

A close-up photograph of a woman with long, dark hair, looking down and to the left. She is wearing a dark, possibly black, top. The scene is dramatically lit with a strong red light, which highlights her hair and the contours of her face and shoulder. The background is dark and indistinct.

A DARK RH ROMANCE

HOLLY

CARA NORTH

Holly: A Dark RH Romance

Crossbow University Book 2

Cara North



N2: Nagle-North Publishing

Copyright © 2023, 2022 by Cara North

Cover Art: Sweet15 Designs

Editor: Michelle Edits

All rights reserved.

No portion of this book may be reproduced in any form without written permission from the publisher or author, except as permitted by U.S. copyright law.

N2: Nagle-North Publishing

www.creativewritingwithdrnagle.com

Contents

[Patreon Acknowledgement](#)

[Foreword](#)

[Holly.](#)

[Storm](#)

[Holly.](#)

[Storm](#)

[Holly.](#)

[Winston](#)

[Storm](#)

[Holly.](#)

[Winston](#)

[Holly.](#)

[Storm](#)

[Holly.](#)

[Winston](#)

[Storm](#)

Holly.

Storm

Holly.

Storm

Winston

Holly.

Winston

Autumn

Holly.

Storm

Holly.

Storm

Autumn

Winston

Storm

Holly.

Storm

Winston

Autumn

Storm

Holly.

Storm

Holly.

Autumn

Holly.

Storm

Winston

Holly.

Storm

Holly.

Storm

Autumn

Winston

Autumn

Winston

Storm

Holly.

Cara North

Patreon Acknowledgement

I would like to thank my Patreon Team! You are the best and I am grateful to each and every one of you.

Thank you to Jamie for letting me bounce these crazy books off of you. To Renee and Meghan for giving me feedback to make it better on those those first reads.

And, thank you the Beta Readers who took a chance on this one!

A huge thank you to anyone who purchased this one! I hope you'll be back for more Crossbow antics.

Foreword

Dear Readers,

Holly contains content that may be triggering to some readers. Honestly, I wrote this book and there were times when I was offended by my characters. It's fiction. It's gritty. It's filthy. It is filled with characters that have questionable morales. Even the "good guys" aren't that great in the peopling department.

Content to be aware of and possibly skim or skip if you are triggered by it may include, but is not limited to the following:

Sexual situations that may contain: violence, dubious consent, manipulation, blood play, bullying, BDSM, multiple partners, same sex relations, and prior abuse.

Emotional situations that may contain: abuse, neglect, manipulation, and more.

These are messed up characters finding some happy in their fucked up lives by uniting with other broken characters to form a whole. I do not recommend it for reality, but for fiction,

it has been a wild write and hopefully, for you, a wild read you won't easily forget.

I am not responsible for your decision to read this smut, but I'm glad you purchased the book and hope you enjoy it.

Hope that helps.

Cara

A decorative graphic of a horizontal arrow pointing to the right. The arrow has a simple shaft with a small tail and a pointed head. The shaft is a solid black line. The arrow is centered horizontally and vertically on the page.

Chapter
1

Holly

I knew this Saturday was orientation-slash-initiation day for the men on this campus who, apparently, wanted to clean our sorority and possibly have sex with us. Totally the reason I put my room on the list. Day one, I was on the *pass this room right on up* roster.

It's why when my door opened and the giant of a man walked into it, I blinked up at him. He seemed surprised and really happy to see me. I was overwhelmingly surprised to see that much chest. My God. He took up most of the doorway's width and height. I had my headphones on, so I couldn't hear what he said as he looked around my very clean and private room. When he looked back at me, he started walking toward me. I had shifted to sit at the edge of the bed. I was going to stand up, but forgot my phone was next to me so as the cord to my noise cancelling headphones pulled, my head went back, and so did I.

As I reached for those, he...*oh no*. That was a shoulder against my knee.

I gulped. I...couldn't breathe. I couldn't speak. I...had never even kissed a guy and this one was pulling my shorts down.

Say something. Anything. Speak, Holly! Move! Do something!

Nothing. Why? How? What the hell was happening to me and—oh my God, what the hell was he doing?

I just held onto the headphones and felt my entire body quiver with fear and uncertainty as he shifted my legs and... damn her. My mother was sending the wrong message this morning. We went last weekend for a spa day and she told me to get the bikini wax, but told that torture artist to wax it all, and they did. It was the first time someone other than a doctor had ever touched me there and it was so bad I thought I would never let someone do that again.

His large finger stroked over the bare lips. I squeezed the headphones in my hands. My blood was pounding so hard in my ears, I could not hear the narrator of the audiobook anymore. I blinked at the ceiling above me. Inside my head, I was screaming. I was moving my head to say no. In reality, I couldn't even open my mouth, let go of my headphones, not a damn thing on my body worked for me.

His fingers parted that flesh gently, something cool and like a...barrier of...oh.

He was...licking me...there and...I didn't want to like this, but the only thing working at this moment was that juncture. I closed my eyes tightly and fought against the sensations

starting to overwhelm me. I couldn't so much as think about sex without getting a bitter taste in my mouth or worse, nauseated. This situation was beyond those thoughts. When it came to those thoughts, I had already resolved I had no use for that part of me. I was not like the rest of the girls in this sorority house. My mom, my grandma, my great grandma, they were OBDs and represented all the Only Brave Diva's motto stood for. I was not brave or a diva, much to my mother's dismay. Sometimes I thought I could be, but anytime I had a thought or urge to, I got a terrible taste in my mouth, so I wouldn't do whatever it was I might have wanted to do.

That thought helped distract me as this man between my legs pushed a finger under that barrier and inside of me. I felt my vaginal walls clamp around it in a pulse. My legs were shaking uncontrollably at this point and as he pushed deeper, focused attention on my clit through that barrier, he...I don't know what he did to me. My toes started to tingle, go numb as a cool sensation shot up the arches of my feet then my legs and everything began to tense, tighten. My grip on the headphones was crushing. Again, I wanted to say no, shout it, scream it. Something. But my lower body was sending out slut signals as that single finger worked into me faster until I felt a cramp and then...oh fuck, then it was...wow.

It was...amazing and...I just had an orgasm. I totally understood what all the fuss was about now.

He removed that finger, the barrier. It could have been a minute before I opened my eyes. When I did, he was pulling

the liner from the trashcan by my desk that had three things in it. I blinked, looked at him.

He seemed really confused and all I could understand from what he said was *do better*.

Then he took my trash and left.

In the aftermath of that, I just...closed my legs, curled up on the bed, and...cried as the sounds of the British narrator told me about a mystery set in London.

A decorative graphic of a stylized arrow pointing to the right, with a feathered tail on the left. The arrow is white with a black outline and is centered horizontally. It is flanked by two vertical black lines, one on each side.

Chapter
2

Storm

I went over to the clipboard and looked at it one more time. Room 405. I looked back at the door. 405. Okay. So, that's how this was going to be played. I went to the staging room and sat the trash bag down and grabbed my t-shirt.

“Hey, you done already?” Some guy I didn't know, asked.

“I'm part-time and assigned to one room. Yup.” I held up the clear trash bag with the wrapper and latex, one empty soda can, one candy bar wrapper, and two balls of paper in it.

He shook his head and said, “Damn.”

“I'm out. See you later.” I was still hard, still wanting, but she only laid back and spread her legs. Didn't give any more direction, so I was struggling right now.

We had a whole handbook of shit we had to study. As one of the wide receivers, sometimes running back on this football team, I totally understood how to study. Had been studying playbooks, film, and textbooks for school since I could read. I transferred here because my other grandpa died, and this was closer to home. I had avoided schools within a day drive for

one reason and one reason only. I needed to get away from here. Still, my dad traveled a lot, and my mom wanted me closer to home. They still paid the tuition, so...I did what they wanted me to per the usual. I had two years of life away from the one person I needed to stay away from.

The one person that I could no longer avoid but was using this little loophole as an opportunity to do just that. Set some boundaries. I was in the kitchen, putting that nothing trash in one of the large trash bags when Essie walked in. She leaned against the doorframe and asked, "Why are you wearing a shirt?"

"I'm done." I shrugged.

"Already?" She giggled. Then she gave me that look that messed me up sometimes. When we were younger, when our parents got together for holidays and other events, we were often left to our own devices. Essie was a curious girl and back then, I was a scrawny little thing with a mouth full of braces. I was an only child, and she was the youngest of four much older brothers. Her attention was everything and she gave me plenty of it.

Secrets. We had secrets. Secrets no one could know about because we were also cousins. She developed a lot faster than I did. I trusted her. I loved her. I would do anything she asked or told me to. No questions asked. Essie was my world back then.

It wasn't until I was a bit older that I realized I should not be kissing my cousin. I should not be letting her tell me what

to do or how to do it. Once I did, and tried to talk to her about it, she made it impossible to escape her. She threatened to tell if I didn't do the things she wanted me to do. By then, we had already done so much, what was one more thing?

I clenched my jaw. I really hated her sometimes. She was mad at me right now because that contract with room 405 prevented her from asking things of me. I wondered if she sent me there because whoever was in it would make me want to quit. Quite the opposite. I liked a challenge and I...liked to please, especially in that arena. I tested my theory and said, "I'm not sure you got the right room."

"405." She smiled.

I nodded.

"Then yes, it's the right room." She rolled her eyes as if exasperated, then she looked around and said, "Unless you want to come to room 101."

"No." I shook my head. Yup. Thought so. She had one of her friends teaching me a lesson they probably didn't know why I needed to learn. But hey, *torture the big guy* was a fun game that Essie had played all my life just not through other people. At least not this way. I reminded her, "That is in the contract."

She put her finger like she was gagging herself and said, "Whatever." Then she looked at another guy without his shirt on and asked, "You hungry?"

His brow shot up. He nodded.

She walked over and pulled at the elastic of his shorts. We were required to wear those this month. Because the OBDs were called Divas but required *only big dicks*, we had to meet a certain standard in that arena as well. I was putting myself through a lot of shame and humiliation to avoid my very private shame and humiliation associated with this woman scrutinizing this guy's dick. She made a little hum sound as he looked up at the ceiling. Essie said, "There you are. You'll do."

I gave him a thumbs up. At least he was going to get some attention in return.

I left that stupid sorority house where I had been humiliated enough to last me a week or two for damn sure. I...didn't know what I was looking for here. Essie had signed me up for it, but I realized that was because she wanted to be able to pull me aside and do things and take away what voice I had left. I knew Ripley from a few joint family gatherings and holiday events at the country club. I trusted him enough to confide that I only wanted to find one person, keep my focus on the game. That was all I needed to say for him to agree. He hated losing and they went through some shit last year as a team, so this year was our year if people could stay focused.

Essie told me I would thank her some day for introducing me to the working man's world. Like her, I was not exactly in the poverty line. None of the OBDs were and neither were the Extra Large Extras. I did thank her when I showed her the contract. She was pissed at me because it stated for me to be sexually intimate with anyone other than the person assigned,

which could not be Essie for obvious reasons, I would have to put it in writing and that person I was assigned to would need to agree.

Room 405 had a smokin'-hot redhead with big, green eyes and full, pouty lips. She looked like classic Hollywood from the Monroe era. I damn near fell in love just looking at her. Love. All I wanted was someone to love me. I knew what I looked like and that was how people approached me, treated me. I needed to convince 405 to give me a chance to be more than a jock with a giant ego to match the giant body that came with a naturally large dick. I was sure someone else my size would probably also be my size, but locker rooms proved otherwise as even straight guys would comment. I tried to be the last to shower, undress for that reason.

I returned to my frat house and to the number two room on the first floor that used to belong to the other wide receiver, and my unofficial lawyer since he was not even in law school yet. Ripley Manchester the Third, who still attended this college, was part of this frat, but lived in an actual house with my manager, Harper, my quarterback, Titus, and then there was Apollo. My dad travelled a lot and most of it was on behalf of Apollo's family. His older brother was just like his father so that meant they made quick decisions. My dad handled businesses that were in other countries. I planned to go pro and skip that shit all together.

How Apollo wound up in that house with them was a mystery to me. In fact, the whole "three men", Ripley's son, and one woman...yeah, that was some weird shit. Alas, none

of them were related, so I kept my judgment to myself even if I was curious.

This girl, room 405. She, obviously, didn't give a flying fuck who I was or what I could do for her. She barely acknowledged me, then put me to work. After that orgasm, which took a little more work than I had done since learning how to do it in the first place, she looked at me like it was subpar at best. Like I wasn't even worth a thank you.

A part of me wanted to fuck her into submission and remind her that's the way the world worked. She was not better than me because I agreed to do this. Another part of me was a bit curious about her long game. Like, how long was she going to make me wait? How hard was I going to have to work for her to reciprocate? That part. The one that hadn't been challenged in years, and certainly not in a bedroom, was...the reason I needed to take a shower and handle myself.

I gripped my shaft and fucked into my fist and nodded. "I'll do better. I have to do better."

The thought of getting my dick into that tight, wet... "Fuck, yeah. I'll earn my way into that."

Only, the next two weeks, her room number was on the clipboard which meant *stop* now instead of *go*. Day one was a list full of consent to enter and see what awaited. The rest of the time it meant stay away. Three in a row meant go away forever.

I looked at it and sighed. I looked at the door and wondered what this was about. Was it that bad? It didn't seem bad. She

came. I did...what I was taught to do.

For all my giant stature, I had been with one woman and one way because I was...afraid of someone finding out somehow. No one would want me then.

One more no and that meant I had to find another job aka person or be trapped by Essie again. I didn't want another job. I wanted that one. I hung it back on the nail and left, not saying a damn thing to anyone. I had never felt so rejected in my entire life. I didn't understand. Maybe I didn't do anything right in there. Maybe she was messing with me. Next week. If that room was on the do not enter list, I was going to demand a meeting.

Back in the XIX frat and in my own room, I sulked.

The knock at the open door pulled my attention and I looked at the gorgeous woman in my doorway. "Hi."

"Here to get the laundry, Big Guy." Autumn wore a rainbow bracelet which meant she was only here to work. I didn't have a vagina so she was not super interested in me. She looked at me, my wrist, my bracelet and asked, "What happened?"

"No entry." I looked at the ceiling. "I don't know what I did wrong. I used the dam. I made her cum."

"Did you ask if she wanted that? I mean, it's the whole point of the contract. They knew every guy on that list and you're exclusive, right? She had to pick you. Did you ask if that would offend her or just use it?" she asked as she pulled my clothes out of the basket. She was a first-floor bunny since I

had a commitment to a Diva and Winston was her gaming buddy, so he didn't want to fuck her anyway. Probably. I didn't know him well enough to confirm that. Autumn said, "Because if I committed to fucking one person for the rest of this school year, I better be able to trust where that bitch has been. We are *not* going to be licking fruit flavors unless I am licking that into or out of her pussy."

I shook with the laughter. She was so fucking beautiful but that mouth on her was straight dude brain. She slapped my foot and said, "Hey!"

"I wish you were bisexual at the very least." She just laughed at me. "Okay, Dude Brain. I will take the dive. I've just...only once before so—"

"I'm here to coach you through it, Bro. I'd be in this frat if I didn't keep my dick in a drawer." She winked and walked out to the sound of my laughter. I kind of wanted to be her. Just free. Somehow, some way just free to be me.

A decorative graphic of a stylized arrow pointing to the right. The arrow's shaft is a horizontal line with a small arrowhead on the right and a tail on the left. The shaft passes through the center of a diamond-shaped frame. The top and bottom edges of the diamond are curved and pointed, resembling the fletching of an arrow. The word "Chapter" is written in a serif font above the shaft, and the number "3" is written in a bold serif font below the shaft.

Chapter
3

Holly

I kept having dreams about him. They were somewhere between horrific and...making me insanely horny which had made me insanely sick to begin with. It was getting better. Just bitter these days, but I hated how much my body hated the thought of me...enjoying anything.

How could I want him to do that to me again? Why? I didn't want him to do that in the first place. I didn't sleep at all last night which is why I was sleeping in this morning. This... Saturday...oh shit.

I heard the tap on the door and then it opened. I was supposed to write my room number on the do not enter list. Instead, I forgot.

Did I forget? Yes. No. I don't even know anymore. It's like there were two of me in this body and one us was trying to break free and...get more orgasms and the other was what I knew, what I knew to be right, that didn't leave a bad taste in my mouth. I made good decisions based on that guide. I didn't eat junk foods. I never let my gas tank get below half before

refilling. I...was a nut job. I was starting to think maybe I needed to be tested again.

I didn't have on headphones, but I only had on a t-shirt and underwear under these blankets. He closed the door as he stepped into the room. So much body. So. Much. Body. The part of me that thought yes, you want this was so damn attracted to him. Another part of me only saw someone to fear. It was confusing me.

He looked around and then puffed out a breath and said, "I didn't mean to offend you. I know now you didn't want that."

The giant moved into my room and took a seat next to me on the bed. He looked at me very sincerely with those dark-grey eyes and said, "I'm going to do better this time."

Better? The word hung in my brain, but nowhere near the frozen vocal cords I wanted desperately to work. I talked all the damn time. Why couldn't I speak to him? Why did the sight of this man particularly in my bedroom both excite me and scare me speechless?

He blinked, shook his head, and then said, "Yeah, all right then. Straight to work."

I was still on my back, under my blankets, unable to speak or move, just like the last time he came in and assaulted me. He moved the blankets, appraised me from that position and asked, "Are those...fuck?"

I tried to remember what was on my underwear. Again, something my mother supplied. They were always really soft,

comfortable, but really pretty and...sexy. No. No. No. Why was everything from my navel down communicating the wrong message again? He, obviously, had the wrong room. Was meant for someone, but not me. I just couldn't get my brain to send enough signals to make things work like they should in this situation.

He moved his body, shifted mine, looked down at me as I looked up at him in what I thought must express sheer horror but by the expansion of his chest as he sucked in that breath, told him a different story. He hooked his large fingers into the sides of the panties, and while I did not smile on the outside, I did on the inside. That part of my body should tell him the truth.

He stroked the back of his finger down the front of those lips and said, "I'm going to make it worth it this time. I'll get better."

Better? How the hell did he plan to improve on that last performance? Worth it. Oh crap, he thought I didn't keep the wax up because he didn't do it right?

What kind of...shit. I knew that he didn't know I didn't want this. I couldn't seem to save either of us with words because I was mute again. I needed an appointment. I needed to go back to therapy. Something. I needed help.

I gripped the hem of my shirt, held it down, in place. He twisted his lips to the side and said, "Gotta earn every inch. Understood."

Then he looked at my vagina and shifted my legs wider with those massive shoulders as he repositioned himself. He spoke to it, not me as he said, “I haven’t done this without a barrier since I learned how to do it.”

He didn’t have to do it. I didn’t want him to do it.

Did I?

I wasn’t sure. I didn’t even know his name.

Couldn’t say it anyway, but I was sure if I could and knew it, I might be screaming it out right now. Better? He made it better. He just revolutionized my whole self-worth. I had no idea my body could do this. Feel like this. I closed my eyes, fought the bitter taste in my mouth from the naughty thoughts, as he pushed that finger into me, worked. His tongue, flesh to flesh, wet, soft, thick. Was he...sucking...dear God in heaven? I know I don’t talk to you often, but if this guy gets any better, I might actually die during my orgasm, so maybe I should ask for forgiveness now. Today. Right. Lord. Now.

And that wave rolled up, through me, over me, and I arched my back, my mouth opened, and the slightest sound escaped it.

He lifted from his position and looked at me. Waiting, it seemed. I gulped and managed to turn my head, so I looked at the wall and not his face, his body. My legs, tired, twitching, began to collapse inward, together as he shifted back and stood at the foot of my bed.

“Damn.” Then the next thing I heard was the liner from the trash at my desk. This was so confusing to me. He paused at

the door. I knew that because I heard it click. He said, “Don’t write your number on that paper. I’ll do better.”

Then he left and I had the same reaction as last time. I cried. What the hell was happening to me? What was I doing?

Who the fuck could I tell?

What would I even say? This mystery guy shows up to lick my vagina and empty my trash?

I pushed my hand down to that mystery box and cupped it. The bitter taste was getting less and less each time, too.

He was so good at that. I could still feel the pulses, the tingles. I breathed out and decided I needed to figure something out. First and foremost, why my room? Why me?

When I walked down the stairs, I heard someone complaining to Essie, the cunt queen extraordinaire, about her guy never showing up. I was sure her name was Katarina but she went by Kinky Kiki. Kiki said, “He is not showing up! I don’t care if you’ve seen him here, he is not coming to our room, and we are not breaking his contract with one girl. You said you wanted to have some fun and torment your cousin. I think he quit before he even started. Why come here when he has a house full of bunnies that would definitely fuck him?”

Essie said, “I saw him day one. I’ll ask.”

“We’ve been waiting and there are other guys here willing to do stuff.” Kiki was all upset about it.

I snickered but four steps out that door something registered in my brain. She was on the fifth floor. Oh my God. No.

Essie's cousin? Shit.

He was her cousin, and he was coming to the wrong room. But...why...I needed to call someone. I needed to fix this for both of us.

I drove past the bakery that always smelled so good, but then got that taste in my mouth and almost wanted to vomit. "Yuck."

My body and mind made no damn sense to me. Hadn't since I was a kid and loved it. Then...when did it start getting gross and... puberty. That's when I... no.

Sometimes, it was like nothing made sense anymore. Like I lost entire chapters in the book of my life. That thought scared me to the core. Maybe I had dementia already. My great gran had it. Could I get that at nineteen?

A decorative graphic of a stylized arrow pointing to the right. The arrow is white with a black outline and is bisected by a horizontal line. The top half of the arrow is curved upwards, and the bottom half is curved downwards. The word "Chapter" is written in a serif font across the upper part of the arrow, and the number "4" is written in a bold serif font across the lower part of the arrow. The entire graphic is centered between two vertical black lines.

Chapter
4

Storm

This woman was making me straight-up fucking crazy. I went to the staging room and straight to that bathroom, turned on the water. In the shower at OBD, I did what I needed to do right away this time. I would need to unload the chamber next time. Maybe if it wasn't like a loaded gun, I could pay more attention to her, figure out what clue I was missing. She just... dismissed me again. Got hers and time for me to go. There was a soda can and candy wrapper in the trash again.

One much needed release and my personal clothes on, I looked at the contents and decided maybe I was supposed to bring her a refill. Maybe she was a real mystery. Still didn't know her name, but damn, I knew she tasted like...nothing I had tasted before. I put my *catch me, fuck me* shorts in my backpack. I had to wear them for this job one more week before we could ask permission to wear real clothes to work. I headed down the stairs with the trash bag in hand and found Essie and another girl in a heated conversation. I tried to side-step that, but Essie grabbed my arm and said, "Where have you been?"

I felt the brow arch, looked down at that grip and she loosened it. Yeah, when we were little, she could boss me like that. She was not my boss in this house. Room 405 was. I requested that, too in my contract. One girl and she had to be faithful to me if I was going to be faithful to her. We both had the right to move beyond that, but with written notice. I said, “Work.”

“With who?” Busty, bleached-blond girl put her hands on her hips and said, “Not in 504 for damn sure.”

My brow went way up. Essie blinked, looked at her and she said, “We’ve waited for him for almost a month. Iesha is on cycle now and you know I will fall like dominoes.”

So gross. Still, I looked at entitled girl and said, “No. And no plans to be there next week either.” I held up the bag and said, “See, I’m working.” I took it over to the larger trash and then wiped my hands together and glared at them as I said, “All done.”

“Tor, wait.” Essie was following me out the door as busty blonde went to that trashcan.

I turned. “What?”

She settled next to me, looked up and said, “Um...so... apparently, I made a mistake when I wrote the room number down.” She gave me that oops smile. “So...”

“I’m settled. She fires me, I’m done. I can get pussy, Essie.” I looked her up and down and said, “We both know that, right?”

She blushed, gulped, sighed a bit. Yeah, she wanted me. A part of me still responded to her. She was my first everything and she made damn sure of it. “Right.”

“I have other shit to do this weekend. Find someone else to tend to them. Winston. He’s here during the week, right? Put him with those bitches. They’ll eat him alive.” I smiled at her. Sure, day one, I would have been all about those two tag-teaming me if it meant I could pick one and settle the fuck down. Now. No. Now, I had something to prove to someone else. I was about to ask her name but realized that would give too much of my own feelings away to Essie. I had given her enough of me. I decided to go talk to someone else about it. My real boss.

“Are you coming to dinner after the game or...” Essie looked down because I was sure she could see it in my face. No. Hell no. After what we did. No fucking way. I went to college three states away to avoid ever spending more time than absolutely necessary with this woman. She said, “Mom told me to ask.”

“I hope to be in 405 after the game, but if not, I’ll be there Saturday morning for sure.” I gave her a slight salute and headed off to my jeep. Psycho. No wonder Ripley left her crazy ass. I could not leave Essie. We were family after all. I tried to get away from Essie, but when my other grandpa died, my mom begged me to come closer, come to Crossbow. With Ripley’s turmoil with football last year, stopping, then starting again, they eagerly accepted me as a transfer. It wasn’t so bad

on the team. With Titus as QB, we might get some real scouts this year. I still had a chance to go pro.

I drove away from Crossbow's fraternity row with one sorority house, the old XIX frat house that was now the OBD sorority house. When I arrived at Sophomore House, which was actually filled with juniors, I looked up at my home for the next two years. Guess they didn't think that shit through when they had the names engraved on the buildings. Whole frat filled with smart people doing stupid shit. Story of my whole life.

I dropped my bag in my room and headed to the Bunny House, which was actually now the equivalent of an office that Harper Harrington, the head of this operation worked and the upstairs rooms were rented to grad students and temporary guests. All XIX legacy, of course.

I knocked on the door leading into the kitchen and Ripley answered it. "Hey, man. What's up?"

I cleared my throat and said, "I need to speak to Harper... Ms. Harrington...what?"

He glared at me and looked me up and down and asked, "Why?"

"Because I have a situation and she's the boss." I was bigger than him. About two inches taller and at least thirty pounds heavier, probably more. Ripley was strong, fast, and excellent at his job on that field, but so was I.

“Daddy.” My eyes went wide, but he smiled as the woman of the hour touched his arm and said, “Let him in.”

He glared at me but stepped aside. I had no idea what his problem was today. I looked at her and she smiled up at me and giggled. “He’s being—” He popped her on the ass, and she yelped, swatted at him and said, “Bad. Ripley, seriously. This is business.” To me she said, “Come on, Stormy, is it?”

The name made me bristle. “Storm.”

“I like Stormy better.” She kept walking.

Ripley was next to me and said, “Me, too.”

I mouthed the words *fuck you* at him. He snickered. I shook my head and once seated, looked at him like he was invading my privacy because he was. She waited, looked at me, at him, and then asked him, “Daddy, grab me something to drink, will you?” She touched her throat and said, “It feels a bit dry.”

“Didn’t feel dry a minute ago.” He was back to glaring at me.

She laughed and said, “Now, please, or it’s going to feel like the Sahara before you touch it like that again.”

“You.” He pointed at me. “You are interrupting my time.”

He left in a huff, and she said, “Ignore him.”

Easy for her to say. I had to practice with that asshole later today. I cut to the chase because I knew he would not take long to get a drink. “Essie assigned me the wrong room. I... don’t even know who she is. Did she agree to any of this?”

Harper's glare was about as menacing as Ripley's. She tapped her pen on the desk and said, "Did she now. Okay. Good to know. What room, sweetie?"

I gulped and said, "405."

"405, 405." She was typing in something and then made a face as she said, "That is...Holly Ringwald." She looked at me and said, "What, um...what has happened so far?"

I snorted a sound of disgust and admitted, "I give her orgasms and she acts like she's bored as plywood."

Harper smiled and said, "Nice." Then she shook her head and said, "Not the situation, the metaphor." She did some more typing and said, "I'm going to need to call her in for this. It's really quite confusing so I can understand why you're here. I'm glad you trusted me with this."

"With what?" Ripley asked.

She shook her head, then looked at me and said, "Stop by tomorrow. Same time. I will be here and have answers for you."

"Thank you." I got up and Ripley gave me more eye daggers. "What? Shit, man. You look at me like I'm after your woman. I'm after your job."

He snickered as she giggled. He said, "That woman *is* my job. I think you can handle the ball, but...probably not my woman."

I looked at her and she winked at me. She said, "I don't know, he's really cute." Then she looked directly at my crotch

and said, “And impressive.”

I totally ignored the last part and focused on the first. Just what a man wants to hear. *Cute.*

I said to Ripley giving me bullet eyes, “I’ll see you at practice.”

I looked over at her and she winked and mouthed *thank you*. I had a feeling this was well beyond my reach of communication between them. Still, this was Ripley and I liked to torment him since he always tormented me with barbs about women. Of course, he didn’t know that he had the only woman I was allowed to know. Promises I had made when I was too young to understand what they meant. Promises I intended to break for all our sakes. Mine, hers, and our family’s. I said, “Maybe you can buy me dinner after since I’m pretty sure I did a lot of work in the eye candy department for you.”

“Eye candy?” He nodded. “Cool. I’ll be sure you have something to look at tonight. Then you can buy me dinner for teaching you a lesson you can’t learn in a playbook.”

“*Daddy.*” She gave him a look.

“You’re getting your ass beat the moment he steps out that door.” He pointed at her but looked at me. “Go.”

I was torn between leaving and... what if she didn’t want that? I heard her giggle and she said, “And he’s a sweetheart. Go, Stormy. He’s getting wound up now.”

Ah, yeah. Okay. I shook my head, chuckled, and left. I was sure that kind of sex was never in my future. Essie liked things a certain way. I did everything the way she liked. Until she started dating Ripley. While I had threatened to bring someone home that year, I had no one to bring without fear of Essie acting out. She brought Ripley, a guy we knew most of our lives, as her boyfriend. I was really surprised they had broken up, but also disappointed because with him and the distance, she had left me alone just long enough I knew I could live without her. This whole thing forced me to do that, and I needed Holly, room 405, more than Holly needed me for damn sure.

I shook my head. Way more than Holly needed me. The text I just got indicated it was not going to be easy to get my cousin to stop trying to fuck me. I needed to get better and fast because right now, I couldn't get Holly, 405, Ringwald, *why the hell did that name sound familiar*, to give me a pat on the head much less an ass to spank. Though, now I also wanted to do more, and I wanted to do more with Holly, not Essie.

Outside, everything seemed fine. I smiled, played video games, had great grades, drew enough attention, but inside... Fuck my life, man. I was so ready for practice today. I really needed to burn some energy and anger.

I did both which is why I was feeling exhausted and really fucking pissed because I somehow got assigned a nonsense shit job since our manager was out sick today. I made sure everything was where it was supposed to be, and finally headed to the showers to take one.

I had my towel and one bar of soap that would do fine as shampoo tonight, too, as I made my way closer to a sound that I had to be hearing wrong somehow.

“That’s it, baby.” A low and lustful female response was the reply to what Titus just said.

I inched a bit closer. What the fuck were they doing in here? I turned the corner as she said, “Yes, Daddy.”

I dropped the soap. I was naked as the day I was born, but so were they. All three of them. “Holy shit. Sorry.”

Ripley said, “Stay.”

“Stay?” I practically shouted it, but it came out a croak of a word.

Titus nodded, looked at my boss, Harper Harrington and said, “Watch her.”

I moved my hand to cover my dick. It might be blind, but it was damn sure trying to look at her with that eye anyway.

I wanted to leave. To turn around and walk out of there, but I hadn’t been with anyone in a long time. I couldn’t trust anyone without a written contract these days. My feet were glued to that floor and my hand covering my dick was too familiar with that appendage to let it be.

How were they...? Oh. Ripley looked over at me and smiled as he pulled her back to his front a bit more and made sure I saw him touching her breasts, pinching her nipples. Damn. Titus adjusted, reached past her to grab Ripley’s hip which allowed her to use his arms like some sort of balance beam. I

was fully able to see that she was being double penetrated in the shower, by the two of them, and nobody had an issue with me standing there, abusing myself, because I couldn't fucking look away.

I tried to, a couple times, but her sounds drew me back. When she came, she shook. It reminded me of how Holly's legs shook when I touched her, made her come, and I wanted to be them, only I wanted that to be Holly and... two of me somehow. I tried to be discreet, but Harper smiled at me as the two men inside her spent as well.

On her feet, she looked... rejuvenated somehow. She slid a hand down each of their chests as she said, "See you at home." Then she walked past me and slapped my naked ass and said, "Good job, Stormy."

I stepped forward with a yelp I was ashamed of and knew no matter how tan I was from a bit of time on the beach before coming to this school, my body was red with embarrassment head to toe. They chuckled and then went about showering as though none of that just happened. I still needed a shower.

I had never felt more awkward in my life, and I literally had to eat Christmas dinner sitting across from Essie surrounded by our entire family after I fucked her in my bedroom because I had no self-control and she had manipulation skills I didn't own to this day.

With as much aplomb as I could muster, I picked up my soap and walked to a shower and turned it on. Ripley, *Daddy* apparently, said, "I thought you were never going to get here."

I paused, but the water hit me full on so at least I had that to help with the shock. “Excuse me?”

Titus said, “She likes to be watched. We like to watch her, but also...I mean, you’re welcome.”

I turned and faced the wall. Ripley snickered. “You’ll get there.”

“What?” I faced him. “Where?”

He seemed to contemplate this and his partner in crime—and life, apparently—leaned against the wall and said, “Yes, *Daddy*. Impart wisdom.”

“Well, *Popsicle*. I was about to.” He turned his shower head off and said, “*There* is anywhere she needs you to be the fucking animal you are because you allow her to be the wicked beast she is. You find a woman like that one and you are free as fuck and tied so tightly to her you’d do *anything* to make her happy.” He looked at Titus and said, “Tell me I’m wrong.”

He replied with, “What are we picking up for dinner?”

They walked off as Ripley said, “Apollo and Rip got that under control already.”

Apollo? I blinked. No. Well. Shit. Damn. I hurried up with my shower and realized my time at that state school might have been good for my GPA, but I missed some serious lessons there.

Which class taught me how to deal with this? Any of it? Not psychology because I took more than one of those and it just made me feel worse not better about myself, my situation, and

the teacher... shit, I left feeling like I had more problems than when I started that year. This year, no psychology classes. My dad finally got his way and I switched to business officially.

A decorative graphic of a stylized arrow pointing to the right. The arrow's shaft is a horizontal line with a small arrowhead on the right and a tail on the left. The shaft passes through the center of a diamond-shaped shape formed by two curved, flame-like or leaf-like edges. The word "Chapter" is written in a serif font above the shaft, and the number "5" is written in a bold serif font below the shaft.

Chapter
5

Holly

I arrived at the Bunny House on the XIX property and knocked on the door.

“Watch out.” An arm reached past me, and I moved as I turned. I gulped. “Go on.”

I had no idea who he was, but I moved my feet because he did not look like the kind of guy people resisted for long. I said as we walked into the kitchen, “I’m here to see Harper.”

“Right this way.” He indicated with an arm and a charming smile. I’d spent my life being relatively oblivious to men. To the baby-making equipment between my legs. Now. It was like giant guy hit a switch when he put his finger up there and I could not find a way to turn it off. The bitter taste flooded my mouth but only slightly. Not as strong as it usually did.

“Thank you.” I was blushing. I could feel it on my way-too-pale face. I knew it was way too pale because after a brief conversation with my mother via face-to-face connection where she told me as much, she seemed thrilled I was experiencing some sort of shift in my life. I had not told her everything, just that I needed to figure out how to talk to a guy

and I kept getting tongue tied. Her answer? She tried to get me to make an appointment to have a spray tan. A new outfit arrived. New undergarments. A pallet of cosmetics that I knew how to use but the thought of them made my stomach turn, so I never did.

“Baby!” he called out and she appeared in the doorway.

She said, “Apollo! I didn’t expect you today.”

“I had time.” He went to the refrigerator. “Apparently, you do not.”

“In a couple hours.” She tilted her head. He shrugged. She looked at me and then really looked at me. She shook her head no and he laughed so hard he almost choked on whatever he was drinking. “Just...do not leave. Okay?”

He made a devil horns finger gesture and she reached for my hand and said to him as she tugged me along, “Okay, then. Have it your way.”

We went into her office, and I took a seat. She moved behind the desk and said, “I need you to sign this document, Holly.”

I looked at it, shook my head, and pushed it back to her. “I don’t—”

“But you do. You have. On the first day, after saying you wanted nothing to do with it, signing the general NDA, you put your room on the list signaling it was okay.” She crossed her arms and tilted her head.

“The list was...to...” I blinked. Oh no. I shook my head no. “No. No. I-I thought...”

“You were too busy with your phone, too uninterested in the, what did you call it? *Nonsense*, to pay attention.” She pushed that paper across and said, “He has signed that NDA. He has signed saying he will not put his dick anywhere other than *his* Diva and you, Holly Ringwald, put your room on that list. Now, if you decide to keep toying with him, you will be —”

“Toying with him?” I balked. I had no problems speaking my mind...except to him. Usually, anything I needed to get out that I couldn’t verbally, I would put in writing. “I didn’t say yes. I didn’t...couldn’t say anything!”

She blinked. “What?”

I looked at her and told the truth. “He came in and I had my headphones on. I was listening to a book I can’t even finish now. I was about to say something, but I got pulled back by the stupid cord. I went to take them off but he...went.” I indicated my lap. “And...I...froze.”

She rubbed her forehead. “You didn’t say anything?”

I shook my head. “I couldn’t. I...he’s huge. I...no one ever...I...”

“It’s okay.” She didn’t seem super empathetic about it. Then she pushed the paper and asked, “Then why the second time?”

I gulped. I had been asking myself that same question. I looked at the paper and said, “I...forgot to put my room

number on the sheet. I did for the next two weeks and I—”

“Do you take psychology classes at all, Holly?” she asked and placed the pen on top of the papers. “Because if you did, maybe you would realize that your conscious actions are the ones you are used to. Maybe have some control of. Yet, you seem to subconsciously be sabotaging yourself.” She sighed and said, “Let me give you the reader’s digest version of what that looks like long term. You ignore the meeting. You put your number on the paper. He comes to your room. You give him the physical signal that you want oral. You say nothing, indicate nothing, so he thinks that is all you want, and he leaves.”

Holy shit. I didn’t read the manual because I had opted out of this whole thing.

She kept going. “Then, after that beautiful creature did that to you, made you cum, right?” I gulped and nodded. She huffed a laugh that seemed more irritated than not. “You somehow forget to put your room number on the paper, *exactly* when he would be fired if you did. He comes to your room, and again, he does what he thinks you want from him. You shun him, he leaves.” Harpy seemed to be taking his side in this. “You have a man who doesn’t need to be doing any of this. Who, for whatever reason, needed to do this for himself. Maybe to lock in some loyalty? I don’t know. I don’t know him that well. What I do know of Stormy is that he was willing to stay here if I needed him to when one of my partners said he was going to spank me. So, while I hate that you lost your ability to say no, you sure as shit made all the physical

and legal signs that said yes, so sign this fucking document and decide before Saturday morning if you are going to see where this leads the two of you or if you will set him free.”

“Free?” I balked. “He a—”

She stood up and leaned over the desk. She looked me directly in the eye and said, “No. If anything, *you* violated *him*. Don’t ever fucking tell him, understand? And if you think that by not signing this agreement it gives you any level of protection, I’ll just remind you of who you are really dealing with. Dead men tell no tales, Holly. Neither do dead women, and if you try to fuck this up for me after everything—”

Yeah, he was way less scary than this crazy bitch. I leaned in and picked up the pen. I believed her. I initialed all the way down and in some places I didn’t even see spaces for. Whatever. What the fuck ever. She sat back and with a light and friendly smile said, “Just have him clean your room if you don’t want to fuck him.” Then she seemed to think about something and said, “But that would be such a waste, don’t you think?”

“I don’t know. I told you. I—” I looked down. When I looked up, she was studying me. “I didn’t know his name. I’ve never even kissed someone and he...did that to me.”

“Apollo,” she called. “Once. Understand? Because you are a special case and he’s been busy lately.”

“Um.” I had no idea what was about to happen. He stepped into the room and looked about as informed as I was.

She said, “Holly is a virgin. She’s never been kissed. She needs to learn a few things. We have about thirty minutes to teach her. Think you can handle it?”

“Whuh, uh...” He cleared his throat and said with a rogue smile, “What exactly do you want me to do here, Baby?”

“Go kiss her.” She indicated and watched him.

He shook his head. I let out the breath I was, apparently, holding in. He smiled and said, “I’ll kiss you, though. You want her to see it?”

She nodded and said, “You are getting cupcakes when I get home tonight.”

He smiled brightly and said, “But just me, right? And Rip, but not them.”

“No.” She winked at him as she tapped that paper. The NDA. I couldn’t tell anyone. “Not them.”

I looked at her as she looked at me and I nodded. “I don’t...” This was happening. I gulped. “I... wouldn’t know what to say anyway.”

Apollo stalked over to her and leaned in to kiss her lips. She pulled back and he went wide-eyed. She teased him, and the more she did that, leaned in, pulled back...oh shit. Did Stormy think I was teasing him? Fuuuhhhkkk.

And the real lesson I learned came when Apollo bent her over that desk in front of me and fucked her like she could take that kind of thrust without injury of some sort. It registered that if I kept teasing Stormy, intentionally or not, he

was going to really do something I might not want him to do. Though she looked very much like she wanted everything he was doing to her and more as she trembled and called out for him in what I understood clearly was her climax.

Just like the high moment in a book, the settling was quick, and for them a bit funny, apparently. Apollo looked at me and winked as he gave me a finger gun click sound and said, “Don’t settle for less than you deserve, kid.”

She laughed as he left, and she situated herself. She perched behind that desk where they just fucked all over my signed documents and said, “I love them. All three of them. You don’t have to love Stormy, Holly. You just have to read your manual, respect the contract, and accept that some part of you is... evolving. Let it bloom, you beautiful disaster, you.”

“Kay.” I got up, all my engines turned on. There was a battle I was fully aware of now, and it was raging inside of me. I... had needs I never had before. Needs I didn’t know I could have. I left that room with a bitter taste in my mouth, but an ache in a place I had not allowed to ache before. Once out of the kitchen, I took off in a sprint, sort of. I was sure I could get to the parking lot faster if I cut across the pool area and then between one of the houses. I had to do a spin move to avoid running into someone, and then I ran directly into someone else. Someone really big which is why I bounced right off him like a basketball on a gym floor and landed in cold water.

That was one way to cool off. I kicked my way to the surface and once I breached, looked directly up and into the

dark-grey eyes of Stormy... something? Was that his first or last name? I didn't have a chance to say anything, and he didn't get a chance to help me out of there, which based on his movement suggested that was his intent.

“Winston will help her. Come on. I have to be home in less than thirty.” She giggled and said, “I've really misbehaved today, and Rip will be home within two hours. I need my time.”

“Yes, Ma'am.” He left me and went to her.

I really couldn't understand the surge of...pure...rage? Was I mad? I didn't get mad. What the hell was wrong with me this year? Ugh. The taste in my mouth was horrible. Like I just licked the bottom of a bitter ashtray. I started to ease off the anger pedal, and that taste went away. My body hated when I acted out. I hated that taste, so I rarely had moments. I once got stung by a bee and still found some calm so as not to taste that bitterness.

“Got you this towel.” A guy, Winston I... I knew Winston! Sort of. He was smaller in high school, wore glasses, super smart. Nerdy. Several grades ahead of me, but he looked younger than me back then.

He held it near the pool entry. I swam to that side, then waded through the water as it got shallower, then walked up the stairs and out as he wrapped it around me.

“Thank you.” I looked up at him and he smiled. I could feel my brows draw a bit together and I asked, “Reed, right? Winston Reed?”

He laughed and said, “Yeah. How did you know that?”

“We went to high school together.” I looked at him and said, “You’ve...grown.”

He laughed again and indicated we should exit the pool area. “Yeah, it happens when you grow up.”

I laughed. “Right. Sorry. I just—”

“No. I was a lot smaller then. Hit my growth spurt last year. You missed it.” He winked. He was a lot more confident this year, too. I envied him. He looked me over and said, “*Pretty in Pink!* Oh shit. You’ve grown up a bit, too.”

I blushed deeply. My teeth were starting to chatter. “I hate my name.”

“Most people don’t know the reference these days.” He had me stop at the kitchen entrance and said, “You understand.”

I was soaking wet and not allowed any further at the moment. I... damn. My phone was in my pocket. I felt for it and realized it was in the pool or maybe I was lucky, and it landed...on the concrete...why did this month hate me so much?

A decorative graphic of a stylized arrow pointing to the right. The arrow's shaft is a horizontal line with a small arrowhead on the right and a tail on the left. The shaft passes through the center of a diamond-shaped shape formed by two curved, flame-like or leaf-like edges. The word "Chapter" is written in a serif font above the shaft, and the number "6" is written in a bold serif font below the shaft.

Chapter
6

Winston

Wow. She remembered me. I remembered her, but back then we were both so shy, neither of us said much to anyone outside our personal little geek circles. She was a freshman when I was a junior, just like now I presumed. She had hit that growth spurt before high school and damn she kept growing in all the right places and all the right ways. I always thought Holly was interesting because she wasn't like other girls. She didn't turn into a... well, she turned into an OBD, but not a real... diva-type diva and all her friends eventually grew into looking like this one in front of me now. "Hey, Cass."

"You wanna see my ears wiggle?" she asked and laughed.

I shook my head no but smiled at her anyway. "Thanks, but I've got a wet woman waiting for me in the kitchen."

Never thought I would ever say that.

"Oh, yeah. She just left. Looked like she was heading back to the pool or something. Anyway, I was thinking for this year's mixer—"

“Committee, Cassidy. There is a process for a reason. Now, shoo.” I shooed her with the dry clothes I had in my hand. I thought about going out there after Holly, but then remembered my tutoring from Harpy. No. I was not going to take the chance that Holly had turned into one of those actual divas. I met enough of those ladies at the mixer last year. Last year...so much happened last year. This year, I volunteered to go to the OBD house as a man toy for one reason and one reason only. Information. Didn't hurt that I got to fuck three girls in the process, but...I'd be wearing my no band on my wrist for a while. Orientation was officially over for me.

Autumn waved and I nodded. Hell, yes! She had the new game loaded and it was time to go kick some ass. I loved Autumn. She was like my best friend here. If she were into guys, I would move that direction, but she was practically a guy on the inside, but on the outside, hell she made every straight and bisexual man in the vicinity aware that she had what they wanted and then she let them know she wanted what they wanted, another hot female.

I asked as we headed out the front door, “How's the hunt going?”

“Alone. I have you. Why don't you get a vagina so we can fuck?” she asked.

“Because if I had a vagina, I would only be interested in myself?” I considered this. I was way too fascinated with the female body. If I had one, I imagined I'd spend all my time playing with it myself.

She made a face and stuck her tongue out. That tongue ring made me sigh. “I mean...you could pretend it’s a vagina...”

Autumn pushed me and then ran. I chased after her and then we got into her car and went to grab food so we could chill in her tiny-ass apartment and play video games. What we had was better than sex. It was friendship and real. She understood me in a way no one else ever tried to.



Storm

Harpy said it would all work out. She explained that Holly was new to her instincts of being the one in charge so I should be patient with her. I could do that. I picked up Holly's cracked phone and was walking back to my house when I saw her coming my way.

I held out the phone to her and said, "Probably would have been better if you just got it wet."

She blinked at me in rapid succession. I tried for a smile. No words. I indicated the house. No movement. I looked her over and she looked down at herself. She was cold. Shivering.

"You take this shit literally, don't you?" I asked. I moved over and picked her up, caveman style. Hell, she wanted to make sure I knew my place. I knew it. She'd learn it, too.

She said not one word, moved not one muscle as I carried her into the house, down the hall, and into my room. I placed her in a sitting position on the sink counter in my bathroom. Her teeth were chattering. Her skin cold to touch. "Just wait here."

I went to my room and grabbed a few things that might not do a whole lot to help, thanks to their size, but would be much better than the cold, wet clothes she had on now.

She hadn't moved a muscle. She looked at me so intently, though. I really wanted to do better, do this right. It would help if she gave me some indication I was. I reached for the towel and slowly removed it. She had her phone in a death grip, but I loosened those fingers, too, and put it aside. "I know. It's like your whole life is in that thing these days."

I tugged at the hem of the shirt and said, "Let's get you out of these. I'll take care of them." Well, we had house bunnies here and they would take care of them along with the rest of my laundry. I had to undress her like she was a baby doll. Fuck. I shook my head as I dropped her shirt and then bra into my shower. I hated that so many things would do that. Trigger me. Pull up a memory that I didn't want to have. Dolls. I played dolls with Essie when we were little. We would change their clothes. She then let me undress her like a doll, and then I let her undress me like one. How did she even know to do shit like that back then?

I shifted focus to the patch of bright-red hair between Holly's legs. It was growing back. I wasn't a hundred percent sure if that was a sign that I didn't deserve the pain she endured to get a waxed pussy or if it was more her style and I didn't fucking know that because she wouldn't talk to me. I knew she could talk. She talked to Harpy. Talked to Apollo, apparently. He had patted me on the back and told me good luck with her. She sure chatted Winston up from the pool to

the house. If I walked in and she was...I might have fucked him up. Truly. I was at my wit's end with this woman and yet, as I tossed her underwear and shorts into my shower, I couldn't get off my knees.

What the hell was wrong with me? I leaned in, pressed my face next to her knee and nudged. Her hands moved down to the counter. I took that as a good sign. I pulled her closer to the edge. My height, this counter, almost perfect for this. I reached back and grabbed a towel and provided some relief to my own damn knees. I rubbed my warm hands up and down her chilled legs and said, "Don't worry. I'm going to make you warm."

I shifted her thighs wider, put one of her feet on my shoulder. I had to move her into positions, but she went any way I wanted her to go. I leaned in, spread those lips, and licked into her. She wanted to torture me? She needed to get warmed up? Fine. I wasn't moving until she started moving, said something, did something. I licked and teased, and the shivers slowly turned to shakes. The pale flesh of her thighs, her chest began to heat. I reached up, touched a heavy breast, ran a thumb over a soft pink nipple and she gasped.

It was a sound and a reward I desperately needed.

I tested the pressure with that, but I still wouldn't stay at her clit. She was soaked. Another gasp as I pinched harder and then her hips bucked. I almost came unraveled. *By the time this woman lets me fuck her I am going to be savage.* Hell, I was already feeling unhinged.

She rewarded me with a sound, a shift, I rewarded her with more attention to her clit. Her hand lifted from the counter and went back. I closed my eyes and practically growled into that pussy. Now, my mission was to get her to touch me. Damn, I needed to be touched.

The slightest “oh” sound and I stopped teasing her. I needed to be touched. I reached for that hand and put it on top of my head for her. I then pushed a finger into her. She was moving a bit more, but I could tell she was fighting her instincts. She wanted to pull me closer, to make me fuck her harder with my fingers, make me make her cum or else she’d make herself cum from riding my mouth and hand hard enough on her own. The moment her fingers began to move on my head, into my hair, I stopped torturing her. I slid a second finger into that heat and enjoyed a real cry of pleasure from her. She broke in a bucking, restrained hum of sound, as her fingers pushed deeper into my hair, held me tighter against her. I stopped, waited for her next direction.

She hadn’t moved her hand, so I lifted and lowered my knees, winced. Looked up. She was a mask of expression. Damn. She wanted me to hurt? I really could not wait for her turn. I would make sure she understood the luxury of these marble fucking tiles even with a towel.

I looked up and then at that wet, soft, perfect pussy of hers and moved back in for seconds. She seemed a bit shocked, but a lot easier to get over that cliff where a louder humming noise was made. I smiled against her thigh. I was doing better. I licked, kissed, couldn’t resist the urge, and since she wasn’t

pulling me away, I sucked against that flesh, marked her. I wanted to mark her in so many places. I'd never wanted to do that before. Thought it was a trashy thing to do. Now...I was feeling less like a man who could be careful with a woman and more like the caveman that carried her in here.

I went back to work and in short order she was making a soft squeak of a sound that made it impossible for me to stop myself. I stood up, looked at her as she slumped against the wall. Her head on the doorframe as she was catching her breath. I fisted the t-shirt, pulled it off, dropped my shorts and her eyes went wide. She stiffened. I didn't care if she didn't want to see it. I gripped my shaft and let her see exactly what she did to me.

What a fucking mess she had made me.

A decorative graphic of a stylized arrow pointing to the right. The arrow is white with a black outline and is bisected by a horizontal line. The word "Chapter" is written in a serif font above the line, and the number "8" is written below it. The arrow's tail is on the left, and its head is on the right.

Chapter
8

Holly

Holy fuck. He was huge. Like just as big as everything else on him. My head was trying to calculate the size of his hands, how much wrapped around that thick cock and then how long because he slid his hand up, around the tip and back down. Stormy said, “Look at what you do to me, Holly.”

I grunted. I heard that. I grunted because my pussy was trying to take control of my vocal cords by contracting when he said my name in that husky whisper. Three. He just brought me to orgasm three fucking times and he thought I could focus. At one point, I thought he had two cocks before they merged back into one. That’s when I realized I was probably on the cusp of a panic attack or something. His head tilted back, and he stroked and stroked and I watched with rapt fascination until he moved faster, seemed to grip a bit harder and said, “Look at me, Holly. Look. At.” He breathed more than said *me* as he released and that liquid heat came streaming up and across my knee and thigh. It was warm, wet. Somehow, I had movement. I touched it. Sticky.

“Oh, fuck.” He puffed out a breath, sucked another one in. He placed a hand on the counter next to me and leaned in closer. “Sorry. I know you didn’t... I just...” I turned my head to look at him and he seemed unsure of what to say. Then he said, “I’ll clean it up. You. I’ll take care of this. Okay?”

I had air in my lungs, but it would not help me speak to this particular man. I was still scared of him. He was still doing things to me and making my body do things I didn’t know how to control. I... wasn’t going to become another OBD tale. Pass on the legacy of having a degree and only using it as a conversation piece as I chatted about what my cook made for dinner because that is what the women in my family had done for generations. Nothing. Not a damn thing. They looked pretty. That was it. I was more than a pretty face. I... holy shit. Where did that mantra come from? Why was it playing like a record in my head right now?

I might be crazy. I admitted as much to myself. It explained why my dad spent so many sessions with me... wait... were those sessions? I contemplated the foggy memories trying to merge or create themselves in my brain as Stormy removed my wet clothes from the shower and put them in the sink. He turned that shower on, tested the water, and then came back to where I was on the counter. He reached for my hand and tugged. I slid, ungracefully, to my feet and my legs wobbled. I reached out and my hand landed on his chest. His really firm chest. That seemed to make him happy for some reason and I definitely did not want him mad. I remembered how Apollo handled Harpy from all that teasing.

Right now, this giant was being gentle. I... did not want him rough. The thought sent a roll through my stomach, turned it. No. Sex was... wait, what? Why?

He led me into his shower, totally unaware of my psychotic state of being, and said, "Stand here."

He then proceeded to bathe me. If I thought I didn't know what to say when he was holding TED talks with my vagina, revolutionizing my life and everything I thought I knew about myself, I was even less prepared to say or do something now. Stormy had plenty on his mind though, so I just listened as he talked a little about football and a lot about my hair. I was a bit blissed out because he spent some time shampooing my hair with his 2-in-1 product and while he did that, he told me how much he liked it. I reflected on why I hated it. The hair, not the massage. *That*, I enjoyed immensely. "Let me know if this is too rough." He was talking about the wash cloth. I felt a smile on my lips and I looked at him with a whole new appreciation when he rinsed me off. Harpy was right. He... wouldn't hurt me intentionally. "Wait here." I did. I wanted to badly to say something. Anything. Apparently, my orgasm haze only got me high enough to move. And I was not running away from him.

"Bend, Holly." I bent and he wrapped my long, red hair into that towel as he said, "You gotta help a little, babe."

The twists slowed as I stood upright, and he tucked that under. I watched a series of emotions cross his handsome face, but now he was the silent one. He wrapped the other towel

around me, and I stepped out. I was at least getting better at moving. That realization sent the thought of my hand in his hair, my hips lifting to meet his tongue, setting a rhythm. I was sure glad I was still dripping with water because Stormy did not turn that faucet inside me off. If anything, it was set to a constant drip. Fuck you, bitter taste in my mouth! That was awesome and I... like it. Okay, crazy brain? I liked it! What now?

I squeezed my thighs together. He left me there and returned, mostly dry and with shorts on. He dried me off, put a t-shirt that could be a nightgown over my head, put a football hoodie with his name on it, over that. Then considered the gigantic sweatpants as he asked, “You don’t have to stop anywhere between here and the sorority house, right?”

I shook my head no. He nodded. “Okay. Because I don’t think you can let them go.”

No. I could not and expect them to remain on my body. I was not a wispy girl, but he was huge...everywhere compared to me.

The socks were my favorite though. I wiggled my toes in those enormous warm socks and smiled. He smiled back at me and said, “Yeah?”

I nodded. I really needed to practice talking to him. *Why couldn't I talk to him?*

“You want me to carry you to your car?” he asked as his dark brow arched.

My lashes fluttered so he took that as a yes. He grabbed my key, which was in my wet shorts pocket, my phone, and then put me up and over his shoulder again. As he left his room, he said, “I don’t know. I might get used to this.”

That would make one of us.

At my car, he opened the door for me, helped me inside, looked at my busted phone and said, “If you had that fixed you could text me. Tell me you got home. Now.” He looked around the parking lot. “I’m half tempted to follow you to be sure.”

He wasn’t looking at me, so I tried to force the words ‘I’m fine’ out, but it came out as, “Fine.”

He snapped his attention back to me and moved to look me eye to eye. “Hey. You spoke. You want me to take you home?”

I shook my head no. He asked, “Follow you?” I shook my head no. I closed my eyes and gripped the wheel. I was freaking out again. He puffed out a breath and said, “Okay, but.” He picked up my busted phone and took a long time to do whatever he was doing then said as he put it in my lap. “Text me to let me know you got there.” Then he added. “Please. Because I don’t want to call Essie and ask, but I will.”

Essie. I gritted my teeth and looked at him. He must have felt the emotions because he stepped back and shut the door. Of course, he could just ask his cousin, Essie. Everyone knew the cheerleading captain, house authority, *I’m so perfect how about you?* brunette that represented everything I did not want to be. She was everything I hated even if I was not a hundred

percent sure why because I had been a cheerleader in middle school.

Thought... *wait, what?* Why didn't I want to do that in high school? I couldn't remember.

When I got to the sorority house and had to hold up his sweatpants on my body, I was sure he could tell I was home because those bitches probably posted it on social media. They did a whole round of cat calling and comments as I walked past the house meeting. His precious Essie asked in a tone that surprised everyone, including her by the look on her face, "Where the fuck did you get that?"

I looked at her and said, "Stormy."

She took a staggering step backward. She seemed speechless, which in a wild turn of events, activated all the courage I never seemed to have other than in my head. I said, "Well, I couldn't come home naked, right? And he did keep my clothes. They were a mess. All of them... soaked."

He had my favorite flip-flops, too, but I would retrieve...no, I would request them. Like, once I had my phone. Oh, yes! Once I had my phone fixed, I could text him. Okay, this might work out after all.

I adjusted his oversize pants and held my head high as I moved to the stairs and up to my room. Essie thought she had put me in a third-floor room, but the girl that was in this room wanted to room with her bestie and this one was too small for more than one sister, so I got my own room. Peace and quiet. Well, until it also came with an unexpected lover, and a

contract I needed to read. I looked at my meticulously organized space and remembered what Harpy said. I had to work him out one way or another. Either fuck him or... oh. I had a plan. Maybe if I could find a way to talk to him... I could possibly find a way to fuck him, too. I might have to do more research, though. I didn't take all the sex ed in high school. I hadn't been interested until... now. I frowned and wondered why exactly I didn't take those classes if no one at home was going to talk to me about it. Something... was not right, but I had a doctor appointment with a psychiatrist not in my father's practice and I begged them to request my records through the school or my mother. I didn't want him to know I was seeing someone else.

Damn. Those *were* sessions! What the fuck? I couldn't deal with my Dad problem right now. Couldn't talk to him about it anyway since he was on tour with his new book on raising girls to be future leaders. He believed that despite being married to a very smart, but very unambitious woman, himself—No. I was his poster child. His only child. I sometimes wished I had been a boy. Maybe he wouldn't have had to do so much research on how to make me perfect.

I did attempt to text Stormy, but the best I could do was send an emoji. Since I didn't text anyone other than my mom these days, I had one of spaghetti in the frequently used so... that is what I sent. Spaghetti was a food I used to love but as I got older, it no longer loved me. I had two things I forced myself to consume in order to not be a total weirdo around other young adults. I had a soda and a candy bar every day.

After a while, they were the only things in the junk food category that started to taste good again. I could not let them go.

I missed spaghetti.

I was also a bit confused by Stormy's reply: Definitely.

Definitely needed to get a fixed phone in the morning before class.

I changed into my pajamas and went to bed early. I was exhausted. Mentally, physically. The next day, I had a mission.

Still, knowing it would piss Essie off to no end, hoping what Harpy said was true, I decided I might as well send out one more message with actions I couldn't convey with words. I was willing to give this a shot. I wanted more orgasms.

I waited, and the bitter taste didn't hit as strong. I smiled. Oh, Stormy might be good for me. That sent a total roll through my stomach. Why, dammit, why?

I picked up that hoodie and looked at the back of it. Storm. I felt my nose wiggle. No. Stormy was way better and matched those gorgeous eyes of his. I carried it with me, planned to wear it today.

I was heading down the stairs as Winston was heading up. I tilted my head and asked an obvious question based on his t-shirt, "You...work here?"

He rolled a shoulder and said, "It's a tough job, but someone has to do it." He held up his hand and I noticed the bracelet on his wrist. He said, "But I think the really *hard* part is over."

I looked at that wristband and asked, “What?”

“You read the manual, right?” His light-brown brow went up comically high. He was adorable. His clear-blue eyes were so pretty. He didn’t wear his glasses anymore. I wondered if he had the surgery or if he was wearing contacts. Winston was sweet. Bigger than me, but not like Stormy. There was absolutely nothing threatening about this one. I shook my head. He laughed and said, “I highly recommend it. Good reading. Very important information in that tome.”

I held up my shattered phone and said, “I can barely see what time it is.”

He pulled his phone out of his pocket and said, “Almost eight. You, uh...when is your lunch break? You stack your classes, right?” I nodded. He said, “Yeah, me, too. Why go five days when you can go three? Why go three when you can go two?” He leaned in and whispered, “And thanks to the online options, I’m really only going to lab, but don’t tell the Divas. I only gave them two days.”

“Stormy only gave me one.” I held up his hoodie.

Winston’s brows went up. “I thought—Storm? Really?”

I was sort of offended on his behalf or mine. I couldn’t tell. “What’s wrong with him?”

“Nothing.” He shook his head. “Nice guy. New wide receiver, so don’t mess up his game.” I looked at that hoodie again. Winston laughed. “You didn’t know?”

“I don’t know anything.” I looked at him. “Have lunch with me. Like, today. Help me.” I reached for his arm and squeezed. He went really wide-eyed then but nodded. “Okay. Sandwiches? Somewhere I can get soup and salad?”

He smiled and nodded. “I know just the place.”

He tapped on his phone and mine lit up. I looked at him. He said, “Harpy gave it to me this morning. Told me you might need some assistance.”

“Like Apollo assistance?” I asked. I did not want to watch Winston fuck someone else. I didn’t think I... well. I didn’t know what to think in that department anymore.

“We are definitely having lunch.” He looked at the top of the stairs and said, “Gotta get to work.”

“Yeah. See you at lunch.” I loved how easy it was to talk to him. Maybe he could help me talk to Stormy.

A decorative graphic of a double-headed arrow with a pointed tip on the right and a feathered tail on the left. The arrow is oriented vertically, with the tip pointing upwards. The word "Chapter" is written in a serif font across the upper shaft, and the number "9" is written in a serif font across the lower shaft.

Chapter
9

Winston

I was all set to meet Holly at a great little café with the intention of speaking to her privately. This is why the arrival of one really pissed off football player came as a bit of a shock to me. Storm pulled out a chair and dropped into it. Holly was not here yet, so I asked him, “You okay, man?”

“Why are you having lunch with my girl?” he asked.

I had so many questions today. “How is she your girl, exactly?”

That was not the right one to ask.

“My contract says—”

“That you are exclusive, yeah. Sex wise. *If* she’s even having sex with you. I remember Holly—” What the hell was wrong with me? I didn’t care about Holly, not really. Sort of. Okay, so maybe I cared about someone I had a crush on in high school. I didn’t stand a chance if this was her type. I had filled out, but yeah, this dude was bigger than Ripley.

“Remember? Did you two... when?” He was about to kill me, and I did not understand why he was this upset. He had

texted to ask where I was, and I told him having lunch with Holly. If I was doing something wrong, wouldn't I lie about it?

Unfortunately for him, I could not let him murder me over this girl. I would hate for this school to lose another football player, but my gun in the kidney holster assured me we would if it came to that. "We went to high school together. Jesus, Storm. Settle down. What the hell is wrong with you?"

"I saw her talking to you." He made hand gestures and all.

I rubbed my forehead. "So? I'm sure she talks to lots of people."

He reared back as though I had just slapped him. "Just not me."

"Storm, you gotta help me here." I was so glad to see the waiter. "I need an ice water as soon as possible."

Storm said, "Same." He looked beyond the waiter and said, "She'll have a coke. Regular, not diet."

Again, how the fuck do you know that and not know someone? Unless he was spying on her. I leaned in because I knew she had to be getting closer and whisper shouted, "Did you spy on her?"

He snort-laughed and said, "No. I... take out her trash and... never mind."

She was really fucking slow getting to this table or he had eyes like an eagle. I turned and realized she was stuck at the edge of the patio. I waved, and then realized she might be literally stuck. I said, "I'll be back."

I got up and walked over, looking, trying to see if she was hooked on something, but when I got there, she whispered, “He’s here.”

“Yup.” I nodded. “You okay?”

“He... he...” She shook her head. I looked back at him, and he seemed pained by the situation, so this was confusing as fuck. I rolled my hand, and she looked up at me. Yeah, me back then would have more patience for this. Hell, me back then would not be in this situation. Me now had to figure out if Storm was going to be a problem for us this year. And by us I meant Team Harpy. We didn’t say that around her, but Apollo told us all how much this business meant to her, and no one was going to fuck it up. No one fucked with her without getting fucked by him. Last person who did that ended up exiled to another country and the other ended up dead, probably also dropped off in another country. “I get nervous.”

“You like him.” I took a step back, reassessed the situation.

She blushed deeply and said, “I don’t know him. I just... I... like you.”

Was it the rooms in the house that caused this crazy shit to happen? He was in Ripley’s old room. I earned my spot in Titus’s old room. Did we have to share a woman, too? I did not want to see that beast naked. I was only recently comfortable with my body. That guy looked like an ego breaker if one ever walked.

“If you really like me, you will come over here and have lunch with us. He’s ready to fight me over you. Do you think

that will work out in my favor?" I had been working out and training, so I might give him a decent go of it, but he was like Ripley plus some inches and at least fifty pounds. I did not want to fight that guy.

"Okay." She stepped forward and as she did, she said, "I'm really sorry. I don't know what is happening or why."

"It's okay. This... might work itself out anyway." If Apollo taught me anything it was to slow down and let it play out. See what I could glean from a situation.

He stood up as we got closer and pulled the chair out for her. Oh shit. He was not just fucking her. He was tumbling. It had to be the rooms. Maybe I needed to see if someone in the vicinity could come cleanse them or something. As I took my seat and he returned to his, I considered that I spent time on the OBD files, not my house since he was the only new addition to it. I had not anticipated him being a complication. I asked, "You don't by chance have a kid out there, do you?"

He looked at me like I just grew another head. "What?"

"Ripley. He has Rip. So... I was just thinking the rooms might have something to do with it." I took a sip of water and they both looked at me with curious expressions. "Never mind." I looked at Holly and said, "Hey."

She gulped and looked at the drink. I watched the hulking man next to her try to decipher that expression like it was code. He then said, "Is that just for studying or?"

He stopped. No one cut him off. Damn, this was painful to witness. I cleared my throat and said, “So, Storm, you have a game Friday. Holly caught me at OBD this morning. She showed me your hoodie and asked if I could help her with some information.” Then for good measure I said, “Surprise.”

He was so fucking happy it made me sad for him. He looked at her and said softly, “I would have answered those questions.”

She blushed and gulped. I adjusted my lean, my proximity because I didn’t know this guy. I knew two very large and brooding men similar enough to him I needed to be ready for any reaction. I said, “She can’t talk to you, Storm. She’s... shy, afraid... I’m not sure which or maybe both.”

He stiffened, looked at me and then at her. He seemed to be thinking, then he jerked back and stood up. I pushed my hand under my shirt, closer to that pistol grip.

He looked at her and said, “Look at me.” She did. “Say *no* to me.”

She started to tremble a little bit. Oh no. Oh fucking no. He took a step back and put up both of his hands as he said, “I.”

Now *he* was speechless and the tear that rolled down her cheek might as well have crawled over here, took out this gun, and shot him. I could see it hit him center fucking mass. He looked at me and then started walking, then he started jogging, then he was in a run. The direction of the street, but not his vehicle.

“Well. That was unexpected.” I breathed a sigh of relief because that could have been way worse. He needed to expend some energy and I would catch up with that end later. The server was back, and I placed my order. I said, “She’s... probably going to just have some soup.”

He put some extra napkins down and left us. She reached for one and then broke down crying over there. I took a sip of my water. I was not about to be manipulated by lady tears. I put the glass on the table and asked, “How did you get that hoodie?”

She said, “He gave it to me.”

“Last night, right? After the pool. You went back there?” I waited.

“To get my phone. He saw me. He... brought me to his room—”

“Brought? More explanation, please.” I did the same hand-roll motion.

“I have an NDA.” She suddenly looked up and around. “She’ll—”

“Harpy. No. I work for her. It’s better we do this here. Help me help you, Holly.” I looked at her and admitted, “I want us to be friends. I don’t think either of you were trying to hurt each other. I just know for a fact you aren’t the only person who got hurt just now.”

She looked up then at the empty seat at the table. “He...”

“I don’t know him. Not really. Don’t have to know a man to see when a woman breaks his heart. Been watching it happen since I was a kid.” It was one of the reasons I was especially qualified to infiltrate the Divas. I wouldn’t get attached to any of them. Only. Here I was, sitting at a nice little place to eat, dealing with Diva drama that extended directly into my own house. “You’re a freshman, right?”

She nodded. I was a junior when she was a freshman back then. Only, a little different. I said, “Seventeen, right?” She shook her head. “Eighteen?” I asked and she nodded, wiped her nose, tried to pull herself together. The waiter returned with the food and once he was gone again, I said, “Me, too.”

She looked up. I smiled. “I was small for a junior then because I was actually supposed to be in eighth grade, age wise. Too advanced. My parents wanted me to get ahead of the pack.”

I did my dad’s voice for that part. I shook my head and said, “Maybe if they hadn’t tried to lead the pack, I wouldn’t be an orphan.”

Apollo’s family stepped in, and I started working for Apollo my freshman year of college because he knew I needed a family. He needed someone he could trust. I would not fail him, or my new Momma, Harpy.

She said, “I’m so sorry, Winston.”

“I’ve survived. But now you know why I was such a scrawny little shit back then.” I put my hand up like I was telling her a secret and said, “I’m still growing.”

She tried not to laugh, but she did. She looked at me and said, “He wasn’t trying to hurt me. I... didn’t know that when it happened the first time.”

I gulped. Things like this were hard to hear, but I was getting better at hearing it. “First?”

“I forgot...” My brow shot up. She amended with, “I’d never even kissed someone and then he... kissed me... there and... I’m all messed up now.”

Me, too. I had to clarify, “Did he or did he not have sex with you?”

She shook her head. “No. Just...”

Damn. I was going to order him a basket of protein bars for him. She should have at least sent the man flowers. “He performed oral on you and you’re afraid he might what? Not give you multiple orgasms?”

“No, he did that.” She went wide-eyed and slapped a hand over her mouth.

I snickered, shook my head, laughed. “Oh damn. And still no sex?” She looked at her soup. I asked, “Like... you haven’t even kissed him? That is the guy you are freezing up around? Hell, the math team is more of a threat, Holly. What the fuck?”

“I don’t know how.” She was getting all spun up again.

I laughed, which did not help the situation. “I’m sorry. It’s just... I mean look at you. How the hell did you get to college completely untouched?”

“I didn’t want to be touched. Plenty of other girls did. I’m not a diva. Not a real one.” She frowned. “I don’t know what is going on in my head right now, Winston. I don’t know what to do.”

I considered what my mentor would do in this situation. Fragile woman, delicate situation. I should totally take advantage of this. I sent an update on this situation. I hated this for her, but some people had to learn the hard way. I said, “I do. We will...practice a few things. You can talk to me, right?”

She nodded, smiled with so much relief. She didn’t see me as threatening. It had been my greatest skill to date. To be the grey man in the room. Unnoticed. Unsuspecting.

I got up, moved to his vacated seat, and looked at her with a smile that she didn’t know was predatory. She just chased off the safest man on this campus because he literally represented everything she was supposed to grow up and become. Married to a prominent man, from a good family, with an intact fortune, and a blemish-free record. She was part of the future feminist club. I remembered that. Never understood why they looked down on women living life on their own terms. Harpy lived life on her own terms and since she had filled the role nicely, I had decided well before the big situation happened last year, I wanted a girl like that. I looked at this pretty redhead and knew, she was not like that. I had hoped she would be, but this girl was a mess, and she was making a mess that impacted the frat, the football team, and the family I made which was tied to both.

I looked at the text that told me to leave. I hoped she made it through the night. I said with a smile, "I'll help you get through this."

A decorative graphic of a double-headed arrow with a central shaft. The arrowheads are stylized with a flame-like or leaf-like shape. The text "Chapter" is positioned above the shaft and "10" is positioned below it.

Chapter
10

Holly

Winston was so great. I leaned forward and hugged him. My head on his shoulder I said, “Thank you.”

He had pretty eyes. Kind, gentle eyes. I was so lost in those eyes I barely registered that he was leaning in closer to me. Not until his lips were a fraction away from mine and he said, “Kiss me, Holly.”

And I did. When his lips touched mine, I felt that tingle roll from where we touched to Stormy’s leaky faucet. That ache in that zone was what had me wrapping my arms around Winston. I didn’t get that taste in my mouth or the ache in my gut. Not around this guy. He was safe, passive. Everything my dad would want for me. Everything my mom would roll her eyes at.

Nice, lean, firm, but not massive, Winston. His arms moved around me and then his tongue pressed against my lips. My mouth parted and I realized maybe I needed to read something else once in a while. I was lost here. Clueless, and my body wanted to do crazy things. Really crazy things like climb into

his lap right here in public. That made my gut clench in the bad way. I hated my body's reactions to my thoughts now.

I didn't move, though. I just... wanted to.

My mother had me tested three times and they just said I was a late bloomer, an over-thinker, not everyone had to be with someone these days. Plenty of people were asexual. She didn't believe them and would show them pictures of me in middle school and point to me then. Once I was in my junior year of high school, she finally said it in front of me. She asked what happened to me. They had no answer. Those were secret appointments my dad did not know about. Probably. Maybe. I wasn't sure about anything anymore.

I was sure about one thing right now. I was feeling *a* sexual all right, a sexual urge to hold onto this man in my arms until he also made me orgasm. I pulled back and blinked at him. Winston smiled, stroked my hair, and said, "Lesson one. Good?"

"You're going to help me with... sex?" I asked, confused.

"Among other things, but yeah." He shrugged and then used his tap to pay and said, "Lesson two, skirts. Need more skirts in your life. Could have done a lot more here today with either one of us, both of us for that matter, if you had a skirt on."

"Um." I gulped.

"We have to fix that, sweetheart. Can't let that monster run around here off leash. I'll train you. You'll train him. Okay?" He smiled, nodded. I nodded back though I was a bit confused.

He smiled that sweet smile again and said, “Okay.” Then he looked at me and said, “I’ll do my best to save you both, promise.”

I nodded. Smiled. I did feel better. Like maybe I could figure this out. I touched my lips and closed my eyes. He kissed me. So gently and then so deeply. When I opened my eyes, I jerked back.

Apollo tapped the cigarette on the table and said, “Want one?” I shook my head no. “Want two?” He snickered at his inside joke. “Lord. You just... landed in it, huh? Sad. Pretty sure this is Daddy’s doing, but still. You are going to let Winston work Winston magic and then you are going to apologize to that giant *heart-on* and not ruin Titus and Ripley’s season because of these psychological shenanigans.”

“Shenanigans?” I balked. “I was.” I closed my mouth.

He smiled like the devil himself, put that cigarette back in his pack, and said, “Come on. Maybe I can speed this up a bit.”

I got up and walked with him into the restaurant. If he had a solution in there, I wanted to hear it. See it.

Apollo gave a hand signal, and it looked like everyone was a bit surprised, but also... going on break? What the fuck?

“Um.” I stopped, but once the last person was through that exit, Apollo looked at me, the smile was gone, and within two steps he had his hand over my mouth, the other on the back of my head, in my hair. He dragged me because I could not keep

up with his long strides. I was crying, holding onto that hand in my hair with both of my hands as he kicked open the bathroom door and pushed me into it.

He turned me toward the mirror, and I could see him behind me. He kicked my feet out one then the next. I was in a full fucking panic. He removed that hand covering my mouth and stripped my shorts down as I asked, “What about... Harper?”

“Are you really trying to make an argument right now?” He pulled out a small handgun and pointed it at the back of my head. I could feel the metal press against my skull.

“No.”

He tilted his head and stepped up closer to me, his front to my back and he was not hard at all. I could feel that because his crotch was pressed against my ass and even though there was a dick in those pants, it was not excited to see me. He said, “What did you say?”

“No. Please. Don't.”

“Three fucking words with a gun to your head.” He looked at me and said, “You need to rethink your narrative, little girl. You will absolutely *not* get another chance. Understand? I'll call your dad next time. Let him know you decided to run with the big divas, be a future leader the way he raised you, but since he forgot to upload a few programs in this robot, you got knocked off the porch. Got it?”

“Yes, Sir.” I nodded. I had no clue what anything meant. I just wanted to live.

“Find your fucking voice because I can assure you, that man wouldn’t do this to you.” Then he kicked me in the back of my knee, and I went down, hit my chin on the counter in the process. That made me bite my tongue. As blood started coming out of my mouth he said, “Now, you look more like a victim. Less like a girl scared of her sexuality.”

He walked out of there and left me on the floor, half naked, and bleeding. Fuck. At least I knew one thing for certain, something else was wrong with me and it was dangerous to more than just me. I... did not want to die. More than all the other thoughts in my head were the instincts to fight back, to live. I lost my only friend last year to suicide. I wasn’t giving up. I could figure this shit out. Make it work somehow.

Once I got myself collected, I decided one more bad decision wouldn’t hurt nearly as much as my tongue and chin right now. Only, when I go to Sophomore House, I learned I was so wrong.



Chapter

11

Storm

I needed to empty some energy before I did something even more stupid than... what the fuck did I do to her? She... Harpy confirmed Holly put her room on the list day one. She made the moves. I... thought she expected more. I really regretted Essie right now. I've regretted her most of my life, but right now, when she had toyed with me, made me think I wasn't good enough at anything even after I made her cum... I was so fucked up and beyond repair.

Karma was an evil bitch, and I was reaping in more than I had sown for damn sure. It was a rotten fucking harvest, and I was choking on it.

The car slowed next to me, and I heard the window click and knew it was down. I could sort of tell from my periphery what kind of car and I was really trying not to look. Essie asked, "What are you doing out here, running in that outfit?"

I was not exactly in workout gear. Not dress shoes and slacks, but cargo shorts and a t-shirt did not scream, *go for a jog*. I slowed, then walked, then stopped. I looked at her and she stopped the car, well the luxury SUV. She said softly, "Get

in. I'll take you back to your car, or home, or wherever you need to go.”

To hell. That is where I needed to go. I knew exactly who could take me there, too.

I got into that car, looked over at Essie. So pretty, so perfect. Not at all what I wanted, but apparently what I needed. I looked at my wrist. That ridiculous bracelet on it, and pulled it off, tossed it out the window. She was a viper if ever I knew one. She was about to strike. Bite. I tried to find a way around this. I thought I found something special. Instead, I found out I became a different version of the same monster I grew up with. “My place is closer.”

We had different last names and did not flaunt the cousin factor so unless someone caught us, being with her, around her, would just seem like it always did. *They are so close. Like brother and sister, those two. I wish she could be as close to her brother as she is to Torden.*

With that phrase in mind, I knew it could be worse. I was an only child though, so I didn't have anyone else to play with. Only Essie paid any attention to me. I reached my hand across the seat, and she slipped one of her manicured hands into it. She asked, “Are you going to tell me what happened?”

“You win.” I stroked her thumb with mine. “Does anything else matter?”

She smiled brightly. “No.”

Once at Sophomore House, we got out of the car and walked directly into the house. She parked in front of it. She was a guest after all, so no big deal. This house was always quiet. I loved that about them. It was clean, tidy. The bunnies did work and only a couple of them were fucking people on the side or in a relationship. I wanted that safety here. That security to protect me from this woman leading me to my bedroom like she knew exactly where it was. Then I remembered two Christmases ago and asked as we walked, “You’ve been in that room?”

“Dane lived here before... *her*.” She rolled her pretty eyes up and shook her head. “It was a long time ago.”

Last school year. Though, knowing the way Ripley, who she still called Dane, and Titus fucked Harper in that shower made me a bit more contemplative as to how I planned to handle this woman who had been handling me my entire life.

I closed the door behind us and locked it. The sun was setting. I hit the remote and the blinds went down. Privacy was essential for these actions. I knew that.

She turned and began undressing. Easily, naturally. “I’ve missed you, Torden.” Then she got that look and asked, “Or should I call you... Stormy?”

Welp, she just made that call a lot easier. “Call me whatever the fuck you want to, Essie. Whatever you need to.”

I stripped as I walked toward her, and she seemed a bit off guard for a change. That made me hard. Wasn’t sure why, but maybe being controlled by women was not really how I was

supposed to be living my bedroom life. I had way more fun with the handful of blowjobs I received in my life because at least those girls did something for *me*.

This one...that one...Holly thought I was a monster. That I could do that and think she wanted me to stop and do it anyway. But she put the room on the list. She left the room off the list. And in that bathroom... how? How could she let me do all of that and not want it?

This one... I'd said no to this one plenty in my life and she never understood that word.

“You’re sweaty.” She stepped back, away from me. “Tor?”

I moved in, put my lips to hers and sealed my fate with that kiss. She didn’t care how sweaty I was anymore. I didn’t either. I pulled back, out of that kiss, and then turned her around to face away from me. “Get on the bed.”

“You’re supposed to—”

“Get on the bed or I’m going to put you on the bed.” I stepped forward for emphasis and she climbed up. “Now spread your legs.”

“Tor—” she started.

I reached down and pushed them apart as I moved in behind her, reminded her, “I know you fucked him. Several times. I’ve seen how he fucks. We never did things like that. We’re going to tonight.”

I pushed two fingers into my mouth, then into her. She moaned and said, “It wasn’t like that.”

Bullshit. I saw that man. No way he was taking it easy on this one. She just wanted me to please her. She wanted me to do all the nice things she had taught me to do over the years. I needed her to be really wet tonight. She started getting lost in that chase. I knew how to make her cum nice and quick. She hadn't been paying a lot of attention to where I was stroking, slipping as I continued to pull more moisture up, back, over the bud of her anus.

Essie was my first everything. Only fitting she should be the first this, too.

Fingers out, I pushed into her pussy and hated that it felt good. I really did hate it. Which is why I grabbed her hips and pulled her as I punched mine forward.

“Torden.” She looked back at me. “That hurt.”

I looked her directly in the eyes and said exactly what I thought, “Good. I want it to hurt. I want it to finally feel to you physically like it's felt mentally to me for years. Because I know you won't tell anyone, Essie. It would ruin the family name if this got out. You wouldn't want to give grandma a heart attack, would you?”

She was getting hit with her own words. Weapons she had thrown at me. “So, you'll do exactly what I tell you to do and like it... or else.” Then I said without the hint of Essie talk in my voice, “And I just want you to take it.”

I pushed her out to the tip. Heard her call my name, then I pulled as I punched my hips forward. When she tried to get up, I grabbed her by the back of her hair and pushed her down and

said, “Say you want it, Essie. Say you need it. Say you love me, you fucking cunt, because that’s what I had to say to you.”

“I hate you!” she shouted, but into the mattress, so only I could hear her. Then she said it, “Stop! Please.”

I was almost out, ready to punch forward again, but I stopped. I hated myself for what I did next.

I pulled the rest of the way out of her. I clenched my jaw and tried to figure out what the hell was wrong with me. Why did I do all that? Essie turned, crying, and reached between her legs and touched herself. I needed to apologize. I opened my mouth to say the words, but she smiled at me, laughed, and said, “Get on the bed, Torden.”

I hated her. I fucking hated her with every fiber of my being. “No.”

This was as routine as it could get.

“Now.” She pointed. “Right now.”

She wiped her cheeks. She said, “I don’t like it like that. I don’t like it rough. You know better. I taught you better than that.”

I should have fucked her in the ass. Should have slipped and punched right in. Maybe then she would stop. Maybe then I could stop.

She reminded me, “I win, remember? Come on. No sense fighting it. We’re here now.”

I got into my bed and laid back, looked at the ceiling as Essie moved over me. She blocked my view and said, as she sank down onto me, “You’re mine. There is no escaping it, Tor-Tor. You belong to me. It’s our secret.”

I did learn one thing from this whole ordeal. I could tune the fuck out. Instead of listening to Essie riding my dick in slow motion, I thought about the upcoming game. First of the season. I really wanted to make a good impression out there. I was so focused on that mental play book, I didn’t realize she had brought herself to orgasm, pulled off of me. I understood why I felt the sting of her fingers across my face. I finally hated her touch enough that my dick didn’t want it either.

“Torden!” She went to slap me again.

I blocked that and said, “Just go. You got what you wanted from me. Just fucking go.”

She sat there, all confused as she looked from me to my decidedly limp dick and said, “But you didn’t.”

“I can’t make myself do it anymore just because you want it.” I shrugged. “You won’t see me at OBD anymore. We are nowhere near one another on campus. Just...leave me alone and I’ll stay out of your way, Essie.”

She looked around my room and said, “I hate this fucking house. This room is... haunted. Tainted. That witch cast her cunt spell on all of them and now it’s on you, too. This.” She shook her head. “This isn’t over, Torden. It will never be over. Understand me?”

Then she slapped my dick. I did not see that about to happen, so I buckled. It took me several deep breaths and more than a second to get my focus back. She dressed quickly and was at my door when I could move again. She opened it, laughed, and said, “Perfect timing.”

She swung the door wide, and I sat there, covering my dick, and looking at the other woman who caused me to have a complete fucking meltdown today. Why the hell was she here if she thought I assaulted her? What did they want from me? Did they just want me...? Maybe. I could give up. Oh, my God. It was so clear why all of this happened. *I* was the *problem* in this equation. I just needed to eliminate the problem and they could go on with their lives and none of this would matter anymore.

Holly took one look at me, then at Essie, and then back at me. I took that time to look her over which is why my focus shifted from suicide to her. I stood up and asked, “What happened?”

I knew Winston did not punch her in the mouth, but she had been hit, something. She had blood down the front of her shirt. She looked me over and said with obvious pain, “This was a mistake.”

Me coming to Crossbow in the first place? Yes. I knew it was a mistake. A huge, fucking mistake that just kept getting worse.

“Holly, wait. Please.” Why the fuck was I begging her to stay? Why did she come here to begin with? She stopped,

though, and I could see it, understand it now. She was really confused and not sure what she was doing here, either. “Just... let me put my shorts on.”

She looked over at the table and moved to take a seat. She had a bit of a limp, too. She sat and rubbed that knee and I pulled on my shorts. I needed a shower before I walked into this room, but I needed an hour-long shower to wash this whole day off of me. Still, as funktastic as I had ever been in my life, I moved to that table and pulled the chair away. Took two steps back, dragging it with me, and took a seat.

A decorative graphic of a stylized arrow pointing to the right. The arrow's shaft is a horizontal line with a small arrowhead on the left and a tail on the right. The shaft passes through a central diamond-shaped frame. The top and bottom edges of the diamond are curved, resembling the wings of a feather or the fletching of an arrow. The word "Chapter" is written in a serif font above the shaft, and the number "12" is written in a larger, bold serif font below the shaft.

Chapter
12

Holly

I looked him over. It was obvious by the way she looked, he looked, the bed looked, what they had been doing. I sat there in various amounts of physical pain and knew that no matter what, I had to make things seem right between us or Apollo was really going to hurt me. Maybe end me. My freshman year of college. No one paid any damn attention to me all through high school and here, thanks to one screw up, I was really screwed.

This is why it shocked me as much as it did him, apparently, when I asked, “Where is your bracelet?”

He looked at his wrist then at me. I was not dealing with the same man I had been dealing with up to this point. I realized that I really fucked things up. Again, five hundred things rolling around in my head and I closed my eyes because I could remember the feel of that pistol against the base of my skull. *Three words and a gun to your head.*

I tried to stuff down the surge of emotions as I said, “I’ve never.”

“Never what, Holly?” he asked. Then he added, “I need you to say what you came here to say. I need to hear it. Even if you think I don’t want to. I just need to know, so tell me.”

I looked at his desk and got up. I crossed the room, picked up the notebook on top of it and the pen next to it. I hated that there was a note on that paper that had a question mark at the top and a list that started with *bring drinks, candy bars, flowers, maybe a book*, and that list ended with *what the fuck does she want?*

I had a beauty in the body of a beast, and I didn’t see that. I just saw ...what did I see? It was like... something I couldn’t reach in my own damn mind.

I wrote the word on the top of the page and showed him.

“You’re a virgin?” He shook his head no. I nodded. I scribbled some more though I could no longer say I had never been kissed. Didn’t know how to throw that into this timeline, so I wrote *only a kiss*.

“Then why did you put your room on the list?” he asked. “If you didn’t want someone?”

Yeah, that was the question of the year. I wrote out what happened, and he was getting impatient, or disgusted with himself because he kept adjusting his position in the seat. He looked like he just fucked someone, smelled like he just fucked someone, and I was really scribbling hard on that paper by the end of it because technically, he was mine and that someone should be me or no one at all.

I handed it to him and started to take a seat on the edge of the bed but thought better of it. Despite the pain in my knee, my newfound anger was enough to help me get to that chair at the table again.

“I didn’t know you were afraid of me. You opened your legs. It’s in the... I... don’t know how to apologize for this. I am so, so sorry. I was so caught up in my own head, my own fucking fantasy where someone... doesn’t matter. Really doesn’t matter. I’m going to take a shower. Clean this room. Clean up... this whole mess.” He was way too chipper when he said, “Hey, you can have your clothes back. Washed and folded.”

It gave me chills down my back. Then he said it, and I remembered the one friend I still had in high school by the end of it. By the end of summer, I had no one. No one had her anymore because she gave all her clothes away as part of a new year, new life party. She invited over people she hadn’t talked to in years. Made amends with them. Gave them her shit. I was with my parents on vacation, so I missed it. I remembered telling her how much I hated that I missed it. Her response still haunted me to this day. *You’re my best friend and I never want to hurt you, but things are about to change. You’ll be fine.*

I thought she was talking about college since we were going to different schools.

I wasn’t fine then, and I was far from fine now. This. I had to do something. I had to try.

Stormy said, “You can keep the clothes you have of mine or burn them in some *take back the power* ritual. I wish I could do that. But I can’t. Took back a little bit of power, but... it’s not enough. You know? It’s... never mind.”

I didn’t have a gun to my head, but I wasn’t going to let him point one at his either. I sucked in a breath. Knowing the stakes, and since it wasn’t about me, I asked, “Because you love her? You have history and she just left mad... because of me? Because she was mad when I came home in your clothes.”

“Yeah?” he asked. He smiled, nodded. “I hate her. She is my personal cancer. And my cousin.”

He then went into his bathroom and shut the door. I sat there processing that information and then worried he might be about to off himself in the shower. I texted Winston that I needed immediate coaching, or the team was going to be in serious trouble. I let him know where I was. I went to the bathroom and listened. I could hear the water moving as if he were showering. Winston popped in and then moved over and asked, “What the hell—?”

I cut him off, “I fell in the bathroom at the restaurant. Stupid wet floor. I... he’s... I think he might try to hurt himself.”

“What?” Winston shook his head. “No way.”

“I just feel it. I have the same feeling now that I had when Lizzy did it.” I fought back the tears.

“Lizzy?”

“Elizabeth. She was always with me. She was on the math ___”

“What?” He looked at me and shook his head. “Brown hair, crazy smart—” I nodded. “How? Why? How?”

“She overdosed,” I whispered. “The note she left said she was tired of fighting it. Whatever *it* was.” I looked at the door. “I didn’t mean to hurt him.”

“Of course, not.” Winston wiped my tears. “So... you’re here. He... won’t do that with you here, so you just... have to stay here.” He looked at the dresser and said, “You already have clothes. I’ll let Titus and Ripley know so they can take ‘football bro’ duty. Let’s get to morning, okay?”

“Okay.” I had to trust him. My life literally depended on saving Stormy’s life.

“You got this,” he said, “Open.”

The shower turned off. He winced and said, “I’m going to get something to help with that, too.”

He was out of there by the time Stormy opened the door. The big guy jolted and said, “Hey. You’re still here.”

I thought about what Winston just said and I opened my mouth. Even though it really hurt, I stuck out my tongue. He looked at it and said, “Holy shit. It’s still bleeding.”

Explained why I wanted to vomit. I kept swallowing down blood. It was not the same bad taste I always got, but it was awful, nonetheless.

“You might need to see a doctor for that.” He started to reach and then pulled back.

I reached for his hand, now he was clean, and pulled that giant mitt up to my face. I pressed my cheek against the palm and said, “I’m sorry, too. If I was brave—”

“Shhh. It hurts to talk, right?” he asked.

I nodded. More than he knew, and I didn’t know why either. Well, I knew why it physically hurt.

About that time, Winston popped back in the open door and said, “Hey, man. Sorry. I... whoa, girl. What happened to your face?”

“She fell.” Stormy spoke for me. “Is that—Doc?”

“Yeah, we were about to play some cards. I came to see if you liked to lose money. Thought after your day you could use some bro time. Doc, here... well, Doc’s here, so.” He turned to the Indian guy and said, “Rajesh, can you put your pre-med to use or what?”

Rajesh looked like he was from another continent, but sounded like he was from the southern states. “Well, come on, little lady. Let’s get a look at ya.”

I followed him into Stormy’s bathroom. As we passed Stormy, Rajesh said, “Put some clothes on, *Incredible Hulk*.” Once in the bathroom, I took a seat on the commode and followed his directions, hoping he really knew what the hell he was talking about. He said, “I’m not pre-med.” He sort of rolled his eyes. “I’m in med school. One college over, but I’m

renting one of the bedrooms in the Bunny House. They just like to make fun of me. I think it's because I'm Texan." He talked as he shined a little light into my mouth and poked at my tongue with another device from his pocket. "I can't help it everything is bigger in Texas." He turned the light off on that device and then smiled as he said, "Cept me. But compared to three generations back, I'm big. Hell, all that hormone and processed food did this body good."

I didn't want to laugh but I did a little.

He said, "She'll survive. I'll get the team doc to call in a round of antibiotics. You on any other medications?" I shook my head no. "None?"

I said, "No."

He tilted his head and asked in a lower whisper, "I mean birth control."

I shook my head. I had no need for thaaat—ooh, maybe I needed that. "Um."

"And a round of those antibiotics, too." He had his phone out and said, "Don't worry. If I can work some magic, you can get the shot. It's once every three months. Most of the bunnies prefer it. Don't have to skip to delay the inevitable, and don't have to take one every day. They have it here on campus, but it's after hours so...yes. Okay, she will hook you up."

This was surreal. I came to Crossbow because it was the smallest school my parents let me apply to. My mom was thrilled because she was a legacy here. She was worried I

might not make it as a Diva on another campus. Here, I was also a legacy. Well, if I failed at this mission, I would be dead. Maybe I'd get a dorm named after me. Holly Ringwald Building or Holly Hall. I sighed and shook my head. Nope. They would probably mess it up and name it after that beloved eighties' icon instead.

The med-school Texan clapped his hands together and said, "So. Who wants to go get some pills with her?"

A decorative graphic of a double-headed arrow with a central shaft. The arrowheads are stylized with a flame-like or leaf-like shape. The text "Chapter" and "13" is centered within the arrow's shaft.

Chapter
13

Winston

I really wished this giant had a kid right about now. Apollo could bitch about sharing Momma to someone else from this day forward. I was on *fix his damage duty*. I knew Apollo hurt her because she was jeopardizing Momma's happiness. Got through this time for damn sure. She was Team Storm now.

So was I. Shit. After watching his cousin strut out of our house like she just fucked someone, I put two and three together to realize I had at least five problems now, and Holly might be right. Storm might be in trouble in the brain department. He might have a spotless record, but Essie was well known in this house as a viper. One lying in wait to hurt Harpy for taking Ripley, or Dane as Essie still called him. She made no attempt to hide her hatred of our queen when she thought no one was paying attention. I was always paying attention in that sorority house.

Stormy said, "You should take her. I'm going to finish getting this room ready."

That did not make a lick of sense. "I've been drinking. I can't drive." I looked around and indicated, "Doc's gone, so..."

you're my wheels. She probably shouldn't be driving."

"My car is back at that place." He didn't even care which was not a good sign since he had a luxury SUV... just like Essie's.

"We can take my car." She finally got in this game and helped me. She turned those big green eyes up at him and said, "It really hurts."

Storm looked so aggravated. Still, he looked down at her and she looked up at him and I knew she had to be with him as much as possible because the big guy was in love. I'd seen that look on three other reluctant faces. I wondered if they had met one another on a different day in a different situation if they would just be a happy couple. Instead... here I was, doing repairs.

Storm said, "Fine. Let's go."

She had a luxury car. I actually had a motorcycle and a sports car because I had a significant amount of life insurance and other inheritance money to spend at my disposal. I did not flaunt those details, well, outside of the vehicles. She drove. Storm tried to sit in the back, but I indicated my size and he opted for the front instead. He was a total wreck.

She was not much better. She went into the urgent care with a pharmacy attached at the furthest fucking place to get a prescription Rajesh could apparently find. I stayed in the car with Storm. I said, "We should go get your car."

"Why?" he asked.

“You don’t want to leave it there overnight. Might get towed. Stolen. You need it to go to class. You have a game Friday night. Do I need to keep going?” He had his head back against the headrest and his eyes were closed. He was tuned out.

“Whatever.” Then he lifted his head and said with a bit more energy, “Okay. Yeah. That will work.”

Nope. Not the way he thought it would.

She walked out of the drug store with a little, brown bag. Once she was in the car, I said, “Let’s go get his car.”

She nodded and we were a silent trio watching the sunset on this long, ridiculous, exhausting day.

Once there, Storm got out and immediately started for the car. Not a word of farewell to either of us. I said, “Go with him. Tell him I needed to borrow your car and you need to go home, rest.”

“I do need to go home.” She took the bag and got out. I jumped up to the front seat and took off. He had no choice now. He could take her home or leave her there, but she had to be with him so he couldn’t do anything else stupid and not account for her.

I needed help with these two. Real help. My psychology classes were working overtime since the frat moved out of the old house and onto the off-campus property. I lived in a dorm back then. My freshman year was so much less complicated. I missed dorm life when the worst thing I had to worry about

was walking in on Rajesh's younger brother, known to the frat as Squeak, trying to masturbate quietly in the bathroom in the middle of the night. Scared both of us. One of us enjoyed it. I shivered. I'd been traumatized by college life, too. I laughed. Maybe Holly needed a friend. I had a friend. A good one I could trust. Not with all the details, but Autumn was not the kind of girl to leave someone in distress if they needed help. Both of them needed help and I was but one man.



Chapter

14

Storm

When all I wanted was to be near this girl, she couldn't even look at me longer than a second. Now that I wanted her to leave me the fuck alone so I could take my leave in peace, she wouldn't give me a minute to breathe without her sharing my oxygen.

"I thought he had been drinking." I glared at her.

"Earlier. I... he said he needed to go, and I'm exhausted." She had all kinds of words for me now, even if she was talking to the paper bag her meds were in.

I had to settle up that this was a delay in my plans. I probably needed to do a few more things anyway. Make sure all my accounts were situated. The more time I had to think about it, the more I was thinking about other people and that was not helping me stick to my current plan. "Fine."

"I don't want to go back to my room." She gripped the bag harder. "I'll see *her*."

"You'll see *me* in my room." Damn this woman was confusing as fuck. "I'm your monster, remember? No. You

need to go to your room. Deal with it.”

“You should come with me then.” She looked over at me and gulped.

“Are you serious right now?” I shook my head. “Why would I do that?”

She thought about it. A lot, if her silence was an indicator. As we pulled up to the sorority house and I pulled in behind the SUV exactly like mine, she found words again. “Because that bitch needs to be reminded that you signed that contract with me, not her. Could you imagine if this was reverse? That I took you from her for a...” She trailed off.

My brow was all kinds of high on my forehead. She had my full attention and just so she understood the disgusting, awful, undeniable truth about the actual monster that I am, I reminded her, “She’s my cousin.”

Her head swiveled and I shrugged. *Get out. Run inside.* Be horrified so I can go back to plan A where I no longer have to live with the guilt, the manipulation, or the fear anymore. She swallowed and then said, “I don’t care if she’s your twin sister. This isn’t that old TV show. She does not get to be perfect and have everything. She doesn’t get to take things from me. You don’t want her to, do you?”

No. I did not.

Back then, I probably could have just told someone. Before it was beyond the lines that no one would want to know we

crossed. I didn't though. I loved her. Trusted her, and each year we got older, I loved her more and she— "Fine."

Holly waited until I was out of the car and around the front of it. I realized a little late that she might be expecting me to open her door, but she opened it and got out. In a brief bout of casual and honest conversation, I admitted, "I never know if I'm supposed to do that these days."

"It's okay." She moved over and steeled her spine. It was like pissing Essie off was a form of battle armor for this woman who was obviously, and for at least one known reason, still battling some fear of me. She looked at my hand and then moved hers toward it. "We have to show a united front."

"Sure." Why the fuck not?

"You have clothes here, so you can stay." She slid her hand into mine, and I hated the sparks that it sent through me. Hated that for whatever reason, I was drawn to women who either didn't want me or shouldn't. I was never a religious man, but I knew if there was in fact a hell, I would be going straight to it, so what difference did any of this make?

"Whatever." I entered that house with her. There were a few girls watching television in the main room, some eating at a table, and a brunette that just lost all the joy she was previously exhibiting. That gave me a whole new burst of energy. I smiled at Essie and then swooped Holly up into my arms and carried her up to room 405.

She was a trembling, little mess when I put her back on her feet, but she wanted to do this, and now, so did I.

I pulled off my shirt, kicked out of my shoes, dropped my shorts, went straight to her bed, and as I got into it, I said, “I don’t have classes tomorrow, but we have a game. Let me sleep.”

A decorative graphic of a stylized arrow pointing to the right, with a horizontal shaft and a pointed tip. The shaft is a solid line, and the arrowhead is a curved shape with a small notch at the tip. The arrow is centered horizontally and vertically within the page.

Chapter
15

Holly

I grabbed some clothes, went to my bathroom, texted the whole situation to Winston, took my antibiotics, removed the little bandage from my birth control shot, and thanked my lucky stars that was a location they could provide it. They were attached to a clinic. They had nurses on staff and an urgent care facility in the back. Explained why we had to go to this particular location when there were a dozen pharmacies closer to where we were. I showered, dressed in my pajamas, and went into my room where a giant of a man was taking up the majority of my bed.

I had two options. Sleep next to him and know when or if he got up. Sleep on the floor and hope he didn't step on me. My knee hurt, my head hurt, my whole face hurt. I thought about that pistol at the back of my head and pushed past whatever illogical, inexplicable fear I had of this giant teddy bear. *Huh*. That helped. I once had a giant teddy bear. I loved that thing. Used to cuddle up to it at night. Then my mom redid my room and donated it because I was too old to be sleeping with a teddy bear. She replaced it with a figurine that she put on the

shelf where she had also removed all my kid books. Like I wasn't saving those for my own house or life someday.

I sat slowly onto the bed next to him and considered, I had thought about that...once. Like, when I was younger. I did think about family and...boys and...it hurt so much to think about it all. I just needed to rest. I laid next to him and tried to curl up into as small of a ball that I could make.

The next time I opened my eyes, I was looking at his back. Dark-brown hair was cut short but long enough at the top it curled. Broad, tanned shoulders, a long spine, and the hint of a tan line where his boxer-briefs band was. I closed my eyes again and dreamed the craziest dream I had ever had in my whole life.

"I'm Holly." I smiled up at him. Well, someone. Not him. But someone like Stormy. Bigger than me by a lot. Handsome, holding a football.

"Deitrick. You here on vacay?" he asked and then sent the ball sailing toward some other guys.

"Yes, you?" I tried not to blush. He shook his head no, then smiled. "You live here? That must be awesome."

He caught the ball and threw it back. "It's not too bad. You want to take a walk?"

"Yes!" I was way too excited. He was so handsome. So confident. My mom would be so proud of me if I brought him home for dinner.

"Cabana is this way." He extended his arm.

I tried not to giggle as we walked that way. Once we were at the cabana, I realized it was still part of the rentals.

He closed the door and said, "You're cute."

"Thanks." I walked toward the mini-fridge in this changing space meant for beach goers as a transition or staging place between the sand and their beach house and asked, "Do you want something to drink?"

"Shouldn't I be offering you something?" he asked and laughed. Something was changing about the whole scene, him, how he sounded. He asked, "How old are you?"

"Thirteen. Fourteen in two weeks." I wanted to be older.

"Thirteen. Wow. I thought you were my age, I'm seventeen." He moved around to where I stood with the bottle of water and said, "No boyfriend? Pretty girl like you is sure to have a boyfriend."

Something started to ache in my chest. I needed to move. Leave. Something was not right here. The whole scene shifted, the inside turned dark, outside it was like a thunderstorm had dropped down, but...I shook my head, unable to think.

"Holly, Holly. What school do you go to?" he asked. When I looked up at him, he had blood red eyes, fangs. He was turning into a monster. "Private school or public?"

"Everest Academy." I whispered and looked for an exit before my heart exploded. "You?"

"I play football at Friedman." He was right in front of me, and I realized just how big he was compared to me. The

moment his hand came up to touch my face, I knew I made a mistake talking to him. “We’ll never see each other again, Holly.”

“I should go—”

But he didn’t let me go. He put his hand on my face, on my mouth, and told me not to move or say a word or he would kill me. And I believed him. Then the monster with the claws and fangs and red eyes raped me and left me there, all scratched up, dying, bleeding, and—

“Holly? Ouch. Shit. Why are you hitting me?” I felt large hands move around my wrists, and as I opened my eyes, I saw intense, confused, deep grey ones looking back at me. I broke down and started crying. He eased his grip and asked, “What happened?”

“I’m not a virgin.” I sobbed.

“We didn’t do anything. In fact, until you turned my kidney into a punching bag, I was still sleeping.” He reached and retreated. “I don’t know what to do here.”

“I have an appointment today. I... don’t know if it was real or just a dream.” I knew my mouth still hurt.

“I should leave. I—” He started to push up.

No. I could not let him leave. Not yet. Not until I got him back to Sophomore House and into someone else’s care.

I reached for him, and he said, “I have a game tonight.”

“Stay.” I shifted closer to his chest and remembered he was a teddy bear not a monster. “Please.”

His hand moved and then settled high on my back. He said with an exasperated sigh, “Fine.”

He didn’t want to be with me now. He had *only* wanted to be with me, and now, he hated me. Probably as much as the woman he did want to be with but shouldn’t.

Once we got through the awkward as fuck afternoon where I woke up in his arms only to realize that I had left my tears, snot, and drool all over his chest, I was able to pick up my car and go to my doctor appointment. I sat in the chair and explained the dream. I had so many more issues, but that was one I needed to deal with and thankfully that dream gave me an outlet to talk about it.

The doctor looked at the computer screen and then dropped some new knowledge on me. “Well, it says right here you had several sessions of therapeutic hypnosis. Too many, to be honest with you. I’m guessing you’ve encountered something or someone who is triggering that memory stronger than the method that buried it for you because it also says right here you were... assaulted when you were thirteen, during a stay at your family beach house.” She was reading and I couldn’t tell if she was convinced that was true based on her expression. “I...will need to look into this a bit more...if that is okay with you.”

“I’m not a virgin.” I watched the woman’s face as she looked from the screen to focus on me. Her expression softened as I explained. “I was never interested in sex. In my body. I thought I was intellectually smarter than that, than my hormones. My dad signed those papers, right?”

She looked and then nodded. “Why?”

“Because my mom would never agree to that type of therapy. You know who he is.” Now, I did, too. I continued, “You know why it would be important for his only daughter to not run around like a head case.” I smiled, but I was not happy.

“Well. Now you know at least some parts of it was real. What’s the trigger?” she asked.

“I was interested in a football player. He’s... large. I freeze up around him.” I looked at the floor and asked, “Am I broken? Like, will I never be able to be with him?”

“You’re not broken, Holly. You can’t expect to know what to do when you don’t even know what is going on. Now you know some of it. Now, you can decide for yourself if this is too much of a resemblance or if you can get past it, but thanks to suppressing whatever this is, and I can barely read the writing. It truly looks like...well, anyway, these notes are not transcribed.” She was looking at the screen disapprovingly again. She shook her head and said, “You have to deal with it either way.” She wrote some notes on her pad. “I have your permission to—”

“Yes. Whatever. Do what you need to do to read my file, but I need to deal with this current situation not the scribbles in

my past.” I was getting really aggravated. It was a new feeling. I gulped down the sour taste that washed through my mouth. “Did he... make me... like this?”

“Like what? It says here he influenced behavior to...” she sighed. “Improve ladylike behavior.”

“How?” I asked. And then I had a new question, “What would be a sign that he controlled things with that? Like...if I wanted a big bowl of sugar sweetened—” I made a face. “I get a bad taste in my mouth.”

She winced. “Holly.”

“He did that to me. How. Do I.” I was gritting my teeth and trying to remain polite when inside of me I was about to rage no matter how disgusting it tasted on my tongue. “Fix. This?”

“Everyone is different, but here is a list of some groups. Some podcasts, some websites. Ignore the one your father created for his philosophy as he obviously is a huge proponent of erasure therapy in addition to what he calls subliminal influence. He may have taken that away or just altered it. I don’t know yet. I’ll do my best to find out.”

“No hypnosis.” I was done with that shit for sure.

“No. I don’t practice it anyway. Just... do your best to recover your memories. Think about the next school year, choices you made, people you were around. It’s possible those memories are tainted because of those alterations but maybe if you can sort through some of the good ones, you can get closer to truth, unlock others that are suppressed as well.” She typed

a moment then looked up at me again. She was holding back some emotions of her own as she said, “He wasn’t trying to help you quit smoking. I don’t want to believe he hurt you like this on purpose. He’s just another person manipulating something they don’t fully understand to suit their own needs. In the process, he hurt you and this potential partner of yours way more than he could have predicted.”

“So, there *is* more?” I asked.

“It’s layers and layers of memory, events, and he worked on this from that summer to the last meeting you had with him.” She turned the screen toward me. “Last year.”

Son of a bitch! No wonder I was perfect in high school. He ‘brain poisoned’ me to be who he wanted me to be.

You are a Brave Diva, Holly. You have always been a spitfire. That flame will come back. You have to want it though, fight for it.

Oh fuck. My father also did sessions with my best friend. She was tired of... she resisted all this shit. I remember her saying things like, *I don’t care if I’m fat. I want to be happy not eat salad every day.*

My mother’s voice rang that mantra again through my head.

I had lost myself and didn’t even know it. So much made sense about why I didn’t really know who I was anymore. Why I felt like a shell of a person. “So... If I just... I don’t know, just... went... wild—”

“It wouldn’t be the first time someone had that reaction to an assault. Many women begin to act out as a means of establishing they have control. I don’t recommend it, Holly. I recommend you do the work and take the steps to heal, instead. Make sure what you remember is accurate.” I hadn’t told her how he turned into a monster. Just the part about the assault. I was already feeling crazy on a whole new level, didn’t want to add the fangs and claws into it.

I nodded.

“You sure you don’t want a prescription? It could help.” I shook my head no. My football-playing boyfriend might try to overdose on it. His sanity, mine. I was about to laugh. No. I had no intention of helping myself to anything other than everything I ever thought I might want and then felt some terrible taste, stomachache, or strange little restraint tug at me, so I never got it, did it, tried it. He didn’t want me to be wild. I was just a girl. A girl about to go wild because I didn’t see a way to save myself, much less Stormy, so... yeah. It was about to get hectic.

She said, “Okay then, let’s revisit in two weeks and I’ll put the script in anyway just in case you change your mind, okay?”

I smiled and said, “Sounds good.”

I crumpled up that paper and threw it in the trash on my way out of the building. I got into my car and went right to the bakery where I got the smallest cupcake they made. I arrived at Sophomore House an hour later with three big and one

small box of gourmet cupcakes. I handed the huge boxes over to Winston and took the one off the top and asked, “Is he here?”

“Yeah, he’s sleeping. They still have hours before the game, so—Where are you going?” he asked.

I held up the box and said, “Therapy.”

I was so chill and not nervous at all when I entered his room, put those cupcakes on the table, and brought one over to that sleeping giant. He was on top of his blankets, sort of passed out there. This would not do. I touched his hand and it twitched. Nothing scary about that. I was right where I wanted to be thirty-five minutes after taking the extra little pill I got from the *special menu* along with the cupcakes.

His hand felt...amazing. Like...so good. I slid my hand up his arm and his eyes opened. I said, “Hi.”

“Hey. You okay?” he asked.

“I brought you cupcakes.” I smiled down at him.

He looked so confused. I touched his brow, that crinkled spot between them and said, “Don’t frown, Stormy. I’m going to make it all up to you. Right now.”

“What did you do in therapy?” he asked. Probably because I was sliding my hands all over him.

Damn. This was a lot of hot, male body to explore. “You feel so good, Stormy. Take this shirt off.”

“What?” he asked. “I don’t understand.”

“This is therapy.” I looked at him seriously and then leaned over and put my lips on his. Damn, he had the best lips in the entire fucking world. “You are my therapy. I need you to do this with me.”

“Do what?” he asked.

I looked down at him and said what I knew might hurt him, but also might get him into this while I was able to do it without all the extra shit tacked on. If I could do this once, now, aware but without inhibition, then I could do it again. He needed me to keep him alive and I needed to finally start living. I pulled my shirt up and over my head. His eyes went wide. I unlatched the bra and removed it. I pulled his hands to my breasts and said, “Fuck me like I’m the girl you really want to be fucking.”



Chapter

16

Storm

I was not putting my tongue in her mouth or letting her put hers in mine. Once she took her top and bra off, I got a bit distracted by the boobs again. My dick was awake, and after wanting her for a month, I could have her. I shoved everything else aside. This was an excellent way to go out on top. Part of being in this mess, fucking Essie again, was because of this crazy lady right here. Why not? My new motto in life, *why the fuck not?*

They must have given her something at the doctor appointment that helped with anxiety, because she showed zero signs of reservation about anything she was doing, including pulling my pants off. “All right, now. Um...”

“You’re so big.” She reached, put her hand around my dick and then said, “And you’ve licked me. So many times, and I didn’t even send you a thank you basket.”

A what?

“That’s not necessary but...fuck...okay. I can’t exactly argue with that.” Not at the moment. Not when her tongue was...wait, didn’t she cut her tongue? Was it...who cares? It’s

her tongue. Didn't seem to be hurting her right now. Not when she was putting her mouth around...whoa, fuck. I closed my eyes, opened them. Was this real? Happening?

Apparently so but, she was not ready for that. I stilled her hips before she could just sit down on my dick and probably hurt us both. "Hold on."

"Are you going to touch me now?" she asked.

"You want that?" I wanted but I also wanted her to say it. *Needed* her to say it.

"Yes." She tried to sit again. I held her firm in place. "So bad."

I turned her around and brought her against me, her back on my chest. I shifted her legs so she was open, I was between them, but I could touch her so much better this way. "Show me how you touch yourself."

"I don't." She stilled.

"No?" I asked. She shook her head.

Then she reached for my hands and said, "Show me how you touch me."

My hips rolled up, the tip of my dick touched entry, but I was not going in just yet. I moved hands over her slow, easy, and she was overly stimulated by everything. It was refreshing and also a bit worrisome, but I couldn't keep worrying about this woman. I needed to do this, enjoy it, and follow through with my next plan. I had plenty of time to study while she was at the doctor's office. Winston finally left me alone when I

threatened to punch him if he showed up in my doorway again.

I moved from her breasts to her pussy and showed her more than one technique. She was a wiggling, gripping, the good kind of trembling mess that kept begging me for more. Once she was really slick and I could move two fingers in and out without resistance, I adjusted her again and began the slow breach into that passage. “Fuck.”

She was clenching me in the throes of her third orgasm when I was mid-dick into her. I groaned because that felt amazing. Allowed me to get further, faster. She surprised me by sitting up, then she began riding me in that reverse cowgirl. I liked this view but wanted to see her face. I tickled the bottom of her feet and she laughed which did lots of interesting things to her inside grip. “Turn around.”

I needed to see her face. If this was the only time we would ever do this, I wanted this to be the memory I held onto as I let go of everything else. I wanted to see her happy, not horrified as she looked at me.

She lifted, shifted, and as she climbed back onto me, seated, she let out a sound that made my toes curl. “Do that again, babe.”

Fuck. No. Do not give her a pet name. That is nonsense. She is not the one. She is not the girl you will spend the rest of your life with. I continued to give myself this pep talk but when she lifted all the way off and then seated again making

that same sound, my toes did the same curl as she asked, “You like that, Stormy?”

“I love that.” I would like to stop talking. I knew she was going to do it again and I might let entirely too many of my emotions overrun my brain, so I did something crazy. I reached for the cupcake on my night stand and that toppled her a bit.

“What are you doing?” she asked as she giggled. I loved her laugh.

“I wanted a bite.” I took one. Fuck. This woman came prepared to fuck me in many ways this afternoon. These were my weakness. I tried to keep a strict diet and exercise routine, but why? I could eat this tonight. Hell, I could eat that whole box. My sounds made her giggle some more. I offered her a bite and she took it. Her sounds reminded me that I could be fucking her right now. I took another bite, handed the cupcake to her, and moved over her, slowly, cautiously so I didn’t scare her.

Her eyes closed and she let out another soft moan, but I didn’t know if it was me, the icing she just ate, or both. She swiped it with her finger then put it up to my mouth. I hadn’t really been a guy with kinks, well, other than the Essie one, but we did things her way and there was no way this would have been an option. I licked, sucked, and then she pulled that finger out, looked up at me as I eased into her again. Then things just...took a turn and I remembered Ripley saying I needed to be an animal and let her be the wild creature she

naturally was. I needed some of those anxiety pills. For sure because this couldn't be the only time we did this. Not now. No. I... needed to hold on a little longer and do this again. At least one more time.



Chapter

17

Holly

That cupcake was amazing. Not a special one because I knew they might test the players and I didn't want him to get in trouble. Those were also on the special menu, but I needed more than I thought a little THC could do. My whole mission here was to heal him, me, and he felt so fucking good inside of me I dropped the cupcake. Instead of picking it up, I sort of smeared it a bit. Then he leaned in and licked the icing and I just...started winding up for another orgasm the more enthusiastic he became. The...harder he pushed. I shoved the last bite of cake along with some smeared icing into his mouth as I said, "More, harder."

He closed his eyes and then gave a testing thrust. I wrapped my legs around him, pulled up to meet him thrust for thrust as the wave rolled, his tongue licked through the icing on my chest, up my neck, and then we were kissing and I felt the orgasm crash through me in wave after pulsating wave as I pulled away from his perfect lips and called out for him. He punched his hips forward in short jerks as he came inside of me and I had a brief moment of wondering how long it would take for that shot to work.

I couldn't process that correctly so I wound up giggling and he smiled down and said, "I love it when you laugh, babe." He shook his head, "Sorry." He gulped. "Holly."

I started to touch his hair, but then laughed again because of the icing. I showed him the hand and he moved his head into it anyway. Damn, he really needed some affection. That hit me harder than I thought it could. I touched his soft hair and played with a curl as he closed his eyes and just let me. Let me do anything I wanted. It was a powerful feeling in my current state, and I said, "You can call me babe."

His eyes blinked open, and he considered me a moment and said, "You don't mind?"

I shook my head. Smiled and said, "You're mine, remember?"

He started to get hard again. I could feel it since he was still inside me. "Yours?"

I nodded. Hell yes, he was. I decided that right then and there, too. After all this shit, yeah. This man was going to live, and he was going to make me happy, dammit. I deserved that. So did he. "Mine."

He whispered against my throat as he pushed into me again, "Yours?"

"All mine." I let my nails bite his shoulder and he groaned and pushed harder. "Harder." He obliged, fuck. That was something else. Different. Maybe. "Harder. Fuck me like you mean it."

Then the words he probably needed to say to some woman his whole life if his reactions said anything, fell against my ear and I knew this was life and death, for both of us, so I returned the sentiment, because in a way, I did. “I love you, too.”

His second release was right as I peaked on my fourth. He was something else for damn sure. We laid there, a hot, sticky-sweet pile of bodies. He had at least shifted us to our sides, so he didn’t crush me. He touched a spot on my chest and then licked that icing off his finger. He said, “This is the best day of my life.” I felt that so viscerally it made tears spring to my eyes “No. No, I don’t want you to be upset.”

“I’m sorry. I.” I sniffed, wiped and he smiled, snickered.

“It’s icing.” He wiped that spot with his thumb and showed me before he ate it. “I don’t know what they gave you, but... I’m really glad you took it.” He wiped my other cheek and said, “When I walked into your room and saw you sitting in your bed, listening to music, relaxed, peaceful. I... saw this hair, these big green eyes and... I thought I was the luckiest guy in the building.”

I closed my eyes and shed more tears. He said, “Hey. I was right. It... took a few dark turns, but...I was right, Holly. I am. You’re here and I... have a reason...” He stopped but I knew without him saying it.

I couldn’t keep making him sad, too, so I smiled and said, “We’re a mess.”

“Yeah.” He nodded. “Huge mess.”

I closed my eyes, and when I opened them again, I had a pounding headache. I looked at the man freshly showered and asked, “Where are you going?”

“I have a game tonight.” He looked me over with a smile.

I touched my chest and felt the material. I had on my underwear, too. “I had the strangest dream.”

He laughed and said, “Yeah. That wasn’t a dream, Babe. You passed out. I couldn’t leave you like that, and I do have a game tonight so I couldn’t let you stay there naked either.” He looked at the dresser, the desk, and asked, “Are you...did you want...? I mean, you don’t have to.”

I absolutely had to. “Yes. Do you want me to drive or...how does this work?”

“I got you.” He smiled and then he puffed out a breath and asked, “What now?”

Winston said, “Checking to make sure you had everything and to see if she wanted to join some of the boosters in the skybox or if she wanted to hang with me and some of the brothers in the stands.”

I did not weigh in on this at all. Stormy considered it and said, “Take my car, but she’ll be bringing me back in it so plan for that.”

“Will do.” Winston looked at me and said, “You have about an hour before you need to get ready. You set?”

“Pick me up at Diva House. I need to grab some things. We’re staying here this weekend?” I asked Stormy and he smiled, nodded. “Okay. I’ll pack for the weekend.”

Winston said, “Awesome. We have a poker game on Saturday. I hope you bring someone’s money!”

Shit. I did not know how to play poker. My molly haze was real, and I wondered if this was what a hangover felt like. I was trying to remember everything the way it felt then, when it was all really amazing. I knew he could make things feel good, but that was over the top good. I worried that while it had definitely done its magic to lower my inhibitions enough to have sex with this man, it also numbed some things like my cut tongue and aching knee which just buckled.

“Whoa.” Stormy moved and had his hand on my arm and the other on my back to steady me. “You okay?”

I looked at the knee and it was swollen again. “Need to ice that.”

He moved to his knees and slid his hand down over my leg. “Damn. You really...took a...turn around.”

I did not want to turn around, but I did. He slid a finger down and asked, “Is that...did you run into something? I don’t understand these injuries. Unless you got in a fight.” He laughed.

I was not fast enough to handle this situation. He touched that knee, and I sucked in a breath. He looked up at me and I realized something Harper Harrington already knew. A man

who loved you was a dangerous weapon. Apollo did this because I was a threat to his woman's happiness. I pushed my fingers into Stormy's hair and said, "After you left and Winston left I... had a drink and... I don't do that often, so..."

He stroked that knee and said, "Winston will bring you a knee brace in the right size. They make them now where they have the cold or heat packs. I'll be sure you get both, but you need to rest this. I wanted you in the stands with them so I could see you, but—"

"I will be. I don't want to watch my first game in a sky box." I smiled as he stood, and I looked up as he looked down. I could read the question, so I said, "Yes. It is the first real football game I have ever attended."

"Then I'll make it worth it." He touched my face so gently, tenderly. He leaned down and put his lips to my cheek and said, "I know. I read your texts while you were sleeping. I know."

My heart was thundering. I looked up at him and he said, "I don't care. I just...want this fantasy for a moment. This afternoon...what you did. I... just want a little more of that."

"Stormy—" I started.

But he cut me off with a brief press of his lips to mine before said, "I meant it, and I'm going to pretend you did, too. Until I can't anymore."

Then he turned and walked out.

Fuuuuhhhkkk. One step forward, three flights back, and it felt like I hit every stair on the way.

A decorative graphic of a stylized arrow pointing to the right. The arrow's shaft is a horizontal line with a small arrowhead on the left and a tail on the right. The shaft passes through the center of a diamond-shaped frame. The top and bottom edges of the diamond are curved, resembling the fletching of an arrow. The word "Chapter" is written in a serif font above the shaft, and the number "18" is written in a larger, bold serif font below the shaft.

Chapter
18

Storm

My whole, fucking life was a lie. Just one big, gigantic lie and filled with other liars, just like me. Only, I hadn't been lying.

Still, this afternoon...that was...real, right? Like part of it anyway. She was...free and we had fun. I...

"Stormy!" Titus clapped my shoulder and I jolted. "What the fuck is going on, man?"

"I'm good." Lies and more lies. Ripley was staring at me. I asked, "What?"

"Liar." I hated his ass, too.

"I'm fine to play. Life off this field is a bit fucked at the moment. This. This I can do." I looked between them, around at the rest of the team getting ready. "For them, for you. I'm not going to fuck-up out there." I shrugged. "Even if I'm a bit fucked-up in here right now."

I pointed to my head. Ripley snorted a laugh.

He said, "You're fucked-up right here, man." He poked me in the chest. "I know you. I fucking was you."

I laughed. Snorted a decent sound and said, “Oh, man. I needed that. You. You really don’t know how right you are about that. See, the first time she brought you home was because I told her I was bringing someone home. Needed a buffer. Something. So. You showed up. Kept showing up. I loved you for that. Truly.”

His expression reflected the question, “What the fuck are you talking about?”

I leaned in a bit and whispered, “Essie.”

He tilted his head and said, “Your cousin? Okay. What abooout? Ooohshit.” He shook his head. “No.”

“Yeah. But that is so tip of the iceberg, man. Wanna hear the rest?” I looked at the clock. “We have a few. So, you know exactly how much I am *not* bringing on that field with me, I will share. I accidentally sexually assaulted Holly.”

Titus looked at me, “What?”

They had moved over to where I was, so this was a relatively private conversation. “Yup. See, she was scared to death, so mute and unmoving, but she put her room on the list and I thought she was just being a... Diva. Turns out...nope. I reminded her of a guy who did hurt her, so all three times I gave her orgasms, she didn’t even want one.”

Ripley nodded. “Rough start, but I mean, she was with you earlier, though, so you figured that out, she knows you didn’t know and... what? Good or, what?”

“She thinks I’m suicidal, so she and her little love interest, Winston, have been babysitting me.” I smiled at them. “Guess you really didn’t care enough to take your shift.”

Titus looked at me and said, “Not if you don’t care enough to step up. No. We are not fucking babysitting you. You think *I* don’t know what you feel?”

“You have to see that girl every day?” I remembered him going through some stuff but not all the details.

“I see that girl every morning, noon, and night. So does he. So does Apollo. Look, this...I can help with this. The other thing. I don’t want to invest my time if you’re going to check out. Cruel, maybe. But you would be fucking all of us with that action, so fuck you if that’s your choice.” He was looking me in the eye and telling the truth as he saw it.

“I needed time to think, process. Then...yeah. I didn’t care. Now...I don’t know what I’m doing, but real or fake love on her end, I wouldn’t want her to feel like it was her fault. Like she failed. So. I’m here.” I looked him in the eyes and told him the truth as I saw it.

“Okay, then. You need me to babysit you, I’d be glad to.” He smiled, nodded. I snickered.

I looked at Ripley and he said, “You want to hang out with Rip? He’s five. I got a kid to take care of. Not adding to that roster anytime soon.” Then as Titus left, he looked at me and said, “I don’t blame you. Essie’s hot. If she were my cousin, I’d probably still fuck her, too. But like, once. So... cut it loose. She’s poison.”

“Harper isn’t?” I asked and for the first time in my life regarding that situation, felt some relief and not judgment.

“Harpy’s the fucking devil. Don’t piss her off, man. Apollo.” He snorted a sound. “Let’s just say he gets rid of her problems. Except us, but I think that’s because she needs the rotation. Seriously. Two athletes and one psycho, and some weekends she’s the only one still walking straight.” I laughed because he pushed me. “You could partner with worse people than Winston. He could help that. Think about how much time you want to spend dealing with girl drama. Titus handles at that mushy shit. Teamwork makes the dream work.”

We picked up running and putting our helmets on as we made our way to the field. When I had a chance to look around, I looked up in the stands in the XIX block, and Holly was there with Winston and some of the guys from the math team. She waved, and I waved back. He gave me a rock-on symbol with his hand, and I decided maybe Ripley was right. That guy had already done a lot to help me with that woman. Did I care about their connection? In fact, if they had each other long enough, they might not need me in the mix at all. It was time to consider the entire playbook. What path kept me alive. What paths provided an exit. I didn’t lie. I was here...for now. This season for sure, but after that...I’d have to reassess as it went.

After the game, I remembered that I had a confusing—and probably confused—woman pretending to actually care about

me waiting at my vehicle to take me home where she would be spending the entire weekend. I smiled. Well, it was better than the woman waiting on me before I could get out of the building.

Essie asked, “Does she know who I am?”

“Yup.” I smiled as I looked at her horrified expression.

Ripley passed with Titus and said loudly, “Cut it loose!”

I shrugged, “He knows, too.”

She stepped back. “You can’t tell people!”

I started walking and said, “Then stop giving me something to talk about.”

She stood there all mouth agape and shocked. Yeah. I should have said something long ago. I approached the vehicle and Holly was all lit up with excitement that didn’t seem to fade as much as I anticipated it would upon seeing me. She said, “You won!”

“The team won,” I clarified. Ripley had the winning touchdown, so maybe he could take credit, but I could not.

“It was...wow, you know?” she asked.

Winston shook his head and said, “Good game, man.”

I snickered. Then I said, “I’m starving. I need to get food.”

Winston said, “I’m heading with the fam to get my carbo load on. Your big game was tonight. I have a competition in the morning.” He then held his hands out and moved like he was operating a controller.

I laughed. She didn't get it. Yeah, I needed this man in my life as much as this woman. "Where? I'll take you. Maybe grab dinner there, too."

"Yeah?" He looked a bit skeptically from me to her then back and shrugged. "Saves the fee for a ride. They would not wait for me."

"They?" I asked as we piled into my car. Holly sat in the back and Winston up front. I snickered. I was liking him more by the minute. Still only wanted to have sex with her.

"The family." He shook his head. "It'll be fine. Maybe fun. Awkward as hell, but I'm usually the only one feeling that so this should be good."

A decorative graphic of a stylized arrow pointing to the right. The arrow's shaft is a horizontal line with a small arrowhead on the left and a tail with three feathers on the right. The shaft passes through a diamond-shaped frame with curved, flame-like edges.

Chapter
19

Winston

It was only fair that I brought them to dinner with me. Apollo wanted me to babysit, and I was doing just that. Bringing my new children with me.

“Winston!” Rip, Ripley’s son let go of Harper’s hand and ran over to me. I gave him a hug and then he looked up at Storm and said, “Tor!”

Torden Storm. I didn’t blame him for going by his last name. His parents did not set him up for success with that one. I had looked it up and found that it meant thunder. Yeah, it was accurate. He was most definitely a thunderstorm these days. My job was to keep him from turning into a tornado.

Storm made a big production of lifting the heavy dude up as he said, “Rip! My God, man. You are getting bigger all the time!”

Rip laughed and nodded as Storm set him on his feet. Then the kid looked at Holly and said, “Hi.”

She smiled sweetly and said, “Hello. I’m Holly.”

“You’re very pretty.” Rip was forward for a five-year-old.

“Thank you.” She blushed so deeply. It was like no one ever told her that stuff. She was a knockout. She had to know it.

She looked up at Ripley as he indicated to Rip he should head into the private room where we would be having dinner. Ripley looked at me, Storm, and said, “This should be an interesting dinner. Right this way.”

He indicated, because of course, he wanted us to walk into that room in a certain order. Me first, Storm, and then Holly. Apollo, sitting at the head of the table, went from happy, to okay, to unreadable. I was pretty sure Harpy did not know he had increased the pressure on Holly to comply with her new situation based on the fact that Harpy seemed really happy to see everyone here. This was evident when she said to Apollo, “I told you it would work out.”

He looked at her and smiled as he said, “You sure did, Baby.”

Well, all I could do was try and hope for the best. If this went to shit, I had enough money to run for a while, and I would absolutely take off until they had enough time to decide not to erase me. He asked me if I loved Holly. I told him I didn’t even know Holly. I was sure as shit not about to take a blood oath making me responsible for Holly the way he was for Harpy. Hells no. I wasn’t even fucking this girl. No.

As we took our seats and Ripley took his next to Rip. Rip was across from Harpy. She was between Apollo at the head of the table and Titus to her right. I sat next to Titus, and

Storm pulled out the chair next to Ripley for Holly and then he took a seat at the head of this end of the table.

Rip said, “Try the bread sticks. They’re the best.” He was reaching for them, already over or oblivious to our adult mini-drama and tension.

The meal was only weird for us and that became less so as the food arrived, and we did more eating than talking. I was surprised by the two vacuum cleaners I brought to this event. Both Storm and Holly ate like this was their last meal which upped my tension to the point I couldn’t eat as much as I usually would. I had leftovers to take with me. I was sort of relieved when they asked for desserts in to-go containers. Were they both on suicide watch now?

Fuck my life, man.

In the car, since we were all going to the same place this evening, I asked, “Best pasta ever or what?”

Holly said, “I’m so full. Yes. I haven’t had spaghetti since middle school. It only lasted a minute. If I just do it anyway, it gets really strong and then, it goes away.”

I looked at Storm and realized he had no idea what the fuck that meant either, so I asked, “Um. What?”

She laughed and said, “Oh. Yeah. I didn’t tell you guys this. So, at my appointment, my psychiatrist told me my father—you know my father. He’s the famous psychiatrist running around the world on his second book tour about how to raise exceptional female children.”

“Oh, shit.” That just registered she was that Ringwald’s child.

“Yeah.” She snorted a laugh. “That one. So. Apparently, the way you get your daughter to do what you want her to do, which is be your idea of perfection, is you hypnotize her repeatedly to not only take away a memory that fucked up a major part of her life and development, but also to just, you know...tweak a few things here and there.” She sat back and said, “Do you have any idea how hard it was for me to eat a candy bar and drink a soda? I did it every day because at first, it was disgusting, but I was already turning into such a weirdo at school I needed to have some normal.”

Damn. That was fucked up. Storm was contemplating too much over there and I knew before he said it what he was thinking, but I still wished he didn’t say it.

He asked, “Do you think that would work for me?”

A decorative graphic of a stylized arrow pointing to the right. The arrow's shaft is a horizontal line with a small arrowhead on the left and a tail with three feathers on the right. The shaft passes through a diamond-shaped frame with curved, flame-like edges.

Chapter
20

Holly

Did he just ask that question after I told him how horrible things had been? “No!”

“Hey, I’m just asking. If I had a magic wand that would let me erase Essie—”

Essie, *Essie*. I didn’t even get the taste in my mouth this time. I was straight-up angry as I said, “You keep saying that name and I am going to find a way to *erase* Essie from your present.”

I didn’t even know what I meant, but it was not what it sounded like. However, we were at his spot in the parking lot, so when he turned the car off, they both turned to look at me and waited. I cleared my throat, picked up the bag with our desserts in them and said, “I know you think those texts are the reason I’m here, Stormy. Why he’s here. That’s not the reason. I’m here because after that appointment, I decided to live my life and do anything and everything I ever wanted to do but didn’t because of my father’s little magic trick that signaled bad. Bad sugar. Bad friends. Bad. Bad. Bad. He was so fucking afraid of a teenage girl and yeah. Yeah, that shit

happened to me. I was thirteen, and if my memory is correct, and it may not be completely, he was a seventeen-year-old football player. I'm not that kid anymore. None of that was good in my memory and a lot of it was terrifying and not just the sex which I can't remember. But you." I looked at Stormy. "You are very good, and you." I looked at Winston and said, "Are an excellent kisser. And today, at that table, looking at that woman and knowing what she has. People think that's bad. Not me. Not now. Not anymore. Now. I want. *I want*. And I want it all. But I'm not sharing what's mine with that fucking cunt, Essie. And you, Stormy, are mine in writing and I've... paid in blood for that contract so you're going to figure it out. I'm going to figure this out. We." I pointed to him and then me and continued, "Are going to work. At least for this year when that contract is up."

I got out of that car and looked into the passenger window where Winston was sitting and said, "You're supposed to be training me, remember? Ask him what I need to learn and get the lesson plans ready, *Teach*."

I did not hear them get out of the car behind me, so I presumed Stormy did not murder Winston for kissing me. Stormy arrived in his room twenty minutes later. He looked at the containers on the table and asked, "You want that?"

I was not on drugs tonight. Probably needed to be medicated, but I was not on anything other than my own crazy desire to live by my own rules since I had been living by my father's manipulated ones for over four years of my life. He brought his container with the tiramisu in it over to the bed

and took a seat next to me. I gulped and asked, “Are you mad at me for what I said?”

“Nope.” He forked a bite and then offered it to me. “Quite the opposite.”

I opened my mouth and he put that bite in. I closed my eyes and enjoyed the taste from start to finish. I made a noise of appreciation.

After his bite as he forked another smaller one for me, Stormy said, “I don’t have a program in my head that makes me not want things. I always want desserts. Always. I have a sweet tooth that is unstoppable, but I need to stay in shape, healthy, blah, blah, blah. Right? I’ve been focused on becoming a professional athlete, getting away from my family through sports, most of my life.” He took his bite. Once it was down, he said, “Which is a shame because I really only need to stay away from one of them.” Then his lips tilted in a smile, and he said, “But I won’t say her name.”

I glared. He laughed as he put the next to the last bite in my mouth as he asked, “You’re done being good, right? Behaving?” I nodded. “Me, too.” He smiled. “So. Let’s be bad together, Holly. I have to finish this football season so there are some things I still have to do and some things I can’t do without fucking that up, but there are just so, so many things we can do. Don’t you think?”

“Yes.” I might actually love him. Like for real not just because my life depended on it. No one has ever just...

accepted me. I thought my father did, but he *never* accepted me. Stormy just gave me everything I needed right now.

And then he said, “Also, you belong to us now. You need training and I realized...I have a lot of needs. So, go talk to... what did you call him? Teach. Yeah. Go talk to Teach.” He winked and then said, “Night, Babe.”

He got up and went to the bathroom. I sat there a moment and then headed out of his room. Once in the main space of Sophomore House, I found Winston. I said, “Hey.”

“Let’s go.” He motioned with his head, and I followed him back down another hallway and into an office space. “Take a seat.”

I sat across from him and watched him as he settled behind that desk. He looked really good back there. Like a boss. It had me thinking out loud, “Where are your glasses?”

His fingers slowed down on that keyboard as he looked over at me with a quizzical brow. “I don’t wear those anymore. I had the surgery over the summer.”

He went back to typing. I was getting a bit anxious and asked, “He said I belonged to both of you now. How? Um, I signed—”

“You signed saying you agreed to be with him, and you initialed the part about adding approved partners. Meaning he would have to agree, and you would have to agree if either of you had sex with someone outside of the contracted terms. He agreed to that, thanks to your little comment—”

“He read the texts. He knew you were helping me. He knows everything.” I gulped. Winston looked up and I shrugged. “He’s not going to kill himself. Step one. We made it past more than one day, so one day at a time, right?”

“This contract limits *me* to *you*.” He looked directly at me.

“And you might not want that.” Ouch. That stung more than I expected.

“It fucks up other plans I had, yeah. Now...never mind. It’s just a year. I’ll manage.” He punched a key and the printer started. “Your syllabus is printing.”

I shook my head, “It can’t be that bad, right? I mean...without all of this. If we ran into each other and I still recognized you...I would still want to get to know you again.”

“Oh, you are about to know so much about me. I am going to know everything about you. And at the end of this year, when this shit is over, it is over, Holly. I don’t like the idea of sharing someone if I care about them. I don’t like being used to train you.” He held up his hand. “It was different when it was my plan. When I was in control. Now, it’s like he is, and I don’t like it. I’m going to do it, but I don’t like it.”

Great. I went from having two guys who could have actually, truly become partners to two guys who resented me, but apparently were willing to have sex with me since I was their only option now. I put away any hopes of a future with either one of them and decided to get through this weekend and then this school year enjoying the parts that I could and...

well, thanks to my father, I knew I could try to tune out the parts that I didn't enjoy.

I looked over the document and then looked up at him. "Um."

"Yeah, so. Where do you want to start? Hum? My dick in your mouth or up your ass?" he asked, arms folded, scowl on as he looked down at me.

"Can we maybe start at the top and work on kissing?" I looked up at his handsome face and sighed. "I'm sorry you have to teach me how to do this stuff."

He grumbled but moved to the couch as he said, "Well, come on. Let's go back to first base."

I put the papers on the desk and moved to the couch. I took a seat next to him, looked into those soft eyes and said, "You might not be glad to be here, but right now, *Teach*. I'm glad it's you."



Winston

Storm was a straight-up psychopath. I sort of wished I could go back to that lunch where I gave a shit about them and take it all back. Stand her up and let him deal with her silence and let her deal with his crazy. Crazy is exactly how they both were acting with a bit too many carbs in them. Maybe they had strict diets for a reason. I didn't know. I had to eat a lot just to gain a pound. Those two. Ugh. They were made for each other.

Still, I was here, and she was right. Maybe if we ran into one another under other circumstances things would be different. I wouldn't be pissed about being tied to one pussy. I would be rejoicing in the fact that I had someone. Someone I shared with a giant. Great. No matter how much I had grown, I wasn't getting that big...anywhere. I wasn't in the tiny dick club, but Storm was a beast, and I assumed his dick represented.

Additionally, I may have overplayed my cards in the coaching department. I had been with five girls and all of those within the past year, three of those within the past month. Two of those at once in the Diva house. All of them

Divas. In fact, this contract changed the one that Harpy had received a request for. Thalia liked me enough to ask for me exclusively. Now, I was exclusive and partnered, and what the fuck was I doing?

Kissing her. Kissing Holly and trying not to enjoy it as much as I was. She had soft lips, and I sure hoped her tongue had healed enough to be doing this because she just shoved it into my mouth and, yeah, okay, she needed some serious training. I pulled back and said, “Holly, like...let me lead, okay?”

She blushed and went wide-eyed, and I said, “It’s not a competition for depth. I’m not trying to shove my tongue down your throat. That’s what a dick is for.”

Her mouth dropped open and I laughed. “Yes. Much better. You sure you don’t want to start there?”

“Winston!” She swatted at my arm.

I don’t know why, other than jealousy, I said what I let slip out next. “So, you can go cupcake rodeo on him, but I’m the scoundrel?”

I closed my eyes. I said way too much in that sentence. I opened them and she had that look on her face that said she was going to tell me something I did not want to know. Before I could stop her, she said, “I was on molly. I got it at the cupcake shop off the special menu. When I asked for it, I thought I was asking for custom cupcakes, and what I got was options for a variety of drugs in the form of baked goods or... others.”

All problematic and for more than one reason. She only needed to know about the Pandora's box that pill opened up for *him* though. "Well, thanks to your little roll, he has high hopes for your bedroom antics." Her eyes went wide. "And you can't be high every time you fuck him. That's not good for either of you and...the way you remember some of that and the way he does, might not line up the same. He said you were on something for anxiety that maybe loosened your inhibitions. You called him therapy and then you were all over the place."

She blinked, winced. "I thought it was awesome."

I laughed. "He didn't say it wasn't. But now. I think he has some expectations that a non-anxiety pill version might be better coordinated but just as impulsive and wild. So. Yeah. Except, right now...even with me...you're like...nervous."

She laughed, nervously, and said, "A little, but I want to be here. With you." Then she rubbed her forehead. "I don't know. I...don't even know what I'm doing with myself, how am I supposed to know what to do with you two?" Then she gave me the answer to several problems if I could just get another clause in this document. "Too bad neither of you have a vagina."

"You're bisexual?" I asked, tilting my head. *Oh, Holly, Holly, Holly. Say yes and make my dreams come true.*

"I don't know. I'm not any sexual. This is all the sex I've had. You know everything already." She huffed and laid back

on the couch against the cushion. “I’m ruining this for you, aren’t I?”

“Nope.” I shook my head. “I have a solution. Just need to see if I can get this in the mix. You may have just made this whole thing worth it for me.”



Chapter

22

Autumn

“I think you’re crazy.” I looked at Winston.

“Come on, Autumn. You know you want to. It will be fun, trust me.” He smiled and I hated that I smiled back at him.

“Once.” I held up a finger and he nodded but did not seem convinced. “Does she know?”

“Yes. It was her idea.” He shrugged.

“You trust her?” I asked. He gave me a look. “I mean, of course you do, or I wouldn’t be here, right? It’s just...girls who don’t know...sometimes...”

“I promise you this. If she changes her mind, I will go straight to my knees, and you can ride these lips until—”

I pushed him and he laughed. “I hate you. Did you talk her into this so you can see girl on girl in person?”

“Probably.” He gave me a look that did not indicate he was kidding.

We were at his bedroom, so I stopped him and said, “Look. This can’t mess us up.”

He leaned in and hugged me and said, “It won’t. I promise. I can’t fuck you even if I wanted to thanks to the contract, so the most I can do is assist.” He wiggled his hands at me.

“Yeah, the last time you assisted me with those hands, I got killed.” We almost lost that competition and we had a rematch with those assholes tomorrow which was creeping up on us as this night moved on. Winston was absolutely my best friend in this world. If he needed me to fuck his girl with him, well. It had been three years since I last had a partner, and I was well overdue some action. I should have applied at the Diva house. At least one of those bitches had to be bi. Big Dicks Only. My dick was big. I bought it that way. I just hadn’t used it on anyone or myself yet.

“Well, let’s hope you *die* a couple times tonight, too. Shall we?” He opened the door, and we stepped inside.

Oh fuck. She was pretty. Like let’s dress up like superheroes and villains and play *who wins this round*, pretty.

I wanted to call her *Poison Ivy* but refrained. He had introduced us, but I was so lost in my head, I missed it. He nudged me and said, “This is Autumn.”

“Hi.” I waved.

She looked at me, at him, at me and said, “I don’t know how to start.”

Winston nudged me again and said, “She’s a pro. We’ll follow her lead.”

The girl's eyes went wide, and I clarified, "I'm a professional gamer, but not a hooker. This idiot is my best friend. He said you were curious and that the two of you were interested in some exploration. It's really simple. If you don't want me to do something, say red. Think of it like traffic lights. Green means go. Yellow, proceed with caution. Red, stop. It's much easier than trying to use stop because that could mean stop doing this but keep doing that. Got it?"

"Green." She gave me a thumbs up. I smiled at her and looked at Winston. He said this was the new complication in his life and I immediately believed him. She was as green as they came.

"Can we get some music? Set a mood, dude. Damn." I moved over to his bed. I'd been in this bed several times. I sometimes napped in it when I was supposed to be working. He did not know that. Still, I only had him and the big guy to contend with on the first floor and they were both neat and tidy, so my biggest tasks were the groceries and supplies which Harper had down to a science, so I worked her system and that shit worked. This was the easiest job I ever had, and it paid well enough I was actually saving money now.

A little music, some lower lighting, and I looked at pretty, green eyes and asked, "Sure you want to do this? You can stop at any time, okay?"

She nodded. Then she closed her eyes. I looked over at the horndog that inhabited my bestie and he moved his hands together and mouthed the word *kiss* through a smile as big as

his face. I really wanted to go slap him, but he was sharing this pouty-lipped princess with me, so I turned back to her and leaned in right as she opened her eyes and mouth as if she were going to say something.

Such great lips. Full, plump, and shy with the whole process. I let her take some time to settle into it, then feel her way through it. Yeah, okay. I wanted to help him. I wanted to fuck this girl. I also needed to figure out her name because I also wanted to dress her up like Poison Ivy and play. If that meant Winston watched, well. He was a good guy. He deserved a view now and then.



Chapter

23

Holly

I kissed a girl, and I liked it. A lot. A wow lot. Winston's idea sounded super crazy to me, but this was my year of yes. My *Only Brave Divas* makeover and the crazier the better, right?

Autumn was so pretty, and she had that style that shouted 'tomboy but fierce.' I needed her to go shopping with me. After the third time our tongues met, I wanted to be her, forget shopping. I wanted to be this damn free with my life. Again, she moved slower through the process, so by the time we had our clothes off, I remembered Winston was in the room with us. Primarily, because he just got into the bed behind me and said, "Holly."

He moved my hand back and over his shaft and I closed my eyes because Autumn was between my thighs, licking that tender flesh to completion. It made stretching back to kiss him easy. In fact, his hands on my breasts, his tongue in my mouth as she pushed three fingers into me and made me cum was amazing. I barely registered the switch from his lips to hers but I registered the shift of my hand from his shaft to between her thighs.

She said, “You don’t have to do that.”

“I want to.” I did. I wanted to try this. Why not? I was this far. Why not go the rest of the way? Winston, rogue opportunist that I was learning him to be, pushed into my core as I pushed a finger into hers. I did to her what Stormy taught me to do on my body and she seemed really fucking impressed with his technique. I wasn’t exactly disappointed in hers or the man pushing his way to his own selfish orgasm behind me.

She shifted her leg over my hip, moving herself closer to my fingers, held on to me tighter. She broke from the kiss and leaned her head back. Winston said, “Lick her—”

I might have laughed if it wasn’t for the fact that once I leaned in and licked her nipple, her legs started to shake. Close. I understood that. I licked, I sucked, she shattered, and I felt that on my fingers as she made the most intense sounds of pleasure. I did that. I caused that.

“Holly.” He was breathless as I shifted my attention back to him and he leaned up enough to kiss me as he pushed deeper, stayed, and twitched with his quiet release.

I was close, but not there again. I slid his hand to my pussy and silently asked him to stay inside of me, like Stormy had. To send me sailing again. He snickered and then worked his fingers as Autumn stared quietly at the ceiling. I called out, “Yes. Yes.” And then I bit my lip because I was about to call out for the one person not in this room. I could feel Winston’s forehead pressed to the back of my head. I shifted off of his

softening cock and reached for Autumn's hand. "Hey, you okay?"

She shook her head no. Totally understood the aftermath of an unplanned orgasm. I said, "Don't regret me."

She turned her soft, blue eyes my way and said, "No. Not that. Just...didn't expect so much to happen."

Winston, my sweetheart said, "Me either. So glad it did. Autumn, you know where the guest room is. We have a competition in seven hours. Holly." I looked at him. "You gotta go."

"Winston!" we both said that and then looked at each other.

He was getting settled in his bed. No shower, no nothing. He said, "I have to try to sleep. I'll be shit for a partner and we have too much riding on that. Night, ladies."

"Oh, my God." She was out of bed and pulling her clothes on when she asked, "I mean...I know we just...but do you like...need a place to stay or..."

"She can go back to Storm's room." Winston pushed me with his foot. I about gawked as I got out of the bed.

Autumn was frozen as she asked, "Wait. No. Winston. Oh, no, no. You're not...just say you are not in room 405."

I gulped.

She went wide-eyed. "He is going to fucking murder us!"

Winston laughed and said, "No he isn't. He knows. He's all good. Get out. Go. Both of you."

She popped him with the shirt she did not pull on over the tank top and said, “You better fucking win tomorrow.”

To me, as I pulled on my last garments, she whispered, “Wait.”

We stepped out into the hall, and she looked at me and said, “Holly, the big guy—”

“I know. It’s complicated. I’m learning. I’m theirs. It’s super weird, but...what?” I asked.

“No. I. Didn’t really expect to miss it as much as I have. Not the sex so much, but the fun, the connection part. I...but it was a onetime thing.” She smiled. “Worth it.”

I grabbed her hand as she started to walk away. “I think we can convince them to add you to the mix, but you have to understand that I’m with them until the end of this year.”

Autumn wasn’t set on leaving me at the end of this year like these two guys, and right now, I felt like I had been tethered to a set of sinking ships. Once they were done with their resentment fucks, I’d be adrift. Maybe she was my life raft in this storm. Maybe I could not fuck up one of these amazing opportunities that landed between my legs for a change.

“I don’t fuck men.”

“I don’t want you fucking my men.” I was shocked by my own statement and the feeling that I could deal with them all watching each other with me and what not, but I was not too keen on seeing her with either of them.

She scratched her head and looked at the end of the hall. “Let me think about it. Okay? I. None of this is what I thought I would be doing tonight.”

“Okay.” I smiled at her. We started walking and then halfway down the hall, she stopped, so I stopped.

She looked at me really intensely and then backed me up to the wall. When her lips landed on mine, I knew I had to hold onto this one. This one could be real.



Chapter

24

Storm

I wasn't sure what time she came back to my room, but she took a shower before she got into my bed. I could see that since her hair was a total mess. I looked at the spot under her chin. Just a little bruise now and fading. She had the most kissable lips I had ever seen in person.

I pulled the blanket up and continued looking since she was in panties and a t-shirt and not afraid of me in her sleep. That knee looked better, too. Content that she was no worse for the wear from whatever Winston told her last night, showed her last night, I let the blanket drop and spent some time looking at her face. She had the lightest sprinkling of freckles across her nose. She looked sweet as candy, but I knew from life experience that what was on the outside did not represent what was on the inside. This one, was a total fucking disaster, like me. I also looked like the best kind of candy apple in fall. Perfect, sweet, a little rough, but overall, everything you think you want. Then you bite into it and find out it is rotten on the inside and the taste ruins candy apples forever. Did for me.

I looked at the mini-fridge and remembered she had dessert in there. I was not going to her room to clean it this morning since it probably didn't even have the soda can and candy wrapper in the trash. She was not awake to worry about that decadent slice of cake with cream-cheese frosting and almond slivers and...the next thing I knew, I was standing in my boxers, eating that slice of cake. A tap sounded on my door. It opened, which meant Holly left it unlocked. We'd have to talk about that. I took another bite of cake and looked at the beauty looking back at me. She wasn't smiling.

I asked, "You okay?" She looked at me, looked at Holly. When she looked at me, I said, "Room 405."

She didn't have any of the upbeat Autumn energy I had come to know. I asked, "What's wrong?"

"I need to talk to you, Big Guy." She looked from me to Holly, and I understood she needed privacy and sleep was not enough of a guarantee.

"I'll follow you." I indicated and stepped out into the hall with her. I had about three bites left and asked, "Want a bite? Might make you feel better."

She steeled her spine and said, "I'm not a man."

My brow quirked and I was really glad I did not have that bite in my mouth, or I might have choked on it or spit it out as I choked on it. "Fully aware, trust me."

Hell, if I met her day one and she was into dudes I may still be riding the somewhat sane train rather than the one to crazy

town I was currently a first-class passenger on.

“But if I do something, I need to man up. And...I did something.” She looked at me and gulped. “And take the consequences...the same if I was.”

“You need me to talk to someone for you?” I did not like this line of discussion.

She smiled, then she got really sad eyes as she looked up at me and said, “I...last night...with Holly.”

I took the next bite of cake and let that settle in my brain for a change. “I’ll be back.”

“Storm.” She stayed because I put my hand up to indicate she should.

With the eyes of every house bunny in the vicinity and on weekend duty upon me, I walked through the open space in the great room and down the hall to Winston’s room. He was already in the office. Before I could say anything, he offered me the documents and said, “Problem solved. Take a seat. There has been a turn in events.”

“Holly and Autumn?” I asked. He went wide-eyed and then shook his head. “What?”

“She told you, right? Autumn? She thinks she’s taking something from you.” He rolled a shoulder.

“She is,” I reminded him. “So are you.”

“So are you.” He pointed at me, and my eyes went wide. “You locked my ass into this when I was about to have

someone, something else real in my life. I... knew her from high school, man. Not even. I knew *of* her. Saw her in the halls. Sure, I had a crush, but damn.”

“You kissed her.” I put the empty dessert container on his desk.

He nodded, rolled a shoulder, and smiled as he said, “Okay. That was a real dick move. To both of you, but I didn’t think I would get another chance. Not really.”

“So last night, how did that go from you and her and our bucket list for the year to her and Autumn?” I watched that little shit light up with a smile so big I wanted to stab him with the fork. He knew it, too, because he pulled the dessert container away from me. “Smart. Explain.”

“Autumn is my best friend. You know she is not into men. She’s lonely, she’s sweet. She would be a good ally because if you saw the way Holly was looking at Harpy with her three kings at the end of the table, plus a kid. And neither of us are as into this as we would have been if it was organic and not life and death. The sex is a bonus, not a fucking reason to shift my whole year, and it did. This little hiccup between the two of you that I landed in and pulled Autumn into, has changed my whole plan for this year. Now, I have Holly. I’ve been with six women my whole life and all of them this year. I had the world opening up to me and snap. That door is now closed. You just wanted one someone. I don’t believe in that love bullshit.” He was lying which is why this was such an important speech to him. “At the end of this year, I’m cutting

it loose and getting back to my life. My plan. But we need help and that is where Autumn comes in. She's got dude brain but is still into chick shit. I don't want to do all that. Do you? Holly is fragile as fuck, man. I can't wear gloves every time I'm around her."

"Speaking of gloves there Casanova—"

"Covered it in Diva house. Come on, man. I'm not an idiot." Then he looked at me and I winced. "You think she made him cover? I mean we all had to be tested and what not, but..."

"Fuck. Fine. I...didn't exactly plan for that." I closed my eyes, opened them. I had not covered it with Essie. "Okay. You're right. I loved the idea of Holly. I, obviously, don't know her. And now that we're in this...yeah, I plan to enjoy it while it lasts, but cut it and Crossbow loose at the end of the year. I'll transfer again. I was not suicidal at my other college. Depressed, sometimes. Ready to drive my car off a cliff? Nope. That was a new thought for me." And because I needed to admit it but also needed to know the next answer I asked, "Why did you stop me?"

He rolled a shoulder and said, "Family. Harpy is...young, but she is the only woman who cares for me like...a mom would."

"Does that make Ripley your daddy?" I thought I had problems in the bedroom kink department.

"Fuck you!" He laughed. "No. Do not ever say that again. No. Those guys...no. Make no mistake about it, Storm. This house particularly is *hers*. These brothers are her soldiers.

Why do you think we have the best? It's her house. This is her home. We are her boys. She just came in and took care of us. Very differently than she took care of them, I might add."

I laughed at that. "Yeah. She sure knows how to play all the angles."

He shrugged and said, "Well, that's fairly far down on the list and I have no real desire to pull my tiny dick out in front of you."

I roared with laughter. "Fuck you, Teach. You think that's a gift? She's not the only girl afraid of me or my dick. It's all good in theory, but in practice, it means getting fucked with it and if they struggle to get their mouth around it, they aren't as eager to let me do anything else, so you roll high on your six over there. I'm...sitting on two."

We were in this now. No point hiding anything from him. He seemed a bit bolstered by that, and I reminded him, "But she's one of them, so...she can handle it."

"Right." He puffed out a breath. "Okay, so. Autumn stays."

"Did you ask Autumn?" I considered the fact that I had one woman trapped already. Didn't need to tie another one down if she didn't want to be here.

"This morning. She's in. She likes her, wants to get to know her. She's good with it." He then smiled and said, "Holly told her that she couldn't fuck us."

I snickered. "That so?"

“It’s a long weekend.” He thought about that, nodded, and then said something as though it was a suggestion. “And it was something to *watch*, man.”

“Wait, you saw it?” So fucking jealous now.

“I did.” He looked up, the memory a good one by his expression. “I did.”

“Yeah. All right. Thanks for that.” I picked up the paper and looked at him and asked, “What are you wearing?”

“Team t-shirt. We have a game in an hour.” He flexed his fingers. “I wasn’t kidding. Autumn and I have a rematch. Winner gets five grand.”

“Five grand?” I practically shouted. “What the fuck are you playing?”

He smiled at me and said, “Come sit in the stands and watch.”

“What?” I did not understand at all.

“The living room, man. We play here or her house, but we’re here, so we might as well make an event of it.” He wagged his brows.

I looked this man over again. Winston was not huge. He was almost six-foot, average build, and still growing. He was young to be a junior. I hoped I hid my surprise when I read that number for his age a moment ago. I was about to turn twenty-one. In three years, he could fill out. With the right diet, exercise. “We need to get you on a real plan. If you’re going to keep up...like. You need to work out.”

He made the hand moves again.

I nodded. “Yeah. My hands are strong too, but if you want to please a difficult woman, you need cardiovascular endurance. It’s a long weekend. Lots of things to learn from each other. After this game, maybe the four of us should go... camping.”

“So you can murder us in the woods?” he asked.

“Football season. Can’t. Maybe I can murder you during basketball season?” I asked as I considered it and laughed. Maybe this year wouldn’t be total shit after all.



Holly

I stepped out of the empty room and found Autumn pacing the hallway. “Hey.”

She waved a hand but kept pacing.

“You okay?” I asked right as Stormy turned the corner. He was only in his underwear. He was being followed by a few girls who stopped when they saw us. I knew he knew. He knew everything all the damn time except in the beginning when he knew nothing. Now he was like a detective and clues fell into his gigantic lap. “She didn’t know—”

“I’m good, Babe.” He stopped to talk to Autumn and said, “It’s all good. Winston has the contract in the office. Welcome to the team.” Then to me he said, “Last member. I’m tapped out on this.”

I nodded. Okay. I was pushing things, him, me, everyone. She turned and smiled at me. This was really awkward because he was still right there in the hall with us. He stopped next to me and said, “You can fuck her in his bed, but I can’t get a kiss?”

I started to move toward him, and he said, “Not me, her. Shit. I’ve dreamed about kissing her for three months now. They were already here working when I transferred. You got good taste.” Then he leaned in and whispered in my ear, “Does she taste good, Holly? You do.”

I didn’t even know what came over me, but I reared back, and that hand was moving, but Stormy caught it and shook his head and said, “No. We won’t be doing that.”

Was I going to slap him? What the hell?

Then Autumn said, “Well. Maybe not that way, Big Guy.” She winked at him and walked away. I wanted to slap her now, too.

I said to him since she was gone, “She told me she wasn’t into guys.”

“No. She doesn’t want to have sex with men. There is a difference. Doesn’t mean she is oblivious to the fact that she is sexy as hell and men are not oblivious to her.” He looked at me and I considered my attire. My plain, ordinary day clothing. “I’m not oblivious to you either, Babe. Damn. You fuck two people and I’m getting the stink eye?”

I followed him into his room and said, “I do not want you having sex with anyone other than me.”

“You want to rub my back?” Stormy asked and positioned himself face down in the center of the bed. “Three. Two. One. Fine.”

He reached for his phone. A moment later, a pretty girl with red hair, massage oil, and cat ears arrived. She said, “Hey, Big Guy. Lower back?”

“Thanks, Cass.” He looked over at me and smiled. “You might want to go watch Winston and Autumn kick ass online. This may take a while.”

“Uh.” I was a bit speechless but not in the scared way. “How is this possible? You work for me.”

He snickered as she took her shoes off. Totally ignoring me like I did not exist. He said, “Well, I’m pretty sure. Actually, because I know so, your room number is on that list today. Third time and all. I’m fired. We can carry on with the exclusive sex portion of the contract, but...you’re not my boss anymore, Holly.”

That redheaded bitch just straddled his hips and sat on his ass. She oiled up her hands and looked over at me with a wicked smile and said, “You’re stupid.”

“Cass-i-dy,” he scolded like he would a child.

I watched in horror as she slid her slick hands up his back and he sighed a sound that had me damn near ready to murder her ass. At this point, I had been angry enough times and so severely I didn’t even notice if I got a bad taste in my mouth. I was pretty sure the stomach ache was simply due to the emotion and may cramp up because every muscle on my body was tensing.

I didn't know this person. Me, not her. I didn't know her either, but she was not the one about to lose her shit. I was. I shook my head and said, "I got this."

She looked at me, at him, kept massaging. He smiled. I closed my eyes and said, "Tell her to stop, Stormy. I'll." I clenched and unclenched my fists because she was leaning way over, her big, perfect boobs pressing against his back. She was in a thin t-shirt and had a black-satin bra with red-lace trim that matched the red see-through top she had on. And a skirt. A—I thought about what Winston said about skirts.

I didn't realize I was next to the bed until she looked me eye to eye from her position on his ass.

He said, "Thanks, Cass. I think she'll take it from here."

Cassidy looked at me and winked as she got off the bed on the other side and then came around to get her shoes. She said, "I'll leave that for you. Lower back, right—"

"I'll figure it out," I snapped at her. She giggled and I started to walk after her, but Stormy grabbed my arm.

He said, "Hey. You got a back to rub."

"Rub your back. I'll rub your back all right." I got onto the bed and tried to sit like she had, but my shorts were modest, khaki, and not as giving. "Dammit!"

"Little more hands with the cursing would be nice." He picked up his phone, looked at it, snickered, and then set it back down. "No camping. Autumn is working this weekend. Party tonight instead."

I didn't want this man to die. Really and truly. However, as I pulled off my shorts and looked at him puffing out an impatient breath, I wondered if I could murder him. I crawled back into the bed, pumped a lot of oil into my hands and then started rubbing them all over his back.

"You're terrible at this." He lifted up, easily knocking me off of him. He got up, went to the door, closed it, locked it, and started back toward me. "Take your shirt off. Turn over."

I shook my head no. He shook his head and said, "Really? Now you say no? Take your shirt off and turn over, Holly, or I'm going to do it for you."

I looked at my oil slicked hands, at him, and some dark defiance just hit me, and I said, "No."

He moved over and grabbed the hem of my shirt and then pulled it up and over my head leaving it at my closed hands. He said, "Down. Now."

I refused because I was crazy. I was now sure of that. Also, why the hell was I turned on by it? What the fuck?

He made rather quick work of moving me to a forward-facing position as he climbed over me, effectively pinning me down before reaching past me to the oil bottle where he pumped twice and then put his hands on my back and said, "If you plan to do this, you need to do it right. Otherwise, I am calling her back in here. She will just push you off of me. And as much as I might be into a girl fight, you didn't fare so well against a bathroom and a slick floor, so...no."

I sighed as he pushed his giant hands along my spine. He was made of magic. Everything he did felt amazing to me. From the first time he put his mouth against my pussy to right now. “Wow.”

“Right there, that is the spot. I need a lot of attention right there. Understand?” he asked. I hummed. “And here. Like this.” I screamed out a sound of pain. “Sorry. I need that hard, deep. Understand?”

“Yes.” I definitely understood the difference in the pressure.

“Good.” He got up and I rolled. He looked at me and said, “Get up. Now you know what to do. I need you to do it or I need her to come back and do it for you.”

“I bet she would like to do lots of things for me.” I adjusted as he situated himself.

“Babe, half the campus would like to trade places with you. I promise, I wouldn’t have this much difficulty getting them to rub my back, my feet, my dick, or anything else if they thought it might lead to one day rubbing elbows with professional football players’ wives, celebrities, or anyone else at the country club for that matter.” He pulled his phone over and set the timer. “Give me thirty minutes of real effort and I’ll make it worth it for you.”

“How?” I asked. I was so pissed at him for so many things right now.

“What do you want?” he asked as he settled.

What did I want? What did I want? “I, uh...I want you to go down on me...for thirty minutes.”

“Challenge accepted.” He put his finger over the button and said, “Timer starts when you get your hands on me.”



Storm

It was not the best massage, but it was a lot better, and I did need my lower back rubbed. I needed to make a real appointment. Cassidy was the best at that around this house. Not sure why a bunny would want to take those classes on the side, but she did, it was noticed, and others were also learning different skills. We had one learning to cut hair, another in the culinary arts program. It was crazy, but so nice to live here.

Holly looked at me as I crawled back into that bed with her. I had to wash the oil off my hands. I pulled those pretty panties off of her and parted her legs with my hands. She had the phone in her hand and said, “Timer doesn’t start until your tongue is touching me.”

This was good. I liked this. I stroked my hands down her thighs, really drew the whole thing out. Put my hands into play before I even leaned down to touch her with my mouth. She was trying to keep some sort of focus up there as I watched her drop the phone and felt her orgasm grip my fingers as she trembled from it, called my name.

“Stormy.” She fell back. I hummed a sound of question.
“That’s not fair.”

“I play to win, Babe. You need your phone? How are you going to keep track of my time?” I asked innocently. She fumbled for the phone as I used my fingers and played that same pattern until she was calling out again. “You keep dropping the phone.”

“You’re so good at that. At everything.” She let her legs fall wider. “It’s like you know how to read my body in a way I can’t understand it.”

I’d been trained to. Would not bring that up, though. I did start my path down her thigh with my lips. My mouth on her, tongue in her, I teased and tormented for fifteen of those thirty minutes before she was begging me to let her catch her breath.

“I mean, I don’t want to cheat you out of your time, here.”

“You win.” She reached down and put her hand in my hair.
“You win.”

“What’s my prize?” I smiled against her flesh. “I need to know if it’s worth it.”

“What do you want?” she asked.

I lifted up, looked down at my erection and said, “Entry.”

She nodded.

“Yeah?” I asked.

“Yes.” She reached out for me. I pushed out of my boxers and situated myself between her legs. I slid the head of my

dick between her slickness, groaned as she lifted her hips to get more friction. I slid the head to push into her and as I did, she said, “Stormy.”

I leaned over her, and she pulled me in for a kiss. Well, at least she was not trying to battle me in the actual sense with her tongue today. I liked the more explorative version. I liked the wild thing, too, but this was good. Her legs wrapped around me, and I continued that slow motion in and out and then in a bit more each time. It was a sweet sort of torture, but I wanted her to like this. I didn’t want her to like being with him more because he wouldn’t hurt her. Hell, Autumn could get a dick smaller than both of us.

Her lifts to meet me were becoming a bit more aggressive. I pushed a bit harder, and she gasped. “Yeah? So—”

“Again,” she breathed before I could finish my apology.

Again? I moved with a bit more force and gulped. I wanted to go harder. Faster. I wanted to do so much.

Her nails bit against my shoulder and I picked it up a little more. She nodded, closed her eyes, tried to pull me closer. Really? Fuck. Okay. Glad I put in the work because this was not going to last long if I got a little more lead on the leash here.

I tested that and she started making noises I’d only heard watching porn, so that really fucked me up and threw me right on over the finish line with absolute luck dragging her with me. I felt that squeeze and pulse around my cock as I emptied into her. I pulled her with me as I rolled to my side. She

snuggled up against my chest and said, “I need to go shopping.”

“Yeah?” I snickered. Winston was right. We definitely needed Autumn in our life because I hated shopping more than anything. Well, almost anything. I pushed that thought and image aside.



Autumn

I was riding pretty high on my win. Our win. Then Storm and Holly showed up and it was obvious they had been playing a different game and they both won.

Storm said, “Holly wants to go shopping. I need to get some stuff done if we are going to that party tonight.”

“I have the team.” Winston shrugged and smiled. “You got a lot of money, honey. Go buy some new headphones for tonight.”

I was on shopping duty? What the fuck? I hated shopping. Well, in a store anyway. I did my shopping online.

Still, I wanted to get to know Holly, and this would give me a chance to just talk to her.

“Okay.” I smiled at her. “Sounds like a fun day.”

She had a really nice car. A safe, dependable vehicle. Not like the motorcycle I had parked next to Winston’s. We made small talk, and it was awkward as hell, but by the time we were at the shops, she said, “I want to look more like you.”

That surprised me. She definitely didn't dress like a Diva, but I had my own style, and I was not giving it over to her. Plus, we were in the wrong parts of town to buy those clothes. Still, I could help her. "What about my style do you like? I don't think it's you, but we can find *you* if we know what you're looking for."

She looked down at her clothes and said, "I look like a soccer mom or something. I want to look...sexy. Fierce." She said, "I want them to look at me the way they look at you."

Ah, she was jealous. Total story of my life. If more chicks looked at me the way dudes did, I'd been a happy girl earlier in my life, but alas, they always wanted to *be* me, never *with* me. This one might want both. I was sorta hoping she wanted both. "Got it. Let's try some stuff on. You got the underwear on lock."

Why did I say that?

She smiled and then laughed. "My mom." Then she considered. "Because my dad can't see it. So much about my life the past four years is making sense now."

"Cool." I followed her in. "You wanna explain what that means?"

She looked at me and said, "Yeah. Actually, I do."

I should stop asking people to explain shit to me. She told me about the possible rape since she couldn't get her memory to line up, about the hypnosis, and the erasure therapy her father was known for. I was sick to my stomach as she stepped

into the dressing room. Rich girl problems. It was the first time in my life I really felt glad I didn't have those.

I texted the guys and they sent back a picture of them lounging by the pool. Seriously? Fuckers. I *was* going to suggest we pick up some food on the way back.

"Uh oh." I heard her suck in a sound as she winced. I looked at the door. She said, "I'm stuck."

I bit my lips so I didn't snicker or laugh where she could hear me. "I'll help."

She unlocked the door, and I stepped inside the dressing room with her.

Holly turned and said, "I may need to cut my hair."

"No." I shook my head. "This might hurt a second, but... see, got it and only...well, you don't need these. You have plenty."

I let the strands fall into the little waste basket. It was a bit of a cut where the teeth of that zipper just took the ends off. This was the kind of upscale shop that had a bench, a couple mirrors, nice hooks, and a small table to set things on.

She stepped out of that dress and said, "I still think it's a keeper."

I nodded, looked her up and down and asked, "Want to do something bad, Holly?"

"Yes." She then shook her head. "I mean. Maybe. What did you have in mind? Yes."

I laughed. I showed her the picture of two lazy boys toasting with beers. Her brow went up and she said, “They just didn’t want to hang out with me today, did they?”

“We aren’t hanging out. We’re shopping. And no. No heterosexual man not shopping for his own purposes wants to come pick out clothes unless you are going to the fancy underwear store.” She still seemed sad. “I was going to see what time they would be back, and we could bring them some food, but now.” I adjusted my phone and the camera and snapped a pic of her ass as she hung that item on the *keep* hook. “Now I think I’ll make sure they are good and hungry for something else.”

“Like cupcakes?” she asked and turned.

“Okay.” I smiled, snapped a close up of her boobs and sent that too. I set the phone on the table and looked to make sure it would capture exactly what I wanted in that frame. I picked it up and said, “But first, let’s make a quick call. See what kind of cupcakes they want.”



Winston

“Damn.” I looked at the photo of Holly’s ass and showed Storm. He almost spit that swig of beer out. “Right?”

“Send that to me.” He pulled his phone out.

I sent him the next one, too, and he said, “That’s mean.”

“It is.” I laughed. Oh, man Autumn was making us pay for not shopping. I sure could have spent some time looking at... no. No, it still wasn’t worth it.

Autumn’s image popped up for a real-time video call and I answered it only to hear her say, “We’re going to pick up cupcakes.”

Then Autumn put the phone on something, adjusted the view, and Storm said, “What the fuck? Oh no. No. You can’t do that there.”

We were on mute. I wasn’t sure if Holly knew we were watching or not and I really felt like I wanted to take my phone and— “Hey.”

“You are not leaving with it.” Storm snatched my phone from me. He read my mind. We were two of a handful of

dudes hanging out and the others were in the pool with a couple bunnies.

I fished out my earbuds and handed him one because I didn't just want to see. I wanted to hear, and we could not listen to it on speaker. He popped it in. Once Autumn had Holly's panties off, done with the boob action, she pushed and Holly laid back on that cushioned, luxury bench in the dressing room. One leg up, bent, the other Autumn positioned down, off the side so we could see. Storm ran a hand over his face and shook his head. I was trying not to touch a different part of my body. This, to me, was my personal kink. I knew other guys got off on watching. That was nothing new. Sure, lots of guys got off on seeing two girls go at it. It was all I ever watched when I watched porn. And I did that a lot since I had been in college my forming teen years and around much older guys.

Autumn fucked her fingers into Holly and brought her to orgasm right there in that dressing room. Then she looked at us and stuck her tongue out. I knew she had a pierced tongue. I just hadn't thought about what that could do in the oral sex department. Now. I kinda wanted to know. I would have to add that to my after-Holly bucket list for senior year. Autumn wouldn't be sucking my dick. I really needed to go handle this though.

I started to reach for my phone when another hand snatched it up before I could touch it or before Storm could pull out of his haze.

I looked up and Apollo said, “Way to outsource the training, fellas.” Then he handed it back to me and said, “Let’s go.”

I looked at Storm and he was still a bit in a lust haze, so he just handed me the earbud, sat back, and closed his eyes. Yeah, enjoy the daydreams, Big Guy. I had work to do.

As we walked, I shook out one of my legs, tried to adjust myself discreetly.

Apollo, being the asshole extraordinaire he was, did not miss a beat. “You better get that under control before your *Momma* sees you playing with it.”

“Asshole.” I was one of few people who could say that and not get punched. I did stop at the door to the Bunny House and adjust myself before following in behind him.

Harpy was there and she smiled up at me, opened her arms, and gave a nice squeeze of hello. Then she leaned back a bit, looked down, and then she smiled up and said, “Well, well. Pool bunnies that interesting?”

I wanted to crawl under a table and hide for the rest of the year. Apollo slapped her ass hard enough she yelped. She looked at him and he said, “Jealous.”

“Me or you?” she asked with a giggle as she moved to her chair behind that desk.

He glared at me a second before laughing. I mouthed the words *I fucking hate you right now*, but he thought that was even better. Prick. Apollo moved to her side, and she took her seat, steepled her fingers and said, “It’s complicated.”

I nodded. “Yes. Very.” My whole fucking life was one big complication right now.

She smiled and said, “No. I mean...this contract. She...is not taking no for an answer.”

“Who?” I asked.

“Thalia,” Harpy said and sighed. “I explained that you were already taken by Holly, and she explained that she would just take Holly out of the equation.”

Apollo filled in, “Her father specializes in disappearances.”

I rubbed my forehead. My dick was no longer in need of comfort now. I made sure to say it out loud because I just needed to clarify my entire situation even if Harpy would be learning some parts of it right now. “So. I had to commit to Holly in order to keep Holly alive so she could keep Storm alive so he could play football this year and not fuck up the team.” Apollo nodded and Harpy tilted her head his way. “Okay, so now, to keep Holly alive, again, I need to commit to Thalia?”

Apollo shrugged and said, “What’s the big deal? It’s just sex, right?”

“The big deal is the big dude out there on the lounge chair who—”

“Fucked his cousin, right? Yeah. He’ll accept that you have two girls on your roster and so will Holly.” He smiled at Harpy. “I got this, Baby.”

“Thalia can’t know you are with Holly in a physical way. Understand?” Harpy sighed. “She’s a virgin. She liked you. *For you*, Winston. She wants to lock you down, so you don’t get, in her words not mine, ‘trapped by some web of pussy when you deserved better.’” Harpy looked up at Apollo. “And I agree, Apollo. He does deserve better than this. Can’t we find someone else to babysit Holly?”

Only, the thought sort of messed me up because on one hand, I had Thalia and a shot at a real relationship but no sex. On the other, I had Holly and that came with girl on girl plus Winston sometimes sex and—my dick suddenly squeezed words out of me as I said, “I’ll juggle them both.”

Apollo smiled and winked. “Keeps him in Diva house.” Then he looked at me and said, “Keeps his dick wet.”

I closed my eyes and gritted my teeth. I did not like Harpy seeing me like that. She scolded him. When I opened my eyes she said, “This is dangerous. It could come out and—Apollo!”

He was cracking up because her metaphor was not working as a single meaning. I said, “I won’t let this blow back in anyone’s face. Mine, or his.”

She tried for a seriousness, but shook her head and said, “I don’t like this plan. If you need help, let me know. Me, Winston. Tell *me*. I didn’t know you were already doing so much. I thought you also liked Holly.”

“I do also like Holly.” I shrugged. “She’s a mess.”

Apollo looked out the window and said, “Well.”

I could feel my brow arch. He said, “Thalia isn’t exactly all...put together.”

Fuck my life!

“I can handle it.” Probably? Possibly? Maybe? I didn’t know, but things were never boring in my life these days.



Storm

I eventually got myself under control enough that I could get up, go to my room, and settle into my bed. That was some shit to see. Holly was...something else. I hated shopping. I hated it for more than regular reasons of being bored. I had reasons I couldn't talk about because she did not want me to tell her how Essie always went school shopping with me. She picked out everything for me. We could match and be in other schools. She had ways of keeping me connected to her emotionally that I was still processing. Maybe I needed to go shopping. Maybe Holly needed to pick out what I should be wearing.

When she arrived at my door with a box of cupcakes, she said, "Surprise?"

"It was a surprise all right." I nodded. She brought me the box and I settled back against the padded headboard that was there for decoration since it was secured to the wall.

I opened up the box top and she said, "I just wanted to spend some time with you, and you shifted that time to her.

Don't get mad because we had quality time getting to know each other. You were back here *beer bonding* with Winston."

I was pulling the wrapper on the cupcake and asked a crazy question, "So, you, uh...just talked all afternoon?"

She blushed and said, "No. I." She looked away and then back to me. "I don't want to lie to you. I don't want you to be upset either."

"Tell me." She didn't know Autumn showed us all of it. Probably thought she asked about cupcakes, we said yes, and that was it. Wow. Bad Autumn. I liked her before, but that dude brain came in handy for sure.

"Well. We, uh." She pulled her hair around and showed me a section that was not even like the rest. "I got my hair caught in the zipper of a dress. She helped. Then, she showed me a picture of you two hanging out. So, we...asked if you wanted some cupcakes and then we...made out."

"Made out?" I put that wrapper in the box and placed the container next to me. I wanted both the cupcake and the answer to that implied question.

"She, uh...you know. Did some stuff." Holly's blush went from her neck to her hairline. Probably down the rest of her body.

I licked the icing and sighed. So good. This woman in my bed was all sorts of bad for me, but the cupcake, the deviant behavior, was so good. "Tell me. In detail."

I enjoyed that story and the first cupcake with almost equal measure. She was a bit warm and wiggly in her spot. I said, “Give me another one.”

She picked a cupcake out of the box and started to hand it to me, then pulled it back. She peeled the wrapper and then said, “We have that party to go to tonight.”

I nodded. Reached, but she pulled the cupcake back and shook her head. My brow shot up. “What?”

She scooped some of the decadent frosting onto her finger and then touched my lips. Oh, she was such a bad girl and she *wanted* to be. I opened my mouth and captured her finger, licked, sucked, nipped the tip as it left my mouth. Her mouth followed and hit with crushing force, so my head popped back against the bedframe. Good thing it was padded and maybe not for decoration after all. Though I doubt my mother thought I needed it for this. Holly had on a dress, so she moved over me easily and seated herself on my lap. Her fingers moved into the icing, then to my mouth, then to the icing and onto hers where she smeared a bit on her lips, down her chin, and I watched this little freak raise that flag again as she crumbled that dessert and smeared it all across her chest and the tops of her exposed cleavage.

One word and I was ready to eat her up. “Stormy.”

I reached under the dress as my lips moved in to meet hers. No panties. Damn. So wet. Fuck. She lifted up, pushing her breasts and that culinary mess into my reach as my hand adjusted for her to ride my fingers. Her fingers twined in my

hair, pulled, and I realized she was all kinds of worked up from the afternoon. Autumn didn't have a dick with her. Just a phone. My Holly needed this. To feel full. To lead and not be led. She pulsed around my fingers and as I pulled those out, she kissed me.

My Holly was not a one orgasm wonder. That might do in public, but this was private, and she was a greedy little diva. I shifted as she pushed at the band on my swim trunks. I had thought to get into the pool, but those thoughts changed as Winston and I got to talking about stuff we actually had in common. No oral for me, but she was wet enough I didn't worry as she practically tried to impale herself on my dick. I grunted with the effort, but damn she was aggressive this afternoon. She was trembling, pulling at me, riding in a wild abandon that didn't provide much rhythm. "That's it, Babe."

She shook her head no and I asked, "You need me to take over?" She nodded. I smiled. Damn, there were moments when I couldn't stop the feelings of pure joy from breaking through and this was one of them. "Hold my shoulders. That's it." I put my hands at her hips. "Look at me." I shifted our position a bit and her eyes went wide. Yeah, you were not all the way down. I fucked up and into her and she made all those sounds I loved to hear. I kissed her lips, tried to eat those sounds right out of her mouth. She pulled back and gasped for breath, adjusted one of her legs and I let out a groan because that adjustment brought her all the way down and she winced. "Hurt?"

I stopped moving. She nodded. I went to adjust us, but she held me tight and said, “Stay.”

“I don’t want to hurt you.” I shook my head no.

“Not in a bad way.” She stroked my cheek. “It hurts so good, Stormy. Nothing and no one feels like you do.”

Well, I guess now we could both feel a bit of pain because I understood completely what my role in this fucked-up triangle had become. Made it easier to give her what she wanted. I didn’t mind. I never got to fuck like this. I would, though, after Holly. I knew there would be an after Holly now, too. That made me happy. I held her tighter, didn’t let her move, and drove up and into her without restraint until she was gasping, tears spilling over, and then claspng me in an orgasm as I emptied in a low growl of my own.



Holly

I wasn't sure what I was doing other than just fucking my way through this year. That was about to stop for at least four days though. I went to the Bunny House and knocked on the door. Apollo answered and I took a step back which made me miss a step. He reached, steadied me before I fell.

I was so fucking afraid of this man. He said as he helped me through the door, "See, Daddy's little miracle solution is wearing off."

"Is Harper here?" I asked.

Ripley leaned against the door and said, "I've never given this woman anything."

Apollo snickered and said, "You're not *her* Daddy, or mine, you asshole. Her father is the great reprogrammer of all time. Makes everyone believe what he wants them to. Manipulates all sorts of things in that brain."

I looked around, hoping she would pop out at any moment. "I need to see—"

“Why?” he asked. He gave me a look that let me know he was not planning to ask twice.

I closed my eyes and said, “I need to see if there are any products here, in this house. The bunnies in our house won’t talk to me except Autumn and she’s not there. I just need something so I can get to the store.”

Ripley laughed and said, “Yeah, man. You handle it for her.”

He left us in the kitchen and Apollo said, “I don’t know. Probably one of the bathrooms?”

“Thank you.” I ducked into the one on the first floor and found a box of tampons. I was so relieved. When I left the bathroom, I found Apollo waiting for me. “I got one. Thank you.”

“I’ll walk you to your car.” He indicated the door. I gulped. Fear rolled through me, and I couldn’t move my feet but really wanted to. He shook his head and said, “I’m not going to hurt you, Holly.”

I found a breath, took it, and started walking. We were halfway to my car when he said, “I’m probably not going to have to hurt you.”

I stopped. He laughed and said, “Come on, Holly. I was teasing.” I took a few steps. He said, “Mostly.” I stopped. He laughed again. I fucking hated Apollo. How could she possibly love this monster? “Move, Holly. You’re taking the fun out of it.”

I didn’t find it fun or him funny at all.

Then he dropped the real bomb on me and said, “I do need to talk to you. It’s about Winston. You’re gonna have to share him with Thalia Moretti.”

My eyes went wide. “No. What? Why? Don’t. Just...give my brain a moment to catch up to my mouth.”

“Getting smarter without that programing, too.” He winked. “Let’s just say your dad has daughter issues he can’t control. Her dad...probably needs to control his daughter. She’s a real diva with a capital D. Daddy’s little girl doesn’t have competition. She gets what she wants because he gets rid of anything in her way. Understand?”

“*Winston?*” I hated the way that came out. Apollo roared with laughter, and I shook my head. “No. I don’t mean to sound like he doesn’t deserve a fight, but...he’s Winston. Plays video games, on the math team, has one particular mischievous bone in his body, but he’s a sweetheart, innocent.”

Apollo really smiled then and said, “I love that guy. Looks like an angel, acts like the devil.” He had a bit of a secret smile as he said, “I guess he takes after his *momma* after all.”

“I don’t know what you’re talking about. His parents are dead.” I blinked. Did he lie about that?

Apollo shook his head and said, “Yeah. That sucked. No. I meant Harpy. Which leads me to say this. You can carry on with Winston in private. Maybe double date, you and the big guy and her and Winston so she doesn’t have a reason to complain about you back home. Okay?” I nodded. “Okay. For

what it's worth, he's only agreeing to be with her to keep anyone from hurting you. Again."

It was worth a lot. "I guess I should be really glad I already know most of the curriculum this semester. I'm learning a lot. None of it in a classroom."

"Don't I know that pain." He winked and then walked away.

I felt the cramp and got into my car and went to get products for a period I had hoped to avoid. I did read up that the shot could take a while to work, and it did not eliminate cycles for everyone. On my way, I voice dialed Winston and said, "I know what you have to do. Bring her to the party. She'll see me with Stormy, and it will be okay."

"I haven't even had a chance to tell you. How the—who?"

"You have to know this next part, too, so. Stormy is sleeping and I needed some products neither of you have. Autumn is not working today. The bunnies won't talk to me. I had to ask Harpy and now I know you have to have that contract with her and me and I have cramps like I have never had in my life, but I will be there. You can count on me, okay?" I needed to start stepping up in this little group. They had already done a lot for me, and I really needed to start doing for them.

"Holly." He didn't say anything, so I imagined he was trying to think it through.

"It's a year, Winston. I don't want to know what you do with Thalia other than you'd better keep it covered, and use

the things that Stormy had, and lie to me if you don't because I...I've never had anything that someone couldn't take from me. Not even my own life, so...I'm just going to pretend that I still have you, and him, and her, and that I'm still holding onto some control here. Okay?" I felt the tears slip. This really was all just a series of unusual events and I lucked out and crapped out at every table I stepped up to. I was gambling with my sanity as much as my life these days.

"Okay. We'll talk more later, okay?" he asked, and I smiled though he couldn't see it. "It's going to be okay."

"I believe you." I was lying. I thought the only thing that was going to be okay was my female situation because I was also going to pick up some extra strength menstrual relief in addition to products.

When I got back to Sophomore House and Stormy's bed, he was waking up, and asked, "Where'd you go?"

"I started my period." I just needed to nap for an hour before I needed to get up and really get ready for this party.

"You want to stay home?" he asked and put a large hand on my back. I smiled. He was so fucking perfect sometimes. I shook my head. "You want me to rub your back?"

I nodded. I felt new tears for a new reason. I really fucked up with this one. With both of them. I knew they were leaving at the end of the year. The contract said it was non-renewable when Autumn was added to it. I only had one hope for something lasting. After the incident in the dressing room, I wasn't sure I was really equipped to run with Autumn long-

term either. I felt like so much was happening lately and so fast that I was up, up, up, but this little reminder that I couldn't actually live on orgasm endorphins all the time was a bummer. I closed my eyes and wondered why I felt like I had to have anyone long-term right now. Right now, I could just enjoy all of this. Why not? I deserved a little happiness. Didn't I?



Storm

Holly fell asleep in no time. I puffed out a breath and stared at the ceiling. I napped after the cupcake sex, so I was fairly rested. She rolled and then lifted, moved closer to me, put her head on my chest and held onto me like I was her favorite teddy bear. It had to be hell being a woman. Imagining if it was reverse made me cringe and then shiver. This little situation did remind me that I assumed she was on birth control because it was in the original contract. The amendments on this deal were starting to get a bit irritating and not just to me. When Ripley called to discuss the latest, we had a decent laugh, and then he sent me the additions. Winston may not think much of his wiry self, but the ladies sure seemed to love him.

I stroked her hair and wondered how she was going to deal with that. How I was going to deal with the reaction to that. I thought it only fair she had to share one of us if not all three of us, though I still didn't trust myself to be on the market and I didn't trust Essie not to send someone in her stead to act like they cared and then fuck me up, so I'd go running back to her. Just like I did when this little minx fucked me up. I pulled her

hand away from my dick and put it back on my abdomen. She was still asleep, but reaching for it, nonetheless. I shook my head. I looked up something online I never really thought I would consider.

Well, heightened arousal explained why this one was like a cat in heat. Orgasms might help improve the cramps. That seemed counterintuitive, but so did going for a run when my legs were sore and that worked. I could have gone forever not thinking of it as nature's lubricant. I bought that the same way I thought grapes were nature's candy. *Bullshit*. Whoa, there was a chance *even if a slim one* a girl could get pregnant! That seemed illogical since the baby oven was running a descale cycle. I highly doubted she would appreciate my comparing her uterus to an appliance, but she should appreciate the fact I didn't send her back to her room since we were sharing a bathroom this weekend. I had full awareness this was a real thing, but zero experience outside of Essie and she was a total bitch even at twelve when she was on cycle. I was always torn between wishing she was always on because she hated me that week, or wishing she didn't hate me for something I couldn't control or do anything about. I was such a fool. I catered to that crazy bitch just to make her feel better.

Holly's hand moved on my abdomen and gripped and gripped, but there was nothing there for her to squeeze. Her thigh came over my leg and she found purchase for that wandering hand on my side. She pulled with both and lined herself up even closer. She pulled any more, she'd be on me like I was the mattress. I'd probably let her. I liked having her

this close, this snugly. I knew a lot of guys did not. I... was a giant teddy bear. I did just want to be held. So what?

The end of this article did remind me that sex was already messy. While it added the expected, the reminder that if anal was an option there were other bodily aspects to consider. We'd already made a mess twice with food. I had some perspective and a plan to just deal with life as it came to me. Shower would be my method for this if it ever occurred, but I was not going to ask for it. I just wouldn't be unprepared for it either.

She lifted her head about ten minutes before the hour and looked at me. I smiled and said, "Hey, Babe."

I liked calling her that. Liked the fantasy of this being real and her being mine. She smiled at me. Very sweetly, tenderly. She touched my cheek and said, "You have the most beautiful grey eyes, Stormy."

I could feel the heat creep up my neck. My eyes were my least favorite feature because they were my father's eyes, and he was not my favorite person because he was an asshole and treated my mother poorly. She touched my lips with her fingertips and said, "I was dreaming about you. About kissing you. About so many things."

Her naturally pouty lips actually pouted, and she said, "I wanted this weekend to be fun for you."

Ah. Yeah. We couldn't just fuck our way through this year. I planned to do plenty of that, but I didn't hate being around her, so I said, "It will be fun. We'll still have fun."

She smiled and said, “I haven’t been to a real party before. Unless you count going to one with the paper hats.”

“Totally count those. They were the best.” I did miss simpler times in my life. When I was young and innocent, and things were fun.

She smiled and then leaned in and kissed me. She snuggled up to me again and said, “I have to get ready.”

“It’s still an hour before we even leave for dinner.” How long did she need to get dressed?

“I’m still getting dressed for this. I don’t want you going to a frat party at a rival frat with me looking like I work in the library. You’re a star athlete and gorgeous. No. I have to at least look like it’s plausible you would be attracted to me.” She sighed.

She was serious and that’s what made it sad. “Holly, you’re beautiful. You know that, right? I didn’t walk into your room and put my face between your thighs because I was repulsed.”

She snickered and looked up at me. “You would have left if I were repulsive?”

“Hell, yes.” I nodded for emphasis. Then I stroked her cheek and said, “But you’re not. So...don’t change your look for me. You do that, you do that for you.”

She smiled at me and then hugged me. “I’m going to do better.” She was handing my words back to me. “I mean it. I’ll be better.”

Fuck. I did not want to like her this much anymore. I just...
couldn't help it.



Chapter

32

Winston

“Hey.” I looked at Thalia and she smiled up at me.

She was far from the *Goddess of Comedy* when she said, “She’s out of the picture, right?”

“She wasn’t really in the picture the way you think.” I was not going to let this little Diva run me any more than the other one. She looked away and I touched her cheek and directed her to look at me. She was all wide-eyed, but she needed to know how I played this game from jump. “There is a copy of our contract and information about your father. Something happens to me. Something happens to him. Understand?”

Her lashes fluttered. I continued before she could begin. “You picked me because you thought I was an easy mark. Someone you could control, boss around.” I rolled my eyes up and admitted, “Too many people make that mistake because I’m a nice enough guy, and I am. I’m just also not a pushover, so if you thought you could force me to like you, you can’t.”

She gulped, nodded. “I’m a lot to deal with.”

“I see that.” I wasn’t going to lie to her about this when I had other more important lies to keep. “I don’t mind a challenge.”

She smiled up at me and said, “And you’re not afraid of my dad?”

I shook my head. “Dead men don’t have to fear, so...I have to enjoy life while I can.”

“Wow.” She considered this a moment. “That’s deep.”

“So. You ready to go to this party or what?” I asked. “We’re meeting my friends, and yes, Holly is a friend. She’s with Storm.”

“If she’s with him, why were you contracted to her?” she asked.

Epic lie ahead, sort of. “Holly’s dad is a renowned psychologist and he’s built that fame and fortune from frat contacts. I was supposed to keep an eye on her this year. See what I could learn about him.”

“Oh, shit.” She touched my arm. “That makes so much more sense.”

She had my full attention. “Yeah? What did you think I was here for?”

“Not me. Essie. She thought you were here spying. Only two brothers in this house. One’s her cousin, the other is you and Harper made you number one at Sophomore House.” She walked next to me and revealed things I worried about but

wasn't sure how they were playing out. "I thought you were here because of the mixer."

I smiled down at her. "You were right."

She went all shocked expression and fit of giggles as she slapped at my arm and said, "Shame on you!"

"It worked, right?" I shrugged. "I am just a man after all."

"A good man." She gulped. "She told you I'm...slow. You know? I mean. I'm spoiled. I know it. I...don't want someone fake in my life like that. You're real."

"The realist." I didn't even flinch. "So. Now you know my secret, can I trust you with it?" She nodded. "So, be cool to Holly. Okay? She had to like give up both her room cleaners."

"What?" She gasped.

"I made sure the number was on the sheet, so he was fired from that part of the contract. They are like...a couple situation now. If you're cool with it, I have to clean her room. You understand, right?" I was so full of shit, and she was excited to be a conspirator. "Your dad ever teach you tactics?"

She shook her head. "Nope. I'm a girl. I'm supposed to stay a virgin until he decides who would be beneficial to marry me off to."

"Wow. I thought arranged marriage was a thing of the past in this country." I hated that for her.

She shook her head. "For some people. Just not for me."

"So, you proposing to me or what?" I teased.

She laughed and said, “No. I just...again. He...doesn’t know. So. We can be out in the open here, but I won’t be broadcasting it on social. I’m not even real on social.”

“Is anyone?” I asked.

She considered that. Then she said, “I want someone real in my life to hang out with, feel safe around. These bitches are not real, Winston. They are different versions of the same story. My dad, theirs. Holly’s dad isn’t the exception. He’s the fucking rule for our house. I hate it, but...I also like these shoes and...I don’t know. I met people here that didn’t come up like this. I don’t want to be worried about money. It’s a tradeoff. And people married like this for ever in the old days. Royalty. It’s...the same today. Just...different kinds of royalty.”

“I’m not a prince.” I shrugged.

“No.” She shook her head. “If this was a story, you could be Lancelot. I’ll have this year with you, and you’ll be romantic and—wait. Are you romantic?”

I laughed. “I don’t know.”

She waved her hand and said, “You will be. I can tell.”

“Well then, let’s start here.” I handed her a helmet and she looked at the bike.

“For real?” She lit up. I nodded. “Yes! I always wanted to ride a motorcycle.”

“Your chariot awaits, my lady.” I got on and then helped her on. She was so excited I thought she might squeeze me to

pieces with those tiny arms. She was petite and curvy, sexy in the obvious ways. I felt a bit like a giant next to her which is how I imagined guys like Storm felt all the time. I kinda liked feeling like a giant.

Once at the only other frat not on fraternity row, I parked the bike. So much easier to escape on this thing than worrying about a car. I attached our helmets to it and offered Thalia my hand. She took it and looked up at me and said, "I'll help you."

"Help me?" I asked.

"I'll be nice to her. She doesn't really have friends. Later, you tell me what you need to know. I'll slip that in. Find out. We'll be a good team." She was happy to be doing something bad.

I flexed that grip on her fingers and said, "We're going to have a great year."



Chapter

33

Autumn

I wasn't surprised I was chosen to DJ at the newest off-campus house for the DIBs because I was one of three high-profile female DJs in the area, and they wanted a quote-unquote hot girl. Much like the XIX fellas, these boys realized lower case letters send a whole different image dIb. They were hilarious and revolting, but they paid well and the purchase of a hotel with indoor pool and way more rooms than they needed, at least until their numbers grew, was like a real slap to the other houses still on frat row. Just like the XIX guys, I worked for as a bunny, the DIBs gave their old house to the sister sorority, the BBBs, which had a real meaning, but I reduced it to boobs, butts, and boys.

That was really the worst part of all this for me. Like, did any of these bitches have connections beyond these guys to get their own place or were they just going to slowly move out of the dorms into frat row until it was sorority row? Move out of sorority houses into mansions that they still didn't own or earn without some man's money. It was sickening because so many other women would be out here hustling, getting good grades, and putting that degree to use. Like Harper.

She and Apollo were two of the first people from my side of the frat life to arrive. I was in my DJ clothing, and that meant neon, small, and glow-in-the dark. I was just shy of indecent, but this was a show and it paid well. I waved and Harper waved back. They made their way over to me and Apollo looked down at me and said, “How long did it take you to get ready?”

That was an odd question, but it was Apollo, so I answered. “Maybe forty minutes? The hair and make-up took the most time.”

“Forty minutes.” He nodded. He looked at Harper and said, “We had time.”

She snickered, reached for his hand, and held it as she said, “No, we didn’t. But we have plenty of time tonight.” She looked at me and I smiled at them. They were cute together. She was cute with all three of them, really. “Anyway, I wanted to thank you for the patience and the assist in the whole... situation.”

“No problem, boss.” I smiled. “Winston is my best friend. I’d do just about anything for him.”

“Just about?” Apollo asked.

I whispered, “I won’t fuck him.”

They both laughed. He nodded. “Ah. Right.”

“Right.” I looked out toward the newest arrivals and said, “He’s such a good man.”

“He is.” Harper nodded as she turned, but then realized I was talking about Storm. “Oh. Yes. That one is a sweetheart. Fragile.”

I looked at Apollo and he was looking at Harper in a way I don't think he looked at anyone else, maybe ever. I agreed, “Men in love are often fragile.” They looked at me and I rolled a shoulder. “Applies to women, too. The most delicate piece of all of us, the emotional heart.”

Apollo glared at me. We were in a creative writing class together and that was a combination of lines from something he had written. Before anyone could say anything else, I said, “I need to get to it. Darkness has fallen and the crowd has arrived. Including Winston and Princess Crazy Ass.”

They laughed. Thalia was well known as a Diva with all caps on each letter. When they walked straight to Storm and Holly, I knew Winston had already smoothed his path. He was smart enough he could be in grad school right now, but young enough he wanted to enjoy life, have adventure, be crazy. He was doing that this year full throttle.

Apollo and Harper headed off in a different direction away from the foursome now gathered near a station for drinks. Holly looked so damn hot. I wanted to go over there, say hello, kiss her. Something. Well, later, maybe I could. Right now, I had work to do and one cue from the hosts and I kicked this shit off with some dance music.

They had the whole ballroom to work with and it was working. Damn, they did a good job with this party. The

platform for the DJ booth was high enough I could see out and around the crowd, the screens flashed images that elevated the mood. The lights had five settings and we were on the first one and would end this thing in the dark with all the special lighting that would really hit the vibe they were after.

It would be one hell of a night for sure.



Storm

Fucking DIB party in a broken-ass hotel that was probably going to collapse once we got out of the fucking building. I could not believe they let them buy it, much less move into it until it was all repaired. This is why the marked, but no longer lit exit was not being used. It's why the toilets in the men's room were leaking. I didn't know much about all this shit. I had avoided frat life at my other college. They did not have a XIX chapter there and this was my legacy. It was this frat or none, so I chose a college without a chapter.

I placed Holly and Thalia on their feet and asked, "You okay?"

They were both looking up at me like I just grew wings and a halo. I shook my head and said, "Let's head over that way until this mess clears out. I don't see or smell smoke. It's probably a false alarm."

Thalia blinked and smiled and said, "Wow. You just... wow."

I would have been embarrassed by the compliment. I was, actually, but the way Holly turned to look at her and the

expression of pure jealousy made me smile. Good. She needed to know what that shit felt like. Thalia may or may not have been jealous of Holly dancing with Winston since she thought they were just buds, but I was jealous of Holly dancing with Winston because I knew better. Hell, I was jealous of Holly dancing with Thalia because I knew she liked women, too.

I wasn't the only one feeling that sting, though. I smiled and said, "Found the cause of the fire."

Autumn looked behind herself at the building as she and Winston walked toward us. I laughed and said, "You, girl. Damn. Every time the lights got lower, you got brighter, and you hit that glow and boom, sound the alarm."

She shook her head, sort of rolled her eyes and said, "Shut up."

I meant it. Autumn may never look at me as a person of sexual interest but it was probably those glow-in-the-dark booty shorts that didn't cover all that booty that got it too hot in there. Holly asked, "You okay?"

Autumn nodded. If she was a third wheel in a trio of lovers, she was a fifth wheel in this weird-ass combo we had now. I patted the seat next to me and she smiled and moved over and took it. I looked at Winston getting the superhero version of my exit with these ladies explained by his date and Autumn nudged me in the side with her elbow and said, "Look at you, Big Guy. You want a cape for your birthday?"

I put my hand on her shoulder and pushed her. She cracked up laughing and then winced. I asked, "What?"

“I think I just got a splinter in my ass.” We all roared with laughter, but she was serious.

This is how I had one of the best nights of my life because I got to make all sorts of people jealous as I pulled out a multi-purpose pocket knife with tiny tweezers and told Holly to use the pen I gave her earlier to hold onto because it doubled as a flashlight. As Autumn went over my lap further than might be necessary so her ass was well in the air, she said, “You’re like Batman.” Then she said, “Ouch.”

Holly said, “Sorry. I was trying to get closer.”

It was a tiny, little sliver, but I got it and then for no other reason than because she was there, I popped her on the ass and said, “Good as new.”

She laughed as she got up, but Holly was eyeing me like I was in trouble.

Winston said as he heard the sirens, “Ready to head out?”

Thalia nodded. She came over to me and hugged me. Oh, that was not smart. My redhead was about to explode. I could see the twitch in her jealous eye. Thalia said, “Thank you.”

“Anytime.” I was so in trouble, and I did not even care why. In fact, I asked, “Autumn, you have a ride, or do you need one?”

“I’m good, Big Guy. I’ll see you guys tomorrow?” She looked at me, Winston, Holly. “Lunch?”

Holly was clenching her jaw, Winston had his complication next to him, looking up at him as if she also wanted an invite,

so I said, “I’ll text you. Not sure what is on the agenda just yet.”

That stung. I could see it as she nodded and said, “Yeah. Of course. I’ll be beat anyway. Sleeping in till noon at least.”

She did a slight wave, and I watched her perfect ass walk away. Winston snickered and said, “Dude.”

I shrugged. “Impossible to ignore it.”

“Try!” Holly shouted and stomped off.

Thalia winced and looked up at Winston and said, “Thank you for not looking at her ass, too.”

He’d seen way more than Autumn’s ass. Still, he was all stoic as he said, “I respect women. I would never just outright ogle them.”

I got up, nodded, pointed at him, and said, “You’re a dick.”

Then I headed after my date. Holly was leaning against the passenger side of my vehicle. I tilted my head, smiled. She scowled at me, glared. I didn’t know why, but that made it better somehow. She didn’t know why either because she asked, “Why are you so happy? You...you...”

I really smiled then, almost laughed. “I what, Babe? I looked at Autumn’s ass? If I’m not mistaken, and I doubt he would lie about it, you’ve had your fingers inside of her, right?”

She bristled, frowned. “That’s different.”

I closed the distance between us and sort of caged her there as I said, “Very different. I only looked. You touched. You touched enough you wanted to touch some more. I have to share you all fucking year, Holly. I’ll look all I want.”

She looked up at me said, “I’m jealous.”

“Me, too.” I shrugged.

“I’ve never been jealous before.” She put her hand on my chest. Slid it up to my neck and pulled me down to kiss her.

We were deep in that action when I heard Essie say, “Could you stop that?”

I ignored her and kissed Holly harder, brought her up off her feet and trapped her against the vehicle with my thigh between her legs. She was trying to break that kiss, but I was not going to let either of them control me at this moment and they both wanted to.

“I need a ride home!” Essie shouted. “Torden!” Then, like the straight-up brat she had been her whole life she said, “I’ll call my aunt and tell her you left me at this frat party so you could fuck your new girlfriend. See how that goes over next weekend.”

I bit Holly’s lip by reflex, accident, because I was torn between remaining focused on Holly and gritting my teeth as I ignored Essie. Holly gasped against my lips, eyes flashing open, wide, and she blinked at me. I looked at her kiss-swollen lips and saw the tint of blood. Fuck. I bit her harder than I

thought. I started to pull back, but she leaned in, kissed me, and then whispered, “I don’t want you to get in trouble.”

This went from being awesome to fucking awful. I helped Holly into the passenger seat, didn’t say a word to Essie as I walked around to the driver side. I got in and said to Holly, “You don’t want me talking to her and now you don’t want me in trouble with my mom. You tell her to get in.”

Holly rolled the window down and said sweetly, “We’ll take you home.”

Essie stomped her way and got in. Sure, if she were anyone else, I wouldn’t have had a problem taking her to begin with and I would have opened the door and even helped her in, but she was Essie, so, no.

Holly added, once Essie was in the back seat and could see her reach across to put her hand in my hair, “I would never use your family against you like that, Stormy. I’m sorry your cousin is so rich in dollars but so broke in friends that whoever she came with left her ass. You’re a good man.”

Well, that was one way to deal with this madness. Testing my contractually obligated girlfriend’s commitment to this current role, I looked over at her before pulling out of the parking lot and said, “You’re still coming home with me, though, right? Or do you want me to stay there with you?”

She smiled and said, “Of course, I am. I love you.”

I kissed the palm of her hand and said, “I love you, too, Babe.”

At some point, Holly looked out the window and I glanced in the rearview to see a silent but deadly Essie stewing in her thoughts. I'd pay for this. For all of it. I just didn't know when or how, yet.



Holly

We dropped Essie off and went back to the frat house where I slammed his bathroom door and took my shower without him. Not that I thought he would want to shower with me anyway, but still. Stormy took his shower and we settled into bed. I loved sleeping next to him, now. He went to his back, arm up and over his head, and I wondered what it would be like to just...tie him up like that. Both arms. He asked, "What?"

"What?" I was blushing from the carnal thoughts that would not abate.

"Why are you looking at me like that?" he asked, brow arched.

"I was thinking. It's stupid. It's...bad." I frowned.

"Tell me." He yawned.

He was mid-yawn when I said, "I was thinking about tying you up."

His mouth was slow to close. He really had a brow situation happening on that handsome face now. I smiled and added,

“You sleep with your arm up over your head and I...I don’t know. I just thought...”

“You’re really something else in that department. You know that?” he asked. My expression must have indicated I did not. “You’re pissed at me for flirting with Autumn. A lesbian, that you’ve had sex with, I might add. Pissed because she who must not be named needed a ride home. And yet, you want to tie me up. What if I wanted to tie you up? Huh? You trust me enough to let me have that kind of control over your body?”

I wanted to. “I don’t know. I just...it’s all I think about.”

“Which is why you have three people at your beck and bedroom call, Holly. Let me ask you this, where are you going for winter break?” He smiled, waited.

“Home.” I frowned. He was, too, and that meant...I shook my head and said, “No. I’m going with you. Or you’re coming with me, or...we will just go somewhere else entirely.”

His eyes kept getting wider. I nodded. “Yeah.” I smiled. “Oh. my God!” I sat up and looked down at his gorgeous face and said, “Let’s go to Vegas. You, me, Winston, Autumn. The four of us. It will be perfect.”

It sounded fun to me. Time with the three people I wanted to be around the most.

Stormy shook his head and said, “Sure. I’ll skip out on time with my mom and grandma this year to hang with you and the rest of the harem in Vegas. What’s my favorite color, Holly?”

I blinked.

“Exactly. No. I’ll be going home to spend time with people who love me for real, not just when they want to use those words as a weapon.” I balked and he said, “You know what. Go...hang with your boy, Winston tonight. Tell him I changed my mind.”

“About what?” I asked.

“I only wanted you to sleep, as in spend the night with me. Now, I want you to go talk about tying him up. He knows you better. Hell, *she* knows you better than I do. I’m just your fuck buddy.” He rolled to his side, showing me his back.

Was he on his period, too? I puffed out a breath and said, “Fine.”

I got out of bed and headed to Winston’s room. Once there, I found him freshly showered. He looked me over and shook his head no. I said, “He said I could.”

“Well, that makes this super fucking awkward then because unlike Storm, I, uh...don’t want to sleep with you, Holly.” He shrugged. “I want to fuck you. Have fun? Sure. Keep us both in the land of the living? Absolutely. But...all the.” He gestured as if my whole being was a mess as he said, “Well. All of this extra. You got the big guy, and you got Autumn. I’m not...investing where there won’t be a return. So...’night, Holly.”

What the actual fuck?

I turned and left that room. I wasn’t going back to Stormy’s room. I was not going to call Autumn. I did text her to see if

she was interested in lunch tomorrow and she hadn't responded. I went back to his room picked up my keys and went back to the sorority house. It was late, rather early in the morning, but...I was going to sleep away the rest of this weekend.



Storm

A week and a half and no Holly. Well, I had plenty of Holly in my head, but no Holly in my bed. It's why I was surprised to run into her on campus. She looked phenomenal in her new style. A cross between casual and kink. Maybe I just liked the red hair. She smiled up at me and I decided I liked that, too. She blushed and I knew how much I liked that, but out here, in the open, with the sun shining down on us, making her hair seem a bit more like fire, I couldn't help myself. I smiled back and said, "Hey."

She bit her lower lip a moment and I remembered biting that lip hard enough it bled. That did some weird shit to my insides and blood suddenly started rushing in directions it should not be rushing at this hour and in this location. Was it just sex? Was everything just sex? The silence was dragging on.

I was about to tell her I had some place to be when she said, "Your parents, at least your mom will be here this weekend for the game, right?"

She remembered that. I nodded.

She said, “I want to be there for you. I want to come to the game. I want to...run interference, I think?”

I smiled widely and laughed. “Yeah. Something like that. You know there will be dinner after. You know there will be *family* at that dinner.”

I knew how to talk about Essie without saying her name. I had done that for many years when I was trying to figure shit out on my own with friends and even once, my mom, who said I should talk to my cousin for advice on girls our age. So, that didn't help.

She stepped forward and asked, “What's your favorite color?”

I reached forward and touched her hair and said, “Red.”

She really blushed then. I wanted to pick her up and carry her to a corner and...damn. It might all just be sex with Holly. I might just be in lust with her. My head in this arena had been so messed up for so long. I wanted something real, lasting, loving, but...maybe lust was better. Uncomplicated. Fun. I took another step forward and asked, “What's yours?”

She looked up and stared deeply into my eyes and said, “Grey.”

“Come on.” I held out my hand and she took it. All sparks and electricity, we moved to the side of a building with a bit of an alcove, and I pushed her backpack off her shoulder and then her up against the wall as I said, “Touch me.”

Her hand moved immediately to the band of my running pants since I was super lazy this morning and didn't really get dressed for classes. I groaned as her soft hand wrapped around my dick and gave a tug. The bushes were high back here, but I was taller than them. She wasn't, but I was. I put my hand on her head and pushed as I said, "Down."

She moved, and that compliance was like kerosene on an open flame. I blocked all thoughts that tried to roll up about who would not do anything like this. Holly would, could, was, and that was all that mattered. I pushed deeper and held the back of her head. Her gasps as I let her pull back, was music to my ears. The slobbering sound of her mouth on my dick had me teetering so soon. I looked down and said, "Look up here. Look at me when I cum."

She lifted those big, green eyes and I watched myself go in, her struggle to take it, heard the sniff, watched the tear stream from her eye and felt everything wind, ball, then release in a hot stream along her soft tongue as she gulped and gulped to get it down. Fuck yes, I was in lust with her. I smiled and for some crazy-ass reason said, "Good girl."

Her eyes closed, then opened as she shivered. I had to pull her up before I got hard and did that again. Right now. She was a bit twitchy, and I asked as I thumbed the tear and she wiped her nose on the sleeve of the long-sleeved t-shirt she had on. Well, that was not exactly lady-like, but I didn't care. I asked, "You want me to touch you?"

"Yes." She nodded. "Please."

My dick was ready to fuck her, here, now.

“I have to go to class.” I was not exactly lying. I had a class I needed to attend, but it was online, not in person, so I could watch the recording later.

She gulped, quivered. I loved looking at her like that. All desperate like. For me. I nodded and said, “Bring me cupcakes?”

Her brows drew a bit tight as she realized I was not going to do anything to help her ease that ache right now. I could. I should, but...I wasn't going to. “When?”

“Tonight. We can eat cupcakes and study up so when you meet my mom and grandma, they will be able to quiz you and you might know something other than how big my dick is.” I winked and walked away as she gasped.



Holly

Autumn lived near the cupcake place. I picked up one for her, especially, and dropped in to say hi.

I followed him out of that little spot and said, “I know your favorite color is red!”

He turned, walked backward, and smiled as he said, “Yes, it is.” Then he turned and kept walking away from me.

I was a turned-on electrical storm as I walked in a bit of a daze to my car. My lack of situational awareness evident as I about jumped out of my overheated skin when Winston said, “Can I get a ride?”

This one. That one had been ignoring me and this one had been in my room lounging to avoid the chores he was allegedly doing at the Diva house. “Where is your vehicle?”

“Funny story.” He got into the passenger seat and as I settled, he said, “Well, maybe not funny. Still, I need to go to Diva House, and I thought, I know who should be heading home about now. And here you are. A little late.”

“Not such a funny story.” I started up the car. I squeezed my thighs together and let out a whimper.

“What’s wrong over there? You’re all...twitchy.” He canted a bit to assess me. “Tell me.”

“I’m.” I considered my words carefully. “I’m...aroused?”

Winston sniffed his shirt and said, “I guess it does work better for me.”

I gripped the steering wheel. *Thalia*. She had bought that for him. Liked it on him. He spent a decent amount of time talking about her to me because unlike Essie with Stormy, I couldn’t really do much about it.

“Well, I guess it’s been over a week now, so you should be in the clear.” He stroked his arm down my shoulder. “I could...handle that for you.”

“I’m driving.” Obviously.

He leaned across and said in a sweet whisper, “That’s what makes it fun.”

“I don’t think I can concentrate and—” I sucked in a sharp breath as his hand slid down my thigh, then up the dress.

“Focus on that road. I’ll focus on this one.” He touched the crotch and said, “Damn. What the hell did you do in class today?”

I was wet. I didn’t tell him for fear he may stop if he knew I was this wet from sucking Stormy’s cock behind some bushes against the side of a building. At school. “A lot of thinking.”

“Thinking about me?” he asked. Before I could voice the word yes in addition to the nod he said, “About Storm? About Autumn?”

“Yes.” I sucked in a breath as his fingers moved up and down, teasing but not entering or giving enough pressure anywhere. “Please.”

That was the second time in less than an hour, I was begging a man to touch me.

“You like that?” he asked, and I nodded. Winston eventually found better employment for those fingers, and I found the line in the road difficult to see. I jerked the wheel back before clipping a parked car. I missed the turn. I eventually just pulled into the first space I could find and when I put it in park, he put me into orbit. I held the steering wheel as I tensed to the point of breaking and then I shattered around his fingers in a much needed, and long overdue, release. I was catching my breath as he whipped his cock out. “Come here.”

I leaned across the seat and was glad I didn't have a car with a shift in the middle. My mouth opened, and again, was filled with a dick. Winston was not as big as Stormy, length or girth, but he was not average by any means. Maybe for his size? I didn't really know. He pushed down on the back of my head as he lifted his hips up and said, “That's it, baby. Take it good and deep like, yes. Like that. Fuck. Almost there. So close. Swallow me down, Holly.”

I did.

Two shots of protein and one orgasm later, I was looking at the devil in my passenger seat and asked, “Where is your car?”

He winked and said, “Bike’s in the parking lot at school. Mind taking me back to get it?”

These motherfuckers.

“So. This is how it’s going to be between us?” I asked, though I did smile. My body was humming a whole new tune. A comfortable, lazy, satisfied thrum.

“Good? Yeah. I hope so.” He was such a scoundrel!

“This is good?” I asked as I took him back to the parking lot.

“Hell, yes this is good. It’s kinda great. I’ve been napping in your bed every afternoon I’m at Diva House. I’m surrounded by your scent, your things. And Thalia is so damn boring.” He groaned. I frowned. “I mean it. She’s pretty, but I would rather have someone interesting in my life. Don’t you agree?”

“I have three interesting people in my life who have been ignoring me.” I frowned. “Why is everyone ignoring me?”

“I don’t ignore you.” He was confused since we saw each other all the time.

“You being in my space, jabbering on about your lady problems with my sorority sister when you are contracted physically to me, never touching me, never talking about...me. I...haven’t really asked about you, though, either. Have I?” I winced.

“You know lots about Autumn now, though, right? I mean I only thought it was fair since you seemed to want to share your lady problems with me that I share mine with you.” We were back at the parking space and his bike was literally behind where my car had been.

I looked over and said, “I’m sorry.”

“Hey, you’re in the clear now, so...back to training. We’re friendly enough. We fuck, Holly. I’m not proposing when the timer runs out on this leash. ‘Kay?” He tilted his head and I nodded. “So, catch ya later.”

“Right.” I smiled and hoped it didn’t look super broken like my heart was feeling. I didn’t love Winston...right? I didn’t really love Stormy either. I knew that now. How could I when I didn’t even know something as basic as his favorite color?

Winston winked and got out of my car. I shouted, “What is your favorite color?”

He said, “Black, like my heart.” Then he laughed.

Awesome.



Chapter

38

Autumn

I had something to lose from Holly walking away from our contract. A lot actually. I puffed out a breath and then decided maybe I would walk the two streets over and get a cupcake after all.

I answered the door and tried not to smile too hard or show the shock I was feeling. “Um.”

“You’ve been avoiding me.” Holly offered me a box from the bakery a couple streets over. They had so much amazing stuff in there, but none of it should be eaten on the regular. “I got this for you.”

“You came all the way here to give me a cupcake I could literally walk ten minutes and get myself?” I was mad at her, and I wasn’t a hundred percent sure why because my problem right now wasn’t just with or about Holly. She was the catalyst, but the problem was me.

“Will you let me in? Talk to me?” She then let out some of her frustration by saying, “Or are you going to be just like the guys and shut me out?”

I let her in and when I closed the door I said, “You have no idea what it’s like to be me.”

“Tell me.” She looked around the efficiency apartment and said, “This is really cute.”

“Cute?” I snorted a laugh. “It’s my home, Holly. Technically, it’s the home of a friend’s great grandma, but I needed a place, so I sublet it. Because I wasn’t a pain in the ass, they let me stay when she died. It’s rent controlled. I don’t want to live in the dorms.”

I pushed her hand away because she was reaching for me. I said, “No. I don’t want or need that from you. Understand?”

She shook her head no and said, “I don’t understand why calling it cute is a bad thing. It’s small, but you’ve decorated it. I—I don’t know what I’m doing here.”

“Sure, you do. You came here because you are through your cycle and ready to be fucked.” I was being mean and bitchy, but being around Holly was fucking me up. Being around all three of them like this was way worse than before when I was theoretically looking for a partner. And Storm. Hell, even watching her with Winston. I...had enough to deal with in that department.

She glared at me and said, “No. However, it is very apparent that everyone was tracking my cycle to see when I could be fucked again, so thank you. I see exactly where I stand with all three of you now. Clearly. This. I wanted this. I don’t need it.”

She walked over and picked up the cupcake box. Was she taking it back? I was almost proud of her for that.

Holly said, “And you don’t need this.”

I gasped and asked, “What the fuck does that mean?”

My ego taking a hit in a way it hadn’t been punched in a long time, revealed I was not prepared for this.

“Nothing.” She looked me up and down and said, “Had nothing to do with your body, but I understand you...thought it did. I get that. If I had half my ass out all the time, I’d need to watch my weight, too. But I have two men contracted to fuck me no matter what I look like and since they can’t fuck anyone else, I’m pretty sure as long as I’m not bleeding, they’ll find a way to get through it. You, on the other hand. Would you have wanted me if you showed up and I didn’t look like me?”

“No.” I felt my body flinch back as though I just slapped myself with my own words. She didn’t even seem offended. “I mean...”

She held up her hand and said, “I’ve been coming to terms with my *perfection*. The diet that didn’t allow me to have cupcakes. The triggers that flooded my mouth with sour or bitter tastes to keep me from making my own choices about things. I don’t have them like I used to. It’s not all the time and every day, I’m getting rid of more of those. Pushing past what is expected of me and becoming who I want to be. I’m glad I learned this now. I’m not going to be the same woman standing before you in the next six months. At the rate I feed Stormy cupcakes, I might outweigh him by the break.”

“Look.” I didn’t know what to say. I had only liked girls with a certain look. Shallow? So I worked hard to keep my image, my rep. And one woman and one time being bent over some giant’s knees was not going to undo the decisions I made about myself. My life. How I was going to live it.

“I’m out.” She shrugged. “I’m done. I didn’t want you as part of the contract to have sex with you. You only wanted to be part of the contract to have sex with me. I knew. I knew in that dressing room. I knew when I touched you in that bed you didn’t want to be touched back. You want control of too much and I’m not giving up any more control of my life. I wanted a friend. A beautiful friend that represented who I wanted to be. Confident, bold, secure with herself and the choices, but you aren’t even that. Are you? You’re no more sure of who you are than I am about myself. You just fake it better.”

Then she left my apartment, and I stood there looking at the closed door and considered how I was going to deal with this because a lot of it was true, but I was not ready to admit or accept any of it. I had built an amazing shelter for myself in the emotional forest of my heart and only Winston had navigated his way to it.

He was like my brother, but like...a stepbrother maybe, because I didn’t mind seeing him naked. Didn’t mind him fucking Holly with me. Didn’t mind when his hand touched me, even if it was because he was touching her. So, maybe I just wanted to see him as a brother so I wouldn’t allow myself to be attracted to him. He is my best friend and that would have to be close enough because it was the closest to anyone I

had been since my mom died. I didn't know my father, so there was nothing to gain or lose from that.

I knew I had the tingly feelings for guys and gals, but I made a choice and I was going to stick to it. Even if that meant cutting Holly out so I could go back to my original route. With Holly in my life, two men came with it. I thought I could handle it. Thought I could ignore it, but...I lied to her and myself when I said I didn't want to fuck her men. I didn't know what I wanted. Or who. Or why anymore. I hated losing anything and it sure felt like my mind was in competition with my heart for first place in the loser race.



Holly

I had the four-count box on the table and the one with soft pink icing and multi-color sprinkles in my hand in the bed, where I was naked and waiting for Stormy to get his ass home.

He opened the door and went wide-eyed as he said, “Damn.”

I wasn't in the mood for small talk. I gripped the stacked high swirl of icing in one hand and pulled it off the top of the cupcake. I used it kind of like a weird lotion and strategically deposited pink frosting on my breasts, down between them, lower, until I smeared it on a recently waxed pussy. He was naked by the time he got to the bed, so I offered him a little from my fingers and he grabbed that hand and began eating me up like he hadn't seen me in years instead of days. Like I hadn't sucked his cock a couple hours ago.

His perfect lips, tongue, met mine and I pushed a relatively icing-free hand into his hair and pulled him closer. I said as I let him pull away, “You've made quite the mess of me.”

He nodded. “I'm going to clean it up right now.”

I would never do this again. He literally would not move on until the icing was gone from one spot to the next. I put way too much on my boobs and not nearly enough on the place I needed him to get to. I had showered earlier when I arrived, but by the time he was licking at the lips below my navel, I was dripping. The Stormy faucet was on, and I wanted. No. I needed him to stop torturing me. “Stormy, please.”

“Please, what?” he asked and then said, “This?”

My hips bucked up to meet his kiss because he was finally beyond frosting. “Yes.”

My hand pushed into his hair, tried to hold him there. He teased, tortured, and then sent me on a sugar crash as that wave rolled through me in a sweet release. His hand gripped my hand at his hair, gathered the other wrist to hold them both as he moved up, over me, lifting my arms above my head and pinning them above me. He said, “Tell me you want it, Holly.”

I nodded. “I do. I want it.”

He shifted and then positioned himself for entry and then began the push and pull of working his way into me, deeper. I instinctively reached, but my arms were trapped above my head. He pushed down, held them in place. Grey eyes pinned me a moment and gaged my reactions. I tried to lift my chin higher, I wanted to kiss him. I wanted to wrap my arms around him. I wrapped my legs instead since I could still move those. I pulled at him by using my heel against his perfect, muscled ass. Once he was all the way in, deep, he stopped, just sort of nudged as he asked, “Good?”

“Yes.” I nodded. I gulped. It’s like he really is Torden Storm. The thunder rolling around in my brain, in my body, all stems from this man’s touch. I wanted lightning. I wanted hurricane-force winds. I wanted him to...“Be bad.”

“Yeah?” he asked. His lips twitched.

“Yes.” I tried to keep my eyes open as he pulled back and then pushed in with some force. “Yes.” I didn’t know why I liked this so much, but I did. It was like too much and not enough, and “Fuck. Yes. Harder. Make it...make it hurt.”

He let go of my wrists and slid out of me only to turn me over, spread my legs wide and outside of his as he pushed into me from behind. I tried to eat his pillow because my face was in it for a scream of pleasure. It was that or risk the entire compound come running to save me because I was loud. One large hand at my hip, the other on my shoulder, he fucked me without any restraint. I would feel this all week, I was sure of that. I didn’t even understand how my body could process the slap of his heavy sac to my clit, but the pace, the consistent motion had me breaking his rhythm as my body collapsed with the orgasm that pulled him over into one with me. It was an ungraceful and uncoordinated effort at the end, but I was so blissed out, I didn’t care.

He tugged at me and I turned to face him. Only once I was looking at him, did I realize I was also crying. He realized that immediately. Eyes wide, I shook my head no to stop his guilt from overtaking his afterglow. “I’m fine. That was just intense.”

He reached back and brought tissues forward and cleaned up my eyes, my nose as he said, “I don’t want to be that rough with you if it hurts in a bad way.”

I sighed and smiled, “Not in a bad way. I’m so relaxed right now. My entire body aches, I’m still throbbing, but also...it’s so good, Stormy. You’re amazing.”

“It’s the cupcakes. The sugar rush.” He eyed the box on the table and looked at me. I looked at him like he was straight-up crazy. “No?”

“I don’t think my legs work at the moment.” I smiled so brightly at him. He was like the best chill pill in the world with that sexual skill set. He looked at the box of cupcakes again and his bottom lip slightly poked out in a pout. I reached up and touched it. Pinched it with my fingers and tugged until he was meeting me for a kiss. I had two choices at this moment. Roll back and out of this bed to get his cupcakes to distract him or keep kissing him where he would likely gear up for round two which I was not cardiovascularly prepared for.

I rolled and wobbled, reached between my legs because I was embarrassed. I could feel the liquid from my core, maybe even from him, slipping down my thighs. He groaned and said, “Fuuuck. Stop touching yourself. Damn.”

I grabbed the box and tried to walk back without touching myself, though I was trying to keep my thighs together as much as possible. I handed him the box which he promptly put on the night stand and then tugged me as he repositioned himself in the center of the bed. He said, “Climb on up.”

“Did you hear the part about no strength in the leg muscles?” I was trembling, Thighs burning as I straddled his hips.

“I’m about to do some hip curls, Babe. Just. Fuck. Yes.” He put his hands on my hips and rocked up and into me. “Is it laced with meth?” My brow went up and I snickered, which made him groan, push higher which meant deeper into me. “I’m fucking addicted. I was trying not to be. It didn’t matter. I wake up wanting to fuck you, Holly. I go to sleep wanting to bury myself so deep inside you I get lost.”

He shifted slightly and the angle made him hit a new switch on that faucet. “Stormy.”

My fingers curled on solid abs. He didn’t need coaching to know what happened. He stayed there and did it again, and again, and again. It was so intense I had to fall forward, cover my mouth, bite into the pillow. Only, that wasn’t a pillow. It was his chest. Instead of reacting badly to that, he gripped me harder, held me tighter, and ground out a sound of release I would dream about the rest of my life. When I looked at his chest, the teeth marks, and the slight break of skin from one of my canines and said, “I’m so sorry. You’re bleeding.”

He looked and then shook his head. “That’s a scratch.”

He reached for the box of cupcakes and put it on my back like I was a table. I wasn’t moving. I couldn’t move. I closed my eyes and listened to the sound of his pounding heart thrumming strong and steady in my ear. I asked, “Which one’s your favorite?”

“The one with my dick in it.” He had food in his mouth when he said that. He was still inside of me. Not hard, but still there, resting.

“I don’t think I should tell that to your mother.” I shifted my head and looked at him as he took his next bite. “How cool is your grandma?”

He snickered and said, “Not cool enough for that. Maybe this one. But you can’t tell them I’m eating *these* cupcakes and you shouldn’t tell them I’m obsessed with *your* cupcake.”

“Why can’t you eat cupcakes?” I asked as I looked at him.

“Too much sugar, they’re bad for me, no one wants a fat wide receiver, they’ll move me to defense. I don’t know.” He frowned at the last bite and then put it in his mouth. He moved the box from my back to the nightstand and said, “Food has always been something I could control. That and working out. I... needed some control.”

“I get it. Only, I wasn’t making those decisions because they were smart.” I looked at him and asked as he offered me the last of that frosting on his thumb, “What if I gain a lot of weight?”

I opened my mouth as he put his thumb into it. He closed his eyes and smiled as he said, “I could probably fuck you even harder.”

I licked that thumb, let my teeth graze against it. I could feel him swelling inside of me again. I warned, “I’m still on limited mobility here.”

“I’m still in great fucking shape.” He rolled us and said, “After this, we may need a nap.”

“I might start that early.” I did a fake yawn and he laughed at me, punched his hips forward and I said, “Such a good dream.”

“You want that, Holly? Want to wake up with my dick inside you?” he asked, and I could see the lust in his expression. That was something many would consider being bad. I nodded. “Yeah?”

“I want you to take me when you want me, Stormy.” I then said some really crazy shit because the fact that he didn’t care if I didn’t look perfect as much as he cared that he could fuck me the way he wanted to meant everything to me. “I want you to treat me like I belong to you. Take what you want. When you want.” Oh fuck, he liked that a lot. “H...how...you...oh, yes.”



Storm

Letting Holly leave that night took effort. After the blowjob, the afternoon of cupcakes and sex, we made a plan. Between good food and fucking, we covered most of the basics that a couple would need to know about one another. I liked Holly. Liked her shy, liked her bold, and liked her naked. I was still processing how that would play out in the long run, but focused on the short term because she would be meeting my mom and grandma at the game.

Today, I was encountering another beautiful woman, but this one was scowling at me. I looked at Autumn and said, “Hey, Cranky.”

“I am cranky!” She threw her hands up and added, “You talk to Holly lately?”

Ah. Girl problems. I nodded. We shared this particular problem, or we used to. I asked, “What happened?”

“Do you care? You don’t want to share her with me.” We walked to a bench, and I took a seat while she remained standing in front of me.

“I *didn't* want to share her with you. No. But.” I rolled a shoulder. “I realized that was nonsense.” As I reminded myself why it was nonsense, I gave Autumn a list of reasons. “I don't love Holly. I'm just in lust with her.” Well, that didn't quite fit. I added, “I like her.”

Autumn nodded.

I wanted to stop sharing my thoughts, but kept on anyway. “We barely know each other. She's a freshman and I'm a junior, so I'll be out of here and she will remain. I...had a plan to find one woman and settle down this year. That's what it was about for me. You weren't exactly available.” I winked and she tensed. I didn't comment on her blushing but I was a bit proud of myself for getting that reaction from her. “I thought Holly was that woman and she is, just not the way I thought she would be. And...that's okay, because...I don't love her.”

“Me either.” She sighed and then looked at the concrete. “I thought I wanted a relationship with someone, but I forgot that means...knowing more than what they sound like when they cum. You know?”

“Right.” I laughed. “It was like a two-hour inquisition last night. Wanna quiz me?”

She looked at me and then asked, “You hung out last night?”

“Of course.” I waited.

“A few days ago, she came by and I...was not my best.” Autumn was in a real funk. I totally understood that. Didn’t know what to do about it.

“Is that what happened? You two got into an argument or didn’t see things the same way and now Winston and I have to re-read the contract and sign it again to make sure no other changes were made?” I looked at her and said, “You better be serious about wanting out, Autumn. I’m tired of that paperwork. I might not agree to let you back in if this is going to turn into some...girl drama.”

She went all shocked expression over there. She was not using dude brain, or this wouldn’t be that big of a deal. It wasn’t for me, and it wasn’t for Winston. Hell, we agreed we didn’t really even have to like Holly anymore. She was who we were fucking this year. I just planned to do that more than either of them. Especially after she said I should treat her like she was mine. Wake her up with my dick inside her. I shifted, needed to get my head back in the moment. I missed part of what she said, but she was all animated about it, nonetheless.

“...I mean, what am I supposed to do?” she asked.

“Talk it out. Be adults. I don’t know.” I smiled and tilted my head. “Watch me enjoy something you had and let go of.”

I motioned with my hand and Holly moved closer to us, her hand reaching for mine. When I gripped her fingers, I pulled until she was perched upon my lap. I kissed her cheek and then her neck, sweetly.

Autumn puffed out a breath and said, “Hey.”

Holly turned just briefly to look at her and said, "Hi."

I said, "I was just telling Autumn how much I missed you and then you were here."

"You were not," Autumn said it so indignant like.

Holly laughed and said, "I missed you, too."

I leaned in to kiss Holly's neck again and looked at Autumn while I did. While Holly leaned her head back. While Autumn registered that Holly was an exceptional woman who didn't just enjoy sex, she craved it. That by shunning her over whatever little bickering they had, she was missing out. I was not missing out. I sort of whispered but also said it loud enough Autumn could hear, "You want to take a quick study break in the car?"

"Yes." Holly had her eyes closed, she sighed. I could probably touch her right here and she wouldn't say anything other than yes.

"Let's go, Babe." I helped her up and said, "Later, Cranky."

Autumn just stood there, mouth agape.

I hadn't parked in that spot with this in mind. In fact, I was running a bit behind so parking in this spot was worrying me for the very reason it was helping me right now. Sort of. As I helped her into the back of the luxury SUV for what I had hoped would be a blowjob, at the very least a hand job, the other door opened, and Winston popped in. I closed my door and said, "Um. Hey, man. What's up?"

“Me.” He looked around. “Knew it when I saw you heading this way at this hour when you both have classes. I do not. I was dropping something off for Apollo. So. We doing this or what?”

She looked at him, at me, and shocked the hell out of me though he seemed to expect this answer. “Okay.”

“Okay?” I asked. “How do you plan to manage this?”

She smiled up at me and said, “I have two hands.”

Well, all right. She had a plan. I looked at him and said, “I thought you didn’t—”

“Desperate times, my friend. I don’t care if it looks like a Twizzler next to a can of Pringles. I need this.” He began unfastening his pants.

I cracked up. Holly frowned up at me and said, “You’re both very well endowed. Let’s not body shame.”

“You’re right. Let’s body praise.” I leaned in and kissed her as he moved her hand over his already hard dick.

Damn, what the hell was he doing today that had him that desperate? His sounds of straight-up need and want on that visceral level drew my attention to her hand. She was making him wait, teasing him. Her hand moved to my lap and my semi-hard erection. I caught up by getting my pants down. She surprised the hell out of me by saying, “Good boys.”

“Okay.” Winston nodded. “I’ll be a good boy for you. Just a little more...such a good boy. I promise.”

He was going to make me laugh out loud again. Little suck up. She looked up at me, bit her lower lip a second, then asked, “Are you going to be a good boy?”

I shook my head and said, “Probably not.”

Her lashes fluttered. Winston groaned, then said, “Promise. Promise. So good. Just get me...fuck yeah.”

He was getting her full attention and I was getting the gentle strokes he started with. I was not being good. I was not going to be either. Maybe if he nudded, he could get out and I could get her on top of me.

She turned to him and kissed him. It was both something I had settled with and something that was interesting to watch, though it took a moment for me to not snatch his head right off his shoulders. I watched him get lost in that kiss. His hand moved up to cup her breast as he sighed. He was a tormented man if his actions were any indicator. I pulled her skirt up her thighs and exposed her panties. He slid his hand down and then eagerly under the crotch and then mumbled, “So fucking wet.”

What? I had to know. I reached and touched and damn, he was right. I asked her as I pulled that fabric away from her heat and his hand, “You like that?” She nodded as she turned from his kiss, and I found myself leaning in to her lips. When my hand returned to her completely exposed pussy, I realized he had a finger in her. That was my pussy, too. I pushed one in next to his and that tender touch on my dick firmed. “You want to cum, don’t you, Baby?”

Panting she nodded, shifted her thighs wider, giving us better access. Winston slid his finger out and began working her clit. I pushed another finger in and pumped. It was obscene. Her head fell back against the seat. Her hands worked in time with the thrust of my fingers, and then she let go. Let go of our dicks or else she might have pulled too hard because she was lost in the next moment as she pulled her shirt up, the bra, and pulled at her own nipples. We both leaned in, capturing the one closest as we worked for her orgasm. When it came, he put a hand over her mouth and covered the screamed release. We both watched the squirt of fluid, the buck of her hips, the way she shook from it.

Coming down, she was so pliable. It was no wonder he hit the release on the seat so it laid back. I hit the one on my side as he pulled her hips toward him, and she moved her mouth toward my dick. We were doing this. It was happening. The moment her mouth engulfed the head of my dick, I didn't even care that we were fucking her like animals in the back of my car in the worst spot in the parking lot.



Chapter

41

Winston

I saw two girls making out in the classroom next to the TA office when I dropped off a package for Apollo. I did love anatomy and physiology and apparently, they did, too. I saw Autumn and was going to say hi, but then saw these two sneaking off somewhere. When they both went to the same side of the vehicle, I practically sprinted. Yeah, he was not getting another afternoon delight without me.

It's just...this sort of took on a life of its own. I pushed into Holly and groaned at the relief. It felt like it had been since forever and that was entirely too long for an eighteen-year-old junior in college to be waiting to bust a nut in his contractually-obligated sex buddy. Storm was a bit quieter about all this, but he'd been fucking her. I knew that. The whole house knew that since one of the other bunnies had passed his door. They all staked him out in hopes that he would need something to put his giant dick into.

Holly was so damn responsive to everything it didn't surprise me they heard her. I held her hips and he put his hand in her hair and pulled her closer to his lap. She liked that. I

groaned at the clench and said, “Do it again. Whatever the fuck you just did, do it again.”

He must have because she did that clench again. I hated this seat, the leather. The fact that it sounded like we were chewing on dog toys with the occasional squeak, the slurping sound of her mouth on Storm, the wet thwap of my thrusts against her. She began to tighten around me without the pulse, so I knew she was about to hit that peak. I said, “I love it when you cum, Holly. Cum with me. That’s it, baby. Fuck. Take me with you. Yes.”

I barely heard them over my own blood rushing so hard through me it blocked all sound as I emptied into her. Storm was panting and the beautiful woman on her side between us looked disheveled since we hadn’t taken off all her clothes.

Coming down from that event, I looked at the ceiling in the SUV and said, “That would have been way easier in a bed, right?”

Storm snickered and Holly adjusted her bra, her shirt. She said, “Probably. I think I’ll have a bruise on this arm and hip now.”

That got my attention. His, too. We both sat up and looked at her arm as she touched it. It was red and irritated, probably from the friction of the seat. Storm reached for it and inspected it. He said, “Little red. Not even a scrape. You’ll be fine.”

I reached for my shorts and underwear that were around my ankles and pulled them up as he continued to inspect her hip. He said, “This will bruise. Not bad, though.” He pulled up his

shorts and briefs and continued, “I need to get to my next class.” He pulled his hand up and sniffed his fingers. “Fuck. I’m going to be distracted as hell.”

“Well, Big Guy, I put on quite a show. Of course, it’s memorable.” I was tapping into my bravado. I was actually just glad that I didn’t look like a pencil compared to him. He was bigger. No doubts there. That was a Magnum. I just also felt better knowing I had more than a .22 in my pocket. Unfortunately, that reminded me that I had a Glock in my kidney holster and both of them noticed me easing that from the floorboard and back into my shorts. “So. These aren’t the...memories you’re looking for.”

“You okay, man?” Storm asked and Holly just looked worried as hell.

“Fine. I have a permit.” I did. I knew we weren’t supposed to have them on campus, but I usually keep my clothes on so no one would ever know unless they had to know, and at that point, I doubted the rules would matter.

Holly reached for me and asked, “Is it because of me?”

I smiled at her. “No. I promise. It’s nothing to do with anything involving this arrangement right here.” I looked her over and asked, “You going to class, too, or what?”

She looked down at herself, at her panties as Storm stuffed them in his pocket.

He said, “Mine for now.”

She looked at me and said, “I think I should go home. I’m a mess and.” She looked at some extra special evidence and her face went red. “Are there any tissue or something?”

“Yeah, that was new.” Storm nodded. “I need to do that in a bed, too. See it again.” He then got out of the car and said, “You can stay with me tonight. I have practice, but...you’re welcome to come spend the night. If you want.”

She was about to say something, but I interjected with, “Awe. Thank you. I would love to, but I have dinner with a Diva and her parents tonight.”

He laughed and shook his head. Holly said, “I’ll be there.”

He winked at her and then shut the door and walked off. She looked at me and said, “Dinner with her parents? Why?”

“Same reason you have to go to dinner with his. They think we’re dating.” I blinked at the head rest in front of me and said, “I need to find her a boyfriend. Someone for real.”

“I’ll help.” Holly smiled at me.

“Yeah? Why?” I asked as we got out of his car, and I hit the ‘lock door’ feature.

“We’re friends, right?” She walked with me. She seemed a bit dazed, high, but she had two maybe three orgasms in that back seat, so it made sense. I nodded. “Well. I want to help my friend.”

“Okay. Let’s figure something out.” I nodded. Once we were at her car, I said, “That was fun.”

She looked at me and said, “It was a lot of fun. You’re always surprising me, and I want that. I want to spend this year having fun with you and not worrying that you might need that.” She pointed below my waist, and I laughed. “You know what I mean. One of those things is essential, the other is scary.”

“Hmmm. I wonder which one is which.” I winked and then stepped away from her. I was not parked over here. “Maybe I’ll see you tonight after all.”

She did this breathing thing that made her chest expand and her shoulders sort of shiver. Hell, yes, I was going to get home from that dinner in time to get some space with this woman.



Holly

Winston was home before Stormy which made me worried until Stormy sent a pic of a restaurant. I knew it was a hard practice because of our talks. I looked at Winston behind that desk and said, “He’s bringing Italian food with him.”

“I like the way he thinks.” Winston nodded. We were not talking about anything. I was just watching him type away back there.

I decided to ask, “Are you doing homework?”

“Online classes. Posting discussions. And...done.” He punched a key for emphasis and then looked at me. “So. What’s up?”

“I wanted to talk to you.” I smiled at him. He was so handsome, so interesting, and I still didn’t know much about him. He was not that kid from high school for damn sure. Neither was I, but he really changed. I...sort of, turned into a sexual fiend of sorts. Whatever. I was maintaining good grades, not pissing off people to the point they wanted to kill me, or making people think it would be a good idea to kill

themselves. It was going well. Autumn was the only thing that wasn't working right now and that was okay, too.

“Look, I know that I know both of you and all, but this is not for me to get in the middle of. If you two want me in the middle of you like you were between me and Storm, maybe, but this talk.” He made mouth gestures with his hands. “I’m not interested in the lady drama. I have limited time before your curtain falls again and I plan to be on stage every opportunity I can get.”

I blinked at him. He snickered and said, “Before you get all PMS agro again.”

“Gee, Thalia must be swept away by your charms.” I folded my arms and frowned at him.

He laughed and said, “She is. Because with her, I am charming. With you...this is me, Holly. It’s not the version people want to know, but it’s the real me.”

I believed him. I also knew one thing. “I want to know you.”

“What do you want to know?” he asked and leaned back in the chair, kicking his feet up to rest on the desk top. “Ask me anything.”

I asked him the same things Stormy and I covered. I shared with him the same information. At least until Stormy arrived. Conversation was quickly shifted to food. The three of us shared two different pastas, breadsticks with dipping sauces,

and salad, which nobody touched. I pushed the almost empty plate forward and said, "I'm so full."

Winston shook his head. I tilted mine. He looked at me, at Stormy, then back to me and said, "Earlier. You were full. This...this is just less hungry."

I laughed as my cheeks flushed. The memory of what we did today in that back seat, the three of us, had my thighs clenching tightly together. Stormy said, "She probably needs to digest a bit, don't you think?"

I nodded. "An hour. Maybe...we could watch a movie?"

"I'll fall asleep." I heard that in stereo then they laughed.

"Okay then." I waited.

Winston smiled and said, "Let's play a game."

I nodded. I should have insisted on the movie. We were in Winston's room, he and Storm were at the foot of the bed playing some stupid video game, and I was the one who fell asleep.

I heard the whisper, "She did not."

"She did. She told me I could. I just...wonder when she'd wake up." I hoped I could fake sleep long enough to find out what he would do. I was already warming from the words.

Winston said, "Experiment. Now we're talking. What's the wager?"

Bet? They were going to bet on this? What the fuck?

"What do you want?" Stormy asked.

“Thanksgiving,” Winston answered.

“Can’t. Cannot do family events alone.” Storm added, “I mean I could, but it would be easier with her there with me.” Then he said, “But you could come, too. You win, you get to come to the amazing and ridiculous place I grew up.”

“Okay.” Winston then said, “She’s awake already.”

Storm said, “No, she...Holly!”

I opened my eyes and said, “I did want to be asleep.”

They both laughed and I sighed. “So, now I’m awake and Winston is going to Thanksgiving with you?”

“You’re coming, too.” Stormy climbed into bed, and I realized we were in his room. I had slept through their game and being brought here. I slept through all that but woke up before I could wake up in the throes of an orgasm. At least I hoped that was how it would go.

“I have to go home.” I frowned up at them.

Storm shook his head. “Your parents are coming to our place. I guess...when I mentioned who you were to my mom. So, surprise.”

Winston said, “You know what would make that sour expression go away right now?”

I crossed my arms and asked, “What?”

“A dick in your mouth.” He smiled and I fought all urge to laugh. Such a jerk. “See. There’s the smile. I told you. She loves it. Don’t you?”

I was all warm again. I nodded. I did like being led, losing control in this part of my life. In this room, with these men.

“Come here.” Winston motioned and I moved to accommodate his request. He said, “We were good boys today. Right?” I nodded, smiled. “Now. It’s your turn to be a good girl for us.”

“Okay.” I was so eager to see where this path was leading.

He yawned and then said, “I’m going to bed. He needs a back rub. I’ll catch up with you tomorrow.” He leaned in and kissed me. “Night, Holly.”

I was so deflated when the door closed behind Winston.

Storm smiled at me. He said, “I knew you were awake. He’s been talking about the holiday.”

I poked out my lip. “I thought you guys were going to seduce me or something.”

He nodded. “Yeah. We were, but then we realized the time, so...we thought we might get you fired up a bit. More eager to play tomorrow.”

“I want to play right now.” I went wide-eyed at my own pouting tone. Stormy chuckled.

“Yeah?” he asked. “Well, you do a good enough job on my back, I’ll probably fall asleep. Then, you have my permission to take full advantage of me.”

Okay, then. He wanted to play it that way. Fine. I could play, too.



Storm

It had been a good week with Holly. I was anxious about this game because my mom, my dad, and my grandma were in the luxury box. The arrival of my dad was unexpected. So was my aunt. Holly texted me that everyone was being nice, cordial. Even Essie, which was expected. At least, I expected her to behave in front of family. It was away from them their little angel grew horns and stabbed me with them.

“You ready?” Titus patted my shoulder and I nodded. “Just another game, man.”

Sure. For him. He’d worked through all his drama last year. I wondered if these felt like just games back then, to either of them. I knew better.

Ripley shouldered past me with a grin as he pulled his helmet on and said, “Let’s go get this, W.”

Right. We needed the win.

Win or lose tonight, I had a feeling post-game events were going to be way more painful than any hit I was about to take.



Holly

“He really is special.” She said it low enough I wasn’t sure if I was supposed to hear it.

I smiled down at the players rushing on the field. I cheered at a rather high volume for the man on the field wearing the same number that I had on this hoodie I borrowed from him because it was his. I was wise to do that because every one of his female family members had on some visual display that number 17 was who they came to support. Essie included. Small talk continued inside the large space where hot foods and cold beverages were brought in by cart and upon request, they got more.

I stepped out to the seating beyond the glass window that was essentially a wall facing the field because I wanted to focus on the game, on him. Essie stepped out a moment later. The game was in progress and Ripley scored one for our team. I puffed out a breath and took a seat since the defense would be coming on next. Essie sat two seats over from me and said as she looked at her nails done up in school colors, “Ugh. Dane annoys me.”

I didn't know who Dane was. I also remained quiet. I didn't trust her.

“You know I went out with him for a while. My parents were really happy. It's why I came out here to watch the game. In there, it's all about who I should be with now that I'm single and Tor is bringing someone home for the holiday.” I saw her turn her head to glare at me because I had turned my attention to her.

“Well. I like spending time with him.” I looked back toward the room and the people clearly not paying attention to the game while they talked to other people that were not there before the game. “I'm excited to try the peach pie your grandmother was raving about.”

She snorted and said, “I'm sure you are.”

I tried to tamp down the surge of anger building inside me, but the truth was simple. I wanted to toss her right over this rail in front of us but when no one would be down there to catch her. Right then, there were a ton of people, and we were not so far up that she would break anything significant. Like her stupid neck.

I focused on the field again and stood up, clapping as the offense got into position. I stepped forward, holding the rail, and watching him take off down the field. They had Ripley covered this play and Stormy was wide open. He turned to grab the ball and I was already screaming and celebrating as he caught it. Then I lost my air, my sound, as someone crashed into him on the way down. It was such a hard hit I could hear

it from here. The touchdown was bittersweet as all eyes were on Stormy. Ripley extended a hand down to him as Titus made the last few steps to get there. The relief I felt in my bones when Stormy's hand reached back was enough to breathe again.

I cheered with everyone else and didn't take my eyes off of him until they had him at the sidelines and the doctor was checking him out. I heard Essie say, "He's okay."

I looked over at her because she sounded about like I would if I had the ability to voice those words. I wiped the tear on my cheek and nodded. She looked at the room of people behind us, totally oblivious to anything on the field. Before I voiced the question, she had the answer. Essie said, "Don't bother. See. He's going to the bench, so he will probably be in for the next play. They don't actually support this. They just have to act like they do. Just like I have to act like I have a sprained ankle to avoid cheering tonight."

She shrugged and added, "It's a great way to get some business done. Everyone comes to the games, right?"

I blinked at her. "Right."

He had mentioned that I would probably have more fun watching the game with Winston and the frat guys, but he appreciated me hanging out with his family. His grandma's age and comprehension showed the moment I met her since she thought I was someone else before we were even introduced. His mom had turned the television from the game

to something else and that is what she and his grandma were watching as they enjoyed the beverages provided.

His dad and Essie's mom seemed to be conducting business during this game since the people in that room now, were not the same people who had stopped by earlier. I asked out of sick curiosity, "So, are you here to watch the game or did you come just because your family is in town?"

"Both." She shrugged and then looked back toward the field. She smiled brightly and waved. I turned my head and then I also waved, but not in the same excited way Essie was waving at him. He probably thought I missed the whole thing while paying attention to her. I groaned as he turned to speak to a teammate, and I turned to look at Essie who is now looking at me. She said, "I like supporting the team. I'd be down on that sideline in my cheerleading uniform if it wasn't for the *sprained ankle*."

I looked at her feet. She is in heels. "Uh?"

"Old injury, but." She sighed and looked over toward her mother. "No more pom poms for this girl." She shrugged and continued, "I have enough on my plate with the house anyway. If I knew it was going to be worse than the dorms, I might have voted to stay where we were until I graduated. Sheesh."

I didn't know what to say.

She didn't need me to say anything to continue telling me about herself as though I should know, care, something. I wasn't sure of her tactic at that point. I listened and

occasionally said things like, *oh* and *wow*, and *hmmm*. Then she asked, “What about you?”

“I’m a freshman. I have an amazing boyfriend. What else is there to tell?” I asked and then focused on said boyfriend back on the field.



Storm

“Congratulations, Son.” My dad slapped my back and that only reminded me that I had a headache. My ribs hurt enough that I might go get them checked if it didn’t ease up by tomorrow.

“You did amazing, Sweetheart.” My mom hugged me. In the distance, I heard my grandma ask, ‘where are we going?’ and my mom nodded at me and said, “She’s having a good day so far.”

Right.

My aunt, Essie’s mom, was next with the hugs and she whispered, “Maybe bring someone along so Essie doesn’t look so...lonely, yeah?”

Fucking seriously? I didn’t think anyone was asking Essie to drag a date for me when she was bringing Ripley around. Fortunately, I had no problem with Ripley, and he made those visits easier rather than worse for me so I loved when she brought him with her because she left me alone, for the most part.

I smiled as she moved on and there was no mistaking my joy as Holly broke away from Essie's side and finally hugged me. She said against my cheek, "Do you need anything? Are you hurting?"

I hugged her a little bit tighter because she said the right things at the right time with those questions. I turned, catching her lips with mine for a brief and gentle kiss, and said, "I took something. I'm okay for now. Just...easy on this side."

She moved to put her body on that side as if to protect me. My head, my heart. Neither could be trusted, but both were in a tug of war over this woman. Both my head and heart were in agreement about my cousin. Essie seemed disappointed as I just gave her a head bob of acknowledgement and did not say her name as I did. Wasn't sure how I was going to avoid ever saying her name in Holly's presence when family was around, but I would do my best. I ensured that Holly was my driver this evening. My aunt made my peaceful time a bit more challenging by saying, "Essie, you should ride with them."

I handed Holly my keys and opened the driver side door for her. I left Essie standing at the passenger side door right behind the driver seat and moved around my vehicle to get into that passenger seat. She huffed and puffed as she settled into the back seat. I smiled because Holly was biting her lips in an effort not to laugh. I reached over and stroked Holly's hair. "We'll leave as soon as we've eaten."

"Okay." She nodded. Essie practically snorted a sound. I closed my eyes and let my head rest a moment.

The next thing I knew, we were parked, and I was coming out of a nap I had not intended to take. Holly said, “Hey.” I blinked at her then looked out the window. We were at the Sophomore House parking lot. Before I could ask, she supplied, “You were knocked out, so I told your mom we would meet her for lunch tomorrow. I dropped Essie off there and brought you home. Can’t carry you to your room.”

I smiled and asked, “Would you?”

“Yes.” She nodded. My heart did that extra-hard pulse it did sometimes around her. The beat that sometimes made me wonder if things had gone differently in the beginning, if I would be here, next to her, and she would still be smiling, but there wouldn’t be a contract and a timeline on our smiles. I almost wanted to ask but thought better of it. She opened her door and said, “But I will come around and open the door for you, Big Guy.”

That’s what a lot of people called me, but not her. I let her open my door and asked, “So, Big Guy?”

She smiled up and said as she reached for my hand after I closed the door, “That’s what all your friends call you, right?” I nodded. She gulped. “And...we’re friends.” Because I was a bit rested and the pain reliever had kicked in, I made a face that indicated I was thinking. Her gasp of offense and the following, “Stormy!” before she tried to stomp off had me laughing.

I reached for her and pulled her around to face me. I admitted that much. “Yeah, we are friends.”

She really seemed happy then. So much so she hugged me, paying attention to that side I mentioned earlier. Then she said it and I felt it roll through my bones in a way that solidified the feeling. A quiet whisper that maybe I wasn't really meant to hear, but I did. "I love you."

Fuck. This...might change a few things. If it could be real... I shook my head and my thoughts. I kissed her forehead as she looked up at me. "Come on. Let's get some sleep."



Autumn

I knew she was in there with him. I knew that my time for making this decision was running out. Winston told me so. I tapped on the big guy's door and then just about jumped out of my skin when Holly whispered, "He's sleeping."

Hand to my chest, I looked at the woman smiling at me as I turned to face her. "I was trying to be quiet."

She whispered back, "Me, too."

Then she smiled and indicated with her head we should go back down the hall toward the open living room space. I followed her and we took a seat on the couch. Not close, but enough we could speak quietly and not let anyone else hear. She was waiting and I was, too. I broke and said, "I miss you."

She nodded and reached for my hand and said, "I miss you, too."

I looked toward the hall that led to Stormy's room. Then toward the one that led to Winston's. "What about them?"

"I love them." She was serious and my eyes went wide.

“What?” I didn’t mean it to sound so appalled or shocked, but the contract was one thing, actual feelings...where the hell did that leave me?

“I don’t think they love me.” She rolled her shoulder and squeezed my hand. “I don’t think you do either, but I love you, too, Autumn. This...whole...situation has made me realize that...I don’t know. I just...shouldn’t have to choose between the people in my life that I care about. I’ve had to do that my whole young-adult life. My mom or my dad. He never said it, but he had a way to ensure it and I was too weak to understand or do something about it. I won’t keep being that girl. I care about all of you, and I know, on some level, you all care about me, but you might not feel the same as I do and that is okay.”

“I don’t know where I fit in this equation,” I admitted. I gulped. “I...have strong feelings for you, but with them...things get a bit more...complicated.”

She studied me a moment and her fingers squeezed mine. “You’re not just into girls, are you?”

Was I sweating? Did I just start sweating because she asked that question? “I.” What? How do I explain all of it? “I.”

She shook her head. “No. You don’t have to. Not right now. It...means more...complications? Right? But...we’re here. The only thing we need to know right now is if you are willing to be in this little circle with me, them, or not.”

I nodded. “Yeah. I want you.”

“Okay, then.” She smiled. “I’m going to go check on him. That hit last night—”

“No. I heard.” I looked toward the hall leading to Stormy’s room and said, “He is a giant, but...not invincible.”

She stood and said, “Don’t I know it.”

With that settled, I went back to work, which meant I went to the guest room and crawled in bed for a nap. Winston was out doing whatever shady shit he did at this hour. Holly and Stormy were in his room. The rest of the house was still sleeping or gaming, or...well, the people in that room were fucking. Fortunately, I was one more floor up and several rooms away. I hadn’t been sleeping. It wasn’t a drawn-out conversation filled with drama and confusion.

Things for Holly seemed really simple. She wanted me, I wanted her, we had group consensus and a standing contract. It was all good for now. Well, until I told her who had brought those inner cravings back to life. I really hadn’t done more than appreciate Stormy until he put me over his knee and pulled out that splinter. Since then. Things I thought I no longer felt for dudes...were...surfacing.



Winston

I looked at the text from Autumn and smiled. Cool. The team was together again. Everything was going to be okay. Right after this little disaster happened.

“I don’t understand.” Thalia looked at me as we stood near the edge of the cliff near the ocean. The full moon was shining and providing quite a bit of light. That was not to my advantage. “I don’t see anything out there.”

“Keep looking.” I pointed at a light in the distance, but it was dim.

She took another step closer to the edge. Fearless. Ignorant. Her father had really fucked-up recently. Unfortunately, that meant someone had to pay. Since it was a family feud and the target was a member of Apollo’s family, the decision was made to go old school eye-for-an-eye style.

“It’s right there.” I needed her to see it. I wasn’t killing her. Probably. Apollo agreed that she needed to disappear and immediately, but he had a greater fear that if they killed this one, there would be other family to target. I had no idea who he had left other than Harpy or maybe they would consider

Rip, Ripley's son, a target since Apollo was part of his harem of dads now.

Her expression lit up a bit and she said, "I see it. I see it."

"Good." I nodded. "You can swim, right?"

"Of course—"

I pushed her at the same time I fired the shot. I knew the bullet wouldn't hit her, but this had to look real. I stepped forward to watch and once she hit that water, I nodded. I didn't shout it, but as I waited for her to come back to the surface, I said in a whisper no one but me could hear, "Then swim to that light."

I thought she would never come back up for air, but she did. I breathed a sigh of relief. I could only see her head bobbing in the water. I turned and said loudly so she, too, could hear me, "She was crazy. Attacked me. She's gone."

The guys coming to take her away from this meeting, to kill her and send her body as a message to her father, ran toward me. I turned and looked for her. No sign. Good girl. I started walking away from the cliff and one of them followed me. The others stood there talking, but not looking. I hoped she made it to the light. I never cared much for Thalia, but it seemed really shitty that she would have to die a virgin, with only me for a boyfriend, just because her father took a hit job from the wrong people.

It was all too *Godfather* for me, but despite Apollo's efforts to evolve and change the life, there were people who just

wanted to live like the movies. Or die like the movies. I often wonder if any of these idiots ever watched any of the docuseries on crime bosses.

The goon to my right asks, “Why here?”

“Privacy, romance.” I shrug.

“You tell her?” he asked.

“No.” I shake my head. “I messed up. I was trying to say something romantic, keep her distracted, but she...thought I was breaking up with her and she...just freaked out.” I had discretely cut my hand with a pocket knife and held that up for him to see. The slash. “I...defended myself. She said she was going to kill me.”

“You believed her?” he stopped.

I turned and looked at him. He was twice my size and maybe three times my age. “Believe? She came at me with a knife. Why the fuck would I let someone stab me a second time?” I was bandaging my hand with the bottom part of her shirt I had ripped by accident trying to make sure I held her out of the way of the bullet. I did not shoot her. I did make sure she was clear of it. I hoped. I gulped and kept to my part in this. “Maybe I knew you guys were coming to pick her up, but I didn’t... expect it to go down like that. I cared about her, okay?”

I mustered up some fake emotions that I hoped were convincing and added, “She was my girlfriend.”

“Oh, shit. Yeah.” He tilted his head and then shocked me by saying. “You’re right. Bullet is definitely kinder for someone you care about.”

I looked down then up at him. “What now?”

He shrugged a big shoulder and said, “Now, I tell the boss she didn’t trust you and tried to kill you. We’ll just say she... jumped. They would probably rather you be the one with the bullet, not her. Value and all.” I had no idea what he was talking about. “Now...he will decide what happens next. They didn’t plan to be kind to her and give her a bullet. Her father owed a debt. One he can’t pay with money. One that wasn’t going to be paid in blood. Not that kind anyway.”

I was so fucking confused by that. “What?”

“You think a virgin is going to be sacrificed to a piece of lead? Come on, kid. Think. She’s worth more alive. And to the highest bidder.” He patted my shoulder and whistled. The two other guys passed me without a word.

I had to tell Apollo. This was...news. I hoped it was news anyway. If not, then...was his brother dealing in flesh now, too? Fuck. I had bigger things to worry about now than the *Team Holly* Thanksgiving reunion.



Autumn

“Hey.” I looked at Winston and frowned. “You okay?”

“Yeah. Long night.” He tapped a few more keys on the keyboard and then looked up at me. “What’s up?”

“Just checking in. We have a game tonight.” I was worried about him. He nodded. “You ready?”

“It’s just a game, Autumn. Not even for money or status. It’s just a fucking game and no one cares. Not really. No one cares if you die in a game. If you just...disappear.”

He was definitely not okay. “I’ll reschedule the match.”

“Yeah. You do that.” He got up and walked around me and out of the office.

Something was very wrong. I just...didn’t know what to do. I made quick work of snooping around the desk, but that revealed absolutely nothing. I couldn’t break into his computer without him knowing, so that wasn’t going to work. I was in a funk when I wandered out to the common area and found Cass consoling one of the bunnies.

I tried not to be in their business, but when I heard the name, I couldn't help myself. "What happened to her?"

"She's dead." The girl wiped her tears. Cass looked at me and shook her head. I wouldn't press for more.

"My condolences." I did a little nod and then headed over to Storm's room because they also needed to know this. Every step had me feeling a chill that crept up my legs, then my spine. Why didn't he just tell me?

I went to tap on the door when it opened, and Storm reacted with a wide-eyed expression and a step back. "Shit. Make louder noises when you walk." He must have sensed it because he asked, "What happened?"

Holly emerged from the bathroom as I said, "Thalia's... gone."

Storm closed the door after I entered his room. They waited and I shook my head. "I don't know what happened. He's... not okay. I...don't know what to do."

I also didn't know why I was about to get all weepy over it. Holly moved in and hugged me and said, "It's okay. We're here for him. All of us. You aren't alone."

Wow. She understood why I was upset before I even registered it. Bonus of growing up with a dad in the psychiatric field. At least when he wasn't screwing her head up.



Chapter

49

Winston

Apollo assured me that his connect picked up Thalia and that she was going to be safe. He also confirmed that he had no idea his brother was part of any flesh trafficking but would find out.

I returned to Sophomore House and found my travel bag packed and three people waiting on me. “Uh.”

Storm said, “Let’s go. My mom will be pissed if we miss dinner and it is the one time of year, I am allowed to just... eat.”

I was so mentally exhausted from this semester, I just... followed them. Autumn had grabbed my bag. Probably packed it for me and I didn’t even have the decency to take it from her. Holly opened the back door to Storm’s SUV and I realized that was for me. I climbed in, and she followed. Autumn loaded my bag and got in the front passenger seat next to Storm who asked, “Everyone good?”

Good? I was not a good person. Not a good man. Not anywhere near good these days.

I pushed a woman who trusted me off a cliff. Sure, I had confidence if she could swim, she would survive, but what if she didn't? What if she hit one of the submerged rocks or—

“Hey.” Holly gripped my fingers harder. “I’m sorry about Thalia.”

“No, you’re not.” I frowned over at her. No need to lie.

She glared back at me. “Yes. I am. Sure, I wanted her out of our lives, but...not like that.”

“Doesn’t matter.” I was bubbling with so many truths I wanted to share but couldn’t. “It’s done now.”

Autumn gave me an expression only I could see since it was in the side mirror. I knew then she was worried that I had done something. I had. Just...not what she thought. Well, not for real. To get the focus off of me, I asked, “Music or what for this ride?”

Storm cut their protests off by turning on some music. I tuned in to that and at some point, must have tuned out completely since I woke up to the feel of fingers running through my hair and Holly whispering, “I’ll stay with him.”

“Okay.” Autumn. “I’ll grab you drinks and snacks.”

The door shut softly, and I opened my eyes and turned to look up at Holly. She smiled down at me and pushed my hair again with those magical fingers. “Feel better?”

“I was tired.” That was true and I could admit it.

“Are you going to be okay? At dinner, I mean. I know you are going to be fine overall.” She smiled and it was like a nice, warm blanket just crawled around my heart. I nodded. “You don’t have to talk about anything, but we are all here for you if you ever want to. Okay?”

“I’m messed up.” I didn’t mean to say that out loud.

She laughed and I gave her an expression that made her laugh more before she said, “We.” She pointed to me then her then to the two empty seats up front. “We are messed up. It’s why you fit so perfectly in this little square life of ours. Why they fit. Why I fit.”

“That so?” I thought about it. Thought about Apollo and Harpy. Thought about Harpy and Titus, Ripley, and little Rip. Yeah, I can see how to the outside it might look weird, but on the inside... “But at the end of this year—”

“At the end of this year, we shouldn’t need a piece of paper to hold us together.” She ran her fingers through my hair. “If I had one wish for my birthday, it would be that the three of you can see how far we have come and how far we can go... together.”

“Together?” I asked, brow arched.

“All the way and together. Yes.” She leaned toward me and before her lips touched mine, she said, “I love you. I love Stormy. I love Autumn. And if we can survive this holiday, we can do anything.”

Oh shit. I just remembered that her birthday was on Thanksgiving. “You hit the big one-nine in a couple days.”

“Yup.” She nodded. “I don’t think Stormy remembers that conversation, and I don’t know if Autumn knows, but my parents are going to be there and...I’m going to have a piece of cake and eat it, too.”

She gulped.

I sat up and looked at her, “You’re worried about your dad?”

“Very.” She looked toward the gas station and the sound of laughter from Storm and Autumn. “Very much.”

Ah, yes. The programing. I reached for her hand and said, “We will keep you from falling back into that, okay? Promise.”

She smiled at me and nodded. “Okay.”

I knew she didn’t believe me, but she was happy I had said it anyway. I would talk to the other people on this team and ensure her father did not get time alone with his daughter to... mix her brain up again.



Storm

This evening at the country club was going as well as could be expected. Winston was coming out of his funk, Autumn and Holly paid extra attention to him, and I was forking a big bite of cake when my mother finally tracked me down.

“Torden.” The disapproval in her tone used to bother me.

“It’s one piece of cake, Mother.” I took the bite.

“What?” she asked. Shook her head and smiled. “I don’t care if you eat cake, Sweetheart. You will burn those calories when you do your football workouts.” She looked to the three people I brought with me. Only one of those was announced. “I wish you would have told me you were bringing...who are they?”

“Winston and Autumn. I introduced them to you when we got to the house.” Before we changed into more appropriate attire for this little holiday kickoff. It was not the Thanksgiving Day dinner, no. That little tradition would involve only the highest rungs of society that didn’t want to host family, or didn’t have enough family speaking to them privately, anymore to enjoy a catered meal with all the

trimmings of family atmosphere without actually having to have family...in their home atmospheres.

“Yes, but who are they?” she asked. My brow shot up. “Their family?”

I smiled. “Oh. Ah. Yes. Well. I, uh, didn’t exactly ask. They are my closest friends, so...that’s why they are here.”

“Of course.” She smiled. “I am glad you have friends. I just...wish I knew more about them...is all.”

“I’ll ask.” I smiled at the trio now looking at me as if I may need rescuing. I did. “I’ll be subtle.”

“Of course.” She waved her hand at one of the passing members, someone of more influence than my friends.

I put the plate and fork on the tray for used items as I made my way to the group. Once there, I said, “My mother is interested in where these two came from. What kind of influence you possess.”

Autumn snickered and said, “Just make something up.”

I laughed. Winston said as a slow song began playing. “Or...really make them wonder.”

He grabbed Holly’s hand and led her to the dance floor. I stood there, awkwardly and then asked, “You feel like it?”

Autumn nodded and I offered her my hand. As we moved to the spot next to Winston and Holly, I asked, “Why are you nervous?”

She gulped, looked at Holly, but Holly was looking at Winston all smiles and giggles. Autumn looked up at me. Soft, blue eyes blinked and then she said, “Because I...”

My brow shot up. “Me?”

She nodded. I smiled. It was about to be Holly’s birthday, but it sure felt like I was the one getting the gift tonight.

“Well.” I made sure she was looking at me. “There is room in my bed for two of you.”

“Three.” Winston was always on alert for things like that. “I don’t want to wind up ghost food in that creepy-ass mansion you call a home.”

I snorted a laugh and nodded. “All right then. We will make it work.” I looked at Holly and she was smiling brightly at me. “You good, Babe?”

“This is the best night of my life.” She reached for my hand, and we swapped partners. Autumn went to Winston, Holly came to me, and I had a feeling this was exactly how my life was going to be moving forward.

Then a crash of dishes brought everyone’s attention to the direction of the noise. Essie. She looked at her dress, looked around the room, and then shouted, “Watch where you’re going!”

She then turned around and ran out of the room.

I looked at Holly and smiled. “Might be the best night of my life, too.”



Holly

I gulped and tried to maintain the smile on my face as my parents walked into the room. Tomorrow was my birthday. After sleeping in a very large bed with three other people, feeling safe, settled, and truly happy for the first time in my entire adult life, I could feel the sense of freedom, peace begin to unravel with every step my father took in my direction.

“You got this.” Stormy slid his arm around me, his hand resting at my waist. “I won’t leave you alone with him.”

I looked up at the man glaring at my father. My father was not as tall as Winston, and a slight frame that made him even smaller to me now. My mother looked at Torden Storm and smiled brightly at him then me as though this was the best thing she had seen in years. She hurried ahead of my father and said to me in a whisper, “Oh, Holly. I knew you could do it. I’m so proud of you.”

I didn’t have time to speak before my father did some sort of hand gesture and made a noise that...I shook my head. No. No he would not get my full attention. That was the signal for it. I remembered that now. I crowded into Stormy’s side and he

pulled me tighter as he said, “Dr. Ringwald, whatever you just did, don’t do it again.”

My father stopped, frowned. “Excuse me?”

“I know you know who I am. I know you know who my family is and what my father does for the...other Chi Iota Chi legacies.” Storm looked at me, at my mother, then to my father and said, “So...stop before I put a stop to you.”

My father gulped, my mom squeezed my arm and said, “He’s a keeper.”

“Yeah.” I nodded, so confused by that conversation. What did his father do? I thought it was business, but...Apollo made sure Harper’s business had no interference, so...what did I know? Why should I care?

“You”

“No.” Stormy shook his head. “She didn’t do anything. I did.”

I gripped him harder.

“Me, too.” Winston nodded at my mother and then moved to stand behind me.

“Plus, me.” Autumn held up her hand. “Holly is our family now, too. So. No more games or you will know just how badly this particular lady will behave. I have no ties. No family. Nothing to lose but them.”

I let go of my mom’s hand and reached for Autumn’s.

Winston put both of his hands on my shoulders and said to everyone, “I think they just started the appetizers. Let’s act like civilized creatures and eat, shall we?”

My mom was lit up like a Christmas tree. She said, “Yes. What a lovely idea. Come, young man, escort me and tell me what you are majoring in.”

Winston waggled his brows at me as I looked over my shoulder at him. I snickered. Stormy passed me off to Autumn, who linked her arm in mine and said, “I’ll escort your father to his seat.”

I was not about to argue that. I don’t know what they talked about because they didn’t move from that spot until we were halfway through the appetizer banquet line. Autumn had piled up quite the plate and I was eyeballing her because she didn’t normally eat like that. “You okay?”

She laughed and handed the well-stocked dish over to Stormy as he approached us. “This isn’t mine.”

But when he smiled at her, I knew better. Knew he was hers as much as he was mine. They both were. She was theirs, too. Stormy said, “Thank you.”

“You are welcome, Big Guy.” Autumn winked at me and then went back to the start of the line.

I looked at him, at my own plate and said, “I, uh—”

“No problem, Babe. I know you have a lot on your life plate right now. We are all focused on you and you need to stay focused on yourself tonight, too. Your father understands it’s

over, but that doesn't mean he won't try something else." Stormy shrugged and then added some vegetables to his plate before adding some to mine. "You need these, too. Tomorrow is your birthday. Lots of sweets on the horizon. You know what you want?"

"Yes." I nodded. "I want you." He smiled, nodded. "And them." He nodded. "All together and at once."

"I'll see what I can do." He winked and we started toward the table where my mom was chatting up Winston as he ate and Autumn tuned in to listen.

"Really?" Autumn asked. My mom nodded.

"What?" I asked.

Autumn looked up at me, Stormy, and said, "She was telling us about the summer—"

And it was like something took over in my brain and began shuffling the deck of my life, throwing memories this way and that until I remembered that summer. Remembered that guy. Remembered that when he kissed me, my father and some other woman walked in and we...hid and...that didn't happen to me. None of that...

"Holly?" My mom's voice asked as something strong hit my sense of smell so hard my eyes popped open. "Oh good."

She sounded relieved.

I looked up at four people, her, Stormy, Autumn, and Winston. "What happened?"

Where the hell even was I?

“You fainted.” Autumn held my hand. “You were about to sit down and then you just...bam.”

I looked at Stormy who had only his t-shirt on. No more button down and tie. He said, “I caught you, but that meant letting go of the plate.”

I gulped as the memory flooded me and I said, “I wasn’t... that summer, I was still a virgin.”

My mom looked very confused, and I was not about to tell her anymore. She lived in the dark as far as what kind of monster my father truly was, so why shine the light now?

Winston asked, “Mrs. Ringwald, maybe we should take a turn about the garden? Get some air?”

I bit my lips and Autumn frowned at him. Stormy chuckled and nodded. My mom agreed and with the air of some historic hero, Winston escorted my mom out of the room.

As soon as the door closed, Autumn crawled into bed and hugged me, rocked me, and said, “You are okay now. Safe. We don’t have to go back out there. You don’t have to see anyone.”

I looked at Stormy. He did. His family was one of the big ones that meant something and I had already caused a scene. I said, “It’s okay. I’m fine and I know you must be present.”

“Okay.” He nodded and then moved to his closet and pulled out another shirt. “But I’m not putting another tie on.”

Cara North

Cara North writes contemporary, paranormal, and sci-fi romance ranging from sweet to full-on filthy. Be sure to check out the blurbs and categories lest ye find yourself reading some stuff you are not really prepared for. I do my best to put in some content warnings, but there is no way to know what may trigger someone and I put some characters through hell in sweet romance, so...yeah, read the blurbs and decide for yourself.

I write YA for Mature Readers as September North and in all genres and ranging from light to serious.

I write Fantasy as Echo North.

My non-fiction is by Tonya Nagle, PhD and you can find it all on my website [Creative Writing With Dr. Nagle](#). I also have a podcast by that name.

Thank you for reading. Even if you hate it, thank you for giving it a shot.