. I think her smart mouth and quick wit is what has kept the men of Snow Hills at bay from trying to pursue her. Thank fuck for that.

I hear a few people whisper as they pass by, wondering what I'm doing here. I only ever come to town for supplies. At least that's what everyone thinks. I've been here plenty of times without them knowing. I might be a giant motherfucker, but if I don't want you to see me, then you won't. Going unseen has become a bit harder with the newest resident of Snow Hills. Crane Douglas.

He isn't as he appears. I know a professional when I see one. I'm not sure why he's settled here in Snow Hills. I do know that his interest since he hit town is Liza. Her family is clean cut. I'm not sure why a professional would be here for them, unless he too has come to Snow Hills to lay low.

What are the odds of two men that come from the same type of world pick a small town like this one? I don't believe in coincidences.

I picked the town because it was one of a handful of memories I can recall of my birth parents. They'd brought me here as a child. I remember laughing and having fun with them. We'd come for a long weekend, I believe. I was so young at the time that the memory is hazy, but when I got out of my line of work, knowing if I didn't I'd end up dead sooner rather than later, this town had popped into my mind.

I'm not sure what Crane is up to, but I'm sure in time I'll figure it out. I haven't done too much poking around about him. The last thing I want to do is to alert him to me, but I suppose he and I will likely come face to face tonight at some point. He's here for the very same reason I am: to get our girls, Liza and Eve. My Eve and Liza thought it would be cute to have a bachelorette auction at the annual holiday party to raise money for a charity. An idea that had been Eve's.

I grit my teeth thinking back to the town hall meeting when she'd shouted the idea across the room. I might not attend the town hall meetings usually, but you bet your ass I see them all. I don't miss an opportunity to see Eve.

It would be over everyone else's dead body before I let another man win her for a date.

I don't think Eve has any idea what she's gotten herself into, but she'll be finding out soon enough.

This year I'll be treating myself to something special. Eve.

What the hell have I gotten myself into? I tried to pull a fast one on my best friend and ended up getting myself roped into this. The auction sounded like a wonderful idea when I shouted it across the town hall meeting. The second I'd seen the way Crane had been staring at my best friend Liza and the way she was blushing up a storm over it, I knew there was a spark there. I thought I'd have to nudge my friend along, but I was wrong. The two of them are already a thing.

Now I'm stuck being up for auction. I mean, don't get me wrong, so is she, but she has Crane, who will bid on her and win. No way he's letting someone else get a chance with Liza even if it's only for a few hours of a date. Who am I going to get stuck with? Next time, I'll learn to keep my mouth shut. I don't even have someone in this town that I'm kind of interested in.

Lie.

Okay, maybe there is someone but he doesn't count. He doesn't know I'm alive and can barely be considered a resident of Snow Hills. Marco Marone. The man is every girl's wet dream come to life. Including that wicked scar that cuts through his eyebrow, which only makes him more mysterious and sexy.

I've crossed paths with him a few times. He never speaks, and when he does, it's more of a grunted yes or no response to someone's question. That's if a person works up the nerve to

ask him one. Again, that only adds to the whole mysterious thing he's got going on.

Not gonna lie, I have tried to get his attention before when I've crossed his path at the grocery store. I thought once I'd caught his eye, but the man stared right through me. I don't know why it bugged me so much. Why do I care? The man is almost twice my age. I'd know because working for the mayor, I have access to all of the town records. Since he bought a house here on a giant piece of land, I had some information on him but not much.

"You okay?" Liza nudges me with her elbow. She's stunning tonight.

I still can't believe I talked her into that dress. She and Crane might be a thing, but another nudge and the two of them are going to be done for. This dress is that final kick in my little plan. Liza still has a small fear in the back of her mind that Crane is only all over her because she picked up a creepy stalker, but I know Crane is all over her because he wants to be. Stalker or not.

"Just ready for this to be done." I let out a long breath.

Why does my dress suddenly feel tighter? Where Liza is shining in gold, I went with black because I always go with black. I might speak my mind and draw attention when I need it. That doesn't mean I want the spotlight on me. Male attention is a bit new to me.

I was what many would call an ugly duckling growing up. I didn't blossom and come out of my shell 'till college. When boys started to pay attention to me, I only got annoyed because I knew it was because of my looks and nothing more. Even when I took a trip back to my hometown, the boys that once picked on me about my glasses and braces were all trying to get in my pants.

We're standing up on the stage behind the curtain as the mayor speaks to the residents. The auction is about to start.

"This was your idea," Liza mutters under her breath as the curtains part. The whole town stares toward the stage. The

mayor doesn't get another word out before Crane is storming the stage. He doesn't say a word. We all watch in shock as he plucks Liza up and carries her right off with him.

The mayor opens and closes her mouth. Liza is her daughter, after all, but I know she's all for the Crane and Liza relationship. She's already been making some wedding plans. I'd know because I'm at her side most days. We even have a bet between us at how high Liza would go for tonight. I guess we're both out on that count. I'll still make sure Crane pays something. There are no freebies around here.

"Let the bidding begin!" I announce, bringing the attention back to why we're here and not on what Crane is likely doing with Liza right now. I hope he doesn't rip that dress.

"Right." The mayor shakes her head and has Erica come up first. Liza was supposed to go first. I worried that a lot might not bid in hopes of getting a date with her, so I thought it best for her to go first so bids would get spread out.

Erica steps forward, and the auction begins. I really should have put myself second. I hadn't accounted for having to stand on the stage this long. If it's a speech or conference, I'm more than comfortable to take center stage to do my job. This, however, feels like I'm on display. I suppose that's because I am. I mean men are bidding money on us.

My eyes roam over the crowd when I get the sensation someone is staring right at me. I try to shake it because of course people are staring. That's the whole point, but this feels different.

I let out a small gasp under my breath when my eyes lock with Marco's. He's standing at the very back. His arms folded over his broad chest. He's not staring at me. He's glaring.

He looks different than normal. He doesn't have a flannel or plain black or white shirt on. He's in a buttoned-up shirt tonight. It's a soft blue. It only makes his dark blue eyes seem even darker like the deepest depths of the ocean.

"Eve."

“What?” I jerk my attention from Marco. I can’t help but wonder why in the hell he’s here. Is he with someone? Why else would he be here unless a girlfriend pulled him out? That would mean he’s dating a person from town. How is that information not all over the place? I’m always up to date on town gossip. Really, it’s part of my job to know the tea in case the Mayor needs the heads-up about something. I’ve obviously failed on this one.

“Can you step forward?” The mayor motions with her eyes for me to get my butt moving.

“Oh.” I go to the center of the stage, my face flushing. How many times had she called my name? Half the girls are already gone from the stage. Jeez, how long was I in a staring contest with Marco? I shouldn’t be surprised that I got lost in those gorgeous eyes of his. Now I’m making it a point to look anywhere but at him.

“We’ll start the bidding at—”

A deep voice from the back of the room cuts the mayor off. “Five thousand.”

This time, my gasp is loud as my eyes fly back to Marco’s. He did not just bid on me. Did he? That was his voice. I may not have heard it a ton, but I could never forget the deep, husky sound of it.

“Well, then.” The mayor laughs. “I don’t think any of us saw that coming, Marco. The lovely Eve is all yours.” She bangs her gavel before my brain can even process what just happened. The sound echoes in my ears.

I hadn't seen the point of getting into a bidding war with anyone. I don't care for games at all. Plus, I don't like to waste time. Especially when Eve was uncomfortable on the stage. I could sense the tension in her body. I've watched her speak on the same stage over a dozen times over the years, but this was different for her. She didn't care to be showcased. It made her uneasy.

That for some reason made me restless as well. Her discomfort bothers me, and I wanted it to come to an end. I also didn't care much for her being up there for all the men of Snow Hills to leer at. I knew for a fact that there were many who were going to bid on her. My ears have been burning since I stepped into the holiday party.

I'd thought about Crane's approach, but he and Liza have been dating for a little. If I did the same, the townspeople would've probably tried to stop me, and then someone would get hurt. And it wouldn't have been me. So I gritted my teeth and waited for my opportunity.

It took everything in me to manage my self-control. Normally, patience is easy for me. I could stalk and watch my prey for days, waiting to strike. But all of that goes out the window anytime Eve is involved. The woman is under my skin.

Eve gives me one last look before she rushes off the stage. She doesn't come out like the other woman. I find myself moving toward where she disappeared. I stop when I get to a hallway and see her talking to Liza and Crane. She has her back to me.

Eve grabs Liza and pulls her back into the room. I'm pretty sure Liza and Crane just exited that same room.

This only makes me lean more toward the idea that Crane isn't here for business. If he had been, that went out the window when he laid eyes on Liza. A concept I wouldn't have been able to understand myself until three years ago when I first met Eve.

A year ago, I was called and begged to do one more job. They'd thrown a ton of money at me, but I couldn't take it. What if I was gone and something happened to Eve was the only thing I kept thinking when considering their proposition. I might not be all over her, but I keep my eyes on her. I know she's safe, and I keep it that way. So leaving town was never even an option as far as I was concerned. No matter how much they offered.

"We don't take checks," Carlton says, coming up to me with his pouch. I stare down at the man. Something isn't right about him, but I can't put my finger on it. I try to keep eye contact, but he pulls it away.

"I have cash." I pull out one of the three envelopes I have inside my back pocket and hand it over. Each of them is holding five grand. I'm always prepared. I didn't have a clue what someone might bid on Eve, and I wasn't going to lose. I never do.

"Oh," Carlton is surprised that I have the cash ready. I keep my eyes on him as he scurries back off. I take one last glance down the hallway to see Eve slip into the room she's been banging on the door of. It's a dressing room or one they'd been using as one today.

Knowing where she is, I track after Carlton, keeping a nice distance as I watch him. I grab a chair and sit. As big as I am when I'm standing up, I'm unmissable. At least now I can blend in to a degree as I try and put my finger on why Carlton makes me uneasy.

That's the thing about psychopaths: They are the hardest to read. They try to blend in but still have quirks that make them

stand out. But there are some people that are fucking odd all around and aren't psychopaths.

My attention shifts to Eve as she reappears with her arm locked with Liza's. When Eve first moved to town, I wasn't sure Snow Hills would be a permanent home for her. Her job with the mayor was something to add to her resume to move up and into a bigger city. You can't get very high in ranks around here. Unless one day she wanted to be mayor herself.

I push those thoughts away, not wanting to think about Eve moving. It sends my mind in a tailspin of having to pack my life up and settle in again somewhere new. I tell myself I wouldn't follow after her, but I would.

The distance between my cabin and her in town is hard enough. The hold I have on my control is slipping. I grip it as hard as I can, but the rope is tethering away by the second. I'm falling. I should be finding another exit strategy, but I'm letting the rope unravel, and I'm not doing a damn thing to stop it.

Crane, Liza, and Eve all go to get a drink. I watch them and read Eve's lips as she gives Crane a hard time. My girl is rather protective of her best friend, but I also know she is pushing the two of them together. I only think she's making it clear she'll cut off his balls if she has to.

That won't be happening. I won't let her near his balls, but I'd be more than willing to cut them off for her. I'm bigger than Crane, but I'd still need to get the jump on him to secure him. I'm almost positive it would be one hell of a fight between us.

It doesn't go unnoticed by me that Eve keeps glancing over at me while she sips her champagne. Crane went to settle up his tab but kept getting caught up by people trying to talk to him. I had a few do the same to me, but I gave them a blank stare that did the trick. Now everyone is giving me a wide berth. Just the way I like it.

Eve says something that has Liza throwing her head back and laughing. At this angle, I can't read her lips. I want to move, but there aren't a ton of options. Liza sets her glass down and heads to the bathroom. Eve steals a glance over at me again.

She's supposed to be spending her night with me. Those are the rules. Is she waiting for me to approach her? Of course she is. Eve would need to be chased, but I'm not sure she understands what she's baiting me with.

Eve walks over to talk to Crane, thankfully. If it were any other fucker, I'd have to go and grab her. For now I'll watch. Crane is a safe space. The man is consumed in what he has going on with Liza. It's something I can relate to and understand. Eve takes a sip of her drink and glances back toward the bathroom where Liza disappeared before saying something to Crane and heading that way.

Liza has been in there for some time. Crane's whole body changes. I try to keep mine relaxed as I glance around to determine what has put him on alert. Eve pulls open the bathroom door before letting out one of her gasps. She has a million different ones. Each one means something different.

I've never heard this one before, and I know it's because it's laced with fear. I rise to my feet immediately and head out of the building to survey the surrounding area. My gut already told me that Liza wasn't in the bathroom based on Eve's reaction. She's gone.

I step back when Crane exits the building to the parking lot with Mayor Grable and Eve with him. Crane points at a parking lot. That's when everything clicks into place, and I know without a doubt who took Eve. Carlton. That is where he always parks. The devil really is in the details when you watch a small town. You know the routines down to where some people even park. Humans are creatures of habit.

Eve wrings her hands together as she and Crane go back and forth, Clark the town sheriff joining them. I'm too far back to hear them, but I can catch some of what they're saying from reading their mouths. Before I can go over and tell them it's Carlton, Crane has already pieced it together.

Both Crane and I have our phones pulled out, and I have no doubt we're both doing the same thing. Figuring out where this creep has taken Liza. The distress on Eve's face is more

than I can bear. I want to go over and pull her into my arms, but I know I can't.

I do what I do best instead and start to search my phone. Getting myself into records and places I shouldn't be is my specialty. If I can find something, I'm going to hand over the information. It doesn't take me long to see his family owns a property on the outskirts of town.

That's where he'd take her. He couldn't take her back to his place, but this option was a stupid one to pick as well. I know Crane is seeing this information as quickly as I am and putting it together. Carlton is no real criminal. He's a man that's lost touch with reality. As much as I don't want to relate to that, I do to a degree.

If he's had a thing for Liza, then watching her with Crane was likely his breaking point. It would be mine if I'd seen Eve with someone else. I'd hope I could handle myself with a bit more tact. You're supposed to find a way to get rid of the competition. Not put a target on your own fucking head. Carlton is an amateur.

Crane takes off toward his SUV, jumping in. He'll get her. This dumbass Carlton is no match for Crane. He has no idea who or what he's dealing with. Carlton is as good as dead. The sooner the better.

Without thinking, my feet are moving on their own accord, heading across the parking lot toward Eve. Clark heads for his patrol car.

"I think Crane is going to get her back. Not Clark," Eve mutters. She's still wringing her hands together.

"Yeah," Mayor Grable agrees. I can see the worry in her eyes, but she's trying to remain calm.

"Eve." Her name comes out harder than I mean it to, but I don't speak often. She turns around slowly to face me, her eyes filled with tears. She tries to fight them back, but they explode free. Her legs give way. I catch her before she can hit the ground, pulling her into my body.

I cradle her in my arms as she sobs in my neck. The mayor's brows lift all the way to her hairline at the sight before her.

"I've got her," I tell her. The mayor only nods before she too takes off. The search for Liza is in full swing.

"It's going to be okay, angel. Crane will bring her back." The soothing words come from somewhere inside of me I didn't know was there. Then again, when it comes to Eve, I'm not quite myself. Or maybe I'm finding myself again. The person I was before I'd become almost a machine for the most part.

My humanity is coming back to me. I'm not sure what it is, but what I do know is that now that I have Eve cradled in my arms, there is no going back. Not that there ever was. There was going to be something sooner or later that forced my hand.

There is no going back. Ever.

Marco isn't wrong. Crane finds Liza, but Carlton is dust like the rest of his house. At least that's what I heard. The fire trucks raced out of town to try and put the fire out, but there was nothing left by the time they made it there.

The holiday party is kind of over, but everyone is still hanging around in shock over what went down. This will be the biggest news to ever hit Snow Hill. Not that we'll let it get out. We might gossip inside our town, but it stops there. We don't like outsiders knowing our business.

I think I must be in shock too because I have been in Marco's arms since he caught me seconds before I could hit the cold, hard ground. He doesn't give a smug *I told you so* when word gets back that Liza is safe and sound with Crane.

"You doing okay?" Marco asks.

I nod my head that's resting on his shoulder. He carried me back into the building saying it was too cold for me to be outside in a dress. I hadn't protested. It's been nice being in his arms. He's been holding me close with a firm grip. There is no wiggling out of it. I'll have to ask for him to let me go eventually. But for now, I let myself just be. For so long, I've wondered what it might feel like to be like this with him.

Liza has been my person since I moved to Snow Hills, and to think of losing her almost killed me. She's the only person that gets me. I've got a tough exterior that formed from my childhood, but inside, I can be a softy that loves romance

books and cries at Hallmark holiday movies. Doesn't matter how many times I watch *The Family Stone*, I cry every time. I'm not talking a few tears either. I turn into a blubbling mess.

Now she has Crane. I wonder if our relationship will change. It will have to. I'm sure she'll be knocked up and heading down the aisle in no time. With a dating record of zero, I don't see myself getting that anytime soon. I also don't think anyone knows I long for that—except Liza, but she's my romance book hookup.

The smell of Marco is soothing. Outdoorsy is the only word I can think of to describe it. It's a mix of snow, sun, and pine. My mouth is so close to his neck. If I moved in only a touch, my lips would be on his skin.

Now that I know my best friend is safe, reality starts to creep back in. I'm sitting in Marco's lap. Not only that, I think he has a hard-on. I shift my ass because I have to be wrong. That's too big but not big enough to be one of his giant thighs.

"Eve," Marco grunts. I stop moving. Yeah, that's his cock. "Ignore it."

"Ignore it?" I whisper. How does one ignore that?

"You smell good" is his only response before I feel a tug, and Marco pulls my hair out of my ponytail that I always keep it in. It's easier than having to deal with it.

"What do I smell like?" Curiosity gets the best of me.

"Heaven."

"Have you been? How do you know what it smells like?" I challenge him. I really can't help myself.

"You, angel. You're heaven." I lean back to peek up at him. Here I have Marco talking, but this is nothing like what I thought he'd say when he finally spoke to someone. I wasn't expecting him to be sweet.

"You're nothing like what I thought you'd be." I rest my head back down on his shoulder. I'm exhausted. I can't remember the last time I cried that hard. It was all too much.

“Most people aren’t as they seem. They try to be what they think you want them to be.” I let out a small yawn.

“Are you telling me you’re not a lumberjack? That might be disappointing.”

“I thought you were sure I was a serial killer.” I tense at his words.

“You keep up on town gossip?” Now he is really surprising me. He does one of his grunts. The sound makes my body tingle. I enjoy him talking, but there is something about those grunts of his that do it for me. A week ago, they annoyed me, but I’m realizing now that I felt that way because I loved them but I could never get them.

“I keep up on most things.”

“I didn’t know you knew I existed. I’ve seen you around but —”

“I know you exist, angel. Have since you moved to town.” A warmth blooms in my chest. Then I heard Marco’s name whispered from somewhere. I lift my head again, glancing around the room, wanting to know who is talking about him. There is a group of ladies who quickly turn away when they see me looking their way. I might not have heard them, but I know for sure they’re gossiping about Marco and me.

“Maybe I should move. People are watching us.”

“Let them watch,” he says without a care in the world.

“The staring doesn’t bother you?” I’ve wondered if he hid away in his cabin because of the scar on his face. Has no one told him it’s a badass one that only makes him more appealing? He has a story, and everyone wants to know it, but no one has the balls to ask him.

“No,” he says without hesitation. “I don’t care what they think or say. It’s irrelevant to my life.”

“Damn, I wish I had some of that. I can brush some stuff off, but you really give no shits.”

“Not true. If I gave no shits, I wouldn’t be here tonight.”

Right. How had that slipped my mind? He threw out a crazy bid and won me. The date was only supposed to be for the night, but that didn't go as planned. I have spent most of it with him, though.

I'm sure that, paired with the auction and now me sitting in his lap, people are forming all kinds of rumors. I try not to fidget. I know they don't mean harm, but it takes me back to my high school days when people would whisper or make not-so-kind remarks about me.

I let out another yawn. "You need sleep." Marco rises with me in his arms.

"You know I can walk, right?"

"Not chancing it." He carries me out of the party and down the stairs. He doesn't stop until we're at his truck. He opens the door and places me gently inside. The way he's handling me, you'd think I was made of glass. Then he goes and puts my seatbelt on.

Who the hell is this man? I watch him round the front of the truck in a jog. "It will warm up fast." He grabs a coat from his back seat and places it over my lap to keep me warm after he starts up the truck.

"The drive isn't far." I lean my head back. My eyes are heavy from all the crying. I let them fall closed, having no clue Marco isn't taking me home. Not to my own at least.

I can't help but to keep glancing over at her, making sure she's still there. So many times I've imagined what it would be like to have her in my space. Even now, her sweet smell fills the interior of my truck. How long have I wondered what she smelled like? Three years. My mouth waters wanting to know what she tastes like too.

This is not how I thought this night was going to go. I wasn't sure if I'd bid and leave knowing no one else got her. That was the idea I had in my mind, but if that had been the case, I wouldn't have lingered. I wanted my time with her. I was underpaid for what I actually got. The deal was a couple hours of a date, but now I've got her in my truck. I'm almost to my cabin. The snow is starting to come down hard.

We could get trapped out here for a few days. I could live out here for a year if need be, if not longer, without having to go into town. I'm always prepared. I have access to a natural spring and generators if need be. The barn I built with my bare hands two years ago is back away from my cabin out of sight and is fully stocked. Unfortunately, I don't think Eve is going to let me keep her locked away for a year, but at least I have tonight.

I pull my truck up as close to my front door as possible. It's cold, and Eve's fair skin turns red quickly, I've noticed. Silently I slip from the truck and make my way to the house. I unlock and disarm my alarm.

“Komne.” I call to my dog Snow to come. Snow lies in waiting until I give him a signal to move even if he can smell me coming. He stays hidden in the shadows as a second layer of protection to the home. He sniffs at me, and I know he can smell Eve.

Two years ago, I snuck into her place and stole a sweater. I’d brought it home for Snow and trained him to seek out the smell. I wanted him to learn it wasn’t a threat. It looks like it worked since his tail has started to wave back and forth in excitement. “Myjesto.” I tell him to stay in Russian. I’m not Russian, but it is one of five languages I can speak. When I trained him, I didn’t want his commands to be in English. Snow stills; even his tail stops swinging back and forth, obeying my command.

I head back out to my truck and open the passenger door. It’s not until I have Eve in my arms that she wakes. I’d managed to take her seatbelt off without waking her.

“What?” she mutters, confused. Her eyes start to flutter open as I carry her into the house. “Where are we? I thought...” She trails off. “There is a polar bear dog in your house,” Eve whispers as if I don’t know I have a giant dog.

“Are you scared of dogs? I promise you he will not hurt you.” In fact, he’ll do the opposite. Snow stares at Eve, watching her intently.

“I’ve never seen a dog that big.”

“A lot of it is fur.” I try to help calm her worry. He is well over a hundred pounds.

“Okay.” She wiggles in my arms. I don’t want to put her down, but she wants to pet Snow. I wasn’t sure what she was going to say when she realized I hadn’t taken her to her place. Now her attention is on Snow. I’d rather keep it there than on her wanting to leave.

I put her on her bare feet. I’d slipped her heels off when I got her in my truck. I’ve seen Eve run around town in heels, but I always worried they hurt her feet.

“What’s his name?”

“Snow.” She walks over and pets the top of his head. Snow doesn’t move. Eve drops to her knees, making her eye level with Snow. She continues to stroke him, and I can’t help but be a tiny bit jealous of the attention she’s giving him. Is it ridiculous, of course, but that doesn’t stop it.

“I don’t think he likes me.”

“Molodets.” Snow’s tail starts to wag as he gives all his attention to Eve.

“Molodets?” She laughs when he licks her cheek. “I thought you said his name was Snow.”

“Molodets is what I tell him so that he knows he’s free to do what he wants. It’s Russian.”

“Your dog speaks Russian?”

“Not that I’m aware of, but he understands it.” A giggle slips past Eve’s lips. The sound soothes me in a way I didn’t know I needed. Her crying put me on edge. I’d felt helpless in getting her to stop. Helplessness isn’t something I’m used to.

“Are you always full of jokes? You’ve been keeping them hidden from the town of Snow Hills,” she teases me as she pets Snow. He’s making her smile, which I’m grateful for. Even though I want all those smiles for myself, this will have to do for now.

“Nothing is ever as it seems.”

“That’s the second time you’ve said that to me.” She rises to her feet. Her eyes take in my home, stopping on the stairs. “I thought this was a one-story cabin.”

“I’ve done renovations.”

“I don’t recall seeing a permit for that.”

“I don’t need one. I’m considered out of city limits,” I remind her. When I bought this place, it only had two bedrooms, but one was more of an office space. The other is the master bedroom. I won’t lie to myself. When I bought this home, it was meant for me and Snow alone.

Then Eve came along, and the need to expand ate away at me until I did it. What else was I going to do with my spare time anyway? I did most of the work myself, but I called in for a few things that required a skill level a bit greater than mine. I used contractors from the town over, not wanting to draw attention to myself from Snow Hills. I put three more bedrooms and a couple bathrooms up there and a small lounge area.

“It’s so modern. Did you decorate it?”

“This is considered decorated?” Now I’m glancing around. The inside is modern. The cabin was brand new when I moved in. I’d updated some things, but the walls are bare, the light gray paint being the only decor.

“I guess not decorated but staged?”

“Staged?” I have no clue what that means.

“Like you plucked it out of a home and garden magazine.” She walks around, her eyes going big when she sees the kitchen, which is open to the living room. The whole main floor is set up that way. I’m not sure why she’d be excited over a kitchen. She doesn’t cook. Not that I’m aware of, at least.

“I suppose it kind of is. Pottery Barn.”

“Pottery Barn?” She laughs.

“It was easy.” I shrug. They had things in sets, and they reminded me a bit of her place. I know she’s ordered from there too.

“I’ve wanted this chair!” She rushes over to the chair in the corner of the room next to the fireplace. It swings. I know it’s sturdy, but I’ve never tried to sit in the thing myself. “This is the kind of chair you read in.” She sways back and forth in it. The chair is no coincidence.

“You didn’t eat much tonight. I’ll make you something.” I head toward the kitchen. She needs to eat, and I need to kill time as the snow grows thicker outside. The longer she stays distracted, the better the chance I have of keeping her here with me for a few days.

“You cook?” She sways in the chair.

“How else would I feed myself?”

“Right. You never come to town to eat. You know the diner is really good.” It must be. She eats most of her meals from there. Eve gets up from the chair as I start to pull items out of the fridge. “Whatcha making?” She eyes what I’ve laid out on the kitchen island.

“Chicken marsala.” Her whole face lights, and she says what I know she is going to. “That’s my favorite!”

I know. I always know when it comes to my angel.

“Who taught you to cook like this?” I take another giant bite of the chicken marsala. I don’t think I’ve ever had one this good before, and I order it on any menu if I see it.

“The Internet.” I burst into laughter. Maroc’s lips twitch. “I thought you’d say your mom or something.” For some reason, I can’t see Marco searching for recipes on the Internet.

“I don’t have one of those.”

“Oh.” Shit. How do you respond to that? “A father?” He shakes his head no. Double shit.

“Don’t feel bad for me. I barely remember them. How about you?” I stare into his eyes for a long moment. He might not remember them too well, but they’re there somewhere in his mind.

“I’ve got both of mine.”

“But you never go home for the holidays.” He says it as if he knows this for a fact.

“Keeping tabs on me?” I raise an eyebrow in question. How does he know when I go back home? It seems Marco keeps a tighter watch on Snow Hills than any of us really know.

“I notice things.” I bet he does. Marco is the kind of man that watches. It makes me curious to know if he’s always been that way. I’ve only learned he really talked today.

“The holidays were never big for us.” I shrug to downplay it. That’s what I always told myself growing up.

One holiday my parents didn’t bother to pick me up, having forgotten altogether that it was Thanksgiving weekend. I ended up spending the weekend with one of my teachers at the boarding school. My parents never even acknowledged that they forgot me and missed Thanksgiving that year, but I hadn’t been shocked. So many of the other girls would get care packages and small things sent to them. I never did unless it was something I specifically requested.

“Both of my parents are lawyers. They’re busy.” They aren’t just any lawyers; they’re big-time trial lawyers. The kind that are very sought after. Which means they never really had time for children. Pretty sure I was an oops baby.

“Interesting.” He takes a bite of his own food.

“Why is that interesting?”

“You got your degree in criminal justice, but you didn’t go on to law school.” I didn’t think he could surprise me anymore tonight, but that’s exactly what his words do. This man sure knows a lot about me. That should probably frighten me, but it does the exact opposite.

“How do you know that?” Has he been secretly stalking me? I’m having my own lumberjack romance story unfold in my mind. This one won’t be a secret baby, though. I don’t know why I love those so much. *Because you secretly want a baby.* Oh, no. I shove that thought all the way down. I have to stop reading all those romance books. It’s hard when your best friend is a damn librarian and knows which ones you’ll love.

“Your profile is on the town’s website. All the city officials are.” Duh, I’m the one that updates that website.

“Right. I forgot. You’re all into the Internet.” I wouldn’t have guessed Marco to have Wi-Fi, but his home is nothing like what I thought it would be. Add some Christmas lights outside and decorations in the home, and this place would be perfect for a family.

A picture perfect one. But I'm guessing a man who lives out in the middle of nowhere alone isn't looking to fill his home with people. He's out here by himself for a reason. A reason I really want to know. I'm not sure if I should bulldoze my way in and ask, which is my normal way of doing things, but Marco isn't what I thought, so maybe my approach should be different with him.

"Into the Internet." He lets out a deep chuckle.

"But still. Why is that interesting?" He's reading me and I want to know what he sees.

"I'm guessing your parents were very absent in your life but you worked hard to get your degree. Bet you graduated at the top of your class to impress. Did they show up to your graduation?" Wow, that is crazy accurate. I'd even graduated with a higher GPA and more honors from college than they had.

"No." The reminder burns. I try to pretend I don't care, but I do. They didn't show up to my high school or college graduations. They had sent someone to give me flowers at my high school one.

"You worked so hard, and they didn't even take the time to notice. I'm sure they did when you didn't go on to law school." His tone gets more serious. I put my fork down.

"They did." They both lost it. It was the first time I had both of their attention on me. We'd fought back and forth over the matter for hours. I don't think they realized I wasn't as much of a pushover as they thought. I'd partly raised myself. Plus, I was the daughter of two of the best lawyers out there. Arguing was in my blood. Here they thought they'd been grooming me into a lawyer. You have to be around to do that. If anything, they made me more independent. "I didn't want to be a lawyer, so it doesn't matter." Them not being around taught me that I didn't want their lifestyle. One that didn't have room for anything or anyone that wasn't involved in their jobs.

"It matters, angel. If you ask me, you got the shittier end of the stick when it comes to parents. I don't have to think about what mine would want me to be doing."

“Are you always this good at reading people?”

“When you grow up in the system, you learn to understand and predict what people are going to do. It’s a language of its own.” Marco gets more interesting by the second. This isn’t helping the crush I’ve been harboring for him.

“They were crappy parents at times, but I never went without. In fact, I had too much.” I can’t deny the privilege I was given. I might not have gotten goodnight kisses and I love yous, but the world of opportunity was there for me. The best schools, clothes, and anything really. I would only have to send an email to one of their assistants about what I needed, and boom it was there. I’m sure their assistants were on a standing order to just send whatever I asked for.

“*They* had too much,” he corrects. “Money doesn’t buy happiness, but it does buy freedom.” Damn, that’s so true.

“I suppose you’re right. They had no control after I got my degree. That had been the stipulation of my trust. That money did grant me freedom to choose another path. I knew I’d be a shit lawyer anyhow.”

“I very much doubt that.” Marco shakes his head. “Is there anything you put your mind to that you don’t accomplish?” He’s right. I can be a bit relentless. I’d beat a horse until it was glue. I might not have wanted to be a lawyer, but whatever that drive is my parents have in them it’s in me too. I only choose to channel it somewhere else. I want something else. A different life than what they had.

“I think at first I would be good, but in time—”

“You’d start to hate your life.”

“I was already starting to hate it.” The few law classes I’d taken made me question so many things in life. I might have raised myself, but I was also sheltered. “I was in one of my classes, and we were going over cases. When my mom married my father, she didn’t take his last name. She’d already been building her own, so sometimes people forget we’re connected. One of her first cases got brought up. A case that put her on the map.”

“I’m guessing you didn’t side with your mother.” I shake my head.

“That’s the fucked-up part. She’d been right. The district attorney fucked up, and she caught him. Got the case thrown out, setting a murderer free.”

“So you think he was guilty?”

“Yes,” I say without hesitation. “I know everyone should get their day in court, but I snuck into their office a few times at home. Drunk driver hit a man on a bike. He ended up dying. My mom got him off with nothing because of a technicality. I’m glad I didn’t have to see the faces of that man’s family. No justice.”

“I would say you could work for the district attorney, but I have a feeling I already know what you’ll say about that.” Both sides could be fucked up at times, and I didn’t want that in my life.

“It’s not a world for me.”

“What brought you here to Snow Hills? You thought this was a world you wanted?”

“I wanted something different. I saw a job listing for a mayor of a small town needing a right hand. I came down to poke around. It took me an hour to know I was going to take the job. There is something about Snow Hills. It’s special.”

“So politics. Is that much different?”

“Is it really politics around here?” I laugh. No, it’s a lot of laughter and love. The mayor has been more of a mother to me than my own. Even her husband. Then there is Liza. I’ve never had a friend like her. We clicked from day one. I couldn’t imagine my life without her in it. In the three short years I’ve lived in this town, I’ve never felt more at home.

“You realize no one thinks you’re going to stay. Most people say this is just a mark on your resume. That you’re overqualified.” Now Marco is even up on town gossip. The man really misses nothing.

“I might be overqualified, but does it matter? I love my job. Isn’t that all that really matters?”

“No plans to leave then?” He doesn’t answer my question but asks one of his own instead.

“No, but what brings you to Snow Hills, Marco? What did you run from?”

“I don’t run.”

“Then what are you doing here?” I cock my head to the side. As much as I’ve gotten Marco to talk, he’s gotten a lot more out of me about my life. I still know little about the beast of a man with a scar on his face that holds so much mystery.

“Five years ago I retired.”

“Retired?” Marco might be close to twice my age, but how is he already retiring?

“I was past my shelf life.” I eye him up and down, trying to figure out what the heck it is that he did for work.

“Did you play sports or something?” He’s big enough.

“Not any you’d know about.”

“I know what you’re doing, Marco. You’re being evasive.”

“I never thought you didn’t.”

“But you’re not really going to tell me anything, are you?”

“Not yet.”

“Not yet?” I repeat, not understanding. “Be more clear.” I hold my finger up before he can say something evasive again.

“Not until I get my hooks further into you.”

“You know we all joke you’re an ax murderer, right?” I deadpan.

“I didn’t say anything about an ax. I said hooks.” I don’t know why, but I burst into laughter at his response. It feels good to laugh. It’s been a long day. One I had no idea would end this way.

The more I get to know Marco, the deeper I fall. That scares the shit out of me. He might not run, but I can't say the same for myself.

Fuck she's beautiful when she laughs. I want to puff out my chest at the fact that I got her to do it. Sure, I've seen her laugh before. I both loved and hated it. I wanted to be the one to make her laugh, and now I am. What has this woman done to me? Honestly, I don't care. I'm past the point of no return. I have been from the moment I laid eyes on her.

I found myself speaking more tonight than I have in the past five years combined as I made her something to eat. She answered each of my questions. Some I already knew the answers to, but the sound of her voice is soothing "Oh my," Eve moans as she takes another bite of the chicken marsala I made her. The sound makes my dick get completely hard again. I'd managed to get it to go down some while I cooked, but I haven't pulled off getting it to go down fully since I saw her up on that stage. Then her tiny ass was pressed into my lap for over an hour.

Before tonight, that shit irritated the hell out of me. The reaction she could pull for me that no other could. I am a trained machine. One that knows how to control myself. Until her. Now I don't want the sensation to go away. I feel alive.

"Are you just going to watch me eat?" Eve asks before taking another bite. That had been my plan, but from her question, I'm guessing she doesn't want me to. Though she doesn't fidget or seem uncomfortable like she had been when she was up on the stage.

“I should feed Snow.” She glances down at Snow, who has been sitting next to her this whole time.

“He’s a very well-trained dog. Were you both in the military?”

“I never said I was, but you know that don’t you, Eve?” She smirks, cutting herself off another bite of food. “To answer what you wanted, no, I wasn’t in the military.”

“Really.” Her brows pull together. “Law enforcement?” Her nose scrunches now because that doesn’t feel completely right. She looks fucking adorable, and I want to eat her up, but she’s not ready yet. I have to be patient. Something that’s becoming increasingly harder now that she’s in my space.

“I never wore a badge.” I’m as honest as I can be for now. I don’t want her running for the hills.

“Are you being mysterious with me?” Eve teases. I call Snow over to give him a small second dinner. I fed him before I left, but he’s been good.

“I’m answering your questions.” I try to shrug it off. I can tell it doesn’t work because her face lights up as she realizes I’ve cracked the door. Really she has. I called her out on her trying to trip me up with her questions. Not that I was surprised by it. I know who her parents are, after all. Hell, they might know who I am. Or better yet, who I once was. From her lit-up expression, I know I’m not going to close the door again. Not if I want to lure Eve inside.

“Did you work for the government?” Fuck me. How the hell do I answer that one?

“I suppose.”

“You suppose?” Her bottom lip puffs out. The room grows quiet. The fear of her suggesting it might be time to head home hits me. I know if I want to keep her here, the snow needs to keep accumulating outside. Answering some of her questions will give me the time I need for that to happen. Once we’re snowed in, she won’t have a choice but to stay here with me.

“I think I worked for a multitude of governments.”

“That’s like a thing?” she whispers. “Like a United Nations or some secret undercover agents?”

“That’s not a terrible way to describe it.”

“That’s why I can’t find any past information about you? There is nothing.” She looks both intrigued and disappointed at the same time. My lips twitch.

“Have you been digging around about me, Eve?” I know she has.

I’m thankful Eve moved to a small town because she is very much the definition of curiosity killed the cat. She would have made a killer reporter, but I think her parents would have found a way to shut that down. That could have gotten really fucking awkward for them.

Eve ducks her head as her cheeks start to turn pink at my suggestion. There she is. The soft sweet girl under the hard shell she shows to the rest of the world. Few people are privy to this side of her. I only know about it because I have a habit of watching her. Those glimpses only made me crave her more. I want to get past the hard shell. I wonder if Eve is trying to do the same with me. I just worry there is nothing beneath mine. Only hollowness.

“I mean, the ax murderer rumor should be checked out.” She tries to make light of it. Is she shy about the fact I knew she’d been checking into me? That meant she cared. Emotion was connected with it.

“Feel free to roam,” I invite her. Not that she would find anything. If she did happen to find my little room, she couldn’t get inside.

“What gives, Marco? You’ve been out here in the middle of nowhere, but now with me you’re so open.”

“You have the answer to your own question, angel. *You*.” She takes another bite of her food, contemplating what I’ve said. I don’t think she’s quite sure what to do with the information. “I told you Eve. I’ve always noticed you. How could I not?”

“Because I’m pretty?” she blurts out, a hint of irritation to her tone. I struck a nerve.

“Pretty? It’s a very insufficient word for what you are.” I speak the truth. That word doesn’t even come close to describing her. She is so much more than that.

“What would you use?” She cocks her head to the side, her dark hair falling over her shoulder. She cut a few inches off of it last year. I’d always loved her long hair, but when she cut it, she wore it down more. It highlighted her heart-shaped face. I realized that all that hair hid too much. I wanted to see every inch of her face. To read the expressions. I wanted to see her.

“I don’t think there is a word. As you’re aware, I’m not a man of many words.” Her face softens.

“You call me angel.”

“I do.”

“You know people in town think I’m pretty tough. Badass at times.” Her chin rises.

“An angel can be many different things to many people.” No one said an angel can’t be badass, as she would call it. No, I don’t think Eve is bad in any sense of the word. When she pushes back, it’s in the protection of others.

“Okay then. What is an angel to you?” What she really wants to know is how I see her. That’s what she’s digging for.

“Many people might not think you’re introverted, but you are.”

“How can I be introverted?” She’s puzzled not because she thinks I’m wrong but because now she’s contemplating the idea. “And what’s that got to do with being an angel?” Her nose scrunches again, and the strange thought of wanting to kiss it fills me.

“Being introverted does not mean you aren’t social. You just don’t crave the spotlight, but you will take it if you need to. In fact, it’s your loyalty to the people around you that thrust you back into the world. Your joy is in helping others. To serve what you believe is a better good. You’ll always be the first to show up, and you somehow always know what the people around you need.”

“Wow.” Her eyes water. Well, fuck. That is not what I meant to do.

“And you are breathtakingly beautiful, but that’s a drop in the bucket of who you are.” She’s more than I’ve ever deserved. I should keep my hands off her, but I can’t. Not any longer. The more I’m around her, the more I crave her. I thought I had it bad before. I’m beyond fucked now.

She licks her lips. “I don’t know what you need.”

“I need you, Eve.”

“You need me?”

“More than you’ll ever know,” I admit. She stares at me for a long moment.

“Maybe I need you too Marco. You have this way of making me feel cared for.” Yes, I know that is something that she craves and needs. A mark left by her parents that I would give my dying breath to heal.

She pushes back from her chair at the kitchen island, getting up. Did I go too far? Normally, I’m good at reading people, but Eve throws me off. I try to catch everything, but she can be very distracting, and I could miss something. If anyone could make me do that, it would be her.

Eve walks around the kitchen island where I’ve been standing to hide my hard-on. She comes right to me. Her hand comes down on my chest as her body comes flush with mine. I fight a groan. She drops her head back. I fist my hands at my side so that I don’t grab her. Because once I do, there is no going back.

“I don’t chase.” She licks her lips as she parts them. The invitation is clear. I want to pounce.

“After a man.” She grips my shirt, her fingers tightening in it.

“Don’t be a smartass.” She fights a smirk.

“Angel, I understand what you’re saying. I would never make you chase me,” I tell her. If anything, I’m trying to make sure she doesn’t run from me. God only knows what I’d do when I

caught her. “But you need to be *very* clear if you let me over that line. I can’t come back. I’m no angel.”

“You know, Marco, I’ve gotten more than a few things wrong about you over the years, but I get the sense I’m not wrong about one thing. Nobody makes you do anything.” True, except she’s the exception. She could wrap me around her finger and get me to do anything to have her.

“You were wrong.”

“I, ah—”

I cut her off. “You do know what I need.”

I let go. I plow right over that line. My hands sink into her hair as I claim her mouth in a kiss. My angel parts her lips, and the gates of heaven swing open, allowing me access.

I don’t belong here, but I dare someone to try and pull me from it. I’d drag them right to hell with me.

Marco's hand in my hair tightens as he pulls my head back to deepen the kiss. I don't know why for a second I thought him gripping my hair would be painful. That it could have a bite to it that I know I've read about in romance books.

Some girls enjoy the spanking and rough play. To each their own, but it has never been my style. With how big Marco is, I'd done the same stupid thing once again thinking I knew how he'd be. That his hold would be too rough, his kiss hard, but that is not what this is.

His mouth is gentle but firm against mine. The tug on my hair is the perfect amount that it doesn't hurt; it only reminds me who is in control. He's going to give me what I need one way or another.

Somehow, he maintains control of the kiss as one of his hands slips from my hair so he can wrap his arm around me. He pulls me up to sit on the kitchen counter, stepping between my legs to spread them wide. My dress rides up so only my panties and his slacks separate us. Marco's erection presses into my clit.

I moan into his mouth as he rocks against me, giving me friction where I need it the most. My whole body is on fire. I've been having small fantasies about Marco in my mind for years. From the first time I spotted him in town, I've been crushing on a watered-down version that isn't even close to what he truly is. The man is so much more than I ever could've imagined.

“Marco.” I gasp for air when his mouth pulls from mine, but it doesn’t leave my body. It travels across my jaw and over to my ear.

“Going to taste you.” There it is. The line I invited him past. It’s not a question, and damn does that turn me on because I’m into it. I’m into him.

His sweet, gentle, gruff firmness is what I need in my life. This man wants to take care of me. I’m pretty sure he already sees me as belonging to him. Again, red flags should be flying, but all I’ve got are white ones of surrender. In all my life, I’ve never felt this pull to another man. Even before I knew who he truly was. All the layers underneath the man.

I don’t know fully what Marco did in his past life, but he sees more than any of us do. That day in the grocery store when I was so sure he was staring right through me, I hadn’t been wrong. He sees right to the core of who I am. Telling me things about myself I hadn’t even realized. I know I put on this hard exterior to the rest of the world. In one glance Marco knew it was a thin shell. One he’s shattering right now.

“Get out of that head of yours. Need you here with me,” he says as he begins to trail kisses down the column of my neck. I know I’ve read about this stuff in books but doing that and experiencing it firsthand are two totally different things.

“Oh, I’m here, big guy.” My fingers dig hard into his shirt as I try to shift my hips to rub myself against him.

“Not here,” he grunts.

I wrap my legs around Marco as he carries me through the house. I have no idea how he manages it. We kept kissing, my mouth never leaving him until he lays me down on a bed. “Marco?” I breathe out when he stands, not joining me on the bed. Did he change his mind?

“Said I need to taste you.” It’s on the tip of my tongue to tell him it was only fair, he’d fed me, but I let out a small gasp when he pulls his shirt off. Scars mark his broad, muscular chest. If I had to guess, I’d say one might even be a bullet wound.

I try to sit up to touch him, but he's a man on a mission. He pushes my dress up farther before yanking my panties down my legs. I don't get a chance to respond to anything. He buries his face between my thighs, causing all rational thought to leave me.

My hips jerk up at the first touch of his tongue to my clit. He brings his arm down across my waist, keeping me pinned to the bed. I let out a whimper, my legs spreading wide for him. My body is clearly on board with his domination.

"Marco, I can't," I blurt out when he sucks my clit into his mouth as he presses a finger inside of me. A loud guttural growl comes from him. He lifts his head. His mouth is covered in my juices. I thought Marco was hot before, but this is something else altogether. He licks his lips greedily for more of the taste of me. "Why are you stopping?!" I grip the sheets, fisting them to hold on to something.

"You said you can't." He circles my clit with his tongue. I need more pressure.

"What? No!" I try to lift my hips again, but I'm thoroughly pinned under him. "I'm sorry, I don't know what's coming out of my mouth, but the last thing I want you to do is stop." Marco closes his eyes and sucks in a deep breath, and I know he's smelling my desire. It's all for him. "It never felt this good."

His eyes fly open, and the room goes from being too hot to a cold chill rolling through it. "Who wasn't it this good with, angel? Because I know no one in Snow Hills has touched you."

"Are you stalking me, big guy?" I bite my lip. A thrill courses through me at the thought of him not only stalking me but also him being jealous of another man touching me.

"I think the idea turns you on. Your pussy gives you away with its flutters." He pulls his one thick finger out and thrusts it right back in, making me moan. "Now, who is this man that you let taste you?" *Taste me.* He doesn't say sex or intercourse. I suppose a man would say fuck. Which leads me to believe he

knows I'm still a virgin. He can feel that, but he doesn't know if I've done other things.

"You want a full name? Social Security number too?" I tease him. Why I have no idea. I want his head back between my thighs sooner rather than later. I know it's ridiculous, but I can't help but love the fact that he seems jealous.

"A first name will do. I don't need much to find what I'm looking for." He keeps his finger deep inside of me.

"Me. I was talking about myself, Marco. It never felt this way when I touched myself." His nose flares.

"Then I must ruin you so that you'll crave my touch," he says before his mouth descends onto me once again. He licks and sucks until he has my whole body quivering and screaming his name.

His mission is accomplished. I'll never be the same after this.

*H*er juices fill my mouth. It's the sweetest thing I've ever tasted. I lick and suck, wanting every drop of her I can get. Her moans fill the room. I'm relentless. I wasn't joking when I told her that I wanted to ruin her. I want her to crave me the same way I do her. For her body to only ache for me when she's in need.

Eve's fingers dig into my hair as she thrashes under my hold. Her legs are shaking now. I've gotten two orgasms out of her, working her up to two fingers, but she's still so damn tight. As turned on as I am, the thought of getting this taste of her and it being taken away scares the fuck out of me. That's saying a lot, considering nothing or no one ever has that effect on me.

"Marco, please I need more," she begs, breaking me from my thoughts.

She continues to move her hips that I have pinned down with my forearm. I swallow and slowly stand from the floor where I was resting on my knees. The bed really is the perfect height. I noticed the kitchen counter was too. She lets her fingers slip from my hair. I can see the desire for me in her eyes, which settles something inside of me.

"Off," I order, my voice not sounding like my own. Eve doesn't hesitate at my order. If anything, something in her eyes lights up at my command. She wants me to take over, allowing her to hand over the control and be taken care of for once in her life. She's not used to someone doing that for her unless it's someone her parents paid to do it.

Unbeknownst to her, I vowed from the moment I laid eyes on her that I'd spend my life taking care of her even if from afar. But I'll fight like hell to keep her near me. The more I touch her, the worse my addiction to her becomes.

I slowly take all of her in, every inch of her until I get to those gorgeous emerald eyes staring back at me. She is perfect, every single inch of her. And while I may not be worthy of her, I'm sure as fuck gonna take her.

"You planning on standing there fully clothed all day? Or you gonna show me the goods and do something with me now that you have me naked?" There's that smart mouth of hers that turns me on. I love that she's not a pushover. I can tell she's a little nervous, but her desire for me has overridden most of that.

"You'll wait and trust that I will give you what you need when I think you're ready." I'm just as eager as her for my mouth to be on her again. It's torture for not only her but for me to wait. "Open that pretty mouth again and I'll put it to good use." I grab my erection that's begging to be let out of these damn pants. Her eyes immediately go to where my hand is. I watch as she licks her lips, loving the idea of having my cock in her mouth. My angel suddenly looks like a little devil sent here to tempt me.

She rolls over and crawls back to me as I free my cock from my pants. "Marco." She lets out a small gasp when she gets a look at my cock. "It's a good thing I like a challenge."

When her warm hand wraps around my cock, my knees almost buckle. Eve hasn't gotten her mouth on me yet, and I'm already about to come.

"Angel," I grit out when she runs her tongue around my cock, teasing me. She peeks up at me through her eyelashes. "Take me in your mouth," I order her, fisting her soft hair in my hand. Her eyes light up, only stoking my desire. Fuck, she really does get off on doing what I tell her.

Eve parts her lips farther, taking the head of my cock into her mouth, and starts to suck. "That's it, angel." I thrust my hips forward, unable to control myself. Her moans vibrate through

my cock and down to my balls. It's too much. This is more than I ever could have fantasized, and fuck have I done that more times that I can count. I've jacked my cock to all kinds of dirty thoughts about Eve. "Swallow." I can only get the one word past my throat before I explode into her mouth.

Eve only sucks harder, her cheeks hollowing out. My cock jerks in her mouth, barely softening. "That's it. Keep me hard." Eve whimpers, pressing her thighs together in need. I thrust in and out of her mouth a few more times, wanting her as worked up as I can get her. That's all it takes and I'm fully hard again after a few strokes.

I pull back, letting my cock slip free of her mouth. "Marco," she whimpers, licking her lips.

"You want more, angel?" I tilt her head back. The fact that she's greedy for me pleases me.

"Please."

"You don't have to beg." I lean down and claim her mouth. I groan, tasting my release. "Center of the bed. Spread those thighs," I order when I release my hold on her. I strip the rest of my clothes off quickly. Eve barely gets her legs spread before I'm pushing them farther apart to make room for myself.

Her hips buck, trying to rub her pussy against me to get off. I don't let her. Not yet. "You said I don't have to beg." She grips my shoulders.

"I'm getting you there. Trust me. Last thing I want to do is hurt you."

"It hurts. Make the ache go away." She lifts her head to kiss me. This woman is going to be the death of me. I wanted her needy for it, and I got it. Her pussy is so wet my cock easily slips right to her opening. Eve's cunt flutters, kissing the tip of my dick, silently begging to be filled.

"You're gonna come for me." I reach down between us, strumming her hard little clit. She screams out my name, already on edge. I watch her come for a second before I push forward, filling her with my cock.

“Ahh!” Her nails dig into me, her whole body tensing.

“It’s done.” I kiss her all over as I keep myself still, letting her get used to me being inside of her. “Nothing but pleasure now. Promise.” She nods, her body relaxing. “That’s all I want, Eve. To take care of you. Are you going to let me do that?” She nods again, her pussy fluttering around my cock. “Say it, angel. Say you’re going to let me love you forever.”

“Love?” She gasps. Fuck, I went too far. It’s too much too quick, but I can’t stop myself. Tonight might have been quick, but this has been years in the making. I’ve wanted her for so long that I can’t stand to be without her for another second.

I’ve never spoken those words before. If I did it was as a kid to my birth parents. With her, the word comes easy. I understand what it is. At least it’s got to be what this is. I’ve seen people do crazy shit over love, and I’m fucking insane when it comes to Eve.

“Say it,” I order, not answering her. Her hips wiggle, and I know her body is ready for me to move.

“Yes, you can love me.”

“Too late.” I kiss her as I pull out and thrust back into her.

“Marco,” she moans against my mouth.

“That’s it, angel, say my name.” I pick up my pace. I’m ready to come again, but I fight it off. Not until I’ve got her with me. I dig my knees into the mattress, pressing down harder, wanting her to feel that she’s pinned under me. That she’s mine. That no other man will ever have her in this way or any other.

“Yes, Marco. Oh, God,” she cries. Her pussy clamps down around me.

“Fuck,” I grunt. She’s soaked, but her pussy is as tight as a vise, sucking me in as she comes around my cock. I thrust as deeply as I can, exploding inside of her. I groan into her ear, wanting her to hear what she does to me. Nothing has ever felt this good in my whole damn life. “Won’t let you go,” I vow.

Eve is all mine now. There's nowhere on this earth she could go that I wouldn't find her. I'm not sure she knows what she's done, but it doesn't matter. Both our fates are sealed.

I've been here for two days. Marco hasn't said one word about me going anywhere. But one thing is for sure: he's driving me insane. I glare at him out the window as he brings down his ax on a log. The thing explodes under his force. He grabs another log and does it again. The muscles in his arms flex. He grunts this time. I press my thighs together. Yeah, I'm gonna murder him.

I march over to the door and pull it open. Snow is sitting on the porch right in front of the door, guarding it. The dog is sweet as hell, but he's also very well-trained and protective.

"Get in here." I snip at Marco as he brings the ax down again.

"It's cold." He stares at my bare legs.

"Stop being a thirst trap and get in the house," I order. He picks up the ax and swings it down into the tree stump before stomping my way.

"The fuck is a thirst trap?" He stomps the snow of his boots before he pulls them off. I back up to make room for him to get into the house. Not much, though. I want him to brush against me. The man has flipped on some invisible switch inside of me. My body is no longer my own. He owns it. He said he was going to ruin me, and he has. He's made me crave him.

"I'm ready to go home." I fold my arms over my chest, making his shirt I'm wearing ride up my thighs, the cold tickling me. Marco calls Snow inside before kicking the door

closed. “Did you hear me?” He grunts, taking off his coat. “Don’t grunt at me.” The sound doesn’t help my arousal.

“Are you hungry?”

“Are you trying to plump me up or something?” He shrugs as if it doesn’t matter if I’m plump or not. “Marco.” I stomp my foot like a freaking child.

“We don’t need to go to town. You don’t have work.” No, I don’t. We’re on a long break for the holiday.

“Well, maybe I want to—”

He cuts a look my way, his eyes locking with mine. The words die on my tongue. That damn heated stare of his. You’d think he wants to eat me alive, and he does. That look should scare the crap out of me. I’m not going anywhere, but then again, I don’t really want to. I’m only throwing a fit because I’m all worked up, and I know it.

He wraps his arm around me, lifting me off my feet like I’m a doll. I melt into him. “How do you feel?” Marco drops down on the sofa with me in his lap. His hand presses between my thighs to cup my sex.

“I’m fine,” I groan in annoyance.

After Marco took my virginity, we both passed the hell out. I did, at least. The last thing I remember was his body on top of mine. I woke to him kissing me the next morning. All had been fine until he got a look at the sheets and turned into a drama king.

There had been a few drops of blood, and I was sore, but it was a good sore. Which I told him twenty times. He hasn’t had sex with me since. Anytime I do try to lead us that way, he goes down on me until I can’t take it. I didn’t know one could orgasm to the point of begging someone to stop.

“Let me see.” He spreads my thighs apart.

“Shut up.” I laugh. “You had your face down there an hour ago, you’ve seen it all. It’s fine.” I turn to straddle him. “Marco.” I run my finger down his jaw. He hasn’t shaved, and I love the roughness of his short beard.

“Promised it wouldn’t hurt again. I think a few more days and ___”

I put my hand over his mouth. “No, you big bully. I’m not made of glass. You’re not gonna break me.” I drop my hand and go for his pants. I’m not waiting another damn second to have him inside me again. Although I love his mouth on me, I need all of him again.

“Bully?”

“I don’t know,” I mutter. I can’t explain this need I have for him to be back inside of me. Is it the fact he won’t do it or is it something else? It has to be something else.

When he took me the other night, I felt thoroughly loved and possessed. His neediness for me is addicting. His grunts as he thrusts in and out of me turned me on even more.

“Angel.” He groans when I wrap my hand around his hard cock and stroke him. I’ve almost got him. Though I thought that before, and that’s how he ended up outside destroying perfectly good wood in more ways than one.

“I’m not sore,” I promise him. A bead of cum slips out from the head of his cock. The man is giant, and I understand why I was tender the next morning. I’m still a bit shocked that it fits inside of me, but I know it does. I lift my hips, but Marco grabs them, stopping me. “Let me love you.”

“Eve.” He doesn’t let my hips go, but he doesn’t stop me from lifting myself over his cock. I guide him to my opening. He hisses when the head starts to press inside of me. Slowly I let myself drop down onto him.

“See?” I moan. “I was right.” I try to be smug, but it’s really hard at the moment. I’m stretched full of him.

“When I get inside of you.” He grits his teeth. Taking back hold of my hips, he lifts me and then drops me back down on his cock. “Got no control.” I love that I can make him lose it. I grab his shoulders, never getting the chance to rock myself against him. Marco takes over, lifting me up and down. His cock slides in and out of me. Soon, he’s thrusting his hips up as he pulls me down, pounding deeper inside of me.

“There,” I moan, my head falling back as his cock hits the perfect spot deep inside of me. It’s not only that. I get off on his loss of control. My whole body contracts as I come. Marco keeps moving me, his grunts filling the room as I ride out my orgasm. He pulls me down hard, making me gasp at how deep he is. He holds me there as his release fills me. “Oh God.” I come again when his warmth blooms inside of me.

I press my face to his neck, enjoying the tingles that linger throughout my whole body. Marco’s hands run up under the back of my shirt, stroking me. His rough fingers feel good against my skin.

I kiss his neck, slowly lifting my head. “See. I was right.” I smirk. He wipes it right off my mouth by kissing me. I don’t want to admit it, but I think Marco is way too good at handling me.

“I’ll take you back to your place,” he says, shocking the hell out of me when he releases my mouth. He cocks his head to the side, his eyes leaving mine.

“What the—” I’m cut off when Marco’s hand covers my mouth.

“Not a word,” he whispers into my ear. His whole demeanor has changed, and I’m getting to see the Marco he’s been trying to keep from me.

There is someone out there. I'd been so lost in Eve that I wasn't paying attention to Snow trying to silently alert me to a threat. My cock is still buried inside of my woman. I've been here five years, and there's never been a problem. Of course this is the moment someone has to try something.

Eve only blinks, not trying to fight me or question me. I keep my hand in place as I slide my cock out of her. She closes her eyes tightly. My good girl is trying to be quiet, but I can tell she's fighting a moan. I grit my teeth to do the same when I feel the mixture of our releases slip free with my cock.

Someone is going to die for interrupting this.

First things first, though, I need to get Eve safe. I know whatever is out there is human from what Snow is signaling. He smells them. My phone in my pocket vibrates as sensors outside begin going off. Fucking amateurs. They have to be to even step foot on or near my property.

I drop my hand from her mouth as I stand to put her on her feet. Her shirt falls, covering her body. I quickly shove my dick back into my fucking pants before I pull out my phone to check what the hell is going on.

Snow turns in a circle, getting more worked up. I grab Eve's wrist and pull her toward the kitchen and into the pantry. Her mouth falls open when I grab one of the shelves and pull it open to reveal a vaulted door.

I press my thumb against it to unlock it. Eve's eyes grow wider when she gets a peek at what's inside. "It's a safe room," I tell her as the monitors come alive. I grab a few weapons off the wall, my eyes lingering on the screen to see if the cameras have picked up on movement yet.

A small gasp leaves Eve when she spots one of the perpetrators and then another. "Stay put," I order her.

"Marco." My name comes out in a panicked plea.

"No one will hurt you. I'll never let that happen." I reach up and stroke her cheek to reassure her.

"You, what about you?" Her eyes fill with tears. I was thinking of only killing one of these assholes and keeping the other to pull information from, but not now that I've seen the fear they've caused her.

"I'll be back," I promise her, pressing a hard kiss to her mouth before I close the door, the lock clicking into place. Only I can get in, but Eve could get out if she needs to. I hadn't thought about that before, having the door be able to lock both ways. I file that away for another day.

I disengage all the locks on the house with one click. No need for anyone to break my shit. Not with Eve living here. She loves the house, and that might upset her. I order Snow to stay on the front door, wanting to stay toward the back of the house. I know Eve is tucked away safe, but I don't love the idea of going far from her.

I press my back against the wall and let myself slide down to wait. My phone lights up with a message that I have company headed my way. That's a damn late notice. Who the fuck is here? A total of three people know the general area where I could be located if they tried to even look for me. I don't see why they would. They can get a hold of me. Two are my connections with my old life with the agency, and the other is Nick DaVinci, who has his hands in fucking everything. You can cut off most ties, but you need a few for oh-fuck situations.

There you are. I smirk when the floorboard upstairs creaks. I glance up, knowing right where they are. I itch to pop a bullet through the ceiling but that would be messy inside the house. A figure in all black moves toward the back door.

Is this serious? The motherfucker might as well be wearing hunter orange. Everything outside is coated in white snow. I allow the asshole to continue to creep in. The least he could do is speed this up. I wait for him to finally make it through the kitchen. He pokes his head around the corner, not realizing I'm on the ground.

"Here, dumbass," I mutter so he looks down. I slam the butt of my gun up against his forehead. He drops like a fly. I quickly push his gun away and zip-tie his hands, hearing that Snow has caught the second.

I jump up, heading toward the living room. Too busy trying to get Snow off him, he doesn't see my giant ass coming. He drops as easily as the first one.

"Lezhat." I call Snow off and zip-tie this guy's hands behind his back. Then I roll him around to pull off the mask. No fucking clue who pretty boy is, but he's still wet behind the ears. He's in his mid-twenties, I'd guess. I fish through his pockets, coming up with a phone. Lucky me, it's ringing.

"You got a death wish?" I ask, taking the call. It's quiet for a long moment.

"Did you kill him?" the woman asks.

"Thinking about it. How did you find me?"

"It's more like you found me," she responds.

"I'm not playing games. I'll track you down and everyone near you. You'll be six feet under before you even know I'm there."

"Threatening my family, Marco? That is your current name now, right?" It doesn't matter what my name is; I'm still a ruthless fucking killer no matter what I go by. I've tried to leave that life behind, but there's is nothing I wouldn't do to protect Eve.

“I’ll see you soon.” I go to end the call, but one word catches my ear that the woman rushes to say. *Eve*. That’s the only word I catch as hot white rage bleeds in. “Or maybe you will see me.” A quick death would be too kind.

“Eve is my daughter.” What the fuck? Why would Eve’s mom send these assholes to break into our home?

“Carol Sherwood.”

“We’re coming up the driveway. Try not to kill us,” she says before ending the call.

Eve’s parents keep an eye on her more than I think she knows.

It's so quiet. I wrap my arms around myself, my eyes going from the closed door to the screen that shows the house. I'm so freaked out and worried that I forget for a second how insane this is. I'm inside some kind of safe room.

Not only that, I think it's also where Marco keeps a small arsenal. I hadn't been wrong in my line of thinking of what he'd once done for a living. We hadn't really touched the subject of what he used to do since that first night. What had he said? Something about getting his hooks into me before I found out who he really was. He's gotten more than his hooks into me.

A week ago I without a doubt would have believed Marco was some super solider or ax murderer. I suppose that could be twofold. But the way he loves me. The soft touches that linger on my skin from him make it hard to believe. Even if I'm looking it right in the face.

I hold in a breath when I see two black SUVs pull up the driveway to the front of the house and stop. Had he called someone? Is this a good or bad thing? I do a doubletake when people start to get out of the vehicles.

"No." I lean in closer. It can't be. There is no freaking way. What the hell are they doing here? And how the hell did my parents even know where I was?

I have to get out of here. I know Marco told me to stay put. but there is no way I can leave him on his own with my parents. I

have to protect him. Not in the same way he was protecting me. I turn the lock and push open the door.

“Oh God.” I gasp when I trip and fall over a man on the floor.

“Angel.” Marco comes out of nowhere, his arm wrapping around my waist, my feet leaving the ground.

“There is a man on the floor, and my parents are here.” The words tumble out of my mouth. Marco keeps walking.

“They might think I kidnapped you or some shit.”

“One could argue you did,” I tease, trying to make light of the situation.

“You’re supposed to stay in the safe room.” A knock comes from the front door. Marco lets out an irritated breath. “Come in.” He puts me on my feet but doesn’t let me go. His arm stays wrapped around me, keeping me close as my parents come through the front door with two other men. It’s then I notice another man lying on the floor. Are they just littered around the house?!

“We’re not armed.” I follow my mother’s eyes and realize Marco still has a gun in his hand. I also only have a shirt on. It goes to my knees, but there is nothing under it. I’m sure I look as though I just rolled out of bed after sex. Lovely.

“You’re in my fucking house.” Oh shit. My mother cuts him with glare that can slice through anyone. “Breathe, angel.” His hand flattens against my stomach, and I let out the breath I didn’t know I was holding. “I promise I’m far scarier than her when provoked, and I’m feeling real fucking provoked.”

“What’s happening?” I ask, trying to cut off whatever is going on. I don’t want my boyfriend and mother killing each other. If they weren’t already.

“Collect your shit,” Marco says.

“What does that mean? What shit?” My mother nods, and the men with her go to grab the other men that are cuffed on the floor. One of them starts to groan, finally waking up. At least he’s not dead. My dad closes the door after they are taken out

of the house. His brows are now furrowed together. They tend to do that when he's in deep thought.

"I take it you think you can keep her," my mother says, pissing me off because I know she's talking about me. As if I'm a thing that could be kept. As though I have no say in the matter.

"She's mine." Marco almost sounds bored. Like he's daring them to try to take me away from him because it's not happening, and he'd easily swat them away like an annoying gnat. My mom almost smirks but manages to stop herself.

"What are you doing here?"

"I came to find out what you were doing *here*," she tosses back at me.

"I live here."

"Glad we settled that, angel." I fight a laugh. Marco slid right in there and latched on to that opportunity.

"I meant here as in Snow Hills." I tilt my head back to stare up at him. "Marco?"

"They're here because I have you. They thought they could take you from me." His jaw ticks.

"She clearly doesn't know who you are or what you're capable of." My father finally speaks. He looms a few feet behind my mom.

"I do." Call me crazy, but I think I know Marco in ways no one else does.

"I don't think you do," Mom chimes in.

"The real question here is why *you* know who he is." I raise an eyebrow in question. I don't really give a shit what they or anyone thinks of Marco and the things he's done. I know *my* Marco. The only reason I'd want to know more about his past would be to get to know him better. Not because it would change anything. I get it. He was in some deep *Men in Black* shit before he settled down here.

"I was alerted when the last check in on you was done that you hadn't been back to your apartment. When you were located

and we realized where and who you were with, I sent someone to get a closer look.”

“You really thought that was going to work?” Marco asks her. “Shit must be bad in NML.”

“They were close.” Mom shrugs. “And as we made our way here, I got more intel. That’s why I let them go up.”

“You’re lucky I didn’t kill them over this little game you’re playing.”

“It’s no game,” Mom snaps back, letting her emotions peek out for once. This is a side of her that I don’t see often. “We would do anything to keep Eve safe.”

“Wait, how do you know I haven’t been home?” Everyone is speaking a different language than me. “What’s NML?”

“No Man’s Land. What they call it,” Marco answers.

“Oh, I thought MIB,” I mutter.

“MIB?” Marco asks. I can tell from his expression he is really trying to place what MIB might be.

“*Men in Black*. It’s a movie with aliens. And of course none of you know it.” I roll my eyes.

“I didn’t name it.” Marco’s hand presses firmer against my stomach. “Your parents keep a better eye on you than you knew.”

“Seriously? They once forgot me at boarding school, but they keep tabs on me now.”

“My guess is they’re either connected up and work for NML or they use their services.” Okay, I’m putting together Marco worked for this NML. I still need to buy a vowel here.

“We didn’t forget you. Things came up.” She actually looks apologetic. “We’ve always checked in.” Her shoulders drop.

“Carol.” My dad puts his hand on Mom’s back, moving into her. Growing up, I always wondered how they worked. I never saw a ton of romance, but I didn’t see a lot of shit, clearly. They were always a team, though. Whatever it is, it works for

them. My mom nods, answering whatever unspoken thing my father is saying to her.

“We didn’t know—”

“That doing your job would get that deep so quickly. Like quicksand.” Marco cuts her off.

“Yes, it’s messy.”

“Messy.” Marco chuckles. “A polite way to say it, I suppose.”

“We didn’t want it touching you. A lot of the things we’ve done over the years were for your protection.” The corners of her mouth turn down as her eyes cut to Marco. “It hadn’t.”

Marco’s whole body goes solid for half a second at my mom’s insinuation. If I wasn’t pressed against him, I don’t think I would have noticed.

“What’s touching me is a man that loves me. One I’m not leaving because of what my parents think of him. You don’t have that privilege in my life.”

“You’re right,” she says.

“Did she say I was right?” I whisper under my breath. This must be a Christmas miracle. Marco kisses the top of my head. The room grows quiet, and I think for once, my mother isn’t sure what to do. “So I’m not kidnapped or whatever.” I wave my hand. “Marco isn’t going to kill anyone.”

“I didn’t agree to that.” I elbow him.

“Jesus, big guy. You’re like hitting a brick wall,” I tease him.

“You love her,” Mom says. It’s not a question.

“I do.” Marco still answers it.

“And I love him.” His hold on me tightens. “You know I have to breathe?”

“Well then. I, ah—”

“You should call,” I fill in for her. “If you want. That’s on you guys, but you can’t just show up.” I give them the truth.

“We don’t have that privilege,” my mom says in understanding.

“No.” I shake my head. Liza could. So could her parents.

“We’ve made mistakes.” My father speaks.

“But we do love you,” Mom adds softly. My resolve crumbles a bit at their soft tone.

“Thank you. For showing up for once.” It may not be the way I imagined them showing they care about me, but it’s a start in the right direction.

“I’ve got her. Pull the people that you have checking in on her or I’ll find and pull them myself.”

“I think that’s already been done if she’s here.” Mom glanced around Marco’s house. “But we hear you.” With that, they go, leaving Marco and me standing there. My head is still spinning.

“I really didn’t think parents meeting the boyfriend was as dramatic as people made it. I was really wrong on that one.”

“Boyfriend?” Marco grunts as though that title isn’t enough, spinning me around to face him. I pull him down to kiss me.

I’m not wrong about this one.

EPILOGUE

MARCO

Years later

Thick snowflakes start to fall. One hell of a storm is rolling into town. They've already called off the school and are shutting down the town for the next two days. My angel is more than pissed about it. I'll have to hide my pleasure. Let it snow, let it snow, let it snow. I enjoy nothing more than being locked away with my wife for a few days.

Normally she wouldn't mind either, but the annual town Christmas party is in a week. It's her first one as acting mayor of Snow Hills. I know she wants it to go off without a hitch, and it will. Even if I have to glitter decorations myself and serve hot chocolate. Between my Eve and Liza, those women can get anything done they set their minds to.

Eve can be an Energizer Bunny at times, and I love fucking her until she's exhausted, making her come over and over until she passes out. I lick my lips thinking about it. Actually, I'm going to steal myself a taste right now. She should have known I would when she walked out of the house in a dress today, one that showed off more of her than I cared for. I think she was taunting me with it, knowing I was hard up for getting my mouth between her legs.

I woke up this morning with her climbing on top of me, the words *I'm ovulating* slipping past her lips as her wet heat dropped down on my cock. In a heartbeat, I had her pinned under me. My plan had been to take her, then eat her and take her again. I only got to do the first before our four-year-old twins were knocking on the door. I love them, but they can really be little cockblockers.

Wonder if it will be twins again. I smirk, recalling when the doctor told her that the first time. She almost fell off the table. Said I put two inside of her on purpose then called me a caveman. Eve knew it was only a matter of time before she got pregnant. I hadn't even hidden the fact I was trying to do it.

I'm no angel like my wife. I wasn't wasting any time binding her to me. The quick marriage wasn't enough. I needed her round with my child as quickly as possible. So I'd continually whisper it into her ear as I took her, telling her to milk my cock. To get every drop inside of her. Her pussy would clamp down around me and do as I told her.

She was right then and now, I can be a caveman at times but a modern day one at least. She runs Snow Hills, and I run our home. Chasing around twins can be more work than offing some asshole in the middle of the jungle.

My little angels give me a run for my money. But I wouldn't have it any other way. Who knew I would love being a girl dad? They have me wrapped around their little fingers. Much the same as their mother.

"Hey, Marco." The Sheriff waves at me as I pass by the hardware store. I give him a chin nod. Hey, it's better than me ignoring people completely. I had to be somewhat social. I am no longer the ax murder that lived in a cabin on the edge of town. I am Eve's husband.

Crane gives me a nod when I pass the library. He's leaning up against one of the pillars.

"They giving you a headache?" I ask him. The two of us get along well. He's obsessed with his wife and has retired as well.

We worked somewhat in the same ballpark. He did his jobs solo and contracted out. He got to cherry pick, I'm sure being hired out by one outfit to take out another. NML knew about some of them but often turned a blind eye. They didn't care if one organization killed the other. I know when my wife and kids are with him and Liza, they are protected. Crane can more than handle himself.

"I'm on door patrol so no one tries to slip out." He glances back to the doors of the library. I dropped the twins off there a few hours ago. They are making decorations for the Christmas party. It's something Liza has the kids do every year.

"You got glitter on your face."

“There is glitter everywhere.” He shakes his head. “Your daughters are the worst with that shit.”

“Oh I know.” Once I tried to ban it from the house. That lasted a whole day. I keep on walking, knowing I don’t have a ton of time until they’ll be wrapping up at the library. My window of time alone with my wife is closing with each second that passes.

Quickly I pull on my gloves and pop the back of my SUV parked out front of Town Hall. I set down my box from the bakery and grab the giant bin of salt to toss across the stairs. Can’t have my wife busting her ass. Her and those damn heels. I love and hate them at the same time. When I’m done, I pull my gloves off, tossing them in the back and snagging the cupcakes I got for my wife.

I figured if she was going to give me something to eat, I could return the favor. My wife’s mouth around my cock while she’s on her knees in her office is hot as fuck, but I’m not chancing that. Eve can be distracting, and then I wouldn’t come where I needed to. Inside her. Fuck, my balls ache as I make my way inside thinking about my mouth on her.

Eve glances up from her computer when I enter her office, shutting the door behind me. “Hold on. I got one email left.” She starts to type faster. “Don’t distract me.” I set the box down going straight for her. “You can do your email.” I lean down and kiss her neck. “I’m not going to stop you.” I grab her thigh to spread her legs for me. “Marco.”

“Yeah, angel.” My hand slips up under her dress. I freeze when my fingers meet the wet folds of her sex. She tries to hide a smirk, but I catch it. I can also see that she’s writing gibberish in this email. When it comes to Eve, I notice everything. “Expecting me, angel?” I nip her neck. “I know you didn’t leave the house without panties.” I spin her chair around to face me and drop to my knees. My hands grip her hips and yank her to the edge of her seat.

“Few minutes ago.” She licks her lips, her hand coming to my head to run her fingers through my short hair. I can feel her wedding ring against me. That shit always turns me on.

“How much time we got?” I circle my tongue around her clit.

“Twenty minutes.”

“How many you think I can get?” I slide my tongue down her folds. My cock jerks in my pants. She still has my scent on her from this morning.

“Don’t tease.” She tries to lift her hips, but I’ve got her pinned in place, and she knows it. Eve gets off on me pinning her down.

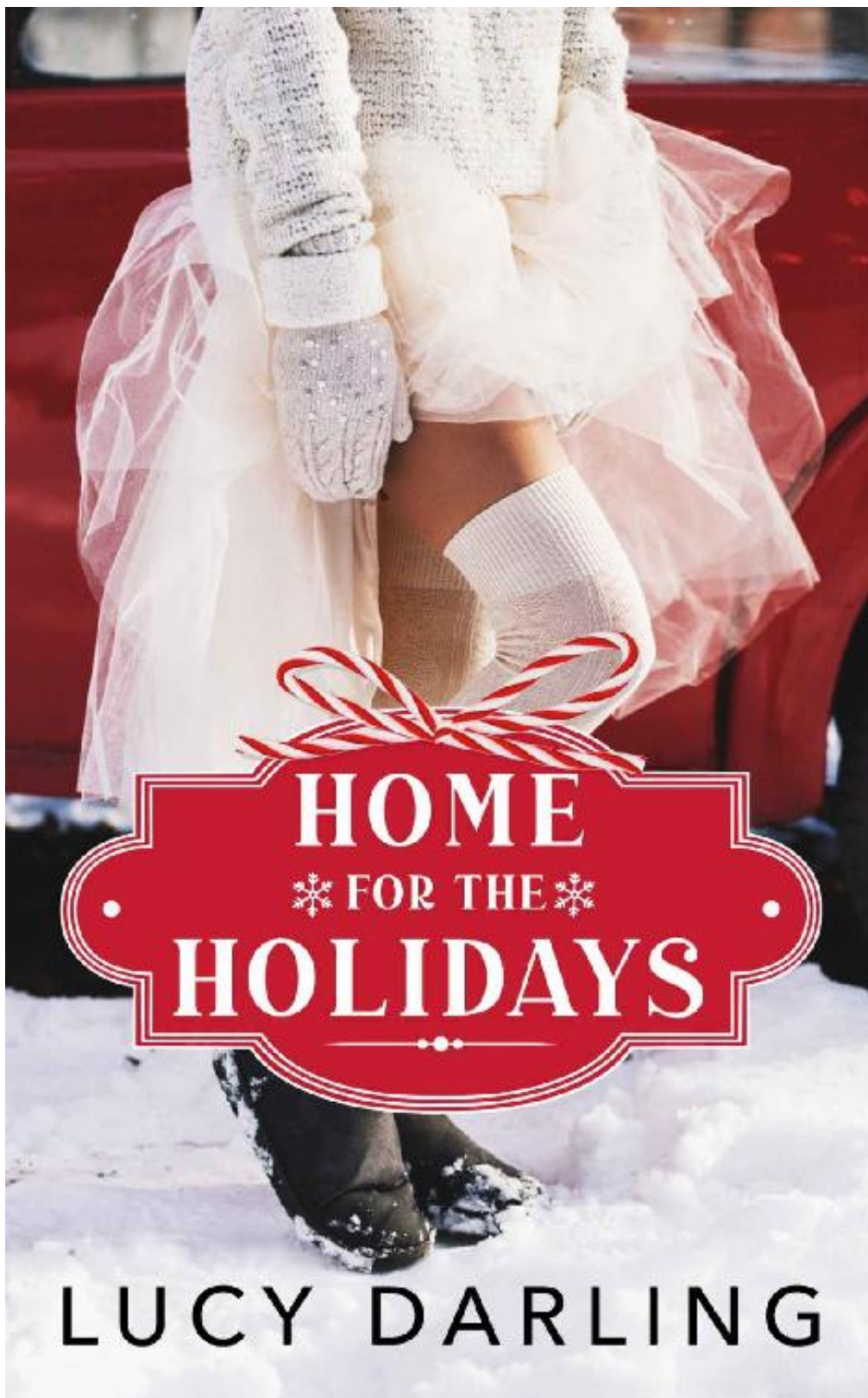
“I’m not going to tease,” I promise her, burying my face between her thighs. There will be no teasing. My angel knows that. When it comes to her, I take everything.



Thank you for continuing to read my stories. Warmest thoughts and best wishes for a wonderful holiday and a Happy New Year.

Want more of Lucy Darling? Keep scrolling to get a peek of [Home for the Holidays](#) available now.

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HOME
❄️ FOR THE ❄️
HOLIDAYS

LUCY DARLING

HOME FOR THE HOLIDAYS

Escaping the big city to go home for the holidays is the only bright light in the year I've had. I'm constantly surrounded by people, but I've never felt more alone or out of place. Going home had been the plan until a historic snowfall downs all air traffic.

Well, not all of it. A handsome billionaire with a private plane can still fly, and when he asks me to accompany him for the holidays and pretend to be his fiancé, we strike a deal.

They say Logan Duncan is hard, brooding, and seemingly cold. But with me he manages to send hot tingles down my spine whenever he touches me and holds me close. He makes this all feel too real. The closer we get the more I see he's never been loved. I make it my mission to show him the magic of Christmas.

My holidays started out grounded, but now they're soaring. The only problem is, what happens when I want this fake fiancé to be the real thing?

CHAPTER 1

ANGEL

I love snow. It's one of the many things I love about the holidays. Everything looks so pristine when it's covered in a fresh blanket of it. I've been so excited to get home to see snow again. But Mother Nature has decided to play a cruel joke on me. Snow is going to be the very thing that's going to keep me stranded in LA.

It hasn't snowed in LA in more than fifty years. I look out the window of my small apartment that I share with three other girls. Small snowflakes fall to the ground. It wasn't even supposed to start until tonight. I didn't think I had anything to worry about because by then I'd be back home and in my parents' house to enjoy three weeks off of work.

I'm looking forward to being back in Rocky Hill. I need this trip. I'm barely hanging on by a thread, and now everything might be ruined. The disappointment makes my stomach hurt. I know that a drive home would take days, not to mention how hazardous the roads might be along the way. I also don't have a car, so there's that.

"Can we use your room for storage while you're gone?" Victoria asks. I peek over my shoulder to look at her. I bite the inside of my cheek to keep from laughing.

These models and actresses out here can't handle the cold. This is the first time I've ever seen Victoria in so much clothing. Unlike me, who's on the shorter and curvier side, the girls I live with are stick thin and have legs for days.

"I-

“Thanks.” She cuts me off before I can answer, turning to head back to her bedroom but not before she cranks the heat up more. It’s already a freaking sauna in here. Barbie comes stumbling out of her room next. She doesn’t say a word as she makes her way to the coffee machine.

“What is this?” she snaps. Crap. I rush over toward the coffee pot and grab my sugar container.

“Sorry.” She only glares at me. I had no idea how hard living with models was going to be. They get pissed if I leave any sweets or unhealthy things in the fridge. “If you cut the sweets —” Her pretty blue eyes flick over me, finishing her sentence for her.

I really wish my roommates were as pretty on the inside as they are on the outside. I often think sometimes they are only mean to me because they must always be hangry. Now that is something I can relate to.

“Morning.” I give her a soft smile that does nothing. My mom is going to have to explain this whole *kill people with kindness* thing because all these girls are still alive and kicking.

“Aren’t you supposed to be gone already?”

I ignore her, going back to my bedroom and putting the sugar on top of the mini fridge I have in there. It’s where I keep most of my food.

The only things in the kitchen refrigerator are bottles of water, a box of baking soda, and yogurt. The freezer isn’t much better, with only grapes in it. I feel insulted whenever they call those frozen grapes dessert.

That was another thing I was looking forward to. All the home cooking my mom and I planned to do over the next three weeks. I know it’s going to be amazing. My throat grows tight thinking about not making it home. I missed Thanksgiving at home this year. I didn’t have enough time to take off for both, so I saved up all my time so I could stay for one long trip.

Of course when Mom heard what I was planning, she, Dad, and my brother showed up here for a surprise visit. They

rented an Airbnb for the long weekend. It was wonderful, but there is nothing like being home for the holidays.

My phone dings, letting me know the driver is here. I roll out my two giant suitcases from my bedroom toward the front door.

“Bye,” I say to Barbie, who rolls her eyes at me.

“Let me get those,” the driver says, taking the bags from me.

“Thanks.” I look up at the snow, which seems to be falling harder than it was ten minutes ago before I get into the car.

“They’ve already cancelled some flights,” the driver informs me. I quickly check my phone but see that mine is still on schedule.

“I’m good.” He gives a nod and pulls out, heading toward the airport. My phone dings with a text from my brother telling me to text him with my flight information before takeoff. The drive to the airport is slow due to the worsening weather.

When I make it in and past security without my flight being cancelled, I let out a giant sigh of relief. I’m going to make it home. No sooner than I have the thought my phone dings with an alert.

My stomach drops as I look down at my phone. I don’t have to read the message to know my flight isn’t only delayed but cancelled. The people around me all let out curses and groans.

My eyes start to burn with tears. I’m a terrible crier. My face turns red and starts to swell. Not to mention I can’t do it quietly. And I know I’m about to burst into tears. I’ve been so freaking homesick.

I grab the handle of my carry-on bag, needing to get away from everyone to breathe. I walk quickly, not sure why I think I can find somewhere to be alone. I take a sharp turn, thinking I’m going into a dark nook, but the door is open, going down a long hallway. I head down it, the sounds of the people behind me fading away as I break into some waiting room.

I drop down into one of the chairs, burying my face in my hands before I burst into tears.

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR



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Return to Me

Never Let Go

Never Been Kissed

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Stalking His Bride

Forever Her Cowboy

Always His Cowgirl

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Only Tonight

His Forever Girl

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Home for the Holidays

Coming Home For Her

209 Wedding Lane

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Just One Look

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