

BIZARRO UNIVERSE BOOKS

JANIE MARIE



Janie's

Tercero
Ryder
David
Lynn

A HIGH SCHOOL REVERSE HAREM ROMANCE

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FOR JESSICA

April 1st has been such a painful day since your passing all those years ago. I've not let myself find any joy in April Fools' Day, and I cry because you should be here.

But, dear cousin, I think you'd like me to change this horrible tradition of further mourning you. I think you'd like me to smile and remember your incredible spirit and beautiful soul instead.

So, I dedicate this story to you. It's a totally inappropriate story, but I'm at peace because I can see your smiling face in my mind. Your innocent little cousin wrote a naughty story that would have our mothers blushing and our fathers furious, ready to lock us away from sexy bad boys forever.

I think you'd adore Jane's free spirit and the love around her.

So, I send her to you this April Fools' Day. Well, technically, it's the 2nd because I want to respect your family. Still, all will see where your memory is within these pages.

No jokes. No pranks. Simply my love.

When it's my turn to join you in the stars—that second one to the right—you can tell me how hard Jane and her boys made you blush.

Until Eternity,

Janie

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WELCOME TO JANE'S TEAM

While this story is an alternate reality with the characters from Janie Marie's Gods & Monsters trilogy, you absolutely do not have to read the trilogy. It's a complete standalone, merely made more entertaining if you choose to meet the gang in every universe I have dreamed up for them.

So, if you want to see their origins and smile at the Easter eggs I've planted, visit my [Amazon profile](#) (before or after ... it really doesn't matter).

Additionally, the behavior and acts of the characters within Jane's Team are not guidelines for anyone, especially teenagers. This book contains strong language, sex, prejudice against lifestyles, assault, abduction, and of course, a reverse harem relationship. *Reverse Harem is 1 girl and 3 or more males.*

While I do encourage everyone to love and embrace positive love and healthy, honest relationships, I do not encourage minors to drink, do drugs, have unprotected sex or careless sex. Nor do I encourage anyone to disobey their parents.

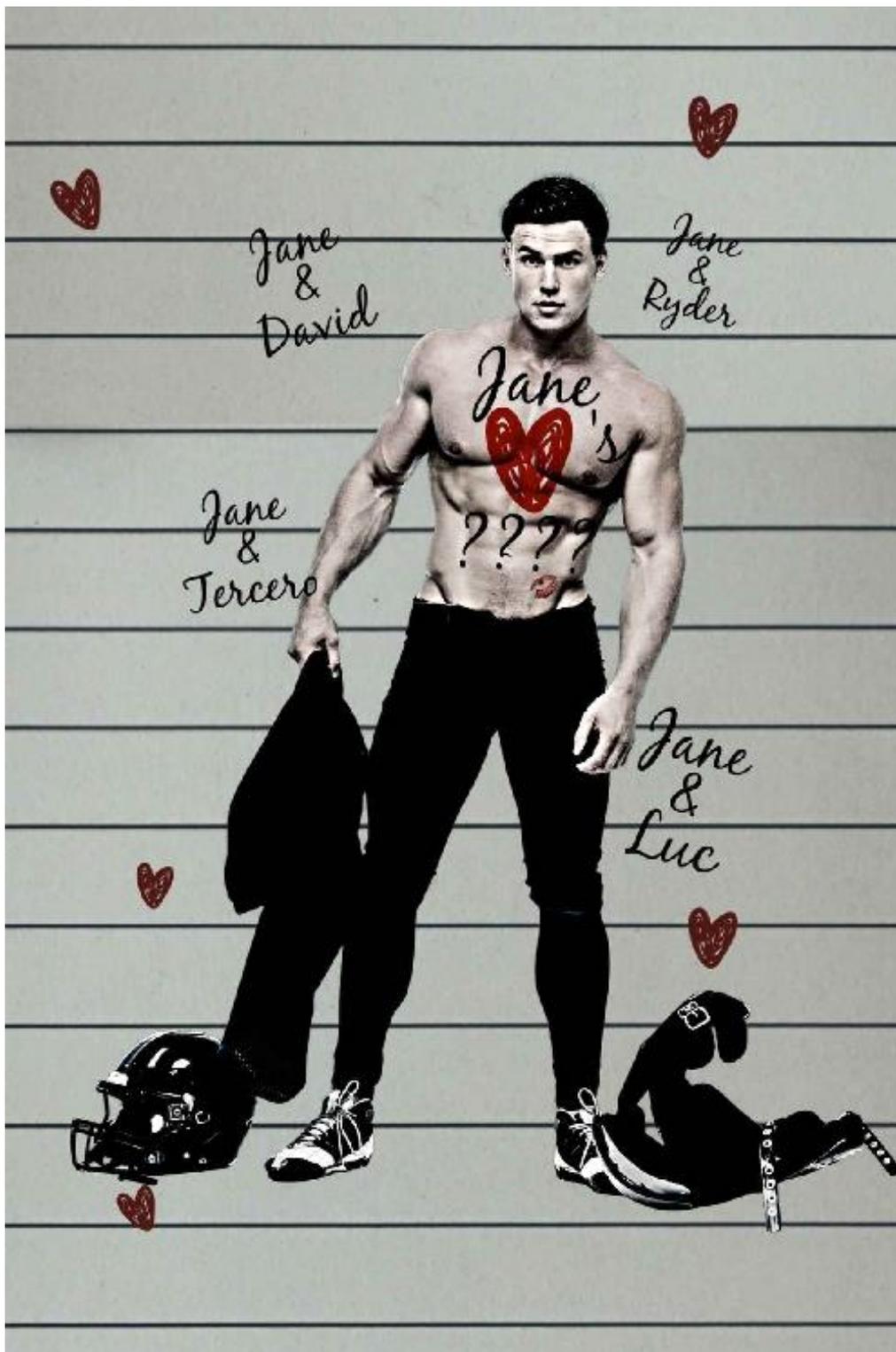
This is a fictional story and should be viewed as such. My only goal was to allow Jane another chance to embrace herself, her men, friendships, and her family.

Now, welcome to Jane's Team. I hope you enjoy the ride.

xx

Janie

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ONE

David Leodegrance and Ryder Godson ... Jane was the luckiest, unlucky girl of Black Hills, Oregon, because of them. With their height and lean, muscular bodies, they towered over many of their fellow freshmen. Some of the upperclassmen, too.

Their bodies were only part of their power. When you added their handsome faces, killer smiles, black hair that sometimes covered their gorgeous eyes—David's sapphire blue and Ryder's mesmerizing emerald pair—no guy stood a chance with the ladies.

Hell, even the exposed skin along their arms, David's golden and Ryder's a sinful bronze, had every girl jealous of the players who they tackled on the football field.

So, how was Jane the luckiest and unluckiest girl? Well, it was simple: these sexy man-boys were her next-door neighbors. And, even though they could pass for brothers or cousins, they weren't related. That meant she had one on each side.

Yep, the universe could've picked anyone, but when she moved to town at five years old, it had chosen to sit her between them. Every day for eleven years, she got to see them. A single glance could fuel the fantasies of every girl in town for months, and with Jane's window overlooking the Godson's backyard, including their pool, she got a lot of glimpses. Quite the lucky girl, many would say.

Not Jane. To her, it was brutal and unfair.

Why? Because David was the best guy there ever was. He was good, kind, and he looked out for everyone. He was everything she wanted in a boyfriend. Only, the universe had screwed her over by making him her best friend instead.

To make matters worse, he and Ryder had hated each other for as long as she could remember. Because of that, Ryder treated her like she was the enemy. It wasn't like she cared about him any other way though. David was the bestest and no one compared. Not even the godlike boy with green eyes and a smile that manifested in her head at the most inconvenient times.

"You're drooling," Wendy said, wiping under Jane's chin.

"Shut up." Jane grinned, shoving Wendy's hand away before returning her attention to the football field. Tryouts were today, and she was there to cheer David on. He wanted to keep his position as the middle linebacker, and she hoped he'd get it.

"Ryder looks bigger than last year," Wendy commented. "Tougher."

Jane bit her lip, her gaze tearing from David as he spoke with the coach.

Ryder guzzled down water from a water bottle, some of it spilling out the side of his mouth. It should've been gross, but it wasn't.

Green eyes suddenly locked onto hers, catching her looking. A faint smile stretched into a wider one, and he winked right at her.

"I would hate you if that boy did it for me," Wendy muttered, chuckling.

"How does he not?" Jane tried to act casual even though her cheeks were burning. It wouldn't be just Ryder tormenting her for looking. He was the firstborn in a set of quadruplets, and he had two older brothers, one of which was the varsity quarterback.

Wendy shrugged. "I like me some good ole country boys. Cocky jocks always go for cheerleaders anyway."

“Yeah.” Jane scanned the cheer team. They were getting all the attention, and they got to be close to David ... and Ryder.

“He’s still looking at you,” Wendy whispered.

She darted her eyes to David and frowned. “No, he’s not.”

Wendy grabbed her chin, turning her toward a different group. First, her eyes locked with the taller blond. Luc Godson, the star quarterback their entire town worshipped.

Her cheeks warmed when his gaze briefly stopped on her, but she nearly gaped upon realizing Wendy meant Ryder. He was staring at her while his brothers talked to him.

Wendy giggled, fanning Jane. “Cool off, girl. You’re making it too easy.”

Jane blinked, shaking her head. Ryder wasn’t interested in her. He was mean to everyone, even his brothers. He was rude to her, too. No, if he was looking at her, it was to upset David.

David was protective of her, and he made sure no one messed with her. So, that’s all it could be. Ryder was looking for a weakness. In David.

She swallowed and looked back at David. He didn’t look happy, and she realized he would take it badly if she gave Ryder any attention. Ryder was after David’s middle linebacker position, and he’d been killing it in tryouts today. He did look better than David for the position, but what did she know? David was the best, and the defensive team he’d led all through middle school had secured championships because of him.

God, she was a horrible friend. Waving, she only smiled when he did.

“Poor girl,” Wendy said, chuckling again.

“What?” Jane held her breath as the coach called David and Ryder together, his finger going between them.

“I’m sure you’ll figure it out.” Wendy patted her hand. “I think the coach is testing them against each other.”

“God, why is Ryder trying to take David’s position?” Jane felt like pacing as both boys got on opposite sides. At first, Ryder was on the offense as a tight end, while David maintained the defensive middle linebacker spot.

“I think Ryder’s always wanted it.” Wendy blew a bubble, smacking her gum after. “He likes to be aggressive, and they always say the middle linebacker is the quarterback of the defense. I’m sure his brothers expect him to be in that position, with Archer locking the quarterback position.”

Jane sighed. “When did you become a football expert?”

“When you made me come to all of David’s practices with you.” Wendy blew another big bubble.

Archer yelled play-calls as David did the same to the defense.

“David’s gonna blitz,” Wendy said as the ball was hiked to Archer.

Sure enough, David read the play and found a gap. He rushed through, right toward Archer, but he got blocked by Ryder, giving Archer time to throw and complete the pass to a receiver.

David shoved Ryder, yelling, but Savaş, the largest Godson brother, broke them up.

The coach whistled, calling Archer over. This time, he sent in Luc and the varsity team. And, this time, Ryder filled the middle linebacker spot.

Jane and Wendy scooted to the edge of the bleachers. Hell, everyone watched in silence as David joined the varsity team as a tight end.

“Varsity won’t go easy on them,” Wendy said softly.

“I think that’s the point.” Jane darted her gaze to Ryder. The coach wasn’t going to chance Archer throwing the play, and they knew Luc was just as mean as Ryder. He would destroy Ryder if he had to.

The calls were shouted out, and Ryder looked ten times scarier and more confident than David as he ordered the

defense into position. Another blitz.

The ball snapped, and four of Ryder's defensive team rushed Luc. Even though they were varsity, Ryder got through them all... even David. Then he sacked Luc. Brutally.

The freshman team cheered, and the coaches clapped as Ryder helped his brother up. David didn't celebrate though.

When Jane stood, Wendy gripped her arm and said, "Don't."

She yanked her arm free, her eyes on David as he said something to Ryder. Ryder smiled, and his reply had the whole team laughing. David didn't laugh. He glanced at her, but so did Ryder.

The punch David threw happened so fast, and Ryder's reaction came even faster.

Before she knew it, she was on the field, screaming when Ryder slammed David down. He punched him again and again, and the team cheered the whole time. The coaches weren't breaking it up. No one was going to stop Ryder.

"Easy." A strong arm wrapped around her, and she was pulled against a football player. Luc. His gray eyes gleamed as he stared down at her. "It'll hurt less if you stay out of this."

She thrashed, not caring that the most gorgeous upperclassman was holding her close. "Stop them or let me go!"

He darted his eyes to her tears, then sighed. "Stay here." He let go, pushing his way through the crowd. He yanked Ryder off David. "Enough."

David sat up, pushing Archer away when he tried to help him up. Ryder locked angry eyes with her, and Luc shoved him in her direction. She had no idea why it seemed like Ryder was going to talk to her, and she didn't stick around to find out what bullshit he had to say about David.

"Asshole," she said before he could reach her, and she shoved him aside to make her way toward David. He'd embarrassed David on purpose and taken the spot he'd earned

over the years—the position David loved. Now, he'd goaded David into a fight, and it was probably going to cause him even more problems.

The whole world fell away when she finally reached David. Blood dripped from his mouth, but he seemed to be okay. She didn't want to embarrass him by worrying over his wounds, so she wrapped her arms around his waist, smiling when he hoisted her up so that she had to switch to hugging him around the neck.

“You okay?” she whispered against his hot skin.

“I am now,” he said, turning and heading off the field.

Jane sniffed, clinging to him as he adjusted his hold so that his hand cupped her ass. Well, that was new, and she wasn't going to complain. If he wanted to move from the friendzone to boyfriend, she'd gladly go there.

She smiled, squeezing him tighter, but she also noticed Ryder watching them.

Luc had him by the shoulder, holding him in place as the coach congratulated him on becoming the new middle linebacker.

You'd think he'd be smug, but absolute fury roared in those emerald eyes of his. Why on earth he was mad for stealing David's spot, she didn't know. Yeah, David punched him, but he probably had a reason for it. David wouldn't do something like that for losing his position alone. So, she glared at Ryder and flipped him off.

Luc caught sight of it, and he forced Ryder to look away from her. The words *she's not worth it* on his lips hit her hard.

It shouldn't have hurt to see Ryder nod and look away from her, and it shouldn't have hurt to see the other Godson brothers, Tercero, Archer, and Savaş—the three remaining quadruplets—shake their heads before they followed their big brothers off the field. But all of it hurt.

“Sorry you had to see that,” David said, his lips brushing against her neck.

Jane sighed and closed her eyes as her hand ran through his sweaty hair. His touchy-feely moments had only started up a few months ago, but they'd been nothing as blatant as a hand on her ass. "You deserve another chance," she told him. "They had too much time to prepare for the blitz. And Luc probably let Ryder sack him."

His lips, still against her skin, curved upward. "When did you learn what that was called?"

"Watching you play, of course." She shivered when he gave her ass a little squeeze. Oh, hell, she was in trouble if he thought this was their new norm as besties.

His lips moved to her ear. "You like watching me, huh?"

"You're the bestest." She grinned, hoping she was putting him in a better mood. Because he was putting her in the best damn mood ever.

"Bestest?" He chuckled, nuzzling her neck. "I think you've called me that before."

She didn't think she had, but she'd definitely said it in her dreams. "Well, you'll always be my favorite football player."

"I better be." He leaned away, giving her that David Leodegrance, panty-dropping smile. "I have to finish practice."

Jane realized he'd carried her back to the gate where his dad waited.

"Dad, will you take her home?"

"No." She shook her head. "I want to finish watching."

Mr. Leodegrance awkwardly gestured for David to put her down. "Manners, son."

David yanked his hand away as if it had been burned and lowered her to the ground. "I'll see you later." He kissed her cheek before he turned and ran back to the team.

Kingston Leodegrance sighed, his strong hand touching her shoulder. "Come on, sweetheart. Your mother actually sent me to bring you home."

She wanted to argue, but she saw the other players were already teasing David. They shoved him and some of the guys looked her way, which seemed to cause David's anger to spike. He roughly bumped a few of them and even shoved another.

So, she nodded to Kingston. "Okay."

The whistles sounded again, and the clash of players met her ears again.

"Damn boy," his dad muttered.

She flinched, glaring up at him. "They weren't fair. Don't you take it out on him for losing his spot."

His dad smiled at her disrespectful tone and caressed her cheek in a fatherly way. "I won't take it out on him. I know he did his best. The Godson boy is better suited for the spot. He worked hard for it."

Childishly, she crossed her arms and lifted her chin. "Ryder's an asshole."

He chuckled, rubbing her back. "An asshole you were staring at for longer than you probably realize."

Her cheeks grew hot. "Only because Wendy was saying stuff about him."

"*Hm.*" He patted her back.

That '*hm*' made her uncomfortable as hell, but she ignored it and climbed into the front seat of Kingston's truck.

He'd become like a second father to her after her dad died. She was only five when it happened, so even though she'd not forgotten a single moment with her dad, Kingston was the one she had more memories with. It might've been because of him that she and David were such good friends to begin with. It all changed in seventh grade for Jane, though. It took one time for her to glimpse David's abs when most of the other boys were still smooth for her to see him as something more than just a friend. Too bad that's all David saw when he looked at her.

Kingston sighed again as they drove past the field. She could always pick out David, and her heart squeezed when she

saw him playing beside Ryder as the weak linebacker.

“This is so unfair,” she said, touching the window. “He deserves the best.”

“He does.” His dad patted her knee. “Sometimes, it’s not meant to be. Sometimes you have to accept you are better suited for a different role than you expected.”

Jane watched Ryder in David’s place. The jerk was perfect for the position, and she felt like a bitch for thinking so. “Why does my mom want me home?”

“She has some news to discuss with you.” He tightened his hold on the steering wheel. “Nothing bad.”

“We’re not moving, are we?” With her heart beating wildly now, she grabbed onto his arm. “I’m moving in with you and David if she takes that stupid job she was talking about.”

His lips twitched. “You would, huh?”

She grinned. “You and David sound alike. It’s weird.”

He laughed, again like David. “I promise, I won’t let your mom take you away from us. How’s that?”

“As long as I have David in my life, she can tell me whatever she wants. He just has to be within walking distance. I need to see him every day.”

“Have you two become more than friends, Jane?” He gave her the most serious look she’d ever received.

She gulped, shaking her head and feeling beyond embarrassed. What if she said she hoped they were, and he told David? What if David didn’t like her the way she liked him? “Still best friends, sir.” That was a safe answer. It was the truth, and friends sometimes became more than friends later on.

He eyed her for a few more seconds before nodding. “Good.”

Jane blew out a breath, relieved he didn’t catch on that she was in love with his son.

Kingston shot her another wary look and continued, “Because I asked your mother to marry me, and David is going to be your stepbrother.”

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TWO

Three Years Later

“What’s the matter, princess?” Ryder Godson sneered at her from across the office. His long, muscular legs were stretched out in front of him, obstructing everyone’s path. He didn’t care he caused everyone to move out of his way. He didn’t care that with his arms stretched across the backs of the two other chairs that no one besides his ever-present fan club would sit beside him.

Since she was so not a Ryder fan, she sat across the pathway. It didn’t matter the office lady had instructed her to sit beside Ryder.

“Not used to getting called into the principal’s office?” he asked mockingly.

She glanced up at him, hating that the bastard was sexier every time she saw him. He was still David’s nemesis, and he still ruled the field in David’s position. “I get called in to be rewarded,” she said haughtily. “And I don’t have to use my stupid muscles to get rewards.”

He grinned at her, and it made her tummy tighten. “Staring at my muscles, Sweet Jane?”

Her face burned. “Don’t call me that.”

That smile grew. “Why? I think you like it.”

David doesn’t, Jane thought. Not that it should matter what her stepbrother thought about other guys calling her anything

other than her name.

Ryder chuckled, running a hand through his dark hair. He had a faux hawk hairstyle, but he usually kept it short during football season. This year it was long on the top and close to the skin on the sides. “Yeah, you like it.”

“Oh, get over yourself.” She crossed her arms, glaring at him. Everyone cowered around him, even his brothers, but she never did.

Those emerald eyes watched her, sparkling when she narrowed her eyes to intimidate him. “You’re gonna get me hard if you keep staring at me like you want to rip my clothes off.”

She gasped. “You’re sick in the head, Ryder Godson.”

“*Mm*, I think I like hearing my name being said from your pretty mouth.” He smirked. “Let me hear you moan it this time.”

The way his eyes held hers had her skin tingling. When the sensation spread across her lips, she spat, “Eat dog ass.”

Disgust twisted his sexy face, and she grinned triumphantly.

All excitement of silencing Ryder vanished when the office door opened, and David entered.

He stopped short when he saw her sitting in one of the chairs usually only bad kids sat while they waited for the principal. His confusion was adorable until it turned to anger at the sight of Ryder sitting opposite her. “What are you doing here?” he asked her, ignoring the arrogant smile on Ryder’s face.

She shrugged, hoping her attraction to him wasn’t obvious. Her feelings for David had only grown over the years. It didn’t matter to her he’d put distance between them after their parents married—he was still the boy who owned her heart.

“Don’t know yet,” she said, her voice trembling as his gaze halted on her thighs. “Why are you here?”

He tore his eyes from her legs and held up a slip. “Signing out for the day so I can go pick up dad from the airport.”

“Dad.” Ryder snickered. “Never knew a dad to burn a son so bad. Actually, I have, but this one is hilarious.”

David shot him a fierce look. “At least my dad stuck around.”

Jane’s eyes stung, and she looked away from Ryder’s sudden loss of confidence. She’d lost her dad in a car accident, but Ryder’s had left them without so much as a note. The Godson boys didn’t even have a mother because she’d died soon after giving birth to the quadruplets.

They’d been abandoned into the care of their older brother. It was the one thing she felt in common with Ryder. She found herself wanting to slap David and hug Ryder.

“Feel good for having that over me, Daddy’s boy?” Ryder challenged.

She jerked her head up, ready to jump between them. They’d had many fights over the years, but they always stopped when she got between them.

David sighed, holding up a hand. “Sorry. I didn’t mean it. All right?”

Ryder’s cold expression stayed, and Jane’s heart pounded as he slowly turned toward her with that terrifying stare.

“Godson, Mortaime?” Mr. Prince, the principal, called from the doorway to his office. As soon as he noticed David and the tension between him and Ryder, he sighed and asked David, “What are you doing here, Leodegrance?”

David looked between her and Ryder instead of answering him. “Jane?”

She got up, shrugging. “Tell Kingston I want shrimp for dinner.”

Mr. Prince held the door open for her, ushering her inside as Ryder chuckled, following behind her.

“Mr. Perfect isn’t happy with you, Sweet Jane,” Ryder whispered in her ear.

She shivered, walking faster as Mr. Prince ordered David to hurry up and sign out because he’d heard there was an accident on the highway, and he was giving David a different route to take.

Jane sat, jumping when Ryder sat and put an arm behind her.

“I don’t bite, babe.” He smirked. “Lick and suck, definitely. Fuck, maybe I’ll bite if you want me to.”

She put down her backpack, and dramatically scooted her chair farther from him. “Grow up, pervert.”

“You like it.” He eyed the football trophies. Mr. Prince had been their coach during their freshman, sophomore, and junior years. He’d taken the position as principal just this year. “Just like you like watching me play your boy’s old position.”

Fire burned in her veins. “Asshole.”

His predatory eyes settled on her. “Call me whatever you need to, babe. You know I’m better than him, and you know you watch me on the field ... and in my pool when I swim naked.”

The blood drained from her face, but she steeled her nerves and glared at him. “I watch you play, wondering why they let a muscle-head like you take over the spot David was made for. And I hear your stupid swimming because you’re so freaking obnoxiously loud that I have to get up and close my window to block you out. Unfortunately, I’m greeted with the sight of your ass and small dick when I do.” It was a damn lie about his dick; the boy was blessed by God in every way.

He didn’t change his expression, but Mr. Prince cleared his throat, hiding a laugh as he shut the door.

“I’m glad to hear you two know each other so well.” Mr. Prince smiled kindly at her before shooting Ryder a dark look. “You’re in trouble.”

The bad boy shrugged casually. “So, get me out of it.”

Mr. Prince sighed, holding up a folder. “No pass, no play, Godson.” He then nodded at Jane. “Ask her to get you out of trouble. She has been nominated as your tutor for English.”

Ryder opened the folder he’d been given as Jane sat there frozen. Tutor?

“You can decline, Jane,” Mr. Prince said, “but I would really appreciate this. Black Hills would appreciate it if you could help our star player raise his grade in time for the playoffs.”

Ryder spoke before she could. “Who the fuck is taking my spot?”

Jane’s breathing was becoming too fast.

“Who do you think?” Mr. Prince sighed. “We haven’t told him yet, but David has been on your heels ever since you took the position. He’s our best hope if you don’t return. Your best bet is to raise your grade quickly and get back on the field. I don’t think the new coach cares that you’re better. He cares about team players, and you’re not a team player, Godson. You could lose it all.”

Ryder glared at her while Mr. Prince gave her a hopeful smile.

“What do you say, Jane?” He smiled. “Help your boys claim glory their last year here. I’d like to see them both on the field, holding the championship trophy over their heads. And you’ll be the one they have to thank for seeing them there together.”

Jane knew what Ryder was thinking; she wouldn’t help him so David could keep his spot. She wasn’t the smartest girl around, but she knew why they would nominate her—she was the only “A” student who didn’t cower from Ryder Godson.

The bad boy himself growled, “You mean, little b—”

“I’ll do it.”

THREE

The last thing Jane expected after her shower, was to open the door to her bedroom from the attached bath and find David waiting in her room. She also didn't expect to ever come face to face with him wearing only a towel.

Neither of them spoke, and she wondered why he'd come into her room like this. After all, they had a joined bath, and he would've heard the water running. Granted, he never used it for himself, but he still would've heard. He still would've known there was a high chance she'd come out without clothes.

Maybe he didn't find it odd. There had been plenty of times he'd used the other bathroom in the house and then pass her in the hallway with only a towel around his waist. She supposed it was a normal sibling thing because he barely acknowledged her when those moments passed. He didn't realize he drove her hormones crazy.

She gripped the towel closer to her chest as he slowly scanned her from her head to her blue painted toenails. "What are you doing here?"

His sapphire eyes returned to her face. "Is that the way we greet each other now?"

She realized he was referring to this morning at the school office. It was more than that for her, though. He used to hug her, kiss the top of her head, call her 'his Jane'. Now she was just Jane—just the stepsister. There was no way she could blurt out how hurt she was by all of this. She had to pretend

she was only thinking about this morning like he clearly was. “I didn’t volunteer to help him.”

“You’re not going to help him.” He leaned forward, resting his forearms on his knees. Why did he have to be so sexy doing something so simple? “I mean it.”

“You’re not the boss of me.” She walked toward her dresser, praying he didn’t notice how hot he was making her. God, why did he have to play big brother?

“But you want him to boss you around?” His reflection in the mirror was fierce.

Jane swallowed because if she hadn’t been his stepsister, she’d think he was jealous. “I thought you wanted to win the state championship.”

“You think I can’t bring that for the team?” His glare was sexy instead of frightening.

“I didn’t say that.” She shakily opened her panty drawer. “You’re the one who said it takes the best players, and the guy taking your old spot isn’t the best.”

“Ryder is the guy who took my spot,” he growled, standing to approach her.

Her chest heaved, but she could only stare at his reflection, trembling when his body heat enveloped her.

He stopped just a few inches behind her. It had been a while since he was this close to her, and she noticed how much bigger he’d gotten. His hair was also longer, hanging over his eyes until he did a little jerk with his head to move it. “Just tell me why you’re helping him. Why are you choosing him over me?”

She frowned, confused. “David, I’ll always choose you. Especially over Ryder.”

He watched her for a few moments, then turned her around, grabbing her chin. “Do you mean that? You pick me, even if he’s better?”

Her heart warred with something ... but she smiled. “You’re the bestest. Always will be.”

That smile that stole her heart so many years ago appeared on his lips. “You haven’t called me that in a long time. I thought I’d lost that title with you when we became ...” His words died, but his gaze didn’t. A fire that she wasn’t sure was anger or desire swirled in his eyes, either preparing to destroy her or engulf her so no other could get close.

Kingston’s voice carried through the door. “David? Jane?”

David released her, holding his finger to his lips as he went through the bathroom, and she heard him open his main door. “Yeah?”

“Where’s Jane?” his dad asked.

“I think she’s in the shower,” David said in a bored way that made her question whether something special had been about to happen between them just moments ago.

“Oh, well, if you see her when she gets done, tell her to come downstairs. I want to talk to her about this Godson boy.”

David grunted. “Tell her to give him bad advice.”

Her stepdad laughed. “That will reflect poorly on your sister.”

“She’s my stepsister,” David corrected. “And I’m heading out. The team is having a party with the cheerleaders.”

“Behave. Don’t forget you have double practice tomorrow.”

Jane’s eyes stung, and her heart throbbed. The fucking cheer squad picked any reason to party, and they were celebrating David as if he’d not already been on the team. Didn’t he see it as a slap to both his and Ryder’s faces?

“I’ll behave,” David said, his door shutting hard. “I’m not fucking this up.”

“Language,” their dad chided. “And I know things with Diane ...”

“Dad—” The rest of whatever David was saying was mumbled, and then their footsteps retreated.

Jane didn't realize tears were falling from her eyes until she looked in the mirror. Diane was the co-captain of the cheer team, and she'd been the one girl David had gone out with for more than just a single date. They'd gone on nine dates—Jane had counted, and not much time had passed since their last date.

He usually avoided Jane like the plague after a date, especially dates with Diane. He didn't have a problem letting her hang all over him at school, though.

The only relief Jane had at all was David's football practice took most of his time, but she knew the cheerleaders were practicing too. There could've been more dates she didn't know about. There could be a lot more to David's relationship with Diane.

A part of her knew there was more, but she held onto hope that the two worst scenarios hadn't occurred. She'd die if it turned out David was having sex with Diane, or worse, if he'd fallen in love with her.

Laughter coming from outside thankfully captured Jane's attention before she spiraled down the David and Diane nightmare.

She knew the view would only annoy her, but she still walked to her window and gazed down into the Godson's backyard.

They were having their own party, it seemed. Well, she couldn't call it that. Ryder was there with Luc, Tercero, and Gabriel. Gabriel was the eldest and their guardian. He was hardly home, but he did seem responsible for a Godson.

Her attention shifted to Tercero. She figured Archer and Savaş were at the football party, and he was the only brother not on the team.

She took in his features quickly, her skin prickling because he looked so much like Ryder. Only, he was a paler, leaner version. He never talked to her, or anyone, really. She didn't know why, but the mystery of him always had her looking his way.

Sometimes she wished she was brave enough to talk to him, but she didn't think it would do well to talk to someone who looked so much like her enemy.

She tore her thoughts from Tercero and took in the few older guys there. Gross; they were either drinking or smoking weed.

She wrinkled her nose when it looked like Ryder was rolling up a joint. "I guess failing means he can act like a loser."

Emerald eyes darted up to her window, and she froze. When Tercero and Luc also looked up, Ryder barked something at them and then he flipped her off.

Jane's sadness turned to rage for only a few seconds before returning to sadness. "Fuck, I must be getting ready for my period." She looked down, gasping because she was still in her towel. She yanked her curtains into place before grabbing her phone to call Wendy and then rushed to hide in her closet.

"Hello?" Wendy already sounded like she'd been asleep.

"I hate all men," Jane wailed.

Wendy sighed. "Until they smile at you. Which one?"

"Which one, what?" Jane sniffled. "I think I'm about to start my period."

"Yeah, I just started." Wendy laughed. "You'll start soon. Unless you've been fucking your sexy stepbrother without telling me, and you're carrying a little blue-eyed scandal in your belly."

Jane laughed, rubbing away her tears. "You're so awful."

"So, it's a green-eyed scandal, and those two sexy beasts you are lucky to see every day and night are fighting as we speak, ripping clothes off and ... oh, dear, I'm getting hot. Record it for me. I'm gonna combust if I see it in person."

"They're not fighting." She sniffed, but she was smiling now. "I hate being me."

“I know.” Wendy sighed dramatically. “Forbidden love no matter which door or window you look out of.”

“What?” She had no idea what Wendy was talking about.

“Are you serious?” Wendy deadpanned. “David, the boy you’ve loved for years is just the door across yours, and Ryder, the other boy you love but won’t admit to yourself, is out your window.”

“I don’t love Ryder.” She frowned, her tears drying. “He’s the ultimate jerk.”

“To everyone but you,” Wendy sang. “You’re too crazy about your step-bro to notice the heart-eyes he makes at you. I have no idea why.”

“Whatever. He just flipped me off for looking out my window.” Jane stared at the very window, wondering if he was still looking at it.

“I’m sure he had a reason.”

Jane rolled her eyes. Wendy always found excuses for Ryder’s rudeness. “You realize I have to tutor him, right? He could be a bit nice to me.”

“Like I said, he probably has a reason.” Wendy yawned loudly. “I’m cramping like a bitch. Can we talk tomorrow? I took a bunch of painkillers and my sleeping meds.”

“Yeah.” Jane felt bad for waking her now. Wendy had horrible periods. “Love you, always.”

“Beyond the stars,” Wendy said before ending the call.

FOUR

Jane glanced at the alarm clock by her bed, sighing. 5:45 a.m. David was going to be late for practice. His first damn day, and he was going to mess up because of his party last night.

She sat up, chewing on her lip. Ryder would love for David to mess up on the first day, and for a moment, the sad side of her pitiful heart wanted David to screw up. He'd hurt her yesterday. He'd looked at her like he'd done in the past, then went off with his precious Diane anyway.

All night she'd wondered if he'd renewed their relationship. Had he kissed her? Danced with her? What would she do if things got serious—if he started bringing Diane over to their house?

Well, there was one thing she could do to stop that—let him get in trouble and get kicked off the team. His dad would punish him and then he'd have no time for Diane.

“Seriously, Jane?” she hissed at herself for being such a bitch. David wanted this chance so badly. Christ, he wasn't even hers to be getting so worked up about. He was her stepbrother, and stepbrothers dated other girls.

Her lips quivered at the painful truth, but she closed the door on her heart. David had been killing it as the strong linebacker, but he wanted the middle position. He was a leader, and he deserved the chance to take back some of his lost glory.

Jane swung her legs off the bed. She wasn't going to let him ruin his chance.

She walked toward their joined bath. Hopefully, his side was unlocked; she wasn't in the mood to walk all over the house to wake him. Even if she was going to be mature about helping him, she was tired and annoyed that he chose to be irresponsible last night.

The door to his room stood ajar. She figured he might have left it open by accident when their dad interrupted ... nothing. Nothing. David meant nothing by the way he looked at her.

Jane held her breath as she pushed the door the rest of the way. There he was, out cold. He had one arm hanging off the edge of the bed, the other over his eyes and a very noticeable case of morning wood. Her cheeks burned as she tiptoed closer. She'd seen this sight a few times on him before, mainly when she'd gone to his house before their parents got married. But the boy had grown.

Bad Jane.

Okay, she could do this without being a pervert. She'd just lock up her heart. It was time to be a stepsister ... who still pervs.

“David?”

He didn't move.

She eyed his package and bit her lip as she suddenly imagined him pinning her down and thrusting into her. *Jesus, I am so sorry.* She needed a therapist. Someone. Maybe just a boyfriend. No. She couldn't even think about a guy now.

Jane touched a safe place—his shoulder. “David, you're gonna be late.”

He shifted, groaning, “Jane, baby.”

Her eyes widened. He never called her baby, and she was certain he didn't know another Jane.

She shook her head; he'd said someone else's name. Maybe she'd fantasized so much about them that she was now swapping ‘Diane’ for ‘Jane’. *What a sad life I live.*

Jane leaned down, jostling his shoulder as she spoke a bit louder. “David, wake up.”

His movement was so fast, she barely realized what happened until she felt his hand squeezing her ass before pulling her down on top of him. “Fuck, Jane.”

Her breathing came fast, and she tried to get a good look at him. His eyes were closed, and he suddenly rolled their bodies, pinning her below him. She squeaked the moment his muscular thigh slid between her trembling legs. Oh, Lord, she was in her shortest shorts, and his hand was inching along her thigh. It went up and down until he gripped her ass cheek and pressed his erection into her. And he clearly said, Jane!

Her eyes rolled back, and she grabbed his shoulder, not sure if she was going to push him away or pull him down. “David?”

“*Mm ...*” He was still asleep, his weight crushing her as he nuzzled his face against her neck and breathed evenly.

That hand, though.

And his erection ...

Oh, boy, they were not done exploring her.

He mumbled, squeezing her ass hard, but his head—the one on his shoulders—got even heavier. Definitely asleep.

“David?” She tried to tell herself the breathless way she said his name was just because he was crushing her. But it was probably a bit of the dirty girl in her who still hoped her stepbrother would say fuck it, we’re not related by blood, and then he’d confess his love and rip her clothes off before making passionate love to her. “I need to stop reading dirty books.”

He groaned, moving his hips as his hand slid under her shirt, up to her right breast. She wasn’t wearing a bra.

He squeezed just as his dick hit the spot that ached for him.

And she moaned.

Loudly.

Of all times for him to wake, it had to be when she was moaning underneath him.

David slowly lifted his head, his eyes locking with hers. “Is this real?”

He looked utterly confused and worried. Jane almost told him it was just a dream because she feared the look he would give when she said: yes, he was feeling her up, and she was in his bed for some reason.

David glanced down at his hand, and it was then Jane realized he’d managed to push her shirt up, and her breasts were fully exposed. “Fuck.” He ripped his hand away and yanked her top down before sitting up. “Jane, what the fuck?”

She couldn’t move. “I came to wake you up.”

He stared at her, his breathing heavy as he scanned her. She was only in a tank and her booty shorts, and he was in his boxer-briefs and nothing else. “What?”

She pointed at the clock. “You overslept. I touched your shoulder.”

He frowned, grabbing his head. “I don’t—” He jumped up. “Fuck. I’m late.”

Jane sat up, wrapping her arms around her knees. “I’m sorry.”

David pulled on his shorts and a shirt. He didn’t look at her as he stuffed his backpack full of a change of clothes. “Fuck, why are you in here? In my bed?”

“I was trying to help. You pulled me down.” Her eyes pricked as she got off the bed. “It wasn’t my fault!”

He sighed, closing his eyes. “Can we just pretend this—whatever the fuck it was—didn’t happen?”

Jane was too hurt to respond. It was her fault for having dirty thoughts, but it wasn’t her fault he’d felt her up in his sleep. She marched past him, her sob breaking free.

He didn’t stop her—didn’t apologize or tell her it was okay.

All she heard was something slam against the wall and then the door closing and his footsteps racing down the stairs

and out of the house.

“He felt you up?” Wendy asked, her jaw practically on the floor.

“Don’t yell it!” Jane covered her friend’s mouth. It was the last period of the day, and she was barely getting a chance to talk to Wendy.

“We’re the only ones awake,” Wendy pointed out.

Jane didn’t care. Yeah, they had a weird teacher who let them meditate and sleep for the last ten minutes of class, but she and Wendy were working on a project together, and the class was snoring or on their phones. “Just whisper softer.”

Wendy rolled her eyes. “So, are you together?”

“What?” Jane cringed at her raised voice before lowering it. “I just said he yelled at me and told me to forget ‘whatever the fuck’ happened.”

“*Hm.*”

“That’s all you have for me?” Jane shook her head. “You’re my ‘words of wisdom’ friend.”

“I’m your only friend. I should charge for this,” Wendy mused. “Give me one of the Godsons.”

Now, she laughed. “Get one, girl. They’re always hooking up with girls. I’m sure they’ll keep you. You’re a keeper.”

“Even Ryder?” Wendy chuckled, and it was hard for Jane to understand why Wendy saying his name in this context annoyed her.

“He’s not exactly a country boy, but I’m sure if there’s anyone who can change him for the better, it’s you.” She deserved an award.

Wendy snickered, hugging her. “I’m messing with you. Go have fun with that godly piece of ass and forget about David. He’s an asshole.”

“David’s not an asshole,” Jane muttered, her emotions all over the place again because she hated how he looked at her this morning.

“He’s not perfect, Jane,” Wendy said, hugging her again. “And you already know Diane was probably all over him last night. You need to move on. He has, or maybe he never felt what you feel for him.”

If hearts could truly wither and die, Wendy was saying everything that would make hers do just that.

“I’m saying this as a friend who loves you,” Wendy said, touching her arm. “If David is hooking up with Diane, or any girl, you have to accept it. Go have fun being a sexy tutor. That should cheer you up. How many chances are you going to get to fuck with Ryder Godson?” Then she wiggled her eyebrows. “Better suggestion—just fuck him.”

Jane smacked Wendy’s arm as the bell rang. “You’re terrible.”

“Nah, I’m just dying to find out how things go with you. Your boy drama gives me life.”

“Glad I can be of service.” Jane hesitated when the room quieted from everyone grabbing their stuff and waking up. She hesitated because as she went to grab her stuff from the floor, a pair of black boots stopped right in front of her.

“You haven’t serviced me yet, babe.” Ryder smirked at her when she finally looked up. He didn’t even glance at the others all gasping and whispering. “Get your shit and come on.”

Jane didn’t move.

He sighed, retrieving her backpack. He slung it onto his back with his own backpack. “Don’t get used to this.”

“What are you doing?” she finally managed to choke out.

“Picking up my tutor, genius.” He put a hand on her back. “I want to get out of here now. I have shit to do later.”

“I could’ve just gone to your house after I got home,” she said, waving to Wendy who gave her a thumbs up.

“Not in the mood to wait around for you.” His hand moved to her mid-back, but he was pushing her to walk faster. “Do I have to carry you?”

Jane smacked his arm, realizing everyone was watching. “Stop touching me.”

He dropped her backpack on the floor. “Then find your own ride home.”

She gaped at him as he walked away. Her own ride? Fuck. David was staying late, and the car they shared was at the shop. She’d gotten a ride with her mom that morning, but her mom worked at the hospital, and she was on a twelve-hour shift. Her stepdad worked too far to get her.

“Ryder!” She snatched up her bag and chased after him. The damn jerk ignored her and kept walking. His strides were fast enough that she had to run. “Wait!”

He didn’t slow down, and he didn’t turn as she kept hollering for him to stop. He continued out the door, through the parking lot, and left Jane panting like she’d just played jump rope by the time she reached him.

“Ryder.” She grabbed his arm, pulling him to a stop.

He stared down at her before pulling his EarPods out. “What?”

“Oh.” She rubbed her cheek. “I didn’t know you had earbuds in. I was yelling for you to stop.”

“Get in if you’re coming,” was all he said. He put his earbud back in as he got into his gray Camaro.

She didn’t blow it this time. Running around, she pulled open the door and dived in. It was then that she noticed Ryder had been parked right beside the practice field, and the team was watching. David was watching.

Ryder slipped on his sunglasses as he started the car, then patted her leg. “Seatbelt, babe.”

Jane pushed his hand off. “I’m not your babe.”

His smile was both deadly and sexy at the same time. “You sure about that?”

It was pointless to argue with him. She turned away, ignoring the tingles on her leg as she yanked the seatbelt in place.

“Like it rough, huh?” He twirled a lock of her hair, laughing when she smacked his hand away. “Okay, you like rough and sweet. Gotcha. Good thing I’m good at everything I do.”

“Just drive.”

He nodded, placing his hand over the shifter. “Want to grab my stick with me?”

“Oh my God. Just go.” Jane looked out the window, cringing when she spotted David still staring.

Ryder just chuckled, then he was driving dangerously fast. Well, he was until he peeked down and saw her gripping the seat.

“Sorry.” He patted her hand. “Forgot.”

For some stupid reason, she warmed from knowing Ryder was talking about her dad. Her father died after he lost control of his car in the rain one night. Of all people comforting her, she never expected it to be Ryder to bring her the most comfort with just a simple gesture.

“Thanks,” she whispered, releasing her death-grip.

He nodded. “Ever think you’d be in my car?”

“I’ve contemplated stealing it.” She grinned as she spoke. It was a sexy car.

He frowned at her. “You can’t drive a manual.”

“You don’t know that.”

He scoffed.

“Okay, you got me, but I could figure it out.” She studied the interior. He had the ZL1 model, and she was pretty sure she’d drive it right off the road if she ever got behind the

wheel. She had a fear of driving which was why David drove her everywhere.

“I’ll teach you,” Ryder finally said. “Can’t have you thieving my car and not even making it out of the driveway before I catch your ass.”

Jane laughed, surprised as hell she was laughing with him. “Thanks for setting me up for the life of crime.”

He grinned at her. “Whatever you want to be, Sweet Jane, you’ll be greater if I’m your teacher.”

She couldn’t stop smiling, and she didn’t care that it was David’s rival that had her feeling happy after such a stressful day.

Ryder groaned, throwing his head against the couch. “This is confusing. Can’t you just write it for me?”

“I thought you were good at everything,” she said, trying not to laugh that his words were biting him in his muscular ass.

They were in the living room at his house. She sat at the desk while Ryder lounged on the sofa, tossing a football up and down. Every sentence she read to him, he’d groan or growl.

He shook his head at her, but there was a faint smile on his lips. “I am good at everything, but I don’t want to be good at this shit. It’s Beowulf. The movie was lame. Who the fuck has sex with the Mother of Monsters?”

“That’s not what happens in the real epic.” She stretched her arms over her head, feeling her cheeks burn when he peeked at her exposed stomach.

“Trying to make me feel like a dumb jock.” He returned to tossing the football. “You said, Anglo-Saxon Kenning. Why do I have to do that for things that are not even in the story?”

You're telling me I have to read the story, then make up evil Anglo-Saxon Kenning things for modern shit?"

She shrugged. "I didn't have Mrs. Santiago. That's just the assignment. I only said fast-bringer for a car or light-bringer for a flashlight. You don't have to be lame like that. She'll probably have Beowulf questions on your quizzes. Like pointing out the types in the poem or something."

"I liked 'fast-bringer'." He grinned as her face warmed. "I can't believe he didn't fuck Angelina Jolie."

"Angelina Jolie wasn't alive back then, but I get horny boys like you would be disappointed there was no sex with a hot woman." Jane smiled, flipping through his notes. He was smart, and she was in love with his handwriting. Like David's, they made her feel like a four-year-old spelling her name with a crayon.

"What happened with your boy this morning?" Ryder suddenly asked.

"Huh?" Jane tried to look relaxed, but inside she was panicking.

Ryder turned his head. "Your dumb fucking stepbrother. He was almost late to practice, and he said you had an accident that he had to fix. So, was he blaming you for him sleeping in, or did you fuck something up?"

Jane ground her teeth together. How could David call it her accident? She had only woken him up so he wouldn't get in trouble.

"Fucking fag," Ryder said, shaking his head.

"Shut up!" Jane always heard the guys tease David loads of times, calling him gay because he didn't have a girlfriend. There was Diane, obviously, but they still picked at him.

Ryder smirked, tossing the ball. "Unless he's fucking you, he hasn't been fucking any girls. Therefore, he must be gay."

"That doesn't make someone gay, moron." Her heart hoped some of Ryders' words were true. Had David *not* been with Diane? She shut her stupid heart up and focused on

Ryder's gay comments. "It's not like it's a problem anyway if he was. There are like two guys who are openly gay on the team." She slammed his notebook shut.

"I didn't say it was bad." He watched her carefully. She'd seen Ryder with the gay players. He accepted them, even scared others who might pick on them. It suddenly made sense; this was a tactic for him to make her angry about David.

It wasn't gonna work. She could knock him down a peg, too. "Maybe he's focused on keeping his grades up so he can play the sport he loves."

"Low blow, babe." He put the ball down and sat up, swinging his legs over so he was able to fully stare down at her. "And I didn't say he hadn't ever fucked a girl—just that I don't think he has lately." Her heart sank. "Tell me what happened, or I'm telling everyone I saw him in your room late last night. Naked."

Her eyes widened. "What?"

A dangerous smile appeared on his face. "You didn't shut your curtains all the way. He was in there, maybe not naked, but he wasn't wearing a shirt. Tell me how long you've been fucking your stepbrother, and I'll keep it between us."

"I am not fucking him." She felt those damn tears building—angry tears—and she hated that she cried so easily.

"So, you suck his dick?"

Jane launched his notebook at him.

He caught it, tilting his head as he watched her breathe faster. "Is he forcing you?"

"No," she screamed. "We are not fucking. If he's fucking anyone, it's probably Diane."

Ryder tossed the notebook aside, and got up, walking over to her. He gripped her chin and stared into her eyes like he could read her mind. "Easy. I just wanted to make sure he wasn't forcing you into anything because he was in your room."

She shoved his hand away and started to gather her things. “I wrote the answers for you. Put them into your own words.”

Ryder didn't move away. He watched her throw her stuff into her backpack, dropping more than she managed to pack away. “You haven't told David you're in love with him?”

Jane stopped, her hands shaking. “What?”

“You love him, babe.” He picked up her pencil, sliding it into her hand. “Tell him. See what happens.”

“Why are you such an asshole?” She sniffed, looking up at him.

“I just want you to see he's not the better man,” he said, brushing away a tear sliding down her cheek. “You won't until you see the truth.”

“Which is?” Her lips trembled, and he stared at them the same way David used to.

“You gotta find that out on your own, Sweet Jane.” He brushed his thumb over her lips. “You saw it—I know you did. But you've only focused on him, and now you're unable to see anyone else. He's trying to, though.”

“I should go,” she said, but she remained still, entranced by the way he was looking at her—like she was all he saw.

“I'd tell you not to worry about Diane, but I honestly don't know what David does—we don't talk much anymore.”

There wasn't a time Jane could remember David and Ryder ever talking beyond football plays.

“Or you could stay and go for a swim with me.” He smirked. “We can skinny-dip. I'm sure I can make up for anything if I'm naked for you.”

She choked out a laugh, smiling more when he did. “I'll pass.”

“So, you get to tease me with the towel-show, but I bless you with this?” He gestured to himself. “You know I don't have a small dick. You know you're curious to see if it's just as big as it looked from your window. I promise, it's bigger.”

Where was a hole to Hell when she needed one?

“Brother,” came a male voice, making Jane yelp, “do show some manners.” Luc Godson strolled around the corner, placing his keys on the table. “Jane, it’s good to see you.”

“What the fuck are you doing home?” Ryder moved, blocking her view of his older brother.

“Clearly you were too high to remember the arrangements last night. Gabriel left for London,” Luc said far too elegantly for a twenty year old. “I was asked to babysit.”

Ryder scoffed, still blocking the way out and her view of Luc. Who didn’t want to look at the guy?

“Are you staying for dinner, Jane?” Luc asked.

“Oh.” She shouldered her backpack and squeezed around Ryder. “No. I’ll get out of your hair.” She noticed he’d dyed it from pale-blond to a dark, gunmetal color. “I like the gray, by the way.”

His expression was empty, but there was a spark in his eyes that made her think he might be amused by her. “Thank you. You are more beautiful than I last saw you.”

She knew she was blushing. No one had called her beautiful before. Then she remembered the last time he saw her was last night—in her towel. Perv. “Thanks.”

Luc glanced at Ryder. “Walk her home and return. You and I are going to have a chat.”

“Do you always talk like this?” Jane blurted.

Ryder chuckled at her as Luc simply watched his brother laugh.

“Sorry,” she muttered, walking past Luc. “Thanks for the invite. Maybe next time.”

“You’re always welcome to join us,” Luc said, giving Ryder a fierce look.

Ryder gripped her bicep, gently and led her out of the house. “You are the most dangerous creature,” he growled. “You really shouldn’t talk to him.”

“He’s pleasant, for a Godson.” She picked at him. She thought Luc was sexy as hell, and his more sophisticated way of doing things was attractive compared to his brothers who just destroyed, though Ryder wasn’t as bad as she’d always thought.

“It’s a trick,” he said quietly. “Don’t believe the shit he tells you. There’s always something more to what he does.”

“Thanks for the warning.” Jane shrugged free from his hold, her heart beating fast because he was following her. It wasn’t an uncomfortable feeling. It was nice. It felt like he wanted to make sure she got home safe.

“Are you always home alone for long?” he asked, leaning against the doorframe and watching her get her key out.

“It depends.” She found her key and inserted it. “Why?”

“I’m just at practice after school, so I don’t get to notice these things. David is at practice with me, so you’re alone.”

“I hang out with Wendy when she’s not working.” She didn’t know if he was waiting to be invited in or what.

He motioned to the door. “Let me check things out, then I’ll leave you alone.”

Tingly warmth spread over her as he opened the door himself, entering first like there was really a threat.

“Kinda spooky,” he said, walking in and opening a few doors to check each room.

“Don’t worry, I’ll protect you.” She was starting to like this banter with him.

He sent her a little glare, but it wasn’t mean. “You probably would try. I can imagine you holding up the remote like it was a sword, hollering at a burglar.”

She shoved his back. “I don’t have muscles to scare anyone with.”

He snickered, now making his way upstairs. “Do I scare you with my muscles? ‘Cause you must be broken for how

long you stare at me. Or is that you're thing? You like the dangerous shit?"

Jane sighed, but she was smiling. "I worry about your shits. Maybe you should see a doctor."

A light laugh escaped him. "Thanks for the concern. I'm touched." He stopped at her parents' door.

"Don't go in there," she told him.

"Why? I know it can't be your room."

"It's my mom's."

Ryder swung his head around. "They don't sleep together?"

"What?"

He fully turned to her. "Do your parents not sleep in the same room?"

"They do." She didn't know why he was acting weird.

"You don't consider him your dad?"

Oh. "Kingston's my stepdad. He's good to me."

"You used to call him Dad when we were younger." He searched her face. "You don't like having to associate David as your brother."

She pressed her lips together tightly. Why did he have to ruin everything?

Ryder, again, got way too touchy, and he grabbed her face, running his thumb over her lips. "Don't abuse these. I like them the way they are."

Okay, not what she expected. Nor was she expecting the tingly, fuzzy feeling his touch left behind.

He smirked. "You like these being my lips?"

"You're stupid," came her lame response. Even stupider, she didn't deny they were his, and she wondered how his would feel against hers.

“Nah, just unconcerned about certain things.” He caressed her lips again. “These lips I can be very concerned with.”

“That’s sweet in a weird way.” She pushed his hand down. “Hurry up so I can be alone.”

“Using and tossing me now.” He shook his head as he opened the door. He quickly scanned the room, then checked both doors. “They don’t have whips or sex rooms?”

“Why would that be something you’d check for?” She was mortified at the thought of her mom having a sex room with David’s dad.

He shrugged, walking past her to the next room. David’s.

“I’m sure I can be alone,” she said, not ready to go into his room after that morning.

“I know you can, but it’ll make me feel better to know there’s no one here.” He opened the door, scanning again before checking the closet. “He’s like a little soldier. All his shit is organized.”

Jane rolled her eyes, pushing him out of David’s space. He’d be so mad if he found out Ryder snooped through his stuff.

He chuckled, then checked under the bed. “Making sure he doesn’t have a body under here.”

“Why would he have a body?” Jane had to admit, she liked this playful side of Ryder Godson. “You look ridiculous.”

The cutest grin from him greeted her. “Ridiculously sexy?”

No way was she confirming or denying that. “Get up.”

“So eager to have me in your room,” he teased. He tried to open the adjoining bathroom door, though. “Why is this locked?”

“It’s our bathroom.”

He frowned while jerking the knob. “You share?”

“No. He uses the guest bath. Didn’t you see all his stuff in it?” She huffed when he kept staring at the door, so she sighed,

grabbed his hand and pulled him out after her.

He interlaced their fingers. “If you wanted to hold my hand, you just had to ask.”

Jane struggled not to look affected by him holding her hand, but it was hard.

“So fucking cute.” He laughed, squeezing her hand when she tried to pull away. “Want me to carry you over the threshold?”

“We are not married,” she said, but her tummy fluttered with butterflies.

“You don’t think about marrying me?” He pouted his lips. “What kind of monster are you?”

She covered her face to hide the blush she knew was there. “Let’s just get this over with.”

He sighed loudly. “I know this is just so you can spy on me swimming.”

Jane shoved him, pushing him into her room. “Hurry.”

“Damn, babe, give me a minute to woo you. I’m a romantic.” He dodged her swat, laughing. “All right, I’ll be serious.” He released her hand and strolled around her room, checking her closet and bathroom. He even checked to make sure David couldn’t enter.

“There, no bad guys.” She leaned against the frame, sort of sad that he was going to leave now. Somehow, even with bringing up David and Diane, giving her hope and then crushing it, Ryder Godson had made her shitty day better.

He nodded, exiting the bathroom, but he moved to her window instead of leaving. “You have a good view of me.”

Jane pointed at the mountains beyond his fence line. “That was the view my dad was going for.”

He went quiet, staring at it, then he said, “Your dad must be thrilled he got his daughter God’s two greatest creations in one try.”

“You’re killing me, Ryder.” She couldn’t hide her smile.

His muscular arm went around her shoulder, and he hugged her to his side. “Never, babe.” He winked. “Seduce you, amaze you, maybe fight with you because I’m me—blow your mind as you scream in ecstasy, definitely. But never kill you. Trust me, I’m toning down my hotness just to save your pretty mortal eyes.”

“Wow.”

“I know.” He laughed, squeezing her. “So, can we fuck now?”

“Bye, Ryder.” She started shoving him out, and he let her. It was nice to feel his muscles under his shirt. His body heat wasn’t burning like David’s, but she had the urge to cuddle against him anyway.

“Do you need a ride tomorrow?” he asked when they reached the door.

Jane stared up at him, surprised she liked having him looking down at her. “You mean after school?”

“And in the morning if you need it. I overheard something was up with David’s car.” He gently pushed a lock of hair behind her ear like he didn’t even notice he was doing it.

“The brakes were bad. He dropped it off at lunchtime, I think.” Despite the urge to get closer to him, she stayed in place.

“Coach told me I could skip morning practice once a week. I’ll skip if you need a ride. Or I can see if Tercero will pick you up.” He looked a little uneasy about that. “He’ll give you a ride, but I’d rather it be me.”

“How do you go from being an asshole to a considerate human being?” She almost touched his chest but didn’t.

“Easy to do when you smile at me.” He smirked, and she couldn’t stop her smile from forming. “I’ll pick you up.”

“I can just walk over.”

He opened the door. “Nah, I’m digging this chivalry shit with you. I like seeing you all surprised.”

“Whatever.” She held onto the doorknob as he walked out.
“Bye, Ryder.”

He gave her a little salute as he jogged down the steps, but he glanced over his shoulder. “Good night, Sweet Jane.”

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FIVE

Jane was beyond hot when she tried to fall asleep. She couldn't stop thinking about Ryder, and it confused her. Of course, he was the hottest guy she'd ever seen, David being such a close second that it didn't really matter. Because David was perfect, and Ryder was an asshole.

Except, Ryder wasn't an asshole. Well, he could be, and maybe he even liked to be, but she was convinced she got to see a side few ever saw of him.

She hugged her pillow, sighing. If only he'd chosen to sprawl out on her bed when he was here. She would have the luxury of smelling him because the whiffs she'd gotten were to die for.

A light knock sounded on her bedroom door, interrupting her new fantasy.

"Yeah?" Jane squinted when the door cracked open and the light from the hall hit her face.

"Hey." It was David.

"Hey." She stayed still, watching him shut the door. The room darkened, allowing only his silhouette to remain visible as he walked toward her.

"Can we talk?" He stopped right beside her. "About this morning?"

All her hurt came back. "I thought we were pretending nothing—whatever the fuck it was—happened."

He sighed, and she imagined him running his hand through his hair. “I was freaking out, Jane. I’m sorry. You know I wouldn’t hurt you or really mean it if I do say something harsh.”

“I really don’t know that anymore.” She shifted, moving to sit up. It was too unsettling to have him here after she’d been thinking about Ryder instead of him.

“You don’t?” His form became easier to make out. “Can I sit?”

Jane glanced at the time. 11:20 p.m. “Are you just getting home?”

“Yeah. I showered. I’m not sweaty.”

The yummy image of him being sweaty chose to pop into her head, and she hugged her legs as though that would help control her hormones. “Okay.”

The bed dipped, and she saw him even better now. He smelled like soap, skin, and David-y. God; she was going to lose her mind around him. All that held her in place was that he’d been distant since their parents married, making her think she imagined everything, and his dating. If she focused on that, she might keep her sanity because he’d totally felt her up that morning and had been dreaming about her.

But she missed him so much. He hadn’t come into her room at night since before their parents married. Now that she thought about it, the last time was probably the very weekend his dad proposed, because both their parents had gone on ‘business trips’. And that had been just two weeks before the big wedding bomb dropped.

That night, David had come over late, and he said he’d stay on the couch. She was too eager to have him stay over, so she convinced him to stay in her room, that they could fit on her bed. They were innocent about it, just holding hands and talking, then she’d woken up practically on top of him. He said she was super restless until he let her lay on him, and they just stayed that way—with him lightly running his fingers through her hair—until their stomachs started growling.

That was the day she knew there was more she wanted between them, but she didn't want to lose him if he didn't feel the same. So, she'd decided to wait for him to make the first move.

"You know I care about you, Jane." David's voice pulled her back to the present. "I always have. Always will."

For some reason, this felt like a breakup speech. Like she was going to lose the friendship she thought meant more than it really did. She got angry all over again. "Thanks. I got it—you're my caring stepbrother for life."

He chuckled, moving a bit. "You think I like being your stepbrother—that things had to change between us?"

She held her breath. He never brought up anything about the way things had started to go with them. It had just instantly changed to them being siblings and nothing more.

Then he added, "You know I wanted to be with you, Jane."

She gasped, hugging her legs tighter. "You did not."

"I think I know how I felt about you." He reached out, tugging her hand so he could hold it. "Did you really forget how we were becoming? Because I haven't. I think about every time I got to touch you. I think about that night I stayed here, of you wrapping your legs around me and burying your face against my neck, telling me how good I smelled." He chuckled, making her shiver. She loved when he did that deep laugh. "You're always on my mind."

Tears stung her eyes. "You've pretended like none of it ever happened—like I'm nothing but a stepsister."

"I have to." He squeezed her hand. "I never wanted to make things hard on anyone. My dad was happy, your mom was happy. Besides, you just smiled and nodded, like it was all okay."

"The day they told us was already the worst day for me. Losing my spot to Ryder nearly broke me, but I was okay because I knew things were changing for us. Or, I hoped they were. I could have everything taken from me but be okay if I had you. But then Dad took me out after practice."

“I thought it would be a cheer-up chat or train harder, but then he brought up our friendship and how glad he was that we were such good friends. I thought maybe he was going to get onto me for grabbing your ass, or even the sex-talk, but he said I’ll be a great brother to you.

“I was confused, then panicking and angry when I realized what he was getting at. I wanted to yell, tell him he couldn’t do this to us, but he looked so happy about marrying your mom and making you his daughter. He was proud of me for taking care of you. I just told him I was happy for him.

“Then he brought up Ryder. He said I needed to keep an eye on you around him because you clearly liked him. Outside I agreed to be a good stepbrother and watch out for you, but inside, I was dying. I’d lost you before I could really make you mine.

“I waited for you to do what Dad expected and pick Ryder. I tried to prepare for it, or for anyone to come along for you, because maybe I was wrong about your feelings. Dad was so sure you liked Ryder, so maybe you didn’t love me the same way I loved you. Every day since then has been like a death sentence hanging over my head—waiting for someone to take my whole world from me. All because I was too stupid, holding back when I wanted to ask you to be mine.”

Shock. The cold feeling that spread out from her heart, down her arms and legs, had to be from shock.

“Baby,” he said making her heart pound, “I’ve tried to be the best brother, tried to date girls, just to do the right thing and move on, but I can’t. And I don’t want to ruin your reputation with the shit it would cause by us being together. I don’t want to ruin Dad’s relationship either.

“So, yeah, I was freaking the fuck out to wake up and have you in a position I fantasize about all the time. I thought it was another dream, but you were really there. I’ve been worried about you all day, worried you’d hate me, blame me for abusing you or taking advantage of you. I guess now I’m just hoping you feel something for me.”

“You’re not messing with me, right?” She didn’t know what to think just yet, and she was terrified to hope again.

“I promise I’m not messing around.” He lifted her hand to his lips, kissing her fingers. It felt like a brand. “It’s always been you, Jane.”

She felt like crying. This was all she’d wanted since she was probably twelve, and it had intensified over the years. “I feel everything for you, David. I know you were asleep this morning, so please don’t think you hurt me. It just hurt to have you look at me the way you did. You’ve pushed me away since they got together, and I thought I was stupid for feeling the way I do.”

Even in the dark, she could see his smile. “If you’re stupid, so am I.”

She sniffed, squeezing his hand. So strong and warm. Hot. Like he’d burn her if they went any further, but she wanted to burn if it was him destroying her. Everything would be okay with him. “What does this mean?”

He sighed, scooting closer. “I don’t know. Dad will kill me if he knows I’m even thinking about you the way I do. He’s always pushing me to get a girlfriend, and I think some part of him knows how I feel about you. I don’t want to disappoint him, but I don’t want you thinking I just feel like your stepbrother and nothing else. You’re my best friend, my Jane, my baby. I feel sick whenever I have to put on the stepbrother act around you. It breaks my heart to see your sad eyes, but I don’t know what else to do. I just needed you to know.”

She had no idea she let it show. “You tried to go out with girls because you wanted to do the right thing? Because Kingston wants you to?”

He tensed but nodded. “I couldn’t stop thinking about you, wanting only you. I thought if I forced myself to move on with someone, I’d be able to let you go. Because all I want is to make you mine—always. I didn’t want anyone around you, and I knew someday a guy would go after you. I didn’t want to take that from you, so I tried to move on.”

“Tried? You mean you didn’t love anyone?” She was trying to find the courage to ask if he’d had sex in his effort to ‘do the right thing’, but she was a wimp.

“No, I haven’t loved any girls. I swear. All I want is your pretty face to look back at me, your smile, your laugh. Everything about you, I want. I can barely even function around the girls I’ve been with. No one comes close to you.”

“I feel like I’m dreaming.” She moved to touch his face with her other hand, almost sobbing when she found his lips and he smiled.

“I really hope this isn’t a dream,” he said, “because I’ve imagined telling you so many times, and each time, there’s always you, laughing in my face telling me I’m a sick pervert for loving my sister.”

“Stepsister.”

His lips curved up again. “I hate when people say you’re my sister. It’s like a knife in my heart, reminding me that you’re forbidden.”

She kept touching his mouth, tracing his lips. He had amazing lips and that smile, it was so damn beautiful. “So, what do we do now?”

“Right now, I want to kiss you. Forbidden or not, I need to show you how I feel—show you I’m not your fucking brother.”

Oh, damn.

He moved her hand to his shoulder then pulled her closer. “You okay with this?”

Fuck, was this really happening? She really hadn’t expected David to be so forward, but here he was, proving her wrong.

Her heart screamed yes, let him do everything to her, and she was totally for it. She’d been a good girl all her life, and he was her dream guy.

“I’m okay,” she whispered.

“I’m trying to go slow,” he said, “but I just need to feel you. Tell me to stop when it’s too much.”

She panted, her body trembling with anticipation as his hands slid across her waist. Then he pulled her to straddle his lap. No one had touched her before, and he was setting fire to her. He was so muscular, so warm. “What if we get caught?” she asked.

He dragged a finger down her throat. “My dad got called out, and your mom was coming in when I got here. She said she was tired.”

Jane almost moaned. He was so much bigger than she remembered when they’d hugged and touched before. He was a man now. “David, I haven’t been with anyone. Not even a kiss.”

“Fuck.” He stilled his hand.

“I’m sorry.” She didn’t want him to stop, but she thought he knew, and she prayed he would prove her wrong about Diane.

“No, don’t be. I just feel like I’m forcing you again.” He cupped her cheeks. “I love that you’ve turned down guys. I’ve hoped it was because of me.”

“It was,” she said, embarrassed but happy when she made out his smile. Now, she once again hoped that meant he hadn’t been with Diane or anyone else. “You said the girls you’ve been with ... you can barely function ... Does that mean you never had sex?”

He was quiet, then he was pulling her face closer to his. “Jane, sweetheart, I’ve tried to move on.”

Her nose burned. He confirmed all her fears.

He held her cheek, keeping her face close to his. “I didn’t know how to let you go, how to keep my own sanity. Everyone pressures me. So, like I said—I tried.”

It felt like her chest was caving in but being ripped open at the same time. “Diane?”

He sighed, and that was all she needed.

She sniffed, turning her head away. Why did it hurt so much? She'd guessed this about him, and she'd told herself all these years he was only her stepbrother. She'd hidden her feelings as best as she could, too. So, why did it matter if he'd tried to move on? It should be good that he was here, right? "Are you dating her again?"

"No." He turned her to face him. "She always comes to me, and I let her because it keeps the others away, but I haven't been with her in a while. I won't be with her again." He pulled her hand over his pounding heart. "I hate myself for it, Jane. In some fucked up way, I even did it because it would make me unworthy to think about you the way I have. But my heart aches for you more than ever."

God, David was always like this, trying to solve things on his own, but fuck if this was the wrong way to solve their situation. Her heart wept, but she was so angry at the same time. She wanted to make him forget Diane. She wanted him to see what a damn fool he was for trying to move on, with Diane of all people, and she wanted to have him. More than anything, she wanted to be the one to feel him, to just give in to her heart's wishes. "Fine," she said, wiping a tear. "I get it. It's okay."

"Are you sure?" At least the worried tone in his voice sounded genuine. "I mean it, I've hated myself. I swear she never had my heart, not a single part of it. I would feel bad about thinking that way and using her, but you're the only one I'm worried about."

It should make her mad he'd used a girl to get past his feelings for her, but she wasn't upset about it either. What kind of horrible person did that make her? "Okay, just please show me it's me." She didn't know what to say to him, and she was already regretting this, but she loved him.

"We can go slow."

Jane shook her head. "Everything. Now."

"Jane," he said seriously, but he didn't push her away.

“I’m sure, David.” She ignored her sad soul’s pleas to be smart and pulled him closer. “Please just love me.”

“Baby, I’ve always loved you,” he whispered, brushing their lips together but not quite kissing her. “Are you sure? We really don’t have to—”

Jane tangled her fingers in his hair, tightening her legs around him. “Yes, I’m sure” she breathed, lost the moment his fiery lips pressed fully against hers.

He didn’t exactly go slow, she didn’t think. His fingers dug into her hips but then rubbed the sting away before he wrapped an arm around her back. This wasn’t just her first kiss. This was David kissing her, marking her, showing her that he’d fucked up, but it was her he wanted.

David smiled against her lips, then angled his head, pushing her mouth open and sliding his tongue in.

Oh, wow.

She moaned, gripping him harder, trying to copy him, but he devoured her. Yes, she could forgive him if he kissed her like this. She’d spied him kissing Diane and other girls a few times, and it wasn’t like this. Never like this.

He moved a hand to squeeze her ass, then shifted enough so he could lift her to turn them. “You still okay?”

She pulled his mouth back to hers. Hell yes, she was okay.

He smiled, kissing her harder as he laid her back on the bed. Yanking the covers aside, he situated her, his breathing heavier as he positioned himself above her. “I’ve fantasized about having you under me.” He pulled one of her legs up, sliding his hand along her thigh. “You’re so beautiful, baby. No one compares to you.”

“You can’t even see me.” She wanted his words to wash away all her hurt.

“Oh, I’ve seen you.” He chuckled, lowering his face to kiss her again as he cupped one of her breasts. “I’m dying to see the rest of you.”

She touched his cheek, pulling him to her. “I thought I might be deformed by how you reacted.”

“You’re perfect for me.” He kissed her chin, then along her jaw before sucking on her neck. He squeezed her breast at the same time, and she somehow felt it all the way between her legs. Shit that was new, and it was intense. Like she instantly needed to feel it every second of every day.

Then his mouth covered one of her breasts, and he licked her hardened nipples through her tank top.

Jane moaned, gripping his hair. He grinned and tugged her top down so he could suck the nipple he’d just teased.

“Oh God,” she whispered.

“Not God.” He moved up until he was kissing her lips again. “Just your David. All yours.”

“My David,” she said as Ryder Godson’s face suddenly appeared in her mind.

“Yes, Jane.” David kissed her softly, moving his hips so she felt his growing erection. “It’s always been you.”

Now she felt like crying, and it wasn’t a lustful cry either, or even a relieved one. She felt like she was cheating, and it confused the fuck out of her. Of course, none of this was cheating—she and Ryder weren’t dating. But ...

“Jane?” David had started to kiss his way across her cheek, but he stopped and brushed a thumb over her cheek. Tears. She was crying. “What’s wrong?”

“Nothing,” she croaked, hating that of all times she had wanted this with David, and she gets it, but Ryder is the guy on her mind. It didn’t make any sense. Not even her attempt to get David to have sex with her.

He’d confessed to fucking Diane, yet she was trying to give him her virginity.

This was a mistake. She wasn’t thinking. Still, she blurted, “Just kiss me again. I’ll be okay.”

“No, talk to me.” He settled his weight on one arm as he pulled her top into place “I know you’re upset. I should’ve gone slower—I was just excited.”

“I don’t know what’s wrong with me.” She really didn’t know anything now. He felt so good, better than her dreams about him, and he was perfect for her. Except, he wasn’t the only guy on her mind. No, the guy on her mind made her heart beat faster, made her tummy flutter with his words, and made her skin tingle with just his touch.

Ryder made her tingle, David burned her like he was marking his territory. Like he was too much, or something she wasn’t supposed to touch. It felt wrong to think about Ryder while she was with David. And it hurt most of all that she couldn’t stop wondering how she really compared to Diane, and how many times David had been with her.

David sighed, then kissed her forehead. “It’s okay. We’ll go slower, or do you need to think about us longer?”

Jane stared up at him. She still wanted him so badly, even with the stepbrother thing. It wasn’t like they were blood. Kingston hadn’t even adopted her or asked her to take his name. She was a Mortaime, after her father, and David was a Leodegrance. It was just the Diane that bothered her. And now Ryder.

“I like this,” she finally told him. “It was the perfect first kiss. But I think I need time.” Even though this probably ruined her chances with David she stood by her decision. After all, David had chosen Diane to replace her. She’d never forget that. She’d never forget that he’d fucked a girl to move on from her.

“I’ll wait for you to tell me what you want.” David gave her a final kiss, breathing her in as she did the same. He moved but only to rest his forehead on hers. “If you move on, though, Jane, I’ll do the same, even if it kills me to do it.”

She whined but nodded. “Yeah.”

He caressed her cheek. “My heart is yours. Don’t you dare think I’ll move on easily. It was never easy for me. I wanted

you. Every touch, kiss, thought—it was you. I don't care how shitty of a guy that makes me. I was just trying to protect everyone and do the right thing.”

“Okay.” She untangled herself from him, sliding her legs down.

“I'm going to remember this forever,” he said, not moving away yet. “Better than my best dreams of you.”

“You dream about me?”

“Every night.” He kissed her forehead again. “You're my dream girl.”

That helped a little. Not enough, but it soothed the current sting.

“Are you getting a ride with Wendy tomorrow?” he asked.

Jane froze, but swallowed and answered, “Ryder's taking me to school, and I'm riding home with him.”

She felt David's fiery gaze even with the darkness hiding him. “What?”

“Um. He offered because he noticed you didn't have the car. He said the coach was going to let him skip, so he could take me.”

“No.” David pushed himself off her, but he didn't get off the bed. “Call Wendy.”

His harshness hurt her heart. It felt like he was blaming her for something, and she felt even worse because she had been looking forward to Ryder's attention. But why should she be sorry?

“It's just a ride,” she whispered.

“It's not.” David put a hand on her leg. “Please, Jane. I know Ryder, and I know what he's doing.”

“And what's that?”

“He's trying to get into your pants.” David shook his head. “He's always been after you, trying to take you.”

“What?” She felt an unexplainable urge to defend Ryder, which didn’t make any sense.

David breathed harder. “Why do you think I hit him that day? At tryouts?”

“Because he was taking your position?”

“He said he was taking my position and my girl,” David snapped. “Now I’ve got my position back, and he’s swooping in to steal you.”

She felt lightheaded. “I don’t think Ryder planned to fail so the teachers would suggest I tutor him all to steal me. It’s not like I belong to anyone to be stolen anyway. And it’s not like you’ve cut off all girls.”

“I tried everything to cut off girls and it didn’t work. I was nearly grabbing you and kissing you at breakfast, Jane.” His eyes flashed in the darkness. “It was that fucking hard. You’ll always be mine, and I’ll be damned if I let him come take you away when I’m finally confessing this to you.”

For a few seconds, Jane stared at the shadow around his face, then shook her head. “You need to go. You’re acting like a possessive boyfriend, and I can’t even deal with that after my worst fears about you with Diane turned out to be true.”

“I’m sorry.” He ran a hand through his hair, blowing out a deep breath. “Please try to understand.”

“I understand just fine. Is he why you’re here?” The words were out before she could process them, but now that she’d said it, she needed to know. “You saw him drive me home—I saw you watching. Is this just part of your rivalry? To make sure he can’t have anything? Because Diane isn’t fulfilling your fantasy?”

“Don’t say that shit.” Oh, he was pissed. “Of course, she’s not fulfilling anything I really want, and he’s not why I’m here.”

“How convenient, then.” God, she sounded hysterical, but she didn’t care. “You went out with Diane last night and left me standing here in my towel. You acted like there was something between us, and yet you still left. To her.”

“I went out with the team. I knew you were going to tutor that asshole today, and I was hurt.”

“So, you went and fucked her to get over it?” She gaped at him, a hollow feeling spreading through her.

“I didn’t fuck her.” He exhaled loudly. “I haven’t been with her all the way for over a month.”

The hollow feeling vanished, and ugly cuts sliced across her heart. “Just go. I need time. If you could spend yours fucking Diane and whoever else, I can tutor Ryder and spend time with him.”

“It’s only been her,” he said softly. “Sex, I mean. I tried stuff with other girls, but she’s the only one I went all the way with. She’s not you, though. I felt sick, but I thought I had to try—I had to give you a reason to get away from me. I just let her be the one.”

She rubbed under her burning eyes. “You know, that makes it worse.”

His shoulders hunched forward. “It kills me to tell you this. I’m just being honest. I don’t want to lie or hide anything from you if we start what I want to between us. Just please don’t run to him. Not him.”

Her jaw dropped open, but she snapped it shut quickly. “I know you probably knew I felt the same way about Diane, David. So, you can piss off with the ‘not him’ demand. I’m his tutor.”

“That’s not all you want to be, and you know it.” He growled. “He’s going to make his move.”

“I can’t believe you. He’s the only reason you’re making a move. How many times would you have continued fucking Diane if he hadn’t failed?”

“I wouldn’t have fucked her again,” he said, total defeat in his tone now. “I told you she keeps the others away. I let her.”

Dammit, he was breaking her heart with every confession. “I’ve heard enough.”

David stood, pulling his hair as he stared out her window. “Fine. Let him take you to school, let him bring you home. Then you decide when you’re ready if you want me, or if you want to do whatever it is that I know you’ll do with him.”

“What’s that supposed to mean?”

He dropped his gaze to her. “I’m not blind, Jane. You look at him all the damn time. He fucking gloats about it, and I have to stay silent so I don’t sound like a jealous boyfriend instead of a stepbrother. Yet another reason to let shit happen with Diane.” A loud sigh filled the room, but he lowered his arms then reached down, cupping her face and gave her a firm kiss on the lips. “Just be happy with your choice. And please tell me when you decide. Don’t let me find out I’ve lost from him. I know I don’t deserve you, but I’m not going to just give up now. No more.”

All she did was nod as her heart throbbed. Her whole chest felt like it was caving in, making it harder to breathe.

David caressed her cheek, and gently kissed her lips. “Sweet dreams, Jane.”

She closed her eyes, savoring the beautiful, torturous kiss. “Night, David.”

SIX

Jane had stomach cramps, and they weren't from butterflies at the memories of David giving her her first kiss last night—her first 'make out, almost losing her virginity' epic moment. It wasn't even that David had broken her heart with a truth she denied herself for a long time. No, all of that was locked up with her tears, hidden in the space inside that allowed her to function and suffer at the same time. The sick feeling, though, it had everything to do with Ryder knocking at her front door for the second time, waiting to take her to school.

It wasn't that he was there that had her ready to heave, just that she almost felt he would know just by looking at her that something had happened between her and David, and she was still broken up about the truth. Ryder had been right; she'd not let herself really see that David wasn't perfect.

"Sorry, I'm running—" her words faltered as she looked up to see a very similar face but not the one she had been expecting.

Tercero smiled softly. "Ryder asked me to give you a ride."

Her heart sank, but her stomach discomfort eased. "Oh."

Another faint smile. "Apologies for disappointing you."

"Oh!" She shook her head. "No. I'm just being weird. I'm not disappointed. Thanks for the ride."

He looked so much like Ryder that it was a little freaky. "We should hurry."

“Yes, I’m coming.” She felt flushed as she locked the door. “I mean, not coming like *coming* ... Just—”

“I wasn’t thinking of you having an orgasm.” He chuckled, putting a hand over hers when she struggled to get her key in. “Relax, *cara*.”

Holy moly, his touch was a perfect mix of heat and tingles. “Okay.”

With his help, she locked the door, and he gently led her by the arm to a sleek black Mustang.

Jane took the opportunity to study him up close. True, he looked like Ryder, just leaner, a tiny bit shorter, and his hair, though just as black as Ryder’s, was down a bit past his shoulders. Most guys couldn’t pull the look off, but he killed it.

He caught her looking and smiled. “What is it?”

She blinked, shaking her head. It was like falling into a trance. “I haven’t seen you up close before. I didn’t know your eyes were so dark.”

“*Hm*.” He held open the passenger door for her. “Do I scare you?”

“You know what?” She grinned up at him, happy that all the knots in her stomach were gone. “I feel entirely content with you.”

“As I do with you.” He motioned for her to get in. “Your chariot.”

“Thanks.” She slid in, placing her backpack on her lap as he shut the door.

When got in and they took off, she cleared her throat. “So, not that I’m disappointed about you giving me a ride, but—where is he?”

“Practice.” Tercero didn’t look at her as he drove. “The coaches decided he should be further punished for failing, so he’s doing both practices and having to find time to get tutoring on his own.”

“What?” She gaped over at him. “That’s not fair. When is he supposed to find the time?”

A faint smile touched his lips. “I’m sure he’ll work something out if it means spending time with you.”

As warm as that made her feel, guilt and heartache smothered the giddiness wanting to pour out of her.

“I assumed you were looking forward to your tutoring sessions,” he said quietly.

Jane pressed her lips together while fidgeting with the strap on her backpack. “I actually was.”

Now, he tossed her a quick look. “Something changed?”

She bobbed her head before realizing it. “With David.”

“I see.” He refocused on the road. “Do you want to tell me? Or should I offer useless suggestions?”

She smiled, leaning her head back. “I like your car.”

“Ah, change of subject.” He was definitely smiling. “In that case, I will say thank you and offer to listen if you need someone to talk to.”

Jane saw now that Luc’s way of talking was just something that the brothers had in common. She theorized that even Ryder could sound proper if he ever stopped flirting or being rude. “Are you close with Ryder?”

“He’s my big brother.” He glanced at her. “You think I’ll tell him what we discuss?”

“Well, he’s your brother, so I think you would. Especially with the stuff that’s going on in my head.”

“If you ask me to keep something between us, it will remain so.” He put a hand over his heart. “I give you my word.”

She laughed, thinking of Ryder saying ‘shit’ or something dirty. “Well, I think if we had a bit more time to develop trust, I would spill the beans to you. You do seem trustworthy. I’m just kinda private.”

“Because David was your closest friend, but then you became stepsiblings and you felt like you’d lost a friend? You no longer had anyone you could trust? Except for the blond girl, but you rarely see her anymore.”

“Wow, you’re observant.” She stared at his profile. Gosh, his resemblance was really messing with her.

“It’s easy to observe when everyone is more obsessed with your family than the quiet brother.”

“Does that bother you?” She never thought about how being one of the Godson siblings would be. They seemed proud and confident, but Tercero, despite being nearly as drop-dead sexy as Ryder, was always on the outside.

“Not really. I can accomplish a lot when the world is staring at my brothers.” He hesitated, then added, “Like spending a year in Italy and having Archer turn in assignments for me without the teachers ever noticing I wasn’t in class.”

“Really? I know y’all went to some prep-school when we were really young and came back, but I —” She sat up straighter, trying to remember when he might have been gone. “Wait, I did notice a time you weren’t around. Sophomore year.”

“You noticed?”

“Yes.” She frowned, wondering why he would think someone couldn’t miss him. “I’m your neighbor. And, if you ask Ryder, I’m a pervert who watches you guys swim. I definitely noticed you were missing.” If Ryder wasn’t there, her eyes sought out his look-alike, then all sorts of new ideas began because Tercero was just mysterious.

“Ryder enjoys getting your attention,” he commented.

Guilt filled her again. She did watch Ryder more than she wanted to admit. It made her wonder how much she had really denied it because she was broken over David.

“Smile, *tesoro*. I didn’t mean to upset you.”

“Is that Italian?” She looked up at him, realizing he’d called her *cara* earlier, too.

“Yes, it means treasure,” he said, not showing any indication that he was uncomfortable calling her such a thing.

“It’s pretty.” She felt those damn tingles, and she nearly sighed and closed her eyes to bask in it.

“I’m glad you like it.” He took the turn to enter the school parking lot. “If you’d like, I can give you a ride home. Ryder will have practice unless he can get out of it.”

“Oh, you don’t have to.” She sat there as he waited for some students to cross.

“I would enjoy your company.” He found a parking spot and quickly cut the engine. “I’m home alone almost as often as you are.”

She stared at him, surprised. She was home alone all the time. Wendy had a job that she went to nearly every day after school, and if she wasn’t working, she had school activities. David was either at practice or avoiding her, and her mom was usually asleep or at work. If she did have days off, Kingston usually spent them with her, and they’d go out. Of course, he always offered to take her along, but she didn’t like feeling like a family with them.

He caressed her cheek. “You’re surprised by this?”

“A little,” she admitted, enjoying his touch. “Guess I ignore a lot of my loneliness.”

“Then spend the afternoon with me. I’ll help you remember what it feels like to have someone around who desires your company.”

She giggled, actually giggled. “I love the way you talk.”

A beautiful smile stretched over his lips. “You realize you comment something pleasant about me whenever it comes to you having to confront something about yourself, don’t you?”

Jane sighed. “I have a feeling you’re going to uncover all of my secrets.”

“That is why you are a treasure.” He smoothed her hair back. “Come.” His eyes glinted, and he smirked when she undoubtedly blushed bright red. “Naughty girl.”

Jane practically dragged her feet as she headed to lunch. Wendy was out sick, and that meant she'd be eating alone today. Not that out of the ordinary for Jane, but she wanted to talk to someone. Needed someone.

A muscular arm slung over her shoulder, startling Jane, but all anxiety vanished when she looked up, and the mouthwatering Ryder Godson grinned down at her. "Miss me, babe?"

"Not at all." She smiled, leaning against him and completely giving herself away.

"Liar." He smirked, eyeing her and seeming to take in how well she fit under his arm. "I could practically feel you missing me."

If that was true, she was so embarrassed. Then again, this had to mean he was missing her. Maybe.

"I sent my sorta-clone," he said. "How was he?"

"Tercero's not your clone, but he was nice." She glanced around the hall, cringing a bit as she realized they were drawing a lot of stares.

Ryder noticed her cowering, and he threw a glare at the people in the hall. "Mind your business," he snapped. Never had Jane seen teenagers 'mind their business' so fast before. One kid had even started reading the instructions on a fire extinguisher.

She grinned, leaning against him more to get his attention. When she had it, she carried on like he hadn't just scared their peers. "Thanks for sending Tercero. He told me what happened. It's totally unfair. If I see your coaches, I'm giving them a piece of my mind. How do they expect you to get your grade up if you're being worked double for a sport they won't even let you play?"

"Thanks, feisty girl." He gave her a little squeeze. "And I'm glad you didn't mind Tercero driving you. If I had your

number, I would've warned you. I got the call late last night.”

It still annoyed her that they did this to him. Why get him a tutor if they weren't ever going to let him have time to be tutored? Then his words registered; he was getting bad news when she and David were making out. “It's all right. Um, give me your phone.” She held out her hand, ignoring the cocky smirk he gave her as she took it and entered her number.

“Want me to do some cute shit and send you a picture of us fucking so you have my number?”

She laughed smacking his stomach. Oh, Lord, why is he so ripped? “I have no idea how that could be cute. Nor do I know where you'd get pictures of such a thing.”

He halted and tightened his arm around her. “Here. Stop.”

“Why?” She darted her gaze around, worried that David would show up for some reason. Was she cheating? No, they weren't official. She was taking time to think.

At first, Ryder just messed with his phone, then he grinned, bending down and took a selfie of the two of them. “Cute shit, babe.” He sent the photo, and she felt her butt vibrate. “Put something sexy for my contact so you get all tingly when you see my texts.”

She almost choked on nothing at all. Did he somehow know he made her tingle? As she pulled her phone out, she smiled at the picture. He was perfect.

“Aw, you like it,” he teased, pulling her along with him again. “I'm taking you out for lunch. It'll count as tutoring if you're worried about anyone asking why you're with me.”

Jane bit her lip because she knew that's exactly the excuse she would have given David.

Ryder was quiet as he guided her through the parking lot to his car. This time, he opened the passenger door and waited for her to get in. When he finally sat in his own seat, she imagined all sorts of things she wanted to do with him, and at the top of the list was kissing him

Why? Why did she have to want to kiss him now? Why couldn't she before David had broken her heart? If she was smart, she'd swear off men and become a nun.

"What's wrong, babe?" He slipped his sunglasses on, then tapped her leg. "Seatbelt."

"Sorry." She pulled it on quickly, realizing she liked being called 'babe' by him. "Don't know why I forget that. It's like I have a death wish with you."

He waited for her to get fully buckled before he backed out of the parking space. "Did I say something wrong? You've got your worried look going on."

She wanted to hug him. He sounded so cute, and it mattered so much that he had looks for her. "No, it's nothing you did or said."

He nodded, cracking the window to let some of the heat out. "Did David give you shit for riding home with me?"

For all her ability to just keep things to herself, she blurted out the last thing she should to him, "We kissed. I think we were going to have sex."

Ryder slammed on the brakes and threw his arm out, bracing her so she didn't hit her face on the dashboard. Someone honked behind him, but he ignored them. "Are you okay?" He touched her shoulder then pushed her hair back. "I wasn't expecting—"

"Yeah, I'm fine." She placed his hand back on the steering wheel. "Drive, Ryder."

He looked ahead as he put the car in gear and sped off. "Last night?"

She wiped under her eyes to keep from tearing up. "Yeah. I don't know why I'm telling you. I guess I just don't have anyone. I tried to lock it away, but I'm losing my mind."

Ryder looked completely unhinged. "You asked for it? For him to—"

"Yeah." She held a hand over her face before turning toward the window. "He even told me he's been fucking

Diane. Of all the girls, he picked one who has made my life hell. Then he said it was to get over me—no, to ‘do the right thing’.”

Ryder didn’t say anything.

“I’m sorry.” God, why had she said that?

“You’re saying sorry to me for asking him to kiss you? To fuck you?” He didn’t sound angry, just confused. “You sure as fuck don’t have to be sorry because he used a girl to get over you.”

“I’m just sorry, okay?” She squeezed her eyes shut. Why was she still talking to him? She couldn’t help it. Somehow, he’d become the person she wanted to tell things to.

Ryder pulled into a less popular cafe. One that older people mainly ate at to avoid school kids. The place was pretty dead.

“But you wanted to,” he said softly. “Even when he said that. Why didn’t you? Why are you telling me that you’re sorry?”

A fat tear spilled down her cheek as her nose burned. Her throat closed up, but she managed to whisper, “Because of you.”

Before she could blink, Ryder unbuckled her seatbelt and pulled her onto his lap.

Jane gasped, throwing her hands out to steady herself by placing them on his shoulders. He gripped her waist with one hand, the other held her cheek.

“What are you doing?”

Ryder tossed his sunglasses off, pulling her closer. He held her gaze intensely. “Me?”

She touched his face, sighing as tingles danced across her skin. “I was gonna let him. I was angry and hurt, but then I thought of you.”

There was no joking, no playfulness. This was Ryder Godson, the strong, sexy boy she’d watched from her window

for years. “I want you,” he said without any hesitation. “I’ve always wanted you.”

Jane searched his emerald eyes and asked, “Why haven’t you said anything?”

“You’ve only ever seen me as the bad guy.” He pulled her closer but didn’t force anything. He’d let her go if she wanted to get away from him.

She ran her fingers through his dark hair. “That’s what you meant yesterday. You’ve been trying to get my attention, but he was there, and I made you out to be an asshole. And you’re not.”

Now, he smirked. “I’m still a jerk, babe, but I was trying my fucking hardest to impress you. It just didn’t matter when all you saw was him. Plus, it felt wrong to do anything when I beat him—when I saw all that hate in your eyes that day at tryouts.” His arm flexed around her, and he dropped his gaze to her lips. “I knew about him with Diane, but I didn’t know he was doing it to get over you. I wasn’t trying to rat him out. I just wanted you to see he wasn’t waiting on you like you’ve been waiting on him.”

Her eyes watered. “I’m an idiot.”

“A little bit.” He smiled, staring at her lips. “I’m going to kiss you, Jane.” Those eyes met hers again. “I won’t fight him for you—this is your choice. But Mr. Perfect doesn’t get to claim you when it’s me you’re thinking about.”

She felt so stupid for blurting everything out and overwhelmed as she realized she had some major locked up feelings for Ryder. Feelings that were consuming her in every way now she’d confronted them. It sent her anxiety into overdrive, and she feared he’d laugh at her any second now. “Maybe it was just something dumb you said that popped in my head.”

He shook his head, pulling her closer. “Your pretty eyes and these lips begging for my kiss say it all. You thought of me, and you’re telling me because you want me to do something about it.”

Get him, girl.

Jane couldn't fight it anymore; she wholeheartedly agreed with her inner voice. "So, do something already."

The smile he gave her was pure beauty. The tender brush of his lips against hers was pure torture laced with bliss.

"Don't you dare think about him. These are my lips," he murmured before pulling her the rest of the way to him, and he was magic.

Gosh, he was taking her somewhere already. Someplace where it was just him. "You," she breathed.

"Us," he said. Those tingles were everywhere, rushing across her skin as she gasped against his mouth, and his tongue found hers. He drank her in but somehow also gave her more of him. It felt like she had only come alive at this very moment.

Jane whimpered, gripping his hair as he suckled her lip and hugged her to him. He growled when she rocked her hips, but it felt too good to not do it again, and again, and again.

Oh, what was happening? She felt warm all over. Her tummy tightened, and between her legs ...

He squeezed her ass hard but held her cheek like she was made of glass. "Imagine I'm inside you, Jane." His hands lowered to adjust her, and she felt the bulge in his pants grow. "You know exactly what I look like," he whispered, rocking her hips against him, increasing their pace. "I think about you all the time. Every night, every morning. Every time I jack off, it's you that gets me there, imagining filling you up—your pussy clenching around me. Now imagine me. Put me inside you."

"Ah," she cried, rocking against him harder, like she was mad at him but couldn't get enough of him. The heat. She was making the heat, and he was why. Oh, she wanted him inside her. "Ryder. I think I'm gonna ..."

He kissed her hard, raising his hips as he pulled her down, then she took over, chasing her climax. She panted, moving

harder, faster, imagining his dick was waiting for her to slide down—

“Yes,” she moaned, feeling a flood of release. She fell against him, her whole body tightening with each wave of ecstasy. Every breath between them meant felt amplified as she still felt her core pulsating against his erection. Christ, he no doubt felt the wetness of her panties.

Instead of humiliating her, he slid a hand between them and unbuttoned her shorts. “Just a taste,” he said with the sexiest smile she’d ever seen as his fingers dipped inside her panties.

“Oh, fuck,” she hissed, clinging to him as he pushed a thick finger between her folds. She was tender, but she couldn’t hold back. She wanted him to take the new ache away. It was all for him.

“You want more?” He nuzzled against her cheek. “I want to be inside you so fucking bad, babe.”

“I want you inside me,” she whispered, kissing him as she moved herself against his hand. “Please give me more. I’ve never—”

He pushed that finger inside her, and her body tensed. It was painful but not so bad that she would stop him.

Ryder inserted a second finger. “It’s okay.” Then he curled them toward his palm as he pressed it against her the best he could.

“Oh.” She moaned loudly.

He chuckled, kissing her cheek. “It’s hard at this angle.”

She nodded, looking down to see his hand cupping her. “Do you want to stop?”

“Fuck no.” He hoisted her up a bit, allowing his fingers to slide in and out easier. “I just wish you were wearing that pretty blue dress you have.”

“Why?” She panted, gripping him tighter when she started riding his hand. “I still want more. I want all of you.”

“Fuck.” He reached down, reclining his seat. “Let me get you off again, or I’m going to take you seriously—”

“I’m serious.” She pushed his hands down, so sure about this.

“What?” He stayed still as she got on her knees, pushing her shorts and panties down as far as they could go. “Fuck.” He helped her, occasionally checking her face. “Are you sure?”

“Yes.” She whimpered because she needed him to stop the ache. “If I don’t have you in me, I’m going to die, Ryder.”

He gripped her face, kissing her. “Babe, this is your first orgasm. Think about this before we go further. You were hurt earlier. I don’t want—”

“I know what this is. It’s not him.” She stared into his green eyes, knowing he was something special. She’d overlooked him for all the wrong reasons.

“Jane, this can’t be about him.” He squeezed her ass, groaning. “Promise me, angel. This is us.”

“It’s us.”

He was still unsure. “Is he expecting anything from you?”

She grimaced, but he deserved to know the truth. “He’s giving me time. I asked for time. I want this to be with you. I can’t promise you anything beyond this yet, but it’s what I want. You’re who I want right now. Is that okay with you?”

“I’m your first?” He glanced down, rubbing his fingers down her slit.

“Yes, and I want it to be you.” She couldn’t let it be David anymore, but that wasn’t fully it. It was Ryder she wanted to give herself to. She didn’t care that he no doubt had more experience than David; she wanted him to be the one. “I want it so bad. I want you to do exactly what you said, I want you inside me.” She felt crazy, but she needed him like she needed air. “If you don’t want to, I get it. But please get me off again.”

He nodded, sliding his fingers up and down before making circles around her clit. “Are you on the pill? Because I don’t

have a condom.”

“The shot.” She kissed him, whimpering as he increased the speed of his touch.

“I’m gonna come in you, okay?” He kissed her sweetly. “I’m not going to be able to pull out or last long.”

“Okay.” She reached down, palming him through his jeans. She’d read that plenty of times, and he groaned, so it must be the right thing to do.

Ryder made quick work of getting his pants unzipped, freeing his throbbing cock. Oh, yeah, it was bigger than it was from her window. “Raise up on your knees.”

Jane obeyed, trembling and clinging to him in the cramped space as he rubbed the head of his dick along her slit. He was hot, the tip glistening. “Shit,” she hissed.

“You’re so fucking wet for me.” He groaned as he met her entrance. “Lower yourself when you’re ready. It’s gonna hurt, but it’ll feel good once you move.”

It wasn’t like his fingers. He was smooth, thick, hard as hell—and she swore he grew by the second.

Jane cried out when the head disappeared inside her. It was like her body was trying to push him out but hold him inside at the same time. Shit, he was too big, but she wanted more. So, she did what she’d done earlier and let her instincts take over. She raised up and down tentatively, letting him get a little deeper with each movement.

“Fuck,” he said, pulling her mouth to his as she fully sheathed him. “Ah, damn, babe. Are you okay?”

“It hurts.” As tears blurred her sight, she closed her eyes tightly and dug her nails into the seat, raising herself up to relieve the pain. It hurt more, so she went back down.

Oh.

Jane peeked at him, biting her lip as she took him in. He was doing the same, but she could tell he was conflicted between fucking her and telling her to stop. No way was she

stopping, not when he was looking at her like he was the lucky one.

So, she eased up and down. It still hurt. He shifted them so she was seated fully on him. “Oh, yes.” That’s all she could say. “Oh, yes. That’s it.”

“You’re so fucking beautiful.” He was sweating. He was holding back.

“You better fuck me, Ryder Godson.”

He grinned, thrusting upward as he pushed her shirt up along with her bra. “You have to help me. Ride my dick and put your tits in my face.” Then his mouth was around her nipple, sucking and biting her as he thrust, pulling her down until she moaned and found her rhythm. It was like they were one mind and two bodies molded together.

The noises coming from both of them when he looked into her eyes again were unlike anything she’d ever heard, like they were hurting each other but loving it.

He held the back of her neck, not breaking the fight they were having to reach the end.

There was something in his eyes, something he was telling her. But Jane could only whimper, moaning when he held her tighter and pushed deep with a groan. It was perfect and wrong, but she didn’t care right now. She didn’t care that the car was fogging up while rocking back and forth, that her ass was occasionally honking the horn, or that anyone walking by would know exactly what was going on.

All she cared about was Ryder’s hands on her neck, his other on her lower back, sometimes sliding to grip her ass and help her move. All she cared about was that her ache was being relieved, and she was so close to feeling that magic he’d done earlier.

He hit a spot that had her crying out and almost falling on him.

“Yes,” she moaned, nodding as he hit it again and again. “Oh, fuck, yes. That’s it. Yes, yes, yes. I’m gonna come. Ryder, I’m gonna come. Please.”

He growled, thrusting faster. “Fuck, come, Jane.” Warmth shot inside her, and it was the best damn thing she’d ever felt, and when he yanked her down hard, groaning as more spilled in her, she came undone. Sparkles literally danced before her eyes as she tightened around him with each ripple of pleasure.

“Breathe,” he commanded, almost pained, as his thrusts slowed.

She obeyed, sucking in the sweet air and hugging him as the pulsing inside her faded. He had her grinning like a fool when he pushed her hair back and kissed her like she was the best thing he’d ever have.

He was sweaty and beautiful as he tugged her shirt in place. “And here I thought I’d be lucky if I could get you to share a shake with me.”

Jane laughed, surprised that it made his dick surge inside her.

“Fuck, babe, you better get off before I open the door so I can fuck you right.” He squeezed her ass with both hands. “My windows are tinted dark, but this is the first time I’ve wished for a van or a mom car.”

She laughed, imagining him driving a station wagon.

Giving her a light smack on her ass, he motioned for her to move. “Go slow.”

It surprisingly hurt to try to get him out of her. He was softer but still big and now her whole vagina throbbed. She gasped at the sight of red on his dick. “Is that blood?”

His lips touched her forehead. “You’ll be all right. We can use the bathroom here before we head back.”

She was suddenly embarrassed to be half-naked around him, and she tried to cover herself as she awkwardly climbed onto the passenger seat. There was cum leaking out of her, a few pink streaks running down her legs.

“Don’t feel weird,” he murmured, lightly caressing her cheek before he pulled his jeans up and zipped them. He reached for her clothes. “Put your panties in your backpack so

you can put them on in the restroom. That way my jizz isn't all over them. Wait." He reached in the back seat and pulled over a T-shirt. "Use this to wipe between your legs."

"Thanks." Her sweaty ass was probably red as she struggled to clean herself. He just watched her, and she was so glad they were in his car because for a moment, she imagined him leaving after it was all done.

Ryder ran his fingers through her hair. "I loved it."

Jane peeked up at him as she tried to neatly fold his shirt so all the come was on the inside. "Me too."

"I want to say so many things to you," he said, "but I don't want to scare you away."

"Why would you scare me away?" She finished with her shorts and began re-tying her shoelaces.

He gave her a sweet smile. "Because this is about to hit you, babe. I don't think I was ever the guy you pictured having your first time with. A quickie in my car, no less."

That was entirely true—minus the quickie part. It felt like she'd ran a marathon.

Jane finished tying her shoes when it all began sinking in. She'd fantasized about Ryder—she couldn't deny it anymore. But it was always David who had her for everything real. How had she gone from nearly giving David her virginity, to turning him down and making him wait, then fucking his rival, at lunchtime? The next day!

Ryder's fingers slid down her cheek, leaving those tingles on her skin. "What I feel for you is deep. If you're figuring your feelings out, factor me in, okay?"

"It wasn't just sex for you?" She wanted it to mean more to him, but she'd expected to be just another conquest for him.

"Nothing with you is just sex." He seemed to debate saying more, then finally said, "I left a hickey on your neck." He touched the left side, then the right. "It stung me to see the one he'd left you."

Jane pulled down the visor, inspecting the two bruises on her neck. How had she missed David's? What was she supposed to do now?

"Hey," Ryder said, getting her attention. He turned her to face him. "I know you didn't plan this with me, but I'm still saying I want you. It's okay to think about him. I just hope that this really was about us."

"It was. Is." She stared at him in wonder. He sounded so utterly vulnerable and unlike the guy she'd imagined he was. "I think I'm hurt about him, but I promise it was all you."

His smile was divine. "Good."

"I don't think he expected me to be with you like this, especially when I'm making up my mind." She covered David's mark, feeling like a total—"I'm a hoe."

He chuckled and shook his head. "You're not. Well, maybe a little."

Her lips trembled. She didn't know what to do. Why didn't she wait? David was going to hate her. Ryder would hate her after he saw she was so conflicted later on.

Ryder cupped her face with one hand. "Come here, angel." He slid his hand to the back of her head and pulled her to him for a kiss, calming her like a baby. "It's gonna be all right, okay?"

She nodded, gently touching his cheek.

Another kiss, then he said, "As much as I wish this was you saying you're my girl and no one else's, I know that's not the case. And I might be a jerk about it sometimes, but I'm okay with you taking time to figure out what you want."

"Why are you so amazing?" She ran her fingers through his dark, sweaty hair.

"You forget, babe"—he tilted his head, teasing her lips with a kiss—"I'm—"

A loud knock on his window cut him off.

Ryder cursed before checking her over. “Hide your panties.”

Jane shoved them under the seat with her foot as Ryder rolled the window down to greet the cop.

“Yeah?” he said in the most impolite voice.

Jane cringed. Wasn't it a law to be polite to cops?

The man glowered at him. “Mind telling me what you're doing here?”

Ryder pointed out the window. “We came to eat.”

The officer glanced at her, then back to Ryder. “Then why did I receive a complaint that an occupied vehicle has been rocking back and forth, and honking, for at least fifteen minutes?”

A smug smile touched Ryder's lips.

Oh, no.

Jane leaned over him so she could see the man. “Sorry, Officer. I just had a bad night, and I was being a little difficult about lunch. I was honking the horn by accident.”

Ryder's hand discreetly slid along the back of her thigh, up to her ass, and he palmed it as he calmly spoke to the cop. “She's my English tutor, and I was giving her a hard time. She was just trying to keep me from embarrassing her. We'll go somewhere else to eat.” His hand squeezed again, and then his fingers slid along her core.

Her arm gave out as a strangled noise passed her lips. She nearly fell into Ryder's lap, but he caught her, chuckling.

The cop eyed her for a few seconds, then sighed. “I ain't no fool, kids.” He pointed a finger at Ryder. “I know who you are, and I'm giving you one chance. Keep this business private.”

Ryder nodded, helping Jane readjust in her seat and patted her knee. “She just made me happy. I'll behave from now on.”

The officer shook his head. “This would be a whole different story if you'd been caught.” He tapped the top of the

car. “Next time I see you two up to this kind of thing, you’re winding up in the back of my cruiser. Now, go on and get back to school.”

“Yes, sir.” Jane pulled on her seatbelt, completely mortified. She recognized that cop as one of her mom’s friends. Since her mom was a nurse at the hospital, she knew a lot of cops. She was in for it if he said anything.

“All right,” Ryder said, starting the car. At least he waited for the cop to move before driving off.

Jane sighed, covering her face when a few kids from school walked out of the cafe, staring right at them. Life seemed impossible to go on, and it was her own fault. “I don’t mean to be upset, but I’m so mad at myself. David’s gonna hate me. You’re probably gonna hate me because I won’t be able to get over him any time soon. If ever.”

Ryder pulled her hand away from her face, lacing their fingers together as he rested them on the center console. “I don’t think he can really hate you—I know I can’t.” Her heart turned to mush. “Tell me how you want to do this,” he said, “because if you leave it up to me, I’m gonna gloat. I’ll get a shirt that tells everyone we had amazing car sex. ‘Ryder’s car was rockin’ and the cops came-a-knockin.’”

She chuckled, shaking her head, glad he was back to being silly for her. “Maybe you can wear that to sleep in.”

“I sleep nude.” He laughed, raising their hands to kiss the back of hers. “Want something from up here? We’re pretty much out of time.”

Jane nodded, pointing at the McDonald’s. “Just a happy meal.”

He smiled against her hand before letting her go. He turned into the entrance, honking at some students walking too slow. When they saw it was him, they hurried along.

“You’re so mean.” She snatched up his dirty T-shirt and a bottle of water from her backpack to wet it and wiped her legs down.

His eyes were on her the closer he inched along the drive-thru line. “Burger or nuggets?” he asked.

“Um, nuggets.” She honestly loved that everything felt so natural around him.

Ryder ordered, even got a Dr Pepper for her, like he already knew it was her favorite. As they got closer to the window, he became serious again. “Tell David, Jane. Don’t let him sit in the dark. It’ll hurt you too, and I don’t want to see that.”

“I know,” she mumbled, roughly rubbing her thigh. How could she do this to David? To Ryder? To herself?

“You plan on seeing him before the end of the day?” He took their food from the employee at the window.

Jane held the bags of food on her lap, then quickly opened hers to locate her prize—a Lego Batman. “Man, this movie came out ages ago. They could’ve given me a Superman. He’s my favorite.”

“Stop playing, silly girl.” He snatched up a fry and held it to her lips. “Eat fast.”

She upped her slut-factor by seductively biting her fry and wrapping her lips around his finger.

“You’re gonna end up being fucked hard, and your fries are going to get destroyed before you ever get to eat them.” He leaned over, giving her a quick kiss. “Eat.”

“Threatening me with more sex isn’t exactly going to put me off.” Jane dug in, and not in a very ladylike way.

“There’s my fry-killer.” He laughed, pulling into a parking spot and grabbing his food.

She glared at him as he somehow demolished a burger, sexier than she’d ever seen someone eat one. “How do you know I love fries?”

He held one up for her, and she bit it quickly. “I was watching you back, babe.”

Damn tingles kissed her heart.

Jane scooted over to give him a kiss. “I really like you.”

“And I really like you. Probably more than I do your greasy, salty kisses.” He smirked, kissing her before shoving her back. “Fucking eat.”

“Ruining that romance you said you had.” She sipped her drink. He really wasn’t, though.

“Yeah, right.” He winked then became serious again. “So, listen, I’ll keep quiet, but he’s gonna see or hear about the hickey. Some people definitely saw the cop, and I’m sure it’ll spread around it was you with me. So, tell him as soon as you can. If he confronts me, I’m gonna tell him we agreed you would talk to him in person. If you want me there, I’ll be there, but I think you need to be alone for this.”

Gosh, why did she do this? She always started thinking about other things.

“Call me or text me when you’re done,” he added. “If he gets upset, and you need me, call. Get Tercero’s number, too. In case he’s the only one nearby.”

She felt a wave of heat on her face, just thinking about Tercero. He was going to know right away, and it was going to be awkward because he reminded her of Ryder and David.

“Are you perving on my brother, too?” He shook his head at her. “The Italian shit?”

Jane took another slurp of her drink. Among other things, Tercero’s Italian words were sexy as hell.

“You probably are a little bit of a hoe.” He squeezed her thigh, his gorgeous face inches from hers as he leaned close to kiss her cheek. He whispered in her ear, “My adorable hoe, though. I’m gonna keep you.”

SEVEN

An ice pack landed on the couch beside Jane. She slowly grabbed it, peeking up at Tercero as he sat a foot away from her.

They were at her house. He'd figured out rather easily that she had the sorest vagina of all time, and he knew it was his brother who'd made her walk like she'd been on the cowboy trail all day.

"You don't have to be embarrassed," he said, pulling a blanket from the arm of the sofa.

Jane slid the ice pack between her legs, hissing. He covered her, and she muttered, "Thank you."

"I would say 'any time', but I don't know how I feel about tending to you after my brother leaves you in this state frequently." He leaned back but stayed close enough that she felt his body heat at her toes where she was stretched out.

"It's not his fault," she said lamely.

An amused quirk to his lips made her blush. "I believe it was he who left you in this condition, *cara*."

"I told him to." She closed her eyes, throwing her head back. "I'm so stupid. Why do I keep blurting things out around both of you?"

He chuckled lightly. "You keep your guard up, but around certain people, you can't help yourself. It's an endearing trait."

"Not really." She smiled, recalling all the kisses Ryder had slipped in before they left the car. He noticed her hobbling and

picked her up, running her the rest of the way before stealing one more kiss and pushing her toward the hall she needed to go to while he jogged the other way. “David’s not going to find it charming.”

“Then he should have made it clear he didn’t want you around my brother. And he shouldn’t have hurt you the way he chose to.”

“He was trying to make things easier,” she sulked.

“David isn’t this foolish.” He shook his head. “I wondered if you knew about him.”

“I think I knew all along.” Her heart throbbed so painfully that she pressed her hand to her chest. “I knew. And he did look so guilty. I just refused to accept it.”

Tercero sighed, but he didn’t comment.

“Do you think a little part of me had sex just to get back at David?”

“I think if you’re asking me that, you already know.” He cast her a sympathetic smile. “I’m sure my brother knew this too, but he couldn’t stand to see you so miserable.”

She pressed her hand against her chest harder as more pain lanced through her heart. “I’m a monster.”

Tercero patted her foot when she accidentally bumped his thigh. “No. Plus, you gave Ryder the choice. You were honest. David, however, won’t likely care. He’s going to be hurt, Jane. Because he revealed his feelings this time. Before he was just a stepbrother.”

“You’re making it worse,” she whined. “Why is his casual sex fine, but mine isn’t?”

“I didn’t say that,” he said, “and I don’t think you consider what happened this afternoon casual sex. Not that it would be ‘wrong’ if you had. You’re not exclusive to either of them.”

“Like I can just bang both of them if I’m not with either one?” She peeked at him, aware he had his hand resting on her foot like he was keeping her from ... Oh, Lord, she’d been rubbing him with her foot. “I’m sorry!”

Tercero glanced at her as she tried to sit up to move away. He laughed, patting her foot. “It’s all right. I just didn’t want to add to your problems. Are you still cold?”

“Yeah.” She shifted the ice pack, hoping to distract him from her question about casually fucking David and Ryder. “Is it normal for it to hurt so much?”

Those dark eyes glittered with amusement. “I don’t know how sex with my brother feels, Jane. Nor do I have experience being a female.”

She poked her tongue out at him. “Have you had sex?”

“Yes.” He began massaging her foot, but he, like Ryder, didn’t seem to be doing it on purpose. Just a natural touch, like soothing themselves, and she liked that it soothed her too. “One girl, but we are no longer together.”

There was a true misery in his tone that made Jane stop worrying about her problems. “I never saw you with anyone here. Is she from Italy?”

“She lived in Italy, yes.” He turned to look at her. “She died. That is why I went there. To be with her on her last days.”

“Tercero,” she said, sitting up and reaching for his hand. “I don’t know what to say.”

“You don’t have to say anything.” He released her hand, motioning for her to lie back. “She didn’t love me anyway.”

“What?” Jane gaped at him. “How could she not love you?”

His lips twitched, and he smiled. “She was always hungry for more than anyone was capable of giving. But, if there was one person she wanted most, believed could satisfy her, it was my brother.”

“Ryder?” Now Jane was beyond pissed. Who could do that to Tercero? And Ryder was hers dammit.

He nodded. “Don’t worry—he had no interest in her. His lack of interest is why she saw me at all. I am a close second.”

“You look like him, and you feel like him, but you’re unique and wonderful.” She didn’t know why she said that, but she found Tercero beautiful and fascinating.

“Feel?” He tilted his head. “How so?”

Now she was definitely blushing. “Um, when he touches me, my skin tingles. But then you’re also a lot warmer than he is, and you remind me of David because of that.” She shook her head, not wanting to talk about either boy. “Tell me more about this girl. How did you meet her?”

“Prep school in Europe. I loved her instantly—like soulmates, you could say. I stayed in touch with her after we moved here, but we traveled there often so I invited her on family trips. She always joined us, mostly to be close to Ryder, even if he didn’t pay her any attention. She didn’t care, and I didn’t care she wanted him instead of me. I still loved her.”

“I don’t think she was your soul mate, then.” Jane huffed, wanting to hug him. He was amazing. “Why do you say she didn’t love you?”

He smiled sadly. “She told Ryder that being with me was worse than death. My brother is arrogant and rude, but he wouldn’t even pity her when she revealed she was dying, and that she’d like him to stay with her. He told her she was selfish, that even with death staring her in the face, she won’t be satisfied by someone trying to give her everything.

“I agree with him, but at the time, I only saw the girl I loved dying without the one she wanted. I gave what I could: my brother’s look alike.”

Her heart warmed for both Godson boys. “You’re a beautiful person, Tercero. I hope you don’t think she was your only chance at happiness.”

A gorgeous smile lit up his face. “I hope not. I’m fine with being alone, though.”

The air felt heavy between them, and Jane couldn’t explain her sudden desire to kiss him.

“Perhaps I should help you upstairs so you can take a warm bath before David gets home,” he said gently, releasing

her leg.

“Can I ask you something first?” She swallowed because that was the only way to curb her thirst. “Do you think it’s wrong to want more than one person?”

Tercero stood, pulling off the blanket and took her ice pack. “It doesn’t matter what anyone else thinks is right or wrong, Jane. The only one you should ask is yourself and those you want a relationship with.” He held out a hand for her to take, and she did, but pulled him down and kissed his cheek instead. Tingles and heat.

“I’ll keep that in mind,” she whispered, awed that she felt so good.

His black eyes fell to her lips for a moment, then he put some distance between them. “Probably best if you get upstairs on your own.”

“I was about to say the same thing.” She chuckled, rubbing her cheek. “I liked this, though. I’ve been lonelier than I ever wanted to admit, and you kinda filled that up.”

“Yes, I feel the same.” He headed toward the door. “You have my number now. If you want a ride, just let me know, and maybe send Ryder a message tonight so he knows you’re okay after you speak with David.”

Jane nodded, following him so she could lock the door. It was her final chance to admire how much he resembled Ryder, but also how unique he was from his sexy brother. She decided if he were a book character, he’d be a sexy Italian vampire or even an anime, Japanese-style warrior. He wasn’t as big as Ryder, but she could tell he was all lean muscle.

“Good luck with David,” he said, stopping by the door. He caressed her cheek. “Remember, you still have Ryder if he decides to be angry and that there is nothing to become of you now.”

“Ryder’s not a consolation prize for me,” she said, thinking of how Tercero had been that for the girl he’d loved. “You’re not a filler for me, either. Just because I say you remind me of both of them, I see you, and I like being around you.”

“That is why I call you treasure, Jane.” He turned, leaving without looking back that time. “Lock your door.”

Jane closed her eyes, sinking deeper into the tub. Her bubbles were almost all gone, but she wasn't ready to get out. Her mind had finally stopped spinning, dancing between green eyes and blue eyes, and now she sat content in the dark middle.

“He said I should see you,” David's voice startled her.

Jane gasped, gripping the tub. She turned her head to see David leaning against the counter. He still wore his practice clothes, with some blood and dirt smeared across his arms. “David.”

His eyes focused on the hickey Ryder gave her. “So, you decided in a day without ever seeing me?”

“No.” She sat up, covering her breasts with a hand. “I haven't decided anything. I—”

The muscles in his arms flexed as he crossed his arms while he gave her the meanest look. “I think giving him your virginity is answer enough.”

She flinched, her words stuck in her throat.

He had no problem with his, though. “I know I fucked up, but I didn't expect you to go give yourself to him the next fucking day.”

“I didn't plan it.”

“Didn't plan to get back at me? Or to do it so quickly?”

Her heart was being cut apart. “It had nothing to do with you.”

His stare was cold, his eyes lighter but terrifying. “So, I think of you, go against my heart to protect you, feel fucking guilty for trying to do what is right—what is expected of me—and you fuck him without giving a damn about me?” He

pushed himself away from the sink and started toward the door to his room. “Don’t come crying to me when he breaks your heart.”

“David,” she said, getting out of the tub.

He stopped, looking over his shoulder as she dripped all over the floor. “I loved you without you taking your clothes off, Jane. I was sorry—I am sorry for what I did. But I would never have done what I did as a way to get back at you. It was for you that I did any of this.” He tossed her the towel that hung near him. “I hope he doesn’t make you feel that’s the only way you can be loved.”

Jane watched him leave, her heart screaming at her. Part of her wanted to yell at him and defend Ryder while a bigger part wanted to cry and beg him to forgive her. Even if they weren’t together, even if he had broken her heart, he hadn’t done it to hurt her on purpose.

She should’ve talked to him or tried to cope without letting her hormones get into the mix. But the sad truth was, she couldn’t even talk to David. Not anymore. The friendship she thought she had with him wasn’t real anymore. They didn’t hang out. They didn’t know each other like they used to. They weren’t David and Jane.

She trembled as she wrapped the towel around herself.

Her phone vibrated on the counter, drawing her attention before she broke into hysterics. As soon as she saw the notification from Ryder, her heart wept, and she smiled.

Ryder Cuteson: Talk to me, babe

She covered her eyes, crying silently before she sent a text:
He said don’t come crying to him when you break my heart.

He hates me.

Ryder Cuteson: *Where are you?*

Bathroom.

Ryder Cuteson: *Did you tell him you’re still thinking?*

Yes. He thinks I’ve picked you.

Ryder Cuteson: You picked me for something special between us.

Ryder Cuteson: But you didn't pick me.

Ryder Cuteson: Yet.

Ryder Cuteson: Tell him that.

Jane tried to calm herself. She was sad and angry, but Ryder was helping her breathe: *He won't let me.*

Ryder Cuteson: Did you try? Or did you sit there and cry?

She glared at her phone: *Fuck you.*

Ryder Cuteson: Already did, babe.

Ryder Cuteson: I'm not letting you pick me as a fallback guy.

Ryder Cuteson: Now go talk to him.

Jane stared at her phone, her hand shaking. Is that what she was doing? Picking a runner up because David was too good? Like the girl who picked Tercero when she couldn't have Ryder. Was Ryder her Tercero, and David her Ryder?

Ryder Cuteson: You're my moon, Jane.

Ryder Cuteson: But he's your sun.

Ryder Cuteson: If you pick me, do it because you decide you don't like the heat anymore.

Ryder Cuteson: Not because he burned your pretty ass then sent you crawling to me.

Jane looked up at her mirror and saw a girl she somewhat recognized, ugly crying as she read the sweetest advice from the rude jerk next door.

She typed out a reply: *I really really like you.*

Ryder Cuteson: I know you do.

Ryder Cuteson: Now go take your cute, emotional ass in there and talk to Mr. Perfect.

Ryder Cuteson: If something happens, I understand. I'll still wait for you to tell me what you want.

Okay.

Ryder Cuteson: And I really really really like you, too.

She sniffed, wiping her face. “Sweet asshole,” she whispered. It was moments like this where picking Ryder felt as right as breathing. Really, there was no reason to not go all-in on him. He was funny, sweet, thoughtful. His gorgeousness was just a perk. She’d thought he was just mean—that it was his only good quality—and that wasn’t the case.

So, why was she stalling? Why wasn’t she just running to Ryder because the damn sun was burning her? David had been burning her for years, and she’d let him, even if he didn’t mean to hurt her. She’d taken it in silence.

Jane stared at the door to his room, and she knew why. David was her home. He’d always been home—where she wanted to return to every night. With him right there, she’d felt like a stranger, living at a home she didn’t deserve.

No, she deserved to be happy. Everyone did.

With that thought in mind, she started toward her door to get dressed so she could confront him but halted and headed to his. She’d give him a taste of what he’d put her through by always walking around shirtless around her and entering her room without an invitation.

She swung the door open confidently, ready to drop her towel, except, it was empty.

Her bravado weakened, and she hugged the towel to her chest as she scanned his things and saw the shirt he’d been wearing on the floor. He was probably showering.

“Maybe this is a sign,” she mumbled, walking by his desk where he had his clothes set out for tomorrow. It was Friday tomorrow. Game Day. His first day as a high school middle linebacker, and Ryder would be standing on the sidelines, watching David.

Jane gasped when she saw his spare jersey sitting next to the one he’d wear. Was he going to give it to Diane? He never gave his jersey to one of the girls, not even Diane. The only person he asked to wear it was her mom on Homecoming. But

it was common for the football players to give them to their girlfriends to wear on game day.

“I was going to give it to you,” David said behind her.

She turned, shaking when he shut and locked the door. He wore a pair of gray sweatpants and nothing else, his wet hair dripping onto his shoulders. “But not anymore?”

He shrugged, then ran his towel through his hair before tossing it to the dirty clothes pile. “Figured you’d wear Ryder’s now.”

“Well, he hasn’t said anything.” She pressed her lips together, wondering what she was going to say to him. He was still pissed. Speaking calmly, yes, but there was a storm in his blue eyes, and he was ready at any moment to unleash it on her. If he did, she didn’t think anything of her would survive.

“Well, I guess you should talk to him about that.” He put his hands on his waist, showing off that ‘v’ that dipped below his waistband. “I’m tired, Jane. Go to bed. There’s nothing else for us to say to each other. You made your choice.”

“I didn’t choose the way you think. It’s not an excuse, but I didn’t mean to hurt you,” she said, panicking at the coldness in his eyes now. “I was hurting, but I didn’t plan it, and I didn’t do it to get back at you.” No, she knew there was more to it, and she whimpered, “Well, maybe a part of me did.”

He nodded, his jaw clenching, but he didn’t say anything.

“It wasn’t what I was thinking of, though. I like him. He’s different with me, and he finds ways to be around me. I needed that today. I needed someone to make me their world after everything that happened.”

“You pushed me away,” he said through clenched teeth, then squeezed his eyes shut, like he regretted saying it.

It infuriated her that he was missing the point. “That never stopped you from trying to comfort me when we were friends. The Old David would’ve come after me.”

His eyes shot open, and he stared at her in silence.

Jane wasn't holding back. If he wanted her to feel bad, she'd say her feelings too. "He doesn't sneak into my room when I'm asleep." She remembered Ryder had said something about that, and she remembered there had been a time she woke and heard her door shut. David came into her room at night, and he never said anything.

He stared at her, not so angry now. "It's the only time I get to see you. I'm not like him—I can't tell the coaches I'm leaving. I can't skip out on the team when everybody is going out. No one expects him to follow the rules, and he's just that fucking good, that he can do what he wants." He glared at her. "I'm glad the new coach is stricter, that he found a way to pull him from games. I'm glad he gets to feel the pressure, but the bastard still skips team shit, and no one cares."

"Is it a requirement?" She lifted her chin, not in the mood to listen to him tear Ryder down.

"Is what a requirement?"

"Team time. Do you have to go?" That was always the thing with David; he did everything the others expected him to do, no matter if he disliked it. "Do you have to fuck the cheerleaders?"

"I'm a part of the team—I go." He glared right back. "It's why the coaches gave me this shot. I'm a team player. And I told you why I was with her. Don't twist it around."

"As if it wasn't twisted enough already," she said with venom in her words. "But you don't see it. The David I knew wouldn't care I pushed him away. He'd still know I was hurt, and he would've come to check on me. Something. A hug, a smile. But you just disappear. If Ryder found a way to find me for lunch when I was going to have to eat alone, like I often do, you could have."

She shook her head, realizing the truth. She wasn't worth David's extra efforts. He'd only made the move on her because of Ryder. "You always do what's right. You always please everyone, do what the guys in charge say. But you never choose you. You never choose me."

“I’ve always chosen you,” he snapped, his chest rising and falling with every heavy breath he took. “I made mistakes! But we weren’t together.”

“And we’re not together now,” she all but shouted. “It doesn’t change that you left me before, and you were letting me go through it all alone while you kept up your image.” She stared at him, seeing that he’d known how alone she’d been.

He tilted his head back, staring at the ceiling. “I want to be everything for you, Jane. I’ve wanted to be there for you. I’m always thinking about you. I’d rather be with you every second than with the team.” He lowered his head, meeting her eyes again. “But you know why I can’t be. You know why we haven’t been together, and you know you asked for space. I told you he would make a move on you, and I reacted badly, but you still chose him instead of me. You chose him to forget me.”

Maybe he was right, but she couldn’t help but focus on what he said before; her choosing Ryder to help comfort her. He still said ‘can’t’. Not ‘couldn’t’. “What did you expect me to do if you still have no intention of letting it be known we’re together?” She breathed hard, dreading his next words. Deep down she already knew what he’d intended to happen between them.

He stayed so still like he was waiting for her to flee. “You know what we’d have to do.”

She gasped. “You wanted me to be a dirty little secret you come home to after you’re the school’s golden boy?” She shook her head. “I can’t believe you!”

“It’s not like that,” he said harshly. “I’m thinking about you in this. Don’t look at me like I’m expecting you to be a dark secret. I’m protecting you. This has always been about protecting you. You know exactly what would’ve happened if you came back to school after lunch with me and everyone saw your neck.”

“Yeah, you went and made sure I was marked up, didn’t you?” She was hot with rage. “Mark me up but hide from it all, right? So, be a whore but not yours, right?”

His gaze hardened. “That’s not what I’m saying. You’re just saying that because now you’re fine being his whore.”

She marched over and slapped him across the face. “How dare you!”

He kept his head slightly turned, his nostrils flaring. “All I was getting at was that I didn’t mean to leave a mark. I wasn’t trying to send you out like that.”

“Like that’s any better.” She shoved his chest, and he was solid as ever. His hot skin burned her hand and he didn’t even stumble back. “And here I’ve always thought he was the asshole. No, you’re not even my David. That’s why this is so hard. Because I know my David is still there, and instead, you’ve let this asshole in disguise free because you can’t have what you want. You forgot all about me until he made a move. You kept him away, kept me all alone here just so no one would have me. But you sure as hell went and had your fun. Well, I’m done. You really have lost your chance.”

Finally, he turned, glaring down at her. “I never forgot you. I’ll never forget you.” His voice was low, his body trembling like he was going to explode. “But I’ll move on since you’ve made your choice. That way it’s easier for you. That way you don’t feel guilty—like I’ve felt all this time.” He squeezed his eyes shut for a moment. “Just do one thing for me; check your secret drawer.”

Jane breathed hard, her tears making his handsome face a blurry mess. Her drawer was something they’d found together when he was helping her move her furniture one time. It was part of her dresser, and she hadn’t looked in it in years.

“Don’t let him make you feel like you’re anything less than perfect.” Cupping her face, he bent and kissed her forehead. “Bye, baby.”

EIGHT

Jane's frown wouldn't fade. Her heart wouldn't stop aching, and her soul wouldn't stop crying. No matter how she tried to look at the situation, it just got worse. David was done with her, probably not even her friend. Just, stepbrother. And because she was a fool, she'd pushed Ryder away.

She glanced at her phone and it took all her strength not to sob.

We were a mistake.

Don't contact me anymore.

Ryder Cuteson: Wtf?

Ryder Cuteson: You're picking him?

No.

Neither of you.

Ryder Cuteson: I'm coming over

Don't.

Ryder Cuteson: Then give me a damn reason why I can't even see or call you.

She knew her jerk bad boy wouldn't walk away from her that easily, so she made sure he would leave and not look back.

Because you'll never be him.

Sorry for using you as a revenge fuck.

Bye, Ryder.

Jane moved her gaze from her torturous phone to the even more painful revelation she'd found in her secret drawer.

My Jane,

I don't think you'll look in here today, but I'm hoping you will eventually find this. Maybe we can keep some part of us the same, at least here. I want you to know something before we start this new path. I won't be able to do everything I dream about doing with you, but this will always be true. I love you. So much.

You're my Jane, my baby, my kitten, my love, and in my dreams, you're my girl. And beyond forever, I'll be your David.

I'm sorry, baby.

Yours always,

David

Each letter was dated, the first being the day they were told about their parents getting married. The day she'd had all her dreams within reach of being with David.

Then, there was a letter for every single day after that one. He'd written her every little thing about himself. He even told her about him watching her when she wasn't looking, how he liked that she bit her lips when she was concentrating on something, only because he wanted to kiss her so she'd stop abusing them.

It turned out David was a complete romantic. Everything she remembered about him was still there, and so much more. He was sweet, funny, flirty, and thoughtful. Every choice he made, it traced back to his fears of her being punished or taken

away. Things she hadn't thought of were on his mind—tormenting him—and he based every decision on what he felt was best for her. And his decision to date had been one of his hardest. He truly hated himself, but he did it because he thought it was the best thing for her.

She really had been on his mind, though. He wrote about each girl he went on dates with, and how the entire time he compared them to her. Nothing much happened for a long time, but he pushed himself to be more physical when his feelings for her grew stronger.

David had a lot more experience than she ever thought, but she had no idea a guy could feel so much regret and hatred toward himself for being a guy messing around.

Then he came to Diane. He explained everything, how she approached him, how everyone pressured him about her. He wrote how her being interested helped other girls back off, and it relieved him. He had felt so worn out hating himself and acting like he had an interest in girls who didn't have Jane's face, smile, voice, and he welcomed the reprieve.

But it seemed the break from hating himself allowed all his feelings for her, his stepsister, to get out of control. He said he was hard for her every day. He was jacking off to get rid of his erections, to keep himself from slipping up and revealing the truth to his dad and her mom. To her. He'd known she was holding back on exploring guys, and he knew a lot of guys wanted to date her, but they were afraid of him.

So, he did what he thought would help him let her go. And when he debated how wrong it was, his resolve came to him being a piece of shit for using a girl, for choosing Diane, and that would be enough guilt to prove he deserved none of her love.

All his love for her, all his conflict, rage, and sadness—it was there in the letters, all the way up to that morning.

Dear Jane,

You let me kiss you last night. You let me do a lot more than I ever hoped to with you, and all of it was better than any dream, any fantasy, I've had about you. I'll never forget it. You're permanently a part of me, and I couldn't be happier. I'm the luckiest guy this world has ever had, and it's all because of you.

You knew what I'd done, and you still let me have my heart's greatest desire. Then it all stopped. My mistakes have cost me everything, and I don't know what to do, except give you what you're asking for. Time. And Ryder.

I've realized you don't check this drawer, so I'll be honest. I know you're going to go to him. I know you'll get back at me, and I know he'll let you use him. The fucked up part is that I don't blame you, and I want you to hurt me. I deserve to feel the pain that I saw in your eyes last night. But the selfish, possessive side of me won't be able to handle it, and I'll be a complete ass to you. He's always wanted you, Jane. I would say it's a bad thing, but I think that asshole really loves you.

Baby, I don't know what to do. You haven't even gone to him, and I'm losing my mind. You asked for time, and I agreed, and I want to rip your choice away. I can't, so I'm going to distance myself. It's the only way I can function. I can't let my feelings for you out in the open. I feel like such a bastard for even expecting you to start a secret relationship with me. Fuck, I haven't even told you, but you have to know how things will have to be. We would lose everything, and I don't want to see you hurt. I don't want the world to rip you apart, because it's you who will suffer most. Not me. Everyone will overlook me and focus on you, and I don't want that to happen. I want to shout my love for you, baby, but I'm not there for you. I won't be there to shield you the way I know you will need to be. I won't be able to stop our parents if they decide to take you away.

I'm lost on this, Jane. All I know is that I can play, get my scholarships and move us far away. No one will judge us. No one will know, and you'll be safe. But if you choose him, I have to walk away. I don't want to. I want you to pick me. I love you. I love you more every day. I can make you happy, if you just stay patient.

If he's the one, though, be happy. If he looks at you the way he has since he first saw you, I know he can make you as happy as I want to, maybe more. So, just listen to your heart.

Yours beyond forever,

David

Jane's phone vibrated, and her heart squeezed.

Tercero: Are you sure you don't want a ride, tesoro?

Ryder had probably told him things were over with them, but he was being a sweetheart and still willing to drive her scared-of-driving ass around. He'd even offered to take her to lunch and the game, if she wanted, or somewhere else if she didn't.

The messed-up thing was she wanted it all. She wanted Ryder, David, and she wanted Tercero when they weren't there. She wanted to be there for Tercero, the way he deserved to have someone there for him. He knew what she felt—had suffered the same loneliness—and she wanted to be the girl who made him smile and feel special.

“I'm such a whore,” Jane had said, shaking her head as she angrily responded to him: *I'm good. You don't have to offer anymore.*

And stop calling me your treasure! I'm nothing to you.

And you're nothing to me!

“And a bitch.” She chucked her phone on the bed, hating herself on every level a person could hate themselves. The worst places in Hell were reserved for selfish little sluts like her.

“Hon?” Her mother called through the door with a light knock before it opened. “Are you okay?”

Jane nodded, wiping her face before snatching her phone. “Just allergies are bothering me today.”

Her mom smiled softly, a faint blush staining her cheeks. “Well, might want to blow your nose. There’s a handsome boy waiting for you downstairs. He says you aren’t expecting him, but he insists on you coming down.”

“What?” Jane’s heart raced. “Who is it?”

“Why don’t you go see,” was all her mother said before slipping out the door.

Just like her mother to leave her hanging, without any advice to help her through tough times. Then again, Jane had been the one to push her mom away after she remarried. Her mom was just as awkward around her as Jane was with her, and her mother’s tactic was avoidance and smiles.

Jane glanced at her reflection, sighing at her splotchy and sick complexion. The hickeys were glaringly visible, too. There’d be no hiding them.

Heaving her backpack onto her shoulder, she headed downstairs. Only two people came to mind of being there: Ryder or Tercero, and right now, she was prepared to run to either one and cry like a baby.

Well, her shitty attempt at self-punishment and deprivation of love remained safe, because neither boy toying with her heart was waiting at the bottom of the stairs.

Luc Godson smiled faintly, and it nearly made her weep because it was a mix between Ryder’s and Tercero’s. Worse, it was nothing like David’s. “Oh, what a mess you’ve made, Jane.” He lifted something out of a bag at his feet. “Luckily, for you, I am better than my brothers at planning and more

clever than the girl trying to push them away because her heart is trying to punish her for simply loving more than one boy.”

Jane dragged her feet all the way to him. “What are you going on about?”

He chuckled, moving her hair as he inspected her neck. “Foolish boys.”

“I don’t have time to listen to any lectures or for you to tell me to give Ryder a chance, or for me to at least let Tercero take care of me.”

“I’m here for you, Jane.” He held up a letter jacket: L. Godson.

She blinked once, then again to see if she had imagined it. “What?”

“You are about to return to school on game day, the day after you arrived at school with one love bite,” he said. “The day after you had the cops called on you because you were with my younger brother at Nirvana’s Cafe having sex, which you returned to school with a second hickey and were rumored kissing him before hobbling to classes.”

He moved closer, putting the jacket around her shoulders. “Now, you’re about to endure a very wounded Ryder whom you’ve pushed away, leaving others to speculate why, and likely attack your reputation. You will have to witness your first love as he gives his jersey for the first time to a girl you despise.”

Jane gasped, shaking her head. David was going to give it to her. He wouldn’t just ... He would.

He was moving on.

Luc took her backpack and set it on the floor then guided her arms through the sleeves of his old letter jacket. “You are going to realize you cared a great deal more for Tercero than you thought, and you are going to miss him, especially when you see how alone you’ve caused him to be. Yet, you won’t be able to bring yourself to go to him because he reminds you too much of my arrogant brother.”

He situated her hair around her neck. “So, instead of being ridiculed, alone, and wounded by jealousy and heartache, you are going to be the girl Luc Godson has chosen, and you will own whatever shame your peers, my brothers, or your loves throw at you. Because, Jane, you are going to be mine.” His gray eyes gleamed silver. “At least, it will appear that way when I escort you to school, pick you up for lunch, after school, and we arrive at the football game, hand-in-hand. The former king of this Hell hole, and his, shall we say, queen.”

Her eyes welled with tears, and her pathetic heart found a bit of strength. When she’d least expected it, light appeared at the end of a dark tunnel. “You smooth-talking, clever bastard.”

One of those faint smiles appeared again, and he retrieved her backpack. “I have been called worse.” His cold hand wrapped around hers. “Let’s make our arrival. I think you’d fair better if the gossip of the day is that you are Luc Godson’s girl, the one he stole from Ryder than the girl my brother fucked once, or that David Leodegrance has officially moved on from his secret love for his stepsister.”

If Ryder’s Camaro made her swoon, and Tercero’s Mustang made her giddy, then Luc’s white Lexus LC had her ready to sell her soul.

Jane slid her fingers over the seats as she prepared to get dropped off. “So, do I get the car when we break up?”

Luc cast her an emotionless glance, then he smirked. “I never said I was giving you up.”

She bit her lip, turning away to stare out the window. Luc Godson was royalty as far as Black Hills residents were concerned. She rarely said more than a few hellos to him in passing on the way to her house, but she knew he was smart, seductive, manipulative, and had been a highly recruited Division One school pick his senior year. He had it made with his choices to the best of the best, then he made even more headlines by opting to begin his own business doing God

knows what. Clearly, he knew what he was doing, though, because unless he stole this car, he was loaded.

So, him saying he wasn't giving her up had her all kinds of worried. Had she missed something when he showed up, offering to save her from public humiliation and heartbreak?

"If you are going to be my queen, you hold your head high. You don't care what anyone whispers about you, and you don't fret over schoolboys who failed miserably at making you theirs." His fingers slid across her cheek. "Smile for me when I say goodbye to you. That is all I ask. That and you don't let your heart weep any longer. Ryder is stronger than this, so is Tercero, and the young prince you live with, David, should know when to put honor aside and when to transition that honor from others to the one who matters most."

Jane sighed, closing her eyes. "How do you know so much? I haven't talked to anyone."

"Ryder isn't able to conceal his feelings when they come to you," he said, "and Tercero attempted to carefully console him without revealing he too was in misery from the sudden loss of what you were building together. It is a good thing Archer's and Savaş' main interest in you is to annoy Ryder."

A laugh slipped free from her mouth. "I'm actually so happy to hear I'm not interesting to guys."

"I didn't say that." He took a turn she wasn't expecting, making her eyes fly open.

"And David?" Her breathing quickened at the sight of the doors that all the football players entered on pep rally day. "You called him 'young prince'. Why?"

"He had the makings to take my place. He is more of a leader than Archer, more disciplined and honorable than Ryder, and he is quite strong. He simply failed to take what was his, starting with you."

"Oh," was all she could say, panicking because Luc parked outside the opened doors to the big gym. "What are you doing?"

He cut the engine to his car as the cheerleaders and football team made double lines at the doors, leading into the gym that roared with school chants, the drums exciting the crowd even more.

“The school they are playing is the ultimate rival I was responsible for first crushing. They have chosen to honor me as a way to intimidate.” He held her chin. “Hold your head high and stay by my side. Don’t drop your gaze for anyone, and do not flinch under their stares. Ready?”

“Luc, what are you doing?” She clutched his arm.

“Urging you to rise after you fall.” He opened his door, the roar of the school spotting him, the cameras for the live stream that fed into the gym’s huge monitors probably adding to the screams as he rounded the car. Then silence when he opened the passenger door and held a hand out for her. “Time to be great, Jane.”

She spotted David and Ryder, their shocked and angry stares proving they had no idea what Luc had done.

Luc cleared his throat, and she focused on him, reading his look: be a queen, not a whore.

He was right. She had no idea David had loved her. She had no idea Ryder had wanted to be with her until yesterday. She wasn’t David’s girlfriend, even if she wanted to be. Even if they had kissed, she had asked for time, and even if it was stupid, she had the right to explore her feelings for Ryder. And she had the right to be hurt by David fucking Diane.

David didn’t get to decide she’d be his secret or that she had to be protected and only when they were gone to be shown off. Ryder ... well, he hadn’t done anything wrong. She’d simply pushed him away. Tercero was probably the one she was most sorry about. He’d been looking for someone to fill the gaping emptiness left by a selfish girl who wanted his brother over him, and Jane wouldn’t even let him be there for her. Instead, she’d purposely hurt him, and it was unnecessarily cruel.

She could either cry, or she could take charge, show David she didn't need protection, show Ryder he could be equal to what he thought she considered David—someone she couldn't live without, and she could learn how to be what Tercero deserved without running and crying.

Jane took Luc's hand with a smile, grinning wider when a full one reached his eyes.

He gave her hand a little squeeze as he turned to the crowd of players who looked to him in awe. He waved, but it was her he turned to, smiling, as he led her past the team, past the confused and envious cheerleaders, including Diane who was wearing David's jersey over her cheer uniform.

It hurt terribly, like a rusty knife to the heart, but Jane lifted her chin and walked at Luc's side into the roaring gym, past the coaches, and toward the principal.

Mr. Prince cast her a questioning look before shaking his head and chuckling. A smile stayed on his face as he led them to the podium set up for speakers.

The cheers died down, and there were whispers as the principal spoke, praising Luc's high school accomplishments, and his success as a multimillionaire startup businessman.

"I give you Black Hills' King of Friday Night Football, Luc Godson," Principal Prince said, moving aside for Luc, who had yet to let go of her hand.

Luc pulled her with him, waving to the students, then he glanced at her, giving her a killer smile before raising their joined hands and kissing her fingers.

Jane couldn't help but smile at him. He'd made her something she was afraid to be, the spotlight, something David had known she'd feared and so he protected her from. Ryder probably feared to push her into just as much attention, even if he was fine with boasting he was with her.

Luc made sure she wasn't cast aside just because she was confused and overwhelmed. She wasn't alone because she was a bitchy girl who somehow managed to scare off the bad boy and his sweet brother. He had done what none of them would,

and he'd pushed her to confront these things and find out how to rise when all she wanted to do was wither where she had fallen.

Never would she have dreamed this was something she needed in her lonely little life. Even with the greatest guys at her door, she needed something else, and it wasn't a bad boy to kiss her senseless and make her forget all propriety or the love of her life, it wasn't her perfect dream boy who she felt inferior to in every way, and it wasn't a wonderful guy who had a sadder love story than she did. It was finding out how to be great and worthy on her own.

So, Jane owned her hickeys that were visible under the harsh gym lights, she owned being at Luc's side when Diane clung to David's arm, while rumors about her and Ryder were freshly being spread around, and while Tercero was absent and unmissed by all but her.

She beamed up at Luc before gesturing for him to begin his speech. When he didn't, she leaned forward, giggling as she said into the microphone, "There you have it, Black Hills, even the great king can drop the ball for the first time."

The whispers turned to cheers and whistles, and Luc chuckled, kissing her temple then put a hand on her lower back and addressed the school as if they were his army preparing for an epic battle. And Jane, well, she was the girl at his side, supporting him.

"So, I miss one day," Wendy said as she dropped her backpack on the floor in their class, the last one of the long day, "and you've gone from being Ryder Godson's lunch conquest, Tercero Godson's best friend, and David's estranged stepsister, to Luc Godson's queen, who is guest attending the big game. The guest coin flipper, no less."

"Luc is flipping the coin, not me." Jane calmly pulled out her assignment and iPad to take notes.

“Excuse me.” Wendy chuckled, taking out her own materials. “The hickeys? Are they really from Ryder?”

“One is. The other is from David,” Jane said, not too quietly either.

Wendy’s eyes nearly popped out of her head as a few gasps greeted her ears. “David?” she hissed. “Are you serious?”

Jane nodded, turning to her good friend. “We kinda confessed to having feelings for each other, made out, and then I said I needed time. I was sorta definitely feeling things for Ryder, and it didn’t feel right starting anything with David when I had his rival on my mind. Not to mention the other stuff David came clean about.”

“And now you’re Luc’s girlfriend? All in one day?” Wendy wasn’t being very quiet, but Jane didn’t care. Let David see she could handle it.

“I’m not sure what we are, except he said, ‘I’m his’.” She smiled at the thought of him. He’d been there to take her to lunch, just like he’d said. He took her to her favorite seafood restaurant where he had already preordered her favorite meal. He explained he’d asked her mom that morning what her favorite place to eat when she was down, and she’d been shocked and touched that her mom remembered this was the place where her dad used to take her. It was the same place she refused to go with David’s dad, or anyone.

She’d loved it so much, that she kissed Luc on the cheek as a thank you, very aware that she’d brushed the corner of his mouth when she did so.

“You’re insane,” Wendy said, bringing her back to Earth.

“No, just figuring out who I am.” Jane scanned the room. Lots of students had been discreetly listening, and she smiled confidently. So what if they wanted to judge her? She didn’t even know them, and they didn’t know her. After they graduated, she probably won’t even recognize them on the street, and she sure as hell wouldn’t care what they thought of her as an emotional teen torn between some dreamy boys.

“And who you want, apparently. What’s this about the cops being called because you and Ryder were fucking at Nirvana Cafe?”

Jane held Wendy’s stare, knowing her friend wasn’t being nasty or judgmental. “Does it matter if I was?”

Her friend smiled, hugging her. “Babe, you bang whichever sexy bastard you want. It’s not my business. Just be safe and don’t regret it.”

And here, Jane realized she’d had another best friend the whole time, one she’d kept at arm’s length because she feared to lose her just as she’d lost David. “Thank you.” Jane squeezed her back.

Wendy nodded, moving Jane’s hair as she inspected the hickeys. “Well, I’d say I envy you, but I wouldn’t want to be in your shoes. Who can choose between those gods? And being Luc’s queen? Even if it’s a one-day thing, you better keep owning it. I almost spat my water on the girl in front of me when you spoke into the mic.”

A giddy and proud feeling rose within her. “He kinda brings out a side I didn’t know was there. Or maybe a side of myself I left behind.”

“Whatever it is, I hope it doesn’t vanish after today. You’ve never looked so confident. You rocked. Then he kissed your cheek and left? And let you keep his jacket?” Wendy fanned herself. “He’s so dreamy. I think Ryder was ready to destroy the world, though, and David looked like he’d happily help him.”

For a tiny moment, Jane’s happiness dampened. Except she realized another thing; Ryder and David had indeed looked like they’d agreed with each other for the first time in, well, ever. They’d shared a look when Luc had said something about opposing strengths and talents uniting to achieve victory against a strong and clever enemy. “They were agreeing to take Luc down,” she whispered to herself.

Wendy frowned. “What?”

“I think I know a way to get Ryder and David to see they don’t have to be rivals, that they can work together and be even greater.”

“You mean with football or something else?” Wendy watched her, probably worried about her sanity now. “And don’t hate me, but I think Ryder is the better of the two.”

“I could never hate you. I’m just thinking about them, how they’ve always been at each other’s throats.” Jane covered her heart as it pounded. Was it really her fault David and Ryder just couldn’t share the glory, and both be the biggest and baddest badasses and destroy any offense?

They were always competing more against each other than the team they were playing, and sometimes that led to losses.

“Luc is a genius.” She covered her stupid smile, not sure if she was touched Luc was using her or if she was ecstatic to learn she was actually so important to both boys. They were so busy tugging her between them that they were lessening their greatness together. Her thoughts were barely caring about David’s actions now. He wasn’t perfect, and he’d made himself that way because of her.

If anything, she could be the bigger person and make sure he didn’t continue destroying himself. He had tried to take care of her and love her the only way he believed he could. He was still a great guy, just a guy trying to give up his heart.

“Tell me what’s up with Tercero,” Wendy whispered as the teacher came into the classroom and told them to pass up their homework.

“Simple: he’s a sweetheart, and I’m a bitch,” Jane said, handing her paper to the girl in front of them. “And I’m a lousy friend.”

Wendy wore a sheepish look, and Jane felt like a horrible person, but still a person who could work to be better.

“I love you,” Jane told her, praying it was enough for now.

“Always, babe.” Wendy winked, and then they had to endure an hour of lecture. Well, mostly, then it was mediation, and Jane took part in it, relaxing instead of blowing off the

whole thing, and she felt even better seeing Wendy had been relieved in the process and for once, not listening to her ramble about her life.

Having the former king of the Black Hills picking her up from school should've been a dream come true, but it wasn't. Why? Because as Jane exited the doors Luc had instructed her to leave through—near the South Gym—all Hell was breaking loose.

“You stay the fuck away from her!” That was David's voice. No, his roar.

Jane ran forward, spotting a crowd around Luc's car, and then she saw them. David had Luc by the neck, pinning him against the car. Ryder was there, but he was just watching as Archer and Lance Grimm tried to pry David off Luc.

“David, stop!” She shoved some guys back, and she only hesitated when David shot Ryder a look and a nod.

Her bad boy moved, intercepting her before she could get between David and Luc. “Don't even test him right now.” His hold was solid, but those damn tingles as his fingers slid around her arm had her all kinds of paralyzed.

Luc, even though David had him by the neck, spoke calmly. “Your *stepsister* and stepmother know I intend to take her to tonight's game. What she does is not your concern.”

Jane tried to shove Ryder off, but he was too strong.

He chuckled, wrapping an arm around her chest and pulling her back to his body. “Behave. I know you like being in my arms again.” His lips faintly pressed against her head, making those tingles go into a frenzy. “*Mm*. Missed you too, babe.”

“Shut up,” she whispered, focusing on David. If he got in trouble or hurt, she didn't know what she would do.

David bared his teeth at Luc like he was an animal ready to attack. “Everything about her is my concern.”

She opened her mouth to say something, but Ryder covered it with his hand as Luc smirked and responded to David.

“You think a single mark from you on her neck, without her consent, is a claim that can’t be challenged? Do you think choosing to flaunt the one you hurt her most with is forgivable?” Luc moved fast, spinning David so he was now the one pinned against the car, but he had David’s arm twisted behind his back and his face pressed to the top of the car.

David tried to move, but he couldn’t. He angrily glared at her where she struggled against Ryder.

Luc leaned closer. “Learn now, boy, it’s the mark you don’t see that matters, and you don’t hurt her unless you want to lose.”

“What’s going on here?” came a yell from the building.

Ryder leaned down, whispering in her ear, “You’re playing with fire, Sweet Jane.”

Finally, she yanked his hand away from her mouth. “And you’re playing buddies with David.”

Those emerald eyes stared into hers as a few coaches came out, breaking up the crowd as Luc released David.

“Why are you with him?” Ryder asked, caressing her arm and smirking when she shivered. “Why, when I know you’re still thinking about me?”

“I told you to leave me alone. What I do with Luc is none of your business.” She turned to face him, thrilled that she’d been right—David and Ryder could put aside their differences and join forces. “Maybe I wanted a man instead of two boys.”

He didn’t look hurt. “You didn’t seem to think you were with a boy when you were riding my dick yesterday.” A wicked gleam lit his eyes. “For you, no one compares to me, babe. Now stop pushing me away. I’m not buying the mean

girl act—it isn't you. And I know damn well a small part of what we did was because David hurt you.”

Jane swallowed, her eyes burning. “I—I—”

Ryder shook his head. “I knew before going forward with everything, Jane. I did it because I wanted you, and I saw you wanted me. But your fucking guilt took over, just like it did with David. And just like him, you're being a coward and pushing away instead of just making things right.” He caressed her cheek. “Unlike Mr. Perfect, I'm not telling you you can't come back to me. Yet.”

Holy hell, he was perfect.

“You'd look cuter in my jacket,” he added, stepping past her. “I'm bigger than both of them.”

Those tingles went right to her heart, and she knew he was saying something besides his size. Her heart was ready to burst as he walked away with Savaş. Archer lingered, a teasing smile on his lips as he held something out to her. Well, it looked like he was trying to hold something out for her.

“Can I help you?” she asked him, keeping an eye on Luc and David still arguing with the coaches.

Archer snickered, holding his hand out still. “We all know it was you who David wanted to wear his jersey. Since Luc slipped in, showing off with his jacket around you, I figured I'd step up for my brother and give you Ryder's underwear.”

“What?” She dumbly held her hand out as a group of guys howled with laughter.

Now, Archer laughed, showing he didn't have anything in his hand. He was taking up for Ryder but also trying to tell her there was a lot more to what was happening, and they all knew. And he was making a fool of her.

It was the start Jane needed. These were the guys David was closest to, and the ones she would really have had to endure if he'd been honest with her. So, she fixed a sweet smile on her face and hugged Luc's jacket around her tighter. “Who said I wasn't already wearing them?”

The boys stopped laughing, their eyes dropping to between her legs.

“Have a good game, boys.” She winked at them then made her way to Luc.

David blocked her path, snarling in her face. “Let’s go. I’m taking you home.”

She shoved his chest. “I have a ride. Why don’t you go pay some attention to Diane? I’m sure she’d love this caveman act of yours.”

For a fraction of a second, he looked sorry, but he didn’t say anything about his little stunt either. He gripped her arm, ignoring the calls from his coach to let her go. “You’re not going with him.”

“I think I am.” She couldn’t believe him. He was losing his damn mind. “Get your head in the right place, David. You have a big game, and I’m not your problem. You couldn’t just give me time to figure out my feelings for the first time.” The hurt part of her had to throw in, “Funny how you’re fine with me being one Godson brother’s whore, but Luc enters the picture, and you’re a jealous boyfriend on steroids.”

He breathed heavily, but he didn’t say anything.

“Be careful,” she whispered, staring into his glare. “People are going to notice this isn’t brotherly behavior. Not that I’ve made it seem like I minded today. Now go and think about who you really need to protect, ‘cause it isn’t me.”

Now, he released her, his fury growing as he watched Luc open the door for her.

“Have a good game, David,” she said softly, hating that he didn’t just say ‘fuck it’ and kiss her senseless in front of everyone. Because no matter how badly David had hurt her, he’d really been trying to let her go, and he loved her so much, he was lost on how to do it, other than going to someone else—someone who would make him feel like shit and unworthy.

She should hate him, but she didn’t. She still loved him.

Once she was seated, Luc shut the car door, and as he rounded the car to join her, David yelled and punched the side of the building with all his strength. She gasped, knowing it had to hurt him, but he prepared to do it again.

Thankfully, Lance stopped him, pushing him in the opposite direction.

Her heart ached. All they were doing was hurting each other—hurting each other because they loved each other. How the hell did that make any sense?

A twisted part of her liked David was finally showing his feelings. Yeah, it was anger and possessiveness, but it proved he could lose some control over her. All these years he'd hidden everything so well that even she believed there was nothing there. He'd tried to move on to hide, to punish himself, because it was wrong for stepsiblings to be in love. At least to the rest of the world.

Luc joined her moments later but remained silent as he drove.

It wasn't an awkward silence. Nothing felt wrong about being with Luc, but she desperately wanted to have David and Ryder right there. She wanted to kiss David good luck, and she wanted to know if Ryder really didn't wear underwear for games. She also wanted to see Tercero, to make sure he was okay and say she was sorry for being a bitch.

Jane sighed, resting her head back, but she glanced at Luc, watching him. He wasn't hurt, but he did have a red mark on his neck from where David's hand had been. "What happened?"

His expression didn't change, and he kept his eyes on the road. "What happens when a man is losing what he loves most."

She swallowed and held a hand over her pounding heart. Why had it been so obvious to everyone but her? Why did David try so hard when they all knew he loved her?

"You let it slip today that the two of you had been intimate," he said, not accusingly, just pointing it out.

“Yeah.” She smiled a little to herself. “He thinks I have to be protected, that we have to hide our feelings for each other. He wanted to keep everything out of sight until he could move us away like I’m a dirty little secret.”

The corner of Luc’s mouth twitched. “I think he wants the world to know he has your heart. He is a disciplined boy, though, and he honors his family and all who look up to him.”

She loved that about David. He took care of everyone, even if he was going about it wrong with her. He was honorable and good. “What do you think? Would it really hurt his chances at a scholarship?”

“Perhaps. But I don’t think he’s concerned with that.” He cut her a look, and she held her breath as the possessiveness of his stare settled over her. “When a man has found the one, it’s difficult to care about what he may lose in order to keep her. However, if his heart and soul truly belong to her, he will be concerned about what she may lose.”

Her mouth felt dry because she didn’t think he was talking only about David. “You mean his worry that I’ll be locked away by my parents and that everyone will judge me—not him? So, he really loves me?”

“Of course he loves you.” Those intense gray eyes locked on her face. “Perhaps the truth that your heart is not restricted to just himself has also been certain to him. Consider he knew this and had to contemplate cutting you apart? What would he watch you suffer by claiming you as he wishes? He wins his heart’s desire, but he forces you to lose part of yours.”

Jane tore her gaze from his, breathing faster because it felt like a part of her was nodding, yes, that’s exactly it. She didn’t want to choose because everything felt right with Ryder.

And Tercero, she mentally added. God, why was she adding him? He was hot, and he was nice, and they’d had a little moment, but that was just hormones. Wasn’t it?

As Luc pulled into her driveway, the air grew thick in the car. She nearly jumped out as soon as he stopped, but she felt

like he had control over her when she sat perfectly still and stared forward.

“Tonight, Jane, you are mine.” His fingers trailed along her jawline until he gently turned her to face him. God, he was beautiful. His piercing eyes made him appear as though he hated you, but there was a softness to the way he studied her that let her breathe again. “I know you love David, that you might even love my brother,” he said softly, “but we are the couple everyone expects to see together tonight. I don’t share.”

“I thought you were just helping me.” She hadn’t meant to even talk, and she realized he hadn’t expected to be questioned either.

“My help has a price. The price is: you are mine until I say you are not, and you do as I say while you are with me.” He stared at her lips for a few seconds before meeting her eyes. “With you, it seems there are unexpected consequences, though.”

She trembled, surprised as hell that it wasn’t in fear. “And what are the consequences?”

His eyes flashed silver and an incredible smile transformed his face from manipulative god to heavenly angel. “Guess.”

His cold touch suddenly warmed and spread all over her face, down her neck and enveloped her entire body, and she smiled. Why? Why, why, why was she suddenly the biggest fool about love?

He took it in as that feeling seeped inside her. “Beautiful.”

“Oh God, I’m such a slut,” she whispered as she leaned forward.

Luc didn’t say anything. He simply took the kiss she gave willingly.

The moment their lips touched, that warmth ignited into a fire she didn’t think even Heaven could put out. Instantly, neediness throbbed at her core, and she whimpered, squeezing her legs together and clutched his shoulder, pulling him closer.

Luc didn't get as reckless as her, but he kissed her deeply, completely different from the wild but completing kiss of his brother, and the branding one David had left her with. Luc's was so amazing it was frightening. Sinful. It was so wrong to kiss him, but she wanted it. She wanted it so bad, and she was at his mercy as he tasted her.

Jane had to put her hand between her legs to try and stop the throbbing, and he smirked, covering her hand with his.

"Want me to make it all stop?" He merely smiled against her mouth when she whined, and he pressed down, a perfect caress that had her coming in an instant because she'd been that tightly wound up.

"Good girl," he murmured, giving her a soothing and final massage before withdrawing his hand. "Unless you'd like me to do more, I suggest you go inside and rest. It's going to be a long night."

Jane closed her eyes, half ashamed and half blissfully pleased with herself for not being afraid to explore her body's needs.

He pressed a kiss to her forehead. "I take it yesterday was your first experience?"

She breathed out, smiling. "Yeah, your brother kinda rocked my world after David gave me a taste."

"I did not need that in-depth of an answer," he said, moving back.

Jane felt Luc's anger and grinned up at him. "Then don't ask, because I may be pushing them away, but I won't stop feeling for them, and I won't forget how either of them made me feel." It pleased her more than it probably should've to see the crack in his normal controlled expressions, so she added, "And I probably won't stop wondering what could've happened with Tercero if he'd helped me into my bath yesterday."

His jaw tightened, and he motioned to the door. "Go before you upset me. I'll be here at six to pick you up."

She chuckled, grabbing her bag.

“Don’t make a joke out of me, Jane. You won’t like it when you’re punished.”

A little jolt of anticipation shot through her, and she sent him a flirty smile before leaning over and kissing him lightly on the corner of the mouth. “You don’t know, I just might like it.”

He held her chin before she could lean away and pressed a firmer kiss on her lips, then released her. “Go.”

Jane, a little frightened but giddy and confident as hell, got out, giving him a little bow. “See you later, my king.”

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NINE

Jane didn't expect anyone to be home. She didn't expect anyone to see her and Luc. And she didn't expect to be on the receiving end of Kingston Leodegrance's wrath.

"This is unacceptable, Jane," he said, bracing his hands on the dining room table. When she entered the house, he had been waiting inside, arms crossed, and too furious to speak, so he just pointed to the dining room. "Making out with an older boy in the driveway, coming home with hickeys? And one of the parents informed me you had been caught having sex with the other Godson boy yesterday!"

She was afraid to be yelled at by him; he never raised his voice to her, never punished her, but now he looked ready to smack her. But she was too angry with him to care. How dare he watch her; how dare he force her and David to part when it was his fault they didn't even know their parents were fucking for years. "I'm old enough to do what I want with who I want," she said, folding her arms and fixing him with her own glare.

Eyes that were almost identical to David's roared with blue fire. "You are seventeen."

"I'll be eighteen soon." She'd actually been proud of herself for not having her first kiss until two nights ago. Yes, she'd gone hormone crazy and had sex the very next day, but she was in control. She wasn't being taken advantage of. If anything, she was the one in charge of everything she'd done with David, Ryder, and Luc.

“You are still a minor, and you are my daughter.”

“Oh, no.” She shook her head. “I love you like a father, but you’re not my dad.”

He stepped back. “What are you saying?”

For a moment she thought about spilling the beans, telling him it was his fault she and David had to pretend they didn’t love each other and now she had lost him forever, but she didn’t want to push David away any further. “I’m saying marrying my mom didn’t make you my dad. And David is not my brother.”

“How can you say that? I took care of you and your mother as if you were my own wife and child. It was just chance we fell in love, Jane. It was never my intention to do that, but I don’t regret caring for you and making you my daughter.” His frown deepened. “If David heard you say this about him, he’d be hurt. He’s trying so hard to be a decent brother, to protect you from boys, and you’re jumping through each Godson.”

She stood, throwing her hands up. “So, I can’t just find out who I like? God, you tell me you didn’t mean to like my mother, but I can’t explore my feelings?”

His eyes dropped to her neck, and his jaw clenched. “Not when you’re being so reckless. You’ve been a wonderful daughter, never giving us anything to worry about. Now, you’ve completely lost your mind. Two, maybe three boys is what I’ve been told, Jane.”

Oh, he didn’t know the half of it. She roughly grabbed her bag. “Maybe there’s a reason I haven’t been with anyone and now I’m sick of waiting around. I want to be loved. I want to love back. Just because you’re a grownup doesn’t mean you’re the only one who gets to experience love. And I can like more than one boy if I want to,” with that, she turned, leaving before she blurted-out: I totally made out with your son after he gave me my first kiss.

“Don’t you walk away,” he hollered at her as she headed toward the stairs. “I’m your father, and you’ll obey me in my

house.”

She spun around, tears in her eyes this time. “This is my dad’s home. Not yours. And my dad would’ve seen through my smile when I was asked if ‘I was okay’. He would’ve known his daughter was in love and confused. He would’ve helped me understand, not yell at me.” She sniffed, angrily wiping away the tear sliding down her cheek. “Like I said, you’re not my dad.”

The man was silent, and Jane didn’t have enough strength to deal with the hurt and sadness in his eyes to stick around. So, she turned, fleeing up to her room as angry sobs poured out of her. It was mean of her to say that to him—he was a good man and a kind stepfather—but she couldn’t hold back her pain anymore. She deserved to be loved too.

Slamming her door, she nearly screamed at the sight of a guy standing inside her room, but she immediately relaxed, relieved, when she saw who it was.

Tercero uncrossed his arms, which she briefly realized were holding a football jersey, and he held them open for her. “Come here, *tesoro*.”

Jane cried, because fuck, she missed him so much, and it had nothing to do with how much he looked like his brother, or how much his touch reminded her of both Ryder and David. So, she walked up to him, grabbing his face instead of giving him a hug, and she pulled him down, smashing her lips to his like she hadn’t been kissed mere moments ago.

She expected him to push her away, to tell her she was being emotional, but he didn’t. He tangled one hand in her hair and the other pulled her to him so there was no space between them. He drank her like she was the last drop of water on earth.

So many tingles and so much heat mixing with ice and hunger. Jane kissed him, taking everything he offered. All the loneliness that surrounded her for years, the misery of losing so much—her father, her David—of refusing to see Ryder, of refusing to live because she wouldn’t move beyond her sorrow. It all came to an end, like he was able to somehow

give all she needed, end her starving heart's desires and not worry that she'd been so hungry for more than him.

He smiled, lifting her up, supporting her ass with his forearm as he breathed heavily against her mouth. "Better?"

Jane cried and laughed, running her fingers through his hair. "Much better."

Tercero, beautiful and mysterious Tercero, looked at peace, and he kissed her sweetly before saying something she didn't expect. "Only temporarily, yes?"

Her soul cried, and she nodded because darkness was returning. She had lost David, lost Ryder, and Luc was going to be furious once he realized she had strayed from him. Moments after leaving his side, no less. And now Kingston was threatening any chance of her being loved.

"Fear not, Sweet Jane," Tercero whispered, "I'm here because you need something they can't give you right now."

"What?" She hugged him when he carried her toward her bed.

"I know you can't choose between David and my brother." He carefully laid her down, then turned to retrieve the jersey he'd dropped. "I didn't realize Luc would have such a desire for you, but I rarely understand my big brother's intentions. He is more controlled than any of us, and he never let it slip he had his eyes on you."

What he was saying was hard to concentrate on as she watched him lock the door before returning to her side. He was wearing all black and somehow looking sexy instead of weird. "How did you get in here?"

"I'm agile," was all he said.

Oh, she bet he was—like her own personal ninja. "I'm sorry for pushing you away," she said softly.

"I know why you did it." He sat next to her, resting a hand on her belly as it rumbled with hunger. A teasing smile touched his lips. "Almost insatiable."

"Shut up." She touched the jersey. "Is this Ryder's?"

He turned it so she could see the name: *D. Leodegrance*. “You have always been his choice. It’s only right he sees you wear it when he is accepting all his feelings for you. Forgive him.”

Jane stared at David’s name, wondering how on earth Tercero was telling her to forgive David, but then she got a heavy whiff of perfume that wasn’t hers and definitely wasn’t David’s scent. “Where did you get this?”

“Diane.” He chuckled, setting the jersey aside. “You’re not the only girl who hungers for me.”

Her jaw dropped and jealousy, like she hadn’t expected, consumed her. “You had sex with her?”

Tercero put a finger over her lips. “Hush.”

She didn’t know what came over her, but she snapped her teeth at his finger.

He let her bite him without flinching and continued calmly, “I approached her knowing David was near. I complimented her attire, and she couldn’t help herself. She said I could take it off her, and I knew David had heard, so I told her to take it off for me.”

Jane released his finger, feeling ridiculous for still having it in her mouth.

He inspected his skin, and she noticed she’d actually made him bleed. Instead of being angry, he smiled and held it to her lips. “Take it.”

Her skin prickled and heated as she got lost in those dark eyes. It was a weird thing to do; drink someone’s blood, but she found herself completely willing. She parted her lips, sucking when he put his nicked finger inside her mouth.

It wasn’t like it tasted like a good drink, but she let out a moan and sucked harder.

“This is why you are a treasure, Jane. You are able to hunger and be satisfied by us, as well as satisfy, complete and fill all our desires.” Again, he leaned down, pulling his finger free but replacing it with his tongue, his lips molding to hers as

they kissed again. Her aching belly tightened with need that wasn't going away this time, and he smirked, pulling back. It was as if he was purposely holding back what she wanted. "Let us finish our conversation first."

Panting, she nodded, hugging David's jersey to her chest. Though it had stunk of sweet perfume, she smelled David underneath it, and she focused on him instead. It was like being home at last.

"Diane isn't in love with David," he said, "and he most definitely has no real feelings for her."

Jane's lips trembled. It was unrealistic for any guy to be a virgin at their age, and David was already eighteen. Guys as hot as him and Ryder, as popular as them, didn't stay virgins. It wasn't going to be easy to accept that her perfect image of David was only a fantasy she'd created. He'd fucked a girl more than once, a girl she pretty much hated. It was out of love if she believed him, and she did. No boy would write to a girl every day if he didn't love her. He wouldn't be as honest as David had been with her in those letters. In one of the letters, he'd even begged her to slap him if she was reading them.

So, yes, she knew that she'd been wrong about David, but he was genuine in those letters, and the boy in those letters was still perfect in his own way.

Tercero smiled softly. "You know his feelings are for you, his whole heart—it's yours, Jane."

"Why are you telling me this?"

"Because I want you to know you've always been loved, especially by him. He should've told you, but he thinks too much."

She choked out a laugh, nodding. David's letters had proven how much he thought, how many scenarios he'd imagined things blowing up, but it was only when it was her that came up in the line of fire that he made his choices, and his choices were all aimed to set her free of him and lock up his heart. "So, what else happened with Diane?"

“After she took off his jersey, I folded it up and promised to give it to the girl who it was really intended for. Then I moved so she could see David.” A wicked smirk flashed for just a second. “She begged him to forgive her, but he brushed her off, telling her he’d been coming to tell her he was sorry for using her to get over you, but he was going to consider them both assholes while he focused on what really matters to him.”

“What?” she breathed as Tercero brushed his thumb across her lips.

“He told me to tell you he was sorry, and if you could give him one chance, he wouldn’t let you down.”

“Really?” She wiped her tears, but more fell.

Tercero nodded. “He wants to talk to you in person, but yes, he is like a wounded puppy, only remembering he is a vicious warrior when he has any hope of earning your heart and of course, stopping anyone from hurting you.” He smirked, adding, “I think he wants to suffer, but his heart is putting up a hell of a fight, urging him to man-up and accept his mistakes and face the consequences and make it all right.”

Jane sniffled, her sad little heart warming back up.

“There is more,” Tercero said. “He knows it’s bold of him to request it, but I think this is the David you never got to experience.”

“What?” She was so curious now, not sure if David was totally forgiven, or that she deserved forgiveness either, but what was Tercero talking about?

“He said, if you can give him time to work things out, and to talk to you—send him a bit of hope by texting him a picture of you wearing his jersey.”

Jane gaped at him.

“I’m not finished.” Tercero dragged his fingers across her jaw, sliding down to David’s hickey. “He asked what my feelings were for you.”

Jane held his stare, feeling like somehow Tercero was showing her himself as well as David. “Yes?”

Tercero slid his finger down between her breasts, over her stomach until he reached the edge of her shirt, then he pushed it up, pressing his palm to her skin. He moved his hand above her navel until he was right over her ravenous stomach. It wasn't really food she wanted, just everything she'd refused to let herself have all these years. “I said I crave you in every way, and I am starved without your presence. That I won't let you become a mindless monster who none of us recognize because you're now going to deprive yourself of love.”

“Oh, wow,” she breathed, wishing he'd say something else because his words and touch were so right. She couldn't choose because they were everything she needed and wanted. “And what did he say after that?”

“Well,” he said, pushing her shirt up, exposing her breasts like it was completely natural for him, then he expertly unclasped her bra in the middle. He took her in as he then teased her with a tingling and heated caress across one of her nipples. “He wasn't alone.”

Tercero lifted his gaze to her face. “Ryder was behind him, and my brother nodded to him—a silent agreement between them, obviously. Then David, as I said—the David he has hidden from you—turned to me and said if you agree to all this, to feed you and only send him and my brother a picture of you after I've satisfied you for them, and for myself. And Ryder said you should know, Archer wasn't lying; he wears nothing under his pants.”

So many butterflies and tingles. “I'm going to burn alive if you don't do exactly what they asked.”

“I take that as a ‘yes, you'll give David a chance?’”

“All of you,” she rushed, her breathing heavy. “Is that okay? At least until I talk to him?”

“It was our wish.” Tercero gently tugged her shirt off then began placing the faintest of kisses down her body as he added in the sultriest tone, “Ryder said you should wear his

underwear and stop teasing him. He also insisted that you be wet”—he snapped the button on her shorts—“swollen”—he kissed her above her panties then slid them down, only to return to where he kissed with his mouth—“and satisfied.”

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TEN

David growled, throwing the ice pack into the trash. He squeezed his eyes shut along with his throbbing hand, praying he wasn't fucking things up with Jane. Again.

"He's not responding to my texts," Ryder said, chuckling at him.

Lance shot David a glare, not happy with anything David had revealed about his and Ryder's plans with Jane.

"I guess that's a good sign," Ryder added. "I'll still beat his ass later."

Archer patted Lance on the shoulder. "Come on. They need to talk."

It wasn't like David to be grateful for the Godson brothers. But their brotherly relationship and acceptance were welcomed. He and Ryder had been working out too much hatred to focus on much else, but Archer and Savaş kept nosy players from interfering. They had enough to deal with now that Diane had gone crazy, telling everyone he, Ryder, and Tercero were all fucking Jane. She'd even told people Luc was charging them for time with her like he was her pimp.

David had been ready to slap Diane and fight every bastard talking about Jane, but the Godson brothers threw their weight around, threatening the team with all manner of things if they added to the mess Diane caused.

Ryder, the bastard, made sure everyone knew he'd been the only one with that privilege, then he punched the guy who tried to high-five him.

“Are you positive she’d want this?” David asked him for the tenth time. “That she’ll forgive me?”

“Thought you knew your girl,” Ryder said, taking a bite of an apple he’d stolen from someone’s locker. “You know she’ll forgive you, just like you’re forgiving her—like I already forgave her.”

“I know Jane.” David sighed, breathing heavily as he tried to imagine Jane with Tercero right now, of her knowing he’d sent Tercero to satisfy her until he could be with her.

“Then you know she’s been wound up tight for years.” Ryder took another big bite. “She locked up all her feelings, every desire for all of us, and you unlocked the door then walked away. You let a very hungry little monster out.” Ryder chuckled, finishing the apple and tossing it.

“She told me she wanted time.” David glared at him. “Because of you.”

Ryder pulled his phone out. The disappointed sigh told David he’d still not heard from Tercero. “She thought of me, but you hurt her, giving her the final push to let me have a chance.”

“I get it. I fucked up.”

“At least you’re admitting it.” Ryder smirked, knowing full well he was the better man.

“She still gets the final say in this,” David said, pulling his helmet down. “If she picks me, you walk away. If she picks you, I’ll leave her to you. And the same goes for Tercero.”

“You’re forgetting she has Luc on the table now, and she might still want more than we, individually, can give. I mean, I can give her the world, but she’s pushing me away because of you. Even if she accepts what Tercero is offering her, she’s not going to make up her mind like that. She’s not going to forget what you did, and she’s going to feel guilty about everything with me because it meant more than she wants to admit.”

David shook his head. “You had a quickie with her. I haven’t been with her. I can satisfy her.”

“It’s not just the sex, idiot. And I satisfied her,” Ryder shot back like a child. “Almost had her coming this morning, too. Except you had to make a scene with Luc.”

“Luc isn’t in this.” David wasn’t going to let that manipulative bastard near Jane any more than he already was.

“She welcomed him with open arms the minute he showed up. He knew she pushed us away, and he knew we were going to either fight or work together to win her back. He’s smart.” At least Ryder didn’t sound happy. “It might take her a while to make up her mind. I’m just saying, even if I know I’m capable of being amazing for her, I can handle her wanting more than me. I understand her—it’s not that I’m not enough.”

“Then what is it?” David hated this. He thought Jane was perfect for him. She was perfect for him, and he thought he was everything she needed. Then again, he’d changed things for her by trying to protect her, by not talking to her or letting her decide anything. Then he’d broken her with his stupidity.

“I’m sure you’ll figure it out when you’re finally with her. It was a quickie in the car, but it was like seeing God.” Ryder got the same faraway look he had when he first confronted David that morning.

“I get it, she felt like Heaven,” David snapped, hating that Ryder got to have that experience with Jane. “I should’ve been first.” David started tying his pants together, grunting because his fucking hand was hurting.

Ryder laughed hard. “Bitch, you’re asking to get your face broken. You knew you’d hate yourself and not deserve her. Well, you got your wish. I got mine.”

David closed his eyes. Ryder was right. He knew all along there was no moving on from her; she was the one for him. He’d done what he knew would make him unworthy of her so she could be free of him.

“Cheer up, fucker, you got her first kiss. You need to stop acting like we’re five again: ‘I saw her first’.”

Finally, David smiled. Five was really young to feel love for someone besides your family, but when he’d seen Jane for

the first time, awareness of there being a girl he wanted to love had been instant for him. For all of them.

They'd been outside playing football when Jane's family moved into the house between theirs. Ryder insisted he'd seen her first, but David was sure he did because she looked into his eyes before even seeing the others beside him, and her cheeks had flushed before she stuck up her little nose and walked to her dad. Her dad had given them all glares that had them ready to shit themselves, but he'd seen the challenge from David and laughed before carrying Jane up to her new room.

"Mr. Mortaime gave her a view of me," Ryder said smugly. "He picked me for her. He knew I was her match."

David threw him a sour look. Her dad had indeed selected Ryder, and Jane had no idea. She didn't know her dad had sat Ryder, Tercero, Luc, and him down the night before he'd gotten into his accident. It was like he knew he wasn't going to be there, and he told them, *"My little girl likes all of you. I don't want you fighting over her. I expect each of you to protect her, treat her like treasure."* He'd paused to stare at Tercero for that. *"You treat her like a queen, even if she's a feisty little princess,"* with that he'd stared at Luc. Then he'd looked between him and Ryder.

Her dad's eyes were a lighter hazel than Jane's. Where hers looked like you were staring at the sun mixing with the earth, his looked like the ocean as it touched a fading sunset.

He'd smiled at both of them, then told David, "You make sure she always knows what she's meant to be, that she's right where she belongs. Loved. Warm. Home."

Then he touched Ryder's shoulder, staring into his eyes like he was checking for something. Whatever it was, he'd found it because he smiled and said, "You protect her from everything, even herself. You show her when she's lost that she can find her way home, but you never let her go through it alone. Even if she doesn't know it, you are with her until the end. You keep her. Understand, boy?"

It was like Ryder knew he could be the strongest. He nodded to Mr. Mortaime, and he had said, "I'll keep her."

“How often do you think about that night with her dad?” David asked, wrapping his hand.

“Every night before I peek up at her window. She does little stretches and gives me a nice view of that perfect ass of hers.” Ryder smirked when David turned to him.

“And that’s why I pull her fucking curtains shut every night.” David shook his head. “She probably leaves them open for you.”

“She likes to tease me.” Ryder checked his phone again, sighing. “Don’t be jealous. I’m sure you see plenty I never get to know about. You’re the one who fucked everything up.”

David wasn’t jealous. He was struggling with his possessiveness and acceptance. Jane had been his. She’d chosen to befriend him out of all the others.

No, that was a lie. She’d been loyal to him after Ryder and the others returned from Europe. It had felt like a gift that he’d gotten to have her all to himself, but then the Godsons were back, and Ryder hadn’t forgotten her.

His rival tried to get her attention, and David had seen it—she was still drawn to the fucker, and Ryder was going to show Jane he was good for her, that he was just as strong and able to protect her.

But his baby was loyal. When David got upset, she chose to see Ryder’s attempts as attacks against him, and the rift in their friendship widened, making them enemies. And it all came down to Jane wanting to be loved and not alone. She’d lost her family because even with a mom, she didn’t have her dad, and her dad made them whole. She told David as they watched the Godsons drive away that she wished everyone she cared for could stay with her. He had ignored that she already felt something with Ryder, and she was losing someone again, so she fought to hold onto David, afraid to lose him.

“I’m sorry I kept her to myself,” David told Ryder. “I was jealous when her dad picked you. I loved her already, and I knew I could make her happy. There’s no one else for me, Ryder. She’s it for me, always has been. When my dad and her

mom ... I just didn't want her to suffer. I didn't want to rip our family apart. I tried to let her go, but I couldn't. I don't even think I can pretend with any other girls now that I've let it all out. But I want her to be happy."

Ryder watched him with that unnerving emptiness that scared everyone. "You need to tell her this."

"I want to." David breathed out; relieved Ryder wasn't just making him feel worse. "If you take her away like you can, I-I —"

"Save the 'I can't live without her' speech. The sad puppy dog eyes you make when she looks at me say enough, and I don't feel like hearing it." Ryder sighed loudly. "I'm not going to take her away. It's whatever she wants. No fighting for her, no lies. I'm perfect for her, but I'm not ripping away her choice."

"Luc is going to steal her."

"I'll destroy him if he takes one step away with her." Ryder grinned confidently. "Don't worry about him anyway— she can't live without me. She's just figuring that out."

David straightened as fear and anger shot down his spine. "I'll make everything up to her."

"Then do it, fucker." Ryder quieted when noises from the other players and coaches coming filled the locker room.

Before David could switch his focus to the upcoming game, his phone vibrated. His pulse hummed in his ears because it was a text from Tercero, and the way Ryder was staring at *his* phone, he'd gotten a message as well.

They both looked at each other and then opened the picture.

"Hot damn." Ryder yanked David's phone before he could fully take it in. "Just seeing if he sent the same photo."

David snatched it back, and he smiled. It was like the universe had forgiven him. All his hopes and dreams with her didn't seem impossible anymore, because his beautiful girl

was right there—on *his* bed, wearing *his* jersey in just a pair of her favorite knee-high socks and nothing else.

It was the sexiest thing he'd ever seen, but she'd made it tasteful. Or, he guessed Tercero had made sure she wasn't totally exposed. Her legs were together and tilted to the side, showing off the side of her bare ass.

"I'm actually glad we had him take the photo." Ryder rearranged himself. "He took a photography class last year, and he's all artistic. She listened to him about me—no panties. That means I'm in with you."

David noticed, and he knew it meant Jane was choosing all of them right now. It hurt, but he hadn't expected her to drop Ryder.

"Fuck, she's a goddess," Ryder whispered.

She really was, and David couldn't take his eyes off her. Tercero had arranged her hair, spread out in a way that made her look like a fallen angel, and her eyes—she made sure he knew this was for him and Ryder. "He's standing on my bed. He better be dressed."

"He wouldn't do that," Ryder said, texting something back. "He said they didn't fuck, but she's satisfied. Lucky bastard probably ate her out."

All sorts of violent thoughts rose, but David tried to control himself. He'd told Tercero to take care of her, and he should be proud, focusing on the fact that she knew he'd been the one to make this happen, to make sure she was satisfied. David wanted to talk to her alone, but he knew he'd have no privacy with players filling in now. "I'm fucking surprised she'd let him do that. I think about that all the time with her, but she's always so sweet—I can't—"

"You think she doesn't have dirty wishes?" Ryder chuckled. "She's always reading naughty books. She definitely fantasizes about it, and we let her have it."

David sighed, realizing Ryder was right again. Jane wasn't a prude, but she'd been something almost sacred to him, and so he'd told himself it was wrong to think about the things he

wanted to do to her, that she became even more untouchable and pure. She became something no one should taint, even though he wanted to do everything with her. “What are you telling him?” he asked instead of blurting out more personal stuff.

“Told him to ask her if she’s ready for all of us.” Ryder dodged the punch David threw. “Careful, you’re already hurt. Coach is gonna baby your ass if he sees it.”

David didn’t give a damn about his hand or the coach. He sent Jane a text, well aware Ryder’s focus was now him doing the same. There were so many things he wanted to say, but it didn’t feel right to do it in a text: *Beautiful, baby. I promise we’ll talk tonight.*

Ryder leaned closer, peeking at his phone. “Say something better than that. She wants dirty talk right now. Show her you’re not a scared bitch, and you want her just like this—all sexy. Or she’s gonna be embarrassed for trying.”

“I want every version of her, but I want to talk to her in person.”

“No, you’re afraid she’s not going to handle the dirty shit you want.” Ryder smirked, and David knew it was because Ryder had had a taste of Jane’s wild side. “Trust me, she wants all of it.”

David was still unsure, but he didn’t have time to discuss it more. He lowered his voice and locked his screen as Lance walked toward him. “Don’t you dare show her to anyone else.”

Instead of joking, Ryder gave him a serious nod. “She’s ours.”

It was strange, but David liked the sound of that.

The coaches started talking about the game, David felt his phone vibrate again.

My Jane: Kickass for me tonight.

His heart was soaring. This was Jane: the loyal, foul-mouthed, sweet girl with the most forgiving heart there ever

was. *Kinda don't care about the game now.*

My Jane: Is my David having dirty thoughts about me?

Ryder was right—she wanted dirty, and she needed to be reassured she wasn't making a fool of herself. She was learning everything for the first time, and he was going to make sure she knew he was there for it now. *Always*, he replied, smiling because he realized she'd called him 'her David'. *Did you read my letters?*

My Jane: Yes.

My Jane: You broke my heart

My Jane: But you showed me you're still my David.

David wanted to wrap his arms around her and beg her to forgive him. *I'll always be your David. I should've talked to you. I should've made sure you knew that would never change.*

My Jane: You can talk to me about it later.

Promise?

My Jane: Promise.

He knew she was probably more in the moment she'd had with Tercero. She wanted to feel sexy, to know it really was her he was thinking about: *He leave yet?*

My Jane: Yeah. But I'm still in your bed.

My Jane: Kinda wanted to replay what he relayed from you in the closest place I can get to you.

Blood rushed to his dick because she sent him a selfie. She was blowing him a kiss. It was sexy, but he needed to know something: *Are you sending this just to me? Or Ryder as well?*

My Jane: He's texting me, but I told him to wait.

My Jane: These photos.

My Jane: What I'm doing and thinking of.

My Jane: It's all for you.

His male pride roared with her next photo. She was still on his bed, and her hand was between her legs. He darted his gaze

to Ryder, seeing his rival glaring at him, and now David smirked.

Ryder's eyes narrowed as he mouthed, *'I'll kill you.'*

David flipped him off and replied to Jane: *Baby, you're begging to be thoroughly fucked.*

My Jane: I love it when you talk all proper.

He chuckled because she seemed to be forgetting he'd written 'fucked'. Maybe Jane liked proper and dirty. *Did you come?*

My Jane: Not yet.

Another picture of her, still touching herself, but she looked close. Damn, she must be using a selfie stick because he had a good view.

Maybe he could be the alpha out of the three of them: *Come, Jane. Now.*

My Jane: I'm coming, David.

She sent a series of photos that time, her pretty mouth open, her legs definitely trembling, and the final photo of her showing the evidence on her fingers.

He had no idea when she got so confident and brave, but he was the luckiest guy in the world.

David sent her another text: *Taste yourself.*

There was another photo: her sucking her sex-coated fingers.

That's my beautiful Jane

My Jane: Next time you taste me yourself.

My Jane: Then I'm tasting you.

He released a harsh breath, earning a questioning look from Lance and a snicker from Ryder, but he ignored them both: *Baby, I'm about to get kicked off the team.*

She didn't text back, and he worried he'd said the wrong thing, but he breathed out seeing she'd sent another text.

My Jane: Then you can be on my team.

My Jane: We don't wear clothes.

Then she sent a picture of herself in front of a full-length mirror in her room, his jersey on the floor by her feet, a hand covering between her legs and his football doing a poor job hiding her breasts.

“Fuck,” he said, aloud.

The head coach raised his voice, “Something more important than your first game as *Mike*, Leodegrance?”

David knew better than to say, ‘his girl was’, but he lowered his phone and apologized as Ryder nudged him, whispering, “I got her.”

It frustrated him that he had to let Ryder take over, but he reminded himself that Jane had wished him a good game, told him to kick ass for her. So, he breathed out, focusing on the coach and prepared for the game he really didn't care about, other than looking good for Jane. He had time to apologize, and he had time to come to terms with the fact that Jane had been with Ryder, that she might not be willing to walk away from Ryder.

His heart was still broken about it, but in a way, he was glad Ryder had been the one she'd gone to. She'd gone to a guy who really cared about her. She'd been upfront about her feelings and while a part of her choice was because of her hurt, she'd chosen Ryder because of something special between them. Now, he just had to make her see he could still have something special with her.

It still stung she'd given herself to Ryder, especially her first time, but it was better than the shit he'd done. He'd fucked Diane for his first. Everything he should've done with Jane, he'd messed up and wasted it on random girls and Diane. It was sickening him, infuriating him, at how fucking insane his plan had been. He had lost himself by cutting Jane out of his life. She was his strength and goodness, and he wasn't himself without her.

All he could do now was be a man, face the consequences of his actions, prove to her and himself that he was her David, and he wasn't going to fuck up this chance. It was time to show her she could come home to him. No matter what, he'd love her and accept her for who she was. In order to do that, he had to fix more than just his relationship with her; he'd have to fix things with Ryder.

They'd been friends, almost brothers, and he'd screwed his friend over by not stepping aside for him.

A jolt of pain in his hand had him wincing, but it was nothing when he had everything to look forward to after the game. The cherry on top would be winning for her, winning for Ryder and the team.

Ryder leaned closer, and keeping his voice low, told him, "She saw you punch the wall earlier, and she asked about your hand. I told her you probably fractured something. Her pretty head is jumping all over the place. She's worried about you, but she keeps saying your jersey stinks. Man, you have to make that right."

"I will." David kept his eyes forward. He'd fucked up by giving Diane his jersey, and he thanked God he had left it at only that this time. Because now Jane was wearing it, pleasuring herself on his bed. She was holding back on the Diane thing with him, but he was going to really get in trouble about his hand. She worried about him a lot. "Why the fuck did you tell her?"

"I don't lie to my girl." Ryder was being cocky now, and David knew he was actually doing it to push him to play harder. "Dammit, her sexy little ass offered to kiss it better before the game. Those are my lips, fucker."

"Not when they're on me." David grinned as Ryder growled and pocketed his phone.

"She's getting ready for Luc now."

All of David's happiness vanished.

"Relax." Ryder's calmness helped, but David knew Luc was up to something. He might have Jane thinking he's a good

guy, but they all knew better. He was the most dangerous guy any of them knew, and Jane was clueless about him.

“If he tries to leave with her,” David started, but Ryder cut him off.

“Tercero will be there, and I’ll keep my eye on her. If anything, I’ll leave. I don’t give a fuck if they say I have to stay on the sideline. Our girl is always first.”

David fully relaxed, surprised again that he wasn’t upset by Ryder’s use of ‘our girl’. He was liking it more and more. It was just a fearful thing to know Luc might find his way into what she wanted. Or that Jane might think all she needed was Luc.

With Ryder and even Tercero, they were the stronger force, and she’d see they were better than the ‘King of Black Hills’.

His phone vibrated again, and he stealthily peeked at it, smiling when he read the text.

My Jane: I think we should get to know each other as we are now before I say what my heart has been screaming for years.

My Jane: So, I’ll just say.

My Jane: I something you.

She’d added a kiss emoji, and he knew that was the best thing she could say to him. They were still uncertain, and he had a lot to learn about the girl she’d become and the woman she was growing into, but nothing would change for him.

David sent her a final text, knowing now that he’d have to put his phone away: *I love that, baby.*

My Jane: I love when you call me baby.

Fuck, one more text: *You’ll always be my baby. I love you. I can’t wait to show you how much I do.*

Ryder nudged him, making David realize the coach was staring at him, waiting for him to say something.

David glared at the man, but reined in his irritation. “Sorry, Coach.”

“I hope whatever’s occupying your attention is worth it, boy, because you’re standing right next to Godson’s sorry ass for the first quarter,” his coach snapped, making everyone freeze.

His rage spiked, and he felt Ryder ready to blow up next to him, but he cut his rival—former rival—a look to calm down, then he stared Coach down. “My girl is worth all my attention, and if you pull me, that’s fine. I’ll have her to go to when you’re explaining why you had your two best players sitting out, and why you didn’t tell Ryder about his grade while there was still time to raise it for this game.”

Everyone knew the new coach hated Ryder. What they didn’t know was, that morning, David had overheard him telling an assistant coach he’d been informed about Ryder’s dangerously close to failing grade—that it had been suggested he give Ryder time after school to come for tutoring, but the coach just told the teacher he’d make sure Ryder was aware.

The fucker had laughed about Ryder being finished, and he’d even counted on Jane not being able to help. Well, he counted on them fucking around rather than studying. It might be a little true, but David wasn’t going to have anyone thinking his girl was a whore.

Coach Belial turned red in the face. “You best watch what you say, Leodegrance. If you want those recruiters to be impressed, you learn your place again.”

David was about to tell him to go fuck himself, but Ryder, Archer, and Savaş pulled him back, then Archer spoke, “His place is with us, and ours is with him.”

There was total silence, and David smiled when Lance gave a nod to the coach. “David’s captain, Coach. We follow him on the field.”

Gareth Knight, a tight end David wasn’t really close with, spoke up, “You might as well sit the rest of us on the sidelines with him and Ryder, Coach.”

His brother Gawain nodded. “Ryder and David are our brothers, and you’re doing them wrong.”

The coach laughed as a few other players nodded in agreement. Honestly, David was surprised they were standing behind him, even more, behind Ryder.

Well, if they were calling David their leader, he was going to embrace it. “You’re going to let Ryder get his tutoring with Jane, and when our girl helps him get his grade up, you’re giving him his spot back as Mike. Or we walk out there and forfeit.”

Every player stood, even the ones talking shit earlier that day. He knew it was because he no longer seemed like a weak fucker, unable to admit Jane was his girl, and that he wasn’t weak for having Ryder beside him when they claimed her.

The coach shook his head at him and Ryder. “You two get your first taste of virgin pussy and—”

David and Ryder were both being held back now, but it was Arthur Knight, the Knight brother’s dad and the Defensive Coordinator for the team, who threw the punch, laying out the head coach.

David and Ryder froze, staring at Coach Knight in shock.

He turned to them. “Jane’s a good girl.”

A laugh sounded by the door, and David looked up to see their old coach, Principal Prince standing there. “About fucking time you boys stopped cupping your balls and took the leap for your girl. Back in my day, we ran out buck-ass naked when our lady or our brothers were dishonored.”

“The fuck?” Archer shook his head. “Coach, I don’t want to think about your dick or your bare ass.”

Gareth gagged. “Prince’s dong out, swinging like a cat toy. I’m sure the ladies loved that.”

Their principal grinned. “They did. I have the goods.” He walked forward, patting Ryder’s shoulder, then he focused on David. “Get your team ready, Captain. You’ll want to impress Jane because she’s gonna have a king showing her off like a queen tonight.”

Ryder scowled. “The fuck, Coach? She’s my girl, too.”

David laughed, grabbing his stuff. “He knows I’m alpha.”

Coach Knight quieted the laughter, pushing through the crowd and grabbing David’s hand, inspecting it. “Damn, boy. Did you break something?”

“I can play,” David said, nodding to the rest of the defense. “I need help without my wingman.”

Ryder shoved his shoulder. “Bitch, you’re my wingman.”

Principal Prince sighed, checking David’s injury. “You play, but you tell your coaches if you need a break. Remember there are more games. But if you get doctor’s orders to not play, you’re at risk of missing the season.”

“I’ll be careful.” David glanced at Ryder. “If I start slipping, you tell me.”

Ryder smirked. “Got you covered, wingman.” He then looked across the room at the new defensive end who transferred yesterday. He’d been Mike at his old school. “Winters, feel like backing him up?”

Jason looked between them. “Does it mean I get a piece of the brunette, too?”

Savaş laughed loudly. “Not in this lifetime, boy. I think Jane’s harem is full.”

David glared at Jason. “Can I count on you?”

“Yeah, I’m good.” The new guy held his hands up in surrender. “She’s hot, but I have a thing for blondes.”

Ryder pointed at Jason. “Better keep your fucking eyes on those hoes, then.”

Principal Prince shoved Ryder toward Savaş. “Take him before I have to expel him.” Then he smacked Ryder on the back of the head. “Don’t disrespect women.”

David hissed as the trainer re-wrapped his hand.

Ryder was still mouthing off as he was led out. “Whatever. I’m gonna have fun sexting Jane from the sidelines.”

Their principal sighed, pinching the bridge of his nose. “I can’t believe you just said ‘sexting’.”

“Channeling my inner-teenage girl.” Ryder put his hand over his heart. “You’re fucking dreamy, Coach.”

Their principal glared at him. “Jane gave you personality. I don’t think I can deal with this.”

Ryder laughed, hanging onto the doorframe. “She said she really likes me.”

Coach Prince laughed. “Get out of here. You’re scaring me.”

David chuckled, watching Ryder disappear. The guy had changed almost instantly from just a few days with Jane. He didn’t know how to feel about it. They were teaming up right now, but he expected Jane to make a choice between them. There was a tightening in his chest when he thought of Jane not choosing Ryder, though. It didn’t make sense, but Ryder was different now. Jane was different. Who would she be without Ryder now?

“If there’s one girl who can deal with that arrogant asshole, it’s Jane.” His principal grinned at him. “After all, she just got you to take your rightful place as Captain.”

“Thanks, Coach.” David smiled at him. Even if their old coach was the principal now, he’d always be ‘Coach’. David liked him, but it had been clear Ryder was the favorite. Principal Prince patted David on the shoulder. “I knew her dad.”

“Mr. Mortaime?” David hardly remembered the man who held Jane’s heart, then had asked Ryder to keep it. He was shorter than David’s and Ryder’s dads, but there was something about him that was scary as hell. Maybe it was that a girl’s dad was usually her hero, and if her hero didn’t like her prince, the prince stood no chance in her eyes either.

Mr. Prince crossed his arms, nodding. “I was a quarterback in college when they moved here from Texas. My dad was the coach then, and I was visiting, so he sent me to show off for the Pop Warner team when they were having their practices.

Jane's dad brought her because she wanted to be a cheerleader, and even though the season had started, they were letting her try a practice to see how she'd fit in because she'd never cheered before.

"She stood out because instead of wearing what the other girls were, she was in a tutu. I guess her dad didn't know what to put her in, or she just liked her costume. But she was already getting teased.

"I had been taking a break, and I sat to watch for a bit, and I'd never seen a little girl so afraid to try the little cartwheels and flips, but Jane was terrified. She couldn't keep up with the commands that the other cheerleaders already knew. She was tearing up because she just couldn't get anything right.

"I felt bad watching her, 'cause I could see the cheer coach was frustrated too. She'd been talking to Jane's dad about the ballet studio that was two towns over, and Jane overheard. She saw her dad trying to tell the coach she'd figure it all out and he'd have her in better clothing next time. But Jane held her tears in and told him she was ready to go home, that she had changed her mind."

Again, a peaceful smile spread over Coach Prince's face. "She was trying to be brave for her dad, but she was hurt. I got up when she yelled at her dad who was still trying to convince her to stay because she tripped and completely wiped out, getting laughed at again. Her little dress was all dirty, and it was one of the saddest things I'd seen."

David's heart was breaking. He'd never heard any of this. He didn't even remember Jane being a dancer or wanting to be a cheerleader. She always said she had no interest in anything like that.

She hid it from me.

Coach Prince sighed. "I jogged over and helped her up, dusted off her tutu as the girls laughed. They all shut up when I asked her if she'd be my helper for the rest of practice, that I needed a really special girl to help me find the best players for the team."

Now, David remembered. She had been there that day, when he, Ryder, and the others were having practice. She'd been with the college football player everyone looked up to, sitting on his shoulders or sometimes in his arms as he hollered at them. David hadn't thought much about her being there, only that she had somehow gotten the cool player to carry her around, and he wanted to show off.

"You boys tried to impress her so much," Mr. Prince said. "You know what she told me when I asked her who was the best out of you and Ryder?"

David shook his head.

"She pointed at you and said, 'He's the bestest'. I laughed and told her that Ryder actually had more potential. Her little cheeks were bright red as she watched him. She really tried to choose between you two, darting her eyes at each of you. Finally, she threw up her arms and yelled that I couldn't make her choose."

"What did her dad say?"

"He told her one boy has to get picked for each spot." Mr. Prince grinned. "She said not if she had any say so, and that I was asking for what she wanted, and she wanted both. There was no changing her mind." He gave David another pat. "Her dad told her she could have both, then. She could have however many she wanted, as long as she was happy, and the boys did their job on her team. He told her Ryder was probably the perfect player for her, but you were a leader."

"And Jane?" David felt like he was falling in love with his girl all over again.

His principal started walking out after instructing an ambulance to be called for the coach, but he answered him. "She agreed with her dad, and she embarrassed us all because she asked if she could go slap your butt like she saw the older players do, because you had the bestest one, and she wanted you to lead her team."

David laughed, flexing his hand as his heart was whole. Jane's dad had approved of him, after all. And his girl had

always seen him as her *bestest*. “Thanks, Coach.”

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ELEVEN

Luc kept a firm hold on her hand as they walked through the gates and onto the football field. The band was there, preparing to do their march around, and the cheerleaders were prepping for when the players come out.

“Do you miss playing?” Jane asked him when she spotted Diane watching them.

“No.” Luc nodded to one of the guards who looked at him like he was a god. “It was merely something to do.”

“Well, you were terrific.”

“*Hm,*” was all he replied.

Jane wanted to roll her eyes, but something pettier took precedence, and she pretended to get her foot caught on something. “Hang on.”

Luc stopped, watching her fiddle with nothing on her foot, but Jane was just getting ready to make a show of the jersey she wore under Luc’s letter jacket.

“Okay.” Jane straightened, letting the number twelve show for all the cheerleaders. “I’m ready.”

Luc knew exactly what she was doing, and he didn’t like it. He tugged the jacket around her, giving her a glare. “Do you like testing me, Jane?”

She grinned up at him. “It’s not my fault you picked a queen who had herself a prince. Not to mention she was already shagging the king’s younger brothers. Well, one of them. I didn’t work up that far with Tercero. Yet.”

His jaw clenched. “You are not a whore, so do not act like one.”

Jane fought really hard to not flinch, but she did anyway. She had felt like a whore, but the way her boys were acting now, they’d made her feel like a goddess. “I’m theirs right now, and that’s all I care about.”

“No, right now you are mine.” He stared at her, then continued along the track toward centerfield. “Behave yourself, or you won’t like what happens to them.”

“Is that a threat?” Jane knew Luc was going to be upset about her with Tercero right after he’d dropped her off. She knew he wasn’t going to like that she’d been giddy about David and Ryder getting along for her—for David asking for a chance—but she hadn’t thought Luc would do anything to hurt them.

“Yes,” he said simply. “Anger me and learn my threats are to be taken seriously.”

She darted her eyes around, her nerves returning because she had a feeling Luc wasn’t joking.

“I don’t want you to be afraid of me, Jane.” He came to a stop on the home team sidelines, near the fifty-yard line.

There weren’t a lot of people on the track or field, besides the visiting team doing warm-ups. Somehow, though, it felt like the spotlight was on them, and Jane was regretting agreeing to Luc’s help that morning.

“Well, you’re freaking me out by threatening my—”

He cut her off, his tone as sharp as his look. “While you’re with me, you don’t celebrate your relationships with them.”

She darted her gaze to the band as the drums started and they prepared to circle the track before taking their spot in the bleachers. “You want me to act like you and I are together?”

Luc caressed her cheek before holding her chin, forcing her to look only at him. “There is no need to act. You want me, and you’re curious to find out how I compare to the boys you’ve played with so far.”

Jane frowned, noticing the displeased look he gave when she did. It was like he really wanted to see her smile at him. As thrilling as that was, she wasn't going to let his ego crush her. "Ryder had me horny, and I'm emotional. Of course, I enjoy you touching me, but that doesn't mean you and I are together. Even they know I'm not sure what I want to do yet. But I'll figure it out ... with them."

The band began their march, the announcer introducing them, as the crowd cheered.

Cold fingers trailed down her neck as silver eyes held hers. "Do you really think your stepfather is going to rejoice when you tell him your intentions with his son? Do you think your mom is going to accept you two leaving to go on dates together? That they will allow you to sleep mere feet from each other?"

She swallowed, knowing the exact opposite would happen.

Luc smiled, but it was cruel. "And if that isn't enough, do you really not expect either of them to take action when you openly reveal your relationships with my two brothers?"

"I'm almost eighteen," she said softly, not sure he could even hear her with the crowd clapping.

Apparently, he did. "That doesn't matter to Kingston Leodegrance. You are in the home he is master of, Jane. Regardless of it being the one your father picked out, Kingston Leodegrance is its master now, and he will be ruthless if his son and daughter are fucking under his very nose."

"We haven't fucked," she said, her confidence in being out in the open wavering. "And he wasn't happy with me kissing you either. He saw, and I'm sure he thinks you're an older guy just trying to get in my pants."

"I will get you out of your pants." He smirked at her glare. "Don't worry—you'll ask for it, and you'll enjoy it far more than the virgin fumbling's of my brother."

Jane's jaw dropped. Ryder was a virgin? Her confident, bad boy neighbor who'd blown her mind and made her walk

bowlegged for the afternoon because he'd fucked her that good, was a virgin?

“Did he not tell you?” He chuckled, leaning down closer. “Well, I'll inform you this; I am not.”

“Congratulations,” she said, hating that she was wondering if he was about to kiss her. “And if that was Ryder as a virgin, he might've ruined every man for me.” Except for David and Tercero.

An amused twitch of his lips came and went. “Experience, maturity, and power are still too tempting for you, though.”

“Whatever,” was her lame response before turning to clap for the band passing them.

He chuckled, placing his hand on her lower back. “Perhaps you are not as brave as I thought. You still want to play with boys.”

Jane scowled at the band. She was afraid. Sometimes she felt like screaming because what on earth was she doing? Considering a relationship with her stepbrother, the sexy neighbor she'd refused to believe she had feelings for, his almost twin who lost the girl he considered a soul mate, and what—was she considering Luc too? She might as well sell her soul to the Devil. Not to mention she still tingled between her legs from Tercero's mouth. What was wrong with her?

“Giving up your crown before you can even show it off?” His hand moved under the jacket she wore—his jacket—and then under David's jersey. His hand was ice-cold, and she shivered as she realized the monitor behind the field goal showed the two of them. “Will you smile like a queen, or cower like a peasant?”

“You really take this king thing too seriously.” Jane looked up at him, and he met her gaze. It was only when the briefest drop in his cold exterior appeared that she made her decision. “I can run to Ryder and Tercero, *and* David. I know he'll tell me when the time is right for him.

“But you're right, I am curious about you. I'm curious why you want to push me to be great when I'm just a girl no one

has really cared about. I'm curious about the way you look at me, and why you lost your composure in the car before. Why you're acting possessive because I think you're thoroughly pleased I was with Ryder and Tercero."

He gave her a real smile before bending a pressing a tender kiss to her lips. "Not exactly," he murmured, speaking just a hair's breadth from her mouth. "Immensely pleased when you challenge me, yes, but that my younger brothers have claimed you, that you're yearning for David to do the same ... Not in the slightest."

The cheering crowd kept her from forgetting everything that mattered to her because Luc's kiss had that ability. If she had to compare him to anything, it would be a drug. Something to numb her, to let her escape, and if she let him, he could keep her however long he wanted.

Yes, if Ryder made her come alive, if David consumed her with a fire he seemed to be trying desperately to make sure it didn't destroy her, and if Tercero sustained her in their absence—then Luc was the sweet escape from all worries, from all she really loved and desired.

Sighing, she turned away, noticing their faces still on the huge monitor with a caption now: 'Black Hills' King of Friday Night & his Queen'.

Jane smiled, pushing up the jacket's sleeve a bit, and waved like a princess. Not because she was living out a fantasy of being Luc's queen for the day. No, she was doing her best Cinderella wave because she'd used a sharpie on her wrist, creating a heart out of David's, Ryder's, and Tercero's names. It might be hard to make out, but she tried to show them they were the ones who had her heart. No way was she showing up on Luc's arm, letting him kiss her like they hadn't just made her feel like the most special and beautiful girl in the world.

"Cute," Luc said, waving at the camera now.

"I can be clever, too." She chuckled even though she could feel his rage. "Oh, don't be pissy. I'll behave and make you look good, and who knows, maybe in the future, you won't

have to worry about the fumbblings of an inexperienced little queen if she ever takes her pants off for you.”

“Maybe I look forward to your fumbblings,” he said, turning her toward the field when the monitor switched views to show the black and gold inflatable tunnel the football players ran through. “Much easier to teach a beginner than re-teach one who learned the wrong way to ride a cock. And there is no if—I am going to bury myself deep inside you.”

Goodness, her vagina was the ultimate slut because that hoe was aching now, wondering why he wasn’t already there.

“Ryder didn’t complain.” God, she hoped she did it right.

“What virgin boy complains about a pussy around his dick?” He was enjoying trying to make Ryder look bad.

Jane sighed, ready to just pull Luc’s pants down and fuck him so he’d shut up. Literally, the stupidest thought her teenage mind had ever concocted, but damn it all, the seed was planted. All she could do was act unaffected by Luc’s experience. “I really don’t care if he was a virgin. It makes me like him more, and he made me come twice. I loved it, and I’m pretty sure I’m falling in love with him. So, fuck off about him being a virgin. I don’t even want to know where your experienced dick has been.”

“Tell yourself that when you’re unable to sleep and imagining me worshipping every inch of your beautiful body.”

Damn him.

Music that normally played before Ryder led the charge started, and the announcer spoke: “Led by their Captain, Senior: David Leodegrance, the Black Hills’ Warriors.” It wasn’t David who walked through the two flaps holding the team back, though. “Seems there’s been a change.”

Her heart sprinted when Ryder came onto the field. He wore black jeans and his black jersey with the number ‘4’ in gold. Obviously, he wasn’t playing, so he wasn’t dressed, but she had no idea what he was doing there.

He acted the confused, looking around and scratching his head. The girls were screaming, and Jane wanted to join right

along with them. He was just so sexy. She wanted to shout they'd totally lost their virginity to each other, but the announcer was speaking again.

“It seems Senior, Ryder Godson, former Captain will be leading—”

Ryder held up his hand and did a little motion, and the music changed. Jane didn't know the song title, but she'd heard David play it before. It was then Ryder held up his hand to his mouth, hollering, “Number Twelve.”

The crowd went crazy when David walked out of the tunnel, and Jane couldn't stop herself from screaming this time. He wore the all-black uniform, his number twelve matching the number she proudly wore. His black helmet with the golden archangel warrior, their mascot, hit the lights, making him look like a god himself.

She was cheesing like a fool when Ryder gave him a bro-hug before they both suddenly did a pose, crossing their arms. Then two more players—Archer and Savaş came out, flanking them and doing the same pose. Jane screamed, bouncing on her toes as another set came out. She knew it was the Knight brothers: Gareth and Gawain.

The air felt like it was vibrating when the rest of the team came out. She expected them to charge the field, but then David started moving side to side, dancing.

“Holy shit,” she whispered as Ryder and the others in a wave started copying him. It was simple but holy hell, David was dancing, and it was driving her crazy watching his golden arms flexing with each movement as he held them out wide.

Not a single person was sitting in the stands. Everyone stood, cheering, then screaming when the players all took a step to the side, but they stayed low before doing it to the other side. Jane was gonna pass out. Ryder never led the team out like this, but he was there, slightly behind David, participating and letting David lead.

The boys parted, and Jane saw another player walking through, holding up the school flag.

The announcer spoke again as the player reached David. “Introducing the newest member of Black Hills’ playing Defensive Tight End, Senior, Jason Winters.”

David slapped the new guy’s helmet before bumping it with his, then Jason was leading the team across the field, the flag high as the band played the school fight song.

She couldn’t stop grinning as the team reached the opposite end zone, circling Jason as he handed the flag to David. They whooped and jumped up and down as David shouted, getting them pumped. Her heart turned to mush seeing Ryder right there with him.

He yelled, smacking David’s shoulder pads as the others chanted along. Whatever he said had them hollering and David grinning, before yelling something else out. The boys all kneeled, praying, then they stood one by one, jumping and hollering, waiting for their teammates to rise.

When David rose last, they let out a huge cry and started toward the sideline.

Luc sighed heavily, and Jane felt a bit bad. He obviously didn’t like that she adored every bit of that, especially David and Ryder getting along.

As the team got closer, Jane felt their eyes on her, and she smiled at David. Her body heated when he winked, then he made a motion to Ryder, and her sexy boy looked like a kid on Christmas as he ran up to her.

Ryder completely ignored Luc, reaching for her hand and pulling her a step closer. “Hey, angel.”

“Hey.” She seriously hoped the camera wasn’t on them.

“We couldn’t get you flowers or jewelry, but we want you to wear this tonight.” He held up a gold wristband, but they’d both written on it. One side: *David ♥ ’s Jane*, the other side: *Ryder fucking ♥ ’s Jane*.

She laughed, sliding it over her ink-free wrist as she wondered if Ryder meant love with his heart the way she believed David did. “I love it.”

“I know you do.” His eyes flicked over her shoulder. “You only do what she asks for.”

Luc was cool and calm. “She’s not being forced into anything.”

“Did you want that kiss?” Ryder asked her, no judgment, but he wasn’t thrilled either.

Lying to him wasn’t something she was going to do though. “I didn’t ask for it, but I didn’t mind.” She pressed her lips together when he just stared at her, then she added, “He didn’t make me tingle like you do, or burn like David’s kiss does.”

“Is that how it is?” he mused, licking his lips as he stared at hers.

All she could do was nod.

“Interesting.” Those green eyes lit with flames before shifting back to Luc. “Next kiss, you ask for it.”

“I will offer, and she will accept,” was Luc’s cocky reply.

Ryder actually looked like he was contemplating killing his brother. All emotion slipped from his handsome face, and he just stared at Luc. Silent.

It was unnerving to see. Ryder had been nothing but sweet and funny around her, and she had completely forgotten the bad boy who ruled him. “Ryder,” she said softly, putting a hand over his heart. “Hey.”

He blinked, dropping his eyes to her, his gaze softening. “I have my phone. If you need me, don’t hesitate to call or text me.”

“Okay.” She smiled when he touched her cheek.

“I’m tempted to kiss you in front of everyone.” He smirked, rubbing his thumb over the lip she was biting. “Stop, these are my lips.”

“So you’ve said before,” she whispered, shivering when tingles seeped into her skin.

“Damn, babe, you’re making it hard for me not to embarrass you.” He glanced over at the team. “I’ll behave, though. Don’t want him to lose his head.”

Jane looked over, spotting David. He was with a coach, but she felt his eyes on her. She smiled, hoping he was able to stay focused. “I loved watching you together. He’s doing good as captain.”

“Yeah.” He tilted her chin up. “I gotta go.”

She couldn’t believe how much she missed him. To think she’d pushed him away, telling him he’d never be David. “Just so you know, I’m kissing you in my head right now—in between my apologies for being a bitch.”

The gorgeous smile of his that haunted her dreams stretched wide across his face. “Am I squeezing your pretty ass as you wrap those perfect legs around me?”

“Hard,” she said, giggling when Luc exhaled loudly behind her.

Ryder was totally enjoying it. He shuffled closer so their legs touched. “You fit perfectly in my hands. I love it. And you don’t have to apologize, babe. I know your mind fucks with you. That’s why you have me—I can hold you while you sort shit out.”

Certainly, there were hearts in her eyes as she beamed up at him. “Liking you more than I can put into words.”

He winked. “Back atcha, babe. Anything you want me to tell Mr. Perfect for you?”

God, Ryder had no idea how perfect he was himself. “Um.” Her cheeks burned. “Maybe give his ass a smack and tell him I said have a good game.”

Ryder laughed loudly. “I’ll do it for you. Don’t get jealous if he likes that it came from me.”

She giggled, shoving him but secretly feeling his abs. “I’m sure you’ll make sure he knows it was you and not me.”

“He’s gonna see my handprint for days.” He chuckled, then growled. “Kissing you in my mind, Sweet Jane.” Then he

was jogging over to David.

Luc pulled her to him, but she kept her eyes on David as he listened to Ryder. There was a distinct, ‘*what?*’ from David before Ryder let him have it. The hardest ass smack she’d ever seen.

Jane gasped, covering her mouth as David glared at Ryder, shoving him a little. Ryder laughed it off, pointing toward her before he walked away.

Her blue-eyed boy glanced at her, and even with his helmet on, she saw his smile. He shook his head at her, but he pointed to his wrist.

She nodded, holding up hers, then she gave it a quick kiss before Luc guided her to the middle of the field.

“You are more troublesome than I had hoped for.” Luc put a hand on her back. “We are being watched. Remember our deal: behave, and I won’t have to hurt them.”

“Remember this deal, then: hurt them, and I’ll hurt you.” She raised her chin when she felt his stare. “Yeah, I said it.”

“Almost.” He pulled her against his side more. “You almost sounded like a queen.”

Jane smacked his stomach, not surprised to find it firm and sinfully tempting. “You’re a jerk.”

“It’s pronounced king, Jane.” He actually looked cute for a moment. Then he was all business, shaking hands with the referees.

She peeked behind her, hearing the announcer again, “Retiring his number, the coin toss ceremony will be led by the nationally recognized all-star quarterback, Black Hills’ graduate, Luc Godson.”

The crowd cheered, standing and clapping for Luc as the announcements continued. “Coming onto the field for the Warriors, Captains: David Leodegrance, Archer Godson, Savaş Godson, and Gareth Knight. And the Helldona Hellhounds, Captains: Alexander Sin, Damon King, Than Messor, and Dylan Berith.”

Luc tightened his hand around hers, and she squeezed closer to him as the four players focused on her.

She calmed when David's presence was right behind her, and she breathed out when he brushed her hand with his as the two teams lined up opposite each other. The big guy named Sin stood opposite of David, telling her he must be their head captain.

Normally, the teams shook hands, but there was none of that. Just glaring and quiet name-calling. The one named Dylan continuously darted his eyes to her, like he was trying to see if she had a purpose, and he only smirked when David noticed and shot him a glare. *Crap.*

Principal Prince strolled down the middle until he was face to face with Luc. He shook Luc's hand before turning them toward the cameras. He gave a speech about Luc's years at the high school, his successes, including decimating the Helldona Hellhounds his first year playing in varsity.

Jane smiled, clapping for him because Luc was impressive. She also learned he'd donated a million dollars to the district, including a scholarship fund that would go out to one student each year. It was incredible to learn all this about him. He didn't look cocky about any of it. In fact, he seemed to want everything to wrap up as his hand tightened around hers.

She gave him a little squeeze and smiled up at him, mouthing 'wow' when they announced they were retiring his number: Eleven.

His lips twitched, and he gave her a tiny squeeze back. It was things like this that drew her to him. He acted like he wanted to steal her, harm his brothers, and he didn't even like to talk about David, but there was definitely something about him that got to her.

Principal Prince held up a brand-new jersey with Luc's number as an assistant coach held up another for Luc to sign so it would hang in the gym with the handful of other retired numbers.

As she prepared to let go, so he could use his hand, she found herself being gripped tighter. Luc was left-handed, it seemed, and he elegantly signed the jersey. He took the spare one, holding it up high as the stadium cheered for their former king. Then he handed it to her.

The crowd even ‘awed’ when he kissed her fingers and let her go so he could do the coin toss ceremony.

Jane laughed nervously as Mr. Prince winked at her, taking her by the arm and leading her to stand behind Luc who was now between David and the other captain.

“Keeping them on their toes, Miss Mortaime?” Mr. Prince chuckled at her when she used Luc’s jersey to hide her face because she saw it on the monitor, bright red.

“I guess so.” She blew out a breath and stood taller, composing herself as she caught sight of David watching her. God, he was so hot. It just wasn’t fair to be in his presence. Jane made sure David could see she had on his jersey, and she beamed at him when he smiled her way.

“Careful, girl.” Mr. Prince patted her hand. “Let my boys win the game before you have them competing for your attention.”

“Are you calling me a distraction?” She batted her eyelashes up at her principal. She remembered he’d been the one everyone was crazy about when she was a little girl. He’d been almost as famous as Luc, but he wanted a humble life, and he came back to their hometown after graduating college instead of going pro.

“Yes.” He chuckled at her. “Don’t do that to me. My fiancée will have my balls if I have a pretty, young girl flirting with me.”

Jane covered her mouth. “I’m not flirting.”

“*Mhm.*” He sent David a smirk. “Tell him that.”

David was all business, though. He just nodded to whatever was being said by the referee talking beside Luc. The referee told David to call the coin once Luc flipped it and for Alexander Sin to confirm it.

Luc took the coin from the referee, and the flip was done.

“Heads,” David called.

Luc nodded, showing it to Alexander, who confirmed it was heads. Jane didn’t hear what else was being said, except David said they would ‘defer’.

“That means we will start the game on defense, but halftime, we will receive,” Mr. Prince muttered to her.

“Oh.” Jane should know this, but even she had to admit she was too busy just staring at David’s and Ryder’s asses to care about the rules and ceremonies. “Did you know they were going to dance?”

Mr. Prince chuckled, shaking his head. “Not exactly. All I knew was David wanted to get the boys hyped and behind him, and he wanted the new player accepted. The Jason boy will be helping out as Mike if David runs into trouble with his hand.”

She gasped. “Is it bad?”

He nodded solemnly. “He shouldn’t be losing his head about you.”

Oh, dear. Did everyone know their business?

“I don’t mean that in a negative way,” he said. “I mean he should know your feelings for him won’t fade, no matter Luc’s attempts to woo you.”

The referee made the boys turn their positions, and he did a few hand signals, and the crowd cheered.

“I’ll intercept Luc for a moment so you can wish David good luck,” Mr. Prince said, letting go of her and clapping Luc on the back.

Jane shyly walked closer to David, surprised his teammates all nodded to her and sorta blocked the crowd’s view of them. “I didn’t know you could dance.”

He pulled his helmet off. His hair was already sweaty, and that made her want to run her fingers through it even more. “That was just me being head Captain.”

“You had me screaming like a girl,” she said stupidly.

“Kinda one of my favorite things about you.” He chuckled, grabbing her hand, the one she’d written his name with Ryder’s and Tercero’s. “I love this as much as I love you wearing my jersey.”

“I just wanted you to know I was thinking of all of you.”

There was a flash of jealousy in his eyes, but he didn’t act like a caveman this time. “I’m happy I’m included.”

Jeez, she didn’t think she was going to be able to stay mad at him. He was hurting as much as she was. “You’re definitely included,” she said, warmed by the way his eyes lit up with happiness. “I’m cheering for you tonight.”

“Then I’ll play my best for you.” His thumb slid over her wrist. “I promise we’ll talk, okay?”

“I know.” She reached up to touch his lips. She’d wanted to do that for so long. “I’d kiss you right now if it wouldn’t cause the audience’s and your dad’s heads to explode.”

The smile David wore dropped. “What did he do?”

She was so dumb. “Don’t worry about it. Focus on the game.”

He nodded, grabbing her hand and turning it to kiss his name on her wrist. “Call Ryder if Luc tries anything. Or Tercero.”

Gareth smacked David’s shoulders. “Cameras are back on us, bro.”

David nodded, letting her go.

She pointed at his hand. “You better not be more broken when this game is over.”

He gave her the David Leodegrance panty-dropping smile and pulled his helmet back on. “Depends on what my punishment is.”

Savaş laughed loudly, shoving David away from her. “Time to go, lover boy.”

Archer walked by her, pinching her cheek. “She’s all red.”

David winked at her before jogging away with them.

“You actually managed to use my old coach as a diversion to get alone time with him?” Luc asked, taking her hand and leading her off the field.

“It wasn’t my idea.” She grinned at Mr. Prince. “He’s looking for a win tonight, and I guess I’m a distraction.”

“You are *the* distraction.” Luc shook his head at her as they passed Ryder. “If you go and kiss my brother, I am going to be upset, Jane.”

She sighed, hugging Luc’s arm and even gave him a kiss on the shoulder. “There. You’re not the one playing, but you got the kiss. Feel better?”

“Not entirely.” He smirked down at her. “A smile from you, however ...”

Jane felt that strange flutter of warmth he’d made her feel in the car, and she smiled up at him.

He took it in entirely. “Better.”

It was one of the most soothing things she’d ever felt; not nearly as warming as David or Ryder’s sweet moments, but in a different way, he made her feel like she was cherished. Which is why it felt right to lean her head on his arm as he took her toward the reserved seats.

Her phone vibrated, and she pulled it out as Luc shook hands with a few people around them.

Ryder Cuteson: I want extra lovin’ for that burn, babe.

She giggled but then remembered Ryder had lost his virginity with her, and he’d said nothing. It made her sad she hadn’t even had time to cherish it. She hadn’t had time to cherish any of her experiences with her boys. But she promised she would. She would make sure Ryder knew how much he meant to her, especially giving him her first and taking his. *Maybe not extra since I don’t know how to do it yet, but would cock kisses soothe that burn?*

Jane peeked over, seeing her bad boy spin around, his eyes wide before he quickly replied.

Ryder Cuteson: A blowjob?

Ryder Cuteson: Fuck blowjobs. I want cock kisses.

She smiled quickly responding with a kiss emoji because she was so stupid. Why didn't she just say blowjob?

Well, it was too late; Ryder Godson was going to get the best cock kisses ever.

“Jane?”

She nearly dropped her phone when her mom's face bent down just inches from her. “Mom?”

“I forgot to tell you I was going to make the game.” She noticed the jersey Jane wore. “Oh, good, David asked you to wear his jersey. I was worried he'd be the star with no number one girl.”

“Uh.” Jane darted her eyes to David. He was too busy now, but she saw Ryder watching, and he was pointing at Luc. “Oh, Mom, you remember Luc, right?”

Her mom glanced at Luc, and she actually blushed. “Oh, hello. I didn't know you were coming here together.”

“A pleasure to see you again, Mrs. Leodegrance,” Luc said, reaching to shake her mother's hand.

“Yes, you as well.” Her mother shook his hand, and her face reddened even more. “All these years with you boys next door, and we hardly know you.”

Luc nodded. “Yes, we should change that.”

“That would be wonderful. I know David isn't close to your brothers, but he seems to be getting on with them tonight.”

“*Hm,*” was Luc's reply before he took Jane's hand. No, he took her phone, and slid it into her pocket. “Will your husband be here tonight?”

“Yes.” Jane’s mom went to sit at Luc’s other side, and she pointed at the field. “He said he had to speak to David. He’s really on his case lately. I think he’s just hoping David won’t blow his chances.”

“He’s a talented player,” Luc commented.

“I think so too,” her mom gushed. “You know, I always imagined Jane winding up with one of your brothers or even David when they became such good friends, but I’m so happy to see her here with you.”

Jane needed help picking her jaw off the floor. Did her mother just jump to that subject like it was no big deal? Did she just admit she’d even envisioned her settling down with David? Okay, maybe not getting married, but her mother had thought about David that way with her and still decided it was a good idea to get married without checking if they were more than friends?

“Yes, the ‘girl next door’ is always tempting,” Luc said, a teasing smile on his lips as he placed a hand on her thigh. “I’m lucky they showed no interest in her.”

Jane’s mom was bobbing her head along, fully onboard with Luc. “Imagine how awkward that would be.”

“Quite awkward, I’d imagine.” Luc was surely going to laugh, but he was fine entertaining her mother. They talked about his business, his donations, and the scholarship fund. It wouldn’t surprise Jane to see her mom coming up with ideas to sell her off to Luc.

“You know,” her mom whispered, “David has struggled to get himself a girlfriend. Did you have that problem when you were in school? Do you think it’s just his focus? Or should we worry he has a problem?”

“Mom,” Jane snapped, “David doesn’t have a problem getting girls. Leave him alone.”

Her mom’s brown eyes were wide, and her face flushed. Now Jane knew where she got her blushing from.

Luc squeezed Jane’s leg and spoke calmly to her mother, “I don’t believe your stepson is struggling in the girl

department, but he may find it difficult to go after true love. It's nothing to worry about."

Jane sighed, turning her focus to David. Whatever Kingston was saying was pissing him off, and she could see his teammates and coaches were about to interfere.

Kingston poked David's chest hard, and her heart sprinted when David smacked his hand down.

One of the coaches called for David, and Ryder pushed David away from her stepdad. Now, Kingston said something to Ryder, and before David could leave, he turned to hold Ryder in place and snapped a sharp reply at his father.

"Oh, dear," her mother whispered. "Kingston said something about Ryder and Jane on the way over here. I think he's being a protective father."

Jane tore her eyes from the scene on the sidelines to glare at her mom. "He's not my dad."

Luc squeezed her leg again, but he rubbed it too as he talked to her mother. "I believe your husband was upset with Jane and my brother."

"Whatever for? Isn't she tutoring him?"

God, her mother was clueless.

"Yes, but you see, Jane wanted my attention. She asked my brother to help her get it."

Jane gaped at Luc. What the hell was he doing?

Now, her mom focused on her neck, shaking her head disappointedly. "Jane, you were raised better than that."

"Yes, I got onto her," Luc said, turning toward Jane. "Didn't I?"

What was she supposed to say? Was she supposed to forget things with Ryder, David, and Tercero?

He slid his hand a tiny bit higher on her leg. "I told you there was no need to be a silly girl to get my attention, and you would behave around my brothers from now on."

Jane stared at him, wondering what his angle was. If she blurted she was kinda with Ryder, her mom would put a stop to it. To them, Ryder was probably a bad boy, just like she'd always thought—therefore unsuitable for her. With him leaving hickeys, since they didn't know one was from David, she'd be called a reckless teen and Ryder would be the boy taking her down the wrong path. But her mom clearly liked Luc. Was he letting her use him?

“Jane?” Her mom waited.

“Yes,” she said through gritted teeth. “I guess I just didn't know how to do the whole dating—”

“Boyfriend,” Luc cut her off, turning to her mom once more. “She explained she'd never had a boyfriend and how David scared away the boys all these years. I assure you she won't behave like that anymore.”

Sarah Leodegrance bought it, and she welcomed Luc with open arms. “I'm so glad she's found such a mature boyfriend. Just take good care of her. I'll cool Kingston off, and he'll see that David gives you no problems.”

“I'm sure he won't.” Luc managed to grab Jane's hand, and she teared up when he tugged the sleeve down to hide her heart.

It was on the tip of her tongue to shout Luc was full of shit, that Ryder and David had given her these hickeys, that Ryder had fucked her good in his car, that she was dying for more, then he and David had sent Tercero to satisfy her for them. She'd always been repulsed by the idea of a guy going down on her, but that boy knew what to do, and he made her feel so damn special, she just hoped she could find a way to make him feel just as special. Not to mention, she wanted to kiss David until they'd fully forgiven each other.

Jane couldn't say any of that, though. Not without her mother flipping her shit, not with Kingston walking closer, already glaring at Luc.

Luc leaned closer, whispering in her ear, “David wasn't a fool, Jane. You will be ripped away from all of us if they find

out. But if you are mine, your stepfather can do little because I've already won over your mother."

"Ryder would've been able to win her over," she said, wanting to run down to her boys. She could feel Ryder watching her, as weird as that was. Her phone was vibrating nonstop. "I have to respond to him or he's going to come over here."

"Then inform him of our relationship and that I will be bringing you to the house tonight, where he and David can hear the details."

"And say goodbye to me?" She tried to push him away.

He kissed her temple. "Are you not a queen, Jane?"

Jane turned toward him, but she didn't know what to say.

A faint twitch at the corner of his mouth showed all the emotion she needed from him. He was pushing her again. "Be a queen," he said softly, then he closed her hand around her phone and turned to greet her stepfather.

Jane barely heard her mother chiding Kingston before she gushed about how Luc was going to take care of her. Luc wasn't backing down from her stepdad's glare and disapproval.

"I hardly think this is the place to discuss my intentions with your stepdaughter, Mr. Leodegrance. I intend to finish the evening I have promised Jane. It was one your wife consented to, I might add."

Kingston looked like a bull ready to charge, his nostrils flaring as her mother confirmed Luc's statement, which obviously was a lie because her mom didn't know she'd still be with Luc. "You don't fool me, boy, and you can stop with your pompous way of talking. You are a boy to me."

"Kingston," her mom admonished. "He's a respectful young man, and he's our daughter's boyfriend. She made a mistake with the younger boy, but Luc is helping her learn right from wrong."

Jane wanted to laugh at the whole situation, but she tuned them out and opened her messages.

Ryder Cuteson: He thinks David let me fuck you.

Ryder Cuteson: And he forbids me from seeing you.

Ryder Cuteson: He doesn't know about Tercero or David.

Ryder Cuteson: We'll fix this, babe.

She smiled, knowing he and David were really finding a way to get along, to work together. It was going to be hard to tell them Luc was taking control of the situation, but she honestly didn't know how any other approach would work out. So, she told him: *Luc won my mom over. He told her he's my boyfriend.*

Ryder Cuteson: Tf he is.

Ryder Cuteson: We'll figure something out. Don't go along with this.

I don't know what to do.

David was right about Kingston.

He's going to take me away.

Ryder Cuteson: Babe, I'll knock your stepdad's old ass out if he tries.

She chuckled, shaking her head: *No fighting stepdads.*

Ryder Cuteson: I'll fight everyone for you.

Ugh, he was such a cute mean boy.

Luc said he's taking me to your house tonight and we can talk.

Ryder Cuteson: Don't let him manipulate you.

Jane looked over at him, sighing because she really thought going public with Ryder was possible. But she didn't know what he wanted with her.

Ryder Cuteson: I can apologize for the hickeys. I can do the whole supervised dates. Door stays open. Just not Luc.

You're really the cutest

Ryder Cuteson: Focus, babe.

She sighed, glancing at Luc. He was telling her stepdad he'd be talking to Ryder and would have no problem informing Gabriel, their eldest brother who had gone to Europe, all about it. Luc was smooth, and she could already see the argument Kingston was ready to deliver dying out. Not that the man was happy, but her mom was already on board with Luc, the boyfriend.

I don't want him ruining David's game, she texted. After we talk, we'll figure out how to do everything.

Ryder Cuteson: But his girlfriend?

Jane wanted to hug him. *Well, he's the only one who sorta mentioned he's my boyfriend.*

Ryder Cuteson: Babe I'll be your husband.

She laughed, covering her mouth and hiding her phone. At least Jane could see him smiling now.

Ryder Cuteson: Alright, he's boyfriend for the game. We'll talk about who gets to be your boyfriend tonight.

How did you manage to make me like you so much?

Ryder Cuteson: Lucky I guess.

Ryder Cuteson: I'm gonna be your boyfriend btw.

This boy was melting her heart. *Your confidence is sexy and cute.*

Ryder Cuteson: I know.

Ryder Cuteson: Gotta go.

Ryder Cuteson: See you after the game.

She sent a kiss emoji before hiding her phone when Kingston raised his voice.

“She’s coming home tonight,” he was telling her mother before the National Anthem played. “She doesn’t get to misbehave and stay out with boys all night.”

Luc held Jane’s hand through the song, acting as if he wasn’t standing right beside her mother and stepfather as they

quietly argued with each other.

“Not exactly a fitting first date for king and queen,” she whispered, leaning her head on his shoulder when the song ended.

He shifted as he put an arm behind her and kissed the top of her head. “I don’t know—it’s rather interesting to be on the receiving end of a father’s wrath.”

“Stepfather,” she mumbled, frustrated that she could somehow feel comfortable with Luc moments after thinking the world of Ryder as he’d made it clear he wanted to be her boyfriend.

“Still, it reminds me some things are not easily obtained just because I have money, status, and power. And those with less power can deny me my desires.”

“Clearly, fame isn’t everything.” She grinned up at him.

“Are you Professor Snape-ing me?” he asked, chuckling.

Jane reached up and pinched his cheek. “I can’t believe it—Luc Godson is a Potterhead.”

“So are you.” He smirked down at her. “Yes, I saw you reading the books on your porch one evening, and I wanted to know why you smiled and cried. They’re masterfully written.”

She groaned. “Stop making me like you.”

He merely tightened his arm around her shoulders. Even if she felt Ryder was the one who had a chance at being her boyfriend, it was nice to just experience having one. She’d given up on the idea of a boyfriend when her mom got married, and things with Ryder and Tercero were still so new and neither one had been able to be a public boyfriend yet.

So, feeling guilty, Jane still enjoyed being a girlfriend with her boyfriend on a Friday night. “Do you like your brothers?” she asked Luc quietly.

“Not really.” That damn smirk was on his lips again.

“You’re such a prick.” She closed her eyes as the game prepared to start.

“Do you normally watch the game with your eyes closed?”
His lips were at her hairline, not kissing, just there.

“No.” She resumed her focus on the field. “I’m praying for my heart and soul.”

“Because you feel I will destroy them?”

For the first time, Jane looked away at kickoff, and she peered up at Luc’s handsome face. He was giving her all his attention. “I’m afraid you’re going to make me really like you and make it even harder for me when I have to choose between all of you.”

He was quiet, not reacting to the cheers in the crowd. “I only said you’re mine when you’re with me, Jane. Not that you had to choose.”

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TWELVE

Jane cheered as David stood after tackling one of the players from Helldonna. It was one of the captains; the one who had caught David's behavior around her. There had been a lot of tension between the two of them all night. Thankfully, the Warriors were up by seven points with a score of fourteen to seven. While both teams had excellent offenses, it was their defenses that killed, and David was just keeping the Warriors on top, but it was clear they were missing Ryder.

"He's going to wind up with a personal foul or a broken hand," Luc muttered, leaning back and pulling her with him.

David shoved the player, and Jane saw it; he was favoring his hand, but he was still playing aggressive. Luckily, Lance Grimm guided David away, as did a few other players, from the guy he had looked ready to punch.

"Do you know who that player is?" she asked Luc.

"Just another *Devil* wanting to make a name for himself." He casually twirled a lock of her hair. "I've heard he talks a lot on the field. Whatever he's saying down there is getting to David."

"Mind me asking Ryder what's up?" She pouted her lips at him.

"Pouting doesn't work on me, Jane." Luc watched her and sighed when she smiled. "I never should've told you your smile is my weakness."

Jane chuckled, pulling her phone from her pocket. "Oh, you like me getting my way."

He pressed a kiss to her head and whispered, “I love watching you get your way, but I would like to occasionally get mine.”

Damn butterflies in her stomach. She peeked at the field and the monitor to make sure they weren’t being recorded before turning and kissing him.

Luc didn’t let her keep it short and sweet. He turned enough to block her mother’s view and cupped her cheek, then he gave her a kiss that made her feel like royalty.

It was the kind of kiss that looked good enough for movies, tasteful but holy hell it was so hot that she was gasping by the time he ended it.

“See,” he murmured, brushing his lips against hers one more time, “being mine feels good.”

“Yeah.” She blinked up at him, feeling a little drunk.

Luc smirked, lowering his hand. “Text your boys.”

“Oh.” Jane shook her head, focusing on the sidelines. David was there, and he and Ryder were looking her way. “Shit.”

A chuckle rumbled in Luc’s chest, but he didn’t say anything as she sent Ryder a text.

Please don’t be mad.

David snatched the phone from Ryder, and she watched him ignore the coach calling him as he angrily responded.

Ryder Cuteson: Baby, I’m barely keeping my head.

Ryder Cuteson: And I look up and see that.

I’m sorry.

He said I’m his when we’re out.

David stared up at the stands, and a bead of sweat rolled down her spine under his dark gaze.

Ryder took the phone from him, reading and shaking his head before she saw him texting her back. *Ryder Cuteson: Babe, don’t say that shit to him.*

She pressed her trembling lips together, moving to the edge of the seat so she wasn't nuzzled under Luc's arm like she'd been most of the night. It was always going to come back to this, back to feeling guilty because she couldn't choose or push away a guy who could treat her like a girlfriend.

All she wanted was to make her own choices and have experiences she'd denied herself for years. She wanted to listen to her heart, but she knew that it was just as torn as she was. The only way to figure out who she wanted, was to be around them, wasn't it?

The real reason she was panicking, unable to choose, was what it really came down to; once she picked one of them, she'd never be able to pick again. The others would move on, and she'd have to pray things worked out with her.

Ryder Cuteson: I'm sorry, angel.

I'm sorry I'm a stupid whore.

Ryder Cuteson: You're not a stupid whore.

Ryder Cuteson: Just hold off on things with Luc until we can talk to you.

Okay. She hid her phone between her legs when Kingston started talking to Luc.

Ryder Cuteson: I can feel your sweet heart crying, babe.

Jane smiled sadly, still hiding her phone as she replied: *I would go kiss both of you right now and shout for Tercero to come join us if it didn't mean I'd be locked away.*

Ryder Cuteson: I told him that

David jogged away, shaking his hand out as Jane texted: *What's going on with him?*

Ryder Cuteson: Dylan is goading him about you.

Ryder Cuteson: The guy he almost hit.

What's he saying?

Ryder Cuteson: Asking how badly it hurts to watch you with Luc.

Ryder Cuteson: Bringing up our sex.

Ryder Cuteson: He must know someone at our school.

Ryder Cuteson: Someone who knows David's been hard up for you.

Jane hung her head, sighing. Poor David. He was really trying, and no one was going to let them have it easy. Then she was making it a million times harder by being with Luc in front of the world.

Ryder Cuteson: He can handle it, babe.

Ryder Cuteson: Just keep the kisses private.

Jane understood where they were coming from, but they didn't get what it was like for her: *It just feels nice to finally have a boyfriend.*

His head lifted from staring at his phone, and she got lost for a while, knowing Ryder would be the perfect boyfriend.

I've wanted a boyfriend to love me.

If it was simple, it would be you.

But it's hard.

And Luc's the one here now.

Instead of replying, he pocketed his phone and walked down the sidelines. All she could do to hide the excruciating carving of her heart was press a hand to her chest and look away from Luc and her mother.

Why had she said any of that? Ryder had feelings for her—had had them for a long time. He was being told he couldn't see her by her stepdad and now she was saying his older brother was there when it had been Ryder who'd been there all along.

As she began to fall down the hole of self-loathing, she spotted Tercero in the crowd. He was sitting five rows behind them but closer to the end of the field. He made a little 'come here' motion with his head, and she nodded, only realizing now she was crying. Damn it all, she was such a crybaby.

She wiped her tears away and turned to Luc. “Hey, I’m gonna run to the restroom.”

He caressed her cheek, frowning. “Do you want me to walk you down?”

“No.” She stood, fixing her hair to show off his name. At least she would make him happy. “I’ll be back.”

It took her a little while to squeeze by the row of spectators, but when she did, Jane spotted Tercero waiting at the top of the stadium. He did another little incline with his head for her to follow him, and she did.

Out of the guys her heart was trying to sort through, Tercero was the one she knew would understand and not judge her. It was unfair to expect him to make her feel better, but she was stressing out.

It was a million times worse to live out her drama in front of others. Jane lowered her gaze as several of her classmates whispered while pointing at her. Some just watched, while others wore judgment plain as day on their faces—she was a whore. It might’ve been easy to act like she didn’t care what anyone thought, but she did. She just desperately wished she didn’t.

She was so busy pondering her dumb choices, she didn’t realize she’d walked all the way to the restrooms near the exit gate.

A hand closed around her wrist and she was gently pulled into the shadows, but she didn’t scream. “*Tesoro*, you must really pay attention.” Tercero pulled her head to his chest. “I could’ve been a kidnapper.”

Jane didn’t hesitate to wrap her arms around his narrow waist. He smelled like honey and sunshine—like leather and cologne, which crazily enough, was the mixture of David and Ryder. “Do you steal Ryder’s and David’s clothes and rub them on yourself?”

He ran his fingers through her hair as he stepped farther behind the building. “Absolutely not. You’re trembling.”

“Sad,” she mumbled, tightening her arms around him. “I like Luc.”

Tercero chuckled, his hand sliding up to cradle the back of her head. He gently tugged her hair so she’d look up at him. “You develop feelings unnaturally fast.”

Her frown deepened along with the ache in her chest. “I can’t help it. It’s like I don’t have control over my heart at all now. I don’t want to choose wrong, to miss out, and I just want more than I should.”

He lightly massaged her head as he studied her face. It was like looking at Ryder but not. They were very different, she decided, and not just the fact that Ryder was gorgeously tanned with hypnotizing emerald eyes while Tercero’s black eyes were like a deep abyss brought out by his pale skin. He had a faint quirk that was always in the corner of his mouth, like he always found something amusing about her. And the softness of his gaze was different. Ryder’s was absolute adoration, but Tercero’s was full understanding of being without.

In a way, Jane didn’t think Ryder knew loneliness, abandonment. It was just something he didn’t allow himself or that he couldn’t process. But Tercero, he knew how it felt to have your greatest desires right in front of you yet impossible to touch.

“Ryder’s mad at me,” she whispered, wondering if Tercero’s resemblance would make her comment hurt more. It didn’t. It was instantly like being reassured she wasn’t hated. “I told him I’ve always wanted a boyfriend and Luc was the one here.”

“There is nothing you can do that will truly turn my brother on you. He probably knows you’re conflicted, and he’s stopping himself from marching up and showing everyone he wants to be your boyfriend.”

What he said made her heart tingle as much as it made her want to cry. “I don’t know what to do.” She listened as the announcer said David’s name, and breathed out, relieved that he had simply made a tackle that resulted in a turnover.

“Everything’s happening so fast. One day Ryder was a jerk and David was just the stepbrother I was trying to hide my feelings for, and you were usually so stealthily absent from view, and Luc, God, I haven’t had a crush on him since I was a little girl—and now all of you are here and wonderful, but there are so many obstacles. I just like feeling cared for, and I want to care for all of you. But what can really go on now? Am I going to ask you, David, Ryder, *and* Luc to all be my boyfriends?”

That little quirk of his lips twitched. “Luc and I have slipped into the equation?”

“Yeah.” She frowned at him. “Why? You don’t want to be my boyfriend?”

He chuckled, pressing a sweet kiss on her forehead. “I just didn’t think I was to be considered alongside Ryder and David.”

“Oh.” She leaned forward, hugging him. He was a lot stronger than she ever gave him credit for. He was lean, but really, so was Ryder. Only Ryder’s strength stood out and Tercero was pleasantly fit under all his clothes. Not that he’d let her see him; he’d stayed completely clothed when he went down on her earlier, and he made excuses to leave before she could fully reciprocate, but she felt him against her now and the few times he’d pressed his body down on hers. He was glorious, for sure. “You’re definitely considered. I’m just lousy at showing you.”

“If this is you not showing me, you’re not lousy.” His lips were on her head now, and he was caressing the nape of her neck, occasionally applying more pressure exactly where she felt the tension. “Try not to stress yourself. Just continue being honest about your feelings. If you’re torn between all of us, tell us how you’d like to figure things out and leave it up to us to decide if we want to wait around.”

“You mean be strung along,” she mumbled, feeling drowsy under his touch.

“I’ve been strung along before, Jane.” He kissed her head. “This is not how it feels.”

“Even if I want to do things with each of you?” She was afraid to look at him, but she counted on his response to help her build up her confidence again. “It’s just, I’ve never experienced anything before. I kinda crave more—like I can’t get enough, and I want to see what you’re all like with me. I don’t want to look back and wonder, you know?”

“Yes, I know what you mean. Personally, I am not interested in sharing a woman, but you’re not just any girl to me. Nor are you for the others.” He dragged a hand down her back, making her sigh out in bliss. “I’m actually curious to see just how satisfied my brothers and David can make you.” His tone changed, his voice dripping with lust. “I’m curious if we make you moan the same as you did with me—if you tremble so when one of them tastes you. I’m curious to know if you’d allow yourself a chance to feel everything at once.”

“I think that’s enough,” came Luc’s calm voice.

Jane spun around, leaning against Tercero for protection. “We were just talking.”

“I heard.” Luc barely glanced at Tercero as he held his hand out for her. “Did you use the restroom already? Or was that only an excuse to run off with my little brother?”

“I—”

Tercero kissed the top of her head. “Don’t be afraid of him. He won’t hurt you.”

Luc’s jaw tightened, and he exhaled loudly through his nose. “Since she has included you in this, brother, make sure you’re at home tonight. We’ll discuss everything there.”

“She’s overwhelmed,” Tercero said, gently pushing her to Luc. “Stop ‘pissing on her’ in front of them. You know they’re both sensitive for different reasons, and she wants to be with them. So enough.”

Jane darted her eyes between them. She hadn’t expected Tercero to be so dominant, especially around his big brother.

Luc went quiet as he tucked her against his side, observing Tercero in a calculating way. “Do you plan to tell the others

‘enough’ when they have their moments with her? Will you tell yourself enough when she is supposed to be with me?”

Tercero dropped his eyes to her, reading her. He knew she wanted affection, and he didn’t want to rob her of it. “She wants your attention, brother, but there are ways to be discreet around the others. Give her time to talk to them first.”

“Thanks, Tercero,” she whispered, relieved because he was reminding her that she was the one in charge of her love life. She just had to do what was necessary to make things work and make sure she had a plan to deal with her stepdad and mom. Jane moved a bit away from Luc, but she smiled up at him. “I want to hold off on being too cozy with you, even if I love it.”

He straightened as irritation flashed in his eyes, but he nodded. “If that’s what you want.”

Gosh, how she already wanted to take it back and just be glued to his side as he showed her off, but she pushed down her girly wish to finally have a boyfriend. She didn’t consider him her boyfriend, even if she felt drawn to him, so it wasn’t right. Not when Ryder was who she thought of as a boyfriend, and not when David was still the guy who she’d always wanted to be her boyfriend. And definitely not when Tercero was also winning over her heart. “For now, it has to be this way. When the game ends, I’m going to run down to David and Ryder. I want to reassure them my feelings for them haven’t changed, but I’ll leave with you.”

“Do you plan on making me look like a fool?” He wasn’t smiling as he held his hand out for her.

“I don’t see how me hugging my stepbrother makes you look foolish,” she said, gripping his hand.

Tercero walked past them, chuckling as Luc pinched the bridge of his nose.

“Jane, your stepbrother wants to fuck you.” He lowered his hand. “You want him to fuck you. The entire student body and some of the staff know all this. The only clueless individuals are your parents, and you want to run up to David after he

wins his first game as the star, and you expect him not to make it clear he's the one who has won your heart?"

"Well, I know David. He won't mess up in front of everyone. And he knows I'm thinking about more than him." She gave Luc her best smile. "I'm not stupid—this will eventually come out, but it's not coming out tonight."

Luc sighed, but he didn't say anything to put her down or boss her around. She secretly loved he was arrogant and almost old fashioned than any guy she'd even been around, but she wasn't going to let him take her boys away.

"I think it's best we watch the rest of the game from the sidelines," Luc murmured, guiding her the opposite direction Jane had planned. "Otherwise your stepfather will make an excuse to take you home with them."

"Ugh." Jane had no idea how she was going to work things out. It was a good thing David hid everything because she realized now, Kingston would stop everything. "How are we gonna get onto the field?"

He cut her a quick glance. "Do you think they're going to tell me to go back to my seat?"

"Forgot I was in the presence of a king." She beamed up at him, awed that officers greeted Luc with a nod before opening the gate to the field.

"You tend to forget some of the most important details, my queen." He smirked down at her. "Behave around my brother now," he said as they approached where Ryder stood.

Jane tingled as she watched him frowning at his phone, then turning to scan the bleachers. Her cute, mean boy was worried. So, she gave Luc a look, respecting him as her 'boyfriend' for the evening but pleading that she give her bad boy some attention.

He squeezed her hand. "Did you not just boss me around with your terms?"

She felt warmth all the way to her toes. "Thank you, Luc."

He nodded, walking her closer to Ryder until they were right beside him.

Ryder was still checking his phone when she brushed up against him. He looked almost annoyed someone was beside him until she said, “Close game, huh?”

Her bad boy took her in quickly, barely darting his attention to Luc before focusing on her again. “Like you’ve been staring at anything other than my ass.”

She giggled, nudging him a bit. “Um, I was staring at David’s, wondering if your handprint is visible.”

Ryder grinned, pocketing his phone but at the same time, he snuck a little squeeze of her fingers with a free hand before crossing his arms. “Papi is gonna be sore for days.”

“You did not just call him Papi,” Luc chastised.

Ryder glared at him. “Shut the fuck up, bitch. I’m not thrilled about you claiming our girl in front of the damn world.”

Jane’s heart skipped a beat at the words ‘our girl’, and she moved enough to gain Ryder’s focus. “Hey, he was trying to help.”

Twin emerald infernos fell on her. “Babe, you’re not dumb. You know he’s looking to gain from this.”

It was nice he was saying he thought she was smart, but she needed him to cool off. “You don’t have to worry then, do you?”

Ryder searched her face like he had seen it a thousand times before but never tired of her. “You don’t care if he’s using you?”

“If it weren’t for him, I wouldn’t be down here—I wouldn’t be seeing you tonight.” She shifted her eyes toward the stands. “I think I’d already be grounded because I had sex with you. You’re the one Kingston is worried about corrupting me.” She bit her lip for a second, sighing when he stared at the action with narrowed eyes, his hand twitching like he was considering touching them. So, she grinned. “Kingston always

told me you were watching me, and he knew I was watching you. Not Luc.”

It made her sad to say that with Luc right there, but Ryder was hurting, and bad boys hurting were never a good thing.

The tension in Ryder’s posture eased. “Next time, I want to see you in my jersey,” was all he said, though, then he turned away to watch the game.

Jane took his words as a good sign, but he still wasn’t happy. She’d have to make everything up to him before the night was over. She was still sad about not getting to embrace her first time with him.

Whistles blew, and shouts rang out. Jane couldn’t see a damn thing because players and coaches kept pacing in front of her. It got so loud, she barely heard Luc and Ryder discussing something, other than making out David’s name.

“What happened?” she asked, peeking at the monitor. It showed David on the ground after a tackle, but a player from the other team stomped on his hand. She gasped, looking up at Ryder. “Is he okay?”

Ryder shrugged a shoulder. “Dumbass should’ve gotten up faster.”

Like she’d always done in the past, she bristled, ready to defend David, but she held her tongue. They were football players after all.

“Winters, take Mike,” Coach Knight yelled. “Lykos, take his spot.”

Jane squeezed closer to Ryder, but Luc pulled her against his side.

“Don’t forget you are being watched,” he said, fixing his grip on her waist as David walked toward the sidelines with the trainer.

Everything in her screamed to run to David. His hand was dripping blood, and his eyes looked wild. It was easy to forget David was aggressive as hell. She always made him out to be perfect and sweet, and she’d blinded herself from the painful

things he was doing, but the guy cussing up a storm because he couldn't go kill the player who stomped on his hand—that was the David she forgot existed.

Ryder laughed, glancing down at her. “He’s not going to come to the house, babe. They’ll make him go to the hospital.”

“Oh, gosh, is it broken?” She couldn't tear her eyes away from him as the trainers cut his glove off. “Is he telling them to let him play?”

“Probably.” Ryder winked at her. “I’ll be back.”

All she could do was stand with Luc as Ryder went to inspect the damage. David greeted him with a middle finger, but Ryder didn't seem bothered by it. She still couldn't believe they were getting along. Well ... David smacked Ryder's hand off his shoulder, and Ryder shoved him back as the trainers yelled for them to stop.

“Children,” Luc said bored.

She ignored his jab, her full focus on David, who was now looking her way. He was sweaty, a ruddy color flushing his cheeks, and his blue eyes hardly visible. There was even steam rising from him as he breathed heavily, listening to the coaches and Ryder. He looked like a monster.

The sexiest monster alive.

‘Are you okay?’ she mouthed to him.

He nodded once, his eyes flicking to Luc then to her again. ‘Love you,’ he mouthed back.

Now she felt like a lovesick fool. How could he think to tell her that while blood was dripping from his hand and the trainers were painfully taping it closed?

“I something you,” she whispered, knowing he'd read her lips.

He smiled, then turned to his coach and grabbed his helmet to head back in.

Luc exhaled loudly, turning her a bit so she wasn't gawking at David.

“Sorry,” she muttered, patting his stomach on instinct.

He didn’t look down at her; he kept his eyes on the field, but he said, “You complicate quite a lot, Jane.”

“Well, you don’t have to shield me,” she said just as he moved in front of her, catching the football that had been thrown out of bounds.

“You were saying?” He smirked at her before launching the football all the way to the referee standing at the center of the field. The crowd went wild.

“Thank you.” There was no point denying it—she needed him to cover for her, and if he was willing to help her with Kingston and her mom, she was going to let him.

He put an arm over her shoulder as people clapped after seeing him ‘in action’. “Just smile for me.”

A sad one came to her face, and she leaned her head against him. “I don’t like liking you.”

“I know,” he said as David jogged onto the field again. “As I said, you complicate things.”

“Then get the fuck away from her,” came Ryder’s dark voice.

It was like someone had thrown a bucket of ice water over her. She even gasped as she turned her head and spotted Ryder giving Luc a deadly look.

Luc removed his arm slowly, but he didn’t block her from Ryder. It was almost as if he knew now was not the time to push Ryder.

“Ryder,” she called him, hoping to dissolve the tension before anyone noticed.

He dropped his gaze down to her. “Babe, you really don’t need to hide behind him. I can handle your stepdad. I can handle David, and I don’t give a fuck if you want Tercero—you can have his ass, but this motherfucker”—he lifted his eyes to Luc’s—“is unwanted and unnecessary. If you’re going to be a fucking complication to anyone, it’s me. And nothing

you do is a complication for me. So, like I said, he can get the fuck away from you.”

She was actually afraid for Luc as she took in Ryder’s intimidating stance across from them. He was already taller than Luc, more muscular, too. But more than that, Ryder could fight—she’d seen him destroy guys bigger than him and even when he was outnumbered, he was the one to walk away. His brothers always kept other teammates from helping him because ‘he could take care of himself’. And she wouldn’t be surprised to see Ryder fight right now, especially with him already pulled from the games.

Jane swallowed, moving to stand in front of Luc. “Ryder, I already told you Luc is helping with my stepdad.”

His gaze narrowed at her. “Are you not hearing me? I can handle your stepdad.”

Luc sighed, moving in front of her. “You’re going to upset her, and I recall you said she’s worth everything to you.”

“Fuck you,” Ryder spat, closer to Luc, making a show of how he was taller and stronger when he tilted his head down. “Where the fuck did you take her for the last twenty minutes?”

Jane gaped at him. He was more hormonal than her during her period.

“She snuck off with Tercero,” Luc said, a definite smile on his face. “She can have his ass. Yes?”

There was a growling sound, then Jane practically felt Ryder leaving. She peeked around Luc, her heart sinking at the sight of his back and him shoving players out of his way.

“The game is almost over, Jane,” Luc said, pulling her to his side again.

She kept watching Ryder; he’d gone as far as he could get without actually leaving the field. Her whole chest felt like it was being crushed. “Fuck,” she said, putting a hand over her heart. Why did she have to make things so hard? Why did she have to like all of them? Why didn’t she try dating like David had? So many *whys*.

Yet again, there wasn't much time to ponder. Jane's attention was pulled to the field where David made a destructive tackle on the guy who'd stomped on his hand. It caused a fumble, and David managed to knock the ball to the newest player to pick up. She screamed, clapping as Jason Winters ran toward their endzone. That's when she spotted the clock. It was the last play, and she'd missed when the Hellhounds had gotten up by a field goal.

"Go, Jason," she cheered as Gareth knocked a player from tackling Jason, and she screamed like a maniac when Jason made it to the endzone, spiking the ball before he was tackled by the rest of their team in celebration.

"I thought you were going to run to him at the end of the game," Luc said, hugging her and brushing a kiss to her temple.

Jane realized the stadium was clearing and students were rushing the field, and she also realized Ryder was walking out.

"Congratulate David, Jane," Luc said, walking onto the field with her. "Then we will leave."

Her excitement and worry were torn between her boys, but when she saw David lifting Jason up and the guys going nuts, she smiled and let go of Luc to run toward him.

It was easier said than done, but Jane managed to lose Luc in the crowd and push through until she was at the pile of players. David was in the center with Jason, but there was no way to reach him.

"Hey, gorgeous," a dark voice purred in her ear.

She jerked, turning to see a player from the other team. It was the guy who had stomped on David's hand. "I'd piss off if I were you, asshole."

He smiled, his dark eyes flicking toward the celebration. "You don't mean that." His hand came around her wrist, and he tugged her close.

"Stop!" She tried to yank away, her eyes searching for Luc or David. Neither were visible with all the ruckus.

“Don’t put up a fuss,” he said, covering her mouth and hugging her like he was her boyfriend. No one was paying attention.

Jane tried to kick and scream, but the crowd was too chaotic. He was taking her toward the exit. Oh, God, what was happening? She knew, but she was crying like a baby. No one was looking.

“Don’t worry—his little cheerleader will keep him busy,” he said, kissing her cheek.

Jane fought, trying to bite his hand, and he only shoved gloved fingers down her throat, gagging her.

“That’s a good girl,” he said, well into the shadows now. “I knew you’d know how to take it deep.”

“Let her go.”

Jane’s heart soared as the guy stopped walking.

There, leaning against the fence in the dark, was her bad boy. Ryder didn’t move away from the fence, just stood there, arms crossed. “And get your goddamn fingers out of her mouth.”

Jane coughed, almost hurling up her dinner when the guy roughly pulled his hand away from her. She was in too much shock to move more than that, but she was aware more people had shown up.

“Aw, fuck,” someone said, the deep, sinful tone somewhat recognizable but no one Jane knew. “Dylan, get the fuck off her—he’s gonna kill you.”

Someone pulled her away from ‘Dylan’, supporting her as she was walked toward Ryder. “Apologies, little queen.”

Jane sobbed, looking up at the player with her. She knew him from the plays he’d made all night—Than Messor. The one who’d spoken earlier was the captain—Alexander Sin. There was another guy beside them—Damon King. All the captains.

Damon King watched her without saying anything, and a humming noise filled Jane’s head as the Sin guy yelled at the

guy who had tried to take her. When Ryder took a step forward, about to go past her before Than could leave her with him, Damon swung, punching the bastard who'd taken her.

Dylan fell like a rock, and Ryder halted when the principal appeared out of nowhere.

“Take Jane, Ryder. He’s not going anywhere,” Mr. Prince said.

Than Messor grabbed Ryder’s arm, holding him in place. “She’s shaken up. We’ll deal with him.”

Ryder was still. Too still. He just stared down at the guy who some other players were now checking on. Again, he looked like he could really kill someone, and she didn’t want to see that.

“Ryder,” she croaked, grabbing her throat. “Please take me away from here.”

He didn’t look away from Dylan. He only blinked after Than moved her in front of him.

“Godson,” Than said firmer. “We’ll deal with him.”

Mr. Prince blocked Ryder’s view. “Jane, do you want the cops to arrest him?”

“Yes,” she whispered, worried the fucker would do it to someone else.

Tingles finally caressed her cheek, and she was pulled into a hug. “I’m here, Sweet Jane.”

She trembled, hugging him tightly as she buried her face against his chest. There was mumbling and some scuffling noises, but Ryder kept her with him, eventually picking her up and holding her like a little girl. He swayed with her, kissing her neck in between questions being fired at them. It was impossible for her to talk at this point, and she briefly registered Luc standing off to the side, watching. Tercero was with him, neither pulling their gazes from Dylan, who was awake now and being led off stadium grounds.

Then she saw David. He was scanning the field after breaking away from the mob still celebrating, the band trying

to surround him as well as the cheerleaders. Her mom was there now, grabbing his hand and inspecting it.

He was having his big moment, and she was going to ruin it with her stupidity for rushing off without Luc. “Ryder, I don’t want to ruin David’s victory.”

“You matter more, babe.” He hugged her tighter. “We need to get your parents, too.”

“They’ll take me away,” she whispered, hugging him.

“I won’t let anyone take you.” He kissed her neck again. “The cops want to question you.”

She shook her head, her heart racing again. “I can’t.”

“You can,” he soothed, turning her and motioning for a cop to follow him. “She’s panicking. It’s probably better if she does this without her parents and stepbrother near.”

Jane gasped when David turned in their direction as the police car’s emergency lights were turned on. “Ryder, they’re going to take me from you.”

He chuckled, carrying her farther away with two cops trailing him. It was strange they obeyed him, but she was freaking out because David and her parents were heading their way.

Ryder sat down on a car hood—a cop car, and he situated her on his lap and made her focus on him. His beautiful smile lit up his face, and she breathed easier. “Babe, you have to know by now ... I’ll follow you wherever you go, and if I have to, I’ll pick your cute ass up and bring you home.”

She hiccupped, staying still as he wiped her tears. Home meant David, and he knew that.

“You’re not ruining anything, and this wasn’t your fault.” He glanced behind her, nodding to whoever was there. “Keep them away until she’s done with her statement.”

“You got it.” It was Mr. Prince, and then it was just Ryder and the two officers.

“This won’t take long, Miss,” the one officer said coming to her side. “Are you fine with this gentleman staying for your statement?”

She nodded, hugging herself to Ryder, comforted by the tingles as he slid a hand under her shirt, the other on her thigh. “Please don’t take him.”

The cop chuckled, shaking his head. “No one is taking him, and the suspect is already being escorted to the station. You won’t have to see him again.”

Ryder kissed her cheek. “Come on, babe, you can do this.”

“People are going to laugh at me—call me a liar,” she blurted, a whole new set of panic taking hold when she saw people pausing to watch where she sat on a cop cruiser with Ryder.

“If you’d like, we can have the principal open one of the buildings,” the cop told them.

Jane felt pathetic and dirty. Her heart wouldn’t stop pounding, and only the feeling of Ryder’s arms around her was keeping her from screaming.

“That’ll take too much time, and he’s keeping the parents away,” Ryder said. “Mind opening the door and letting me sit in the dark with her?”

“Sure.”

Jane squeezed her eyes shut, feeling the urge to spit when she tasted dirt and grass. Ryder merely cradled her head against his shoulder, hiding her face with his hand as he took a seat and let the cop shut them inside the backseat of the police cruiser. The cops were in the front seat shortly after, and the questioning began.

It was hard to look at the cops, but she answered their questions and recounted everything she could remember, all the way to when Ryder and the others arrived, and the Damon player punching Dylan.

“Will she have to do anything else?” Ryder asked.

“We’ll need to photograph her, especially her mouth and if she has any bruising. You guys stopped him from getting her completely, so it’ll be up to a judge or prosecutor how the charges go. I’d say it’s a bad thing he didn’t do more to charge him, but he’s eighteen; he’ll be charged as an adult.”

Jane closed her eyes, exhausted and ready to fall asleep now. She just wanted to curl up with Ryder, curl up with David and make sure he was okay—he was going to be so angry. Luc was going to be mad at her for running off, and Tercero had warned her about being kidnapped not even an hour ago.

“All right,” Ryder told the cops. “But this is it for her tonight. She needs to get out of here.”

“Let me just take some photos.”

Jane felt so violated as they got close to her, finding dirt smudges around her lips and a piece of grass in her mouth. They bagged it, but knowing it was from the game and not Dylan, they’d just have to hope her saliva was present on Dylan’s gloves.

“We can swab her now,” the cop said, pulling out a kit. “They may ask her to do another later, but this is good evidence, even better that you witnessed it.”

“Yeah.” Ryder hugged her as he maneuvered her for the officer to get samples. “Just a little more, babe.”

She bobbed her head, clutching his arm as the officers worked.

“Will you be staying with your girlfriend tonight? She probably needs to have someone with her.”

Ryder kissed the back of her head. “Yeah, she’ll have me.”

The door was yanked open, and David stood there, his eyes wide with fear and rage. “What the fuck happened?”

Ryder only scooted over, motioning for him to get in. “Nah, let him in but keep her parents out,” he said to the cop who had tried to pull David away.

Jane sobbed as David tugged off his jersey and removed his shoulder pads so he could get in.

“Baby, what the hell?” He darted his eyes between her and the cops.

“Hurry the fuck up,” Ryder snapped at him.

David glared at him, but he got in, pulling her to him even though she tried to cling to Ryder.

“Babe, go with him; let me go talk to your parents.” Ryder kissed her head. “It’s David; he’s not going to let anyone get you. He’s not mad at you.”

Heat engulfed her, and David pulled her completely onto his lap. “I’ve got you,” he whispered, kissing her forehead.

She sobbed, clutching his sweaty tank. He was dirty and way too hot, but he smelled like home. “I’m sorry I ruined your moment.”

Ryder leaned up behind her, kissing her shoulder. “Hey, I’m probably gonna blow our cover, babe.”

David pressed his lips to her forehead again, and with Ryder still behind her, his hand sliding down her back as he murmured something to David, she quieted. Her erratic heartbeat slowed, and she sighed, completely content.

“We’ll figure something out,” Ryder told David, and he kissed her shoulder again. “Look, she likes being between us.”

“Uh, boys?” The cop cleared his throat.

“Fuck, man,” Ryder said, leaning away. “We’re calming her down, and you gotta ruin shit.”

A harsh laugh rushed out of her, and she sobbed while laughing as she turned her head toward Ryder. “You and your shits.”

He grinned, leaning forward and kissing her full on the lips with David supporting her and sliding a hand under her shirt. “Fuck, yeah, I can do this,” he said against her mouth.

David squeezed her. “Baby, let him go. Your mom is panicking.”

Ryder snuck in another quick kiss. “Be back, babe. And don’t worry, your mom checks me out all the time. I’m gonna

kill whatever impression Luc left on her.” He winked, moving back as he threw a glare at David. “Easy with our girl, Papi. She’s still drunk on me.”

“Get the fuck out of here,” David said, burying his face against the other side of her neck that Ryder had been kissing.

“Getting the fuck out,” Ryder said, slamming the door behind him.

Jane tilted her head up at David, sighing as he smoothed her hair out of her face. “The plan is fucked.”

“Baby, we’re all for fucking shit up, as long as it’s with you.” He pressed his lips to hers, stealing her breath.

“Damn, kids have really changed since I went to school.”

David stilled. She jerked back, turning to the two cops she’d forgotten about again.

The one who had done all the questioning grinned. “You guys aren’t related, right? ‘Cause that would be weird.”

Jane stared wide-eyed at the cops, certain she had one of those little sweat-drop things going on. “Uh ...”

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THIRTEEN

When Jane imagined Ryder talking to her parents, she never thought that would result in Kingston punching Luc, then Ryder immediately knocking Kingston out. But that's exactly what she and David witnessed from the police cruiser.

It had happened so fast. One moment Kingston was shaking Ryder's hand, then he was glaring at him, then Luc said something, and then *bam, bam*.

Now, she sat in the backseat of Kingston's SUV, with David beside her as they headed to the hospital. David needed his hand checked out, and Kingston was to be examined because he wanted to press charges against Ryder.

David slid his good hand into hers, squeezing it.

She returned the gesture, smiling sadly up at him. Ryder hadn't let it slip about things with David, but he had admitted to Kingston he was seeing her until she could make up her mind between him and Luc.

"Fucking hoodlum," Kingston muttered for the third time. "You're not seeing those boys, Jane."

Her mother was driving, and she shot Jane a worried look but kept her mouth shut.

"Dad," David said, his tone full of respect but challenging, nonetheless.

"Shut your mouth, boy," Kingston growled. "I should beat your ass for letting your sister get passed around like this."

“He’s not my brother,” Jane blurted, her body shaking as she fought the urge to punch Kingston herself. “And they aren’t passing me around! I just can’t choose, and they’re being sweet by giving me time.”

Kingston laughed mockingly. “You really have lost all sense, Jane. They are making a damn fool of you and using you, and your brother—because that’s what David is to you—let those bastard Godson boys turn you into their personal whore.”

David’s body temperature skyrocketed, but he spoke calmly. Well, if calm was a low, deadly voice that didn’t sound at all like David—yeah, he sounded calm. “She’s not their whore, and she hasn’t let them do anything to her.”

Just like David, Kingston’s tone changed into something that was unrecognizable as her stepfather’s normal loving but firm tone said, “You disappoint me, son. Eric would be ashamed of you. I’m ashamed of you.”

Jane’s jaw dropped. Kingston never spoke of her father, and he certainly never said anything close to saying he was ashamed of David. Her dad wouldn’t think so either. “Mom,” was all she could say.

Her mother only pressed her lips together, never turning to even look at Kingston or her.

David, her beautiful David, was silent, his gaze cast down at his feet. Her heart clenched at the sight, and again, Jane wanted to lash out at Kingston. He was never cruel, never this harsh with David. It was all her fault.

No one spoke for the remainder of the drive to the hospital, and Jane knew David was thinking everything through again. Every bad scenario he’d feared was probably consuming him, and she was going to lose him.

Carefully, she intertwined their fingers, peeking at him as he stared down at their hands. It was unfair, and probably never going to work out now. David loved his dad, and he always chose honor over himself. He’d never pick her, and she

knew now she had to let him be honorable David who obeyed his father, who made his father proud.

David looked at her, a range of emotions crossing his handsome face before he opened his mouth. “Dad, I lo—”

“We’re here,” her mom declared loudly, slamming on the breaks.

Jane’s heart thundered in her chest. He was about to say it. He was about to tell his dad he loved her. She couldn’t let him.

“Jane, dear, go with David and help him get checked in. He might need you to fill out some paperwork for him. I’ll be there after I get Kingston situated.”

She didn’t have to be told twice. Yanking the door open, she pulled on David’s arm. “Come on. I have to pee.”

He stared at her then darted his eyes to his dad, hesitating.

“David,” her mother said almost pleadingly. “Go with Jane.”

“Listen to your mother,” Kingston snapped, raising a hand to rub his jaw.

It was on the tip of Jane’s tongue to ask him how it felt to get knocked out by Ryder, but she just wanted to get David away from his dad. “Come on, David,” she said, tugging his arm again.

Slowly, David got out, his posture stiff as he gently pried her hand from his and walked ahead of her into the building.

Her eyes stung with tears, but she shut the car door and followed him. Every step felt like she was heading toward her own destruction. As much as she wanted to fight, she didn’t want to cause David pain. Now she knew how he’d felt all this time. It sucked.

A vibration of her phone in her back pocket thankfully distracted her enough to not break down, and she sighed in relief when it was Tercero calling. “Hey,” she greeted, still following David. For some reason, her mother had dropped them off at the West Wing of the hospital rather than the

emergency, so it would take a while to get where they needed to be.

“Are you okay?” he asked.

“No,” she told him with a pitiful laugh. When David looked over his shoulder at her, she smiled. “It’s Tercero checking on us.”

“Just hang up before he sees you,” was all David said before continuing through the halls.

“Jane?” Tercero called.

“Sorry.” She slowed her steps but kept close enough to David that they didn’t get separated. “Things just aren’t going well.”

“I wanted to go to you,” he murmured. “But I knew it would make the situation harder.”

“Yeah, it would’ve.” She could only imagine the chaos that would have ensued if Kingston learned Tercero was also in the picture, and she had no doubt if Tercero came forward, David would have too. “I saw you, though. I know you were there if I needed you.”

He sighed, and she wondered if that had been wrong to say, but he was talking again, “Have you made it to the hospital?”

“Yeah,” she said as David came to a halt. He didn’t say anything; he just stared up at the ceiling, taking deep breaths before closing his eyes. “Did they take Ryder in?” she asked Tercero.

“Yes.” He chuckled. “The cops were afraid to handcuff him, but he went along. Luc went to the station, but I don’t know if he’ll be able to get him out tonight.”

“Oh.” She hadn’t even thought about Ryder having to stay the night in a jail cell. “He’s seventeen, though.”

“I think Ryder would rather be in jail than juvie.” Tercero chuckled again, but he didn’t sound happy; it was to soothe her.

Jane glanced at David, sighing because he was losing it. “I gotta go. Will you tell them to text me if he comes home?”

“Of course,” he said in that gentle tone of his. “Focus on David and yourself. I’m here if you need me.”

“Okay,” she said, ending the call before he made her cry from his sweetness. Right now, David was her priority. So, she walked closer, wrapping her arms around his waist and kissing his chest before she nuzzled her face there. “Hey, you’re not a disappointment, and my daddy would never be ashamed of you.”

His arms came around her, but he didn’t say anything.

“Don’t tell him, David,” she whispered, ready to cry. “You don’t have to pick me. I see now—you were right.”

His voice was rough, but his touch gentle as he ran his fingers through her hair and tugged, tilting her face up. “Baby, I think I picked you when I was just a little boy playing outside, and I saw the prettiest girl moving in next door.” He smiled, still keeping her head in place as he added, “I was certain you were the girl for me the night you slept in my arms. And today I chose not to let you go as long as you’ll have me.” His thumb slid across her cheek as those blue eyes burned fiercely for her. “I love you. I’m not going to stop loving you.”

She fought to not smile as she covered his hand with hers. Still, everything was against them. “But if you tell your dad, it’ll be you he takes a swing at.”

He nodded, his thumb still stroking her cheek. His skin was hot, but no longer unbearable. It was like he’d figured out the perfect temperature for her. “Ryder and I have a plan ... sort of.”

“Plan?” She pulled his hand down as a few people came into view down the hall. It was only a couple of nurses, relieving her that it wasn’t Kingston and her mom. “You and Ryder?”

David chuckled, wrapping one arm around her and kissing the top of her head. “Yeah.” He leaned away, taking her hand

before leading her on. “I don’t know how it’s going to play out now, but we came to an agreement—if you’re okay with it.”

Already, her mind was on Ryder being stuck in a jail cell and never seeing him again, but no way could she pass up hearing their plan. Honestly, she had no idea how she was going to do things, so if they were getting along and willing to come up with something, she’d consider it. “Well?”

He cringed a bit but said confidently, “He dates you publicly while you figure out, privately, if you prefer me.”

Jane stumbled, but David kept her upright, stopping before he rounded the corner.

“You can say no,” he said softly. “We just thought keeping things with us private would be best—while you figure it out. That way ...” he trailed off.

She knew what he was getting at. “That way if I don’t choose you, no one will judge me.”

A sad smile she’d never seen on his face before appeared. “I see you really like him. Just because you’re it for me doesn’t mean I’m it for you. I don’t want to see you hurt because I’m not what you want, and I don’t want Luc manipulating you. I know Ryder feels strongly for you; I’ll leave it to him to tell you how much, so if I had to watch you walk away from me—I’d be okay if it was him. I just still want a chance.”

She didn’t know what to tell him. She did like Ryder—a lot—but she still loved David. Then there was Tercero. Gosh, that boy did something to her, and Luc had definitely risen to a level she never thought she’d put him on. “God, I’m the worst girl to put up with. I’m really sorry I’m so difficult.”

“I will never put up with you,” he said, a sexy smile back in place. “And you can give me your worst, Jane. I promise from now on I’ll still give you my best.”

A stupid, dreamy smile was surely on her face. “Wow.”

David laughed softly, leaning down and giving her a soft kiss. “I haven’t stunned you in a while,” he murmured, teasing

her with an even lighter kiss. “Let’s go so I don’t lose any chances to see you all drunk on me.”

“I’m not drunk.” She shoved him, her warm lips still stretched into a dopey grin.

“You’re tipsy.” He peeked around the corner. “Fuck, they beat us. We got lost, okay?”

She nodded, her heart sinking because he was letting go of her.

“Just a bit longer, baby.” He caressed her lips. “I don’t want you to get Ryder and me ripped from you in one night.” He searched her face, then added, “I know you’ll have Tercero, but I really want a chance, and I want to see you happy with all of us.”

“I was gonna say something about you two putting him last.” She watched him, waiting to see how he’d react.

He smirked. “I’m alpha, Jane. Throw Luc, Savaş, and Archer in if you want—I’ll still be the one you come home to.”

“Duh, we live together.” She made sure her wristband was hidden just as a smack on her ass made her yelp. Jane stared at him with wide eyes. “David.”

“Jane,” he said seriously. She knew he was teasing her, but he crowded her, making her back bump the wall as he towered over her. “Ryder says your lips are his—I say this ass is mine. I’ll claim your heart, too.”

“Y’all are just carving me up now?” She beamed up at him. “I’m getting some freaky images of you sleeping with my lower half and telling Ryder he can have my head or something.”

“Gross.” The playful David she remembered was back. “I was thinking more when you’re between us, your ass is against me, and you can let him stare at your lips as you tell him how good I make you feel.”

And naughty David was joining the party.

“God, you’re worse than Ryder.” She pressed against his chest, almost moaning at the feel of his muscles.

“Just your David,” he said, moving away from her and walking around the corner. “I’ll behave now.”

Jane sighed, stretching out on the firm sofa against the window. Kingston was being kept overnight for observation, and David hadn’t returned from getting stitches. His hand, thankfully, wasn’t broken, but he needed stitches.

She would’ve preferred to be with David, but her mom had insisted on her staying with Kingston. They were both ignoring each other, which was fine by Jane. If he said anything negative, she was going to tell him she’d seen Ryder punch other guys harder than that.

“Jane?” Kingston’s calm but stern voice felt like a jolt of electricity, and she could barely meet his eyes where he lay in the hospital bed. “If you continue seeing either of those boys, you will be grounded until you move out.”

There wasn’t even a reaction to fit how angry and sad his words made her. All she could do was stare at him, every ounce of love she ever thought she felt from him, gone.

Not a bit of warmth in his tone as he said, “If I catch you so much as saying hi to any of them, you’re going to be restricted to your room—or worse. Do you understand?”

“I understand,” she said through gritted teeth. There was no point talking to him—no point letting him know he was an asshole, that she’d lost all love for him—no point telling him he was too late because she was going to do everything she could to see Ryder again, to spend more time getting to know Luc, definitely Tercero, and David—she was going to find out what him owning her ass meant.

The privacy curtain was suddenly yanked aside, and her mother stood there, her watery eyes shimmering as she stared

at Kingston. “I’m going to take Jane home. I need to get a few hours of sleep, and I’ll come back with a bag.”

“Where’s David?” Kingston asked, motioning for her mother to come closer to him.

“He’s getting his prescription filled. Lance showed up, and he asked if he could spend the night with him—I said yes.”

Jane dropped her gaze to the floor, but she stood, walking past her mother and out into the hall. How could David leave her? Where the hell was he going with Lance? Well, she knew—a party. There were usually parties at the Godson house, but with Ryder locked up, maybe not tonight. She couldn’t believe him.

The door shut behind her, and her mother brushed past. “Let’s go.”

Sometimes she missed her mother and wished they were closer. Her mom had been in nursing school when she was younger, so it was her dad who spent time with her, and instead of growing closer after her dad’s death, her mother faded, devoting herself to supporting them rather than mourning with Jane.

“I’m not the mother of the year, Jane,” her mom said as they neared the exit. “But I do love you.”

It didn’t feel like it for Jane. If she loved her, she wouldn’t let Kingston treat her like this. She would’ve at least asked her about remarrying, especially to David’s father.

The ride home was silent. There was nothing to say to her mother that would make either of them feel better. The last thing she wanted was to make someone feel the same pain she did, so she closed her eyes, praying all the way home that Ryder was okay.

“I called the chief,” her mom said as they came to a stop.

Jane opened her eyes; they’d made it home already. She glanced next door, her heart’s sadness blooming at the sight of many cars, including Luc’s Lexus. The music was blaring, and lights from the backyard lit up the sky.

“I won’t stop Kingston from enforcing his rules.” Her mom put a hand over Jane’s. “And I won’t pretend I don’t know about those four boys.”

Her breath hitched, and she sat perfectly still as her mother smiled sadly.

“They’ve watched you for years, just waiting for you to look away from David.” A tear slid down her mother’s cheek. “Ryder, especially. He’s the one your father and I thought would be your pick, but you had your little heart set on David. Eric thought you two were so cute together, but he was so sure Ryder was the one—that in time, you’d see he was perfect for you. I suppose that’s why I ignored the voice inside me, telling me it was wrong to remove your chances with David when I fell in love with Kingston.”

Tears blurred Jane’s vision. Her nose burned, and her chest ached. Her dad had picked Ryder, so her mom had stolen her chances with David.

“I wronged you, and I’m sorry because I know you love David very much.” Her mom sighed, flicking her gaze toward the Godson house. “I know David is in love with you as well.”

Jane sniffed, turning her head so she wouldn’t cry in front of her mom. Her mom was basically saying their love didn’t matter.

“He’s your stepbrother, Jane.”

“Yeah, thanks to you!” Jane’s body shook as she cried silently.

“I thought you’d choose Ryder,” her mom said tiredly. “I know Kingston dislikes him, but I know he’s a good boy underneath the asshole he is to everyone else, and it’s why I told the chief we wouldn’t be pressing charges.”

Jane gasped, sitting forward as her gaze shot toward Ryder’s house.

Her mom started talking again. “I told David to stay away from home tonight, and this is the one time I will go against my husband and tell you I think you should check on Ryder. I’m sure he’s worried about you.”

It should've sounded wonderful; her mom was going to let her see Ryder, but what it really was ... "You want me to pick Ryder so there's no more David." She felt numb. "You know we love each other, and you want me to let him go."

"It's not possible for you to be together." Her mom sniffed too. "I can't tell you not to love him, but I hope you will be rational. In time, you'll see reason. Plus, I know once you give Ryder a chance, you'll realize he can make you happy—he can take care of you. I promise Kingston will accept him. How can he not after Ryder saved you tonight?"

Jane jerked away, shaking her head. Her mom couldn't even say it—she'd nearly been kidnapped and likely raped, and she hadn't even asked her if she was okay. Strangely, it didn't even matter as much as what her mom was saying now. "You knew I loved David—Daddy knew—and you both decided for me which boy I would be with? You're telling me I get no choice because you're selfish?"

"Your father wanted you to have everything your little heart desired. The last thing he said was they were all perfect, and he was going to have to let you choose all of them," she said with a shake of her head. "I'm sorry, Jane, but that's absurd. I think your father simply meant you would have time to make up your mind after dating them. Now, I'll talk to Kingston about letting you see Luc and Ryder, but I won't back you up about David. He's your stepbrother, and nothing will change that. You simply have to move on, and we will never tell Kingston about it."

Jane pressed her lips together and reached for the door handle. Her hand was shaking so badly, she almost didn't know if she'd be able to walk, let alone open the door so she could leave. "May I go now?"

"I'll leave your key in the rock. I expect you to come home at a decent time." With that, her mother got out, slamming the door shut like she was the teenager who was just being told she couldn't be with the boy she loved.

Well, Jane wasn't going to let anyone tell her who she could love or be with. If she had to sneak around behind her

mother's back—well, she'd just be learning from her. After all, things might've been more understandable for her if her mother and Kingston had been open about their relationship. They'd hidden things first.

Yes, she wasn't going to continue letting everyone decide how her life goes or who her heart should beat for. She'd start by telling the Godsons they no longer made decisions for her.

Marching across their lawn, she roughly wiped the tears from under her eyes. She knew she was a crybaby, but dammit, she couldn't help it. What she could help was still embracing herself with tears in her eyes. Her family—her boys—none of them were going to push her around. She didn't care if David was her stepbrother, and she didn't care her parents actually had picked well by choosing Ryder for her; she was confused about who she wanted, but she was going to make sure she didn't regret who she ended up with.

“Damn, girl.” Archer emerged from the shadows, his white hair glowing under the moonlight as he smirked down at her. “Are you coming to start a fight? Because I'll back you up. Just say the word, and I'm yours to bring.”

Her rage fizzled, and she felt utterly ridiculous because she had felt like she was about to go into battle. And to what? Yell at Ryder, Tercero, and Luc to stop babying her and throw her to the nearest bed so she could start making up her mind?

“Ah, there's a smile.” He jumped off the porch, striding toward her with predator-like grace. “So, who are you here to see? I'll smuggle you in unnoticed. You just have to do one thing for me.”

“I don't need you to smuggle me in.” She stayed still as he circled her.

“Well, considering my brothers are not talking to each other, and we had to break them up from fighting after Ryder got home, I think you need help getting to the one you're looking for. And the three of them together is not recommended.” He then laughed, a boyish smile on his attractive face. “It seems Ryder and David's alliance is

bothersome to Luc, and Tercero prefers courting you alone—his words, not mine.”

“He said courting?” She felt her cheeks flush as she wondered if oral sex was normal courting.

“He’s weird like that.” Archer came to a stop right behind her. “You have a really nice ass.”

Jane should’ve been appalled, but she could feel his amusement in the air, like a tickle across her skin. He was just enjoying messing with her. “Thanks.”

“Wow.” He chuckled, taking a step closer. “Can I touch it?”

She giggled, shaking her head. “You know someone is going to arrest you for sexual harassment one day.”

“You think?” He grinned down at her. “Ryder ... You want to see Ryder this time.”

“How do you know?”

He leaned down, whispering. “Your eyes. They’re more gold than green. Like the gold misses the green.” He snatched her hand in his, pulling her along behind him. “This way, beautiful. I’ll give you a raincheck on the favor you’ll owe me because he’s in a foul mood, and if Luc or Tercero manage to distract you from seeing him, we will have to clean up bodies.”

“Are you trying to scare me away from Ryder or impress me?” She struggled to keep up with him.

“Ah, he won’t hurt you.” He grinned over his shoulder, his icy-blue eyes twinkling. “Unless you like the rough stuff.”

“Jesus Christ.” She covered her face with one hand.

“Hey, do I need to teach him how to do the rough stuff for you? ‘Cause, you know—he’s only been with you.”

She smiled fondly. “I think he knows how to please me just fine.”

“Damn.” He shook his head. “Asshole is good at everything he does, huh?”

“Yes.” Jane giggled again. She’d never really talked to Archer before, but it was nice to be around a guy who wasn’t tugging at her heart. Even if he was hot, she knew he wasn’t interested, and she wasn’t either.

“I’d say I taught him everything, but he refused my offer to show and tell.” He snickered when she gasped. “What? Savaş and I fuck girls in the same room all the time. We just offered to let Ryder watch when he started getting grumpy about you.”

“I guess that’s sweet,” she muttered as he unlocked the gate that led to their backyard. Music and laughter filled the air, but it was dark, and she wondered how he was sneaking her in this way. “More loving than my mother who knew I was in love with David, but decided her heart was more important than mine.”

“Ouch.” He slowed, pushing her against the wall as he peered around it. “Damn, Tercero is back here. Pervert is watching your window, waiting for you to come home. I bet he was gonna sneak over as soon as he saw your light come on.”

Jane smiled at the image of him waiting in her bedroom. “Well, as fun as that sounds, I want Ryder right now.”

“Need big dick tonight,” he murmured. “I would say I don’t blame you because Ryder has a nice dick, but I’m a pussy man.”

Her jaw hit the floor, yet Archer didn’t seem to think saying his brother’s dick was nice was being weird.

“All right.” He pushed her back a bit before distancing himself. Then he ran toward her but jumped up before he could hit her. His hand gripped the edge of a brick that looked like it had been purposefully damaged, and pulled himself up, using his momentum to go even higher so that he reached an open window. He hauled himself inside, grunting when he fell onto the floor.

“Are you okay?” She had no idea how he expected to get her up there.

His head popped out, and he winked. “Your turn.”

“I’m not that athletic.” She was about to head toward the back door, damn it all if Tercero spotted her.

“No? You’re a dancer, aren’t you?” He tilted his head, his hair falling over his eyes. “Yes, I’ve peeked in on you when you’re outside at night. Don’t panic—Ryder hasn’t seen you. You’re good, though. You should dance for him.”

She was speechless. No one knew she danced; that’s why she snuck out at night whenever there was a half-moon out. It was the moon she saw the night her dad had died, and she felt like he was watching her.

“Need a lift, Tex?”

Jane yelped as a large hand came down on her shoulder. “Savaş?”

The big guy grinned, running his hand through his fiery red mohawk. “Of course. How many sexy redheads do you know?”

“Just one, it seems.”

He winked, his amber eyes glowing as he looked up at Archer. “You’re not going to do something perverted with her, are you?”

Archer put a hand over his heart. “I don’t know what you’re talking about—I’m an angel.”

Savaş snorted as he glanced down at her. “If he tries anything, yell. Ryder is across the hall, and he’ll kill him.”

“Damn, bro.” Archer leaned down, holding out his hand for her. “I thought I was your favorite brother.”

Savaş grabbed her by the waist and lifted her without warning. “There are no favorites; we’re brothers. Grab his hand, Jane.”

She’d forgotten how damn tall Savaş was, and she panicked when he lifted her high without any real effort.

“Gotcha.” Archer grasped her wrist, pulling her up as Savaş managed to grab her feet and push her up.

“Shit, don’t drop me.” She scrambled up the side of the house, letting Archer pull her in.

“Don’t worry, I got your ass.” Archer totally grabbed her ass, laughing as Savaş cursed him. “Okay, letting her go.” Thankfully, he did, and politely helped her to her feet as he waved his hand around the messy room. There were clothes everywhere. “I couldn’t decide what to wear.”

“Is Ryder this messy?” She scanned the room, noting two bras draped over a lamp.

“Guess you better find out.” He pulled a needle-like thing from his pocket and headed out the door, whispering, “He stormed up here an hour ago. He locks his door to keep everyone away, but I’m cool. I know how to pick locks.”

She followed him, her nerves kicking in now. “Archer, wait. What if he doesn’t want to see me either?”

He stilled his hand as he looked at her. “Impossible.” Then he did a little movement with his hand and the lock clicked.

Ryder’s voice practically shook the air around them. “Archer, you piece of shit, leave me the fuck alone!”

Oh, he was pissed.

Archer chuckled, pushing open the door. “Relax, brother. I merely caught your moon. She was sneaking across the lawn.” He shoved her into the room and shut the door behind her.

It was dark inside, but moonlight poured over the king-sized bed along with the figure sitting on it.

Jane smiled even though her bad boy looked ready to attack. He didn’t move, but with his forearms braced on his knees and his hands clasped, he was an intimidating sight. Still, she shyly whispered, “Hey.”

“Hey.” It was a detached greeting, his voice rougher than usual too.

She took a hesitant step forward. “I told Tercero to let me know if you got out, but neither of you called. Are you mad at me?”

He shifted, shaking out one of his hands in a way that made her think he'd been making too tight a fist. "Never mad at you, babe. Just making sure I don't fuck up what's going to make you happy. Knocking your stepdad out isn't exactly making our situation any easier for you. It was the last thing you needed to happen tonight—I should've kept my cool."

Gosh, he really had so much of her heart already. "I'm the one making things hard, and you were only defending Luc. I'm not mad."

"I kinda expect things to be hard with you." He breathed out, putting even more weight on his arms. "I'll take it all, Jane. But I'm not going to force you to be with me."

"You want me to leave?"

"Baby, I want to keep you always." He said it so casually, but each word went directly to her soul and made her flicker with beautiful light in the dark. "But if I have my way, I'll destroy you. And I want you whole, happy ... glowing. I'm afraid I'll put your light out if I try to get closer again."

Jane didn't know what to do. Being around each of her guys felt right, but Ryder was all she could think about right now. "Are you okay? No one hurt you, right?"

A dark chuckle slipped out of him. "Nah, no one hurt me. The only one who can do that is you."

That made her frown; was he saying she was going to break his heart?

"Come here." He didn't move from his position as she walked over without any hesitation. He tilted his head a bit to look up at her once she stopped in front of him. "I'm saying too much."

"No. I want to know what you're thinking and doing." She was trembling, the hairs on her body rising as if her body knew he was right there.

He stared at her, the same way he always did—like she was everything he needed and wanted to see. "Do you know how I feel about you?"

“I think so,” she whispered, her heart hammering away now. He loved her.

Absolute beauty when he smiled at her and shook his head. “But you don’t want to believe it, do you?”

“It’s just hard. I’m afraid, I think.” Fox Mulder suddenly popped into her head, and she grinned. “I want to believe.”

“You’re such a nerd.” He sighed, taking in her attire. “Well, if you’re not running from me after the shit I pulled—I’m wondering if you’re planning on flaunting your *boyfriend* and stepbrother in my face all night. Or do I get to have you to myself for a while?”

Jane rolled her shoulders back so Luc’s jacket would fall off. Ryder stayed right where he was, just inches from her as he scanned her still wearing David’s jersey. She didn’t wait for him to say something about it. Instead, she untied the knot on it and pulled it over her head. But no way was she disrespecting David by tossing him aside. So, after folding it, she held it out to Ryder.

He glanced at it, taking it slowly and setting it on top of Luc’s jacket. “You had me excited, you little tease.”

She laughed, shivering when he gripped her hips and tugged her between his legs. “You mean this?” She snapped the strap of her cami.

Intense emerald eyes peered up at her. “You know you’re my goddess, right?”

A shaky breath passed her lips as he moved his hands around to grip her ass. When he touched her phone in her back pocket, he pulled it out and tossed it onto the pile of clothes. Then he was back to holding her ass.

“See how you fit perfectly in my hands?” He squeezed her butt cheeks.

Jane stumbled, bracing her hands on his shoulders. “Yes,” she breathed.

“Everything about us is meant to be,” he continued in a velvety tone as he slid his hands down the back of her thighs

and up again, under her shorts. Squeeze. “In my dreams, you’re my queen, and we’re joined even beyond the end of time.”

“That sounds like a lot more than you just wanting to be my boyfriend.” Her voice trembled as much as her body did beneath his touch.

He breathed out, moving his hand under her cami to hold her waist. Then he stared up at her for what felt like a really long time but was only seconds. “I would say I want to be your everything—I know I can be—but I know you more than you realize.” His fingers tightened before he moved one hand to caress her stomach. “You want David. Maybe even more than just him and me.”

Now Jane reached out and caressed his cheek. Sometimes he looked older than a seventeen, which was super sexy. Especially because she had always hated he was a day younger than her. “I don’t know why I’m being this way,” she told him, referring to her inability to just choose. “I want to be simple. I mean, you’re perfect for me.” She stared into his eyes, knowing every bit of this was true. “Already, you’re the one person I’m certain about, and I think I’d follow you anywhere —”

“But,” he cut her off with a smile that hugged her heart. “But you’re not simple. It’s okay, babe. Just tell me how you want me to deal if my distance is wrong. Believe me, I want to be with you, holding you—carrying you out of every bad situation, but I’m aware you don’t want that. And I know, even if you’re mad with Kingston, you don’t want me to hurt him.”

There he went again. Jane leaned down, cupping his cheeks before pressing her lips to his. Tingles went all the way to her chest, spreading out like a blooming flower until he broke their kiss.

“Focus, babe.” Though he said that and held her out a bit, his gaze still fell to her breasts. “Damn.”

She laughed, embarrassed that it only made her boobs bounce in his face.

He smiled up at her. “Hurry up and tell me so we can get naked.”

The way he said it, both teasing and serious and mixed with his smooth tone, was too much. Her legs buckled, but he caught her by wrapping an arm around her thighs and the other around her waist. He pulled her closer, burying his face against her chest.

Jane hugged his head, her whole body alive—every cell was aware he was holding her. “This. I want this,” she breathed, sliding her fingers through his black hair. “You. I can’t have you too far from me. Even when I’m with him, I think a part of me cries for you.”

“I’ve always been here.” He rested his chin on her chest and peered up at her. “But you want to keep Luc as the public boyfriend? Or did David tell you our plan?”

“David told me.” She thought about Luc. “It was the same plan Luc had proposed.”

Ryder inhaled, but he leaned forward, kissing between her breasts. “You like him.”

“A little,” she admitted.

A low rumble resounded within his chest. “And you like Tercero.”

“Yeah, I didn’t mean to.”

Those emerald eyes locked onto hers. “But you like me more.”

“I like you most.” She moved enough to break his hold then tugged up her cami.

“Is this my reward?” His eyes lit up once she was able to see him again, and he was taking her in, but it was her face he kept returning to. “You know I want more than sex, right?”

Jane hesitated but still moved from him to unbutton her shorts. “I know. I want to show you my feelings because I don’t know how to say them.”

For a moment she thought he was going to tell her to get dressed, but he didn't. He gave her a sweet kiss on the inside of her left breast and slid the zipper down on her shorts. "Ah, damn, I forgot you were wearing my underwear," he said, groaning as he slowly slid her shorts down. "Your thighs are already wet, babe."

That was embarrassing, but she'd been turned on from the moment she'd spotted him walk out of the football tunnel. "Sorry."

He chuckled, trailing his finger up her inner thigh. "Don't be. I like it." As he tasted her juices from his fingers, he inclined his head toward her bra. "Take it off."

There was no waiting around—she wanted to show him everything as he did with her. "I know I perv on you"—she grinned unclasping her bra— "but I kinda need to touch you, too."

"Only kinda?" Instead of tugging his shirt off, he leaned back, bracing himself on his hands as he waited for her to free her breasts. "I promise you'll get to touch me wherever you want. But you're giving me my dream right now."

She used her arm to cover her breasts as she dropped her bra. "A naked girl is your dream?"

"Only one girl is my dream." He made a twirling motion with his finger. "I'm looking at her right now, but I want my dreams to become memories. Turn. Let me see your gorgeous ass. Then I want the rest." He dropped his gaze to where she shielded herself.

It was weird how she wasn't shy around him. Yes, she knew he'd watch her whenever she was in her room, and she'd sometimes give him a little show by stretching before she closed her curtain enough to do her private stuff, but he was finally going to see her in the flesh. Even their sex hadn't been undressed, except for her bottoms. But she had no problem turning, other than wanting him to touch her.

"Stop," he said when she was facing the other way, and his strong hands gripped her hips. "You have a dimple."

Her face burned. She did have a dimple above her freaking ass crack, but a little to the side. She had the same thing on her face, a barely noticeable dimple on her left cheek. It was only there when she really smiled.

“Just like the slight dimple on your pretty face,” he murmured then kissed her dimple before kissing where she should’ve had a mirroring dimple. “Perfect for this incomplete boy.” His hand caressed her bottom before he turned her to face him.

Jane had never felt more beautiful than she did right then. His smile was something only God could create, and he was giving it to her.

Ryder reached up, sliding his thumb over her lips. “Stop biting.”

She laughed, kissing his thumb. “You were right about you being a romantic.”

“Told you I’m good at everything I do.” He smirked, leaning back again so he could get a better view. “Now, let me see my goddess.”

Her hand shook as she lowered it, but she let him see all of her, the way he willingly did with her watching him from her window.

He took his time studying her, his green eyes flashing when they moved down her figure. “I’ll never see a more beautiful sight. Well, this,”—he met her gaze with fiery passion swirling in his— “except you wearing a wedding ring that matches the one I’ll wear.”

The dreamy smile on her face probably made her look like a fool. “Going straight for the husband title.”

“I decided I’m king boyfriend.” Mischief lit up his face. “Then I’ll be your husband. I gotta graduate and make some money first. I want to get you a specific ring, and I either need a good job or I need to rob my brother.”

The adorableness and confidence in his statement made her whole being glow for him. “I love you,” she blurted. *Holy shit*. She hadn’t meant to say it, but she knew immediately she

meant it. She'd been in love with him for longer than she ever let herself know, and she could recall every moment now, every smile he sent her way, every glare he threw at boys around her, every time he'd ball his fist when girls teased her, and every awed stare.

Ryder's eyes widened, but he recovered from her slip faster than she did. He stood, but he kept her from stepping away by putting a hand behind her head and tilting her face up. He was a whole foot taller than her, but he was right—they still seemed like they were meant to fit together.

His fingers slid through her hair, gripping her firmly as he finally said, "And I love you."

A relieved, choked sound passed her lips. "You gonna kiss me, or do I have to learn how to fly so I can reach you?"

"I'll teach you how to fly," he said, leaning down. His lips met hers as he lifted her, letting her legs dangle as he squeezed her ass. His tongue danced with hers as tingles sparked with every little gasp between them.

Oh, man, she really loved him. The sudden overwhelming amount of warmth rushing out of her was trying to wrap around their bodies, and she tightened her arms around him, trying any way she could to show him.

"You make it so hard to give you back," he whispered as he laid her down on his bed.

She knew he meant back to David, and she knew she'd still go to David to figure out what they had between them, but she only wanted Ryder right now.

"Let me give my girl a show," he said, standing and tugging his shirt off.

She actually moaned at the sight of him. He was a masterpiece. Tanned skin over a body sculpted by the gods. The veins running down his forearms were visible even in the dark, and she itched to touch them, to caress every inch of his smooth skin. He had no blemishes. Not a single imperfection. His abs were glorious, and the narrow waist and 'V' dipping into his jeans had her squeezing her thighs together.

“You know you’re the first girl I’ve been with, right?” He snapped the button on his jeans. “My first kiss, too.”

Tears misted her eyes, and she sucked in a breath as he slid down the zipper of his jeans.

“That makes you sad?” he asked, halting his movement.

“You’re just amazing,” she told him with a smile.

A cocky grin transformed his face into the bad boy she always knew. “I can be anything when it comes to you, babe. Even a porn star in the sack.”

She giggled, waiting for him to finish undressing. “How do you know what to do? What if I’m really bad?”

“You’re perfect.” He continued unzipping as he used his feet to take off his shoes. “I watched a bit of porn with Archer to learn some shit. I wanted to be ready for you.”

“That is either the weirdest or cutest thing ever.” She stopped laughing when he pushed his jeans down. “I forgot you weren’t wearing underwear.”

He stood proudly, and he had every reason to be. It was no doubt the most beautiful cock she’d ever seen. Because she’d also watched a bit of porn to learn whenever her hormones were driving her crazy. She never touched herself because that felt weird until she did it for David. She’d also seen all sorts of dicks on the videos. But Ryder erect ... Her mouth watered and her core throbbed. She’d seen him a bit in the car, but this was different.

“I’ll take a picture for you next time.” He grabbed her ankle, raising it to his lips for a kiss. “You promised me cock kisses, but I really want to discover you before I take you again.”

“Oh, yes, let’s do that.” She was nervous as hell about trying to please him with her mouth in any way, so if he wanted to explore, and she could touch him, that would help her work up the confidence to get on her knees for him.

A sexy smile formed on his handsome face. “Say the words, angel.”

Her tummy fluttered, and her soul began to glow, but the words that came out of her mouth were those of a horny girl. “Fuck me, Ryder.”

Strong hands slid down her thighs, spreading her legs to give him room before he braced one arm next to her head. His gorgeous face hovered above hers as he brushed a faint kiss to her nose, and she gasped when his cock teased her core. “Sweet Jane, I plan to make love to you.” Now he kissed her like she was everything that mattered to him. Then he said something that had her moaning and raising her hips. “But you’re gonna come like I’m fucking you.”

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FOURTEEN

Tingles that somehow managed to be warm and cold at the same time trailed across Jane's stomach. She smiled blissfully, letting her head roll to the side so she could see the beautiful guy lying beside her. The beautiful and completely naked Ryder Godson.

Her body heated at the sight of him. His focus was on her skin as he continued using his fingers to draw a masterpiece only he could see. His black hair was sweaty and sexily tousled. A few locks fell over his eyes that were still trained on his hand. It was like watching a predator fully sated—lazy yet still so dangerous they could attack at any moment.

Jane sighed as she took in his slicked skin. It made every muscle on his tanned body more defined, and for the third time that night, she had the urge to lick him.

Ryder's hand slid over her ribs, heading toward her breasts, but she yelped, right before he made it there.

He glanced up, his eyes as bright as his smile. "Found it."

"Found what?" She giggled as he leaned down, kissing where he'd just tickled her. It was just below her heart and to the side.

"My spot," he murmured against her skin. "It'll be where you feel me, even when I'm not with you." His palm pressed against it, and she gasped as that very spot bloomed with tingles that went every which way inside her, pulsing out like a bell being rung.

“How do you do that?” she breathed, touching his cheek as he watched her.

Yet another kiss was dropped on that little spot below her heart and to the side. “Magic, Sweet Jane.”

She would have lain there forever, but she wanted to talk to him. So, she rolled onto her side, facing him. “I don’t want you or David, or Luc, deciding things for me anymore.”

Ryder copied her position as he grabbed a hold of her hand and pressed it to his chest. His heartbeat was steady and strong, like a fairy tale being read to her at bedtime. “All right.” He wasn’t mad, but she could see his guard coming back up; the blank-faced bad boy was returning. “Tell me what you want to do.”

A chill slid between them, and she couldn’t stand it. Jane scooted closer, draping a leg over his waist. She sighed when he tugged her into a better position and started grinning because he put the blanket between them.

He smirked, relieving her at last. “Need you to focus. My dick has other plans.”

“I can tell.” She giggled, tightening her leg around him to pull him into her, which only made her laughter shift to a needy moan.

A low chuckle rumbled within him, and he squeezed her ass, pressing in deep to make her cry out louder. Then he rolled back, smacking her tender flesh. “I’ll cut you off. Let’s get this serious shit over with.” His eyes narrowed at something behind her. “It’s already two.”

She groaned, nodding as she stopped trying to find a way to get that blanket down. “I just want a choice.”

“I know.” His hand started moving again, sliding up and down her side. “What choice do you want to make now?”

That was the hard part, one she was afraid to even think about. But staring into his eyes felt so right, and she knew he was really the one who wouldn’t judge her. So, she confessed what she’d tried not to think of. “I love you. I want to pick you.”

His head bobbed, but he wasn't rejoicing. "You want to, but you won't." He lifted a hand to hold her cheek. "You still love David, and you're confused as fuck about it."

"He didn't even stick around," she said bitterly. "I waited for him to get done with the sutures—after he was once again the David I remembered; the David he is with just me—but he left without saying goodbye. Probably to go off to a party."

"Relax," Ryder said in that commanding but almost bored and a whole lot of sexy way of his. "He's just with a few players. No hoes." He smirked. "I mean ... women."

The increasing pattering of her heart slowed. "How do you know?"

Ryder leaned forward, teasing her with a faint kiss at the corner of her mouth. "He texted me about twenty minutes before you came. He didn't want to draw attention to you, and he knew you'd be going home soon. He said, if I heard from you, to let you know he loved you, and he'd be home soon." Ryder finally gave her the kiss she wanted, his perfect lips pressing firmly to hers while his fingers slid through her hair. He tugged, pushing his tongue inside her mouth. God, she felt his kiss between her legs.

She gasped, ready to rip the sheets out from between them.

"Sorry, babe." He grinned, pecking her lips playfully before escaping her attempt to pull him down for more. "These lips distract me."

Pouting, she puckered up with hopes to get pounced on.

"Babe," he groaned, giving her another kiss, though he kept it short. "You wanna talk, right?"

"Stop being responsible." She didn't mean it; she loved he was thinking about her concerns.

"You miss the sexy asshole who wants in your pants, don't you?" He chuckled, smoothing her hair back.

"It's so weird," she murmured, entranced by his beauty for a moment. "Just this week you were a jerk."

He frowned, still playing with her hair. “You don’t mean that.”

“No?” She grinned because he was right. Now, that she wasn’t being so stuck up her own ass and David’s she could see everything Ryder did in a different light.

Now he smiled. “You wouldn’t put on little shows for a jerk. Teasing me as you’re about to pull your shirt over your head.” He dropped a hand to her breast, massaging it and setting those tingles off again. “Only to smirk down at me then tug your curtain in place, leaving your silhouette to tease me further.”

A cackle, an actual cackle, passed her lips. “I don’t know what you’re talking about.”

“You can’t lie to me, babe.” He watched her laugh like a crazy woman with absolute adoration.

Oh, she had missed this with him. “It was only fair. Making a girl look at what she can’t touch.”

“It was an invitation.” He exhaled, holding her face as a seriousness fell over his. “Do you want to stop this between us?”

Her smile vanished. “No.”

“Then what do you want, Jane?” Those emerald eyes stayed on hers. “I want to be your boyfriend. I’m not going to pretend I don’t. So, tell me.”

“I want you to be my boyfriend,” she said fully meaning it. But ... “But I still love him. It doesn’t seem right to be your girlfriend when I love him. It’s worse because of Tercero and Luc.”

“We’re back in the same spot then.” He sighed, moving his hand away from her breast. For a while, he stared at the moon outside his window until finally nodding to himself. “What if I’m okay with it all?”

“Okay with it?” Jane waited, her mind racing as he kept staring outside.

“You pick which of us is yours.” Now he looked at her. “You are with us however you want, without worrying what the rest of us may think because we know when it’s our time, it’s our time, and you’re ours as much as you are theirs. No fighting over you. No trying to make each other look bad so we win you—just you as our girl.”

Her mouth was agape. “What?”

Ryder propped himself up. “Okay, say right now we’re doing this. I have you in my bed, kissing you, making love to you.” He gave her a quick kiss. “I know you love me, and you know I love you. But I know you’re in love with David, and you’re my cute hoe who likes my sorta twin and my fucking asshole, older brother.” Mischief and possession filled his eyes, but his love for her was what she saw most. “I know all this, and I know you still love me more than any girl ever will. I know I’ll never love another, and even sharing you, I’m the luckiest guy. ‘Cause I see it in your eyes, babe.” He caressed her cheek. “You fucking love me. Now I just have to help you love all of us the way you want to.”

“How?”

“I’m going to kiss you good morning soon, and you’ll go downstairs—probably be captured by Luc or Tercero. They’ll earn a kiss from you, a few sweet words, then you’ll go home.”

He held her face in place. “David loves you so much, angel. He has hidden it so fucking long, and I want you to have it. I want you to know he has loved you as much as you’ve loved him. And I want Tercero to give you whatever the fuck he does.” He grunted, adding, “And I want Luc to protect you the ways we cannot. I want you to have everything. Me, David ... and my fucking brothers. And, yes, I know that means your panties are coming off for some or all of them.”

“You’re fine with them having me?” she spluttered, not believing him. “Like passing me around?”

“No.” He shook his head, his grip never loosening. “More like you’re our girlfriend, and we’re your boyfriends. And

we're devoted boyfriends as you're a devoted girlfriend. We get our alone time with you as well as group time when we're up for it. We're still devoted to you, as you are to us."

"How is it devoted if I'm with all of you?"

"Cause you're you, babe." His lips twitched, then he said, "The night before your dad died, he talked to all of us. I think about it every day. None of us have wanted to tell you about it because, in a way, we all felt something spiritual took place—like your dad knew that was his last time seeing us, and he wanted to make sure we took care of you. For me, at least, it makes everything clear, and I'm not mad about your heart being more than mine. Even if I am a possessive asshole who wants to keep you to myself, it's like complete peace to know you're loved so much, I guess."

Her heart stopped for a full second before beating harder and faster. "What did he say?"

"We were outside playing football, and he was heading to his car. Then he stopped, turned and walked over to our yard. He singled out David, Tercero, Luc, and me. We thought he'd caught us spying on you, or at least I did. But he wasn't angry. Like I said, it was like time stopped for this moment, and we listened to every word he said.

"He said you liked all of us, and he gave us a look like he knew we already loved you. He told each of us something—how to treat you—but he told all of us not to fight over you. That we all had a role in your life."

Her eyes watered. "What was yours?"

The most serene expression appeared on his face. "He talked to me last. At first, I thought it meant I was the least impressive to him, but I realized it was the exact opposite. Because he ended up telling me, the littlest shit there, to protect you from everything, even yourself—to show you when you're lost, you can find your way back home, but I was to never let you go alone. Even if I had to stay hidden from you, I was to stay with you until the end. To keep you, always."

“Really?” she blubbered.

“Really.” He chuckled at her sniffing. “I think he knew I’d already decided you were mine. He knew we were a match the moment he looked into my eyes. But he knew his little girl was special—and she was meant for more than me. I agree.”

Sniffing again and again, she tried to get herself together. The night her dad died, he’d talked to her too.

“Watching those boys again, my darling flame?”

Only five years old but already in love, Jane had looked away from the view outside their window to smile up at her dad before returning her attention to the boys playing football. Her gaze had fallen on David at first, but almost instantly shifted to Ryder.

He called to her like a magnet. As soon as she’d find herself getting closer, though, an uncomfortable heat would surround her, and she’d remember it was David she loved.

Her efforts to not look at Ryder usually meant her eyes drifted toward Tercero, his look-alike. He didn’t play football with the others, but she felt he would be just as good if he had. He simply didn’t want to play. Sometimes, Jane pretended it was because he knew she was watching them, and he wanted to watch her too. She’d see a little smile whenever she’d catch herself staring. It was a game between them, never admitting they were looking.

Embarrassed, Jane switched her focus to Luc. It was like looking into light when darkness was all around. She didn’t understand it, only that he was better than his little brothers and David. For some reason, she wanted him to notice her too, to think she was great all by her little self.

Strong but gentle hands rested on her shoulders. “Which one are you watching today?”

Jane pressed her lips together. Her daddy always caught her watching them, and he’d smile and tell her one day she’d have to choose.

“Still can’t pick between them?” He chuckled, squatting behind her, his chin on her shoulder. “Ah, David and Ryder.”

“No,” she tried to argue.

“No?” He kissed her head then watched the boys playing. David had tackled Ryder hard. It looked painful, but Ryder got up, shoving David away from him. “You can’t lie to me—I know they are your main focus. But who else, I wonder?”

“I’m not looking,” she said, crossing her arms. “I’m watching the moon.”

“Hm.” He was quiet for a long time, just watching the boys play as she pretended to stare at the half-moon over them. “Tercero and Luc as well,” he said. “Not the other two. Just David, Ryder, Tercero, and Luc.”

Jane didn’t say anything. How did he always know what she was thinking?

“Most fathers would be upset with their little girl spending her time staring at boys, but you know—I think one of them might be your soulmate.”

She stiffened, her eyes falling immediately to a pair of green eyes looking her way. The magnet again. When she wished it, without even knowing she was doing so, she’d call silently, and he would find her.

“Ah, you see it now.” Her dad grabbed her hand, holding it up to the glass. Ryder was watching as the others huddled together. “See how he only sees you? How nothing else matters to him?”

Her heart had never beat so fast before as she watched the others laughing at him when he held his hand up the same way she was. They were making kissy-faces, even David was. Though the moment the others ignored him, David’s gaze drifted her way, and he held his hand up too.

“That one,” her dad said, and she knew he meant David. “That one is strong. Good heart, good head on his shoulders, loyal. He also only has eyes for you. He’d be perfect if he didn’t always try to do what is expected of him. That’s where they are different; Ryder doesn’t care what’s expected of him. He only wants you to live right before his eyes. I think David

might be afraid he's too much for you. You'd have to show him you're brave or he'll smother you.

"But Ryder ... yes, he will fall into fires and darkness for you. With him, there is no reason to be brave because he believes in you, and he'll do all to protect you. He'll hold your hand, give you all of himself, just to watch you glow in the dark. He'll stand behind you silently but fearless as you roar. Yes, I like him for you."

Her face warmed at what her dad was saying about Ryder, and she shyly lowered her hand. "Well, David is perfect."

"Oh?" Her dad chuckled. "Sometimes our heart fools us, and perfect isn't as perfect as we think. Especially when things get tough."

She didn't know what he meant at the time, but she did now. David had been perfect in her eyes from the very beginning, and though he was incredible, and he did his best to put her first, he wasn't the perfect, infallible guy she imagined him to be. But did it really matter? His heart was good, and he'd given it to her.

"It is difficult," her dad said. "I suppose it's too early to expect you to pick—they are great in their own ways—perfect at things the others are not. Perhaps you should wait. Maybe you can try hanging out with girls again."

"No," she said quickly, her little heart stinging with rejection from the other girls already. No one liked her.

"One day you'll find a good girl who doesn't judge you, baby." He sighed, watching the boys again. "One day you'll pick a boy, too."

"I'll never pick between them, Daddy. I can't." She focused on all four, her heartbeat steadying.

His stare could be felt on the side of her face, and he pressed a kiss to her temple. "Okay. I swear you don't have to choose; he'll keep you anyway."

A tear slid across the bridge of Jane's nose. "Daddy knew you were mine."

Ryder smiled, nodding. “And he knew you were mine. But he knew the others were going to hold your heart, too.”

She pressed her palm to his chest, hers rising and falling quickly as she remembered her dad’s smile before he walked out the door.

“Just in case, I’ll make sure he knows,” he had said with his hand still on the doorknob. “Just promise me one thing.” When she nodded he smiled wider. “Promise you’ll allow yourself to be loved to the fullest. Don’t let anyone stop you from being loved, even if it’s not what other people expect for you. Promise me, Jane.”

“I promise, Daddy.”

The last smile he’d ever give her spread over his face. “That’s my little moon. Never stop glowing. It is our favorite sight.”

A sob broke free from her, and she let Ryder pull her to him. “I’m sorry,” she whimpered, sliding an arm around his back.

“What for?” He leaned away enough to tilt her face up. “Babe, I don’t like it when you’re sad.”

“I know.” She laughed pitifully as more tears escaped. “I’m just sorry for pushing you away. Even Daddy knew you were the one, and even now I can’t choose. I’m such a spoiled, bratty slut.”

His lips curved up. “Only a little. I’m keeping you anyway.”

Her heart. “I really fucking love you.”

Ryder shifted her, pulling her up so he could kiss her. Tingles. Love. Glowing souls. “And I really really fucking love you,” he murmured before rolling on top of her. “Spread your legs, angel.” He squeezed her thigh before tugging the blanket out from between them.

“Again?” She grinned, wrapping her arms around his neck to pull him down.

“Nah.” He leaned down, kissing her and making her lips feel fuzzy. “I just like teasing you with dick after you tell me you love me.”

Her cheeks were starting to hurt as much as her throat was from all the screaming he’d had her doing. A choked moan left her mouth as he did just as he said he would. He chuckled, thrusting forward but not penetrating her—just a tease.

“You’re soaked, but I’m worried I’ll break you if we go at it again.” Ryder smirked, giving her yet another thrust. This time ... a little penetration. “Oops,” he said, chuckling.

Jane nodded, raising her hips. She wasn’t going to get tired of this ever. “I can take it.”

“Horny girl.” He pulled her arms from his neck, pinning them above her head with one hand as he pushed all the way in.

“Oh, yes.” She whined in painful ecstasy. How could it hurt and feel so good that she needed more?

He kept moving, each thrust powerful until he was hitting her cervix. Only then would he breathe and grind against her until she gasped.

It was different from the car. Each time he’d loved her, it changed. He’d go rough then sweet. Loving then wild. His words ...

“That’s my girl,” he growled. “Come all over my dick.”

Dirty. He’d said dirtier the two times before. Her bad boy.

And she was coming. Oh, she was coming so hard, her walls tightening so fast around him, making him speed up.

“Oh, fuck, Ryder.” She tried to pull free, but he merely hiked her leg up, angling his hips to go deep.

Sweat. Moans. Grunts.

The smacking of their flesh. The squelching sounds as he slammed into her again and again.

He could go on and on. But, fuck, he liked to fill her up with his come.

She lifted her head, kissing him. That always made him slow to a rock, but it also changed his angle, and he'd hit a spot that had her seeing stars and losing all awareness as she cried out at the top of her lungs.

"Breathe, angel," he whispered, easing back. "I love you. I love you." *Sweet Ryder.*

Jane sucked in a breath. "I love you, Ryder." She should've been used to him by now, but no. He was magic every time. "Oh, come in me. Please."

His response was to release her hands and spread her legs wide, using his thighs and weight to keep her in place. He was almost crushing her but still careful not to hurt her with his weight. That didn't mean he wasn't surging forward like a madman.

"Oh, shit." She gasped, whimpering each time he plunged into her. Her tummy clenched, and she hung onto his shoulders. His arm slid under her neck, keeping her from sliding up, and there... . Oh, fuck, right there. The muscles on her legs twitched, even her lips trembled.

"Ah, fuck." He pressed his lips against hers, pushing in as warmth shot deep inside her. It was what she was waiting for, what she craved.

Ryder groaned as he pulsed inside her, pushing her over the edge. Her inner walls fluttered around his throbbing dick, and he growled before kissing her, drinking in every panting breath she released. "You okay?" he asked, breathing heavily.

With her eyes closed, she nodded and hugged him. "This way really gets my clit."

He chuckled, easing out. "I know. I'm learning fast."

She grinned, sighing as he kissed down her body until he reached *his* spot.

"I love coming in you." He left more kisses on his spot before moving to her right breast. His tongue even made her tingle, and she moaned as he sucked and licked at her skin. "Fuck, I need to stop so we can sleep."

Just then she yawned, her body fully agreeing with him.

“Yeah, my baby girl needs sleep.” He pushed up, like an actual push-up over her, then leaned down kissing her sweetly. “Do you want to shower? I need to at least rinse my dick off so I don’t get fucking sticky.”

She giggled sleepily. “Sorry.”

“Don’t be.” He sat up, using the blanket to wipe himself. “I’d keep you on me if I didn’t want to gross you out.” Now he got up, tossing the blanket and standing there in all his glory. “Clench your pussy together so you keep me for a little longer.”

“Keep you in me?” She held up her arms, expecting him to tug her up, but he slid an arm under her thighs and one under her back, lifting her easily.

“Yeah.” He carried her toward the attached bathroom. “Makes me feel like a king knowing I filled you up. Like one day that shot won’t be there, and I get to give you my heir.”

She laughed, wrapping her arms around his neck. “Your heir, huh?”

He nodded, turning and kissing her as he kicked the door shut. “Told you I’m gonna be your husband. I’m putting babies in you one day, babe.”

Why that made her heart flutter, she didn’t know, but she grinned and told him, “Baby Ryder’s will be the cutest babies ever.”

“I want a baby Jane, too.” He lowered her to the countertop. “Fuck, am I scaring you with baby talk?”

At that, she laughed. He was too cute sometimes. “You don’t scare me. And I’d be pretty stupid to not think about getting pregnant after all that sex.”

His eyes dropped down to her belly. “How effective is that shot?”

Oh, gosh. He was going to be angry. “I think like ninety-four percent.” Cringing, she whispered, “I’m sorry.”

Ryder put a hand over her tummy. “I just told you I want babies with you. If I get you pregnant, I’m taking care of you both, and I’ll feel like a king.” He cupped her cheeks, staring into her eyes. “But if you want me to wear a condom from now on, I will. I just hope you don’t let the others come in you.”

That hadn’t even been a thought in her mind, but she realized it was something she had to think about. Every time she was with one of them, she wanted to be with them without restrictions. Well, at least David. Tercero was still new, and she just worried so much that she wasn’t going to meet his expectations after he considered his soul mate to be someone else. Luc, well, he terrified her in the most sexual way. Which was weird as hell ‘cause she liked it.

Ryder kissed her forehead. “Just think about it. I mean, if you get pregnant, I know the others would step up, but like I said, I’m husband.”

Jane nodded as she smiled stupidly. “I kinda don’t want to think about sex with the others right now, though.”

“Me either.” He stared down at his dick. “Look how fucking limp that shit made me.”

She threw her head back laughing. “It’s still a bit hard?” She didn’t know how to describe it, but he was cracking her up.

“A bit?” He smacked the side of her ass and moved away. “Okay, I admit it, David has a nice ass.”

Now she was howling. “I can’t breathe.”

He laughed, pulling the shower door open and turning on the water. “I mean, mine is better, but he comes in second. Good for him.”

She couldn’t stop giggling, but she wobbly slid off the counter. “I’m so telling him this.”

“Don’t slip, cowgirl. You’re like a baby deer.” He had his hand in the cascading water as he watched her. “You gotta pee?”

Nodding, she hurried over to his toilet, relieved the seat was down but a little embarrassed about peeing in front of him.

“I won’t look. I’m gonna piss in here before you come in.” He said it like it was no big deal, which was so fucking cute. No wonder he called himself her husband.

“Okay.” Jane pulled a towel down to cover herself anyway, peeking over as he got in the shower. As promised, he didn’t watch her, but she watched him staring down at his dick, when he was clearly trying to piss. It almost looked like he was in pain, but he relaxed and straightened, grabbing his soap.

Now she focused on her own pee. She felt full in so many ways, like she needed to empty more than her bladder. *Oh*. That’s when she remembered she’d held his come inside her.

Jane snuck a glance to make sure he wasn’t looking before spreading her legs. There she watched it drip out into the toilet. “Oops.” She felt a little weird about it. Did Ryder consider this his kids?

She shook her head at her stupidity, but she still peeked down as her bladder gave out, and she peed. “Sorry, little guys.”

Ryder’s low laugh almost had her falling off the toilet. “Are you talking to my boys?”

“I peed on them,” she said, moaning though because she had really needed to go.

“And you’re enjoying it.” He was facing away, but she could tell he was laughing. “Get your cute ass over here. I’ll clean you out.”

For some stupid reason, that was sweet as hell to her. She still cleaned herself the best she could then made her way to the shower. Now he was facing her, and he pushed the door open to let her in.

“We’re gonna fuck in here a lot but not tonight.” Tingles danced across her jaw then her lips as he held her face between his hands. The water was falling over him, but he blocked it from smacking her in the face. Her shield. “I love

you,” he murmured, his eyes swirling with green flames as he searched her face.

“And I love you,” she said, copying him from earlier. She liked it.

He smirked, obviously picking up that she stole his line. “I knew one day I’d make you mine, but it still feels like a dream.” His hands moved to hold the back of her neck. “You’re still okay, right? No regrets with me?”

“Never.” She pushed up on the tips of her toes, offering him her kiss.

With a gorgeous smile that had her wanting to clench her tired legs together, he hoisted her up by her ass. “Babe, you know these lips are gonna get us in trouble,” he said, balancing her on his forearm as his free hand stayed on her neck.

“I like getting in trouble with you.” She teased him now, brushing her lips faintly over his. “I’ll have your back no matter what, and I know you’ll have mine.”

“You bet your sexy ass I got your back through anything. My ride or die girl,” he said, pulling her closer but now teasing her when she tried to press her lips to his. “But you know what? You and I never die.”

Soul mates.

And maybe something more.

“We’re always,” she whispered.

“No, babe.” He finally gave her the kiss she wanted, but he stopped long enough to add, “Longer.”

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FIFTEEN

Jane blinked sleepily as Ryder sat at the foot of his bed with her feet on his lap as he tied her shoes. Sweet Ryder.

“Are you gonna be able to walk?” He lifted his head to meet her bleary stare. “Or should I carry your newborn Bambi trying-to-walk ass?”

“That’s so descriptive it’s cute.” She grinned but it was a sleepy smile. “I’m sore and tired.” She seriously felt like she’d had the workout of a lifetime. Her stomach, her legs, her vagina—they all screamed in sweet agony.

Ryder was more alert than she was, but the faint circles under his eyes proved how tired he really was. After all, they’d only gotten two hours of sleep, and it was already six in the morning. “I’ll carry you then.”

She was going to argue and stop being so whiny, but he already had her in his arms. After situating her legs around his waist and pulling her head to his shoulder like a baby, he carried her out of the room.

“This is one of those moments I envy David gets to be your stepbrother,” he said as he descended the stairs.

“I don’t think you and I would ever get along as brother and sister.” She couldn’t even imagine it.

“We’d be kinky as fuck, babe. I’m not noble like he is; I’d fight my dad if it meant I got to love you.” He chuckled, pausing on the last step. “Fuck.”

Jane turned, her jaw dropping at the living-room full of guys. Some were passed out, but most were lounging, sipping either beers or orange juice. It looked like someone had made breakfast because a group was huddled around a mixture of pizza and pancakes.

Archer laid on his back at the center of the group. He waved with his slice of pizza. “Morning, beautiful.”

There were knowing smiles all around but not one of them teased her or Ryder.

“Who the fuck wants sausage?” Savaş came strolling out with a sizzling pan. It was popping grease everywhere, even smacking his massive bare chest, but he didn’t even flinch. He merely waved the spatula at her. “Mornin’, Tex. Want some sausage?”

“I think she already had some.” Archer snickered as someone threw a pillow at him. “I couldn’t resist.”

Ryder was too pleased with himself, apparently, because he only turned to her. “You want breakfast? Or do you want me to take you home?”

“Um ...” She scanned the group of guys, most of them shirtless. “Maybe take me home. I’ll have breakfast next time.”

The boys cheered, high-fiving each other.

Ryder shook his head at them, carrying her away from the boys celebrating that she was declaring there would be a next time. “I’d rather them focus on us,” Ryder said, “than the shit that happened after the game.”

Jane stiffened as his words hit her hard. She’d been avoiding thinking about *it*, and even the thing with Kingston, but now it was time to go back to reality.

“Hey,” Ryder said, smoothing her hair back. “You know I’m not letting that fucker get close to you again. And we’ll work out shit with your stepdad. He should fucking know no one hits my brothers but us.”

She closed her eyes, tightening her arms around his neck as he talked. He anchored her to the present, but the moment he went silent, it felt like Dylan's finger was sliding down her throat. "No," she gasped, pushing away from Ryder.

He stopped walking right in the middle of the yard and sat down with her, rocking her. "Look at me, Jane."

His voice wasn't Dylan's, but she was struggling to breathe. She couldn't look at him. She'd been taken so easily. No one saw. No one helped.

"Jane," Ryder said, remaining calm. "I was there with you—just a little bit away, but I was there. I saw. I stopped him. I'll stop him, baby girl. Now, look at me."

It was a command, a powerful one, and Jane's eyes flew open, locking onto an emerald pair. She cried, touching his cheek as he smiled.

"That's it. See? I'm here." He watched her struggling to get enough air. "Breathe, it will pass." He kept smoothing her hair back but then he lowered his hand to her chest, pressing his palm over his spot. "Feel me?"

Tingles. Jane nodded, dragging in air as she tried to keep his green eyes in sight.

"I didn't want him to hurt you more," he said calmly. "I knew if I revealed myself too soon, before I could reach you, he might hurt you. I had no idea if he had a weapon or anything; I couldn't risk charging out there. So I waited until you got close enough. He wasn't taking you anywhere, Sweet Jane."

"I'm sorry." She kept gasping, her heart. Her heart ... Oh, no, she was having a heart attack. "I think I'm dying."

He shook his head, pressing his hand over her heart. "You're having a panic attack. It's okay. Just focus on me. I won't let anything happen to you."

No, but he couldn't stop her from dying, which is what she was doing right now.

A car door slammed, and she faintly heard a familiar voice as the world seemed to spin out of control. Everything kept getting dark around the edges of her vision, but she refused to look away from Ryder. If she was going to see one last thing before she died, it was him.

“What happened?” Heat blasted down on her just as a burning brush against her cheek jolted her in Ryder’s arms.

“She’s having a panic attack,” Ryder was saying. “The shit with Dylan.”

“Baby?” David. It was David. “Give her to me.”

“Sit the fuck down,” Ryder snapped. “She stays with me, but I’ll hold her between us.”

“David?” she called out.

“It’s me.” He leaned closer, pressing his lips to the back of her head. “I’m home.”

Jane cried, embarrassed and afraid. They were going to be taken from her. Dylan was going to get her.

“Jane,” Ryder said, that command again, as he tilted her chin up. “We’re here. David and I are here. You’re not dying. You’re not going to be taken.”

She hiccupped, nodding. David’s hands were scorching as they slid down her back, and Ryder was leaving tingles as he smiled at her.

He tilted her face toward David, and she sighed the moment those sapphire eyes locked onto hers. *Home*.

“Hi, baby.” David didn’t act bothered by Ryder at all. He leaned down, kissing her on the lips. His brand ... his brand was back in place, though not for a second did it feel it would destroy her. As he leaned away, he kept one hand on her cheek and spoke to Ryder, “Did she stay the night with you?”

“Yeah.” Ryder shifted, sitting fully on his ass and pulling her onto his lap again. “I just said something ... triggered it. I guess she’s been avoiding it.”

A humming sound mixed with their voices, but she tried to keep her eyes on David. He was furious, his jaw tight as he listened to Ryder, but his touch. Oh, his touch right beside Ryder's ... Heaven.

"What's going on out here?" It was her mom.

Ryder answered, "Just bringing her home."

"She was supposed to be home at a decent hour last night."

Jane clutched Ryder's shirt with one hand, but she also grabbed David's wrist, afraid to have them taken away.

David smiled at her. "It's okay."

Her mom had been approaching, but she came to a sudden halt, her gaze narrowing on David. "You were supposed to stay with Lance."

He slowly met her mother's glare and moved his hand to intertwine his fingers with Jane's. "I came home to check on Jane."

"I told you what I expected of you," her mother told David, her words tight. "I've already spoken to Jane, and she understands nothing can happen between you two. Is that not clear by the fact that she stayed the night with this boy?"

David darted his eyes between her and Ryder. Pain.

Jane whimpered, reaching up to touch his lips, sobbing when he smiled and kissed her fingers.

"It's okay," he told her, nodding to Ryder as well. "It's okay."

"I fucking know it's okay," Ryder said before pressing a sweet kiss to her temple.

David stood and faced her mom. "Sarah, I love you because you make my dad happy. I usually obey you because you're his wife, but you're not my mother. I've never been able to see you that way because I've been in love with Jane for as long as I can remember—before you ever thought about my father romantically."

For a few seconds, he stayed silent, weighing his words. That same determination he'd shown in the car ride was there; he wasn't hiding his feelings anymore. "You knew about us, and you hid a relationship with my dad, let him think Jane liked Ryder more than me, and you let him tell Jane instead of telling her yourself. For that, you will only be the woman who married my dad, and I will no longer pretend Jane is merely my stepsister. We don't see each other that way."

Jane held her breath as Ryder slowly got up with her. He let her stand on her own, but he held her to him, his forearm resting over the top of her breasts as his free hand held onto hers.

Her mom, well, she looked torn between bawling and screaming at David.

David reached for Jane's left hand, raising it so he could kiss her fingers. "She's my Jane." There was a hardness in his tone that she'd never heard before. All she could do was stand there as Ryder leaned down, kissing the top of her head. And David's reaction to Ryder's affection? He pressed another kiss to her knuckles and continued, "We said nothing when it came to you and Dad choosing your happiness over ours. I get it, I really do because I know you love my dad, and you were broken over Eric's death and raising Jane alone, but you don't get to choose for her. She's conflicted right now because I fucking broke down and told her how I really feel. So, she's trying to pick between us."

"Actually," Ryder butted in, dragging out his words, "she's considering all of us, and I'm down with it." He peeked down at Jane. "None of this shit is important right now, though. If you hadn't noticed, she was having a fucking panic attack because she was almost abducted and raped last night." Now he looked at her mom. "So, can we just stop? Jane's my girlfriend, she loves David, and she likes my brothers. We're almost legal, and we'll figure out how our relationship is gonna work. Not you. And though I appreciate you sending her my way because I'm your number one pick for her, I won't forgive you trying to make your daughter settle, sending her to

me like I'm a slice of fucking chocolate cake for her. Damn, woman, she's not a whore and I'm not a fucking gigolo."

Her mother shifted her gaze to Ryder then to David. Then back to Ryder. "Kingston was right about you. You're trouble."

Ryder chuckled, hugging Jane closer to him. "Lady, take your fucking anger out on someone else. Trying to turn us against each other or trying to make her choose one of us just so she won't be with David isn't gonna work." He pointed at David. "I'll leave it up to him on how he tells his dad, but you can stop the little game of trying to make Jane choose me. Eric told her she didn't have to, and he told us not to fight over her. We're getting along, and that's how it's gonna be. Now move out of the way so I can carry her upstairs so she can rest." He smirked at David. "She's sore."

Holy shit.

"Come on, babe." Ryder didn't wait; he lifted her into his arms like he was about to carry his bride across the threshold. "Practice makes perfect," he murmured, passing her mother.

It was cute as hell, but she was too stunned by everything that had been said. Her mom was a good person, but she never really treated her the way Jane expected a mother to treat a daughter. She didn't comfort her, didn't try to learn about her. She provided food and shelter. She gave her medicine when she was sick, but there was everything absent that Jane's dad had given. Love.

"You okay?" Ryder kicked the front door shut behind him when David raised his voice to her mom. "Let him deal with her right now," Ryder said. "Think about yourself for a minute. 'Cause I'm worried about you. David's worried about you, and if the vibration in my pocket is who I think it is, Tercero and Luc are worried about you. Your mom, though? She's worried about herself."

"She has a reason to be. She's right—David is my stepbrother. If Kingston reacted badly to you, he's going to explode about David."

Ryder shook his head. “Maybe, but right now she should be worried about you almost getting raped last night. Instead, she leaves you out in the dark to go to a party at my house. Did you see how many assholes were there? Not like they’re stupid enough to fuck with my girl, but your mom doesn’t know that. Someone could’ve snatched you. You could’ve been hurt, anything could’ve happened.”

Jane leaned her head on his shoulder. He was really the most amazing guy. “Maybe she wanted me to run away with you.”

He grinned, opening her bedroom door and carrying her right to her bed, but he sat, keeping her on his lap. “That would fix her fears, wouldn’t it? She probably thinks I’m loaded like Luc, so at least she’s thinking you’ll be provided for.”

“Are you?” She sluggishly pulled her phone from her pocket, noticing she had several notifications from Wendy, Tercero, and Luc. Everyone was going to have to wait until she was calm and rested.

“Not really. Gabriel has control over our mother’s assets. He got us cars of our choice, but he’s holding everything else. Dad’s is untouchable because he’s alive. Like I said, I need a good job or I’m robbing Luc.” He tossed her onto the bed and started untying her shoes. “Shoulda just kept your ass naked.”

Jane yawned, closing her eyes. “I’m sorry for freaking out earlier.”

“For having a panic attack?” He started massaging her leg. “That was my fault. I shouldn’t have brought it up like that. You feel okay?”

She shrugged, not sure if she had even processed it. It felt kinda like a bad dream. “I’m okay.” As she said that, though, her heartbeat sped up so fast that she pressed her palm over it.

Ryder’s hand joined hers. “This isn’t going to stop beating because of that fucker’s memory.”

Now she opened her eyes, tears stinging them, but she refused to cry this time just so she could see him.

He linked their fingers but didn't move them away from her heart. "You remember each time that I was there. Remember that you didn't die. Last night you fought against him, and I had your back. And just a few minutes ago, you felt like you were dying, but it passed. It'll always pass." He moved their hands down. His spot. "Feel me?"

Nodding, she sniffled because this boy was freaking everything.

"Always with you, babe." He leaned over her now, a half-smile in place as he lowered himself to kiss her. "Wanna make out and get caught by Papi?"

"You're caught," came David's voice from the bathroom.

Jane froze, darting her eyes between him and Ryder.

"I heard your loud ass trying to open the locked door," Ryder said, giving him a brief look before focusing on her. "Gimme a kiss."

Jane felt like a deer caught in the headlights. She had been so ready to kiss him. Hell, she was gonna keep him hostage with all his cuteness, but now?

David crossed his arms and leaned against the doorframe. "Baby, if I tolerated Luc kissing you repeatedly in front of the damn world, if I instructed Tercero to come satisfy you for us, and if I am not beating this fucker's ass for spending the night with you, I can handle you kissing him goodbye."

"Good morning," Ryder said with a smirk, his tired face now alive with mischief. "I give her good morning and good night kisses."

"Stop being cute," she told Ryder, her cheeks hurting from smiling.

"You like my cute ass as much as you like sexy me and asshole me." He leaned back, though, as if sensing she wasn't ready. "What did she tell you?" he asked David as he went for the button on Jane's shorts.

Her eyes widened, and she stilled as David pushed off the wall.

“Before she left to the hospital, she threatened to throw me out since I’m already eighteen,” David said in a strangely relaxed tone as he walked closer. “Did she fucking ask you to undress her?”

Well, so much for him being relaxed.

Ryder turned his head toward David in a sizing-up manner. “Bitch, she’s my girl. I got her dressed to bring her home. Now I’m helping her undress so she can nap. We didn’t sleep well.”

“Both of you stop,” she said, feeling her first ‘boyfriend’ fight coming on.

Ryder smirked, shaking her hips. “Do you want help? I was doing it ‘cause you’re sore, and you’re looking groggy as fuck after what happened outside.”

David sighed, crossing his arms again. “I can leave—if you prefer him.”

Now, she felt bad. David had come home to check on her, confronted her mom, and he was worried. Ryder was in full boyfriend mode, and she knew he didn’t want to leave her either. “Stay,” she told David as she put her hands over Ryder’s. “You help.”

“Getting bossy now?” He chuckled, casting a quick glance at David. “She needs panties and a new shirt.”

An adorable, puzzled look fell over David’s face. “What?”

“She’s gonna sleep for a while, moron.” Ryder unzipped her shorts. “In case your dad comes storming in here, I want her dressed, and she’s not wearing panties. Get her some fucking clothes or get out.”

David stared at her, a mixture of desire and concern. Her good boy was showing, but she knew he was hiding his inner alpha male, the guy she saw cussing up a storm and pushing Ryder around like he was the bigger one of the two of them. The guy who told her when to come and taste herself.

So, she smiled and said, “David, I still sleep in your gray shirt sometimes. It’s in my panty drawer. I’ll wear that.”

Ryder gave her a little glare, but he didn't say anything. Instead, he lightly pinched her hip then slid a hand under her ass. "Up."

Her whole body heated under David's stare. Goosebumps rose on her skin, but she raised her hips, trembling as Ryder slowly tugged her shorts until they were on her thighs.

"You gonna stare the whole time or help out?" Ryder asked, turning so he could pull the shorts off the rest of the way.

David blinked, shaking his head as he strolled over to her dresser.

"I think you broke him, Sweet Jane." Ryder held out a hand for her, pulling her into a sitting position. "Arms up."

Obedying, she kept her eyes on his, though she felt David's stare the entire time.

"That's my girl." Ryder freed her cami, his eyes darting down her body. "Feel like letting me nap with you?"

"If you want to fight my father, sure," David said, strolling back. He held up his shirt and a pair of cotton panties. Her favorite pair with white bows on the butt cheeks. "And you won't let her sleep."

"Bitch, like you will." Ryder snatched the panties, inspecting them with a wicked grin. "Me likey."

David didn't seem as on board with Ryder's playful side, but he wasn't throwing out aggressive vibes either. He motioned to Ryder. "Help her into those. I'll put my shirt on her."

There was a half-second of protest in Ryder's eyes, but it was gone fast, and he was tugging her up, sliding his hands to her ass. He squeezed, lifting her off the bed to stand in front of him with her back to David. "Look at this," he told David, squeezing her ass. "Fits my hands perfectly."

She peered over her shoulder. David was as serious as ever. No joking. Just taking her in. Taking her in while she was in Ryder's arms.

Ryder grabbed her chin, turning her to face him. “Both of us, right?”

She gasped, feeling a blast of heat as David stepped closer. *Oh, gosh.* She locked eyes with Ryder. He wasn’t upset. All the love was still there. More of it. He was giving her more than himself. “Both,” she breathed, sighing as a pair of fiery hands moved her hair aside and one lightly held her throat.

“You have us both, baby,” David said, gripping her hip with his free hand. “He’s waiting for his good morning kiss. Let me see.”

Alpha David.

Her entire body trembled as Ryder smiled down at her. This was really happening. They said she would be between them and now she was.

Ryder tugged her a tiny bit closer, not so far as to cause David to let her go. “Don’t be nervous. It’s me. It’s David. You’re our girl.”

“Both,” she whispered, her hand shaking as she reached up to his chest.

“Both.” Ryder surprised her by lifting her so fast, she cried out. He had a good hold on her though, his hands gripping the underside of her thighs as he pressed her back against David’s chest. Her blue-eyed boy lowered his hands to each side of her waist, but it was Ryder who was still talking, “Now put those lips on mine.”

Well, damn. How many girls could go buck ass naked in Ryder Godson’s arms with David Leodegrance holding onto her from behind?

“Did I die?” she blurted before reaching her target.

Ryder smirked, the corner of his eyes crinkling as he shifted his attention to David. “Our baby thinks she’s in heaven.”

“Turn her the other way and she will be,” David quipped then kissed the back of her neck. “Hurry and kiss your boyfriend, Jane, so you can be kissed properly by your man.”

Hot damn.

“Bitch,” Ryder said, giving David a death glare. “Making her swoon and shit. I should fight you.”

Confidence and amusement shone in David’s eyes as he shrugged. “When she’s not looking, you can fight me. When she’s between us, we’re brothers.”

“Whatever,” Ryder muttered childishly as he left butterfly kisses on her cheek. “Love me up, babe. My feelings are hurt.”

Who would’ve guessed David would be the badass and Ryder the cutest asshole there ever was?

David moved his mouth closer to her ear. “Show me how you kiss him. He’ll show me where you like to be touched.”

“Her legs are weak,” Ryder said quietly, to which David slid a hand down, sliding under her ass so Ryder could let go. “Come here, Sweet Jane.” Then he was pulling her by the back of the neck to him. No more waiting for her to get over her dreamy state. He was reminding her he was an alpha, too.

The moment his lips touched hers, every bitter thought that she’d held onto, every fear, every worry, every insecurity fell away, all replaced by him. And the awareness of David at her back, watching as Ryder pushed her mouth open with his, watching Ryder’s tongue slip into her mouth as he kissed her breathless only to suck her lips and do it all over again, well, it had her body in flames.

But her bad boy was there to soothe the burn. He kissed her like they were alone, using David like a wall, pressing her against his chest as he trailed his hand down to her breasts. He showed her with his tongue what he wanted to do to her nipple as he brushed it with his thumb.

She moaned, throwing her arms around his neck, feeling David’s gaze, taking it all in. Ryder shifted, sliding a forearm under her ass then he grabbed David’s hand and placed it over her right breast.

“Oh, fuck,” she breathed, blinking at Ryder to make sure he really meant to do that.

He smirked, squeezing his hand over David's. "Both of us, angel." He nipped her parted lips as David started exploring her on his own.

David's breath fanned down her back as he began kissing her neck. *Oh, wow, this really is heaven.* She instantly knew the difference between their touch.

Heat. Tingles. Both so strong and so careful even when they were a little rough.

A heated touch kneaded her breast as its partner in crime left a tingling trail up her neck.

Ryder held the front of her throat. It would've been frightening after everything she went through, but the way this boy looked at her, the inferno in his eyes that never burned her ... she could only smile and hope he'd kiss her again.

"Want me to get you dressed now?" A cocky, half-smile teased her as he rubbed his thumb over her lips. "No. You're still looking to play."

She nodded, wrapping her lips around his thumb.

"*Mhm.*" He grinned at David, who she could feel smiling against her skin. "So brave."

He was referring to her being okay with a finger in her mouth, she realized, and she loved him that much more. They were pushing her in the sexiest and most loving way, reminding her what a man's touch is supposed to be.

Ryder leaned forward, giving her a sweet kiss followed by a hard suck on her bottom lip had her moaning. She panted, her skin feverish as he slowly turned her face toward David's. "His turn. Let me see."

David didn't pounce on her, but he did discontinue his work on her breast to hold her face in place. "So beautiful," he said softly.

Ryder hummed in agreement as he leaned away. To watch.

Never had she imagined she'd have either of them, but it had to be right. Nothing wrong could feel this perfect or make

her feel more beautiful and more loved. They were hers, and she was theirs.

“Ready for me?” David asked, dipping his head closer to hers.

Tingles bloomed across her stomach before settling in Ryder’s spot. “Answer him, Jane.”

Her head was already bobbing. “Ready.”

A breathtaking smile spread over David’s face as he said, “That’s our girl.” Then his full, perfectly shaped lips were against hers. He didn’t hold back—didn’t struggle with the awkward position. He worshipped her mouth, her lips, her breath.

“Damn,” Ryder broke the spell, but he made up for it by massaging her breast. He chuckled when she yelped, then pinched her nipple. “How far do you want to take this, babe?”

David breathed in as he gave her a long kiss. “We should probably stop,” he whispered, giving a sweeter kiss to her tender lips.

“Oh.” She stared at him, wondering briefly why she wasn’t disturbed by everything she was doing, but when they stared at her like she was their world, there was really no way to feel uneasy. Except for the fact that she wondered how Tercero and Luc would feel.

A growly grunt came from Ryder as he glided a hand down her stomach. “All right. Let’s get you dressed, then I’ll get out of here.” He gently lowered her feet to the floor, kneeling before her, he kissed her tummy. “You call me if you need me to come over. I don’t give a fuck what your stepdad or mom say, you’re my girl.”

“Our girl,” David corrected, his fingers skimming her spine until he copped a feel on her ass.

“Yeah, yeah.” Ryder snatched her panties off the bed and helped her into them. “Guess you’re my brother from another mother. If they give you shit, you can stay with us.”

She internally awwed at this. Why were they so cute together?

A kiss was pressed to the top of her head before a shirt was pulled over. It shouldn't have taken long, but the shirt was halted before her head could pop through.

“No, I want to see her face,” Ryder said.

David chuckled, tugging the shirt so her head was free, revealing Ryder holding up his phone to take a picture.

“Babe, smile.” He held up a phone... . No, he had David's phone.

“You're taking sexy pics for David,” she teased with a grin.

Ryder winked. “He's got no idea what photos I took of you.”

Her body heated against David's, but he didn't get angry.

He simply bunched up the hem of her shirt, raising it to her breasts to show off her stomach and his other hand pushing her panties down. “Smile, Jane.” She shivered, obeying as Ryder took the picture with a cocky grin in place. Then David tilted her face up so he could kiss her. Another picture. He kissed her chin. “Thank you, baby. I'll keep the pictures safe.”

“You better.” Ryder got up, tossing David his phone then cupped Jane's face. “I'm gonna bail. Get some rest instead of fucking around with this asshole. Give me a shout when you're up. We're treating you to dinner.”

“We?” She frowned as he let her go and started walking toward the door.

“Yeah.” He paused with his hand on the door. “Your boyfriends want to take their girlfriend out, and you can let the other two get some time with you.”

“My dad isn't gonna let her out,” David said, hugging her to him. “I'm telling him my feelings for her.”

Ryder nodded, opening the door. “Well, we'll sneak baby girl out. 'Cause I'm seeing her again today whether or not

your pops has a problem with me. Motherfucker can suck my left nut if he thinks I'm obeying his rules after everything last night."

Gosh, so much had happened. Jane almost needed to take notes. It really had been unfair for Kingston to punch Luc and not expect retaliation. Ryder wasn't a Luc fan, but they were brothers. You didn't punch one and not expect the others to defend him. Worse, Kingston wanted to arrest Ryder, a minor, after he had been the one to start things.

"Don't worry, Sweet Jane." Ryder smiled, preparing to shut the door. "Have fun with David, but I mean it, get some rest. If they ground you, I'm springing you. If they kick David's ass out, I'll put him up. Don't stress."

"Okay." She touched his spot, beaming when she swore his eyes glowed.

"Good morning, my moon," he said, shutting the door before she could reply.

"That asshole is actually romantic," David said with a chuckle.

Jane turned in his arms, hugging his narrow waist. "And you're rougher than I thought you'd be."

"I can be gentle." He pushed her hair back, finally his tougher exterior softening. "I can be anything you need me to be. And right now, you need a nap."

She pouted her lips, but she didn't argue; she was tired as hell.

He laughed quietly as he guided her to bed. "Want me to leave, or should I stay?"

Crawling onto the bed, and knowing very well she was showing off her ass, she peered over her shoulder and said, "Do I need to entice you in some other way?"

Two hands grabbing hold of her ass cheeks and a growl were her only warnings before he was on her.

SIXTEEN

Never, in almost eighteen years of her life, had Jane been so humiliated. In a pathetic attempt to hide her sniffles, she turned away from David as he dug through her cabinets. It didn't help; her obnoxious sniffles still echoed throughout the bathroom.

“Baby,” he said softly. She could feel him looking at her, but she knew he hadn't gotten up yet. “Jane, it's fine.”

She closed her eyes, refusing to even talk about it with him. All she could do was imagine his handsome face as he gave her the most intense kiss of her life. His blue eyes had been full of happiness, swirling brightly with sapphire and specs of cerulean—but then he bit her lip, and his eyes darkened like a beast's.

“Tell me what you want,” he'd rasped against her mouth.

Yes, Jane's vagina was sore, her body equally weak and aching, but she wasn't going to make either of them wait. There was no telling when Kingston and her mom would be back, and what they would do to them. There was a very good chance David would be kicked out and seeing him would be difficult, no matter what fairy tale Ryder wanted to create for her. So, she pulled his lips to hers, whispering, “All of you.”

A dangerously sexy smile stretched over his face. The predator David had always hidden from her was there. He was ready to consume her, and Jane was the most willing prey when it came to David.

He gave her a tender kiss, smoothing her hair back, then he pushed himself up into a kneeling position and peeled his shirt off. *Dear Lord, he is magnificent.* Golden skin stretched over his mouthwatering muscles that flexed as he tossed his shirt aside and returned to push hers up, over her breasts. What could she say? The boy worked fast.

Every lick and nibble of her sensitive skin was proof the boy was going to destroy her. He wasn't like Ryder at all. Ryder worshipped her. David wanted to conquer her.

He teased her with a faint caress along the little bows of her panties, causing her to writhe and whine below him.

"I say when you get it, baby," he said, lightly tugging her panties only to release them back in place.

"David." She clawed at him and clenched her legs to relieve the ache, but he didn't let her.

"What did I say?" He grinned, shoving her legs apart, but he finally rubbed hard over her sex. "I satisfy you."

Oh, the quiver that sent through her had her closing her eyes. Again, he wasn't letting her have any control. He was David, and he was claiming her his way.

"Look at me when I'm touching you," he said as his hand finally moved to the edge of her panties. Unlike Ryder, he didn't push them down. He yanked them to the side and dragged his finger between her slick folds.

"Oh, shit." She held her breath, holding his stare as he pushed one finger inside her. "Oh God," she moaned, struggling not to close her eyes. His touch was so hot, and though she started to worry Ryder might've made her too swollen because she felt really tight around his finger, she wanted more.

David didn't look away from her face as he inserted a second finger and started fucking her with his hand. A cocky smile stayed in place as her whimpering bounced around the room.

Then he glanced down. His hand stopped moving, and he darted a worried glance to her face.

“What?” She was drunk off his touch, sitting at the brink of release.

“Nothing.” He pulled his hand free, but he lifted her so fast she got dizzy. “It’s okay.” He kissed her forehead and carried her to the bathroom. He carefully sat her on the counter then leaned over to the sink and washed her period blood from his hand.

Yep. She, Jane Mortaime, had started her fucking period on David’s hand.

“Baby, don’t be embarrassed.” He finally walked over to her, holding out a clean pair of panties and a tampon he’d gotten from her drawer.

She snatched them, even more humiliated now. “Just go.”

He squatted in front of her, his hands on her calves. “No. If I go, you’re going to lock me out. I don’t want to be locked out, and I want to spend time with you. It doesn’t have to be sex to mean everything to me, Jane.”

Ugh, why is he so wonderful, too?

David bent down, tilting his head to the side to get in her view. That gorgeous David Leodegrance smile that haunted her was right there, all for her. “If you really want to, we can. I just wouldn’t think you’d be okay with that.”

Her eyes bugged out. “What? Have sex with you while I’m on my period?”

“People do it.” He started massaging her calves. “We can go in the shower.”

She gaped at him before finally hissing, “I’m not fucking you on my period.”

“All right.” Calm as ever, David leaned down, kissing her thighs. “I was only saying if you’re upset we had to stop, I don’t have to. Your blood doesn’t bother me.”

“That’s gross.” She shoved his head.

A spark lit his eyes as he grinned up at her. “Nothing about you is gross. But I’m not trying to force you. I was only

concerned with making sure you're satisfied."

"I can't be satisfied now." She tried to shove him, but he only balanced himself better and lifted his head.

"Don't be angry." He watched her as her embarrassment turned to anger. "I'm not mad or grossed out; I was only worried. I honestly don't care if you get blood on me, other than I know it might embarrass you." His attention fell to the apex of her thighs. "Are you still aching to come?"

"Jesus." She looked away because dammit, she was. He was shirtless, his hair messy from fooling around, and he was offering sex in the shower even though she bled all over his hand. It was nasty but somehow erotic. Fuck, now she couldn't not think about him fucking her on her period.

"Stand up," he told her, his tone so firm that her head swung around to stare at him in shock. David appraised her slowly, then scooted back enough to let her stand. "Get up, Jane."

Why she listened, she didn't know, but she obeyed.

"Give me these." He took the tampon and panties, placing them on the floor beside himself. Then he locked eyes with her and said, "Take off your shirt."

"Why?" Even though she asked, she reached for the hem of the large shirt that belonged to him.

"Because I want to see my woman," he said, making her feel pretty despite the situation she was in. "Take it off because I'm going to make you come."

Everything about his words and the serious way he said them had her throbbing between her legs. She had no idea how he would do that when she was bleeding, though.

"How?" she asked, her fingers bunching on the fabric of the shirt she wore.

David stood, and he was a mouthwatering sight wearing only his jeans, and his bare feet on the tiled floor. The corner of his mouth twitched as she ogled him, then he unbuttoned

his jeans and pushed them down. Along with his underwear. “With my dick, Jane.”

His dick. Holy shit, his dick. She’d only ever seen Ryder’s, and even the erections she’d seen David sporting beneath his underwear had nothing on the hard-on he had going now.

“I’m not afraid of your blood,” he said. “You shouldn’t be either. But we’ll do what we can to make cleanup easier. Your call.”

She couldn’t look away from him. He was almost as tall as Ryder, nearly as big as him too. Their skin tones were different. She always thought Ryder’s had been tanned permanently in the sun. But the sun’s rays had simply embraced David, enhancing every masterful inch of his body.

“If I’m scaring you, I’ll stop.” His finger slid under her chin and tilted her face up, and he smiled at her stunned expression. “Trust me, baby, I’m down for anything you want.”

“I want you in me,” she blurted, clapping her hand over her mouth. What the hell, she mentally screamed at herself. “No.”

“No?” He chuckled, caressing her jaw as he moved closer. Now his cock was poking her in the stomach. “Do you want to watch me jack off then? Because I’m that fucking turned on right now.”

“How?” she asked, gasping as he moved her hand down and placed it on his dick. “Oh, gosh.”

“Do you know what to do?” he asked when she just held it.

“David,” she whispered, peering up at him. The stupid thing was she wanted to jack him off so badly and then let him fuck her like a bloody animal. Bloody. “I don’t want to see it.”

“See what?” he sighed as her grip tightened on him. Christ, it was so hot and hard.

“The blood.” She pressed her cheek against his palm. “I don’t know what’s wrong with me. I have to have you in me,

but I'm embarrassed. And they might come and take you away."

"I'm not letting us do this because you think it's the only chance," he said, lowering his hand, prepared to take her hand off him.

Jane grasped him harder, sliding up this time. He suddenly gripped the hair at the back of her head and tilted her face up even more.

"Yes, I'm worried about not having a chance," she said quickly. "But this is something that's been building between us, something you and Ryder stirred up, and my whole body is on fire, itching to have more."

He growled as she pressed her thumb over the rim of his dick. "Does he come in you?"

She froze, but she nodded. "I only want him to come in me for now."

He nodded. "Yes, that's better. He's better."

Her heart squeezed in on itself, but then David was kissing her like she was his and his alone. "It's not that he's better," she rushed out when he leaned away.

"No, he is," he said. "I'm glad you have him, but you still get all of me, too." The way he smiled made her want to cry and be loved by him every single day for the rest of her life. "Taking this off?" he asked, touching her hand.

Jane nodded, lifting her shirt over her head.

He took her in before turning her to face the bathtub. His thumbs slid under her panties, and he leaned down, kissing her neck. "If you want me in you, but you don't want to see, we can do this. Give me the word, and I'm yours, and you're mine in this moment. If you don't want it, I'll make you come anyway, put your tampon in for you, clean you, then dress you so you never have to see."

Her need was now giving her the most unbearable cramps. They were unlike anything she'd had before because instead of the normal internal agony, she wanted to be thrust into to

exchange the pain for pleasure. “You’re not grossed out?” she asked, moaning as he cupped her breasts and pulled her ass toward him, tugging her panties down in the process.

“Not at all,” he said, kissing her neck again. He palmed her ass when her panties fell to her ankles. When she kicked them off, he smiled against her skin and produced a towel before tossing it onto the floor by her feet. “On your knees and lean over the tub.”

Jane had never obeyed so quickly before. She needed him to claim her right now. It might sound stupid, like in one of her books and he was some sort of supernatural badass who considered her his mate, but yes, she needed David to conquer her. She just didn’t want to see the blood.

“That’s my girl.” David dropped down behind her, pushing on her back to make her fully lean over the tub. Her thighs were flush with the sides, and he was already sliding his dick along her slick opening.

She moaned, sticking her ass out like the needy girl she was. “Oh, please.”

“Tell me if I’m too rough,” he said, kissing the center of her back sweetly. “This time will be quick and hard.”

All she did was nod, and then he entered her. She thought the mixture of her juices and blood would mean it would feel less. She wasn’t sure why she’d thought that because it felt like there was more of everything.

“Good?” He panted, just holding himself inside her.

“Yeah,” Jane breathed, her arms quaking as he pulled back to slam into her. Oh, this was different. His strong thighs were cradling hers, his hands on her waist, squeezing, trying to keep her from ramming her hips against the tub.

He was relentless, striving to make her come. It was like he needed her to come for him or he was going to lose his mind. But then he’d give her a sweet caress, sliding a hand along her spine as he chanted, “My Jane,” under his breath.

She cried out when her hand slipped on the tub.

“You okay?” He slowed, moving her hair off her sweaty back.

“My arms are burning,” she told him, moaning at the slower thrusts he was giving her now.

David kissed her neck, then pulled her upright. He held her against him, still moving in and out. “There’s not that much blood. I’m gonna lift you up, okay?”

Right now, she didn’t care if she was unleashing the river of blood from *The Shining*. He could take pictures as long as he didn’t stop.

He chuckled, squeezing her breasts before pulling out.

“David,” she protested, but he lifted her up, carrying her to the counter.

He put the towel from the floor on it, then plopped her down. There was blood, but he was right, there wasn’t that much, and he had no hesitation when he lined himself up and swiftly buried himself in her. “Ah, fuck, that’s good.”

Yes. God, yes, it was good. Jane moaned, wrapping her arms around his neck as he went slow and deep.

“I love you,” he said, his lips brushing her cheek. “This is home.” Deep. So deep. “No matter what happens, this is where you’re meant to be. Right here.”

“Home,” she agreed, hanging onto him. He was hitting the spot that made her toes curl and her breath hitch. Her pulse pounded in her ears as he sped up, hooking an arm under her leg and hiking it up as the other held her ass slightly off the counter. She was more or less getting speared.

Now she was lost. It was like being lit on fire. Painful but beautiful because she knew this boy loved her. He was fucking her, but he was so in love with her. She knew because he breathed next to her ear.

“Just you, my love.” His lips left whispering kisses along her jaw until he was sucking her neck. The beast was back. He hoisted her off the counter and kept her legs wrapped around

him. Jane's instincts overrode her senses, and she held on, assisting him by riding every thrust he gave. "Ah, fuck, Jane."

Her orgasm hit her like a freight train, and she cried out as the world collapsed around them. Her weak arms trembled as he continued, reaching for his own release.

"I'm gonna come," he growled, setting her onto the counter again. He pulled out, his dick so much bigger than it was before, as he grabbed himself and jerked a few times before ropes of hot, white come shot across her belly and thighs. The noises leaving him didn't sound human, and she kissed his forehead as he braced himself against the countertop, giving himself the final strokes to empty his load.

Though she felt beaten and bruised, she smiled and hugged him. His skin was sweltering against hers, but she let him lean against her as he calmed down. The way he nuzzled her, strongly pressing his lips to her shoulder, her neck, and her jaw then licking wherever he felt the desire to, reminded her of a male lion or wolf greeting his mate.

"Not even God will stop me from being with you, Jane." He kissed the base of her throat. "You're my heaven. I love you."

A dreamy smile stretched over her lips as she ran her fingers through his wet hair. She knew she loved him, too. That hadn't changed. Sometimes your heart just knew. So, she told him. "I love you, too."

He smiled against her neck. "I know. I've always known."

Jane laughed, leaning against him now. "I need to wash off."

"Yeah." Giving her a final kiss, he moved back, turning before she could see any mess she'd left on him. "Let me get the shower warm, and I'll help you down."

"Yes, sir." She saluted him before slouching back.

"Ryder's lucky," he said, turning the water on.

He was jealous, and she hid her smile as she met the stare he gave over his shoulder.

“Did you not get lucky just now?” she teased, pulling the towel from under her butt to wipe herself. There was so much come, like he’d been holding it in for months.

Holding his hand in the spray of water, he smirked at her. “I got very lucky. I’m just a bit envious he gets to come in you.”

“Believe me, I want you to.” She hadn’t meant to say that, but it was true. “But I think it’s for the best we limit the risks to one of you.”

The muscles in his back flexed. “Is it that you’re worried about me?”

She frowned, looking up to his face. “Worried?”

“I used condoms with her,” he said quietly.

“I know,” she whispered; he’d told her so in his letters. He’d said how one time he even pretended to come, just so he could stop. “As much as I don’t like Diane, I don’t think she’s been fucking guys behind your back. I don’t think any guy would be stupid to do anything with her if you were sorta with her.”

Slowly, David turned, no shame in the fact there was blood on his thighs and stomach. It looked like she’d dropped red and pink paint all over him. Thank god she no longer had super heavy periods. “No, she had been with one guy before me, but that was it. I got myself tested anyway, after the last time I was with her because I felt sick. I’m clean.”

“I know,” she repeated, holding out her hand. “Baby, I’m not mad.”

His lips twitched. “I’m baby, huh?”

Her cheeks heated; it had just slipped out that way, but yes, he was baby. Nodding, she warmed when he grabbed a hold of her hand, lifting it to his lips for a kiss.

“I thought you were my baby,” he said, moving to stand between her legs.

“I am.” Jane hooked her legs around his waist, grinning as he lifted her up.

Again, he kissed her like she was only his, not bothered that another held her heart. Confident that she would still be his even if she was Ryder's, too.

"Time to bathe my girl, then," he said, carrying her under the water. He didn't let her see the blood that was no doubt circling the drain. He just kissed her, rubbing his hands over her thighs, squeezing her ass with soapy hands, and licking the water from her skin.

That's when Jane realized she had *her* David. The boy she loved for as long as she could remember, who broke her heart to protect her, who set aside his jealousy to make sure she had the world when he couldn't give it to her.

She grinned, resting her head on David's shoulder as he cleaned her. Ryder was her world, but David was her sun. Hopefully, they'd keep her so she could figure out what Tercero and Luc were to her.

"Okay, let me rinse you off so you can follow your boyfriend's orders to rest." He kissed her head, turning her around. "I need to call your other men before they sneak over."

"I was just thinking about them," she mumbled, closing her eyes as he washed her breast as his other hand slipped down between her legs.

"Thinking about them while I'm touching you?" He flicked her clit and making her almost fall. "I've got you," he said, laughing.

"I didn't mean it like that." She peered up at him, worried. "I just wondered what they are to me."

"You don't know?" He frowned with water dripping down his face.

"I was just thinking about how I view you and Ryder. He's my world, my rock. But you're my sun, and you're thinking about everything and everyone as you keep us warm. I guess he sorta tries to do the same for you, but—never mind." She stepped away from him to wash the bubbles he'd lathered upon her. "It's stupid."

David moved closer, moving her hair away from her neck. “You’re his moon. I see the same thing, and I love watching you glow for him.” Fiery lips touched her skin. “As long as I’m a part of it, I’m happy. And believe me, this was heaven.” His hand came to rest over her heart, and she shivered under the heat. “Are you happy?”

“Yes,” she answered honestly. Finally, she had the guy she loved, the guy she denied loving, and two guys who were very concerned for her. She wasn’t alone, wasn’t forgotten. “I feel loved.”

“You are very loved.” He kissed her head again, then moved to leave the shower. “Take your time. I’m going to clean everything out here.”

“You don’t have to.” She grimaced at the thought of him cleaning her blood now.

“Jane, I’ve seen you have cramps. You’re not down for anything other than being curled up around a heating pad.” He leaned down, kissing her one more time. “Hurry up—I’ll be your heating pad.”

Memories of him watching her on the couch, whimpering with her heating pad flashed in her mind. “You always brought me my heating pad.”

He pulled a towel around his waist then dragged a hand through his dark hair, causing water droplets to fall onto his shoulders and chest. Then he smiled and said, “I’m the upgrade, baby.”

SEVENTEEN

“Jane,” the harsh whisper startled her from her sleep. “Wake up.”

Jane rolled to her back, groaning. “Wendy, what are you doing here?” She glanced around her bed, quickly noting David wasn’t there. It stung that he’d let her wake up without him, but Wendy was there—maybe he left them alone to avoid anything awkward.

Wendy sat beside her, pushing her dirty-blond hair behind her ear as she peered at the door. “I was coming to check on you because I heard about last night.” She turned to Jane again, worry dancing in her brown eyes. “I can’t believe you were almost kidnapped. You didn’t even call me to let me know if you’re okay. I had to hear about it at work, and that was mainly Ryder fighting your stepdad.”

“Sorry, a lot kinda happened.” Jane hated that she could be such a terrible friend.

Wendy darted her gaze toward the door again. “I guess now isn’t a good time to tell you David and his dad are next door. The Godsons are outside.” She paused when Jane sat up fast, then finished, “There’s a lot of yelling going on. Your mom is screaming like a banshee.”

“Oh, shit.” Jane stood, glancing down at the panties and cami David had put her in.

“Don’t go out there like that,” Wendy said, rushing to her drawers. She threw Jane a pair of leggings and a hoodie. “Do you think carrying a bible will help?”

She laughed as she pulled on the clothes and hopped in place, trying to get her shoes on. “That’ll give Kingston Catholic School ideas.”

“You guys aren’t Catholic.” Wendy opened the door. “If he says something about shipping you off, run to my car. I got paid today. We can make it to Mexico and hook up with some hot cholos.”

Jane bust out laughing as they ran down the hall. “Oh my God. Never say cholo again.”

“Whatever. Don’t you have some Spanish in you?”

“That’s Spain,” Jane replied distractedly.

“Well, just imagine it, Ryder and David come riding through Mexico to fight our hot Mexican boyfriends. They’ll have to bring someone who wants to fight for me.”

Sliding to a stop, Jane turned to hug Wendy. “Thank you for having my back. But stop acting like no one would fight for you. Those country boys are always asking you out.”

“Not the ones I like.” Her best friend returned the hug and smacked her ass. “Hurry up, chica. If they rumble, I’m jumping on Savaş and telling him to snag you and dump you in my car.”

“Savaş, huh?”

Wendy’s face flushed. “It’ll be like riding a wild bull.”

Jane made it to the front door laughing, but her laughter died as soon as she opened it and heard the roar of insults hurled between Ryder and Kingston. “Shit.”

Wendy nodded as she looped her arm through Jane’s and dragged her toward the yard.

Everyone was there. David stood between Ryder and Kingston, but he was glaring at his dad, yelling right back as Savaş and Archer kept them both from getting too close to Kingston.

Luc was on the steps, arms crossed as he watched the mayhem unfold. Her mother was tugging on Kingston’s arm,

sobbing as though someone was about to get shot.

Kingston wasn't calming down, though. He jabbed a finger at David's chest. "She's your goddamn sister!"

Thankfully Ryder was holding onto David but that didn't stop David from firing right back, "She's the girl I loved before you started sleeping with her mom!"

"Dang," Wendy dragged out with a snicker. "If he had said 'fucking', I would've creamed."

Jane was too worried to comment on that, too focused on what his words meant. David had told his dad. They were never going to be able to be alone together for the rest of their lives.

Inner-Jane rolled her eyes at herself, and she took a breath. Okay, she was almost eighteen, and Kingston couldn't control their lives forever. She could handle this.

Slap.

Jane gasped, covering her mouth as Kingston's hand left David's cheek. Everyone quieted as David stayed still, his face turned to the side. The handprint on his cheek was huge. After all, his dad was just as tall as he was and strong, too. It looked like David was about to bleed.

She'd never seen a guy slap another guy, but it seemed more insulting.

"You will never see her again, boy," Kingston growled, his blue eyes like ice and he seemed bigger than David all of a sudden. "None of you are to see my daughter again. I'll call the cops if you step one foot on my property. I'll have the principal and your coaches aware that if you so much as are caught talking to her, you are expelled. Don't think I can't create some story about finding you with her that'll have them sick to their stomachs at the thought of you near her. If I have to, I'll see that the universities you're eyeing are aware of your disgusting behavior with her. You won't see a day on the field ever again."

Jane couldn't move. Even Wendy was shaking.

Kingston couldn't do this. It wasn't possible. Mr. Prince wouldn't believe they had done anything to her. No school would ban them from enrolling or playing. Would they?

David's fists trembled at his sides as he slowly lifted his head to stare at his father. He didn't move beyond that, but it seemed Ryder and Tercero weren't taking chances, and they each had a hand on his shoulders.

Moving her mother aside, Kingston met gazes with David and shook his head. "My pride—that's what you were to me. Now you're a sick, disappointing mistake that cost me your mother."

Jane shook her head as agony filled David's eyes. If there was one thing he regretted about himself, it was that he was born. His mother had suffered from postpartum depression after having him, and she committed suicide, though no one ever said how she'd done it. David never brought her up, as he was only an infant at the time, but she knew it was the reason David tried so hard to make his dad proud. He wanted to be someone his mother would be proud of, but he wanted to also be the son who was worth keeping. It made all the sense in the world to Jane now why he'd held back—why he put his dad's second chance at love above his happiness.

"Kingston," her mom whispered, moving slowly in front of him. "That's enough."

He dropped his icy stare down to Sarah before briefly taking in some of the neighbors standing on their porches. Then he spotted Jane. Anger and sadness flitted across his face, but it didn't stay. He marched over to her, grabbing her by the arm. "I'm beyond disappointed in you."

Ryder moved forward. "Yeah, you need to let her go."

Kingston laughed, maneuvering Jane so she wasn't within reach. "Boy, if you are smart, you'll go inside right now."

Jane peeked around Kingston, noting the Godson brothers standing behind Ryder. David looked in a state of confusion and anger, but Savaş kept a heavy hand on him.

Cocky as ever, Ryder winked at her as soon as they made eye contact. “Considering she’s my tutor, you’re the dumb one to think I’ll be smart about shit. Especially when it comes to my girl. Now let her go. You’re not in control.”

“That has been the problem—I trusted my son and you bunch of delinquents to be so close to her,” Kingston growled out. “You’re not seeing her again.”

A violent light flashed within Ryder’s gaze, and he straightened, giving himself a few inches of height over Kingston. “You can insult me all you want, old man,” he said in that calm way that was more frightening than she expected. “But you’re not Jane’s father. Her father approved of me taking care of and loving his daughter long before you were ever in the picture. You’ve been a clueless stepfather, and you have no fucking say in her love life. That includes what she does with David. You’d be a fool not to know he loved her since we were kids. Now, don’t make me say it again.” He held out a hand, and every bit of Ryder’s dominance hit Kingston like a blow to the face.

Her stepfather flinched, moving half a step back—speechless.

Jane didn’t know what to do, only that she was afraid to let Kingston take her away. She met Ryder’s stare, her frantic heartbeat calming at the sight of the destruction hidden beneath his relaxed stance. Her bad boy was always going to have her back. The only problem was that she had to be realistic. Ryder had already been hauled into the police station for hitting Kingston. A second trip probably wouldn’t be so simple, and she wasn’t going to let him get in trouble for her.

She looked toward David, her lip trembling because he was worried. He wouldn’t fight his dad for her, and she didn’t want him to. It would destroy him, and she was thankful Archer and Savaş were there to keep him from doing something he’d regret.

Kingston tightened his grip. “Let’s go, Jane.”

Ryder’s mask dropped fast, and she rushed around Kingston to stop him.

“Wait!” She pressed a hand to his chest. “Ryder, please.”

Warmth that he only gave her transformed the fury he’d been about to release, and he nodded to her. “Your choice, babe.”

Again, Kingston tried to tug her, but she dug her feet down as much as she could, smiling when Ryder hooked a finger under her waistband, anchoring her even more so she could face her stepfather. “Kingston, please stop this. It has nothing to do with you, and you have no right to forbid them from seeing me. We live next door.”

“That can change,” he said icily.

Jane’s heart squeezed, and she looked toward her mother. “Please. We’re not hurting anyone. It’s our business.”

Sarah shook her head. “You’re hurting our family. Look at the scene you’ve caused, Jane.” She waved her hand toward the street. “I told you you could see Ryder, but you chose to disrespect me. I warned you—David is your brother. Nothing more. But we come home and you’re in bed together!”

“You told her she could see this loser?” Kingston roared, turning to her mother. “You knew about them and you left them alone?”

Ryder took the chance to pull her to him, wrapping an arm around her chest as David darted between his dad and her mom. “Miss me, babe?” Ryder smiled down at her as he moved them a little farther from the commotion.

“Hell yes.” She hugged his arm but switched her focus to David and his dad.

“Dad, enough!” David shoved him back. “Take it out on me. I chose Jane. Sarah had nothing to do with this.”

Kingston’s nostrils flared, and his jaw clenched tightly when he spotted Jane under Ryder’s arm. With a growl, he pointed to the house. “Jane, get inside now. And you”—he sneered at David—“get your shit and get out. You’re no longer my son.”

Jane gasped as her legs buckled. The only reason she didn't fall was that Ryder supported her.

David glanced at her with the saddest but most breathtaking smile and said, "This changes nothing, baby. I love you, and I'll still be yours beyond forever." Then he shoved past his dad, ignoring her mother who chased after him, telling him to just call things off.

"Wasting her damn time," Ryder muttered, leaning down to kiss the top of Jane's head. "Hey, I'll let David stay with me, okay? But tell me what you want to do right now."

Kingston glared at them, and Jane couldn't look away. She wanted to slap him and beg for forgiveness.

"Just take care of David," she whimpered. As much as she wanted to think everything would work out, she knew she was a minor for two more weeks. David wasn't, and they could throw him out. She'd only cause more drama if she let Ryder take control.

He dropped a hand to her belly and lowered his voice, "You didn't let him come in you, did you?"

She sniffled, covering his hand. "Stop making me want to get knocked up."

He snickered, kissing her head. "I'll get you one day."

"I know," she whispered, her heart breaking because she didn't know when she was going to see him again. "And, no, he didn't."

"Damn right." His arms tightened, and he spoke even softer, ignoring Kingston's call for her to go with him. "Send the word if we need to spring you. Not joking, babe. I'll destroy the world for you if I have to."

Sweet, deadly boy.

"David loves you," he murmured as his fingers slipped under her shirt just enough to caress her skin. "Tercero and Luc ... well, they'll tell you when they're ready, but you should know those fuckers got it bad for you. And you know you're my heart and soul. We'll tear apart the universe to have

you between us again. The others already know this, but I'll remind you; your lips are mine." His hand moved up to his spot. "And this." Tingles. "This is where you keep me. I'm never gone."

Kingston snatched her hand, pulling her toward the house.

She whined, holding up a hand to keep Ryder back.

Her bad boy nodded, crossing his arms. "I'm yours, Jane. No matter what he says."

Kingston threw a final glare at Ryder before pushing her into the house and slamming the door.

Jane wriggled free, sobbing. "Let me go!"

With only a light shove toward the family room, he pointed at the sofa. "Sit down. I don't need you sneaking into David's room."

"You act like we're related," she shouted, marching to the farthest chair.

"You are related." He marched to stand between the sofa and walkway as if to make sure she didn't make a run for it.

"Not by blood." Jane's hands were shaking now. She had to turn away because it hurt to see the man she cared for like a second father staring at her as if she was the most disgusting human being on the planet.

"It doesn't matter if it's not by blood," he said sharply. "By marriage, he is your brother. Brothers do not have relationships with their sisters. And good daughters don't screw the boys their father forbade them from seeing!"

"Step," she shouted. "Stepbrother and sister. And Daddy picked Ryder for me." She lifted her chin and plastered a fake smile on her face. "He picked all of them—including David. He knew I loved David. He never would've made me choose. He knew Ryder was my match, but he knew I loved your son, and he wasn't going to take that from me. You should be ashamed of yourself for everything you just said and did out there. I won't forgive you for hurting him."

Heavy footsteps on the stairs, and her mother weeping, had Jane standing. She held her breath as David reached the bottom step, facing off with his father with two bags in one hand, his football gear in the other.

“I don’t want to see you in this house ever again,” Kingston said, though his voice trembled as David stood there silently. “Leave your keys on the table. Sarah will clean out the car and put anything of yours in a box. If you’re staying with those delinquents, I’ll send it over to you.”

Jane shook her head. This couldn’t be happening. All she had wanted was for David to be proud to call her his, and he did it for her. He did it knowing his fears would come true and now they were.

“Don’t cry,” David told her with a smile on his face that didn’t quite reach his eyes. “These have still been the best days of my life, and I know we’ll have more. Don’t give up on me.”

“I won’t.” Her pitiful attempt to smile probably looked disgusting.

Nonetheless, a gorgeous smile lit up his face. “There’s my beautiful, brave girl. Don’t lose her. I want her back.”

Kingston growled, walking closer to David. “Out. I better not catch you around here. I’ll call the cops, boy.”

David steadied his helmet on the couch and pulled his keys out, dropping them on the floor. “Bye, Dad.” He walked away as Jane held back her cries. Though the moment the front door shut, she wailed, running up the stairs until she made it to her room.

She slammed the door, locking it and pulling her dresser in the way. Well, she tried, crying harder when she couldn’t even make it budge.

Bracing herself on the dresser, she sniffled, her hands shaking as hard as her legs. David was gone. Her David was gone.

Her chest ached so badly she almost fell to her knees. Only, she gasped at the ripped piece of paper on the dresser.

It only had one word: Secret

She knew instantly what this was, and dropping to the floor, she yanked open her bottom drawer and pulled open her secret compartment. All of his letters were still there, but a torn letter at the top was the one she pulled free.

Hey baby,

I'm sorry things couldn't stay perfect, but I want you to know it was the best experience of my life to be with you. I'll think about it every day and feel just as lucky as I do right now. Because I know you love me the way I love you, and I know I'm strong enough to make things work. Just be patient, okay? I'll be next door for as long as Ryder and the others let me stay. We'll get through this.

I love you, Jane.

Your David

Clutching his letter to her chest, she got up and hobbled over to her window. She had completely forgotten about Wendy and hoped her friend wasn't upset with her. But she knew there was no getting out of her house. She was trapped, and she had to lay low otherwise her fears of Kingston making them move would come true.

Jane's phone chirped with a notification, and she snatched it before heading to look out her window. She just wanted to feel like she was close to them.

Ryder Cuteson: Talk to me, babe.

She smiled, calling instead of texting him.

He answered on the first ring. "Hey."

“Hey,” she croaked, leaning against the window. No one was outside, but it was nice to hear his voice and at least see the same spot she usually saw him in.

“You okay?” he asked as a door on his end slammed. “Come to your window.”

“I’m already here.” She darted her eyes around, her pulse humming as soon as she spotted him.

He grinned up at her. “My little pervert.”

She pressed her hand against the window, her head bobbing. “I love you.”

“And I love you.” He rubbed a hand over his heart. “You say the word, and I’ll come for you.”

“You’ll get in trouble.” She wasn’t going to let him get in any more trouble.

He shrugged, sliding a hand into his pocket. “You’re worth it.”

“Stop being cute.” She traced her fingers over his face. “Did David go over there?”

“Yeah.” Now he scratched the back of his head. “We’re good, but I’m not the best to be around right now. Luc is talking to him.”

“Why aren’t you the best to be around?”

She swore his eyes flashed as he stared up at her.

“Because my girl was dragged away from me, and I had to stand there and watch like some weak ass bitch.” He took a deep breath, closing his eyes. “Sorry. I’m just pissed, and my mind is fucking with me. I keep thinking I should’ve told you how I felt years ago. Maybe shit would be easier. Well, not easier. Just not where you’re hurt. If I’m around anyone but you, I’m gonna take my anger out on them. So ...”

Jane sighed, still drawing little lines over his perfect face. Ryder was sweet. With her. No one else. “I can’t believe Kingston slapped him.”

“Don’t worry about him. He’s strong enough to take whatever shit his dad deals him, especially if it has to do with you.”

It was honestly the best thing that he and David were getting along. Even if Ryder wasn’t in the mood to be around David, he wasn’t bad talking him, and David had completely laid off talking crap about Ryder. “Will you tell him I found his letter?”

“Fucker had time to write a letter?” He chuckled and didn’t answer her question.

“It was a quick one,” she said, hoping that Ryder wasn’t upset about her wanting him to pass messages along. They might get along, but they weren’t each other’s errand boys.

“Yeah, I’ll tell him,” he finally said. “Your mom took his phone, I guess. He deleted everything in front of her. I don’t think he let her see what was there, but she told him to delete what he didn’t want her to see.”

“He doesn’t have a phone now?” Jane asked. Everything was out of control. She didn’t know how she was going to handle it all without them by her side.

He was quiet, then he sighed. “I’ll get him one, but I don’t know how long they’ll let you keep yours.”

“What?” Her breathing hitched, and she pressed her hand against the window even harder.

“Babe, this isn’t going to be easy. I don’t mind fighting for you or waiting for you, but you gotta remember you’ll make it through whatever they throw at you. I’ll be right here.”

Even though she didn’t feel it would work out, she still said, “Okay.”

He tilted his head back, exhaling loudly. “Baby girl, don’t start this shit.”

“I’m not starting anything,” she fired back, her heart burning as he glared at her. “Don’t be an asshole.”

“I’m not being an asshole. I just fucking know you’re doubting shit. I’ve never lied to you, Jane. We’re gonna make

it through this.” He stayed quiet, watching her like a predator watches its prey. Still. Patient. He was waiting for her to make a move. “I need you to keep your mind clear, okay? Kingston is going to say shit to provoke you, and you acting like a brat is going to make things worse.”

“I am not a brat,” she said through gritted teeth.

“You’re talking to the guy you’ve been a cute little bitch with because you couldn’t admit you loved me.” His smirk was unmistakable. “I love you, angel, but you can bite when you want to. And I saw that fire in your eyes around Kingston. You want to rip a hole in his ass for hitting David and Luc, and you want to scream like a wildcat because he is keeping me from you. But that’s what he wants. He wants you to act like an immature little girl who is getting taken advantage of by the big bad wolves.” He might as well have had fangs with the deadly smile he sent her way. “He doesn’t know my little red riding hood is actually a wolf, a huntress, and the girl who lived. Outsmart him, Jane. Bite that little tongue—not your lips—and let him see that you’re not a child. You’ve been a good girl for a long time, but now you’re a woman. You’re my woman. You’re David’s woman.” He cleared his throat, his gaze, dark. “Are you Tercero’s and Luc’s woman?”

Tercero’s, she thought in an instant, but who was she to Luc? Did she really want to make things harder? She liked him, but she had Ryder and David, and she had Tercero if he wanted her.

Ryder grunted. “Your silence says enough.”

“Are you mad?”

“Kinda.” He rolled his neck, and she could hear the pop through the phone. “It’s fine. You haven’t had time to really think about shit, and I told you it was up to you. So, you can explore shit with Tercero and Luc. But that’s not my concern at the moment. Right now, I need you to get things as smooth as they can be with your parents. I want you to clear your threads to me and David. And anything you sent Tercero. I’m surprised Kingston even let you have your phone, but if he

sees our texts with you, we've got little chance left that we'll get you at all before the school year ends."

She shook her head. "He wouldn't—"

"Jane," he said, exasperated, "you and I have been together—he knows that. And he knows David was in your bed, and you were hardly dressed. To him, you're being fucked by both of us and maybe Luc. No dad, even a stepdad, will let that go."

"But you made love to me," she said lamely.

He chuckled as he nodded. "I did. But that doesn't matter to him. All that matters is I'm the idiot who punched him, who got the cops called on us, who let my brother take you out when you're supposed to be mine. And I'm the guy who you stayed the night with when he expected you to be home. He's not going to let me see you. He's going to make sure we don't have any contact at school, or he's going to have you switched to another school."

"He can't." Even as she said that she felt it, in her gut, Kingston was already arranging to keep them apart for as long as he could.

"Do what I tell you to, okay? Right now. Delete every thread between us and David. Anything that you talked about with your friend that talks about our relationship with you."

Fumbling, she accidentally ended the call with him. "Shit." Instead of calling him back, though, she deleted everything, her heart breaking because she wanted to keep those messages forever. But she trashed them along with photos from last night. Ryder had mainly used his phone, but at one point he'd taken photos of himself. Well, of them. Of him sliding in and out of her.

Jane squeezed her achy legs together as she sent a few to him before deleting them, and then again, deleting her text thread. Only then did she call him back.

He was laughing when he answered. "Thanks, baby girl. I'll keep your porn stash safe."

She peered out, wondering what would be different if he had told her his feelings years ago. Would she be with only

him right now? Would David have moved on? Would Kingston welcome Ryder into the family and would he and David be happy as father and son?

“Hey,” he said, his deep voice really the most comforting sound in the world. “Look at me.”

That’s all she wanted to do, and she focused on him. There’d been so many nights where she’d spied on him, and he’d only smirk her way before acting like he didn’t care she was there. Except, almost every time, he managed to take some article of clothing off, and if she was a good girl, he took everything off.

Ryder held his hand up like she was. “Keep my spot safe, all right?”

She nodded, feeling like an absolute baby now.

“I’m gonna marry you one day, Jane.” Absolute certainty in his voice and the way he watched her. “I’m putting babies in you, and I’m gonna kiss your pretty lips every morning and every night. I’m going to stare into your eyes and watch the green kiss the gold dancing in the center. You’re everything to me. My moon, my heart, my soul. My Sweet Jane. Waiting longer than I already have is not so bad when you remember that.”

She licked her lips as tears flowed freely, biting the bottom one to keep from blubbering on the phone.

“Don’t bite,” he warned in that threatening tone that made everyone but her take off running. “I can see them from here. I’ll knock the door down and march upstairs to spank your perfect ass, then I’ll remind you who those pink lips belong to.”

She stopped biting and pressed the sexiest kiss she could manage to the glass.

“Are you trying to keep me here or tempting me to say, ‘fuck it’ and come take you right there in front of your mom and stepdad?” He sounded moody, but she loved it.

“Just showing you some love because you’re the sweetest boy I’ll ever know.”

“Sweet?” He chuckled, and damn it all if she didn’t love his laugh more each time she heard it. “How’s this for sweet?” Before she could blink, he’d tugged off his shirt, even flexing for her as he dragged a hand down his sculpted-by-the-gods abs. Then he snapped the button on his jeans. And smirked up at her. “That’s it.”

“Huh?” Jane kept staring at the ‘v’ carved into his waist that dipped below his jeans.

“This is all you get.” He gestured to himself. “Now call me sweet again.”

Her senses somewhat restored, she narrowed her eyes at him. “I can’t believe you just teased me to prove you’re not sweet.”

“I’m a monster, babe.” He chuckled again, now standing with a hand on his waist. It was a casual stance, but he managed to look like he was doing a photoshoot. “Our birthdays are coming up.”

“I know.” She didn’t want to have her first birthday with a boyfriend and not even get to see him.

“Are you upset about dating a younger guy?”

“You’re a day younger.”

“I’ll be a minor for one whole day.” He walked to a chair and sat. “Want to do some kinky cougar shit with me?”

“We might not even see each other.” She pushed her window open to feel closer to him. The cool air rushed past her heated cheeks, making her realize how worked up she really was.

“I’m seeing you on your birthday.” There was total confidence in his statement.

“Really?”

“Yeah.” He leaned back, giving her an even better view. “It still feels like a dream, doesn’t it?”

“I don’t want to wake up if it is.”

“It’s real. It sucks right now, but it’ll be over soon.”

“What if it’s not?” She didn’t know what she would do if this went on longer than her birthday “I mean, I should be able to do what I want after my birthday, right?”

“Not while you’re living under their roof, babe.” He glanced toward his house as he continued, “I’d love to have you here with me, but we just got together. You need to stay at home. You’ll regret leaving like this. I don’t want to be the reason you lose what’s left of your family. It’s bad enough David got thrown out.”

The way he said that made her feel like he was saying it was her fault—that he didn’t want her around him—and she didn’t know how to respond.

He returned his focus to her. “Hey, don’t let your mind fuck with you. I’m just saying your mom has shit to make up for, and Kingston is the only dad you have left. He’s being a dick, but he’s not a bad guy. Your dad liked him, and he couldn’t have picked a better man to raise you besides himself. So, I’m not going to make you my teenage wife just yet.”

She didn’t mean to say it or sound so whiny, but she still blurted out, “But you’re blaming me for David getting kicked out, and you don’t want me.”

“The fuck, Jane? I am not saying any of that.” He sighed but not the annoyed sound she was expecting. “David knew the risks of being with you, and he chose you. That’s not your fault. And I’ve told you repeatedly, like I’m some kind of fucking stalker psycho, that I want to marry you and knock you up. I want you, but we need to finish school, babe.”

“Jane!” Her doorknob rattled as Kingston called louder. “Open this door, young lady.”

Ryder stood quickly. “Hide your phone. Don’t bring it up and maybe he’ll forget.”

She breathed faster, her eyes pricking with tears when Kingston banged on the door.

“I love you, angel,” Ryder said softly. “It’ll be okay. I’m here. I’ll stay here all night. Okay?”

“You don’t have to,” she cried, but she wanted him to.

“I’ll stay,” he promised. “Hide the phone now. Call me after he leaves. If he finds it, it changes nothing. I’m still here. I’m still so fucking in love with you, and I have a house full of the other fuckers who’ve got it bad for you. We’re not forgetting you or walking away.”

“Okay,” she said, flinching with every bang on the door.

“Just in case,” Ryder said, “good night, my moon.”

That agonizing pain in that happened when she really had to cry but was trying so hard to hold in flared in her jaw and ears. “Good night, Ryder.”

He kissed his fingers and touched his chest, then ended the call.

Tears broke free, and she rushed away from the window to hide her phone as well as all of David’s letters. Then she opened the door, tears and all, and she glared up at the man who had such a similar face to David’s.

Kingston took in her appearance quickly before scanning the room. When he noticed the window open, he marched over to it. Jane waited for him to yell at Ryder, but he didn’t react other than shutting her window and tugging her curtain closed. “You’re grounded,” he said with his back to her. “No phone, no internet unless it’s for school, no going out for anything other than school. And absolutely no boyfriends.”

Jane tried to focus on everything Ryder had told her, that he didn’t want her mouthing off and getting into more trouble. All she wanted to do was scream at Kingston, but she closed her eyes and saw her boys in her mind.

Ryder and David stood side by side, serious expressions on their faces until they both smiled the way they did just for her. Her breathing slowed, and she calmed at the sight of Tercero. He wasn’t standing behind the others, just to the side of Ryder. Not pushing his presence in her face, but there. When she needed him, he was already there. And that left Luc. He was standing in the distance. Watching. Just watching. He wasn’t going to help her anymore, but she had a feeling that if she truly needed him, he would come for her.

“Look at me,” Kingston said, his tone a lot calmer than it had been.

Not wanting to but because she swore Ryder nodded at her to listen and do as she was told, she opened her eyes and met Kingston’s stare.

He sighed, taking in her tear-stained cheeks. “I always wanted a daughter, Jane. I thought I had one, and it was the worst thing to hear you didn’t think of me as your father. It was even worse to know you and David have been lying to my face all this time.”

She dropped her gaze to the floor. “It was only the last few days,” she mumbled, wondering why she said anything at all.

“Don’t lie to me. Sarah told me you’ve been hiding this from me for years.”

Jane jerked her head up, her breathing coming faster again. “No, she knew I loved David ever since I was a little girl. So did my dad. And she even knew about David loving me before he said anything. I had thought he stopped caring about me altogether, but she knew he was in love with me. She’s just been waiting for me to notice Ryder so I’d forget David. So, go be mad at her. I didn’t do anything wrong. You both did, and I hate you for hitting David and for throwing him out. All he did was love me and try to make you proud, and you destroyed him.”

His nostrils flared, and his jaw ticked, but he didn’t blow up like she had hoped he would. “I’m sorry for hitting him in front of you.”

“It’s not me you should apologize to. And you should feel bad for hitting him, period. And Luc. I hope you apologize to him. He was only trying to help.”

Now those blue eyes lit with rage. “Help? He was helping himself to a foolish, underage girl.”

“I’m foolish?” she shouted, slapping her hands down at her sides. “You’re the one who didn’t understand a boy grabbing a girl’s ass meant he liked her! You’re the one who has a wife who keeps secrets from him, and you’re the one who got

knocked the fuck out by my amazing boyfriend.” Well, so much for keeping her cool.

Eyes still ablaze, Kingston held out his hand and barked, “Phone and laptop. Then you can pack a bag because I’m taking you to live with your grandmother. You’ll be enrolled at Helldonna. Happy? I’ve learned I can’t trust my wife, son, or daughter, and I can’t protect her in my own home. So, I’ll send you where you’ll be safe.”

Jane’s eyes welled with tears, but he only looked at her colder.

“Phone,” he repeated. “I know you have it. I heard you talking to one of them before I knocked. You’re not seeing those boys, and that’s final.”

Unable to keep her emotions in check, she cried, grabbing her phone and smashing it on the floor along with her laptop. “I hate you,” she screamed with all the venom she could.

He stared at the mess she’d just made in silent rage. His chest rose just as fast as hers was, and his fury filled the room like a crippling fog. “Then I’m finally doing something right,” he said with thin control over his voice. “As long as my daughter hates me, I’m keeping her safe from assholes and from herself. Now pack. You won’t return home until you graduate.”

EIGHTEEN

Ryder saw Tercero approaching in his peripheral vision, but he didn't tear his gaze from Jane's bedroom window. She wasn't home anymore, and he knew she wouldn't be at school today, but her window was the only thing keeping him calm as he prepared to go through with his piece of shit life without her.

It was stupid, but the little boy inside of him hoped she'd suddenly push open the curtain and tease him.

His anger flared for a few seconds at the remembrance of the early hours of Sunday morning. He had promised Jane he'd stay all night, and he had. It was five in the morning when he'd finally gone for a piss and a drink, and when he returned, his world felt wrong. Like her presence was suddenly gone.

That's when the sound of a car traveling down the road had him panicking. The only reason he hadn't jumped in his own car to follow was because her bedroom light turned on.

Minutes had ticked by, then Sarah peeked out and told him that Jane was gone and wouldn't return until the end of the school year.

He'd nearly gone over to grab her by the throat and demanded she brought Jane home, but Luc had been up. His piece of shit brother had waved Jane's bitch of a mom good day and told him to calm down.

When Mrs. Leodegrance was out of sight, Luc informed him that Jane had willingly left with Kingston. And when Kingston spotted Luc getting into his car to leave, he allowed

Jane the chance to say goodbye, giving Luc the warning to not come looking for her. Kingston promised retaliation if any of them were caught searching for her, then Jane spoke up. She told Luc to let him know that she was okay—that none of them should wait for her.

Silly, beautiful girl. If she thought he was leaving her because her stepdad was hiding her, she was ... well, just his silly girl. She wasn't stupid, but she had a problem seeing her worth and a hard time accepting she had his heart and soul. No, she had every piece of him.

Tercero finally arrived. For a few seconds, he stared up at the window before sitting in the lounge next to Ryder's. "If Jane has learned teleportation, she would teleport straight to you."

"Or to you," Ryder retorted, not changing his posture.

"Or to David," Tercero said. "Or to Luc."

Ryder didn't respond. He didn't love that Jane wanted Tercero, that she loved David and had, by the looks of her Saturday morning, been fucked hard by his rival. No, Ryder didn't love any of that shit, and he was still struggling with accepting Jane had a thing for Luc. That smooth fucker slipped in without ever letting any of them know he'd been watching her.

After a while of silence, Tercero said, "She likes you most."

"Of course she does. She fucking loves me." He smirked now, lighting up a cigarette. He needed to quit for Jane; she was allergic.

Tercero chuckled, relaxing completely. "David's taking things better than I thought he would."

"Yeah, Mr. Perfect is always doing shit like that for her." Ryder released the toxic fumes. "As long as he doesn't decide because he fucked her that she's more his, I'll tolerate him."

"You do more than tolerate him." Tercero gave him a serious look. "I know you're both trying to be with her at the same time. Be careful. She's still getting used to everything."

Ryder threw him a glare. “She’s not even here, dumbass.”

“We’ll find her,” Tercero said with a dismissive wave.

That was true; Ryder wasn’t going to stop looking for her. It was only pissing him off that not only did he feel like Kingston was saying he wasn’t good enough, but that Jane’s choices were being stripped from her the moment she was trying to grow into herself.

“Luc can probably find her fastest,” Tercero said quietly.

“Luc can stay the fuck out of this,” Ryder spat.

“She likes him.” Tercero closed his eyes, stretching out more. “What if she asked you to invite him into your threesome?”

It was a good thing Tercero was sitting far enough away that he wouldn’t land a hit on him right now. “She won’t want Luc.”

“You mean after she has you two together?” Tercero smirked, though he kept his eyes shut. “Did she tell you I remind her of you and David together? Maybe she’ll decide one of us—I—am enough.”

Ryder knew his stare could be felt, and he had no idea when Tercero had gotten the balls to provoke him like this.

“Did you tell her you made sure she could handle your dick?” Now Tercero glanced at him, amused. “It was cute, brother.”

“Shut the fuck up.” Ryder dropped his cigarette, watching it slowly die out. He didn’t care if it was a stupid thing to worry about or not know, but he knew Jane was small and he was big. His dick was big, too. It wasn’t like he had the biggest dick ever, but he was bigger than most guys. He just didn’t want to hurt his girl, so he researched weeks ago.

They’d caught him and laughed because he didn’t know some weird shit happened when a girl was turned on that made her able to accommodate a dick at all. Tenting—whatever the fuck that was. It wasn’t like he was out trying shit out or

paying attention when they taught Sex Ed. He wanted to learn with his baby.

Tercero laughed at him. “Archer didn’t know either. He had been the one to bring it up to me.”

“Archer asked if my dick would fit in Jane?” Ryder didn’t want Archer thinking about Jane at all.

With a smile tugging at his lips, Tercero explained, “That night she almost flashed you, and he joked that you were going to have to find someone to fuck to get the hard-on you had to go away ... He was eating a peach later, and he asked me if it was possible to kill a girl with a big dick.”

Ryder snorted, shaking his head.

“He was serious,” Tercero said, chuckling. “He likes her —”

“What?” All Ryder’s humor fell away at the thought of another of his brothers after his Jane.

“He thinks she’s hot,” Tercero said, “but he doesn’t like her more than a potential friend. He was worried you’d be too much for her because he said Jane was definitely into you, and it was only a matter of time before you two started fucking. He was going to warn her to prepare for you.”

“Fucking idiot.” Ryder leaned back now as he slid his phone out of his pocket. He doubted Jane got her phone back, but he hoped to see a message from her. There was nothing.

“Not really,” Tercero said. “You left bruises on her after your car sex.”

He winced, sliding open his photo gallery. Taking Jane’s virginity in the front seat of his Camaro wasn’t what he’d ever planned with her, but she’d been hungry for him and no way was he letting her run back to David after she’d held shit off with David for him. So, it meant tight quarters, hard and fast; definitely not as gentle as he probably should’ve been for her first time.

The bruises on her hips were visible the night before, and he’d noticed how she’d been a lot more tender when he was

with her then. His research hadn't been a waste because he found out there was another way to prepare a woman for a big dick, and he'd gotten good at making sure he had her ready for him so that she was moaning from pleasure and not from pain.

Ryder stared at the first photo of them, the one he'd taken just ten minutes before he'd become her first. She was so fucking beautiful. Her cute blush whenever he was too close to her always put a smile on his face, and she was all pink in the photo of the two of them at school.

"She liked them," Tercero said, probably referring to the bruises.

Ryder grinned because she had liked them. When he'd noticed them after their second time together, he'd kissed them and tried to tell her he'd learn how to be gentle. She told him not to change at all. "Little masochist," he said, chuckling.

Tercero nodded. "She likes to have reminders."

He darted his gaze to Tercero and narrowed his eyes. "I didn't see a reminder of you."

"No?" Tercero smirked then reached up to the collar of his shirt, pulling it down enough to reveal a hickey. "Because she insisted she was yours to mark up, but she'd make sure anyone who looked at me saw who I belonged to. She was sneaky—it was all I allowed her to do."

Ryder glared at the hickey. "Why the fuck wouldn't she mark me?"

"Because she doesn't want anyone staring at you longer than they need to." He shrugged. "You know her more than even I do. I'm sure she imagined you'd be able to see each other at school, but I would've been her secret. Plus, she thinks you're beautiful. I imagine she would consider it ruining you." Tercero smiled. "I'm jealous."

He didn't stop scowling because he was jealous too. "Did you—"

"—have sex with her?" Tercero finished. "Really, brother, she wouldn't have been able to walk out of here if all three of

us had been with her. It's a miracle she did with all I heard between you."

"That's right, bitch." Ryder felt a little better that he was still Jane's number one. It stung from time to time that she didn't choose him alone, but he would do anything for her. Even swallow the bitterness at the realization that Tercero had likely fucked her with his mouth and David had taken advantage of her needy state after he'd left them alone in her room.

"Did you taste her?"

Ryder raised an eyebrow at his brother. "You're lucky she likes you, or I'd probably kill you."

A rare mischievous gleam sparked in Tercero's eyes. "Is that a no?"

"I doubt my girl wants you talking about her," was what he chose to reply. Of course, he tasted Jane.

"She told me she wanted you to have her every way possible."

Ryder didn't react outwardly, but his heart was pounding. His girl was a freak in the sheets. "Well, I already checked off several on her list, then." He wasn't going to tell anyone how much he'd done with Jane. All he cared about was that she was a satisfied, sexy mess every time he was with her, and all he had to do was look her way for her to clench those thighs together. Though, he was curious if Tercero or David had managed what he had and *made her sq*—

David cut off Ryder's dirty thoughts. "Has there been any word from Sarah?"

Tercero responded to him. "No, but Ryder is certain she will learn teleportation if he stares at her window long enough."

David stared up at the window for a few seconds. "I shouldn't have fallen asleep with her that morning."

"No, you shouldn't have." Ryder balled his fist instead of fighting David like he wanted to. Jane's heart would break if

she knew they weren't getting along, or that Ryder blamed David for her being taken away. Really, there was no doubt in his mind things would've worked out if it had been just him Kingston was worried about

Tercero sat up, offering his spot to David as he prepared to leave.

"Where are you going?" Ryder called after him.

"School," Tercero said, then he was out of sight.

Ryder checked the time, exhaling loudly. "Guess I'm taking your sorry ass to school with me?"

David shrugged. "I can call Lance."

"Jane and I fucked in my car," he told him without any shame or malice.

Instead of responding, David pulled out his new phone and started texting someone.

Ryder laughed, knowing he was getting a ride elsewhere. "Come find me if you hear from her."

"Sarah said she didn't have a phone," David muttered, still focusing on his text.

"Just saying." Ryder got up from the lounge and headed to the house to get his shit for his first day without his girl. He had no idea where she was or how she was coping with everything, and she was definitely thinking he was already moving on. Silly girl. He needed to find her.

He spotted the moon in the reflection on the glass. It was out of place in the morning light, preparing to be out of sight from him. He stared at the half-moon for a few seconds before murmuring, "Good morning, my moon."

"What a bitch."

Jane squeezed her eyes shut upon hearing probably the twentieth insult of her Monday at her new school. Kingston

had enrolled her at Helldonna High School because that was the easiest school to get her in since it was in-district for his brother's house. She wasn't staying with his brother's family because Kingston didn't trust her around any male relative, and she had a cousin Adam, who was her age. He was treating her like a sex offender who couldn't be trusted around male family members.

Still, Kingston got his brother to say she was living there as she stayed with his mother, David's grandmother. His gran was a sweetheart. She tried to argue on David's behalf because even she knew David loved her, but Kingston nearly had a fit, so Jane asked her to stay out of it and locked herself away.

Now she wished she was locked away somewhere else, maybe prison, for fucking her stepbrother, because Helldonna was actual Hell.

The whole damn school was out for her because Dylan Berith had been expelled from school because of what he'd done to her. He was a star, and no one believed he'd done anything wrong. They only saw her as the girl who'd been rumored to be with all the Godsons and her stepbrother. They said she asked for Dylan, then used him to make Ryder jealous.

"Fuck off," came a deep voice as the chair beside her was taken and a muscular arm draped around her shoulders.

She jumped, startled, but stared in shock at the huge guy grinning at her.

"Hey there, pretty eyes." Alexander Sin gave her a little shake before holding up an apple. "Hungry?"

Jane darted her eyes around the science lab. Everyone was staring.

He shrugged when she didn't take his offering, and bit into the apple, chewing loudly but somehow it wasn't disgusting.

"What are you doing?" she finally asked when most of the class resumed their assignment.

Instead of answering her, he held up a finger to his lips then pulled out his phone, pressing call then lifted it to his ear.

Almost instantly, a familiar male voice answered. “The fuck are you calling me for?”

Alexander smirked. “I thought you’d like to know I found something of yours.” He winked at her. “About five feet, maybe a couple of inches, sexy ass, pretty dark hair and ‘Ryder Godson is my daddy’ hazel eyes.”

There was silence at the other end of the call, then ... nothing.

Alexander frowned, holding his phone out.

Jane gaped at him. “He hung up?”

The big guy gave her a little squeeze, chuckling as his phone vibrated.

Facetime: Ryder Godson.

He smirked, holding it up for her, and she almost cried upon seeing Ryder’s face.

A storm had been ready to unleash in his fiery eyes, but he instantly calmed when she was the one greeting him. “Fuck, babe,” he said, searching her face. “You okay?”

Her head was about to roll off with her stupid bobbing. “I’m good. You?”

The corner of his mouth turned up. “Am I ever good without you?”

She grinned, hating so badly that she couldn’t be there with him.

He sighed when she was too emotional to talk. “He enrolled you at Helldonna? Fuckin’ prick.”

“I hate it,” she said as quietly as she could. “I want to come home.”

“I know, angel.” His eyes kept drifting over her face. “Is anyone fucking with you?”

She stayed quiet, unsure if it was wise to tell him.

Alexander tilted the phone toward himself. “What do you expect when they blame her for Dylan’s expulsion? Don’t

worry—I'll keep an eye on her.”

Jane leaned over to see the glare on Ryder's face, and she was surprised he wasn't telling the big guy to stay away from her.

“The others?” he asked.

Alexander nodded. “They heard she's here. We'll watch over her.”

“You better, Sin. I'll kill every one of you bastards if she's hurt.”

Her sweet, bad boy, always threatening others with death. She smiled softly as Alexander chuckled at Ryder who scowled even harder.

“Easy,” Alexander said before darting his gaze at the classroom. “Turn the fuck around.”

Her eyes widened at his dark tone, and she noticed every student, even the teacher, drop their eyes to their desks and pretend they weren't listening.

“Fucking moron,” Ryder was muttering. “I want her to call me again. Before one of you leaves today, find her and let her call me.”

Alexander nodded to him as he handed her the phone again.

Jane teared up. She missed him so much.

He watched her try to hold herself together and eventually smiled. “My emotional girl misses me, huh?”

“Yes,” she whispered, not wanting people to hear him. “Um, I'm in class, though.”

“So am I,” he said, his gaze narrowed at her. “Be proud of me like I am of you.”

“It's easy for you—everyone is afraid of you.” She didn't want him to think she wasn't proud to have him; she totally was, but she also had his brothers and David. At least she hoped she did.

“Then show them my feisty Jane. My girl has claws.” He chuckled, making a hand motion to someone. “I want a call later.”

“I’ll find Alexander.”

“Sin,” Ryder corrected her. “Don’t let that fucker fool you. He’s going to make a pass at you as soon as we end our call. Tell him to keep his fucking apples to himself or I’m making a necklace out of his ballsack.”

She watched her face turn red on the screen as Alexander laughed quietly beside her. “He’s being nice. He called you without me asking.”

“Damn right he did,” Ryder said, his focus on something else though. “Hang on, babe, I got someone who wants to say hi.”

Before she could tell him she didn’t want to say hi to anyone else, David was staring at her through the phone.

“Hey, baby,” he said with an easy smile lifting on his lips. “Figured he was talking to you when I saw him smiling like an idiot.”

“Fuck you,” Ryder’s voice still came through, though he had obviously handed his phone to David.

“Where are you?” David asked.

“Helldonna,” she told him, so relieved to see he was okay. She’d feared he’d done something to piss Ryder off.

David clenched his jaw as Ryder spoke to him quietly.

Jane chose to tell a little lie. “It’s fine. People are leaving me alone.”

David stared at her quietly, shaking his head. “You don’t have to lie. Do you want us to come and get you?”

“Why the fuck didn’t I think of that?” Ryder said. “Oh, that’s right, it would be considered abduction, you dumb fuck.”

“Shut up.” David glared at Ryder before sighing. “When the fuck did you start using your fucking brain.”

“When you started using your dick,” Ryder quipped, snatching his phone. He smiled at her. “We gotta run, babe. Don’t forget to call. Sin will tell you who to trust. Don’t talk to any other fuckers there, and you go to them if someone starts shit with you.”

“Ask her where she’s living?” David told him.

Ryder just looked at her. “Which grandma’s house did he take you to?”

She grinned, surprised Ryder had figured it out. “His mother’s, of course.”

Ryder rolled his eyes. “Told you,” he said to David. “All right. I love you, angel. I’ll talk to you later. Find somewhere secluded to call me.”

Nodding, her eyes teared up again as she stared at his beautiful face. “And I love you.”

He was quiet, just taking her in. “Stop stealing my lines,” he said, smirking. “Tell Papi bye now.”

David was back. “If you call me Papi, baby, I’m only going to hear it in his voice and freak out.”

She chuckled sadly. There was no way she was calling him Papi.

“Be brave,” he said quietly.

“I will.” She searched his blue eyes, hoping hers told him what she wasn’t sure she should say aloud.

He gave her that gorgeous, David Leodegrance smile that had her heart pounding. “I love you, too.” He ended the call instead of handing it back to Ryder.

Alexander, *Sin*, took his phone from her limp hands. “Damn, girl, you turned those two assholes into allies and sappy fuckers for you?”

“Yes,” she told him with a pathetic smile.

He laughed, tightening his arm around her. “Cheer up, cutie. I don’t know what the fuck happened, but the boys and I won’t let you down.”

“The boys?” She didn’t know anyone who went to Helldonna except her ‘cousin’, David’s cousin, and she had yet to see him.

“Most of the team and a few others.” He lobbed the apple core toward the trashcan, and it even swished in. “Nervous?”

Now that he mentioned it, and she realized he was a really attractive guy, she was nervous.

“Hey,” he said, tapping her shoulder. “Your cute face got all ugly.”

She wasn’t expecting that, and she laughed. “Thanks for that.”

He winked, stretching out his long legs. “There you go. Keep the smile. That sad shit will scare all the boys away from you.”

“Wow.” She couldn’t stop grinning.

“Right?” He flexed his free arm. “So, can I take you to lunch?”

Jane glared at him. “Ryder will kill you.”

“Nothing like a good ole death wish to liven things up, aye?” He chuckled, texting someone. “Relax, though, I told him I’d watch out for you, and I will. You can meet your new guards.”

“Guards?” She didn’t know if he was being serious or just messing with her, but she was hoping she’d have someone to eat with.

His head bobbed as he ran a hand through his wild locks. “You’ll like them. And, trust me, Ryder will destroy us if anything happens to you. So don’t be afraid.”

“How do you even know him?” That’s what had her baffled. Ryder didn’t do friends, and she only ever saw him with his brothers.

“Met him at football camp. But we really know him because we fight.” He raised an eyebrow at her. “Did you know?”

“Fight? Like a boxer?” She had no idea what he was implying about Ryder. Yeah, he had bruises sometimes, but so did every other football player.

“Not a boxer, though he can box.” He chuckled, sliding open his phone and going through the gallery. “He would’ve told me not to tell you if he had a problem with me showing you. But you’re the girl he’s always thinking about—I think he wants you to know him.”

She honestly wasn’t expecting something deep from this conversation, but she was so touched that Ryder had let others know his feelings, even if he had been hesitant to tell her.

Then there he was. Jane gasped, taking the phone from Alexander. Ryder was shirtless, sweaty and perfect. His long hair was soaked, hanging over his eyes as he bounced on the balls of his feet. He was standing across from a much bigger guy, one the size of Savaş. A monster.

The guy said something to Ryder. Some of the words were missing, but she gathered most of it. Something about Ryder being a pretty boy and he’d show him what he did with pretty boys.

Ryder spat at the makeshift mat and told the guy, “Sorry, bitch. I don’t fuck guys; I got my eyes on a gorgeous brunette.”

Her cheeks warmed as Sin chuckled. She couldn’t believe Ryder really was so devoted to her. Not that she had to worry about a scary guy being Ryder’s type.

The fighter laughed, rubbing his stomach. “Don’t be like that. Daddy will take care of you.”

All playfulness coming from the upcoming fight vanished. Ryder rolled his neck before pointing his mouthpiece at the guy. “Already made it clear I don’t like dick, and the only ass I want is my girl’s. Now shut the fuck up. I really want to knock your dumbass out so I can go home and get a glimpse of her.”

“You should hear him when he’s high,” Sin said, snickering.

Then they were fighting, and Ryder was brutal. He faulted once and then corrected so effortlessly, and so fiercely, they had to call a medic for the other guy.

Jane closed her eyes, shaking her head. She wasn't upset with Ryder's fight or that he talked about her, but she was upset that she didn't know any of this about him. She had known he smoked weed, and he occasionally drank alcohol, but it was weird realizing he had a life that didn't fit in his backyard.

"Hey, ugly." Sin locked his phone. "What's wrong?"

Since she had no one to talk to, not even Wendy, she told the big guy. "I didn't know any of this. How can I love him when I don't know him?"

"Girl, you'd be nuts to not love Ryder." He dramatically tossed his hair and batted his eyelashes.

"I'm serious," she said, chuckling.

"So am I." He stared dreamily at Ryder on his phone. "Just look at him."

Jane did, sighing. He was certainly the most dangerous guy she knew, but he was an absolute cutie with her. She loved him—even if she didn't know the other sides of him yet. "Do you think I'm too boring for him?" She lifted her gaze to meet his dark stare. "I mean, I'm not a bad girl, and I will probably cry if I see him get hit."

He grinned. "Ugly, that bastard has it bad for you. Any combination you come in—sexy, cute, feisty, ugly"—he laughed at her scowl— "he's calling you his goddess. But you know what? He's insecure as fuck about you. I bet if you show him you're a little badass ugly girl, he'll realize there's nothing to hide from you."

"Are you always gonna call me ugly?"

His big finger poked her cheek. "Stop being ugly, and I'll call you beautiful."

The teacher called for attention at the front of the class, and Jane sighed, focusing on her. She had to make the best of

the situation, even if she had wished to be David's girlfriend for most of her life. Maybe she was a silly girl, though. Maybe she needed this distance to figure out what she really wanted. One thing she was holding onto though was Ryder hadn't moved on like she feared all day yesterday. He and David were tolerating each other, and they weren't giving up on her.

Tercero's and Luc's faces surfaced in her mind. She felt so bad for how she treated them. They at least deserved to know she didn't think less of them. In fact, she really missed them.

Alexander Sin surprised her again. "Hey, ugly," he whispered, sliding his phone toward her. There was an open text.

Luc Godson: Find my queen

Alexander responded. *Already have. I have her next period. I'll keep an eye on her.*

Luc Godson: Inform my little brother.

Jane's heart warmed the same way it did when Luc looked at her. He was really a sweetheart when he wanted to be. "He cares about Ryder."

Alexander snorted. "Not really. He probably knows Ryder will kill someone if he goes too long without knowing if you're safe."

She chose to have hope that Luc wasn't such a bad guy. "Well, thank you."

"You got it, ugly."

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NINETEEN

Jane chewed her french fry, never tearing her eyes off the guys sitting across from her. Sin had taken her to lunch at a diner across from the school. He'd been greeted by a scary group of guys; two she recognized the names of as being on the football team: Damon King and Than Messor. The others: Gabe Astar and Levi Beelz were big enough to play football, but Sin had told her they were more interested in fighting. The last two: Ricky Hermes and Hadrian Apollon, were less intimidating, especially since Ricky kept grinning at her while Hadrian smirked and asked if David knew she was out with them. Apparently, they were on the football team as well, but they were offensive players.

“So,” she said, narrowing her eyes at the Damon guy.

He'd been the one to punch Dylan that night. He was built like a truck. Not as tall as Ryder, but thicker. His tanned skin and slicked back black hair made him seem like he was a mafia boss in training, and his amber eyes only heightened the effect.

He raised a dark eyebrow at her, the corner of his mouth lifting. “So ...” *If sex had a voice.*

Than cast a look at Damon before shaking his head. “Even for you, you're in trouble if you flirt.”

Damon's grin widened. “You don't know that she's not looking to expand her harem.”

Sin frowned at them. “I'm not getting killed because of you two.”

Than inclined his head toward Damon. “Because of him.” His eyes fell on her, and he sort of bowed his head. “I owe Ryder, and he’s a ... friend. If Damon flirts, run.”

She liked Than instantly. He was hot with his tousled brown hair and thick eyelashes and brows, but he emitted a protective vibe, rather than creepiness or sexual interest. “Thanks for the warning, Ryder’s friend,” she said before she narrowed her eyes on Damon—definite sexual interest. “My harem is full.”

Hadrian laughed loudly as he picked up his burger. “The young queen has spoken.” He winked. “Hey, so tell us, does Ryder seriously share you with David and Luc?”

Ricky smacked the burger from his hands. “You can’t ask that.”

Hadrian stared at his ruined burger. “Fuck, bro, I was hungry.”

Jane sighed, realizing the others were actually waiting to see if she’d answer the question. Well, if Ryder wanted her to be proud of him ... “Ryder respects me and wants me to choose what I want. I chose him.” She glanced at Hadrian and added, “And David. There’s something between Luc and me ... even more between Tercero and me.”

Ricky’s eyes widened. “Tercero?”

Gabe chuckled, taking a bite of a fry. “I saw that one coming.”

“How?” Ricky asked him.

“Because I arrived two minutes ago,” said that sexy as hell voice with a slight Italian intonation.

Jane gasped, turning around. He was right behind her, a pair of black jeans and a pale gray tee. “You came for me,” she whispered, ready to throw herself at him.

He pulled off his sunglasses and smiled. “Of course, *tesoro*. I told you I was yours in your darkest hour.”

She laughed out a cry and instead of trying to squeeze out by Sin, she stood on her seat and let Tercero pull her over.

He pulled her legs around his waist to hug her, then whispered in her ear, “We have an audience, *cara*.”

“You’re not a dirty little secret.” She grabbed his face, kissing him firmly on the lips. God, he was like a present of her favorite things and some she didn’t even know she desired.

He was the one who kept her from getting too out of control, but he made sure he kissed her stupid before addressing the guys behind her, “Gentlemen.”

They were staring wide-eyed at them. Well, not Than Messor—he glared.

Tercero smirked as he lowered her to her feet yet kept his hand on the small of her back, under her shirt. It was like he knew he was making her tingle and burn all while numbing the painful ache in her heart and satisfying the hunger she’d not realized had been crippling her.

“Something on your mind, Than?” Tercero asked him as he pulled the chair she’d been sitting on out. He sat, pulling her onto his lap and tapped her plate, a silent order to eat.

Jane locked eyes with Damon’s amused pair, and she wanted to hide. They had no idea what her relationship was with Tercero. They thought she was Ryder’s girlfriend, and it definitely looked bad that she was kissing his brother. No, she didn’t want Tercero to feel like her little secret, but she didn’t even know what they were to be publicly throwing herself at him.

Than cleared his throat as he addressed Tercero. “He didn’t mention you.”

She looked away from Damon to focus on Than. He would’ve appeared calm, but the tightness in his posture told her he was ready to stake Ryder’s claim.

Tercero shrugged, relaxing. “Would you admit your brother was courting your girlfriend?”

Hadrian snickered, picking up his disheveled burger. “You don’t hear that every day.”

Jane sighed, peeking at Tercero. It hit her hard that she honestly had the most ridiculous arrangement going on. Her bad boy had said it was all her choice and for her to explore his brothers if she wanted, but it felt wrong now that others were viewing them. “Does he know you’re here?” she asked Tercero.

Black eyes locked on hers. “Do I need permission to see you?”

She flinched under his stare and turned away. She had a feeling Than was waiting for a sign that she wanted to be removed from Tercero. It made her wonder just how much loyalty Ryder had gathered from guys who she’d never seen him with.

Damon’s amused look vanished as he took her in as well, and he sent Tercero a glare. “Whatever your relationship with her is, it’s clear Ryder is her priority. Don’t throw her on the fucking spot because you want to prove to us you’ve got a piece of her.”

Hadrian, Ricky, and Sin seemed to agree, as they straightened in their seats, almost growing larger as they sized Tercero up.

Tercero didn’t appear intimidated. In fact, he wore a faint smile as he hugged her, nuzzling her from behind. “Forgive me, *tesoro*. You needn’t answer that. I will distance myself out of respect for my brother. As they are right to be suspicious—he does not know I am here, and he will be upset to learn I managed to see you when he cannot.”

Her body trembled as she kept her eyes forward. Than was ready and waiting for her to say the word; she should say the word because Ryder did come first.

A light kiss was pressed to her cheek, and Tercero moved her off his lap.

“I think I’ll go,” he said once he stood. He pulled a cell phone from his pocket and held it out to her. “Keep it hidden. Our numbers are saved, even David’s new phone. They may

not recognize the number, as I haven't told them I was getting you a phone."

She shook her head, wanting to tell him she was sorry, that he could stay and be with her too.

He smiled, putting his sunglasses on again. "I merely wanted you to know you had me, should you need me."

"I do." She hushed when he caressed her cheek.

"I know, but you need more time to figure out how you want us. Speak to Ryder; I know he is your main choice. Ensure whatever you'd like with me and the others is something you are comfortable with him enduring, as well as yourself." He lowered his hand, nodding to the boys. "I'm available, if needed."

Jane reached for him before he could walk away. She squeezed his hand, smiling sadly when he returned the gesture.

"Finding oneself should have nothing to do with another, *tesoro*," he said. "I only hope the woman you find desires at least one more afternoon with me." With that, he lifted her hand to his lips, kissed it once, then he was walking out of the diner.

"Smooth," said Hadrian as he stared outside.

Jane laughed sadly as she turned to the group of guys. They smiled at her pitiful expression.

Sin was the one to pull her into a little—big—hug. "Ugly, I told you not to make this face."

"Girl," Wendy admonished through Jane's new cell phone. "Ryder is your boyfriend. I don't give a damn about these others—not even David. I know you think he's perfect, but he's not. You need to show Ryder he's your priority and tell him you kissed Tercero."

Jane didn't respond. She'd called Wendy after sending texts to her boys, none of whom had replied yet, but her dear

friend was making her feel like shit. Yes, she'd internally admitted to herself Ryder was her priority, but it was hard to say so because it had always been David, and David was still her—

She wanted to scream. What she didn't want was to be judged.

At least David's grandmother, Sylvia, wasn't judging her. The cute old thing was rooting for David, much to Kingston's displeasure. But the awkwardness allowed Jane to make calls; Sylvia was going to cover for her, as long as she promised to talk to David, too.

Wendy sighed loudly. "I mean, it sounds amazing—having all of them, but it's not gonna work. Ryder said all that while you were still living next door. He probably assumed he'd have more time to make the two of you exclusive. Were you really planning to kiss all three of them at school and go make out with Luc after you got home? And, honestly, why would you care about the others when Ryder is kissing you and being as amazing as you keep saying he is? He freaking adores you. How much more do you want?"

Again, Jane said nothing.

"And now you're gone," Wendy said sadly. "None of them are allowed to see you, but you know Ryder will come now that he knows where you are."

Swallowing hard, Jane managed to say, "Ryder understands me. It's not like I don't know he's perfect."

"Then why play games? Why not just pick him and get permission to come home? I know it'll hurt to see David move on, but it's for the best if you're going to be shipped off every time something comes up about you two. And do you really want David to lose his chance at a scholarship? Because if you get caught fucking, it's gonna look bad. I mean, I know it's not really gross, but David was right—they'll make it gross, and he'll lose his future, and you'll be the one everyone blames."

Every word hurt, and Jane glared at nothing as bit her tongue to keep from yelling. *Why is she being so nasty?*

“I’m being realistic, Jane,” Wendy said softly. “I love you, and I know I say stupid things like let’s run away to Mexico ... but this is real. Kingston took you out of your home, enrolled you in a rival school, but you’re one step away from making a schedule for which Godson gets to sleep with you.”

Of course, Wendy was right, and she was thinking logically, but Jane’s heart hurt. It hurt so bad to be far away from David and Ryder, it hurt to watch Tercero walk away, and it hurt to have her one friend telling her she was being irrational. She just needed someone on her side; she didn’t want to spend the rest of the year without her boys, but she didn’t want to throw the others away just to be home again. If David wasn’t going to be there, it wasn’t home anyway.

“I have to go,” she said, barely able to keep the venom from her tone.

“Jane—”

Jane didn’t want to listen anymore. She just wanted a hug. So, once again being a shitty friend, she yelled, “I said I have to go!”

She stared at the phone, her breathing hitching because she hated being upset with Wendy, but Wendy had a loving mom who did anything for her, who trusted her and talked to her. Jane didn’t have that, and Wendy would never understand. She didn’t love any boys her whole life and definitely didn’t love more than one at the same time.

“Oh, dear.” Sixty-eight-year-old Sylvia Leodegrance patted Jane’s head. “How about a cookie?”

“No thank you.” Jane sniffed, flipping through her contacts. Ryder and David were probably at practice, so they hadn’t responded to her, and Tercero had already texted a simple: *Sweet Dreams, tesoro*. Which clearly meant he wasn’t up for talking.

Sylvia sighed, sitting in her recliner. “Do you want to talk about anything?”

“No.” Jane gave her a tight smile, hoping she wasn’t being rude. She didn’t feel like herself anymore. Tercero had said

finding herself shouldn't involve him or anyone else, but she wanted to be surrounded. She felt ill without Ryder, and she felt lost without David. Tercero, sweet Tercero, she'd made him feel wanted then wavered on how she was supposed to act around him. He probably felt so humiliated and hurt that once again Ryder was being thrown in his face.

There was only kindness when Sylvia nodded. "I think you should at least talk about the boy who tried to take you Friday."

Jane jerked back, her heart sprinting.

"Kingston said that the boy was expelled; did you have any trouble with the students?"

"I—" Jane pressed a hand over her pounding heart, and she screamed when a knock came at the door.

Sylvia covered her ears, but she got up as quickly as her old body allowed. "It's probably the neighbor boy bringing me my mail."

Jane covered her warm cheek as she watched Sylvia open the door and greet someone.

"Oh, that's just my son's step-daughter," Sylvia was telling whoever was at the door. "Oh, you go to school with her—maybe you can help her blend in. Come meet her."

"I doubt it," a deep voice rumbled. *Sex-voice!*

Jane's eyes widened as Damon King entered the house.

He grinned when he spotted her on the floor, and he bowed his head and greeted, "My queen."

Sylvia chuckled, patting Damon's shoulder with a few envelopes. "What is this silliness?"

Damon smirked at Jane before answering. "Oh, just an inside joke the boys and I have with Jane." He winked at her. "We met at lunch today. We vowed to watch over her."

"Oh, that's nice of you, Damon." Sylvia beamed up at the big guy. "I made cookies; how about you see if you can get Jane to eat? She wouldn't touch her dinner."

There wasn't much Jane could say when Sylvia meandered out of the room.

Damon slid his gaze over to Jane. "So ..."

"Don't start," she blurted, rubbing her arms. Her skin was crawling. Not in a weird way, in a bad way.

His grin stretched wider, and he walked to the nearest chair and sat. "What am I starting?"

She narrowed her eyes on him. "You know."

He laughed, leaning to one side of the chair. "I'm afraid I don't. Give me a clue."

Jane rubbed her arms, scowling because she knew what it was now; she wanted to be touched.

"Ah, I see." His deep voice slid across her irritated skin. "Which one are you missing? Ryder? David? Tercero?"

Her heart wept. "I'm such a hoe."

"What?" He chuckled as he observed her more. "I thought you were dating all of them? If they know and accept, it's no one's business but yours and theirs."

"I don't know what I'm doing." She roughly rubbed her arms. "And I don't know what the hell it means because you're here, and you're making me feel weird."

One corner of his mouth lifted. "I have that effect on women ... and men."

She sighed, relaxing a little. Yes, he was hot. Not like Ryder, just kinda oozing sex in a different way. "I've never had a boyfriend before Ryder," she said, watching him. "And I barely got to be his girlfriend."

"What about Luc?" He leaned farther away, making it easier to breathe. "The king claimed you as his queen in front of the world. He's not the type to move on after making his choice."

Luc was such a mystery to her, and she hadn't talked to him since their 'date' that ended badly. Now that she looked back on it, she was such a jerk. He had done things oddly, but

she was out with him, and she ran off, nearly got abducted, then her stepdad punched him, all before she ended up fucking Ryder all night long. He no doubt knew she was there, too.

“*Hm.*” Damon’s eyes glittered as Sylvia waddled back in with a plate and a glass of milk. He stood, grabbing both from the woman.

“Oh, thank you, Damon.” Sylvia beamed at him as though he were her favorite son. “I’ll give you two some privacy.”

“You don’t have to,” Jane said, watching Sylvia shuffle off.

“I think she’s looking to marry you off,” Damon said, amused.

Jane rolled her eyes. “She’s Team David, if you must know.”

“Really?” He chuckled, holding out the plate for her. Oatmeal Raisin. Her favorite.

“Yeah.” She snagged a cookie and watched him take one as well. “Apparently, David told her when he was little that he liked me.”

“Cute,” he said before slowly biting his cookie.

“Are you trying to seduce me?” She glared at him.

A laugh that sounded more like a dragon growl rumbled in his chest. “You’re adorable. I see why they like you so much.”

“That doesn’t answer my question,” she said, crossing her arms. “Yes, I know it’s a stupid question, but you’re up to something.”

Amber eyes captured hers. “I was only dropping off mail because Sylvia struggles to go down her steps. I stay with my father more than my mother, and he lives next door.” Jane had wondered that because this house was out of the district. “But I knew you were here,” he added.

“I knew it,” she said as if she were a detective solving some sort of case. “Who do you work for?”

He was beyond amused as he watched her trying to hide from her stupidity. “If we are discussing work, technically, I work for Luc. Well, I have an internship with his corporation. If you want to know how I knew you were here, he told me.”

Her jaw dropped. “What?”

“I’m an intern for Luc. He knew you’d be here, and he knew I lived next door.”

“You’re spying on me?” She didn’t know how to feel about this.

Damon smiled. “I told him I wouldn’t remain loyal to him if I spied. He knows I won’t, but he left the temptation, and I knew what to do to see you—bring Sylvia her mail.”

Spinning. Her mind was spinning. “So, he won’t respond to my text, but he tells you where I am so you can spy, then you tell him you’re not loyal? Who are you loyal to?”

“That is the question, isn’t it?” He took a sip from the glass of milk, his intense gaze fixed on her over the rim.

“Are you trying to annoy me?”

He lowered the glass and set it aside with the plate. “I believe I was making it clear my loyalty would shift from king to queen.”

She leaned back. “You guys take the king thing too seriously.”

He shrugged a shoulder. “He’s ruthless and the title stuck. Luc destroyed many of his rivals and took control of their corporations. It’s all underground kingdom type of stuff, and he said he’d only share his rule with a queen. Men have been trying to marry their daughters off to him for the past year.” His eyes flashed when she scowled. “So, you see, he has a reason to worry about your whereabouts. A king protects his queen.”

Jane stared at Damon.

He stared right back at her then smirked. “I have other news, if you’d like to hear it.”

“I’m sure it’s going to be awful,” she said, sprawling out on the sofa now. “My friend already made me feel like shit for not being able to pick just Ryder, so be a little nice, please. And don’t bring up Dylan. But I will say thank you for hitting him.” She smiled, even though he didn’t look happy at the mention of his former teammate.

“Your friend doesn’t know what it’s like to have the hearts of more than one man who is perfect for her.” He pulled out his phone, then he began reading from it. “Inform her that I’ve arranged to speak to Kingston, and I will be holding a meeting with him until six. If all goes well, I’ll return her call before he arrives. Remind her to be mindful of her sass.” Damon winked at her when her face burned. “Though I enjoy her fire, she must choose her targets carefully. Certainly not the man who controls who she can see. And you’re welcome ... about Dylan, I mean. Nothing more needs to be said.”

“Thank you,” she murmured, holding out her hand for the phone. “May I see?”

Damon nodded, letting her see. There was indeed a text from the contact Luc Godson. It went on to say: *And, Damon, she’s my queen. Remember that.*

“What does he mean?” she asked, handing Damon the phone.

He chuckled, pocketing it. “Did you not know I am called the King of Demons?”

Jane hadn’t known that, but it was catchy considering the school was called Helldonna. After all, he was one of the football captains. “So, he thinks you’re going to queen me?”

A wicked smile graced his face. “When Luc destroyed our team, no one else has carried the team to the playoffs. Until I joined, that is. So, they call me the King of Demons, and I’ll be *the* king when I secure the title for our school.”

“If,” she said, curtly. “You have to get past my boys, which you lost to this past week.”

“Yes.” His eyes gleamed. “I did not expect David to perform as well without Ryder. We underestimated him.”

She knew her smile was smug. “He’s the bestest.”

“If you say so.” He sat quietly, watching her again. “Do you want to be Luc’s queen?”

“That’s for me to discuss with him, I think.” She felt her skin heat as his gaze traveled down her body. “Stop.”

“Just admiring.” He reached for another cookie. “They are lucky Ryder loves you so.”

“Why?”

“Because Ryder is a beast.” He dipped his cookie in the milk. “And a king all by himself. If he were to threaten anyone about you, they’d step down. Even David.”

“David wouldn’t give me up,” she said, though she feared he would. He had been trying to let her go.

“He’d have no choice if Ryder wanted to fight for you. You have no idea how badass your boyfriend is.”

A giddy feeling warred with her responsible side. “Ryder wouldn’t fight for me like that, especially with David.”

“Oh, he would.” He chuckled. “But, as I said, they are lucky he loves you so much. It’s why he has been so patient. He knew if he made a move on you David would do something, and then he’d have to decide whether to destroy him or step aside.”

She frowned, thinking over how well David and Ryder got along with her. Ryder had been the playful one, the one stepping down, she could say. But, clearly, everyone knew Ryder could wipe the floor with anyone. “He’s the sweetest guy in the world,” she whispered more to herself than Damon.

He laughed quietly, almost choking on his cookie. “Probably for you, yes.”

“So, you’re not going to spy on me,” she said, sitting up.

“Watching over you,” he said before giving her a closed-mouth smile. “Trust me, I don’t mind.”

Jane rolled her eyes. “You’re such a bad flirt.”

“I had to try,” he said, chuckling.

Jane realized she really liked him, and the itchy feeling almost instantly eased. “So, you’ll be around if I need you?”

“I’ll always be available to you.” He held out his hand. “Your phone? I’ll give you my number and get yours.”

She grinned, handing it to him. “Smooth way of getting a girl’s number.”

He smirked but kept his attention on the phone. “You make me try harder than any other girl.”

Now, she laughed. “And here I thought I was easy.”

“Easy?” He tossed the phone to her. “Ryder has been pining after you for years. I wonder if he really made the first move.”

Her body went up in flames. She had been the one to tell Ryder how she felt first, not Ryder. She’d been the one to turn a kiss into something more, to tell him to take her virginity.

His deep chuckle halted at the sound of the front door opening. Kingston was home.

Damon stood, turning toward her stepfather and held out his hand. “Kingston Leodegrance, I’m Damon King. I go to school with Jane.”

Kingston sent her a glare but shook Damon’s hand. “I’ve seen you play. Impressive.”

“Thank you, sir.”

“Not good enough to see my daughter,” Kingston retorted before focusing on Jane. “You’re grounded, young lady. That means no boys, even new ones. Even the boy who defended you from your attacker Friday night.”

Before Jane could reply, Damon was speaking. “Sylvia invited me inside to meet her. I don’t think she realized I met Jane Friday ... But I took the opportunity to express to Jane she had a friend. My group saw what happened, and we don’t support Dylan. But our classmates do.”

Kingston sighed, his gaze softening as he took her in. “It was bad?”

She could only shrug. She hated being mad with him, especially when he looked at her like she was his little girl that he didn’t know how to protect.

“I hoped no one would recognize you,” he said, setting aside his briefcase. “Did this young man help?”

“His friends did,” she said with a smile. “Damon assured me I can call on him, though. He’s a bit of royalty, as far as the school is concerned.”

“Well.” Kingston walked around until he stood between her and Damon. At first, he stared at her face, his blue eyes just a paler shade of David’s. “I think we should talk, Jane.” He turned to Damon, shaking hands. “Thank you for everything you’ve done. But I will be upset if you are alone with her while she is grounded.”

Damon grinned, snagging another cookie. “I can respect your rules. But I might sneak over for Sylvia’s cookies. They’re sweeter than your stepdaughter.”

Kingston actually laughed, but he ushered Damon toward the door. “In those instances, I expect to see you sitting close to my mother, not staring at Jane like she’s your prey.”

Damon winked at her before opening the door. Then he stumbled back. He’d stumbled because there was a very fierce boy standing outside.

“Ryder,” she whispered, her lips trembling as Kingston put a hand on her shoulder to hold her in place.

Her bad boy sized Damon up before moving aside. “Beat it.”

She wanted to smile as Damon chuckled and passed him.

“Ryder skipped practice and came to see me,” Kingston said quietly then gestured for Ryder to enter. “I brought him to see you so we can talk. I fear you won’t talk to me without him.” He lifted his hand. “Go. Get your little reunion over with.”

That divine smile that made her entire body tingle spread over Ryder's face. "How long are you gonna make me stand here, Sweet Jane?"

Jane whimpered and rushed toward him.

He swooped her up, hugging her as he buried his face against her neck. "Fuck, babe," he whispered, squeezing her as he kissed her neck.

She cried, kissing his face everywhere she could before he turned and gave the one she needed to live. Tingles. Every caress was a jolt down to his spot and then radiated outward. She felt like a breakable goddess in his arms. One he was prepared to shield, but when he deepened his kiss in front of Kingston, she knew he was always going to see that she was something incredible all by herself.

He smiled against her mouth, kissing her sweeter now. "Let me see those pretty eyes."

Opening them, she laughed, holding his face.

"There's my girl," he said, pecking her again. "Told you I'd come for you. Always with you, babe."

She sniffled, nodding as Kingston cleared his throat. Ryder didn't let her turn just yet. He kissed her firmly on the lips then nuzzled her nose.

"Sit," Kingston ordered, but the bite from before was gone. "Please."

Jane watched Ryder smile. He'd done magic, she knew it.

He lowered her to her feet but took her hand and led her to the sofa. When he spotted Sylvia standing in the hall, he nodded. "David sends his love."

Sylvia smiled, taking in the way Ryder held onto her. "I suppose he did."

Kingston walked over to her, kissing her head. "Mom, I need to speak to them privately."

"Be nice, son." She patted Kingston's cheek. "She's the daughter you always wanted, remember? You threw her to the

wolves today.”

While Kingston’s back was to them, Ryder kissed Jane’s head. “Everything is going to work out, angel.”

She clutched his hand as she searched his face. “What did you do?”

“You’ll see.” He kissed her forehead and nodded as Kingston returned.

Her stepdad exhaled loudly as he sat in the big chair that was beside the one his mother sat in. Grandpa Leodegrance’s chair. He leaned forward, resting his weight on his forearms. “Ryder and I had a long chat.” He scowled a bit at Ryder. “Not only did he reveal his long-standing feelings for you, but he let me in on the way David has tried to suppress his own for you.”

Ryder smirked at Kingston. “And I told him you made the moves on me.”

Jane nervously laughed as she met Kingston’s disapproving glare. “Yeah, I kinda did.”

“He also said you’ve been in love with David, and David had revealed his love at the same time.” Kingston shook his head. “I had no idea, Jane. You two had been so close growing up, but I never imagined you as anything other than the daughter I never had. When you grew apart, I saw it as simply the two of you growing up, and I was counting the days until this one would knock on our door and ask permission to date you.”

“Date?” Ryder scoffed. “Old man, I told you. She’s wifey.”

Jane covered her face. “Ryder.”

“You mean, husband, hun.” He chuckled, raising their joined hands to kiss her fingers. “I told him about Luc as well. How neither David or I knew Luc had an interest in you, and the fucker took advantage of you trying to make things ‘wrong’ between us by making yourself a lonely spinster.”

She lowered her arm, smiling. He was so silly; she never would’ve imagined Ryder doing this.

He grinned at her. “I told him I’m almost positive Tercero is in love with you.”

Her smile fell, and she worriedly darted her gaze to Kingston. He was frowning but not blowing up. More than anything, he looked puzzled and probably didn’t know which one was Tercero.

Ryder squeezed her hand. “He knows you can’t make up your mind, and he knows I was fine with letting you take time to decide. And by taking time, I mean, you’re my girl but you’re exploring your relationships with them. If you decide just me, or one of them, fine. None of us are going to fight. If you decide all of us, that’s fine too.”

She stared wide-eyed at him before watching Kingston.

His face was red. “Obviously, I’m not going to allow this, Jane. But, as he pointed out, you are almost eighteen. I won’t be able to stop you from making choices forever. So, what I am going to propose is this: You may date Ryder, Tercero, or Luc.” She went to open her mouth, and he held up a hand. “Wait. I can’t stop you from loving David, but I have to do my duty as a father. While you are underage, I will make rules, and my rule is you do not subject yourself to the chaos that will ensue if you publicly date your stepbrother.”

“But I’m not ready to let David go,” she whispered. “I don’t know if I’ll ever be.”

Ryder sighed. “Babe, all he’s saying is you have permission to have a boyfriend. When you turn eighteen, he will give you a choice.”

Kingston nodded. “Until your birthday, Ryder ... or one of his brothers will be allowed to see you. Supervised. If you choose Ryder, you may tutor him, as you had originally planned.”

“He means we have to keep the door open, and I can’t feel you up.”

“Jesus Christ,” Kingston muttered, rubbing his forehead.

Ryder grinned at her. “He’s way off.”

Jane was obviously going to take this, but she didn't believe it was real. "So, I can come home? David can come home?"

Kingston shook his head. "David isn't speaking to me, and I have to work things out with your mother." He winced. "I'll be here with you, and you'll stay enrolled at Helldonna until we move home. Ryder has managed to make arrangements to skip practices for the next two weeks to get his grade up. He'll pick you up from school if you want, but you are to come straight home. If I get one call about you two getting into trouble, he's no longer allowed, and you'll be enrolled in an all-girls academy on the other side of the country."

Ryder rolled his eyes. "I already told you; I'll only kiss her in the car."

"And in this house, there will be no kissing." Kingston sent them both a dark look. "Respect my father's house. You get to know each other, not just sex."

Jane's face burned. *He did not just say that.*

"Fine, old man," Ryder said, his smile deadly. "You know she's having my babies, right?"

Kingston had been taking a bite out of a cookie, and now he was spitting it across the room as he tried to roar, "You're pregnant?"

Ryder's smug smile widened. "Well, I don't know about now, but she will be. Told you—wifey."

"I'm on my period," Jane blurted.

Kingston breathed heavily, his blazing eyes on Ryder. His head was going to explode, for sure.

"Yeah, I told him I was with you," Ryder said, his tanned cheeks pinking. "That you're the only girl I've been with."

Kingston pinched the bridge of his nose, just like David did when he was frustrated. "Do I need to get you a pregnancy test, Jane?"

"No." She held a hand over her warm cheek.

“Are you on birth control?”

Ryder snickered, kissing her head. “Old man, she’s fine. I’ll follow your rules. Now can we let her tell me if I’m the one, or if I need to call one of my brothers?”

Kingston glared at her. “Please tell me I don’t have to go through this again. He’s bad enough for all of them.”

Jane got up and went to Kingston, throwing her arms around his neck to kiss his cheek. “He’s the one.”

It wasn’t long before Kingston was hugging her tightly. His body trembled as he clutched her to him. “I love you,” he whispered into her hair.

“I love you,” she said, wiping her eyes as she smiled over his shoulder. Sylvia was watching from the kitchen.

“Just promise you’ll tell me if you decide to see the others,” he said, holding her at arms’ length. “You tell me before you sneak off with David.”

She nodded. “I love him, Kingston. I’ve always loved him.”

He sighed; his sad smile almost broke her. “I should’ve seen it because I see it now. I’m sorry.”

Her whole body hurt, but she was so relieved. She didn’t even know she needed this with him.

Kingston nodded to Ryder, and her boy was there, lifting her away and hugging her. “You be good to her,” he told Ryder. “I’m not past tying you up and throwing you down a hole.”

She thought Ryder would say something snarky, but he surprised her.

“Nothing would make me hurt my girl.” He grabbed her hand. “I’m going to let her call my brothers. Mind if I take her outside? I didn’t bring a car, so you know I’m not going to steal her.”

A real smile spread over Kingston’s face. “Stay on the porch. No making out because it’s still considered the house.”

Ryder muttered a curse. "I'm kissing her," he said, pulling her behind him.

"Keep it respectful, boy," Kingston yelled after them.

"Yeah, yeah." Ryder opened the door and immediately lifted her up, hugging her tightly. "Fuck, how am I going to stay respectful around you?"

She tightened her arms around his neck, and she bawled.

He chuckled, kissing her cheek. "Ah, my baby figured out how to keep me in check."

"I'm sorry," she croaked pitifully. "I'm just so happy you're here. I didn't know if I'd really see you again."

"You doubt me too often, babe." He pecked her lips and carried her toward the porch swing. As he sat, he arranged her on his lap and put a hand over his spot. "Did you keep me?"

Tingles. She covered his hand, nodding. "But I kissed Tercero today."

His smile fell, and he searched her face. "When the fuck did you see him?"

"Lunch." She waited for him to get angry.

"Slick fucker. That's where the phone came from ..." He put a hand over her tummy. "No fucking? I'll have to beat his ass if he fucked you while I was crying about not seeing you."

She laughed sadly, shaking her head. "Your friends kinda scared him away. I felt bad."

His eyes flashed. "Well, you're gonna have to tell him to keep his distance for the next couple weeks. I'm fighting all of them if they fuck this up for us." He began sliding his hand across her stomach. "You're really on your period? I thought David was with you?"

Gosh, she wasn't sure he would be okay with this, but lying to Ryder wasn't going to happen. "He was."

Ryder's hand stilled. "Babe, you let him when you were hurting? Are you okay?"

Cutest boy in the whole world. Jane cupped his cheeks and kissed him long and hard. “I really fucking love you, Ryder Godson.”

Pure beauty when he smiled down at her. “And I really, really fucking love you, Jane Mortaime.”

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TWENTY

Jane's heart cracked as she stared at Tercero through her phone. Ryder was gone; Kingston had taken him to retrieve his car, and though he'd called the others about the arrangement, she wanted to talk to them privately.

"You're sad," Tercero said, his dark eyes swallowing her.

She nodded. "I didn't mean to humiliate you today. I just panicked after I realized they didn't know about how we were doing things. They were the only people nice to me, and then I found out they're friends with Ryder. I didn't know how to be around his friends, and I didn't want to lose the only people being kind."

"No one is friends with Ryder," he said, chuckling. "They're afraid of him. That is why they reacted badly. And their kindness likely has little to do with Ryder." He smiled at her. "You didn't humiliate me, *tesoro*. I should not have put you on the spot."

"But you're not a secret," she told him.

"I know." He tilted, causing his long hair to slip over his eyes. He pushed it back, his eyes on her. "But that doesn't change your first choice is Ryder, and he should be respected. I knew my brother was trying to get to you, and for once, he did things properly. I risked exposing you to more mistreatment. Not to mention, if Kingston had known I was there, you might be sent elsewhere. This is why it is best Ryder is your boyfriend. We'll have time together. I promise."

That promise made her squeeze her legs together, and he obviously knew it.

One side of his mouth lifted, and he shook his head. “You act as if my lips and tongue are still worshipping you.”

“It feels like it,” she whispered, becoming infatuated with the faint smile he always teased her with.

“Does it?” His voice dropped to the sensual tone that sent heat between her legs. She could tell he had leaned back, lying flat on something; he was sitting outside somewhere. One of his hands came to rest on the side of his head, and he pushed his hair back.

“Yes,” she breathed, entranced by his stare.

“*Hm.*” He kept watching her. “I would tell you to satisfy yourself on the phone with me—to let me watch you shatter with just my voice guiding your fingers, but you are quite vocal, *cara*. I don’t want to frighten the grandmother.”

Thankful he reminded her Sylvia was just two doors away, Jane said, “I have to ask you something.”

“I’m waiting.” He plucked something from behind his head. Grass—he was lying under the stars and moon.

“Why wouldn’t you let me try?” She felt silly asking, but she didn’t understand why he refused to let her give him a blowjob. “I barely got to touch you.”

He smirked, tugging down his shirt to show her the hickey at the base of his throat. “You left your mark. And you know why I didn’t let you.”

A lump rose in her throat. “Because you knew I’d be bad at it.”

“Jane,” he said, sitting up effortlessly. The pool lights were in the distance behind him. “You are inexperienced—not incapable of fulfilling every fantasy I’ve had about you.”

Her breath hitched. “You’ve fantasized about me?”

“Quite often,” he said instantly. “But you were nervous. Frightened. I don’t want you pleasing me when you feel that

way.”

That made sense, but she couldn't shake the embarrassment. He knew she was inexperienced, and he knew she was nervous about messing up.

“I believe Luc desires to talk to you,” he said, staring off in the distance. “Will you call me after Ryder leaves you tomorrow?”

Jane saw the text from *Luc Godson: I've grown tired of waiting for him to finish talking to you*. She smiled, focusing on Tercero again. “I'll call,” she said. “I promise I'll be good with Ryder.”

“You two are incapable of being good together.” He tilted his head, observing. Always observing. “Don't feel you have to restrict yourself with him. I want him to love you as much as I wish to. I'll get my turn, and I hope for the same. But do be mindful of Kingston's rules. I will challenge my brother if he does anything that risks us all losing you.”

“I don't think Ryder will take any risks,” she said, loving and frustrated at the thought.

Tercero's eyes gleamed with mischief. “You miss the bad boy very much. You're dying to get caught with him, and I worry you'll push him. Worried more that he'll let you get your way.”

Jane tried to hide her smile. “I kinda have this fantasy my mom will walk in when I'm with all of you.”

He didn't look surprised. “That will be interesting. Though I do not look forward to interruptions.”

Her jaw was on the floor. “You want to be with me altogether?”

“Isn't that what you said you desire?” That adorable yet sexy tilt of his head made hair fall over his face. “I admit, I prefer you alone, but every once in a while ...”

Fire. Her entire body was on fire.

He smiled sexily. “We'll talk about this later. Sweet dreams, *tesoro*.” Then he was gone.

Jane blew out a breath and fanned her hot cheeks. That boy did so many things to her. She was still red in the face when she Facetimed Luc.

He didn't say anything when he answered; he simply stared at her flushed face and sighed.

"Hi," she said, suddenly shy.

"If I were a boy, I would be upset with the fact that my girlfriend"—he gave her a pointed look—"did not only rush off and get herself in danger, but she also proceeded to fuck my younger brother while I was downstairs in our home then her stepbrother, all before ever calling me to inform me she was okay."

Now, she felt horrible. She hadn't even said anything to Luc about the two of them when she saw him last. She'd told him to tell Ryder to give up on her, totally ignoring Luc's feelings. "I'm sorry."

It was like she hadn't even spoken. "As it happens," he said, "I am not a *boy*, Jane." His emotionless gaze softened as it fell over her. "Are you well?"

Just like that, he was back to making her like him. "I'm better now. Thank you."

He sighed, though that blank expression returned. "Your stepfather missed my appointment because my brother snuck in."

She grinned; he was pouting. "I think Ryder just showed up."

"He did." Luc shook his head. "I'm sure he knew I'd arranged to be there, and he made sure they were gone before I arrived."

Jane absolutely adored everything Ryder had done, and she knew it made her bad boy feel good he'd outmaneuvered his clever brother. "What were you going to tell Kingston?"

"It no longer matters," he said quietly. "The new arrangement is one you've agreed to. I'm sure you will enjoy dating my little brother while the rest of us sit here."

“Oh, don’t be a baby.” She couldn’t contain her laughter now. “I love him. I’m going to be happy to see him. You have no idea how rough it was at this new school. But that doesn’t mean I forget about any of you.”

“No, I know you won’t forget,” he said quietly. “Though you are easily intoxicated by us, especially Ryder. He gave himself the advantage, and I am certain David wishes he were suddenly the one failing.”

“I don’t get drunk on Ryder. You’re more the drug than any of you.”

His eyes flashed on her. “Elaborate.”

She freaking loved his way of speaking. “I mean your touch, presence, is like a drug. I feel numb, almost. I could forget everyone if you really worked your charm on me, but I’d fight to remember them. But you’d suppress his magic.” A flutter of tingles blossomed at Ryder’s spot. “I know to keep my guard up around you.”

“Yet, you are foolish enough to expose your weakness and give me power.” He smirked as his gray eyes darkened like the pits of hell.

Jane sighed and snuggled under her blanket. “You wouldn’t use your power against me.”

“Foolish girl.” There was a fondness in the way he said it, and she smiled.

“Damon told me he works for you, that he’d switch his loyalty to me.”

“He has a weakness for bright souls.” He chuckled. “It’s not something to brag about.”

She childishly stuck her tongue out at him, noting how he followed the movement. “For an old guy, you’re pretty immature.”

“Says the young woman poking her tongue at me.” He undid the top button of his shirt and pulled off his tie.

Hormones was all Jane could think as she spotted the inked flesh on his neck.

Piercing gray eyes appraised her quietly. “I still expect you to be my queen, Jane.”

“I know,” she responded like an obedient servant, then she scowled at him. “How do you do that?”

“It’s standard for one to answer a question when asked, my queen. Hardly a magical feat to get aroused over.” He smirked with a hint of his real smile at the end. “You were meant to laugh, Jane.”

Now she smiled at him, her cheeks hurting when he seemed in awe of her.

“One day,” he said softly. “One day it won’t work on me.”

“Not today, my king.”

“I hate this,” David said, running a hand through his freshly showered hair. She’d barely ended the call with Luc when David texted: *Baby, I’m trying to be patient, but I need to see your pretty face.* “I know it’s stalkerish, but I miss getting to see you before I go to sleep.”

“Perv,” she said groggily.

Those blue eyes narrowed on her. “Baby, you’re falling asleep on me. And it’s only a little bit perverted. I never stared at you when you didn’t have a shirt on. You’re the worst at hiding your reactions to a naked guy.”

“You wore only towels on purpose.” She closed her eyes, giggling. “Did you wait for me to leave my room, just so we’d bump into each other?”

“No, but I’m certain you had my showers timed so that you would leave your room the exact moment you knew I’d be getting out.”

She peeked at him in shock. *Fourteen minutes.*

“Busted.” That panty-dropping smile stretched wide. “You’re a silly girl about me, Jane. I’m always going to

cherish that about you.”

Her heart warmed.

“What am I going to do without my Jane?”

Some of the warmth surrounding her heart cooled, and though she tried to sound playful, her lips quivered, “Hopefully not go balls deep in Diane.”

His smile fell in an instant. “Baby, no.” He searched her face. “Don’t do this. I told you I was all in with you. That’s never going to change. It’s just going to take some time before I can be with you.”

She nodded, rubbing her eyes hard so she wouldn’t cry. “I’m sorry. I’m just emotional.”

He smiled adoringly, like he was trying to be right there with her. “Don’t apologize—I love my emotional girl. Just please don’t go to sleep thinking the worst of me. I’m here, sleeping on your boyfriend’s fucking couch because I chose you.”

“I know.” She tried so hard to suck up her fears, but she suddenly couldn’t erase the images of every kiss she’d seen David give Diane. He’d lost his virginity to a girl who had made fun of her. “Fuck, I have to go.” She ended the call as he called out her name. Then she cried.

Through the phone, emerald eyes appraised her the way an apex predator analyzed its prey. “What the fuck did he say to you?”

“Nothing.” She blew out a breath, trying to appear calm, but she’d cried for the last twenty minutes, imagining David getting fed up with her. He’d tried to call her and sent several texts, begging her to talk to him, then Ryder had called.

“Don’t lie to me.” His gaze narrowed. “Nothing is going to piss me off more than you trying to lie. Now tell me what he did, or I’m going downstairs to beat his ass.”

“Don’t.” She glared at him. “He didn’t even do anything. It’s me.”

“Of course, it’s you,” he fired back, shocking her. “Don’t give me that look. I know you more than you think. And I know you do this shit about him.”

“Do what?” she fought yelling. Fighting with Ryder was not how she wanted to end her night.

“Make yourself unworthy of him,” he said before he shook his head. “Baby girl, you are our goddess. But you have this thing where you put David on a fucking pedestal above all of us, and you compare yourself to the bitches he has let on his nuts. You’re panicking because you can’t march around and say you’re his girl, and instead of yelling at his ass for fucking around the way he did—because that’s what the fuck he did, Jane; he fucked around to get over you and to do stupid shit to make it easier on himself—but you twist it around and beat up yourself. Fucking let it out on him. He deserves it.”

“He did it for me,” she argued.

“He loves you, angel, but he’s not a saint.” He let out a deep breath, and she could tell he’d gone to his bed and was lying down, holding his phone above him. “Don’t be sad. I’m hating myself for talking to you like this, but I want you to get it through your beautiful mind and heart; David loves you. He fucked up. Bad. But he made a commitment to you. He’s not going to fuck this up. He’s not going back to Diane. If he could switch places with me right now, he would. He would’ve been a virgin who didn’t give a damn about anyone but you. That’s not David, though. And that’s not what you love about him.”

A shuddering breath slipped past her lips as she realized Ryder wasn’t being mean to hurt her. He was doing what he always did; giving her the truth in his blunt way, letting her see she gave David excuses or made up things to make herself feel bad.

“Hey,” he said, his deep voice actually the most comforting thing she could hear. “Look at me, Sweet Jane.”

She breathed in harshly before meeting his gaze.

“I love you, okay?”

She nodded, whimpering.

“You are a feisty ass kitten. You clawed my ass up for years, so I want you to hear something.” He grinned at her. “David was so fucking jealous of our fights. I threw it in his face all the time, and what I saw was a guy who wanted the girl he loved to challenge him like you did with me. He wanted his wild kitten, not those bitches we have offering to do anything we want.”

“That doesn’t help,” she blubbered, though her chest felt lighter.

“Don’t even start on that. You know I don’t give a damn or even look at women, and David admitted to you he was mentally putting your face over theirs. Don’t get mad that we’ve got the goods.” He laughed at her. “See? Look at me with all that fire, babe. I fucking love it. David does too. So, don’t run and hide like this. He’d much rather be yelled at than have you ignoring him.”

She sniffled, calming a bit. “How do you make things better when you’re goading me like this?”

“Cause I’m husband, wifey.” He gave her a killer smile. “Kingston was close to shitting himself about that.”

“You are so—”

“Incredible, I know.” He winked, still wearing that happy ass smile. “I love you, baby.”

Damn this boy. “And I love you.”

“Copycat.” He let out a loud sigh, and she could tell he was staring at something. “His dumbass is swimming laps in the dark. Such a drama queen.”

Jane laughed sadly. “Will you talk to him for me?”

Ryder’s gaze flicked back to her. “What do you want me to say? My girlfriend loves you—cheer the fuck up?”

She glared at him.

He glared back. "I can do this shit all night."

"Don't be an asshole." She wasn't mad at him, but she was emotionally exhausted and cramping, and she missed her David, and she needed Ryder. She wanted to smother Tercero with kisses and make Luc laugh with her. So, she really just wanted her bad boy to make everything better for her. Just for tonight. He'd already made the biggest move, but she needed more when she was sad like this.

He was staring at her, quiet. "My baby girl is worn out, huh?"

She frowned, nodding. "My cramps hurt, and I miss all of you."

"You got medicine and shit for your cramps?"

Jane smiled softly. He was too cute. "I got a heating pad." She tilted the phone down so he could see it.

"Damn. I thought you were going to show me something sexy." He chuckled as she flipped him off. "Don't tempt me like that. I'll fuck those cramps away for life."

She giggled, trying to quiet herself. "Shush."

Mischief glittered across his face, but he spoke seriously. "Want me to sneak over?"

A gasp escaped her. "You can't."

"I can do anything," he said confidently. "I don't want to fuck things up, but if my girl needs me, she's getting me."

"You're literally the sweetest guy in the world."

"Just for you, future wife." He smiled like he was the lucky one again. "I'll talk to David," he added with a slight grunt. "I'll, um, ask if he wants me to bring you a letter or some shit."

Jane didn't say anything for a few seconds. "Ryder fucking Godson, you are too gosh dang cute. I don't know if the 'um' did it for me or the sweet offer itself, but you just got me pregnant."

He laughed loudly, and it was freaking beautiful. “I’d much rather use my dick, but I can always make sure my little mini-me is stuck in there nice and tight.”

Her cheeks hurt. “That kinda gives me gross images of you stuffing a baby up me, but I’m weird, and I like it.”

“I know you’re weird.” He chuckled, dropping down onto his bed. “I’m keeping your cute, weird ass anyway. You’re mine. No matter who you love or who loves you, your beautiful soul is all mine. And those gorgeous lips you best stop biting right now. They’re mine. All mine.”

David rested his forearms on the edge of the Godson’s pool, his heavy breaths managing to make a pale smoke as the temperature dropped for the night. He didn’t care it was well past midnight and that he had practice at seven. Nothing mattered to him, just Jane. And he’d fucked up everything with her. Again. He was never going to earn her forgiveness, never going to make her see she was all he ever wanted, that Diane and every other girl he’d ever touched meant nothing, not when he knew she was there.

He wanted to beat the shit out of himself for being weak before, for not being man enough to tell her or his father, but all he could do was push his body to its limits. Because his dad wanted nothing to do with him, and she had realized the same; he was a jerk who had hurt her when she believed he was her warrior. He’d never compare to Ryder.

“Hey, Aquaman,” Ryder drawled walking toward him, “stop pissing in my pool. I plan to make long fucking love to Jane in there one day. Don’t need David juice clinging to my balls as I’m emptying into her.”

David clenched his jaw, shaking his head to the side to stop the water from dripping into his eyes.

Ryder chuckled as he dragged a chair close and sat right in front of him.

“I don’t want company,” David told him as he tried to keep his temper in check. Fighting with Ryder would hurt Jane, and he would rather take Ryder’s insults than ever hurt Jane again.

“Bitch, did I ask if you wanted company?” Ryder unwrapped a stick of gum and popped it into his mouth. Even that reminder that Ryder was quitting smoking was a punch to the stomach. “I just got done talking to my girl.”

Pain sliced through David’s heart, but he kept his mouth shut.

Ryder grinned down at him. “Look at you, little prince. You going to let me tell you all the sweet shit we talked about with each other? Or the kinky shit she wants to try when I see her tomorrow?”

“Go away.” David turned his back to Ryder as he contemplated swimming more laps or going for a run.

“You’re such a pussy.” Ryder threw something at the back of David’s head.

He turned, glaring at his rival. “Fuck you.”

“I thought we were fucking Jane,” Ryder quipped. “Together.” He tilted his head. “I can swap you for Tercero. I bet she’d love the excitement of thinking she’s got me twice.”

David growled, nearly splashing Ryder like a child, but he turned again to start more laps. Jane was done with him. “Leave me alone.”

“I told her I’d talk to you,” Ryder said, halting David. “I even yelled at her cute ass for running from you like this. Had to use my sweet side and a fuck ton of my sexy-dominant side to remind her that you knew you’d fucked up, that you weren’t Mr. Perfect like she has always made you out to be, and most of all, that she’s perfect. Nothing your dumbass did was her fault and comparing herself to the pussy you tried to replace her with is pointless. Because what matters is that you love her, and you committed yourself to her Friday night. No going back.”

David slowly turned, his brow furrowing as he took in Ryder. His rival wasn’t even looking at him; his head was

tilted back as he lazily lounged in the chair, his eyes fixed on the pale moon as it got farther away.

“You’ve got to be the David who deserves her,” he said, not tearing his gaze away. “She’s not going to get over the betrayal she feels from you fucking Diane. She’s going to go back and forth because that’s what Jane does. One moment she feels like a fucking goddess ruling her whole kingdom, the next moment, though, she’s whimpering like a baby, blaming herself for everything that has gone wrong, crying because she hasn’t succeeded in the areas she craves to, and destroying all her worth because David fucking Leodegrance made her think she was just a girl from his past, one not worth waiting around for or being honest with. The prettiest goddess all alone in the dark because the sun stopped burning for her.”

The ache that spread through David’s chest intensified, and he reached for the edge of the pool as he attempted to steady his breathing. He kept seeing Jane’s pretty face, those hazel eyes, and her smile, but he couldn’t erase the tears, the way her lips trembled as she tried so hard not to cry, only to sob louder when the first tear slipped free. Then she’d flee. Always afraid to see what his reaction would be.

“She’s never going to not love you,” Ryder said, still watching the moon. “I don’t even know what you really did to make her put you on such a higher level than the rest of us, but I know this.” Now Ryder looked at him, his face cold. “I know you’re going to find that fucking pedestal you knocked over, and you’re going to make yourself worthy to get on it and stand above me, above Tercero, and sure as fuck above Luc’s ass.”

The air was sucked from David’s lungs, and he couldn’t respond.

Ryder did, though. He leaned forward, a fluid movement that made the hairs on David’s neck stand. “You’re going to find *her*, David,” he said calmly. “You’re going to worship our girl. She’s going to be your fucking princess. Every damn time she thinks of you with Diane, you’re going to kiss her until she remembers Diane is fucking dishwasher next to the sweet Dr Pepper she is.”

David let out a harsh laugh, his breathing evening out.

“Fight for her, bitch,” Ryder said, his words harsh but no real bite. “I told her once, she doesn’t settle for me just because you burned her pretty ass. And now I’m telling you, I’m not going to let you burn her. Out of all of us, it’s you who can destroy her, and I know you don’t want that. I know you want to shine for her too, but you’re this fucking close to burning yourself out. If you go out, so does she. No matter what I do, no matter what I’m capable of, I wouldn’t be able to re-light her flame. That’s what her dad called her, you know? His darling flame. I know you see it when she’s in the sun and smiling because I do.”

David sighed as Jane’s smile formed in his mind again. *Hi, baby.*

“You’ve done good with tolerating me and her love for me, but you’re doing this shit—angrily swimming laps when you should be writing her a letter or sneaking over to see her.”

David jerked his head up. “What?”

Ryder gestured to the house. “Either write some romantic shit down and have it ready for me to give her tomorrow or take my car. Keys are on your pillow along with the key your gran slipped me.” He smirked. “Think I switched her to Team Ryder.”

“Are you fucking with me?” David hoisted himself out of the water, his skin instantly chilled as the wind blew.

Ryder got up and started heading toward the house, though he answered David anyway. “I’d go for the letter because you’re not going to say the shit you need to say to her if you see her. And when you have to leave her, all the pain will come back Put it in my backpack with my keys and send her a sweet text good night.” He peered over his shoulder once he reached the door. “Don’t forget to tell her you love her, Papi. Remind her King Daddy—me—loves her more.”

“Dick.” David smiled, grabbing the towel he’d brought outside.

“Jane loves all my dick, even my dick personality.” He chuckled, opening the door. “Don’t drip on the fucking floor. Archer keeps busting his fucking head every time someone leaves the floor wet.”

“Never knew you cared about your brothers,” David said as he roughly dried his body.

“Nah, I just don’t want him knocking the common sense out of his damn head and having him thinking he can be number five with Jane. I’d hate to kill him; she thinks he’s funny.”

David chuckled, heading toward Ryder. “Thanks, Ryder.”

“It’s never for you.” Ryder pointed upward then tilted his head back to smile at the object deserving his attention. “Good night, my moon.” Then he was inside, jogging toward the stairs.

David glanced up at the moon. He really liked that Ryder called her the moon; it fit her so well. She glowed as brightly as she could with the dark all around her, even with all the pretty stars sparkling across the endless night. She just kept trying to glow, changing, always there—lonely—as she watched the world pass her by. She wanted to glow and dance for her earth, teasing him with her sly smiles. But fuck if the sun wasn’t the lucky bastard who acted superior to all, shining even though he burned her. She took it and glowed even more lovely than he could imagine. She glowed for all of them. David promised he’d let her keep her earth, embrace how she changed because that was her. Her earth shielded her from the sun and stayed with her always.

So, he whispered the words he would write down to send with Ryder, “Your father really did pick the most perfect guy for you when he picked Ryder. Whatever I did to deserve your love, to be able to even be considered beside him, I’m beyond grateful. I’ll never forget my mistakes; they’ll be with me forever, but longer than forever is how long I will work to make my heart as worthy as his.

“You’re my dream girl, Jane. My baby, my kitten, my Jane. I am going to show you what that really means to me. And

when I struggle to make you see just how beautiful you are and how I am so in love with you, I'm going to ask that surprisingly romantic bastard to guide me, to hold you when I make you cry, and I'm going to ask him to love you with me. Because I know he's the one, baby. But I'm selfish, and I refuse to let go.

"I'm going to earn my place in the light he helps you shine with." He smiled as a dark cloud rolled away to reveal the pretty half-moon. "Bastard has me thinking like a poet, but I'm glad he's here. I'm not sure I would've looked up without him to block my view of you. I was too busy listening to everyone else, only focusing on the path everyone expects me to follow. The only path I want to take is the one with you by my side." A cloud moved over the moon, but he felt at peace in her dimmed light. "Sweet dreams, my love."

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TWENTY-ONE

“And then I spilled my apples all over the kitchen floor,” Sin was saying.

Jane’s peals of laughter wouldn’t end as she leaned against Damon’s shoulder. He steadied her when she almost fell from her chair. The whole group of guys almost had her peeing herself.

“Are apples symbolism for you nutting before you could get her off?” Hadrian asked Sin as she struggled to breathe.

The big guy threw a glare at his friend. “Bro, there’s a lady present.”

“And you’re the one talking about hosing down your kitchen with Liquid Sin,” Jane blurted.

The group quieted, turning to look at her before they roared with laughter. The whole lunch hall was watching, but Jane didn’t care. She didn’t care about the dirty looks from girls or the teasing jeers from a few brave assholes in the classes she had without the guys. This was by far the best lunch break ever. Well, second best. No one was going to beat Ryder out.

“I’m never eating at your house again,” said Than, grimacing as he lowered his chicken tender. “Fucking hell; I can’t eat.”

“I can.” Gabe snagged Than’s tray and ate like the end of the world was upon them.

She pushed off Damon's shoulder as she leaned over the table and beamed at Sin. "So, is this girl here?"

The corners of his eyes creased as he smiled. "She was in college."

"Did you tell her she was about to fuck an insane juvenile?" Damon asked him as he pushed Jane's fries to her. "Eat. We've only got three minutes before we have to leave for class."

No need to tell her twice to eat fries. She stuffed a handful in her mouth as Than shook his head at her.

"You're incredibly messy," he said, disgusted, though she saw the corner of his mouth twitching as he fought the urge to smile at her.

Jane peeked down at her chest, noting a few crumbs and a drop of ketchup. "Whoops." She used her finger to wipe it before licking her finger clean. When she looked up, she froze. They were all mid drink or bite, staring. "You pervs!" She threw a fry at Sin when he let his tongue hang out like a hungry wolf. "You! I'm telling Ryder."

He flinched, pressing his lips together before rushing, "Ah, come on. You don't want him to kill me, do you? I'm your favorite."

"I have no favorites," she said, taking the napkin Damon handed her to wipe her mouth. "Y'all really need to learn how to behave around women. You can't just stare at boobs."

"To be fair," Hadrian said, "most girls don't have delicious food nestled between their tits. You even had my favorite red sauce."

She chuckled, throwing her napkin at him. "Do you feel fancy for saying sauce for ketchup?"

He winked and dipped a finger in his ketchup to lick it slowly. "Food to the gods, young one."

Damon tapped the table and stood. "Time to go."

"Aw, man." Jane got to her feet, grabbing her tray as she followed the boys to the trash can.

Gabe snatched the last of her fries, but he bowed his head. "My queen."

She rolled her eyes, dumping her tray. They'd been teasing her over Ryder beating out Luc for the king spot, saying that it was epic on Ryder's part to outthink Luc and fix things up the way he had.

"Come on," Damon said. "I'll walk you to class."

The guys sent her smiles, but she could see it; they didn't like her having a class without them.

"See you next period," she told Ricky. The boy blushed but nodded before hurrying off.

"You are going to cost me my team," Damon said as they walked down the hall.

"What?" She laughed, ignoring the stares. By all the bewildered looks from the other students, she'd figured out Damon had a similar reputation to Ryder's; no one saw a softer side of him.

"Your boyfriend will slaughter anyone who gets too close to you," he said, his eyes sliding down a young female teacher's figure as she opened her door. He smirked at the woman before putting his arm around Jane's shoulders. "Forgive me. I need to use you for a moment."

Jane rolled her eyes when the teacher actually glared at her. The woman was probably twenty-five or so, really pretty. Her shiny brown hair, aqua eyes, smooth complexion, and stunning figure could've given the lady a career in modeling, but here she was, glaring at teenagers.

He chuckled, tightening his arm around Jane's neck once they finally passed the teacher. "We'll see if my lovely nemesis can resist me now."

She shoved his stomach, but he didn't release her. "Please tell me you're not going to have a ridiculous student-teacher affair."

"Are you not having a forbidden stepbrother romance?" A wicked grin spread across his attractive face.

Her smile slipped. David had sent her a final text last night, just a simple *I love you, baby. Good night.* But he'd sent nothing today. The fears of her shortcomings next to Diane wouldn't end. No matter what Ryder said, she was going to be a baby about David and Diane.

Damon sighed, giving her a little squeeze. "I didn't mean to upset you."

"Oh, you didn't." She gave him a quick smile. "I just miss him."

"Ah," he said, bobbing his head like he understood. "Is Ryder picking you up?"

"Yep." Tingles kissed her skin at just the thought of him. "I kinda don't want to help him with his work so I have him longer. Once he passes, he'll be back to football."

"I'm sure he'll find time to see you." Damon opened the door to her classroom. "Text me if for some reason he doesn't make it. I'll get one of the boys to take you home."

"Thanks, Damon," she said, utterly at peace with the huge guy.

He winked at her as a boy entered the room. "Gotta do my duties as your guard and scare the riffraff away."

"Don't call people riffraff." She smiled at the guy who had just passed. Then she realized he was staring at her ass. "Okay, maybe call the guys that." She tugged her shirt down then waved at Damon who sent a final glare at the class.

There was really nothing better than walking out of school after a day of stares and whispers than to find your boyfriend leaning against the side of the building, waiting for you. Even better, that very boyfriend cradling a kitten.

"Ryder," she squealed, rushing past the students gawking at him.

He grinned, pushing away from the wall. "Hey, babe."

Jane stared at the kitten, her eyes watering as she took in the fluffy kitten. It was an adorable hairball of white and shades of light and dark gray, and blue eyes.

Ryder handed it over to her. "He's from all of us."

She cooed, hugging the little guy to her. "For me?"

"Yeah." Ryder tilted her chin up. "Gimme a kiss."

His lips were on hers before she could pucker up. Tingles. Breath. Magic.

And a kitten paw across Ryder's face.

He jerked back, glaring down at it. "Little shit."

"Don't call him that."

He gave the kitten a final glare before snatching Jane up. He kept his forearm under her ass as his free hand held the back of her neck. He snuck in a few kisses as he carried her toward the parking lot. "We gotta go shopping for this little turd." He nibbled on her ear. "Pet store is down the street. Let's hurry before he starts shitting."

She could barely contain her excitement, so she just nodded and kissed the little fluff ball.

Ryder chuckled as he fished out his keys. "I wouldn't have thought giving you pussy would make you so happy. You're all about the D."

Laughing, she pecked his cheek. "I am, but I've always wanted a kitten."

"Yeah, I know," he said with that tone full of adoration. "I used to watch you every time someone was giving away kittens. You'd hold them until they all went to new homes."

"Ryder," she said awed. "You sexy stalker."

He shook his head at her. "Just keeping an eye on my girl. But when I suggested getting you a cat, David clued me in that your mom is allergic, so you weren't allowed to have one."

Her heart sank. She'd have to give it away.

“Don’t panic,” he said. “When you move back home, he’ll move in with us. Cats live a long ass time anyway. That’s what the shelter lady told us.”

“You adopted?” She swooned, hugging him around the neck.

He breathed her in. “Tercero and David found one that had kittens available and I had Luc go with me. Technically, he adopted it because I’m a minor.” He blushed, giving her ass a smack. “You shoulda seen those hoes falling over us. Then Luc got annoyed when they kept trying to give us info on every cat and dog they had available, and he told them our girlfriend needed a kitten before she got out of school, so fetch the kittens. He actually said *fetch*, and I laughed at the bastard. Turning me soft, baby girl.”

Her cheeks were hurting. He was seriously the cutest guy in the world.

“Anyway,” he said, “I picked this little fucker because he was lazy as fuck. They said he’s a ragamuffin or some shit.”

“Awe, those are a cuddly breed.” She inspected her kitten with a wide grin. He was wiggly—not lazy.

“He’s a fucking con artist,” Ryder said roughly, but she beamed when he nuzzled her. “That laziness was just an act. Fucker started biting and scratching as soon as we got in the car. Chewed his way out of the box and jumped on Luc’s lap. We almost drove off the road.”

Jane gasped, checking Ryder over. “He was probably scared in the box.”

“Whatever.” Ryder tossed her something else—a folded piece of paper.

“Oh, is this his adoption stuff?” It didn’t look like it, but she didn’t know what he would give her. Unless it was his homework.

“It’s a letter from David. You got your boy back.” They made it to his car, and he lowered her to her feet before opening the door as her heart raced. He tapped her nose. “Don’t swoon over him right now—you can call him later.

Now, get your cute ass in the car and hold onto that little Spawn of Satan. He tries to run as soon as you let go.”

Before she got in, she fisted her hand in his shirt and pushed up on her toes. She knew this meant he’d made sure she would have her David. “Thank you, Ryder.”

He gave her a kiss that made her lightheaded. “Breathe, babe.” He pecked her nose when she gasped. “It’s all for you, Sweet Jane.” *Sweetest boy in the world.* “Now, get in. I want to fuck around with you before I have to act like a good boy around David’s gran.”

She was so in love with this boy. “You’re such a sweet talker, Ryder Godson.”

His eyes lit up as he grinned at her. “Told you, babe ... I’m good at everything I do. That will include feeling you up and making you tremble beneath my hands before your cute, clumsy ass stumbles into the house as you try to act like you don’t need to change your panties.”

“Again”—she laughed—“such a sweet talker.”

Kingston glared over the rim of his glass at Ryder as they sat at the dining room table. She hadn’t expected Ryder to stay for dinner, but her bad boy was making himself right at home, and Sylvia was all too pleased to spoil him in place of David.

“What did you say, boy?” Kingston’s low, dangerous tone only caused a faint smirk to tease Ryder’s lips.

“I said, if those fuckers are caught staring at her delicious ass again, I’m breaking faces.” Ryder winked at Jane. “Want me to get a personalized sticker for your sweet cheeks? Property of Ryder Godson?”

She facepalmed as Kingston exhaled loudly through his nose.

“Are you really this dumb?” Kingston asked him.

“What are you talking about, old man?” Ryder’s brow furrowed, but as Ryder squeezed Jane’s thigh under the table, she knew he was messing with Kingston. “I’m starting to worry about your smarts since you keep forgetting my sexy ass is being tutored by your sexier stepdaughter.”

Sylvia giggled as Kingston’s face reddened. “I think you’re experiencing karma, son. Do you remember when Aurelia’s father overheard you praising her backside?”

Bright red. “Mother.” Kingston shot a glare at her at the mention of David’s mother. “This is not the same.”

“Sure isn’t,” Ryder piped as he served himself another slice of lasagna. “I’m man enough to tell you to your face my Jane’s a smokin’ hottie. No need to eavesdrop on me, Pops.”

“Stop calling me Pops and Old Man,” Kingston snapped, yanking the serving dish away from Ryder. “And stop eating my food.”

“He calls David Papi,” Jane threw out there as Ryder opened his mouth to fire back something, no doubt, inappropriate.

Her bad boy tossed her a wink. “He’s Papi, but I’m King Daddy, babe.”

Kingston rested both elbows on the table before cradling his head, full-on frustration. “And Eric picked you?”

“Of course, he picked me,” Ryder said before taking a huge bite. He swallowed it faster than Jane expected him to and added, “I think I should spend the night.”

Kingston’s head snapped up so fast it popped. “Finish your meal and get home, boy. I can change my mind about you getting visits.”

Ryder grinned, taking another bite. “You can, but you won’t. You’ve already accepted there’s no parting her from me.”

Surprisingly, Kingston didn’t reply. He simply stuffed his mouth as his mother smiled and sipped her tea.

Jane wasn't sure what Ryder was thinking, but she knew this playful side of him was all for her benefit. His hand settled higher on her thigh, though he carried on eating without difficulty.

"I'll have to skip seeing you tomorrow," he said, shifting his gaze from Kingston to her. "I'm going to practice ... Scouts," he explained.

"Oh," she said, sighing as tingles spread out from his touch.

He squeezed, sliding his finger between her thighs. "Sorry, babe."

She fixed a smile on her face. "It's okay. Will you come the next day?"

"I think so. I wanted to take you to a *club* I'm a part of. He"—Ryder inclined his head toward Kingston—"said I could."

Her thoughts immediately darted to his secret fighting. Like a fight club, and though she was afraid to watch him fight, she was happy he was trying to teach her about himself.

Kingston cleared his throat. "I did. I'm leaving work early tomorrow, so I'll pick you up tomorrow, Jane." He shared a secret smile with his mother. "There's something I want to show you."

"Better not be some punk you think can show me up," Ryder muttered.

Kingston grinned. "My, my, he can be a frightened little boy, after all."

Ryder glared at him. "Ask Jane if I'm a little b—"

Jane covered his mouth. "Ryder!"

Jane followed Kingston into the unmarked building. "This isn't where you reveal you're a spy and you are having my

identity erased so I can't see my boys, is it?"

Her stepfather looked at her like she was insane. "Your imagination astounds me." He then pushed open a heavy door and motioned for her to enter.

She gasped, covering her mouth as she took in the wooden floors, mirrored walls, and mounted ballet barre. "You made a ballet studio?" Her eyes darted around the room, and she startled when a figure stood in the corner where a white baby grand piano sat. No, it was two figures. Two men.

Kingston put a hand on her back to soothe her. "I can only credit for urging you to accept their gift. Thank him for this."

"My queen." Luc stepped into the light first, lowering his head in greeting. "I might have insisted Archer spill any secrets he had on you, as I know he sees more than he lets on. I already owned this building. It was no trouble to convert it into a private dance studio for you."

"Overnight?" she asked even with the lump in her throat.

"I told you," he said, his voice dripping with confidence, "power and maturity, Jane."

She smiled, awed when he gave her a real smile in return. It was then the second man stepped forward. "Tercero," she whispered, taking him in. As usual, he wore all black, and his hair untied so that it hung just past his shoulders. *Damn.*

His expression was the same as it always was when he saw her. Empty except for the faint smirk like he knew she was watching him. "Jane," he said, doing the same bow with his head Luc had done. She'd never get over the propriety of these two. "My generous big brother informed me of your little secret. I admit I'm ashamed, as even I did not know this about you. If I had, we might have had the pleasure of knowing one another sooner."

She was confused, and it must've shown on her face.

He gestured to the room. "I dance. Quite well."

Luc sighed, and she grinned returning her focus to him even though she still let her adoration for Tercero's confession

show.

Her elder Godson boy—man-boy—cast her a look of annoyance as he said, “Archer explained you stumbled from time to time.” He watched her face flush without any change in his expression as her embarrassment grew. “He told me you dance beautifully, but you still needed instruction. I thought you must be uncomfortable around traditional instructors. So, I am providing you with the one you will not refuse.”

“Thank you, Luc.” She smiled for him again, pleased when he shook his head at her. He didn’t like sharing, but he was. “So, who plays?”

Tercero motioned to Luc. “Big brother, of course.”

Jane wasn’t expecting that, but she should’ve known when the piano was white. “I don’t normally play music in the dark—so no one knows I’m outside. I dance to the melodies in my head.”

Luc tugged his sleeve as his gaze skirted toward the piano. “You have a Bluetooth speaker at your disposal. Play whatever you like. When I am present, however, I’d like to watch you dance to the music I create for you.”

Oh jeez.

Kingston cleared his throat, drawing her attention to him. “Ryder is not to be informed of this, Jane. Nor is David, as I’m certain Ryder has let you call him without my permission. Don’t forget you are still in trouble for your behavior.”

She sobered up, her guard rising instantly. “I don’t want to keep things from Ryder. And, yes, I’ve talked to David. I don’t see how letting me see them is part of my punishment. So, what is this?”

His blue eyes seared her skin. “Jane, I’m still trying to understand everything. I want you to see all your options.”

“He wants you to know you can choose one of us and still be happy,” Tercero said, amused.

Her jaw dropped. “You’re pitting them against Ryder and David?”

Kingston exhaled loudly. “Do you have to view it that way? I am allowing Ryder his chance with you, but you so easily agreed to his proposal of you being shared. It’s not natural, Jane. You pick a boy. A, as in singular, and you fall in love, he asks for my blessing in marriage, *eventually*, and you get married and live a long happy life together. All I want you to see is that it’s possible to choose one and be happy. Ryder, though he tests me, is surprisingly a good man for you, but I’d rather you know the others individually to know if you wish to be with one of them.”

“Ryder is not making me choose all of them,” she cut in.

He shook his head. “I think Ryder is afraid you will realize he can be replaced, so he is ensuring he doesn’t lose you.” Kingston put a hand on her shoulder. “I’m not saying he can; he’ll give you the world, even if all you need is him. Perhaps you just need to know it can be only him or one of the others. Even David, Jane.” He took a deep breath. “It disturbs me greatly that you’re in love with him; he is your stepbrother, but if I forbid you like I have tried, I fear you will run off and do something foolish with him. So, I will give my son the chance I stole from him.” He smiled at her, giving her hope that he did understand at least some of her conflict, that he wasn’t holding it against her, just being a dad. “Don’t worry about your mother—I’m the one who should deal with her. It was never your fault.”

She couldn’t speak. If he really thought this, she was so grateful. It was so awful to stomach how her mom had done everything, and it was worse that Kingston, though he hadn’t said it, was separated from her for the time being.

Heat, tingles, ice, and desire brushed across her fingertips until Tercero held her hand. “Kingston is aware you will still make your own choices, Jane. He just feels Ryder’s openness to your relationships with us is pushing you to do something you don’t want or understand.”

“That’s not true, though,” she said.

“I know,” Tercero replied. “I agreed to come here because I want you to find yourself, and I learned that I could be of

help after all. Luc, well, I suppose my brother has other plans.”

“But I don’t want to lie to them,” she said.

He smiled softly and caressed her cheek with the back of his fingers. “Consider it a surprise for them. When you’re ready, show them what you’ve gone after all on your own—what you achieved without them. Because I know you will be at your most lovely when you dance for them.”

Jane searched his face, trying to understand everything. It seemed Kingston had his plans, but Tercero was there for her benefit alone. Not for his own, not to win her.

Again, he smiled and caressed her cheek. “I am not as insecure about you as my cocky big brother, and I don’t have the obstacles David must conquer just to be with you. So, don’t worry about me. I merely wish your company, especially when your greatest loves must be away from you. That is who they are, Jane. There is no shame in that. I am blessed to be considered among them, and I am very aware you try to choose just me at times. I see it in the way your eyes glow when they look at me. I am a lucky man.”

She held his hand to her cheek as Kingston groaned.

“I had no idea this one was a smooth talker with no urge to win you for just himself.” He ran a hand down his face. “You were meant to give your brother competition, boy.”

She grinned up at Tercero. “He doesn’t compete. He just likes to see me fed.”

Her quiet boy chuckled as Kingston made a choking sound and started to leave.

“I have access to his cameras,” he said over his shoulder. “No funny business, *slick*. That goes double for you, Luc. And behave, Jane.” He stopped with his hand on the door and glanced at her. “I’m sure Eric will love to look down and see you dance. Make that your focus, okay? Worry about the boys when your heart is full.” Then he glared at Luc and Tercero. “Have her home at the hour we discussed. Unsullied.”

Jane darted her gaze to Luc. He was watching her as she kept Tercero’s arm clenched tightly between her hands.

“Has he forgotten Ryder and David have already robbed us of that pleasure?” A delicious but short kiss was pressed to her lips. “More later, *tesoro*.”

When the heavy door slammed shut, she released Tercero and walked over to Luc.

As always, he was unreadable. That was, until she smiled up at him.

He sighed, shaking his head before gripping the back of her neck and pulling her closer. “One day it won’t work.”

“Not today,” she whispered, pulling him down for the kiss she saw waiting for her.

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TWENTY-TWO

Tercero could fucking dance. Jane sighed as she silently watched one of the videos from yesterday.

“Commit, *cara*,” he said, sliding his hands along her waist as he leaned down and whispered in her ear. “You always hold back. Let go, just like you have with me.” He breathed her in as he continued his caress, but let her go too soon, never letting them get carried away. He wanted her to make the most of her practice.

They’d spent two hours alone together, and he was a fabulous instructor. He corrected her in a professional manner most times, then he asked her to try *pointe*. It was so much harder than she ever expected, but he was patient, encouraging. Sweet. Sexy.

He didn’t hide his caresses when Luc returned to watch the last ten minutes before taking her home. The boy was such a secret alpha male, if there was ever such a thing.

“What are you watching?” a deep voice rumbled beside her.

Jane gasped, dropping the phone, which was snatched up before she could retrieve it. “Damon, give it back.”

He stared at the video still playing. Tercero had let her set up her phone to record most of their session, and she knew it had reached the part where she’d rolled her ankle, only to be soothed with a very distracting kiss. It was one of those kisses where he cradled her face between both hands and melted her into a puddle of dreamy-eyed girl.

“Well,” Damon said, handing her the phone. “And here I was hoping to see a ridiculous set of selfies from Ryder.”

“You can’t tell him,” she whispered, clutching his arm.

His dark eyebrow lifted. “I thought he knew about this.”

“He knows about Tercero and Luc, and David, but he doesn’t know that I’m seeing them.” She winced, realizing how bad it all sounded. “It’s not my idea. My stepdad doesn’t want Ryder to know.”

A knowing grin graced his face. “Your stepdad is trying to ruin Ryder with his brothers? And they’re doing it? Savage.”

She slumped against the chair. “Tercero isn’t doing that. He said it’s part of me finding myself.”

“With him,” Damon chimed. “How convenient for him.”

“He’s helping me dance,” she said as her face grew hot because she knew he was thinking about the sexy kiss he’d just seen. “I fell. That kiss was just one time.”

Damon chuckled, holding out a hand for her as he got to his feet. “We’re going out for lunch today.”

As she took his hand, she pouted her lips. “Please don’t tell the others. They’ll blab to Ryder.”

“As they should,” he said, leading her through the cafeteria. Again, he spotted the female teacher she’d seen him goad before. It looked bad with him holding her hand, so Jane tried to free herself, but Damon tightened his grip. “Stop dragging your feet, babe,” he said clearly for the woman to hear. “We don’t have a long break to take our time.”

Jane wanted to slap him, but she held her tongue when the teacher threw her a glare. *Damn, bitch, I’m a kid*, Jane thought, chuckling to herself.

Damon seemed pleased with her giggle as he grinned at her and lightly bumped the teacher. “Excuse us, *Miss Messor*.”

Her aqua eyes slanted as she spat, “Damon.”

He chuckled, a dark sound, and kept walking, not releasing Jane when they were outside. “You’re surprisingly twisted.”

“Me?” She laughed. “I was only laughing at the fact that a grown woman is ready to fight a little girl like me.”

“Little girl my ass,” he said loudly. “A little girl can’t handle Ryder, David, Luc, and Tercero.”

“I’m flexible,” she said, giggling when they got closer to the whole crew.

Damon’s laugh sounded like a thunderous growl. “This is why you’re queen.”

The title was silly, but she actually didn’t mind being called queen. Whether Ryder’s or Luc’s, she had no problem with it. “Wait!” She tugged him to a stop. “Messor ... Is she related to Than?”

His amber eyes flashed at her. “Older sister. I’ve known her for as long as I can remember. She used to babysit us.”

“Aw,” she cooed. “You had a crush on your sitter. And she’s your friend’s sister! All kinds of forbidden.”

He rolled his eyes and kept tugging her toward the big SUV. “Stay quiet about her and I’ll stay quiet about Tercero and Luc.”

It hit her that he was the only one she could talk to about this. No way would Wendy approve, especially about keeping it all from Ryder. She hadn’t even contacted her after the last time they argued, and Jane didn’t want to consider she’d lost her friend. “If I get emotional, can I talk to you about it all? My only girl friend isn’t talking to me, and I kinda can’t handle the judgment. She thinks I should pick only Ryder.”

His gaze cast down at her, searching her face for a few seconds. “You can talk to me.” As she beamed up at him, he added, “And I’ll tell you all about me fucking Than’s sister in the janitor’s closet last week.”

On the small screen of her phone, David’s blue eyes held hers as he wore a sweet yet disappointed smile. He was sweaty, his

ruddy cheeks accenting his perfectly sculpted cheekbones. “I’m happy you got my letter,” he said. “I miss you.”

“I miss you too.” Jane smiled, laughing when Lance Grimm leaned into view.

He wore a mischievous grin as he wrestled with David to keep the phone on him. “Jane, tell me you’ve forgiven my boy. None of us can stand his pouting—he’s even being an asshole to every girl trying to talk to him. It’s scaring them from the rest of us.”

David shoved him, growling as she clearly saw a naked player strut past them. “I’m on the fucking phone,” he yelled, making the guy turn. Archer.

He beamed and waved when he spotted her. “Hey, Jane.”

“Hi, Archer,” she greeted, her face red as he covered his crotch with a hand.

“We miss your pretty eyes watching us,” he said as Savaş appeared, shoving his brother.

The giant Godson grinned at her as he kept Archer from returning to view. “Howdy, Tex.”

“Hi, Savaş.”

David shook his head as they disappeared out of view and immediately changed the subject. “Ryder said my dad wants to see me.”

“Really?” She didn’t know if she was happy or worried. “He told me he was gonna let you see me.”

“He did?” His eyes lit up, and his smile turned genuine. “I’ll see him, then.”

Her heart ached for him. “David, I’m not completely happy with Kingston, and I’m still furious that he hit you, threw you out, and moved me here, but now that I’m calm, I get it. He really didn’t see it because he viewed me as a daughter for so long; it’s disturbing for him. If you can, try to work things out. You love your dad, and I can’t bear thinking I’ve ruined your relationship with him.”

Ice flashed in his eyes, and he didn't look like the boy who honored his father. "You didn't ruin anything. It was between me and him. I understand the hit, but I can't really forgive him for taking you away like he did. And even though I'm glad you get to see Ryder, it guts me that my own father would give another guy a chance with you."

"I know," she told him, her eyes catching movement from where she was waiting for Ryder. It was her bad boy, and he lowered his sunglasses, playfully scowling at her as he got closer. "I gotta go," she told David. "He's here."

Ryder wrapped his arms around her before she could end the call, kissing her head over and over. "Babe, you are supposed to run to me like they do in the movies."

"This isn't a movie," David said bitterly.

Ryder grinned at David as he lowered his face to get on the call too. "I dunno—I've been making movies with Jane."

David glared at him. "You couldn't give me time to tell her bye?"

He scoffed. "Bitch, grow up. It's my time when I show up. She needs lovin'. Don't make her feel bad for it being me who's giving it to her."

Jane sighed, tilting the phone toward her. "Let me know how things go, okay?"

"I will." David smiled, though it looked like it hurt him to do it. "I'm sorry. Have fun with him today. Give the kitten a kiss for me."

Ryder snickered, but he shut up when she elbowed him. "I will," she told David.

"You need to name him," he reminded her.

"I know." Jane felt so bad that she couldn't think of something. She wanted something that reminded her of all her boys, not just Ryder.

David nodded. "Love you, baby. I'll send you a text tonight."

“Okay,” she whispered as she told him those three words with her eyes. He took it in quietly before nodding and ending the call.

Ryder hugged her from behind. “Sorry, babe. I missed you yesterday, and I am moody until I have you.”

“Have me?” She turned her face up to see him. So gorgeous.

“By my side, little pervert.” He kissed her when she pouted at him. “Let’s get going. You’ll need to do your homework and change before we leave. And you need to take care of that little fluff ball. I don’t want David’s gran throwing it out because you’re not doing cat chores.”

“Fluffy,” she threw out as a possible name for the kitten.

“Fuck no.” He started walking them toward his car. “Babe, you’re not going to have permission to name our kids.”

She laughed, hugging his waist. “Ryder Jr.”

He cast her an amused look. “For the cat or are you trying to name our firstborn? That’s how bad you are at this.”

“Jane,” someone hollered behind them.

She turned with Ryder, but he pulled her closer as two guys quickly approached. The first one Jane knew, and she grinned, rushing forward. “Adam!”

He smiled, lifting her up and squeezing the life out of her. “Hey, girl. Why do I only hear about you befriending a bunch of Hellhounds, but I never see you?”

“I know. I’m sorry.” She hugged him tightly as she took in that his gaze was fixed on Ryder. “Oh, do you know my boyfriend? Ryder?”

Ryder nodded to Adam. “We’ve met.”

Adam lowered her to the ground. “Boyfriend?”

Her bad boy smiled. “Yeah ... Her boyfriend.” He slid a finger under her waistband and pulled her back to him as his gaze shifted to the guy behind Adam. “The fuck you looking at?”

Jane felt her face burn because the guy had been looking at her, but she knew Ryder wasn't playing around. There was that dead look in his eyes, and his whole body seemed larger than normal. She touched his chest, making sure she was between him and the unknown guy.

Adam moved between them, too. "This is Stephen, a friend of mine."

No one said, 'nice to meet you', not that she ever expected Ryder to say that to someone, but she didn't feel good about the cold look on his face as he continued sizing up the guy. He wasn't as tall or as muscular as Ryder, but he was fit. His brown eyes stayed on Ryder now, and it was awkward as hell.

"Well," Jane said, hugging Ryder now as she peered over her shoulder at Adam. "We gotta get home. Come see me sometime."

He nodded, walking back and nudging his friend as he told her, "If you ever need me, I'm here."

She beamed at him. "Thanks, Adam."

Ryder kept his eyes on the pair until they were out of sight. "This is when I wish you were back home, and I had to deal with seeing everyone else with you."

"Because of Adam?" She pushed on his stomach to make him move.

He shook his head and turned to open the passenger door for her. "You know why."

Of course, she knew he was talking about the guy looking at her, but he really didn't need to worry. "The only guys I care about are you and the others. Don't get pissy."

"I'm protective, not pissy." He slammed the door and walked around it to get in. When he was seated beside her, he started the car and continued, "I've seen that prick with someone else before. Don't ever be alone with him, understand?"

"Okay," she told him, putting a hand over his as he angrily shifted gear. "I'm excited about seeing you tonight. It's not too

brutal, right?”

He was quiet, just driving as he stared straight ahead, but he finally moved his hand, letting hers cover the shifter as he guided her into each gear. “I’m brutal. It’s part of the reason why you never got to know this shit about me.”

“Are you worried I’ll freak out?”

“You are going to freak out,” he said, not teasing. “I send guys to the hospital, babe. But you want to see what I do, so you’re gonna see.”

“You can do it now,” she pulled her hand free and turned to stare out the window. It wasn’t like she was angry that he was being protective. She wasn’t. But she felt the change in him—like the whole world shifted because he was worried about her.

He made it to the main road and sighed as he put his hand on her thigh. “Hey, are you mad at me? I’m not gonna be like that about every guy who looks at you. Only if I feel something off.”

“I’m not mad.” She really wasn’t. “You’re just upset, and I can feel it.” It was like her chest was being pressed on, like her breath was being sucked away.

“Then we should talk about happy things.” He patted her leg but didn’t let go. “Like the scouts couldn’t take their eyes off me yesterday.”

“Really?” She grinned up at him now.

“Of course.” He leaned over and kissed her quickly. “Always forgetting who I am, silly girl.”

Slightly drunk on him, she moved so she could lean her head on his shoulder. “I never forget, but I’m always amazed by you.”

“Feel the same about you, Sweet Jane,” he said, pushing her to sit properly in her seat. “You’re a horrible passenger, though.”

“Rude.” She sulked, adjusting her seatbelt.

“Protective,” he deadpanned before he snapped his fingers. “Keanu.”

“What?”

“Keanu. That’s what you should name that little fucker.”

She laughed, asking him, “Like Keanu Reeves?”

He nodded, his smile stretching wide. “First, I know he’s your favorite actor,” he said, making her heart flutter that he’d even know that. “Second, because when we were kids—before you turned into my mean, beautiful girl who haunted me for years—you didn’t mind being close to me. And there was one Saturday night when you were with us. It was me, David, Tercero, and Luc who had sat down to watch a movie with you, and you wanted to watch *Bill & Ted’s*, the one with the Grim Reaper, then you said Keanu Reeves was funny. Every one of us were instantly jealous of that guy. So, Keanu fits. We are jealous that little fucker gets to sleep with you, and he’s something you share with all of us.”

“Ryder Godson, you are the sweetest guy in the world.” She couldn’t believe he’d remember something so far back or that he’d think to include the others in it. “I love it.”

“I know you do.” He pulled up next to Sylvia’s house and grabbed their backpacks but dropped them quickly to hold her face and kiss the life out of her. “Now get your sexy ass out of my car. Time to play teacher with me.”

Two hours later, Jane clung to Ryder’s arm as they walked toward an abandoned-looking warehouse. “Do I look okay?” she asked him. The place was sketchy as hell, and it didn’t help Ryder had parked them where there was no way to see from the main street. His car wasn’t the only one like that in the parking lot either.

His gaze connected with hers before sliding down her figure. She’d worn a pair of black jeggings with a white tank top and converse. It seemed appropriate when she saw he wore

a pair of dark jeans, T-shirt, and a black leather jacket instead of his school letter jacket. “You look like you want me to strip your sexy ass down bare.” He smirked, his eyes flashing. “I don’t like to say I’m fucking you, but I see it, you want to be fucked long and hard now that you’re off your period.”

Tingles shot up her arm. “Ryder.”

She was stunned by his gorgeous smile.

“What?” He laughed as he turned, walking backward but still holding her hand. “You know it’s true. If I didn’t want to show off for you, I’d wrap you around me and love you the way you like me to.” Then he tapped her nose, his smile slipping into the cold mask of the bad boy she knew he was. “But you’re in trouble. I didn’t say it earlier, but I know you’re hiding something from me. So, no dick until I say.”

Her breath hitched, and his smile returned. Deadly.

“Gotcha.” He stopped walking and gently gripped her chin as he stared down at her. “I know you’re seeing my brother, or brothers, behind my back.”

A choked noise got stuck in her throat.

He leaned down, kissing her, breathing in deeply as his lips stayed against hers. “I know you want to tell me, too,” he murmured. “I know you don’t want to keep secrets, but you were asked to.”

Her eyes watered as she wrapped her arms around his waist, her heart hammering violently in her chest. “Don’t leave me.”

His eyes glowed in the setting sun, like an emerald being struck by a ray of light. “You’re my Sweet Jane, hun. We’re longer than always.” Now, he cupped her face, his palms warming from the magic he created when he touched her. “Just answer me this, do you still love me?”

“Yes,” she rushed, hugging him. “So freaking much.”

Those eyes searched hers, and he eventually nodded. “Are you considering picking someone over me? ‘Cause I deserve

to know if I need to fight for you. I'm not fighting these fucks because I love you ... you have to know that by now."

Bobbing her head, she tried to get closer to him. "I mean, yes, I know you're accepting them because you love me and, no, I'm not picking anyone over you. I am keeping a secret because I was asked to, though."

He exhaled through his nose. "Kingston did this, didn't he?"

She stayed quiet as her answer.

A low grunt slipped past his lips. "Sly, fucker. I knew it seemed too easy."

"I'm sorry." She pushed her hands under his shirt, pressing her palms against his smooth skin. "It's just his way of making sure I'm not pressured."

"I wouldn't pressure you, babe." The muscles in his back tightened. "You tell me first, if you decide you don't love me anymore. Or whatever—just tell me shit. I'm trying to give you what you want and deserve, but if it's not me—"

"Ryder," she said firmly, "I am loving you until the end of time."

"Longer," he said, smoothing her hair back. "Always longer."

She nodded, biting her lips only to laugh when he growled and leaned down to nip them.

"You know better," he scolded, his kiss rough in the sweetest way. It was something only Ryder could pull off. "I'm still husband?"

Grinning, she pushed her hands down the back of his jeans.

"That's my ass," he said, chuckling.

"Husband ass." She squeezed, almost moaning as the muscular globes flexed. There was no more denying it; someday she was going to marry this boy.

“Damn right it is.” He pecked her and tugged her hands free. “But you’re still in trouble. My mind is spinning with fear you’re going to fall for their slick shit. You’re a sucker for the Italian shit as well as Luc’s sophisticated bullshit. I know I agreed to you seeing all of us, but I’m not putting it past my brothers to try and have you all to themselves.”

Jane couldn’t believe her cocky bad boy could be so insecure about her. Yes, he was taking a dig at her for being won over by their charms, but he wasn’t trying to insult her. He was vulnerable. Tercero was right—Ryder needed to see she’d still choose him above all.

“I really like Tercero,” she told him. “And with Luc, there’s something I can’t explain, but I swear I love everything about you, especially how sweet and funny you are with me. I know you’ll destroy for me if you need to, and I know you’ll say the dumbest things just to make me laugh. You’ll do it all just for me.” She reached up to touch his cheek. “You’re magic. There is no one else like you, and I’m so fucking happy that I get to say you’re mine.” She lowered her hand and pressed it above his heart. “Now, please, show me the guy you’ve kept secret from me.”

He covered her hand. “I keep it from almost everyone, but mainly you. I thought you’d be afraid of me if you knew what I did. I already know you don’t like smoking or drinking—I’m quitting by the way.”

Gosh, he was too perfect. “You don’t have to change for me, but I will say I’m allergic to smoke, so I can’t be around you for that,” she whispered. It was hard to accept this about him, but she would, as long as he was safe.

“I know—that’s why I’m stopping. I don’t want you sick. Plus, it was to calm me when I wasn’t able to be close to you. And because I struggled with you hating me. Now, there’s no reason to take the edge off.” He darted his gaze between hers as her heart grew for him. “I’ll stop drinking because I want to be sober around you all the time. You taste better than any fucking drop of alcohol anyway. But I need to fight. It’s who I am.”

“Then fight,” she said, still unsure if it was okay he was changing so much of himself for her. “I won’t be afraid of you. Turned on, definitely. But never afraid.”

Now, he laughed. “Then I’m definitely not letting you sit next to Sin.” He took hold of her hand. “Come on. The sooner my fight starts, the sooner we can party together.”

“Party?”

He nodded, holding the door open. “Sin suggested I let you see how we do things. If it’s not your thing, we can leave.”

“Is it your thing?” She watched him shrug.

“You’re the only thing that matters to me, angel. But I’m definitely more relaxed around this group. So, as you might’ve noticed, I rarely participate in the parties my brothers throw—here I join in.”

“Why?” She knew Ryder wasn’t close to the others, but she’d assumed he wasn’t close to anyone.

“Cause they don’t give a fuck like me, I guess.” He nodded to a big guy sitting at the end of the hall. He was bald, and he had a nasty scar running down his face.

“Godson,” the man grumbled, holding out his hand.

Ryder’s only reply was giving the guy a stack of bills he’d pulled from his jacket.

The man counted it, then eyed Jane. “This your girl?”

“Obviously,” Ryder said, tightening his grip on her. “We done?”

“Yeah, we’re done.” He motioned for Ryder to enter, and her bad boy didn’t hesitate to pull her along.

“You pay to fight?” she asked Ryder quietly.

“Yeah.” He grimaced, adding, “And for everything they provide.”

What on earth did they provide? The place looked like a dump, and she didn’t imagine them providing clean towels and water. She scanned the dirty floors and worn out chairs around

a fenced arena. Not many people were there yet, but her blood went cold at the sight of half-naked women dancing on a makeshift stage.

“Jane,” Ryder said quietly. “Hey, I don’t pay for the women. It’s not better, but when I say they get me stuff, they get me liquor and weed. I’m stopping, though. I just had a small debt.”

Her pulse thundered in her ears as she watched a guy holding out a twenty to a woman, who immediately dropped to her knees and started undoing the guy’s pants. “What the hell, Ryder? This is where you prefer to be?”

He growled, picking her up when she turned to leave. “See? This is why I kept my shit private.”

“Yeah,” she said, shoving his shoulders, “silly me for having a problem with you paying for prostitutes and calling it a fight club.”

“Jane.” His voice took on that tone that demanded she calmed down. When she did, he kissed her cheek and spoke in a low voice. “I’m not going to tell these guys they need to stop fucking around just because I don’t agree, or because my girl is here. There are other girls who come with their boyfriends; you just accept it.”

He shifted his hold on her, keeping an arm under her ass as he pulled her arm around his neck so he could hold her face. “Just take a look, babe. Those guys can’t get women unless they pay for them.”

Her eyes flitted over to the group; they were rough looking for sure. Not ugly, just unimpressive next to guys like hers, and their injuries from years of fighting didn’t help.

Ryder chuckled, nuzzling her neck. “They have anger problems, drug addictions, and they can’t hold decent jobs. The club gets them what they need to keep them as fighters. It’s this or on the street for them. They make enough money to at least keep a roof over their heads, and many of them live together. It’s not like the people who run this care about them, but they care about keeping guys who can bring in money.

Some are good fighters; others are good at taking a beating or entertaining a crowd.”

“So, the girls are just for them?” She returned her focus to Ryder, thankful the blowjob was turned the other way. She couldn’t believe people did this stuff.

“Whoever wants it,” he said with a shrug.

“Even you?”

His expression went cold, the same as the tone he spoke to her with. “I’ve had women look my way, offer to give me freebies, or even women who are here for the rush of the fight, but you know I’ve always been waiting for you. Stop thinking I’m the asshole you made me out to be.” She flinched, but he kept going. “I’m not a piece of shit when it comes to you, Jane. I’m not perfect, but I didn’t cope by fucking around with another woman. I fight, I get high, and I rarely get wasted to mellow out the fact I never had you. I won’t need any of it now. I’ll either have you here, watching me, or I’ll rush home to be with you.”

Jane frowned. It wasn’t like she wanted him to do drugs or drink, but was that part of the boy she loved?

“Talk to me, babe.” He jiggled her a little as he slightly softened his expression. But not enough to look like the sweet guy she knew he wanted to be with her. “Do I need to cancel today and do my fights without you?”

“No.” She hugged him, relieved when he returned it with a stronger one. “Let me see you,” she murmured. “If you didn’t do *that*, I’m okay. I promise.”

“I didn’t do that.” He smacked her butt and lowered her to her feet. “Come with me to the locker room. If I tell you to close your eyes, it means a guy is naked or someone is fucking in there. Just close your eyes so I can get changed.”

Her face was hot, but she nodded. He probably thought she was such a prude. No drinking, no smoking, no sex with prostitutes. Okay, the last one was wrong no matter what.

“So fucking cute, babe.” He took her hand. “Let’s go. The rest of the guys should be getting here soon.”

Quietly, they slipped past the hookers, and Jane could barely believe she was doing such a crazy thing as thinking of actual hookers. But, thankfully, the locker room wasn't far, and it was fairly empty. Except for a few guys. And Than.

"Than," she shouted, waving.

He was sitting on a bench, talking to another man, or it seemed, he was selling the guy something. Drugs. *Than's a bad guy.*

Jane almost gasped; *I am such a goody-two-shoes.* Well, if goody-two-shoes had sex in cars with bad boys and got fucked on their period by their stepbrother... . *Oh, no, I'm a bad guy too.*

"Hey," Than said, nodding to Ryder as he got up, pocketing his cash. "Jane, I didn't expect to see you here."

Ryder released her hand as he turned to open a locker. "You're scaring my girl with your illegal activities, Than."

The boy in question smirked at her. "She's not afraid of me, and she's a little wild one at heart."

Now Ryder chuckled. "She's wild with me. This is all new to her—don't corrupt her."

Fire lit in Than's eyes. "She's hanging with the wrong crowd if that's what you want."

"She's what I want, always." Ryder kissed the top of her head and asked her, "Is this crowd too much for you?"

She beamed up at him. "No. Like Than said, I must be wild at heart." Then she threw a glare at Than. "Don't talk to him about me like I'm not right here."

A sinister grin transformed his face, and she saw for the first time the dark guy she'd been having lunch with. "Apologies, my queen."

Ryder moved a bit away and tugged off his shirt. *Hot damn.* He flexed for her, smiling. "Do they treat you like the queen you are, angel?"

“They do keep calling me queen—it’s weird. People keep staring.”

“Let them stare—you’re my beautiful girl.” His smile was wicked as he glanced at Than. “Did you tell her why you call her queen?”

Jane frowned as she looked between them. Luc was the king, according to most in their towns, but she knew they called Ryder *king*, too.

“Figured you’d let her see.” Than inclined his head toward Ryder’s locker where someone had graffitied the Grim Reaper and the words ‘The King Reaper’ across it.

She smiled at the image, running her fingers across the scythe. “You did take that movie to heart. Death ... I like it.”

“I knew you would.” He leaned down, kissing her softly then murmured, “My girl greets Death with a smile and a kiss.”

“More than that,” she said, giggling.

Than squeezed past them. “Let me escape before this gets to ‘more than that’.”

Ryder chuckled, pecking her once more as he ushered her to the bench. “Than, I want her taken care of. No deals around her.”

“No problem.” Than nodded at him. “Do the others know she’s here?”

“Not yet.” Ryder unbuttoned his jeans, winking at her as he sat to untie his shoes. “No smoking around her, either—she gets sick. And definitely don’t push her to try anything. She’s not used to this stuff.”

Jane’s face burned as Than tossed her an amused look.

“Anything else, my lord?” Than asked sarcastically.

“I’m thinking,” Ryder said with a chuckle as he removed his shoes. “Oh, if she has to piss, you or Damon goes with her. Not Sin. I mean it.”

“I’m not peeing with them,” she said, surprised he’d even suggest a guy go with her.

His look was tired now. “Babe, just because I’m a badass here, doesn’t mean some fucker out there knows to stay away from you.”

“There will be lots of drunk and high men in the crowd,” Than added. “Women too. It’s no trouble to keep you safe. There’s always a chance Dylan could show up—he used to fight until Ryder beat his ass last month. We owe you after letting one of our own out of sight.”

Dread slid down her spine, and Ryder flipped Than off before pulling her closer. “Hey,” he murmured as her pulse hummed in her ears. “Look at me, Sweet Jane.” He tilted her face up. “This is why you’re being left in good hands, all right? No fucking around like you can take care of yourself alone. I know you’re my little fighter, but you’re not stronger than a guy like him and many of the guys here.”

Releasing a harsh breath, she nodded. Her heart was beating so fast that she covered it with her hand. “Oh, I’m such a baby.”

Tingles slid down her neck, but Ryder must’ve thought she needed more than that as he tugged her shirt enough to slip his hand under and press against his spot. “You can be a baby about this. For a while, at least.” He smiled against her hair as he caressed her skin. “You know, I think if you ordered them to, the Devils and Wolves would teach you how to defend yourself.”

Jane couldn’t imagine learning how to fight, but the thought of her new friends teaching her some moves sounded fun. “Why not you?”

“I’ll teach you some, but I won’t be able to go hard on you the way you’ll need me to. I’ll baby you and end up taking off your clothes.”

“Of course.” She closed her eyes, sighing as she let those tingles fully embrace her. “Please don’t become distracted by me.” Her throat closed a bit as she realized she was about to

watch him in a fight where someone would really try to hurt him to win money. “Focus on the guy you’re fighting.” A door shut, and Jane noticed Than had left.

“My focus is always halfway on you,” Ryder said as he lifted her onto his lap. He pulled her back against his chest and hugged her. “It’s always been that way for me. From the first moment I saw you.”

“Why are you so cute and perfect, and I’m such a little hoe? Now, I’m realizing I’m a bad guy.”

He snickered, kissing her neck. “A bad guy? Well, maybe a little. You got some street cred with our car sex and your new crew. So, a bit of a bad girl. I’m keeping you anyway.”

She smiled, wiping under her eye. “Do you really think Dylan will show up?”

“If he does, I’m beating the fuck out of him.” He put a hand over her tummy. “Don’t let that fucker ruin your life. You’ve got me, David, Tercero, and Luc. You’ve got my other brothers and your guys at Helldonna. All of us will protect you or help you get strong enough to fend for yourself until we can get there.”

“Doesn’t that make me weak? That I need you?”

“No,” he said without hesitation. “Accepting help is smart, not a weakness. Do you really think fighting off a guy who is more than twice your size is a piece of cake?”

She shook her head. “I’ll probably just panic if I see him.”

“Well, we’ll work on that.” He kissed her shoulder. “Just help me out by doing what you can to be safe, and here, that means you stay with one of the guys. My brothers don’t know about this, so they won’t be here. David knows I fight, but he doesn’t know more than that. So, embrace this queen thing you got here. I don’t care if they call you that because of Luc or myself, you’re a queen and that’s all that matters.”

“I didn’t think you would be into the queen thing.” She leaned against him, sighing as he kept caressing her stomach.

“Well, I’m not as cocky about it as Luc, but I’m not giving up my title—I am the King Reaper.” He tilted her face toward his and gave her a long kiss before standing, revealing he was in a pair of black tight fighting shorts and a black shirt that was just as tight. He pulled on a pair of black jogger pants and pocketed a set of gloves. He might as well be a superhero. “Time to show off my Sweet Jane.”

As she got up, a giddy feeling filled her. She was with her amazing boyfriend, and he was showing her off. He had no shame in letting everyone know she was his, no hesitation to make sure she was comfortable or else he’d take her somewhere else, and he didn’t care she was a prude who was a freak when only he, David, and Tercero were looking.

“I love you,” she told him.

“And I love you.” He cradled her face between his hands and kissed her. “Now, come on. I wanna make sure you’re really okay with a pack of wolves.”

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TWENTY-THREE

Jane's mouth went dry as she watched Ryder prowl around his opponent. The shadows from the few fluorescent lights cloaked most of his body and even his face, though his sexy-as-all-sin lips and jawline were visible as a predator-like smirk lifted his lips.

"Your boy's a beast," Sin commented beside her.

She didn't reply; she didn't have to. The whole building knew Ryder was a beautiful monster, they'd seen him gracefully dance around his larger opponent, they'd cried out when he'd thrown the most devastating punches she'd ever seen before. The sounds alone had her stomach twisting, but the confidence radiating off Ryder was like a drug she couldn't get enough of, and she found herself screaming for him to destroy the behemoth of a man he was fighting.

"He already knows he can beat him," Damon told her quietly. "He knows as soon as he faces them."

"What?" Jane couldn't tear her eyes from Ryder as he almost looked like he was toying with the guy now. He just kept slipping jabs right to the guy's face.

Damon moved his mouth closer to her ear. "He's dragging it out for show. He knew the moment he saw the guy he would kill him; so he's taking the hits he wants to take and placing hits where he knows the fucker will keep standing. This is the last round, though. He's deciding whether to win by knockout or submission."

Her mouth slightly hung open as she watched Ryder's eyes flick up her way. He smiled at her, giving her a wink before focusing on his fight.

A low chuckle rumbled within Damon. "I think that means he's ready to end this."

Sure enough, Ryder went on the attack. It was both horrifying and magnificent. The speed, power, and grace of each step, each blow he unleashed, completely blew her mind. He had held back the entire fight.

The roar of the crowd was deafening, and Jane barely registered they were chanting something: "Time's up."

"What do they mean?" she yelled at Damon.

He was grinning as he answered, "This is why they call him the King Reaper. He has decided his opponent's time is up. He was only waiting."

Her heart sprinted. "He's going to kill him?"

At her right, Sin laughed and slung his arm around her. "Watch."

Jane didn't know if they were just sick and liked watching someone killed, but she wasn't going to let this happen. "Stop him!"

"Stop him?" Sin tightened his hold when she tried to run.

It was too late; Ryder unleashed an onslaught of punches that the guy failed to block. Blood sprayed on the mat, and with a devastating uppercut, the man went down, stiff before he even hit the mat.

Jane covered her mouth as the crowd roared. The celebration rolled off Ryder's back like water, and he turned to see her reaction. The smile he'd started to give her faltered at the shock on her face.

"He's not dead, Jane," Damon told her, pointing at the man who was already regaining consciousness.

A detached mask spread over Ryder's face, and she realized she'd made a mistake. He had expected her to be

afraid of him so he hid this part of himself from her, and her reaction had confirmed his fears. He thought he was going to lose her.

Jane quickly dropped her hands and began pushing her way through the horde. Even though he saw her coming, he stayed still. "Move," she yelled at a group of men and women. They laughed at her, not moving.

When Jane glanced at Ryder, he didn't move to help her. So, she glared at the men and their 'dates' and repeated herself, "Move."

"We got a Reaper fangirl," one of the guys said laughing.

There were so many people pressing up against the cage Ryder was in that she knew she'd never reach him without help.

Infuriated because the big guys were now ignoring her but also not allowing her through, Jane turned, quickly spotting Damon and Sin. "Get me to him."

A dark smile touched Damon's lips, and he moved toward her. Sin was behind him, grinning wickedly as he shoved people aside.

"My queen," Damon greeted her.

It might be silly, but she was going to own her title. "I need to get to him," she said. "Make it happen."

Sin laughed heartily, enough to grab the attention of the group blocking her way to the gate. They turned, spotting Jane before darting their widening gazes to Sin and Damon.

"You're blocking her way," Damon told them.

It wasn't the men who responded.

A woman, probably a few years older than Jane, sneered at them before settling her eyes on Jane. "Sorry, little girl, I'm not missing a chance at meeting the King Reaper. Ask your daddies to take you back to the toy store."

"I'm not that kind of daddy," Sin said with disgust. "Imagine me as a father, Jane."

The laughter behind her signaled more than Sin and Damon had come. The whole crew was behind her. Wolves and Devils are what Ryder had called them, and he'd said they were hers.

Jane's gaze darted to where Ryder stood, getting his tape cut as they prepared to announce him the winner. His eyes were on her, but his expression was empty.

She huffed, pushing back the nervousness about confronting anyone and glared at the woman in front of her. "You're looking at the King Reaper's queen, old lady. I suggest you ask your grandsons to take you to the pharmacy because you're fucking delusional if you think you have a chance with my man. Now, move."

Sin put his hands on her shoulders. "Yes, Little Moon! Get your adorable ass up there."

As soon as he removed his hands, Jane stepped forward, grinning when the group moved out of her way.

Finally, her deadly boy showed some life and opened the gate with a smile on his face. "There's my girl."

She climbed the steps and threw herself at him, laughing when he scooped her up and pulled her legs around his waist. "Always your girl," she whispered, closing her arms around his neck.

He squeezed her ass, brushing his lips across hers. "Longer." Then he kissed her in a way that can only be described as the King Reaper kissing his queen.

Keeping his smile hidden, Ryder watched from his spot as Jane giggled at the center of the crew she'd made for herself. Sin was, of course, too close for his liking, but Jane really liked having the bastard beside her. So, even knowing Sin was attracted to her, Ryder let go of his possessiveness. Jane had chosen *him* as the number one man in her life; he knew it now.

Yes, she hadn't chosen only him, but what he had with her was more than he'd ever hoped for. He knew she was seeing at least Tercero behind his back, but he rather liked the idea of her being happy and loved when neither he nor David could be with her. Luc was no doubt involved, and he couldn't quite figure out why Jane had feelings for him, but she must see something worth loving. How could he deny her when she glowed so pretty?

Ryder sipped his water as Than exhaled a stream of smoke.

"Here," Than said, holding the blunt out for him.

"I'm good." He sipped his water again.

Than chuckled. "Are you this calm when she's in David's arms?"

"Sometimes," he said, watching Sin twirl Jane. Her hair fanned out before coming to rest across her face. She giggled as Sin spun her again, but this time she skirted away then held her arms out and kicked out her leg, spinning herself in the most elegant movement he'd ever seen before. She beamed, finishing off her twirl with a bow.

"By that lovestruck look on your face," Than said, "you didn't know she could dance like that."

No, he didn't.

"Did she tell you she ordered us to train her?" Than asked as Sin and the others clapped for her, making her eyes widened. She hadn't meant to show anyone she could dance, Ryder realized.

"No, no, girl," Sin was telling her. "That was fucking amazing."

But her eyes slid over to where some women were dancing to the music blaring through the warehouse. Their style fit the music, but Jane had looked like a ballerina about to perform her own ballet.

Her gaze dropped, and he watched his angel close herself off. It didn't help that the girls who had come with the group were dancing like the other women. She was an absolute

oddball doing a ballet move to the rock music playing, but he loved every bit of her. “I take it you all agreed to help her?”

“Of course,” Than said. “She’ll be a deadly warrior queen by the time we’re finished with her.”

My warrior goddess, he thought but sighed as he watched her struggle to regain the confidence she had whenever she was free and surrounded by people she trusted.

It was hard to let her go like this, knowing she was comparing herself to everyone else and finding faults in everything about herself. He’d seen her do it most of her life; afraid to be his Sweet Jane. But she was trying to find herself. That’s what she had been doing behind his back, and as much as he wanted to wrap her in his arms and scare everyone for even looking at her and show her how amazing she was to him, he needed to let her do things on her own. Well, if her own meant bossing around her guard dogs.

Taking another sip of his water, this time, hazel eyes met his. Her insecurities were always going to hold her back if she let them. He shifted his weight, leaning back to show her he wasn’t going to rescue her, but he did smile and make a twirling motion with his finger. “Dance for me, Sweet Jane,” he said, knowing she couldn’t hear him, but she would know what he way saying.

Than copied Ryder’s position on the bleachers. “I don’t think she was ready for you to see that.”

“I know she wasn’t,” he said, still watching her. She looked so small now, not his smiling goddess who could make him laugh and act like a fool.

Someone bumped her, and she stumbled forward. His fist balled, ready to attack the idiot who wasn’t watching where they were dancing, but he breathed out and kept himself in place.

She finally smiled at him, but she didn’t start dancing or even come toward him. No, she had spotted something behind him, and the wickedest little grin he’d ever seen her wear appeared.

Than leaned over and whispered in his ear the moment Jane turned, grabbing Damon's hand. "Damon has been playing boyfriend."

"What?" Ryder narrowed his eyes on Damon as the fucker smiled at whatever Jane was telling him. She was dancing ... with Damon.

Than chuckled, adding, "He thinks I don't know."

"Know what?" Ryder snapped, his rage igniting when she began doing the sexiest little dance for Damon. She had turned her back to him, wrapping his arms around her as she kept one hand behind his neck.

"Well, I should've known I'd see this nonsense," said a female voice Ryder recognized.

He looked over, spotting Justine, Than's older sister, as she sat beside him. She taught at Helldonna, but she looked anything but a responsible teacher now. Heavy eyeliner, cherry lips, and a tight leather dress had transformed her into a fucking knockout.

She smiled at him. "They told me you won tonight—congrats."

Than nudged Ryder's arm, and his words echoed in his head: *he thinks I don't know*.

"I win every fight," Ryder said as his gaze swept back to Jane and Damon.

Justine chuckled, but it was a sad sound. "Do I have to ask for a dance?"

Ryder knew she was asking him, but he didn't want to dance with anyone but his girl. His girl who was making him look like a fool. Hazel eyes flashed to him, widening when she spotted Justine. Her lips moved quickly, telling Damon, "Abort."

Damon's gaze darted toward him. To Justine. Possessively.
Gotcha.

Standing, Ryder held out a hand. "Yeah, let's dance."

Though Justine's smile was bright, her eyes were dull. But she took his hand and let him lead her to the floor.

Ryder saw the panic and hurt in Jane's eyes as she tried to pull away from Damon. His girl was going to learn one thing tonight; he didn't do jealousy games. "You know," Ryder said to Justine as he pulled her in front of him, "I think I'd rather dance with my girlfriend."

Than's sister frowned before crimson painted her cheeks. "Oh, you're cute, Ryder, but I—"

He laughed, pushing her away from him so he could snatch Jane from Damon. "This is my girlfriend. Damon keeps her safe for me while we're apart. Maybe you can ask him for a dance?"

Justine looked between him and Jane, then Damon.

"No need to ask," Damon said, grabbing Justine by the wrist and gently pulling her closer.

Ryder chuckled, pulling Jane with him now. She hung onto his arm as he pushed his way through the wall of grinding bodies.

"Where are we going?" she yelled at him.

He was only taking her away from Justine and Damon. So, he stopped in the middle of the dancers and turned to her. "If you want to play matchmaker," he told her, pulling her closer, "make sure you're not pressing your ass against another man's dick."

Her face reddened. "I thought that would be better than the front."

"Really?" He spun her around then tugged her so her ass was on him, and he started dancing with her. At first she tensed, but she soon joined him, her smile so fucking pretty as she tilted her head back against his chest and moved his hand under her shirt. *My spot.*

"Well, Damon either doesn't pack as much in his pants as you, or he's a magician," she said, wiggling her ass. "He must've made it disappear. Because I didn't feel this."

Yeah, he was already hard for her. “You better not have.”

“Are you mad at me?”

Pressing his palm against her skin, he said, “For keeping secrets from me? Yes. For comparing yourself to every bitch humping legs in here? Absolutely.” He watched her eyes flash gold before dimming to a dull olive green. “For being my beautiful goddess who dances for me? Hell, no.”

Her smile made his whole body ignite into those damn tingles she always talked about.

“When were you going to let me see you dance?” he asked. “I honestly didn’t think you liked dancing.”

She swallowed hard. “I’ve never been good enough. I’m not good at this kind of dancing.”

“No, you’re not,” he said, hugging her as her lips trembled. “You’re fucking amazing at this kind of dancing. And you’ve always been better than enough.”

A whimper sounded from her, but she smiled with teary eyes. “You sexy jerk.”

He laughed, leaning down—far—to kiss her. “My little dancing goddess.” When she turned in his hold and threw her arms around his neck, he lifted her and asked, “So, when do I get a lap dance?”

Her reply was instant. “Do you want it public or private?”

Public was on the tip of his tongue, but there was a tiny bit of fear swirling inside her. So, he set aside his ego and grinned. “Private, of course. Don’t want any of these fucks seeing you naked.”

“I was going to do it clothed.” She wasn’t fooling him.

“No, you weren’t.” He stealthily copped a feel under her shirt and groaned. “Wanna go to my hideout? You might even get lucky with the champ.”

“Oh, I better.”

“So greedy.” He situated his hold on her and began carrying her toward the exit.

“Yes,” she admitted, kissing his neck.

As much as he loved her lips on him, he felt neck kisses were a David thing. So, he smiled when she trailed tiny kisses up to his jaw where she started nipping him.

“Is this your way of trying to seduce me?” He laughed, shoving the exit door open.

“I’m trying to consume you,” she whispered in his ear before nipping him there too.

Grinning and squeezing her ass hard, he told her something he thought she knew. “You already have, Sweet Jane.”

David kept his eyes on the plate before him as Jane’s mom hurried around the kitchen. She’d been waiting for him to get home from practice, and she asked him to come over for dinner. He was going to decline, but Jane wasn’t answering his calls, and he hadn’t had a good home-cooked meal since being kicked out.

“Have you talked to your father?” she finally asked him.

“No.” David reached for the knife and fork; she’d made him a steak, mashed potatoes, and she had an apple pie waiting nearby.

“Oh.” She took a bite of her salad. “I haven’t either.”

David jerked his eyes up. “You haven’t?”

Tears pricked at her eyes. “He’s chosen Jane over me,” she cried. “Just like Eric did. Just like you did.”

He frowned, watching her breakdown.

“Enough,” came a loud voice behind David.

Kingston walked forward, his eyes ablaze as he took in the tears staining Sarah’s face. “You know damn well you’ve been the one refusing my calls,” he told her. “You know I’m taking care of Jane because you won’t. You never have, Sarah. And

that's exactly why Eric took care of her, why I stepped in for him, and you knew what I didn't about David and Jane—that they loved each other well before you expressed any of your feelings for me.”

David hadn't expected to see his dad, nor hear him acknowledge his love for Jane.

Kingston didn't stop his onslaught on Sarah. “You are trying to turn everyone against her because you're afraid of being alone. She's your daughter, Sarah. Not your competition.”

Jane's mother sniffed, gathering her plate and standing from the table. “I see she's already worked her charm on you.”

What the fuck? David pushed the plate away and stood as his dad let out a growl. “I'm gonna go,” David told whoever heard him.

Now Kingston looked at him. “Boy, I came to see you—not her. You sit your ass there because I am not going to go into the Godson home where I am certain I'll see someone naked or acting a fool.”

“Not Ryder, clearly,” Sarah said bitterly. “He won't be there.” Her head shook. “I know you're letting her see him. And you're still staying away, even though she's picked him. You're picking her over David.”

Kingston's nostrils flared. “Woman, you are trying my patience. I'm letting her see him so she can make up her mind as any girl should be able to. She shouldn't have her mother deciding who she dates. And the boy, though he annoys me, is good to her. That's all we should care about. He even takes David into consideration and is honest with her. More than you have ever been with her. She should be asking you for advice, not terrified because she's confused.”

David darted his eyes between them in silence. He'd never heard them argue like this. And his father was taking Jane's side. He hadn't expected any of it, especially the jealousy Sarah had toward Jane. But it made sense. Sarah didn't take care of Jane. He'd always thought it was grief that made her

distant, but now he saw that had been why Eric was so involved with Jane. Sarah didn't want her.

"Confused?" A sharp laugh escaped from Sarah as she continued in a sarcastic tone, "She's so confused that she's getting everything she's always wanted. She's sleeping with Ryder, and you're allowing it while you leave me here like some insignificant afterthought. She's so confused that she slept with David right under our noses. And you're babying her like she's a princess when she's behaving no better than a whore you're passing around to the highest bidder."

David stood, his muscles coiled tight as he tried to push down the urge to fight. He'd never hit a woman, but his instincts had his body reacting the way it would if Jane was being physically attacked.

A heavy hand came down on his shoulder, and Kingston squeezed as he said in a low voice, "Go to the Godson's and wait for me."

He wanted to defend Jane, defend all of them, but he accepted this wasn't his fight. Sarah had problems that his father knew about; it was between them, and he could see now that he didn't need to protect Jane from Sarah. Kingston would.

So, he gathered his things and returned to his temporary home. He noted Ryder's car was still gone. It hurt, but he hoped Jane was having a good time. No way could he imagine her hurting after seeing how Sarah felt about her. He didn't have a mother or a sister, but he wondered if this was normal, for a mother to be jealous of her child.

"Bad news?"

David looked up, right at Luc. "There's rarely good news for me."

"That sounds like whining," he said with an amused tilt of his lips. "I don't think Jane expects that from you."

He tossed his backpack onto the chair. "How long have you known her again?"

“As long as you have,” Luc reminded him. “Just because you have lived with her for the past three years does not mean you fully *know* her.”

“What do you want?” David knew Luc didn’t speak unless there was something he wanted to say.

By the faint smirk on Luc’s face, he appreciated being called out to cut to the chase. “Jane was asked to keep a secret from you and Ryder. Seeing that she is trying to obey Kingston, I thought I would take it upon myself to expose us.”

“Expose you?” He ran a hand through his hair as he glanced around the room. Tercero was reading, not looking up, but David knew he could hear them just fine.

“Tercero and I were given the opportunity to see her behind yours and Ryder’s backs.”

David didn’t respond. He didn’t know how to feel because she hadn’t let it slip at all.

Luc sighed, tugging his sleeve like he was going to somehow manage to hide his tattoos. “Kingston told her to keep this private, but I know he will be talking to you about possibly seeing her as well. Though he acts it with her, Ryder is no fool—he likely knows about us seeing her, but he won’t hurt her for it. However, I know it will hurt Jane to feel she is betraying any of us. So, I suggest you be understanding when she’s keeping up her end of the bargain with Kingston, and you respect us the way I am you.”

Now Tercero looked up from his book. “She’d very much prefer to have all of us together.”

Luc slowly tilted his head to meet his brother’s stare. “She is not ready for us.”

Tercero’s lips turned up. “She can decide that for herself.” Then he added more wickedly, “She’s flexible.”

Fire burned through David’s veins as he glared at him. “I’ve had enough of people talking about Jane like she’s a whore. She’s my Jane. My baby. And she cares about you assholes, but I won’t let her be treated or spoken about like she’s our whore.”

Both Tercero and Luc gave him surprised then violent looks.

“I didn’t mean it as a disrespect,” Tercero said, his accent slipping out a bit more, which happened whenever his emotions were amplified. “I only know she would like to see how we behave together with her. She’s not as delicate as you and my brother like to treat her, is all I meant. I want to see her fully happy—that is with all of us.”

Nodding stiffly, David walked toward the kitchen. He was pissed that he couldn’t eat now because of Sarah’s nonsense, but he could go a night without food. His dad’s conversation would come next and then he’d likely have to calm himself down somehow.

Luc followed him, but he kept his distance. “There is Italian in the oven for you, enough for you and Ryder. Though I think he will have fed himself before he returns. Eat and relax. Jane would not like you so upset.”

His muscles felt locked in place, but he braced his hands on the counter as he heard a knock on the door. “It’s my father.”

Tercero stood and left without a word to answer the door.

David lifted his gaze to stare at Luc. “You care about her this much? It’s not a fucking game you’re playing to take her from us?”

A dark smile came and went from his face. “I care a great deal for her. I do not play games regarding Jane. It only appears that way because I make it so.” He moved to leave but stopped as footsteps drew closer. “Because it’s easier for her this way.” Saying nothing more, he left through a separate exit to avoid bumping into Kingston, who was now entering from the main hall.

His father looked much older than he remembered. He’d always seen his dad as a fierce but fair man, but now he looked worn out. “I interrupted your dinner,” Kingston said as he scanned the room. “Should I take us out?”

David knew there would be no apologies—from either of them. No ‘have you been taken care of?’. So, he did what would answer those unasked questions. He walked toward the oven and opened it to find two takeout meals. He retrieved both and gestured to the dining room. “They had a meal waiting for me. You can have Ryder’s—I know Jane will make sure he’s had dinner. We can eat and talk in here.”

A flicker of a smile appeared on Kingston’s face as he followed. “I don’t want to appreciate these boys.”

Laughing quietly, David placed the first carton down and rounded the table to sit. “Yeah, I’m struggling with that as well.”

Kingston sat, opening up the box the same time David did. It was still hot, the steam rising as the delicious aroma of sirloin steak, alfredo, and crusted zucchini hit him in the face.

“I’m moving in,” Kingston said, staring at the food.

David chuckled, grabbing his utensils. He already knew his dad and Jane were at his grandmother’s, and his grandmother made terrible food—except for her cookies. “It’s normally pizza, eggs, or sandwiches. This must be Luc’s doing; he’s normally not around when we get home.”

“He’s a slick one,” Kingston commented as he dug in. “I see why she likes him; he’s all class.”

Was that what Jane liked? No, she was down to earth. Well, at least he thought she was.

“You don’t know her as much as you like to think you do,” Kingston said, watching him. “She’s our silly but shy girl, but she’s a queen at heart. He’s showing her that, but he’s letting her take her time to accept it, even if it never comes.”

“I always saw her as more of a princess than a queen,” David muttered.

Kingston chuckled, cutting his steak. “I think that’s why I misunderstood your feelings for her. I don’t see you as a prince—you’ve always been too fierce. But I think that’s how Jane sees you.” He cleared his throat, uncomfortably. “Her prince.”

Now the tension surrounding David's heart eased. His baby had always seen him as something great, and he didn't deserve it. "Is she doing all right?"

"Aren't you talking to her?" Kingston raised a thick eyebrow. "She's not the stealthy ninja she wishes she was."

David laughed, nodding. "Yeah, she's a horrible ninja." He smiled as he thought about her. Jane was always sneaking around, hiding in the dark and trying to scare them. She even dressed in black once and tried to sneak up on his father, but she really was terrible at it. "And I have talked to her a few times." He stayed still as he waited for some kind of retaliation.

"I feel like I should be angry at you for everything going on between you two. I am angry." His father sighed. "But I've worried about Jane for so long. She's been so reserved ... no—diminished—since Eric died. I remember the sweet girl who had every one of you boys ready to defend her or make her smile. She had no idea the power she held over you all. That's the girl she has hidden, and I wish I could see that girl again. But I think you would've been perfect for her if they hadn't returned to her life."

Lowering his eyes, David nodded. "It seems like all she's learned is how imperfect I am."

"Good." Kingston gave him a real smile. "You don't want a girl falling in love with the idea of you, son. The real you—flawed, if even slightly in her eyes—is the one you want to see her smile at and say those three words to."

Not at all what David had prepared to hear, and it must've shown on his face.

"My son isn't going to lose his girl to a bunch of pretty boys who run amuck." Kingston tossed him another smile as David sat there in shock. "Just as I have rules for Ryder and the others, you will follow the ones I set for you. You may contact me when you are free to ask for permission to see her, and of course, if I say yes, you ask her permission."

"Really?" He was afraid he was hallucinating.

“Yes, really. You’ll need a ride.” He pulled out David’s keys and tossed them on the table. “No taking her out because I’m still upset and coping with everything, but you may stay and visit her. Your grandmother misses you, so I expect you to pay attention to her and not just fawn over Jane. And I only want you driving to school, home, and to visit Jane. If you fall behind on your studies or practice, I will tell Jane, and you know she will do what she has to do to see you succeed.”

David reached for the keys, his whole body alive as he felt true happiness. “Thanks, Dad.”

Kingston nodded. “Respect her, David. No matter what she becomes to you, she’s my daughter. I’m fighting the urge to tell all of you that you’re not good enough for her, but I know that’s not true. Because Ryder is indeed her match, son. I see it—he’s her world, the very ground she stands on.” The words hurt, and by the soft smile his dad gave him, he knew it. “But there’s a certain way she always warmed around you that was magical to witness. I’m rooting for you.”

He chuckled as he tightened his hand around the keys. “What about Sarah?”

“She selfishly—desperately—made choices that wronged you and Jane.” He sighed, adding, “I love her, but I love you more.”

David’s entire body tensed before relaxing entirely.

Kingston went on, “You are my boy, and Jane is the girl I made my daughter—if only by heart and marriage. It’s my job to protect you. That includes your hearts. So, you will not worry about my choices with Sarah. She has taken them from both of you for far too long.”

He could only nod. Then he said something that probably could’ve waited. “I don’t think Jane wants to choose.” Swallowing, he added, “I’m not sure I want to ask her to anymore.”

His father closed his eyes, his lips moving as if he were whispering a prayer. Then he nodded, opening his eyes. “I won’t take her choices from her. I don’t see how you can be

happy and make that work, but I also never imagined she'd turn that bastard into such a ridiculous fool."

"Ryder?" David chuckled as he got up to pour two glasses of water, relieved his father wasn't calling him weak or something worse.

"Have you heard the nonsense he spouts whenever he's around her?"

"I have." David slid a drink to his dad. "I'm sure my letters to her are just as bad."

"You write her letters?" Kingston lowered his glass as he studied him.

"I have written to her every day... Since you told me you would marry Sarah. I told her how I felt about her, about how I wouldn't take your happiness away." His dad's expression fell. "I told her everything, Dad. Everything. I hid them where I hoped she'd look, but she never did." He shrugged, a little uncomfortable to admit something so personal.

"Has she read them now?" his dad asked in a slightly broken tone.

"Yeah." He felt his face redden. "I kinda broke her heart with a lot of things, but I think she loved them more."

"You really love her, don't you?"

"More than she'll ever know." He felt complete relief when his dad smiled. But he still worried about his dad and Sarah. His dad loved Sarah too, and he didn't want anyone choosing him over their happiness. "Are you planning on moving home?"

Smile slipping, Kingston sighed. "I told you not to worry."

"I know, but I would like to know. I'd like you to come home ... with Jane."

Exhaling loudly, his dad shook his head. "Jane is my priority right now. I cannot put her and Sarah under the same roof. And I don't think Jane minds this new school now that she is making friends. I told Sarah we would re-evaluate our marriage after Jane's birthday. When that time comes, we can

talk about things with you as well. If these boys get tired of you ...”

“Tired of David’s sexy ass? Highly unlikely.” Archer strolled into the room wearing only a pair of sweatpants. “Hey, David’s dad.”

“Hello.” Kingston watched as Archer sat, draping himself across the chair at the head of the table. “Please tell me you’re not in Jane’s harem.”

“Am I in Jane’s team?” Archer grinned wickedly at David. “Not yet.”

David threw a piece of bread at him. “Not ever.”

“Never say never,” Archer said, laughing loudly when Kingston threw his zucchini at him.

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TWENTY-FOUR

“Okay,” Damon said, staring at the sheet of paper she’d written out. Her *schedule*. “You’re getting it from Ryder Monday, Tuesday, and Thursday—watching him fight Thursday, and you’re seeing Tercero for”—he made air quotes—“dance lessons’ on Wednesday, which you also spend forty-five minutes with Luc when he takes you to dinner and home.” He laughed lowly. “I never thought I’d see the king on such a tight schedule.”

Sin leaned over, squishing her between him and Damon. “Is Friday blank for us?”

Her heart sank. She had never wanted to root for a team besides Black Hills, but she had been fully accepted by this group of guys and wanted to see them win as well. Cheering for them during the pep rally today had lifted her spirits because she had felt so bad for not talking to David last night. She knew he was feeling neglected, and her little pity parties had hit him most. So, it gutted her to not be there for him for this away game. She would’ve loved to wear his jersey and still have Ryder’s jacket on, but everything was stretched so thin with David.

“She’s not going to our game,” Than said as he picked at his food. “Luc is taking her to watch David play.”

Sin gave her an exaggerated pout. “David is more important than us?”

Hadrian laughed before pouting his lips too. “But, Jane, we were going to dance for you.”

Her face burned; everyone picked at David for leading the team with a dance. “Sorry, boys. I’m a sucker for blue-eyed boys with nice asses and killer smiles.”

“Damn,” Hadrian said, dramatically shaking his head. “I’ve heard the tales of David’s ass, too. Even Ryder was worried.”

“Shut up.” She covered her face when they kept teasing her.

“We’re picking you up at four tomorrow,” Damon declared, snatching her pencil and filling in her schedule. “Two hours minimum. Bring your boys if you want, but we’re training you—Ryder already agreed to stay out of it.”

Than nodded. “The Godsons are horrible teachers.”

“Not Luc,” Gabe said. “But he’ll insist she learn without his instruction.”

She’d asked them to teach her how to defend herself because she knew Ryder worried a lot. Plus, she was tired of leaning on a guy to protect her. It wasn’t entirely her fault—David kept everyone away and Ryder shielded her in his own ways, but she had to prepare for not always having a guy with her.

“Ask your friend to come,” Damon told her quietly. “This Saturday, I mean.”

Her chest instantly tightened, and she swallowed hard. Wendy had tried calling her when she was out with Ryder last night, and then she didn’t answer or respond to texts when Jane had tried to reach her.

“Is she hot?” Hadrian asked.

Jane smiled. “She’s very pretty, but I don’t think she’ll come.”

“Justine will be there,” Damon commented, avoiding Than’s stare. “She’s not convinced you’re really with Ryder when I told her we’d be training you. So, I invited her.”

The anxiety Jane felt whenever she was expected to be around a girl who wasn’t Wendy had her whole body wound

tight. Not to mention Justine was a teacher; a gorgeous woman. Jane was a goofball.

“You’ll get along,” Than said before standing and carrying his tray to the trash.

“He knows about you?” she asked Damon.

Sin snorted. “My Gran-gran knows about them.”

A strained smile twisted on Damon’s face. “Apparently, the joke was on me.”

Jane pinched his cheek. “Aw, they saw through you.”

“If we hadn’t,” Hadrian said, “we would’ve confronted him about flirting with you.”

Sin grinned at her. “Or told Ryder.”

“I’m not afraid of him,” Damon muttered as the others laughed.

“I thought he was going to rip your dick off for dancing with her,” Sin roared with laughter.

“I thought Jane was going to kill Justine,” Than said, walking back. He winked at Jane as the others laughed. “I truly had to consider sister or queen.”

Jane cackled with them. “Please always choose your sister. No question. But I did want to claw her eyes out. She’s so pretty.”

Damon joined in now. “I actually had to hold Jane back.”

Her face heated. “I’ve just never seen Ryder hold another girl’s hand. I always figured he was with older girls since he wasn’t with any at school, and she’s so pretty—totally the type I’d imagine he’d go for.”

“Aww,” Sin cooed, wrapping an arm around her. “Ugly, were you jealous?”

She elbowed him as Than scolded him for calling her ugly.

“It’s what I call her until she gives us the pretty smile and acts confident,” Sin told him, squeezing her to his side more. “I don’t think I’ve ever seen Ryder with another girl. Don’t

even think that. Even if a smokin' hot babe like Justine or someone else made it clear they liked him, he never looked."

She smiled sadly but finally laughed when he raised an eyebrow at her.

"Ah, there's Beautiful." He released her as the others continued to tease her blushing face. Luckily, her phone rang.

"Oh, which one is it?" Sin, nosy as ever, peeked over and accepted the Facetime call from David. "Ah, calling to find out if I've stolen your princess?"

David remained calm, a smirk lifting on his lips. "My princess bites, and she's loyal. Even the bad wolves lure her away for a bit, she knows where home is. She'll rip a hole in you then come skipping back to me with a smile on her pretty face."

Sin pouted, handing her the phone. "If that was Ryder, he'd at least give me a death threat so I feel like I have a chance. David's confidence wounds me."

She chuckled, standing so she could talk in private. "Hi."

A gorgeous smile and mesmerizing blue eyes lit up his face. "Hi, baby."

She was gonna be a pile of goo every time he called her that. "What's up? Are you guys already leaving?"

"Not yet. I just wanted to check on you." He smiled again. "Ryder told me you got to see him fight. I didn't know."

"Yeah." She wasn't sure how he'd react. There was drinking, drugs, and sex all present at the fight club, and she had engaged in one of them with Ryder.

David nodded. "He told me how things are there—that you were nervous. He took care of you, though?"

"Yeah." She really smiled now. "He threatened everyone, and I had my buddies from school while he fought."

He grunted. "I know Sin. The others not so much, but Sin is a good guy when he's not trying to get into a girl's pants."

“Well, he’s not trying, but he does offer me apples quite a bit.”

David laughed, and she realized how much she’d missed the sound.

“You’re okay with me coming with Luc to the game, right?” She watched a slight tightness to his expression. It was hard to tell what he really thought, but he nodded.

“He’ll get you there safe. I know my dad can’t make it, so I’d rather you have a solid ride.” He swallowed. “Unless you wanted to go out with him somewhere? I know you don’t spend much time with him.”

She shook her head repeatedly. “I’m watching you play, and I’m screaming my lungs out.”

“All right.” He looked behind himself. “I’m sure Tercero will be available if you need him. Call him if Luc gives you any trouble.”

“Are you getting along with everyone?” She felt so stupid for asking. Honestly, what did she think was going on?

“Better than I expected to,” he said, focusing on her face again. “I do want to see about getting some alone time with you like the others. Dad said I could ask if you were interested in seeing me.”

“I’d love to have alone time with you,” she whispered as she completely embraced Ryder’s advice to her last night—to let David wrap her up in his love.

Her gorgeous boy gave her a sexy grin. “Just a little bit ... then Ryder can join us.”

That had not been what she was expecting him to say.

His smile stretched wider. “You get both of us, baby. We’re just greedy, and we like to steal moments just for ourselves.”

Jane watched her face turn an embarrassing shade of pink. “Oh.”

“Oh,” he echoed with a light laugh. “Have fun with Luc. Be ready for me afterward.”

Jane wasn't going to lie to herself—Luc made her nervous as hell. He was always proper with her, but it was the tiny touches and looks that he gave her that had her burning beneath his cool skin.

His hand tightened around her thigh as he drove with his left hand. “Why do I have the feeling you wish Tercero would've offered to bring you tonight?”

Her head snapped to the side, her lips parting as he cast her an emotionless glance. “I don't know what you're talking about.”

Those gray eyes made contact with hers. “You prefer Tercero over me.”

“Are you pouting?” She covered her mouth, surprised she'd said that.

His smirk came and went. “Perhaps I am.”

She sighed, placing her hand over his. “I would've gone with Tercero if he offered, but I think he stayed quiet because he gets more time with me than you do. He knows you make me nervous.”

“My little brother wants you comfortable with me?” He chuckled, and the dark sound sent a shiver through her body. “Very well. I will make the most of our time and make a request.”

“Request?”

Though his expression remained empty, the faint squeeze of her hand warmed her heart. “I want you to visit my office.”

She blinked up at him, her mind immediately going *Fifty Shades of Grey* because Luc totally destroyed Christian Grey in every department. “Why?” she managed to choke out as the image of Luc opening a secret ‘toy room’ in his office popped in her head. Did he plan on spanking her or doing some of the twisted stuff?

He sent her an amused look. “Don’t worry, it’s not a trick to tie you to my desk so that I may take you whenever I like or tell you to wrap your pretty mouth around my cock while I take conference calls.”

“Luc,” she said as the pulse in her neck fluttered.

“You were thinking it,” was his calm reply, which left any retort she had silent. He chuckled again. “Kingston mentioned you were not applying to any universities—that you had no goals for your future. I wanted to allow you to explore the departments within my company to hopefully inspire you in a career path.”

“Millionaire playboy?” She tried desperately not to think about the image of her on her knees between his legs with his hand tangled in her hair as he gagged her. *Jesus Christ!* She needed to get a grip on her hormones.

“You are not a boy, Jane. Think of this as deciding your place as the queen who will help me rule my kingdom.”

Her breath hitched. It was true she had zero goals for herself after graduation. She was an okay student, but she wasn’t getting herself in debt by going to college, especially when she had no idea what she wanted to do with her life. “You want me to work with you?”

“I would not offer it if I didn’t want you by my side, Jane.” He squeezed her thigh before pulling his hand free. They finally arrived at the stadium, and he pulled a few bills from his console to pay for parking.

“Are you saying I can be your secretary?”

He rolled his window down as he shook his head. “You would be a terrible secretary. For one with such a beautiful mind, you are incredibly unorganized.”

“I don’t know if I’m offended or not.”

“Perhaps you are not as smart as I give you credit for.” He cast her a wicked smile as she glared at him, and he snatched her chin to stare into her eyes. “Ah, there is my fiery queen. I have missed her.”

The fire in her didn't want to burn him, but she believed he was willing to burn with her if she asked him to. "Why do you always push me?"

He leaned down, brushing a faint kiss on the corner of her mouth. "Because I wish to see you at your full potential."

Her breath released with a soft moan as he continued brushing his lips across the corner of hers. She didn't know how he did this to her—made her desire him even though she was terrified. But her body responded before her brain each time, and her heart clung to every decent thing he did as a sign of affection.

"My, you are a needy one," he murmured, giving her the kiss she had been waiting for. It was a simple kiss, just a firm pressing of his lips to hers, but it made her toes curl, her back arch, and when he inhaled deeply, she saw stars. "Do you really desire to watch the game?"

She blinked up at him, the faint chill of his touch fading as he leaned away.

When she didn't answer, he sighed and continued toward the gate attendant, holding out his money. "You're not ready for me. I'm not sure you ever want to be."

"What?" A knot of dread formed in her gut.

Luc rolled his window up, driving forward without looking at her. "I withdraw my pursuit of you, Jane."

All she could do was stare at him as the knot twisted so tightly that she could barely draw in a breath. "You're breaking up with me?" she finally managed.

He didn't pull his eyes from the road. "I'm letting you go. I am here should you need anything, but yes, *we* are done."

She pressed her hand over her heart as tears blurred her sight. A constant shift of numbness and agonizing pain bloomed in her chest. Luc had always been that wildcard, but she realized now how much she adored that he was there, silently watching over her.

Her gaze shifted out the window as he searched for a parking spot. This wasn't supposed to happen.

“My offer will still stand for you to explore my business. It's large enough you don't necessarily have to interact with me. I think you would enjoy leading, though. Do not let this separation between us hold you back.”

There were no words. Her mind screamed to tell him she was sorry, that she didn't want to end things, but her heart and soul, they stayed silent. Sad. It fully crippled any attempt to ask him to stay.

“Tercero is meeting us at the gate. I'll leave you with him.” He parked, still refusing to look at her as he opened his door.

Sharp breaths filled the silence as he got out and shut the door then rounded the car. Her eyes stung, her throat felt like it was closing, and her heart ... oh, her heart. If he had Tercero waiting, he'd already planned to break up with her.

Luc opened her door and held out a hand for her. Finally, silver-gray eyes captured hers. “Do not cry for this. I am making your situation easier to bear.”

“I don't need it easier.” She smacked his hand and stood up as an inferno raged within her. She glared up at him as he merely lowered his eyes to take her in. No smirk touched his lips, no sign of any emotion at all. “I don't know how to do any of this, Luc.”

“You don't know what you want to do, Jane.” He gripped her chin, forcing her to not look away from him as he leaned closer. He lowered his face quickly, giving her a brutal kiss that surely bruised her lips. “I am making it simpler because you need me to. Besides, you have the others to occupy your filled schedule.”

Her nose felt clogged, and she yanked her chin free. “I guess because they care more than you do.”

A mixture of growl and annoyed grunt sounded from him. “As I said before, you are not as smart as I had thought.”

Tercero studied the empty expression on Jane's face as she stared down at the football field. The game was still in the first quarter, and David was killing it, but she wasn't there for it. She, as bright as she was naturally, was now dull, flickering the bleariest sparks of light.

He and the others had already known Luc was ending things with her; that's why they agreed Luc should drive her to the game. It was Ryder's orders to their big brother to feel things out before ending what she could have with Luc.

But Tercero had known from early on that Luc would walk away. His brother didn't like sharing, nor did he. In fact, none of them wanted to share her. But where Luc would encourage her to rule beside him alone, Tercero was content letting her dance between them, David was fine fighting everything against him to hold her for all of them, and Ryder was doing all he could to see that she glowed her brightest by having the world at her feet. But no one could sway Luc.

"Your heart cries loudly, *tesoro mio*," he told her as he wrapped an arm around her shoulders and pulled her against his side.

She inhaled deeply as crystal tears clung dearly to her dark eyelashes. "I just don't know what I did wrong."

He sighed, kissing her head. "You did nothing wrong. He knew from the start he would not keep you. He just couldn't resist trying."

"He made me a ballet studio," she croaked.

The studio was a brilliant idea of Luc's, one he was grateful she'd been gifted. "Then you should know how much he cares for you. Even the wealthiest of men do not go out of their way to please someone."

Her body folded more inward. "Then why leave me?"

Honestly, Tercero didn't understand Luc's intentions. He knew his brother wouldn't choose another queen; Jane was it

for him. And he'd asked that Jane not be told this. If she knew Luc had no intention of moving on, she'd fight to be with him.

They had to let Luc do his own thing. If his brother wanted to be alone, to watch Jane fall more in love with Ryder and back in love with David, all while he was there for her when they could not be, so be it.

She tried to pull away from him when he remained quiet, but he held her tight.

“Easy, *cara*, I simply do not know his intentions. All I know is he cherishes you.” He tilted her chin up, watching her lips quiver as she tried to contain the pain she felt. “Do you want me to help it?”

Confusion flickered across her face, and she didn't answer.

Just then, her phone pinged. She looked away, not hiding the text from Ryder: *Let Tercero take care of you, baby girl.*

She lifted her head, rubbing under her eyes as she gazed down at the field. Ryder was there, staring up at them, with David at his side.

David took the phone from Ryder, typing another text to her as the coach yelled for him. The boy flipped off his coach and finished his text before handing the device to Ryder again and rushing back into the game.

She dropped her eyes as the second text came. *Go with Tercero, baby. We'll come for you when we're done.*

He smiled as warmth and tingles from the love she felt from those two radiated out of her. It filled his whole being, as it always did for him when his brother and David put her needs above their own. They knew he could love her and indulge her in not just his affection, but he could remind her of theirs. It wasn't something he'd ever enjoyed around others, but Jane—she loved fiercely, and he was addicted to it as much as he relished in the intense love his rivals gave her. “Come, Jane.” Her face flushed, and he couldn't help but smile and kiss her head. “Naughty girl.”

David should've felt on top of the world after that win, but instead a knot formed in his stomach, and it twisted tighter as he followed his teammates through the pitch-dark woods in search of their chosen post-game party. And why wasn't he happy? Because Jane had lost one of her boyfriends.

Again, he should be thrilled, but he only felt sad because it was her first 'breakup'.

"Fuck all that is fucking holy," Ryder yelled, grabbing David by the shoulder to balance himself.

"Only my brother can form a sentence with that many fucks." Archer laughed as he brought over his phone to light up whatever had Ryder leaning on him and inspecting his shoe. "I saw it, but I didn't think you'd step in it."

Ryder shoved Archer. "Fucking twat. Get me a damn stick."

David sighed, glancing at his phone as the others laughed at Ryder's shit-covered shoe. Jane hadn't responded to any of his texts, nor had Tercero.

"They'll be there," Ryder assured him, grunting as he made some lowerclassman clean the mess. "If he isn't, I'll kill him."

"Why did Luc do it now?" David didn't understand the elder Godson at all. It wasn't that he and Jane were even that serious, but he'd learned about the things Luc was doing for her—you didn't do that kind of stuff unless you loved a girl.

"Would you have preferred he drop her after a nice hard fuck?" Ryder snapped. Talking to him was like poking a damn bear right now. It was something David noticed, that he should've always noticed. If Jane was hurting, Ryder became a monster.

David didn't reply and merely squinted his eyes to see into the night. The moon created a slight glow ahead, or else there was some artificial light near the lake they should be getting

close to. They'd only been to these woods one other time, and that was during the day.

“Do you think Tercero fucked her all better?” Archer asked, earning a death glare from Ryder as even David struggled to keep himself in check. Unalarmed, Archer grinned. “My bro is due, is all I’m saying. Didn’t you order him to ‘take care’ of her?”

“You have one second to get out of my reach, you piece of shit,” Ryder growled, reaching for his brother but not snagging him with the way he had his foot lifted.

Archer snickered, rushing away. “Maybe he made a porno. Let me watch.”

“Give me something,” Ryder said, tracking his brother with a predator-like posture. He held out his hand to the sophomore who offered him a rock.

David smacked it away and gave Ryder a pinecone, one that was launched with missile precision and speed. “He’ll kill him with a rock,” he told the kid as he watched Archer still go down with an ‘ow’.

“Damn right I will,” Ryder said, inspecting his shoe. “Ruined. Get the fuck out of my way.”

Normally, David would start an argument with Ryder for being an asshole, but he didn’t think it was really anything his old rival could control. So, he just motioned for the younger player to move toward the back of the group they were walking with as Ryder pushed his way through the crowd.

It was another ten minutes of walking when they made it through the clearing, and everyone stopped dead in their tracks.

A small group of students, a few guys and girls who usually prepped the parties were scattered about, lying face down or moaning.

Ryder moved forward as their group broke off to check on everyone, and David’s heart clenched when he saw who Ryder was walking toward.

“Where the fuck is she?” Ryder roared, flipping Tercero onto his back. Just as Ryder reared back to punch him, David restrained him, pushing him to Savaş.

David knelt beside Tercero, opening his eyes. His pupils were blown, and he was now retching. “He looks drugged.”

Archer rolled his brother to the side, but he held up a cup. “The fucking punch. Dammit, and he hasn’t been eating because he’s been worried.”

Ryder broke free of his brother, his eyes scanning the others being helped. “She’s not here.”

David stood, searching too. His heart was hammering so hard in his chest, he felt it was going to stop. “Maybe she went for help.”

“No.” Ryder glanced up at the moon before taking in his brother who was vomiting a mixture of punch and bile. “Jane wouldn’t leave him.”

David pulled out his phone to call for help, but he cursed when he realized he had no service. The others began checking too, and the situation turned grimmer. “She had to have gone for help,” he said. “She would’ve tried to call.”

Ryder held a hand over his heart, scanning the tree line and shaking his head. Then he stomped over to someone who was helping the most aware person up. “What the fuck happened? Who did this?”

The freshman player only groaned, and Ryder stood, growling. “Who the fuck let it slip we’d be here tonight?”

Frowning, David glanced around. He was sure Jane was just trying to head back to wherever she and Tercero had parked. But Ryder and the other Godsons wore masks of barely controlled rage.

“Who?” Ryder roared.

David noticed Diane lower her gaze, but it was the guilt he saw beforehand that had him marching toward her. “Speak up.”

She paled when she looked at him with tears in her eyes. “I didn’t do anything.”

Now, Ryder was there, wrapping his hand around Diane’s neck. “You have three seconds before I choke your ass.”

David knew Ryder wasn’t putting any pressure on Diane’s throat, but he didn’t want her hurt. “Let her go.”

Ryder didn’t budge, he just kept his gaze narrowed on Diane.

“Enough.” David prepared to punch him, but Diane started sobbing and blurted out words that made his blood turn cold.

“I invited a group of boys from Helldonna.” She cried louder when Ryder shook her once, demanding names. “I only know the one—Adam. He’s David’s cousin.”

“Adam wouldn’t hurt her,” David said fiercely, but he felt dread slide down his spine with the way Ryder’s expression went dead, and he tossed Diane to the ground like she was nothing. “Are you okay?” David checked her neck as she sobbed. She was fine, but he needed to know why Ryder had a problem with Adam. So, he turned, watching Ryder scanning the area again. “Adam won’t hurt her.”

“It’s not Adam I’m worried about.” Ryder’s empty voice made the hairs on David’s arms stand. “I’m going to look for her.”

David watched Ryder pick a direction without another word. Savaş jogged after Ryder, but he quickly broke off, heading in a different direction. “Who would he be worried about?”

“Obviously,” Archer said, kneeling by Tercero again, “if the group with Adam was friendly, someone would’ve stayed behind with the others here.”

“But who? Adam knew about Dylan attacking her. He wouldn’t—”

“No, but his friends might,” Archer said, shaking his head as he took in Tercero’s state. “Maybe it’s date rape shit?”

David agreed, his mind finally accepting what Ryder had already felt on instinct. Jane was in trouble, and they were in the middle of nowhere. Ryder didn't give a damn about anyone else, and while David only wanted Jane, he knew he'd have to help the others. Tercero looked bad, and he wasn't going to let his baby lose another boyfriend tonight.

"I'll stay here," Archer said quietly as he held his brother's head in his lap. "Find Jane before it's too late."

His heart pounded in fear and rage. The way Archer spoke without any humor was too troubling, but David had to stay calm. Yes, even if 'too late' meant the unthinkable, he had to stay rational. "All right," he said loudly. "Two of you need to run back to the cars and call for help. Everyone else, divide up into groups. Some of you need to stay with everyone here, make sure no one chokes on their vomit. Everyone else, break up in pairs and search for Jane and anyone else that might have been taken with her."

Lance jogged over, just barely making it to the clearing. "What the fuck?"

"Jane's missing. Ryder thinks someone took her. He and Savaş went that way." He pointed off in two directions.

"The hottie?" It was Jason Winters asking now.

David stood, nodding as he took in some of the players already running back to the vehicles while others split up to search.

"Well, let's go find her." Jason glanced up at the moon as it struggled to peek through the clouds. "We need to hurry."

David was already jogging away, knowing they'd either follow or go off on their own. "Please be okay," he whispered, praying she had some sort of angel watching out for her.

Jane let out muffled screams as she watched helplessly from where she lay tied on the ground as Adam tried to fight off his friend Stephen and the other two guys. It had been a surprise

when Adam turned up at the clearing, and he'd been happy to see her. He even tried to cheer her up when he heard she'd had a fallout with Luc, but then Tercero started slurring, mumbling for her to run before collapsing.

She'd rushed to help him, noticing others in the small group had also stumbled and collapsed, and it was then she was attacked by Stephen and the two guys with him. Adam went mad with rage, fighting them until someone hit him with a bottle on the head.

Jane had thought he was dead, but they insisted on bringing him for 'the plan', and she'd been carried through the woods, her hands, legs, and mouth duct-taped. Now, Adam was awake, fighting to protect her as she lay stripped down to her panties. They'd laughed at their plan: rape her and give both her and Adam the drugs they'd spiked the punch with to make it seem like Adam had done it.

They just hadn't tied up Adam because they assumed he was out for good, and now she feared they were going to kill him.

She tried to scream, "No!" as she watched Adam get tackled and subdued.

"Jane," he hollered, his face red as she felt someone approach.

"So we meet again, beautiful." Dylan Berith leered down at her, chuckling as Adam was gagged and bound. "Don't rough him up too much," he told Stephen who was about to punch Adam again. "It needs to look like she was the one who fought him."

Adam tried to lunge forward, but he could only howl with his gag as Dylan began groping her. Tears slid into her hair as she kept her eyes on Adam. She hoped he knew it wasn't his fault. He was there with her, and that's what mattered.

"No fighting?" Dylan roughly gripped her jaw, forcing her to look up at him. "Ah, there's that fire they love so much. What do you say I put it out?"

Jane's chest heaved as she tried to give him the most hateful glare possible. This bastard was going to pay; she knew Ryder and David, hell, even Luc, they'd unleash all of hell on these fuckers. She just prayed Tercero was all right. He'd confessed he'd not been taking care of himself, something he did when he was feeling high levels of stress. That's why he drank the punch. She'd told him to drink up and not to argue with her. Then he went down fast.

"We have to hurry," Dylan said, rolling her onto her belly. "The team will be getting to the clearing. Get the pills ready and force it down their throats. Do him first so you can each take a turn."

Stephen nodded, pulling out a baggie with pills. He poured an excessive amount into a bottle and they were cutting a small hole on Adam's taped mouth to fit a straw in.

Adam thrashed, trying to crawl to her, his muffled shouts breaking her heart. He'd fought so hard, and she'd frozen up at the first moment someone covered her mouth and began to drag her away.

"Ass up, you little whore." Dylan tugged her hair and shoved her panties down. "I know you're fucking all of them. Now take my dick. It's the least you can do for ruining my goddamn future." He pressed his hard length to her, muttering she was dry. "No, I need lube so they don't have my DNA."

Stephen came and poured it all over her ass as Adam roared, his eyes red with tears. She swore he was telling her to look at him, to keep her eyes on him.

She rapidly blinked, trying to smile to reassure him she'd be okay, that she was thankful for what he'd done.

"Cut her legs free," Dylan told Stephen. "She's squeezing too fucking tight."

Her lungs burned as she began breathing faster. This was her chance. Adam nodded to her, giving her the strength to keep fighting. She had to fight for him too. But it was going to be hard to fight against two guys while her hands were still taped together.

Despite having no odds of saving herself, she was done freezing up. She bucked up the moment the tape was cut. Dylan fell on top of her, and he laughed, grabbing her hair before slamming her face onto the ground.

But Jane didn't stop fighting. She didn't stop screaming as she felt some of the tape loosen around her mouth. She knew Ryder would come for her; David would come. She had to make noise.

Stephen grabbed her leg, squeezing painfully as he wrenched her thighs apart. Adam's muffled shout of her name gave her courage, and she cried, bucking and kicking as hard as she could. She caught Stephen's face, and he let her go just as a female battle cry sounded and Dylan was knocked down onto her.

Her breath whooshed out as she realized someone had jumped onto Dylan's back and there was a scuffle between him and the others. *Help.*

Jane kicked up, rolling when Dylan tried to pry off the person on his back, and she rolled, kicking him in the nuts. He fell on her with a grunt as Jane peered up and saw Diane wrapping her arms around his neck, screaming and biting at him like a wild animal.

If she could laugh that Diane of all people was saving her, she would, but Jane simply kneed Dylan again and again as Diane tried to choke him.

Jane realized a few more cheerleaders, girls who'd laughed at her over the years, all helping to free Adam as Jason Winters and Lance Grimm beat the shit out of Stephen and his friends.

“Let him go.”

Jane wept at the deadly voice of her bad boy. He was talking to Diane, but he was there. He'd come for her.

Savaş kneeled beside her, pulling her out from under Dylan as Ryder roughly lifted then slammed Dylan onto the ground.

“Easy, Tex,” Savaş murmured, lifting her into his arms as Ryder, the deadly man she sometimes witnessed him become, stared down at Dylan.

“Here,” Diane said, offering Jane the jacket she’d been wearing. “She might be in shock.”

Savaş covered her as Diane tried to remove the tape from her mouth, but all she could do was watch her bad boy turn into something too dangerous to be around.

David dropped down beside her, and Jane realized he’d been with Jason and Lance fighting the others. “Baby?” Heated hands cupped her face as he helped Diane. “Jane, did they give you anything?”

She shook her head, tears spilling as Ryder listened to Dylan mutter something, then he landed blow after merciless blow to his face. Dylan fought back, but Ryder wasn’t in trouble. He slammed Dylan against a tree, punching him in the side, then the other. It was more brutal than when she’d seen him fight the night before.

“Don’t look.” David tried to turn her away, but she couldn’t take her eyes off Ryder.

Finally, her mouth was free, and she cried out, “Ryder!”

He hesitated, fist raised as he held Dylan by the throat. His back stayed to her, his body trembling with fury as she got to her feet.

“Don’t kill him, babe.” She hadn’t called him that before, but she knew it caused the twitch in his muscles. “I swear I’ll be so mad at you if you end up in prison, Ryder Godson.”

David kissed her forehead before helping her walk to Ryder. “Take care of her. I’ll tie him up. Someone had to have called for help by now.”

Jane whimpered, limping her way to Ryder. The second she touched him, he turned and lifted her into his arms.

She sobbed at the sight of his pain and tried to stay still as he stared into her eyes.

“You’re okay,” he whispered, pulling her in for a kiss. Her lip was cracked, but he licked it, sucking and making it hurt more. “It’s over.”

Nodding, she tried to hug him. She was still worried about him killing someone. Maybe it would be self-defense, but she wasn’t taking any chances. “Take me away from here.”

He held her cheek, tingles exploding from his touch. He was shaking against her as he said, “He took you.”

“And you found me,” she told him quietly, ignoring the chaos around them. But she felt David’s gaze burning her.

Ryder’s arms flexed around her. “I found you ... You’re mine to keep.”

She smoothed his sweaty hair back. He sounded almost childlike, and it worried her. It was like he was struggling to process what to do: Kill ... Keep.

“Papi,” he suddenly said, blinking as he shook his head. “Where the fuck is he?”

“Behind you,” she said, breathing faster when Ryder turned. She feared he was going to hand her to David so he could kill those assholes.

His expression darkened when he saw David had taped Dylan’s hands together. When he kept staring, Jane kissed his jaw, then his cheek. It snapped him out of wherever his mind had gone, and he hugged her, swaying with her like she was a baby.

“I’m taking her to Tercero,” Ryder told David.

A scorching hot hand ran down her back as he helped Ryder pull them up. “Let me see if I can find her clothes. I’ll catch up. The others can stay here.” He kissed the back of her head. “You did so good, baby.”

“Yeah, she did.” Ryder kissed her lips, a smile on his now. “You and Diane barely left anything for me to destroy.”

She grinned as David took a chance to kiss her cheek. His soft whispers of love and thankfulness that his prayers were answered washed over her.

“Jane.” It was Adam. He hobbled to her, darting his eyes between David and Ryder before settling on her. “I’m so sorry, honey. I-I—”

David cut him off. “Thanks for fighting for her.”

Ryder nodded at Adam as he hugged her again. “We’re going.” Then he asked Savaş, “You got this?”

“Yeah. Take care of your girl.” The big guy rubbed her head then stalked off, hauling Dylan to the pile of guys that Lance and Jason had bound.

David pressed another kiss to her head, and he too, walked off, using his phone to light the way so he could find her clothes. Diane went up to him, and David seemed to mutter he was looking for stuff.

“Don’t worry, babe.” Ryder tugged the jacket she was wearing down. “Papi is still yours. He just knows I need you.”

Jane closed her eyes, letting his presence consume her. “Tercero?”

“Archer is with him.” He nuzzled her. “He’s going to be so upset that he let this happen.”

“I was the one who told him to drink. It’s my fault.”

“No.” He kissed her forehead. “My brother has a bad habit of depriving himself of his needs, even eating and drinking. Some sort of punishment thing, I think.”

She had no idea Tercero would do that to himself. “Why?”

“Don’t know.” He stopped walking and exhaled loudly. “Did he—?”

“No,” she croaked, kissing him.

He returned the kiss, and it took her far away from the horror that she’d just escaped. “I can’t lose you.” He kissed her again and again. “I won’t lose you ever again.”

“I know.” She laughed sadly when he put her on a log and stripped out of his jacket and shirt. “Maybe we can save sex in the woods for another night.”

He winked at her as he opened the jacket she was wearing and proceeded to put his shirt on her. “Sex-in-the-woods, huh?” She sat still as he inspected the scratches on her legs and bare feet. “Don’t know how I feel about that. I stepped in a massive pile of shit earlier. Unless we get Papi to poop scoop the area before we pull you between us.”

Even after her ordeal, she felt her skin heat.

Tingles surged to his spot, and he leaned down, kissing it then her lips.

“I love you,” she told him.

He cupped her cheeks, looking like an angel sent from heaven, just for her. “And I love you, Sweet Jane.” One more kiss then he was lifting her up and carrying her. “You’re not leaving my side for a long time.”

“I figured.” Jane rested her head on his shoulder. “But I’m not leaving Tercero’s side.”

He smacked her butt. “Then you’ll be sandwiched between us. Papi can sleep at your feet.”

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TWENTY-FIVE

Blinking and flinching at the bright light, Tercero groaned, shielding his eyes as he turned his head to the side. Only, he froze as soon as he made out a face only a foot or so away. It was a face he knew too well.

Emerald eyes narrowed at him, but no words were spoken.

“I’m dead, aren’t I?” he asked, noting how parched he was and how heavy his tongue felt.

“Very dead,” his brother confirmed. “Jane’s devastated.”

Tercero closed his eyes as his chest tightened. “Did you find her ... in time?”

A deadly blast of emotions washed over him as Ryder replied, “I found her. She’s waiting for your ass to wake up. I told her I wouldn’t let you after the shit you pulled. Any last words; maybe I’ll pass them along.”

“Ryder!” It was Jane.

Tercero opened his eyes, smiling though his heart crushed at the disheveled sight of the girl he adored as she crawled gingerly onto the hospital bed. The very bed his brother had squeezed onto with him.

He held out his arm, watching Jane’s lips tremble at the sight of the I.V. line attached to his arm, but she curled up between him and Ryder. She wore a dirty, oversized t-shirt and a pair of hospital bottoms. She had a few band aids along her arms and a slightly swollen cheek, but she was his most cherished treasure.

Ryder smacked her butt. “He deserves a little death-scare.”

She shook her head against Tercero’s chest, hugging him tightly. “Be nice.”

Ryder grinned at him. “Babe, I am being nice by not prying you off this punk.”

Jane lifted her head, ignoring Ryder as she leaned down to kiss Tercero.

Her lips were soft against his chapped pair, and he forgot they were not alone as he kissed her back. She elicited the most intoxicating taste and sensations. She was the sweetest glow of warmth as it tingled and basked in even stronger heat. Then, just when she made him feel he would collapse under the incredible force she created, a shiver of ice would slide over the magic within her, steadying her so the forces around her could hold her tighter.

“This is actually kinda hot,” Ryder murmured as a grunt sounded from farther away. “Like watching one of our makeout sessions in 3-d. Well, if 3-d was as sexy as me.”

Jane smiled against Tercero’s lips, pressing a softer kiss before leaning away.

“Aw, you’re stopping already—I was about to join in,” Ryder said, tugging her back enough to kiss her head. He smirked at him. “You’re lucky we look alike. Same with Papi.”

“I do not look like you,” David said, striding to the edge of Tercero’s bed. He was wrong; David could be one of their brothers. “How are you feeling?”

“Like I have a hangover, perhaps.” Tercero didn’t drink often enough to feel hungover as his brothers sometimes did, but that was the best way to describe it without worrying Jane.

Jane smoothed his hair back. “You look so much better. We were worried.”

“I wasn’t,” Ryder said, hugging Jane as he dropped his head down. “These beds suck.”

“I’m certain you were not ordered to bed with me.” Tercero smiled as Jane reached over him, grabbing a cup of water and holding it to his lips.

“Damn, do I have to nearly die to get pampered, babe?” Ryder chuckled, squeezing her ass before getting off the bed.

Jane fussed over Tercero, not paying attention to Ryder or David as they talked quietly to one another. Tercero needed to know what had happened, what she had suffered because he had failed to protect her, but at the shake of David’s head, he accepted now wasn’t the time. What he knew was that he’d never be trusted to keep her safe again.

He snatched her hand, kissing her scratched knuckles. His heart pounded, his fears rising for what she had been through. But she smiled down at him. No matter the darkness he saw clinging to her, she was still glowing. Faintly. But, yes, glowing for them.

“Babe,” Ryder called to her.

That light shimmered when she glanced at his brother. *Beautiful*. “Yeah?”

Ryder smiled at her. “You promised you’d get some fresh air after he woke up.”

She instantly tightened her hold on Tercero. “He literally just woke up. I can go out later. I don’t even have clothes.”

“Baby,” David said sternly. “You promised you wouldn’t argue. My dad should be here any minute with a change of clothes for you, and the doctors will want to talk to Tercero—that means Luc is going to be here.”

That had her tensing up, and Tercero knew she wasn’t ready to see Luc. There was no doubt in Tercero’s mind that his big brother would be volatile, as this was the second time he had left her and she’d wound up attacked.

“Go,” he told her. “I would like some time to clean myself up. And I feel a urinary catheter ... I really don’t want you here for that.”

“I want to help,” she whispered, but he saw her anxiety about seeing Luc too.

Kissing her hand again, he motioned for his brother to take her. “Then I will be firm, *cara*. Go with your boyfriends. They can call to find out when it’s safe to return.”

“You’re my boyfriend, too,” she said stubbornly.

Ryder grinned, wrapping his arms around her. “But I’m husband, and I’m also going to be firm. You can see him in a couple of hours. I’ll show you my dick if you want to see one so bad.”

Her face flushed, but she let Ryder guide her out.

David lingered, his anger showing at last as his stare narrowed and his jaw tightened. “If you ever let yourself weaken like they said you had done—so much that you were not able to make good decisions that put her at risk—I will be the reason you’re in that bed.”

It was what he expected to hear, and he welcomed the threat. Jane had no idea her stepbrother was just as dangerous as they were. “I swear it, I will not make such poor judgment about her safety or mine.”

“Good.” David nodded, the rage simmering—barely. “Because she does that too. Starve herself, I mean.”

Tercero knew; it was part of the reason why he embraced it. It was a horrible way to connect with her, but he needed to change so she knew it wasn’t right. But that wasn’t the only reason. His first love had stopped eating when her illness took hold of her, and he couldn’t bear the thought of eating when she could not.

Shaking thoughts of Elise from his mind, because Elise was his past and he wanted a future, he focused on David. “How bad did they hurt her?”

“Bad,” David told him. “They had her stripped, bound, and they were about to rape her in front of my cousin then drug them both. But Ryder got there. Well, Diane made it there first—along with Lance and Jason. I helped them, and Ryder got Dylan. Jane didn’t want him to kill him.”

His heart ached, and his mind went somewhere very dark. “It was the group with Adam?”

“And Dylan.” David sighed, glancing down at his swollen fist. “The cops said he shouldn’t get out any time soon, but if there’s a chance he does get out—”

“I’ll take care of it,” said a familiar voice, interrupting from the doorway.

Tercero and David looked over to see Luc entering. He wore his usual business attire, all-white suit, hair combed perfectly, but he had dark circles under his eyes.

Luc walked closer, inspecting him with a slight tilt of his head. “I would see you suffer right along with that scum, but I would have to put myself in the same misery, little brother.”

“I am suffering simply knowing I was at fault,” Tercero said.

“As was I.” Luc glanced at David. “Where is she?”

“Being distracted from you,” David answered, not hiding his disapproval of Luc.

“Good,” was all Luc said to that.

“What exactly are you doing to ‘take care of it?’” David asked Luc.

For a small moment, Tercero saw the beast within his brother, and Luc had one of the worst out of his siblings.

With a flash of silver in his eyes, and a coldness that sent a shiver through both he and David, Luc said, “Sometimes a king must become a monster to save his queen.”

Before David could push Luc to elaborate, or worse, ask to help, a doctor and other hospital staff entered the room. But Tercero was content; Luc would finish this.

Ryder stretched his legs out, shifting Jane on his lap as she signed the statement in front of her. Kingston didn’t like that

Ryder kept her glued to him, but he knew not to argue. Jane wasn't leaving his sight. The only person he trusted was David, and he knew that motherfucker was itching to slide in with her for some alone time. No, Ryder was keeping his baby girl to himself for as long as possible.

“Will she have to do anything else?” Kingston asked the officer.

“If it goes to trial, she will,” the cop answered. “The DA may speak with her as well. She and your nephew are the main victims, as well the main witnesses: him”—he nodded to Ryder—“and the others involved in the rescue.”

Ryder rubbed Jane's leg, hoping his strength would somehow fill her being. She'd gone through exactly what he promised her she wouldn't.

He scanned her, as he'd been doing repeatedly since getting her back. She was roughed up, but she was okay. Kingston had brought her clothes, so she was changed now, but she'd kept his shirt on, feeling some weird need to be surrounded by him even more than she already was. He didn't mind wearing the stupid hospital tunic under his jacket if it meant he was comforting his girl.

Those pretty hazel eyes lifted to meet his own, and he caressed her cheek. “You're not in this alone. I'm with you always.” He ignored the stares from her stepdad and the two cops sitting with them, and leaned forward, kissing the lips that reminded him there was a heaven.

A throat cleared, but he finished kissing her, even licking her cracked lip when he was done.

Ryder glared at the cops. He'd forgotten they needed to speak to him too. “My turn?”

“Unless you'd like to come to the station.” The cop lowered his eyes like the weak-ass Ryder knew he was.

It was then he realized he'd have to let her go for a while. He'd have to tell them he saw his girl gagged, naked, with a fucking monster lining his dick up to her pussy as she struggled against that bastard, Stephen. His girl had fought as

hard as she could, but if Diane hadn't been the swift little bitch that she was, Jane would've ...

He closed his eyes, exhaling loudly as his entire being roared for him to go finish what he should've when he had that piece of shit unable to hold his head up.

A firm hand came down on his shoulder as Kingston Leodegrance spoke to him. "Let me take her, son. She knows you came for her, and she'll be safe until you come again."

Ryder hadn't been called 'son' before. Even his father had left him too early to really hold memories, but he knew his dad resented each of them. He stared at Kingston and for a moment, he felt like a little boy being told by Mr. Mortaime that Jane was his to keep.

When he didn't speak or move, Jane kissed his cheek then whispered in his ear, "I knew my bad boy who is the sweetest, cutest guy in the world, all for me ... I knew that boy would find me. Let me go. I'll find David, and I'll wait for you."

Her words were like silk across his skin, but the rage he only felt whenever associated with Jane's safety and happiness resisted her magic. "Babe, I don't think I can let you go."

Even though he knew he must look pissed, and the shadows of last night were closing in on them, she smiled, lighting up in darkness. Then she pressed his hand over his spot. "Didn't you say, I take you with me?"

"Damn, babe." He kissed her as he massaged his spot. "You're stealing all my lines, making me swoon and shit."

She laughed, kissing him again and again as she crawled off his lap. "I really love you."

He smacked her ass, his heart beating faster as she moved away with Kingston. "And I really really fucking love you, Sweet Jane."

Kingston shook his head, though he had a faint smile as he wrapped an arm around Jane's shoulders. "She won't leave my sight."

Ryder could barely pull his gaze from her as she peered over her shoulder. “Don’t let Papi steal you either.”

David appeared at that moment, opening the door with a scowl as Jane rushed to him. His former rival, now wingman, hugged their girl tightly as he received a pat on the shoulder from his father.

“Let’s get you both something to eat,” Kingston said, not showing any objection when David took Jane’s hand in his, kissing it.

David paused before leaving and locked eyes with Ryder. “Want us to order you something?”

Never had Ryder expected he’d join forces with David, or anyone, and especially for Jane, but David had become a new brother for him. A brother he wanted to love Jane because his baby deserved to feel the warm kiss of the sun as he made her tingle like crazy. “Yeah, bitch,” he said, shaking away the sentimental thoughts. “Whatever you’re getting, but double. You know, ‘cause I’m bigger than you.”

David flipped him off as Jane beamed at them like they were the best damn people on earth. Then they were gone.

“Isn’t that her stepbrother?” one of the cops asked. “He wasn’t staring at her like a brother.”

Ryder turned around, glaring at him. “Because he’s Papi, bitch. Now, let’s get this over with so she doesn’t forget who King Daddy is.”

David noticed his father watching every little touch between him and Jane, but he smiled to himself because there was only acceptance where there had been absolute disapproval and disgust before.

Jane leaned her head against his shoulder, but she spoke to his dad. “Mom hasn’t come looking for me at all.”

Kingston sighed, unloading the tray of food. “She had slept through the calls last night. I told her you needed to be with your boys and asked her to keep her distance. If you’d like to see her, she has a shift later.”

It was a miracle that his father was accepting them, but he had a feeling Sarah wasn’t going to back down. Having it revealed she knew about his and Jane’s feelings for each other to his father had shamed her, and she was at risk of losing everything. He didn’t think his dad would divorce her because of this, but he honestly didn’t know what his dad was thinking.

“Okay.” Jane frowned at her food.

“Eat up, baby.” David took one of her fries, dipping it in ketchup before holding it to her lips. “Open.”

Her face pinked as Kingston chuckled and dug into his meal, but she complied, chewing the fry. He didn’t even think as he leaned down to kiss and lick the ketchup on her lip until his dad cleared his throat.

Instead of shoving Jane away when her eyes widened, he placed a hand behind her head to hold her in place, kissing her sweeter. Only when he felt the stress leave her body did he release her and send his dad a challenging stare.

Blue eyes, a shade colder than his own, narrowed on him. “I’m trying, son, but you have to tone down your affection around me. Tone it down publicly.”

“We’re sorry,” Jane murmured before taking a bite of her chicken sandwich.

“No, we’re not,” he said over her as he pinned his dad with a fierce stare. “I’m kissing her when I feel like it. I’m holding her hand, telling her I love her ... whatever she needs from me. I’m done hiding, Dad.”

Red flush painted his father’s cheeks, but he sighed, nodding. “Just be respectful with her.”

“I will.” He grinned, kissing her head as she nervously darted her eyes between them. “But, baby, if you want to limit who you’re seen with publicly, I understand.”

Completely surprising him, Jane exuded complete confidence as she raised her chin and met Kingston's stare. "I have three boyfriends ... Dad." She gave his father a gorgeous smile as her eyes shimmered with tears. "It should be four, but I guess I pissed one of them off. I won't make the mistake of letting my other guys feel unworthy to be at my side. Because they damn well don't make me feel that way."

David grinned, kissing her temple as his dad gave her a teary smile.

"My darling girl," Kingston said, "I think you will always be able to call yourself Luc Godson's queen. Maybe when he sees how brave, great, and you glowing for the others, he'll realize his mistake."

Jane laughed, wiping the tear that slipped free as Kingston reached across the table to hold her free hand.

"You make them take care of you, baby," his dad told her. "I know your father trusted them, but you keep them in line."

"I will." Jane leaned across the table, meeting his father and kissing his cheek. "Thank you."

"Always, sweet girl." Kingston kissed her head before motioning for her to sit. "Eat before the immature one returns."

"I'm sure he's giving the fastest statement ever," David muttered.

"Good," Kingston said. "Sooner he's done, the sooner she can spend a bit more time with Tercero and then head home for a proper bath and rest."

David's smile slipped; he wouldn't get to see Jane again for who knows how long.

His dad watched him with a smirk. "You owe your gran a visit. Mind driving Jane home later and sticking around until I return?"

"As her boyfriend?" David wasn't sure why he even asked; he'd already said he was her boyfriend.

“Isn’t that what you’re trying to shout to the world?” Kingston asked before he groaned as his gaze shifted behind Jane.

“Pipe down, old man.” Ryder plopped down on Jane’s other side, immediately checking her over and then kissing her. “He acts like he hasn’t been rooting for me for years.”

“Only because Eric told me about you,” Kingston muttered.

David watched Jane glow under Ryder’s attention. He teased her, touched her, made sure she was eating. She really didn’t need another man. She didn’t need *him*.

He turned, catching his dad’s knowing gaze as his heart squeezed. Was this his plan? Let him see just how little he was needed for Jane? How perfect Ryder was for her? His stomach turned upside down. Even Tercero did more for her than he did.

Yeah, the quiet Godson had messed up, but he made Jane feel good and loved. What did David ever do for her besides hurt her?

A warm hand slid over his. He lifted his gaze to hers, smiling softly as she mouthed ‘I love you’ to him.

Fuck everything he just thought. She was his baby, and he was hers.

Grinning, he leaned down and kissed her sweetly. “Love you, too.”

Damn, she even sparkled when she beamed up at him. He didn’t even care that she glowed a bit more when Ryder growled.

“And what the fuck about me?” Ryder asked, taking a kiss as Jane giggled.

David chuckled, leaning away so she could soothe the whiny bastard.

“And I really love you,” she told Ryder but still squeezed David’s hand.

Ryder smirked at her. “Let’s hurry up so we can go make babies.”

Kingston, who’d already been holding his head with one hand sat straighter and pointed at Ryder. “Boy, you’re asking for a whooping.”

David shook his head; the Ryder and Jane combo was as deadly as it was hilarious, and he couldn’t imagine his baby without the fucker anymore. He couldn’t even go back to a world where Ryder didn’t have his Sweet Jane.

“We can box, old man,” Ryder told Kingston as he frowned at the chicken sandwich he’d been given.

“You’re not fighting my dad,” Jane said.

Ryder didn’t even look surprised at her use of *dad*. He merely winked. “Only if he refuses to walk you down the aisle, hun.”

Her blush was too pretty. “Hush.”

David chuckled even as the sting in his heart remained. Ryder would be a perfect husband for her, and he wanted her to have the world. He squeezed her hand before letting go so he could eat faster. Because that meant he’d get more time with her. Even if he knew Ryder would be there. After all, they promised her she had them both.

Jane felt numb as she stood in front of Ryder’s bathroom mirror, brushing her wet hair. They’d brought her here instead of following Kingston’s orders to go straight to David’s grandmother’s, but she wasn’t arguing with her boys. They were stressed, and she was too.

What surprised her was that neither Ryder nor David had followed her into the shower. She was filthy and obviously wanted to clean up, but she wanted the reassurance she wasn’t dirty or damaged. But they’d told her to go shower as if she was a dirty child they couldn’t bear to be around.

Her chest ached as she stared at her reflection. She was still only wrapped in a towel, so she could see the bruises and scrapes. It was proof she'd been taken, been violated. Dylan might not have fully penetrated her, but she felt as if he had. Was it going to feel this wrong when she was finally with Ryder again? Would she feel disgusted and terrified if David turned her to take her from behind like he had before? Just as Dylan had been about to?

She almost threw up. He'd almost pushed in. He might as well have. She'd never stop feeling him. She'd scrubbed her skin raw, but she felt his hands on her hips, his ...

The room started to spin. Ryder wouldn't want her. David was going to be disgusted and angry with her for thinking of being raped as he touched her. And Tercero. He didn't see what the others had, but she knew he'd see their hands on her. He probably already did. They all did. They were only staying out of obligation. Nothing more.

"Whatever you're thinking," came Ryder's voice from the doorway, "if that sad look on your pretty face is reflecting your feelings, I guarantee it's wrong."

She glanced over at his reflection, surprised to see David right beside him. It seemed David had showered while she did. His hair was wet, and he was wearing clean clothes. Ryder was shirtless and wearing a pair of sweatpants. But she had a feeling he had waited for her to finish and had not gone to clean himself up yet.

"Talk to us, baby," David said softly while still slipping in that dominant tone of his. It reminded her of home, how he'd be serious but still so caring.

She wanted to talk to them. She wanted to tell them she felt wrong. She wanted to tell them to leave her to get someone better but at the same instant, she wanted to beg them to stay even though she was dirty.

Ryder crossed his arms, watching her with narrowed eyes. He was too beautiful. How could he want someone so tainted? They were all so perfect, and she wasn't.

“Jane,” David said more firmly this time. His gorgeous blue eyes darkened, and he shifted as though he would approach but then thought better of it, confirming for Jane that he didn’t want to be with her. David shook his head at her. “Get out of your head. I see your mind thinking everything wrong.”

It wasn’t wrong. They’d seen her getting used. They knew she was too much work. David had held back because he knew they would have too much against them. Now, he was sacrificing his happiness for a broken girl who couldn’t love just him. And poor Tercero nearly died because of her. He’d starved himself because he knew Luc was going to break up with her, and then she practically handed him poison.

Luc ... he had the right idea. She was a stupid girl who would never understand how to love the way she fantasized. She wasn’t going to be enough for him, so he left. No way could she be enough for the others, especially Ryder.

“Enough,” Ryder said, uncrossing his arms and quickly closing the distance between them. When she backed up, he shook his head, crowding her until she couldn’t escape. “Easy,” he said, cupping her cheeks so she’d have to look up at him. “You’ve been so brave, babe.” His strong hands caressed her skin so carefully, sending those tingles throughout her being so that she couldn’t move. He lowered his face, peering into her eyes. “Don’t give up on yourself. Not for what happened, and sure as fuck not for any of us.”

She finally let out a little whimper. She hadn’t cried at all since they’d found her. She wanted to be brave and strong as they were, but it hurt.

“Cry,” he ordered, not losing that intimidating stare that scared the shit out of everyone around him. When she shook her head, trying to hold her tears back, he pressed the sweetest kiss to her lips and repeated, “Cry. Even the strongest and bravest have to cry. Be braver than me, because I want to weep for not having been there for you after I promised I would be.” Then he lifted her, wrapping her legs around his waist as he turned, pushing her back against David’s chest.

She gasped as Ryder kissed her the moment David's lips touched her neck.

"Let it out, baby," David murmured, nuzzling her neck. "We, personally, think it's weak not to cry when you have to."

Ryder grinned, nuzzling her cheek. "Our girl isn't weak."

"She's a feisty kitten," David said with a featherlight kiss behind her ear. "She might cry, but she will claw and bite for what is hers."

"For me, babe, you're a warrior goddess," Ryder said without sounding like he was trying to show-up David. He just wanted her to know how he saw her. "You're even prettier when you roar at your monsters with tears falling from your eyes."

Now, she sobbed, her whole body shaking as Ryder hugged her between him and David.

"That's my girl." Ryder kissed her hair. "Don't be afraid to cry."

David smiled against her neck, his heat engulfing the numbing feeling to let those tingles kiss every inch of her skin. "Especially not in front of your boys."

She smiled, reaching back for him as Ryder kissed her neck now.

"Kiss him," he encouraged, his lips still on her skin. Ryder slid his hand to her ass and squeezed. "Don't you dare let that fucker change who you are with us."

Jane tightened her hand in David's hair, shaking as he turned her face so she could see his gorgeous one.

"Hi, baby." He smiled even though she tightened her fingers in his hair. "Tell me what you need from me."

"Us," Ryder amended, sliding his hand along her thigh. She was tense, unsure, and he made a disapproving noise as he massaged her tight muscles. "It's us, Sweet Jane. Not them. Not him."

A hot hand left a scorching trail of fire down her spine, and David pulled free from her hold, nearly baring his teeth at her. “Do you want to be in control, or do you need us to take it from you?”

Ryder lifted his head, the fire to argue with David burning in his eyes until he saw her face.

Jane sniffed, her chest heaving as she remembered last night. She’d fought and lost against Stephen and his friends, and they’d still captured her, still tied her up and stripped her bare. Against her will. They took when she had refused. “He took me. Don’t touch me.” She didn’t even know she’d spoken, that she’d ordered them not to touch her, until Ryder growled.

Though he pressed a kiss to her forehead, he spoke to her in the darkest voice she’d heard from him, “You’re ours, Jane, and I sure as fuck am not going to stop touching what’s mine. Do you understand me?”

She flinched, shoving away from him, but he held her tight.

His tone darkened even more. “You’re mine. You’re David’s. You’re even fucking Tercero’s. They took you but that changes nothing about us. My touch doesn’t become theirs. Those fuckers don’t get to take you from me.”

She whimpered, pushing him harder. She’d been taken against her will. All this time she’d been trying to make her own choices, fucking up everything, losing her best friend, her mother, Luc had tossed her, and now she was going to lose them because ... because ... She didn’t even know. All she knew was that she’d never please them again. There was no way she could erase the images and feelings clinging to her body and soul. And her boys would leave. They’d leave a broken, dirty girl.

David rubbed her back, but he was just as fierce. “Get out of your head, Jane.”

Tears spilled down her cheeks. “Let me go.”

They shook their heads.

Again, David said roughly, “Do you think we don’t know what you’re going to do if we do?”

Ryder turned her face toward his, fury etched into each line of his handsome face. “You got taken, babe. It’s our fault, not yours. You fought. You screamed for help, and you didn’t give up. And we’re not letting you give up on us. Now take yourself back.”

She stopped fighting, staring at him as tears pooled in her eyes.

He narrowed his gaze at her, nodding. “You’re lost, baby girl. You put on a brave face for us this whole time, now you can’t hide it. I’ve been waiting for it to hit you, but you’re forgetting that I found you. You’re home now.” He nodded toward David. “You’re between us. We are yours, and you are ours. They don’t get to take that from us.”

“But I don’t feel right,” she cried. “I won’t be able to ... to ...” She shook her head, squeezing her eyes shut because she didn’t want to see their reactions. “I won’t be able to satisfy you because I can’t have you touching me anymore.”

David’s touch vanished but it returned almost instantly. He held her waist as he kissed the back of her head and, finally, his tone was gentle. “If you really don’t want us touching you, say so.”

“No,” Ryder protested.

David cut him a fierce glare. “If she says no, we stop.” They held each other’s stares before David softened his gaze and focused on her. “But I promise, Jane, no matter what you choose to give to us, even if it’s just your smile, we’ll be satisfied.”

Ryder didn’t say anything, and he gave no warning as he lowered her to her feet and walked around her. It hurt. If she wasn’t lost before, she was trapped inside a dark chasm of nothingness now.

“Take her to the room,” he said in a detached tone. “I’m showering.”

“Ryder,” she croaked as a hole in her heart grew.

He cast her an empty stare as he turned on the water. “Go with him, Jane. You don’t want me touching you, fine. I don’t want to fuck shit up and say something that’s going to hurt you. So, go with him.”

David sighed and ever so carefully guided her out of the bathroom. “Let’s get you dressed.”

She pressed her hand over Ryder’s spot as she peered over her shoulder at him. He wasn’t looking in her direction, only stripping and getting into the shower. No tingles. His spot was empty.

“Jane,” David said, shutting the door, and even he withdrew his hands. He took a step back, pushing them into his pockets as he nodded toward the bed. “He got you some clothes to wear.”

She whimpered, lifting what she knew was one of David’s shirts and then a pair of sweatpants that seemed more like the type she’d sometimes see Tercero wear.

“He said you’d want to have something from Tercero, so those are his pants.” David chuckled weakly. “He wouldn’t say how he had them, but he produced a pair of your panties.”

Jane slumped down on Ryder’s bed as she found a pair of her Superman panties that Ryder had confiscated earlier in the week.

David smiled sadly. “Baby, you know I love you, but I’m not going to deny that Ryder’s your match.”

Panic seized her heart as she looked up at him, her breaths quickening. She was already losing them.

He sighed, glancing at the door to the bathroom. “I’ll walk away if you need me to, but I beg you to let him help you. He’s the one for you, Jane. Don’t push him away. He completes you.”

Her breath hitched, and she darted her gaze between David and the door. “Don’t leave me.” She sucked in air, hiccupping. “I don’t know what I’m supposed to do, but don’t leave me.”

“Easy,” he said, walking toward her and squatted at her knees. “I’m only saying this because it seems like you want to be alone. I don’t want to force you, no matter how much I agree with him that you’re ours. I just can’t bear watching you push him away.”

Lips trembling, she reached out for David’s hand. He was careful, so careful, as he held it. He gave her that gorgeous David Leodegrance smile and kissed her fingers. So much fire, not the cold, rough touches from last night. “That’s my brave girl.”

She released a breath, laughing weakly when she only felt him and didn’t see or feel Dylan or Stephen, and she gripped his fingers tighter. “Please don’t think you mean less to me.”

His smile widened. “I know it isn’t less. I just know he’s your world. If there’s one of us that you keep with you always, it should be him. I’ll follow if you let me.”

“You promise?” She growled at herself for sounding so weak and pathetic.

“Don’t get upset,” he said soothingly. “And I promise. I want to be on the other side, Jane. Even if he’s your world.”

“You’re my sun,” she whispered, wiping away a tear.

Now his smile was radiant, warming her entire being. “Then may I suggest you look at what I’m trying to show you? Because if you push that bastard away, my girl breaks.”

Guilt flooded her. Ryder was beating himself up because he had promised to keep her safe from Dylan, and now she was telling him he couldn’t touch her.

David stood, leaning down to kiss her forehead. “I love you.”

She stared up at him, saying the same with her eyes.

He grinned, kissing her cheek this time. “Do you want him?”

“Yes.” Her head bobbed. “But both.”

“You have to get him first.” He smoothed her hair back. “Do you want me to help?”

Nodding, she reached up to his lips. His smile was so incredible. “I hurt him.”

“I know,” he said, kissing her fingertips as he pulled the covers back. “I’ll help you heal him.” Tugging more, he had the bed completely uncovered. “Lie here for a moment. I’m going to go grab something from my bag.”

“He’ll come out before then.”

Taking a step toward the door, he smiled. “That’s the point. You need to show him you’re comfortable with him again. You in his bed, wearing nothing but a towel, waiting for him, that’s a start. I’m going to go get the next step. Unless you want me to leave for a while.”

“Come back.” She didn’t want him to leave. He was being the strong one for her, and she needed to lean on someone right now.

“I’ll be back.” Then he left, quietly shutting the door behind him just as she tugged the blanket over herself.

Only a few seconds passed before she heard the shower shut off. She tried to be calm, to force her mind to leave last night behind, to embrace everything her guys offered. It just wouldn’t stop, though. The fear that it would be the same, that they’d treat her the same way.

“What are you doing?”

Jane gasped, her eyes flying open as she realized she’d shut them. Ryder stood at the center of his room, sweatpants slung low on his hips, his muscles full and glistening where his hair still dripped onto his skin.

He glanced at his bedroom door causing his hair to fall over his eyes. “Did he leave?”

“He went to get something,” she told him as he stared at the clothes on the floor.

“You didn’t want to wear what I picked?” Fiery green flames locked onto her face. “Is that where he went—to get

you clothes?”

She trembled, though she wanted to be brave. She didn't want Dylan and Stephen to take her loves from her. She didn't want to lose the magic Ryder created. So, trying to be the girl she wanted to always be—Ryder's, David's and Tercero's girl—she sat up and let the blanket and towel fall to her waist. If she was going to bare herself to anyone, it was Ryder.

His gaze didn't leave her face though. “Cover yourself. I'm not touching you until you say and looking isn't going to help me. It's going to piss me off that my beautiful girl can't stand to have me near her. So, cover yourself and get dressed.”

He turned to leave the room, but she jumped up. “Ryder, please.”

“Get dressed,” he said, holding the doorknob but not looking at her.

No matter how dirty she still felt, she wanted Ryder. If she was going to lose him, he'd have to walk away. She wasn't going to push him away. She was going to cling to him.

Running before he could open the door, she launched her naked self onto his back. “Don't you dare leave me,” she shouted, wrapping her arms around his neck.

Tingles kissed her forearm and bloomed across her skin where their bodies touched. Jane kissed his back, crying because of the fuzzy feeling on her lips.

Slowly, he brought a hand to her thigh, holding her in place as the other went to her arm around his neck. “You're touching me, babe.” His voice was low, but it rumbled through his body and hers. “I can't give you what you want—not touching—with you naked as a damn baby all over me.”

She laughed, kissing his back over and over. “I'm sorry.”

“You don't have to be sorry,” he said, caressing her arm. “I let you down, babe. I'm sorry.”

“You can't be there all the time,” she whispered, pressing her cheek against his back as she tried to climb higher. When she was able to press her lips to his neck, she sighed. Every

breath he took was a part of her, every shift in his hold brought her closer. “I don’t blame you. I’m just afraid.”

“I know, angel.” He took one step back, his fingers curling around her thigh as he continued walking. “Let go.”

Jane knew the bed was right behind her, but she hugged him tighter. “You’re gonna run from me because I’m stupid.”

He massaged her leg. “You’re not stupid. Well ...” He chuckled when she let out a little gasp, and it was the best thing to hear him laugh again. “Just get on the bed so I can get you dressed.”

“I’m staying naked until you tell me who you are.” She hugged him tighter, her breasts smashed against his delicious back.

Ryder laughed now. “That’s supposed to be a threat?”

“It’s the best I got right now.” Her whole body melted against him as all the tension left his body.

“So, you’re being our brave girl? My naked little warrior goddess who is gonna fight me until I tell her who I am?”

“Exactly.” She closed her eyes rubbing her lips against the side of his neck.

“Babe, you’re bare ass right now. Your pussy is all over me, and you didn’t want me touching you ...”

“I know what I said.” She whimpered, fearing he wouldn’t let her get away with what she’d done. “I’m still not getting dressed until you tell me who you are.”

“You know who I am.” He turned his head to the side, coming nose-to-nose with her. “I’m yours.”

“Always,” she said, her lips tingling at how close they were to his.

“Longer.” His gaze flicked to her mouth. “Now I want you to tell me who I am to you.”

Jane lifted herself closer and whispered against his lips, “King boyfriend.”

The smile he gave her was divine. “And you’re my Sweet Jane. Now, give me a kiss before we let Papi inside.”

Even though a tear slipped free, she beamed at him before kissing him with everything she felt for him. It didn’t matter the angle was all wrong, her bad boy made it work before managing to pull her around him.

She whimpered as he suddenly pushed her against the door. She hadn’t even felt him walking toward it.

Ryder squeezed her ass hard but kept his kiss sweet as hell. It was so tender, she stopped breathing because she needed so much more. “Breathe,” he commanded, lifting a hand to her cheek. “Take everything you need from me. I’m yours.”

She nodded, sucking in air as she marveled at how he was roughly palming her ass and powerfully pressing her against the door, yet keeping his kiss gentle. It was like he was showing her how easily he could overpower her, just like those bastards did with her, but that he would always love her right.

“That’s my girl.” He switched suddenly, kissing her rougher but rubbing away the soreness on her abused flesh.

It took everything in her to keep up with him. She was shaking by the time he breathed in, breaking contact only to kiss her nose, her cheeks, her eyelids. Then he moved her so she could feel his erection.

The fabric of his sweatpants felt rough against her raw skin. She’d forgotten how hard she’d scrubbed in the shower, and she cried out in shock.

He didn’t jump away, but he returned his kiss to her lips. “It’s me.” His hand pressed against his spot. Tingles.

She felt ashamed, but she smiled, nodding.

He didn’t say anything else, but he knocked on his door and received a single knock as a reply. As soon as he moved her away, David entered.

Her blue-eyed boy took both of them in with a faint smile, but he saw the tears clinging to her eyelashes and sighed. “It might take some time, Jane. Don’t be upset with yourself.”

“We can be patient,” Ryder agreed, caressing his spot.

“How about we leave reminders.” David held up a Sharpie.

Ryder immediately held out his hand for it, and David gave it to him. “I’m going first,” he said, carrying her to the bed.

She had no idea what they were planning, and she moaned as Ryder not only laid her down but pressed his pelvis against hers for a tiny second then kissed down her neck until he reached his spot. Below her heart and to the side. *How did it feel so good?*

“My spot,” he said, kissing sweetly before bringing the marker to her skin. He signed his name with perfect penmanship. She gasped as he blew to dry it. “This isn’t a caveman thing,” he told her, meeting her stare. “It’s a reminder because you’re going to need help as you figure out how to cope with what happened. Every time it fades, I’m writing it again to show you I’ll always come for you.”

David held out his hand, his smile happier than ever as Ryder made space for him. “He’s using too many good lines.” He pressed his hand over her heart. “I don’t know how I got so lucky that you gave this to me so early in your life, but I won’t fuck up anymore. Is this still mine to share? Because I want this to remind you I’m always your David—always here for you to come to—and I’ll make sure your other half is right there behind you if he isn’t already carrying you home.”

“Damn, Papi’s still got it.” Ryder winked at her. “Both of us, right?”

They were so incredible. Jane nodded. “Both.”

David grinned before pressing a searing kiss to her left breast. “I know this doesn’t mean in any way I’m better, because I’m not.” He held the marker over her heart. “But I’ll cherish that you gave me your heart and allowed me to make up for when I didn’t keep it safe.” Now he signed his name and blew it to dry the ink.

Ryder held his hand over his spot and grinned. “You wanna get dressed, or do you want us to take care of you?”

Together?”

Her eyes were wide, darting between the two of them. Ryder wasn't pushing, but she knew he needed her.

David didn't say anything, but she felt his burning gaze sliding down her body. Goosebumps erupted, and he smiled. “No pressure, baby, but I admit, I want you to have something better to hold onto tonight.”

“I'm telling Kingston I'm staying with her—she can hold onto me,” Ryder said, sliding his fingers across her thighs. “You're not tense, babe.” She saw herself smiling in his eyes. “There's my girl. Want us to remind you what we feel like?”

Gosh, what was happening? How did they make her want them when she was almost raped?

“Is it wrong that I like this?” She grabbed their hands and, holding her breath, slid them between her legs. “Is it gross that I'm not screaming like I thought I would?” She shivered as their fingers made the tiniest of movements. Tingles and heat.

They glanced at each other, nodding as Ryder pulled her legs apart more.

“Oh, we'll make you scream, babe.” He winked at her and both he and David slid their fingers down her slit. “Papi, because I know you're too rough and baby girl is tender down here, this is mine.” He pushed a finger inside, just one, but it pulled a breathy moan from her. “There's my girl,” he purred, pushing a second finger as David gave her clit a slow, circular rub. “Uh-uh,” Ryder chided, pushing David's hand. “You'll get rough. Take care of her kiss. Just don't forget her lips are mine most other times.” He moved, settling himself between her legs as David searched her face. Then he pressed a kiss to her pussy. “Both, Sweet Jane?”

She whimpered, throwing her head back as Ryder did things that even Tercero didn't do to her.

“Jane?” David cupped her cheeks, grinning as she moaned and bucked her hips against Ryder's mouth. “So beautiful,” David whispered, leaning closer so his lips teased hers.

“Oh, kiss me,” she begged him but grabbed Ryder’s hair as her legs quaked around his head.

He nodded, still teasing her. “Next time we’ll invite Tercero.” She cried out, coming, as every sensation Ryder created mixed with David’s kiss and the promise that he’d keep them together. All of them.

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TWENTY-SIX

Jane pushed her hair behind her ear as she peeked over her shoulder. Ryder and David were drawing stares as they stood side by side, leaning against Ryder's Camaro. She swore people were pretending to work on their lawns just to get a glimpse of them. Maybe seeing the star football players sitting on the street was snoop-worthy, though.

"Hurry up, babe," Ryder hollered to her. "Or we'll really make sure you can't walk. Look at you, like a baby deer taking your first steps."

She waved him to be quiet, her face warming as David sent her a sexy smile before he nudged Ryder to be quiet. There was no doubt in her mind they were picturing what she was; her between them as they all lay on their sides. They took turns kissing and touching her as she recovered from the intense orgasm Ryder had given her with his mouth, then she begged for more. For both.

Never had she really expected to make love to these boys. Never did she expect to see them working together to satisfy her. David helped hold her so Ryder could fuck her slow and deep. Each time Ryder thrust, David's dick slid between her butt cheeks, and when Ryder finally filled her up and pulled out, David was ready. He pulled her against his chest and slid inside her from behind.

Ryder hadn't looked mad, even though he had been bossy and dominant beforehand. No, when David had her, Ryder smiled, caressing her face as he cooed sweet words of how much he and David loved her. He kissed her when David told

him to, and David kissed her when Ryder ordered him. Loving her to the fullest was their goal, and they helped each other even though neither needed it.

Her bad boy smirked at her as he crossed his arms. “Still tingling, babe? If not, wobble your cute ass over here. I’m sure Wendy will understand.”

“Understand?” Wendy said, pulling the door open.

Jane whirled around to face her friend, flinching as Wendy took in the bruising and cuts on her face. “Hey.”

Wendy’s gaze flicked behind her, her jaw clenching. “Did they do this?”

“Of course not.” Jane wanted to be angry, but she was also relieved to know that Wendy instantly had her back. She reached forward, hugging her before she could tear off after the boys.

Wendy returned the hug. “Are you okay?”

She nodded but then shrugged with a laugh. “I just missed you.”

Wendy leaned back, touching Jane’s cracked lip with a frown. “Were you involved in that attack yesterday? I’ve only heard rumors.”

“Yeah.” Jane took hold of Wendy’s hands. “I’m okay. I’ll be okay.”

Instead of asking her for details, she opened the door wider. “Do I need to invite your boyfriends inside?”

Jane grinned. “They said they didn’t want to interrupt.”

“Why don’t they just leave you here?” Wendy shut the door.

“They’re afraid,” she said softly. “To leave me alone, I mean.”

For a long time, Wendy stared at her, like she was pulling everything she wasn’t ready to say from her eyes. Finally, she sighed, tears pooling in her eyes as she hugged Jane again. “I’m here too. Sorry for blowing you off.”

“Me too.” Jane squeezed her tighter. “I’m a lousy friend.”

Wendy laughed, letting her go. “You’re not lousy. You’re just always trying to deal with things alone, and I didn’t help by not embracing the harem thing you have going on. I was wrong for not supporting it when it got real.”

Jane swiped away a tear, smiling. “It’s okay. I can keep my love life away from you.”

Rolling her eyes, Wendy went straight for the freezer and pulled out a batch of homemade strawberry ice cream. “Even if you wanted to be away from them, which you don’t, Ryder would follow you.”

“He’s the sweetest guy,” Jane said, scooping herself some ice cream. Wendy made the best desserts.

“For you.” Wendy dug her spoon into the mix. “You should see him at school without you. Everyone runs from him. David is only slightly better. Do you think you’ll return to Black Hills?”

“I dunno.” Jane shrugged as she thought over everything. More students from Helldonna were arrested because of her. Well, because of themselves. But not all the kids would see it that way. “I liked going to Helldonna. You’d like the guys.”

“More boyfriends?” Wendy’s eyes were wide. “How many? You have the deadly duo outside, Tercero, and the king.”

“Luc broke up with me.” Jane didn’t look up, though her emotions couldn’t be hidden.

Wendy reached out for her hand, gripping it. “Do you want him back?”

Jane shrugged. “I barely know him.” Even as she said it, the loss of what she had started to feel with Luc ripped wide open, and she finally lifted her head, not stopping her tears. “Yes, I want him. Please don’t judge me. I know I don’t need another boyfriend. It’s not like I need extra because they’re amazing with me, but I want them.”

There was confusion in her eyes, but Wendy nodded. “Then get your king back when you’re ready. Let your boys take care of you first. Then show him you’re his queen.”

It was honestly the acceptance Jane had been waiting for, and she felt a million times lighter. And just like that, they were fine.

Dylan exchanged a look with Stephen as the two of them were finally left alone in the empty room. The guards hadn’t said a word when they’d roused him from sleep. They’d merely barged into his cell, ordered him to turn around for handcuffs, as he was being escorted to a meeting.

When he was situated in a chair, another guard brought Stephen in. They hadn’t seen each other since Friday, and he wasn’t pleased to see the bastard now. Stephen had promised to get the girl away, that they’d have time to break her, but the whole plan fell apart with Adam and because the girl wouldn’t stop fighting. He had the urge to say something, but he wasn’t stupid enough to admit further guilt when he might be recorded.

The door suddenly opened, and Dylan tensed as he stared at the man walking through.

Wearing a pristine white suit, Luc Godson strolled into the room, an emotionless mask across his face as Damon King and Than Messor entered after him.

Dylan darted his gaze between the three of them. Luc stood in the middle, silently scrutinizing him as two guards entered.

“The cameras are off,” the guard told Luc. “It’s all taken care of.”

Luc nodded as he shrugged off his jacket, then started unbuttoning his shirt, confirming the rumors that Luc was tattooed from the neck down.

“What the fuck is this?” Dylan finally asked.

Stephen chuckled as Luc handed his clothes to Damon, who placed them on a table nearby. “We don’t fuck guys, no matter how pretty you are,” Stephen tried to sound brave but a quiver in his voice caused Than to smirk.

Luc tilted his head, and the cruelest smile stretched over his face as he addressed the guard. “Inform the jail population, as well as whatever prison they go to, that they tried to rape my queen. Inform them I will reward all who return them the same brutalization they were so prepared to give her.”

Dylan’s eyes widened at the threat, and he flinched as Damon and Than chuckled at the truth that meant Luc had just ordered every prisoner to rape him and Stephen. He turned his head as the guards nodded, agreeing. “You can’t do this. My lawyer will see you’re all punished.”

“She’s nothing to you anyway,” Stephen said stupidly. “She’s fucking your brothers and David.”

“She’s our queen,” Than said automatically.

“Not theirs,” Damon added. “They have their own duty to her; this is ours.”

“A king protects his queen,” Luc said, motioning for the guard. “Uncuff them. I want them to remember what it feels like to fight for their lives against someone stronger than them.”

Dylan thrashed in the chair, kicking his foot out when Damon stepped forward, shoving him to sit still as the guards removed the handcuffs.

“You’re going to get a beating you’ll never stop feeling,” Damon said with a vicious smile.

“Let him up,” Luc ordered, flexing his muscles the moment silver flashed in his eyes. “I suggest you fight your hardest. I won’t stop when you fall.”

“That’s why we’re here,” Than said.

Damon grinned wickedly. “We’re here to make sure you suffer for all your days.”

Dylan stood, staggering as Damon roughly shoved him against Stephen, and he knew he wouldn't walk out of this room. He'd be dragged out, barely breathing. Because it wasn't death Luc was promising. It was hell.

“Look at this hoe.”

Jane frowned, shifting her attention from Ryder's assignment to find the female voice didn't belong to any of the players on the Black Hills training field.

Glancing at Ryder first, she sighed, realizing he hadn't heard because he was already jogging onto the field. Even if she was feeling a bit smothered by how protective he'd been all week since he'd been picking her up straight after school and bringing her to his practices or he stayed with her until Kingston told him to leave, she was just tired today and didn't want to deal with someone being mean. It was hard enough to go to Black Hills every day and feel the stares of the classmates, who all looked away the moment Damon, Sin, Than, or the others were around.

All she wanted was to quietly go about her evening and finish helping Ryder with his assignment so he could play this Friday. Kingston had already restricted her to only spending alone time with Ryder, not even David or Tercero. Jane had wanted to argue but after he stood up to her mother when Sarah tried to call the police to have her brought home, she couldn't push him. The word “Separation” had been thrown out, and Jane didn't know how to feel.

David had explained it wasn't because of her, but he was also stressed and blaming himself for things turning out so badly for his dad.

“Diane,” Melody whispered, pulling Jane to the present.

She took in Melody's wide eyes as Diane marched toward Jane.

The brunette still sported scratches along her cheek, but she was still the perfect picture of a beloved cheerleader. She stopped with her entire squad behind her, hands on her hips as she sized Jane up where she sat on the bench.

Jane closed Ryder's notebook and set it aside before focusing on Diane. "If it isn't my ole nemesis and her bloodsucking followers."

"I prefer jealous but prettier nemesis," Diane quipped. "And leave the girls out of this."

Standing, Jane couldn't stop her chuckle. "You're right. Forgive me. This is just between us two *hoes*."

They stared at each other, narrowing their eyes until they both laughed.

"I still don't like you," Diane told her, though she smiled. "I mean, you technically stole David from me."

Part of Jane wanted to scream because she suddenly remembered everything David had done with Diane, but she had no desire to state the real truth: David had used Diane. "I love him," was what she settled on saying.

"Yeah." Diane motioned for the cheer team to leave them, which they hesitantly obliged. "Listen, I'm just checking on you. I don't expect us to be friends, but I wanted to say I'm sorry for inviting Helldonna students. I didn't expect Dylan, but I won't deny I wanted to watch you suffer a little."

Fiery pain seared throughout Jane's chest, but she breathed out and nodded. "I can forgive that. I know you weren't with David, but I would've flaunted I'm with him."

"And Ryder, and Tercero, and Luc," Diane added with an amused light in her eyes.

Jane laughed. "Well, I figured 'why choose' when they get along."

"They do, don't they?" Diane chuckled, glancing at the field where Ryder and David played side by side, terrifying their own offense because they were absolute beasts. "I guess it was always for you, though." She focused on Jane again. "If

I didn't like Adam so much, I'd probably still hate you for getting them both."

"I heard Adam was ignoring you." Jane had talked to Adam, actually, and he was pissed because he had no idea Diane had been with David as much as she was, and he was livid upon realizing Diane had invited him because she knew Stephen was friends with Dylan.

Never had Diane appeared so genuinely remorseful and heartbroken, but she was now. "He might not be your real cousin, but he loves you. But I guess everyone does."

"Adam doesn't love me like that," Jane said quickly. "Give him time. He doesn't understand what it's like to be a girl watching other girls with the guy you love."

Diane gave her a halfhearted smile. "That's not an excuse for what I did. Even with David. I knew you loved him and that he was in love with you, but I didn't care. I let myself get used because I wanted what you had. Still, Adam's right to be mad."

She hadn't been expecting to hear that Diane knew she was being used, and that she did it just to have something she wanted of Jane's, but there was no anger in her heart. Diane had come through when it mattered. "I'll talk to him for you. I mean, he liked you—that's why he came."

"What's going on here?"

Jane turned at David's voice. He'd pulled off his helmet, shaking his sweaty hair from his eyes as he sent an intimidating stare at Diane.

"Doesn't look like a catfight," said Archer, grinning as he waltzed over. "You're breaking my heart, ladies."

Ryder shoved Archer as he switched his attention between her and Diane. "Did my baby girl grow up?" He grinned, snatching Jane up to kiss her cheek. "Getting along with meanies."

She smiled, hugging him as Diane rolled her eyes and started to walk away.

“I’ll talk to him,” Jane hollered after Diane.

Her old rival blushed as the football team pouted, begging for a catfight. “Thanks, Jane.”

Tingles assaulted her neck as Ryder murmured, “You okay?”

Hugging him, even though it was painful with his pads, she nodded. “Better every day.”

He smacked her butt and gave her a firm kiss, then lowered her to her feet. “Practice is over. Let’s get our shit and get home. We gotta change for dinner.”

“Dinner?” She sighed as David approached her from behind.

He was holding back, but he did wrap an arm around her waist and press a kiss to the top of her head. “My dad finally talked your mom into agreeing to have us all sit down together.”

She gasped, spinning to face him. “We’re having dinner with my mom and your dad? About us?”

David gave her that gorgeous smile. “Yes, baby. Don’t expect it to be perfect. She’s still beyond pissed at Dad.”

“She deserves it,” Ryder muttered, snagging Jane’s hand but not pulling her from David’s arms just yet.

A deliciously heated hand cradled her cheek as David leaned down and kissed her. God, his kisses were so intense. Even a faint brush of his lips had her body burning with need.

He grinned, ending his dominating kiss with a sweeter one. “Don’t worry about our parents. They’ll work things out if they want; it’s not our business. Just like we aren’t theirs.”

Ryder gave her hand a tug now. “Let’s go, babe. David will meet us at home. Tercero will be waiting for you, too.”

“Aw, you’re making them stop,” Archer cried, lowering his phone.

“Stop fucking filming us with our girl for your porn collection,” Ryder said, pulling her away.

Archer smirked at her. “But she’s my favorite naughty time fantasy.”

Savaş smacked Archer before Ryder could. “I’ll let him kill you if you don’t stop.”

Archer winked at her. “She doesn’t mind as long as I know who her daddies are. Isn’t that right, Sweet Jane?”

“Shut up,” was all she could sputter as the team howled with laughter.

Well, this is awkward.

Jane shifted on her chair, bumping elbows with David as Ryder lowered a hand onto her thigh. The table blocked her mom from seeing the contact, but the way her mother’s eyes narrowed at the table, she wondered if her mom had developed x-ray vision.

“Sorry,” Jane said, taking in David’s reassuring smile before making quick eye contact with Tercero. He was seated next to David, and she felt so embarrassed but also sad and angry that Tercero was so far from her. It was more ammunition for her mother to have that she couldn’t be in a relationship with more than one guy.

He didn’t seem upset, though. That faint smirk of his came and went before he focused on cutting his steak.

“This isn’t working,” Ryder said abruptly.

Jane whipped her head around, her heart stuck in her throat as he stood. “Where are you going?”

“Get up,” he ordered as her mother protested. Naturally, Ryder ignored everyone as he helped her stand then, completely surprising her, sat on her chair and pulled her onto his lap. “Tercero, take my seat,” he said, sliding his plate closer to hers. He grinned at her, kissing her shoulder. “This is better.”

“Jane,” her mother screeched, “move to another chair.”

Ryder held her tighter. “Nah, she’s fine where she is. On King Boyfriend’s lap with her boys at her side.”

Tercero silently took Ryder’s seat, sneakily slipping in a squeeze on her thigh before he resumed eating.

David chuckled, caressing her cheek before he turned to her mother. “Sarah, we’ve already told Dad how things are working. You can throw a fit for two more days until she’s eighteen, but all you’re going to do is push all of us away, especially Jane and Dad.”

Ryder nuzzled her, but he ate again like it was entirely normal to have her on his lap with her other boyfriends, and David lecturing Sarah.

Kingston leveled David with a stern stare. “Boy, I told you I’d handle this. You already know this set-up is unnatural.”

David, Ryder, and Tercero darted their gazes to him, but it was David who spoke. “There’s nothing wrong with us loving her and her loving us.”

Her mom’s face turned from pink to red to purple. “I’ve had enough of this.” She pushed her plate away and focused on Jane. “I’m your mother, and I won’t allow this three ... four-way relationship.” Jane gaped, but her mother kept going even though Kingston tried to quiet her. “I don’t care that she’s eighteen in two days. She’s my daughter, and I did not raise her to be this foolish. You will both return home; she will choose one—not her stepbrother—and that will be the end of it. I’m sick and tired of tiptoeing around my own child! We’re married, Kingston. You are her stepfather, not her pimp, and she does not get to have everything just because her daddy said she could. It’s no wonder she was almost raped! She’s flashing a neon sign with this relationship that any guy can have a round with her. I’m not going to be the mother of the town whore.”

Everyone stayed silent, though Jane’s hitched breathing could be heard by all who stared at her mother.

Finally, Jane spoke, though she wasn’t sure what she was saying until she said it. “You didn’t raise me.” She trembled

but breathed steadier as Ryder pressed the palm of his hand to his spot, just as David held her left hand and Tercero once again held her thigh. “You never raised me, Mom. So, you’ll have to be upset with yourself for not being there for me when you hear that your whore daughter is the happiest she’s ever been with the guys who treat her like she’s the best thing in the world.”

“And Kingston is your husband. You should respect him, and you should be grateful you have such an amazing man taking care of your daughter because you were the one who wanted to toss me to your pick without caring about my choice.”

Ryder kissed her head, and she felt the fury radiating off him, but he didn’t address her mother. “Babe, I just remembered, my house has a no *bitch of a mother who never gave a damn until it inconvenienced her* feature. I say we go see what Archer and Savaş made for dinner.”

Her eyes stung, but she smiled at Kingston’s watery smile as he nodded for her to leave even though her mother was once again protesting.

“She is not leaving this house!”

David and Tercero stood, and Ryder let them take her away as he lingered at the table.

“Ryder?” David called in a dark tone. “It’s time to go home.”

Jane waited, unsure what to do because of her cracked heart. It had never been solid until Ryder truly came into her life, and she realized now it was David and Tercero who healed that crack, and they did it by ensuring Ryder was with her.

Tercero went over, grabbing Ryder by the bicep to pull him away. “Brother, you just promised Jane a more pleasant dinner. Don’t deprive her just so you can make clear what her mother already knows.”

The green flames in Ryder’s eyes roared as they locked onto her. “Do you have anything else to tell your mom?”

Maybe something besides that neon sign that somehow welcomes rape?”

Jane stood taller, taking David’s hand in hers as she met her mother’s furious stare. “You wanna know what kind of mother you are? You’re the mother who knew her daughter and neighbor were in love, and put us close together, just to watch us break apart. I feel like it was a game for you. See how long it would take for us to give in.”

“Baby,” David said with a shake of his head.

She sniffled. “You know it’s true. Who would put their daughter and stepson so close if they knew all this time?”

“There’s nothing wrong with us, Jane,” he said quietly.

“I know.” She faced her mother. “But she couldn’t stand it. She couldn’t stand Daddy loved me, and she couldn’t stand that you and Kingston did too. She wanted me to see she finally had it all. She wanted it in my face.”

Ryder smiled at her like he was proud she finally understood this. It was there all along, and she’d refused to see it. “Jane won’t be at Sylvia’s tonight, Kingston.” He made his way to her, his hands cupping her face as soon as he was close. “My future wife doesn’t have to be around this toxic shit.” Tingles and a kiss. “Tell Kingston bye.”

“I’ll call you tomorrow, Dad.” She saw the protest in his eyes, but he nodded when her mother continued her raving.

“You are not leaving this house!”

Jane smiled brightly at her mother. “David and I had sex in the bathroom you taunted us with. You got the scandalous downfall you expected from me.”

Kingston threw a glare at David but waved a hand. “Leave. I’ll speak to you four tomorrow. And I expect you boys to give her a private room, and you sleep elsewhere.”

Ryder snickered as his arm wrapped around her shoulders. “Telling me what to do with my wife now, old man?”

“You’re not her husband yet, boy. And my son and your brother still offer competition. Behave or I’ll give them your

privileges.”

Her mother opened her mouth, but Kingston glared at her. “Quiet, woman. You will sit there and be silent as they take our daughter where she is loved and feels safe. You’ve made it clear that it’s no longer in this house.”

“Kingston,” her mother screeched anyway.

The fierce glare he sent Sarah made everyone flinch. Except for Ryder; he snickered quietly, and hugged Jane as Kingston growled.

“If you have any hope of saving our marriage, you will shut your mouth. I don’t need our children and these boys to hear what I have to say to you, but I will let them if you keep this up.” He turned, pointing at Ryder. “She stays in your room, none of you or your brothers, family, friends are to be in there with her. I’m trusting you.”

Surprisingly, Ryder nodded. “Understood. I’ll cuddle with Papi tonight.”

David glowered at Ryder. “You’re not cuddling me.”

Ryder smirked at him. “I’m doing it to keep you from sneaking off to find our girl.”

Tercero was the one to reply. “As if you are not fantasizing about his ass, brother.” He held out a hand for Jane. “Looks like you’re replaced.”

“You’re nervous, *cara*.” Tercero smiled, trailing his fingers across her stomach. She couldn’t respond, too paralyzed by his touch and gorgeous face. He did look so much like Ryder, but he was Tercero through and through.

“You’re not boning her tonight,” came Ryder’s dark voice. He leaned against the wall of his bedroom, David at his side. Her two beautiful boys, united against anything they felt was a threat to her, and warriors eager to seek out whatever she desired. They crossed their arms, gazes narrowed on Tercero

as he leaned down, not afraid of their darkness as he kissed her stomach.

“I promise it will be more than *boning* when I am gifted the chance.” Tercero’s dark eyes gleamed as he lifted them to see her face. He no doubt felt the blast of possession and annoyance flaring out of Ryder, and he welcomed it, grinning as he moved higher to kiss Jane’s lips. Oh, he was honey and water, sunshine and earth.

“Thank you,” she blurted without meaning to and completely clueless as to why she was thankful. Then again, who wouldn’t be thankful for Tercero’s attention?

He smiled, leaning away again. This time, he held up the sharpie David had given him. “You are certain? You don’t have to include me out of pity. I will still cherish our friendship.”

“Nothing with you is pity,” she told him, her body trembling as the sensation of tingles, heat, ice, and wholeness blanketed her. “Do it . . . Unless you’ve changed your mind about being my boyfriend.”

“Boyfriend number three.” He let out a low laugh and then the cold sting from the marker was artfully sliding across her lower abdomen. “I accept.”

Jane sat up enough to see he’d written his name in a large, elegant script just above her panty line. She held her breath as he blew the ink.

“I am yours, Sweetest Jane.” He tossed his brother a rueful smile before giving Jane a ravenous kiss that left her panting. “More later.”

Then he stood, walked by Ryder and David, and left the bedroom.

Ryder pushed off the wall and headed toward her. “Slick fucker.”

“Why’d he leave?” Jane sighed as Ryder cupped her cheeks and kissed her, like he was reminding her who he was and that she was his.

David must've sat beside her, as heat soon engulfed her. "He's distancing himself because he's tired of holding back."

Ryder growled into her mouth but calmed when she moaned. It was just what he did to her.

"Are you upset with me or him?" she asked, holding his wrists to keep him from leaving her. It was hard to read Ryder sometimes. He made it seem like he needed her to have everything, then he did stuff like this.

"He wants you alone," Ryder mumbled, watching her reaction.

"He doesn't want to come between us," David amended as he slid a hand down her spine.

Ryder huffed. "He's the one who keeps saying she wants all of us."

Jane was embarrassed, but she smiled, kissing Ryder sweetly over and over again until he chuckled.

"Stop manipulating me with these lips." He kissed her firmly then collapsed onto the bed and closed his eyes. "I'll behave the next time he wants you, babe. Sorry. I just need to be close to you right now."

David kissed her shoulder. "You okay?"

They were obviously concerned about her mother and Kingston. Well, just her mother. It honestly was so ridiculous now that she didn't care. No, she didn't care. She had to keep telling herself that.

Ryder peeked one eye open. "When you pop out our kid, she'll shut her dumb ass up."

She laughed, shaking her head at him. "Babies are not the answer."

He smirked. "I want babies with you. And the act of making babies is always the answer with us."

"You're not discussing having babies with my baby, as though I am not sitting right here," David said, his glare at Ryder was beyond annoyed.

“I’m comforting my woman by the simple truth: her mother will get over herself when our baby is born.” Ryder rolled onto his side and easily pulled her into position so he could spoon her. “Go away, David. I’m gonna put one in her after my nap.” He kissed her neck in that way that had her whole body tingling, and she could only smile. Ryder’s methods of cheering her up were so disturbingly sweet that she only loved him more.

“Baby, please remember me before you let him knock you up.” David leaned down and kissed her forehead. “I’ve got homework.”

Ryder slowly shoved David’s head away. “No more Papi. Jane and Ryder time. I know your ass is sneaking in after you talk to your dad, and you’re getting her longer tomorrow because I have two tests to redo.”

David smacked Ryder’s hand and gave Jane a proper kiss.

Heat, love, breath.

Tingles and lips assaulted the back of her neck as Ryder slipped a hand under her shirt, seeking out his spot. Heaven. It was like seeing Heaven, and Ryder was there, holding her from stepping into a place she wasn’t allowed.

“Hot damn.” Archer whistled loudly. “Grab her tit, bro.”

Ryder lifted his head, ready to attack but David was up first, striding toward Archer and shoving him out of the room. The door slammed, and she knew David wasn’t coming back right away.

“Punk ass bitch,” Ryder muttered, hugging her as she half laughed, half cried. “Let it out, angel,” he murmured, knowing now she was going to break down; she’d lost her mother and possibly caused a divorce. She did care. “None of this is your fault. She’s lost her damn mind, and that has nothing to do with you.”

Jane still couldn’t help but feel guilty. She couldn’t imagine feeling unloved or less loved by the people she loved. So, she cried. It wasn’t up to her what Kingston decided to do, and there was nothing to say to her mother that she hadn’t

already said; she'd confessed what had been buried deep for years.

Sweet kisses pressed against her neck and even sweeter words were whispered in her ear, and Jane drew peace from it all. Ryder knew she needed to let it out, that she didn't want David to feel any worse by seeing her fall apart, as he probably felt his own guilt, and he knew Tercero needed something she wasn't ready to give just yet.

"That's my girl," Ryder praised in that deep voice of his as he continued kissing her where he could reach all while he spread those magic tingles everywhere, letting them seek out her weeping soul. "So brave and beautiful. So fragile and fierce."

"This isn't fierce," she blubbered.

"You were with your mom." He smiled against her skin. "I'll never stop loving watching how your eyes light up when you believe in yourself. In us. My goddess."

It was ridiculously hard to get herself under control, but she calmed enough to smile. "I really love you."

"Damn right you do." He chuckled, kissing her neck as he began massaging her. "And I really, really love you, babe. Let me get you all relaxed so you can rest."

Closing her eyes, she sighed as those tingles kept dancing across her skin. "And here I thought you were going to try to knock me up."

"Oh, I want to practice knocking you up. But I'm not sure you want us to with your boyfriends in the house." He squeezed her ass but rubbed as well, and she knew he was just sneaking in his perverted grabs. "We'll wait until we're alone for when it's just us, otherwise they join in in some way. I'm not going to let them rush you, though."

"Do you really want to share me, Ryder?"

"It doesn't feel like I'm sharing." He leaned closer, nuzzling her. "That's why I say goddess, Sweet Jane. You're magic."

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TWENTY-SEVEN

Ryder lifted his head from the pillow when he heard footsteps. He knew it wasn't Jane; this person had come from outside. He'd counted on David trying to sneak up to see Jane after he fell asleep, but his former rival was on the sofa opposite of his, and he too was lifting his head to see who was entering the house.

"What on earth is this?"

Ryder sighed at the sound of Luc's voice. "We're having a slumber party."

"Jane's upstairs," David said.

"Bitch, I told you not to say anything." Ryder sat up, chucking a pillow at David.

The pillow came flying right back to him. "I'm telling him so he knows not to go in there." David shifted his fierce stare over to Luc. "She's had a rough night, and you're not going to make her feel worse."

Chuckling, Ryder glanced at Luc. "Is that a busted lip?"

Luc regarded him quietly. "Observant, little brother. Why is she here?"

"Only boyfriends need to know." Ryder snickered, watching his brother's stiff posture. "The other guy better look worse. Who the fuck did you fight?"

Now Luc smirked. "Only kings need to know."

"Are they alive?" David asked.

Ryder already knew what Luc had done; it was clear to him the moment his brother found out about Jane's attack. "He didn't kill them," he said, knowing that was part of the reason he'd let his big brother take over. Luc could show restraint and still make someone suffer. Ryder would only kill them.

Luc glanced at him. "She better be gone tomorrow."

"Or what?" Ryder taunted. "You want to act like the big bad boyfriend, but you're afraid of your queen. Afraid to let her know you're a mean bastard, or is it something else?"

"Don't attempt to lecture me on my choices regarding Jane." Luc walked toward the kitchen.

"Or are you afraid to see she might not love you like she does me?" Ryder ignored David's glare. "You know she wears our names on her pretty pale skin?"

Luc strolled out with an icepack on his left hand. "You marked her?"

Ryder grinned, knowing that would really piss Luc off. "She's considering tattoos. Baby girl does turn eighteen soon."

"If you push her to get tattooed, I'll bury you." Luc cast a dismissive glance at David before turning away. "Gone. Tomorrow."

Ryder laughed, returning to his position on the sofa but still yelled out, "Property of King Daddy would look really nice."

The only response was a slammed door.

"Why are you taunting him?" David asked.

"Why not?" Ryder shrugged, but he knew what he was doing.

"He left her," David said.

"So have you before." Ryder closed his eyes. It wasn't that he wanted Luc to return to Jane, but he did want his girl fully happy, and for some reason that bastard had claimed a part of her heart. She never said it, but he knew she felt more for Luc than she wanted to admit, especially to herself.

“I don’t think I will be able to take watching him with her; it was difficult enough with Tercero.”

“Jane loves me.” Ryder smirked, chuckling because he’d not expected David to be weak about Luc. “She loves me more than any woman can, and she knows I can be everything for her. Hell, she comes the moment I slide my hand between her legs.”

“What’s your fucking point?”

He smiled to himself. “My point is I’m amazing, and Jane knows it. She knows we can live happily ever fucking after, and she’d be in heaven every day because I’m that great for her.” Ryder lifted his head, taking in how David looked ready to charge at him. “But she still fucking looks for you.”

David didn’t say anything, but his shoulders relaxed.

“That’s never going to change about her, even if Luc comes back,” he said, lowering his head and rolling to face the other way. “Now shut the fuck up. Kingston said we couldn’t spend the night with her, but he didn’t say anything about the morning.”

Tingles.

Heat.

Both.

Well, with a teasing chill of ice.

“Don’t fucking touch her there until she’s awake,” David hissed as tingles teased the outer edge of her panties.

“She’s awake,” Ryder said, amused. “Angel, if you want to see stars at sunrise, spread these legs for us.”

She giggled, opening her eyes to find his handsome face right over hers. Tercero was on the other side, sliding his fingers along her arm, and David was sitting near her waist,

gripping Ryder's wrist to keep him from getting under her panties.

"Morning, gorgeous," Ryder said, kissing her softly. "Papi is protecting you from me. Mind telling him you already told me to wake you up however I want? How you said you especially wouldn't mind waking up with my hand or face between your legs, or better yet, to us already fucking?"

Her body flamed, as she watched both Tercero and David stare at her in surprise. She really didn't know how to explain that she wanted to do the freakiest things with them. "Yeah, I guess I said that."

Ryder grinned at her. "Only me for now, right?"

David frowned, releasing Ryder after she nodded. That probably seemed awful.

"Well, I wasn't sure about you two wanting to be with me," she whispered. "And Ryder's a freak."

He chuckled, kissing her but also tugging David down. "She's awake now, fool."

David braced himself from falling on her, but he realized, as she did, Ryder was bringing David's face between her thighs. "Baby?"

Oh, crap. She trembled as their eyes skimmed down her body. She was in a shirt and panties because she kept getting twisted in Tercero's jogger pants.

"It's okay," David said, smiling reassuringly as he started to move away.

She widened her legs.

"There's our girl." Ryder smiled wickedly at her before leaning down for a long kiss. One that he had to remind her to ... "Breathe, angel."

Jane gasped, her body sparking now as David slid his hand along her inner thigh, widening her legs even more. But it was still Ryder leading the others. He wasted no time shoving her panties aside and cupping her but just as quickly massaging her.

Her legs jumped because Ryder knew exactly where to touch her. She barely realized she'd wrapped her legs around David's head and shoulders until he pried her off, kissing her thighs until he pushed Ryder's hand away and took over with his mouth.

"Let's see if Papi can make you scream like I do." Ryder smiled as her eyes nearly rolled back. She fought it, whimpering and raising her hips for David. "So fucking beautiful," Ryder murmured, kissing her before turning her face toward Tercero. "Want him?"

"Yes," she cried out as David sucked on her clit. Her stomach was tight, and her legs shook hard. Every fantasy with them was nothing compared to the real thing.

"You heard her." Ryder eyed Tercero, and Jane could hardly keep her eyes open with everything David was doing.

Why are they all so good at this? Isn't it supposed to be hard? She was sure it was normal for guys to be bad at pleasing girls.

Tercero said something to Ryder, and smiled at her as she whimpered, almost coming, but David grinned against her sensitive flesh and told her to wait.

"Don't deny her," Ryder growled, pulling her thigh as though he'd take care of her orgasm himself if David didn't continue.

David tugged her back into place. "Dragging it out has its own rewards."

Tercero chuckled and cupped her cheeks as she once again fell into ecstasy and sweet torture. "Shall we bring you to climax together, *tesoro mio*?"

She moaned loudly, only hushing when he kissed her. It was too much but not enough. She writhed, tightening her legs around David's head as he continued his teasing game.

Trembling, she touched Tercero's waist when she realized she wanted something more from him.

Not giving him any warning, she reached for his pants. He was still wearing joggers, so she slid right in and wrapped her hand around the smooth, semi-hard shaft, moaning even more when it immediately hardened and grew in size.

Tercero smiled in their kiss when she stilled, not entirely sure if he was okay with it.

Ryder massaged her, lifting her shirt to expose her breasts. “You want to see him, don’t you, babe?”

Jane gripped Tercero tighter as she hummed her yes. Yelping when David pushed his fingers inside her.

“Fuck, this is hotter than I expected,” Ryder said, reaching down to aid David. “Help her,” he instructed Tercero. “She wants to learn.”

Oh, yes, she wanted to learn, but she was terrified to try with Ryder for some reason. It was like he knew that, and he kissed her when Tercero leaned away.

“Tell me what you want, Sweet Jane?” Ryder had her right at the edge, right with David. “You want him in your mouth?”

Her body jerked. Yes, she wanted all of them in every way, but she wanted to please Tercero first.

“Yeah, you want him,” he murmured.

“All,” she managed to gasp. Her body was in knots, and she moaned when Tercero pushed his pants down to his thighs. *Was this really happening?* Gosh, she wanted David too. She peeked at him, and he grinned like he knew what she was thinking.

“Naughty ass girl.” Ryder chuckled, shoving his fingers in with David’s and sending her tumbling over the edge they’d had her dangling from.

“Oh, fuck,” she cried, trying to close her legs. She didn’t know if she wanted to stop them or beg them for more. “Oh god.”

“Nah, not God,” Ryder said, pulling his fingers free and quickly tugging her thigh to slide her closer to him. She was barely recovering as he lifted her onto all fours and thrusting

into her with a single stroke. “Ah, fuck, this is heaven.” He slid out and kissed her spine but held her up as he gathered her shirt to hold like reins at the same time his other hand tugged her hair to lift her head. “You pinch their thighs if you need to stop, angel.”

Her eyes widened, and she realized what Ryder was giving her.

He pushed back in, exhaling loudly. “Open your mouth. He’ll use his hand to help you. David will move next to him so you can switch between them. Don’t worry about making them come; they’re going to come all over your tits when I flip you over and fill you up.” He slid out and back in, and she surged forward at the smacking of their flesh. He steadied her, and Tercero murmured words in Italian that she didn’t understand, but she knew he was saying sweet things to encourage her. He knew from the night he’d given her an orgasm that she wanted to do this for him, and he was letting her satisfy him, at last.

Jane locked eyes with Tercero, whimpering as Ryder stayed in and only ground himself against her. It was as if he was making sure he didn’t scare her from her first attempt at giving his brother oral. “You’ll help?” she asked him, wetting her lips as he shuffled closer.

He gave himself a few strokes and nodded as he then gripped her head to hold her right. “We’ll feed every desire for you this morning. Now taste.”

Then he was muttering Italian curses as she took him as far as she could go, the only movement she needed was Ryder, and he didn’t let any of them down as he surged into her, giving her the perfect rhythm.

And when she gagged, and her eyes watered, they praised her and let her breathe and switch between Tercero and David.

It wasn’t long before they were all making noises that had probably woken Archer and Savaş. Ryder kept his promise, too.

He pulled out when David and Tercero said something to him, and he flipped her onto her back before resuming his beautiful assault. He locked eyes with her, a faint smile as she moaned at the sight of Tercero and David jacking off over her. Then he gave it to her hard. Each of her boys hurried to finish with her, and the moment Ryder swelled inside her and her own orgasm shattered her, David and Tercero grunted, shooting hot streams of come onto her chest and stomach. It sounded like they were hurting themselves, and she pulled both of them closer as she trembled around Ryder as he pulsed within her.

They got the hint, and they squeezed the last out onto her face as she licked the heads of their cocks.

“Holy fuck,” Ryder said, massaging her shaking legs, helping her recover.

David smoothed her hair back. “Beautiful, baby.”

She was so tired, but she smiled at him and purred when Tercero also caressed her hair.

“I’m gonna clean her up,” Ryder said. “Scram. If Kingston comes, stall him.”

David and Tercero looked like they wanted to argue with Ryder, but he didn’t let them. He scooped her up and carried her into his bathroom, kicking the door shut behind him.

“Fuckers think they’re going to kick me out of my own room?” He kissed her head as he went straight for the shower. “But I need to tell you something, so I’m gonna be a dick for a bit.”

She frowned but moaned as the warm water immediately hit her back.

“Luc is here, babe.” Ryder held her face as he used a cloth to wash her. “If you want, I’ll keep the others away so you can talk to him. I think you should talk to him.”

Jane could only blink.

Ryder sighed, kissing her forehead. “You need to show him you’re strong and brave. That you’re great and he doesn’t

have to protect you from himself. You're both afraid you have desires that are too twisted for the other, and that isn't so. You're a freak, baby. And my brother is torn between treating you like a queen and corrupting you. So, if you want, I'll take you to his room and leave you there. You probably have an hour before Kingston shows up."

Jane wrapped her arms around his neck and grinned like a lovesick fool as he lifted her up and pressed her against the shower wall. "I really love you."

"And I really fucking love you." He smirked, kissing her chin. "Even all dirty and thirsting for my brothers and David."

God, that sounded so bad. "I'm sorry I'm a hoe."

He laughed, kissing her cheek before he made his way to her neck. "You're kinda a lot of the cutest hoe ever, but as I've told you before—I'm keeping you anyways."

With trembling thighs and sweaty hands, Jane stared at the door in front of her and slowly reached for the knob.

Ryder gave her side a little squeeze and a kiss on the top of her head, then he left without saying a word. She didn't know how he could be so wonderful, how they could all be so willing to be with her, especially with him being the lead most of the time, but she loved it. Now, he was giving her what kept her awake at night; a chance to mend things with her king.

The door opened easily, and it was even easier to spot Luc on the all-white bed in the center of a completely black room. Everything was draped in black or gleaming with dark shine, but the bed, the huge bed was white, even the intricately carved wooden frame.

And Luc, he was sitting there with his laptop on his lap, his jaw tight, and his gray eyes narrowed at her. Dear Lord, his entire body was inked. She'd seen some of it before, but the beautiful designs were so mesmerizing. So fucking sexy.

"Hi," she said, letting herself inside.

“Go away, Jane,” he said, dismissing her and refocusing on whatever he was working on.

It felt like he’d punched a hole in her chest, and she teared up immediately as she watched him completely ignore her.

As she turned and twisted the knob to leave a snuffle slipped out, Luc’s sigh was unmistakable, and it steadied her because she knew he was disappointed in her reaction. He pushed her to be great before, to own who she was, and now she was acting like a sniveling child, even with the encouragement from Ryder to go after what she wanted.

Jane turned, not surprised to see he was still staring at his laptop and typing away. But instead of leaving, she locked the door and walked toward him.

He didn’t say anything as she reached him and moved his laptop off his lap. She held her breath, setting it aside as his eyes followed her every move. Then she tugged her shirt off and unfastened her bra so he could see the claims the others had left behind.

At first, Luc held her stare instead of dropping his gaze. But when she placed her hands on her hips, he got the hint she wanted him to look, and he did.

A series of emotions played across his normally empty expression. “And what am I supposed to think of this?” Again, those eyes were on hers. “That you’d foolishly let them mark your lovely skin, just to satisfy their desire to claim you in front of others.”

“It’s for me,” she said, angry and hot. “To remind me I have them because it felt like I’d lost them after ...”

His jaw clenched for just a moment. “I see. And what exactly do you wish to gain by showing me? I already heard the way they comfort you and how you beg for all of them. Together. Is this your attempt to make me feel upset that I’m not the fourth to play along in your fantasy? Trust me, I have no desire to bed a woman with my brothers and their friend.”

Her hands started to shake, and her weak legs almost buckled. Luc had wanted her to be molded to his desires, but

she was wondering now if that's why he left. He no longer wanted to mold her into something she probably wasn't, and he wanted her to be great, even if that was with Ryder and the others.

“Why are you here, Jane?”

She had to will herself to not mumble or stutter. “I want to show you something.”

“There is little more you can show without stripping further. Or have they written ignorant sonnets across your ass? And you think I will care.”

Again, her heart was attacked, but she fought the feeling and climbed onto the bed, straddling him carefully—afraid he'd toss her.

But Luc didn't move. He sat still as stone, watching her awkwardly trying to position herself on him. She didn't know what to do. The boys had given her a blowjob lesson, and she was starting to think that's what Ryder meant; to show Luc her freaky side, that she wasn't some fragile thing who was afraid of whatever Luc really was.

The question was who was she? What did she want with Luc? What was she willing to do to show him she was ready for whatever he was? And would she ever combine him with the others? Ryder was ready to give her the world, but she wasn't sure David and Tercero were going to be welcoming, especially David.

Luc stayed still as she reached out to touch his shoulder, and he faintly smirked when she jerked back. “I'm waiting for whatever you are trying to show me; I'd like to get back to work sometime soon.”

“Why are you so mean?” She had the urge to cover herself now. Luc was more experienced than Ryder, and probably more experienced than David and Tercero. They knew how to make her a satisfied fucking mess, and they seemed to like what she did, but maybe it wasn't enough to capture a guy like Luc.

“I have little reason to be nice to a girl I ended my pursuit with.” His stare was cold, painful to be on the receiving end of.

“Because you’re a jerk and a coward,” she blurted.

Now he chuckled. “I’ll take the immature accusation of being a jerk, but how on earth am I a coward?”

Her chest felt like fire was swirling within it, and she was entirely embarrassed for not knowing what she was getting at. Still, she tried to rip into him as she felt his strong thighs flex beneath her. “You said you’d prefer a beginner, like you’re some sex god, but then you got afraid of your brothers and David being better. Afraid your talk was for nothing.”

“Not at all, but if that gives you closure ... by all means, believe I am intimidated by my little brothers and your territorial stepbrother.” He was entirely unaffected by her, and he even glanced at his computer.

It hurt like hell. She didn’t know what to do or what she was trying to fully accomplish with him but seeing how disinterested he was in her instilled such a pathetic feeling. “Is it because I didn’t choose you alone?”

Slowly, his attention returned to her. “You sound like a silly girl.”

“That’s not an answer.” She hesitantly put her other hand on his opposite shoulder, and she sighed as his cool skin warmed under her touch.

“Of course, I have no desire to share a woman with other men, but no, that is not why I chose to end what I started. It was foolish of me to expect you could handle a mature relationship, and even more foolish of me to play along with this fantasy of yours to have all of us.”

“I can’t be unsure? And I thought you said you’d prefer my fumbings.”

“There is nothing to discuss further, Jane. We are over, if you even consider what we shared was worth calling a relationship.”

She'd had enough. Clearly, he wasn't interested, and he was insulting her choice to be in a polyamorous relationship. Or whatever she was supposed to call it. God, he had a point. She didn't even know what the proper term was for being with more than one guy.

"Fine." She glared at him but still couldn't help herself from studying the marks on his skin. They looked sort of like words, not the tacky tribal tattoos some guys get. But she didn't want to embarrass herself by asking what they said.

"Fine," he repeated, not moving her but not suddenly begging her to stay.

She sniffled, leaning back, but then thought to hell with it, and rushed forward to kiss his shoulder. One of the swirls around there looked like the moon and a star; they called to her.

Luc sighed like he was being relieved of pain. But he didn't wrap his arms around her. He didn't tell her to stop, either.

Feeling some confidence rise, she kissed another tattoo and pulled herself closer so that her breasts were brushing his chest every time. "I don't know why I can't just accept the obviousness that you don't want me, so you better tell me to leave or throw me off your bed if you want me to stop."

Luc said nothing.

She peeked at him, her heartwarming with how he watched her. He was going to be cold, but she would crack him.

Another kiss, this one on his chest, but she lifted her head and leaned forward, bringing her lips closer to his and waiting for the word or for him to truly throw her. He didn't.

She released a shaky breath and kissed the corner of his mouth, nuzzling him. "I'm going to show you what I wanted to, now. Last chance."

He stayed perfectly still, so she pressed a firmer kiss to the same spot. Just a promise between them. A tease of what she felt for him.

She moved to his chin instead of his lips, determined to tease him too. The faint twitch of his lips excited her, so she moved to his neck. He shivered a tiny bit as she kissed lower and lower. Every tattoo that called to her, it received a kiss or a timid lick. Until, finally, she was at his waistband. He was wearing gray sweatpants, and she totally saw the outline of his dick.

Nervously, she palmed him, internally giddy that he was allowing it, and incredibly turned on that his cock stirred beneath her shaking hand. When he was hard enough, she gripped him and slid down.

Oh, she couldn't believe he was letting her do this, and she couldn't believe she had her boyfriends downstairs, waiting for her—knowing she was in here with Luc.

Jane peeked up, her lips parting as he gave the faintest of thrusts into her palm. "I probably can't make you finish," she told him.

"Giving up already?"

She glowered at him and tugged his pants to free his erection. It stood, seeking her attention, and she did what she had with her boys, just in a more seductive way compared to the frenzy of wild sex they'd shared.

Her tongue darted out, and his hand came down. Finally, she reveled in the soft caress and licked again.

"Focus on the head," he murmured in a strained tone. "Use your hand to help you until you can go deep."

Jane got into a better position, but she wanted to show off, and she went down as far as she could without gagging. His hand tightened in her hair, and he breathed out as she repeated the action again and again.

"Suck the head harder," he said, but he pushed her head down again and held her there for a few seconds before pulling her up enough to do as he'd instructed. She'd seen David react positively to the tip being sucked harder, and it was clearly the right thing to do as Luc's hips jerked and he fisted her hair. "Hard and shorter bobs. Use your hands."

She moaned, making him do the same. It thrilled her, and she squeezed her legs together when her core tingled. The whole time, she obeyed his instructions, moaning whenever he seemed to lose a bit of control.

Luc growled. “You swallow every drop,” he said, shoving her head down as streams of his hot seed went down her throat.

She gagged but moaned as he let out a beast-like noise. There was panic at not being released and fear she’d puke on him, but she was so excited to have made him come. She’d cracked the cold Luc Godson, and he was now running his fingers through her hair as he gently lifted her off him.

He inspected her, a light sheen of sweat on his brow, and he wiped hers away. “Good girl.”

“Thought I was your queen,” she whispered, trying to catch her breath.

Luc reached toward the bedside table for the water bottle there, and he handed it to her. “I thought I told you we were over.”

Jane swallowed the water, glaring at him with as much anger as she could muster.

He smiled a real smile. “There’s my queen.” Then he leaned forward and kissed her. It was rough and short, but he cupped her cheek. “Smile for me.”

“After you’ve been a jerk?” Still, she smiled at his affection.

He chuckled darkly. “And you are a stubborn little queen who has a thing for jerks. I suggest you grow up a bit, as mistreatment is always unacceptable. Allow any man to be a complete ass to those around him, but never the woman he cherishes. Remember that, Jane. Now, give me the marker you have sticking out of your back pocket.”

She grinned, handing it to him as she once more crawled onto his lap.

“One day ...” Luc didn’t finish what he was saying and pushed her hair behind her ear before sliding finger down her neck, between her breasts, and to her stomach, touching every signature. “I will not join them any time soon, Jane.” He snatched up her wrist and turned it, kissing the inside skin. “Come to me when you desire to see me, and I will do the same. When I feel like it, I will attend your couplings with them, but I won’t promise to join in.”

“So, I’m your girlfriend?” She didn’t smile, but she watched a gorgeous one come and go on his lips.

“You’re my queen. Always have been.” He swiftly signed his name to the inside of her wrist, blew the ink and kissed it, nipping her flesh before releasing her.

That’s when she noticed his busted lip, swollen knuckles, and some bruising in various places beneath the tattoos. “What happened to you?” She immediately touched his lips. “Luc, who did this?”

“It’s none of your concern.” He gritted his teeth together. “You should get dressed and meet the others now. We are finished.”

“Finished?”

“With our intimacy today, yes.” He squeezed her ass. “I’ll call you when it is a good time to see each other.”

“You’re not going to tell me who did this to you?”

His eyes barely flicked to his laptop, and she was so ready to slap him.

“Fine, jerk. You want to tell me not to be treated badly, but you’re basically saying I’ll be your booty call when you’re not working.” She scrambled off his lap and snatched up her shirt, roughly yanking it over her head. “Here.” She picked up his laptop and considered throwing it until she spotted what screen he had open. “Hospitalized and in critical condition ...” She looked at Luc, her breathing hitching as she read the short article on a developing story: Sexual Assault and abduction suspects being held at the county jail were found clinging to

life in their cells. The investigation into the attackers was still underway.

“Go to my brother, Jane.” He took the laptop from her, closing it as he set it down beside him.

And she knew. She knew who was responsible for Dylan’s and Stephen’s attack. “You’re not going to get into trouble, are you?”

His eyes gleamed silver. “I’m quite capable of handling my affairs without you being involved.”

She touched his cheek and leaned down, kissing that corner of his mouth again. “A queen protects her king.”

He smiled, nodding. “You may use my bathroom to freshen up. They will not be happy to smell me on you.” When she opened her mouth to argue, he said, “It’s disrespectful until they accept me. Clean up and rinse your mouth several times. Go.” He pushed her away as he pulled his pants into place, and he once again reached for his laptop.

As she wobbled to the bath, she heard him chuckle.

“Start stretching daily, my queen. When they start taking you two at a time, you’ll need to be flexible.”

She looked over her shoulder, gaping at him.

He smirked, typing something. “And I enjoyed it, my queen. Even with your fumbblings.”

Instead of saying something nasty, she poked her tongue out at him.

“Manners, Jane.” That sly smirk was still in place, but he was again focusing on his computer.

“Forgot I was in the presence of a king.” She mock-bowed, grinning when he shook his head.

“Go. You won’t receive sweet words from me. You did well. Leave before they break my door. I do have work to attend today, and you don’t want to be late for school.” Luc waved his hand, dismissing her.

“Yes, my king.” She giggled stumbling as a tremble shook her legs, but she made it to the sink and did what was necessary to respect her boyfriends. All four of them.

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TWENTY-EIGHT

Ryder crossed his arms, leaning against the side of his car as he gazed across Helldonna's courtyard. It was to be a birthday surprise to be there at Jane's lunch hour, and he was annoyed with himself for not at least alerting Than to make sure she came out here to eat.

"Dad said she was greeted by the guys when he dropped her off," David said. "They probably took her out to celebrate."

"Very possibly," said Tercero. "They are her men, after all."

Ryder ignored them. Jane hadn't responded to any of their calls or texts this morning. It was more than her birthday. It was Friday—game day, and it would be his big return to playing on the team. He'd wanted her at school with him today, but Kingston wouldn't pull her from Helldonna. No, that wasn't true; Jane didn't want to transfer. And he had no idea why she was blowing all of them off.

A quick shuffling of students darting away from a group of tables gained his attention, and he smiled. There was his girl, strutting like the gorgeous goddess she was, completely carefree as she giggled and did a little twirl before hanging onto Than's and Damon's arms. She was surrounded by *wolves* and *princes of hell*, and she was right at home. They'd even crowned her with a girly tiara.

He didn't say anything, nor did Tercero or David, as they watched her laugh at something Sin said. She threw her head

back, cackling as the boys laughed with her.

“It’s like watching a movie,” came an unfamiliar voice. “The kind you can’t tell if it’s a rom-com or a horror movie.”

“Oh, hey,” David said, greeting Adam, his cousin, with a laugh. “My baby is not a horror movie.”

“She’s certainly surrounded by monsters, though,” Tercero murmured.

David grinned. “Baby tames her monsters, or we silence them.”

“Well, kings do,” Tercero agreed.

Ryder didn’t take his eyes off Jane. She was being silly and throwing punches at Sin, and Than was correcting her attack, which had Sin’s eyes widened when she went at him again. The whole group was hers, and she ruled them without realizing it.

Adam chuckled. “Yeah. It was rough the first day or so, but no one will fuck with her now. Whatever you did with her, I’m glad. I was afraid it would mess her up. But she’s staring down those who still whisper, or she’s pulling out her guns.” He nodded toward the guys with Jane.

She jumped onto Sin’s back, roaring in his ear as she slipped in a rear-naked chokehold. The guys cheered her on.

“She’s strong,” David told Adam.

She was strong. And she was growing stronger without them babying her.

Ryder sighed, holding out the bag with a greasy burger and fries to Adam. “Take this to her for me.”

David stared at him. “What’s wrong?”

Tercero was the one to answer. “This is her space without us, where she’s learning to be free.”

Ryder passed the food off, smiling at Jane as she laughed. “Just tell her a little bird told you she likes cheap burgers and fries.” He gestured for David to hand over the Dr Pepper, and

for Tercero to hand over the shake. “Let’s go before she sees us.”

“We still don’t know why she’s ignoring our calls,” David said, though he gave the drink to Adam.

“We’ll find out tonight,” he said, already walking around his car.

“Luc was here this morning,” Adam said, halting Ryder before he got in. “He gave her a bracelet that had a moon and star. Or something. He, uh, just kissed the inside of her wrist and put it on before leaving. Girls have been talking about it all day.”

David patted Adam’s shoulder. “As long as he made her happy, it’s fine.”

Ryder had to take a breath, but he nodded along; David was right. Sometimes he needed a reminder that his baby girl was more than his, and his asshole brother knew how to get ahead of them. His brother knew how to make her embrace she was a queen.

“It simply means we give her a better surprise, brother,” Tercero said, reaching for the lever to get into the back seat. He smirked at him before sitting. “The question is do we give her a surprise all together? Or do we fight for who gets her first and last?”

Ryder shoved him onto the seat. “Fucker, I’d get her first and last.”

David shook his head, bidding Adam farewell, then got inside the car. “Let’s go. I don’t think I’ll be able to leave for our game if I see her now.”

“Pussy.” Ryder chuckled as David punched his shoulder.

“You’re fucking soft for her, too.” David glanced at Tercero. “Are you going to try to pick her up since we won’t be able to?”

Tercero shrugged. “She didn’t call. I’ll text her boys and see what’s up. If she wants space, I’ll give it. If she’s hurt that

we didn't show up—even though we did—I'll make sure she's happy.”

Ryder grunted, driving as inconspicuous as possible.

“Don't be jealous, brother.” Tercero started texting someone. “It's you two she feels strongest when I touch her.”

He knew that, and he reveled in it that his touch was magic for her. “Hopefully, Kingston keeps your fucking stepmom away.”

David sighed, nodding. “I'm surprised he's staying with her, but fuck, I can't imagine ending things with Jane. He must really love her.”

“Her mom needs therapy,” Ryder said. “No excuse for being jealous of your own daughter.”

“She'll get therapy.” David was good; he believed in his words, but Ryder knew he'd never forgive the woman for what she'd done.

“Ah,” Tercero said, “she dropped her phone in the toilet last night.”

“The phone is waterproof,” Ryder said.

He chuckled. “Yes, but she washed it in the sink with soap and freaked out, turning it off. It didn't turn on again. She asked Damon for his phone to call us this morning, then Luc came. They told her we'd come if we could. I suppose I have no excuse for not seeing her, so I'll try to meet her when she gets out.”

He knew he was scowling, but he nodded. They needed to show they trusted Tercero with her again, and him escorting her to tonight's game was the best way. “Stop and buy her flowers from me.”

“A Dr Pepper from me,” David added. “And some of those gummy-bears.” He grinned at Ryder. “She tastes like the red ones.”

“I've never had them,” Ryder said, not sure if he was annoyed or not that David had some cute shit with her that he didn't understand.

“You have.” Tercero laughed quietly. “You’ve tasted Jane, so you’ve tasted them. Definitely the red gummy-bear. Raspberry, I think.”

“I don’t want to get hard at the thought of a damn red bear.” Ryder shook his head. “She’s Sweet Jane, not a bear.”

David laughed, turning to show Tercero something. “They sell a big one at that old candy store in town. I’ll call and have one waiting.”

“She’s not going to understand why you’re giving her a big bear,” Ryder said.

“It’s candy.” David was already calling. “She should know what she does to us.”

Ryder’s phone rang through his car system and he growled, answering, “What the fuck do you want?”

Luc wasn’t fazed. “Is Tercero taking her to the game?”

“Yes,” Ryder said sharply. “Stay away. She’s ours today.”

“Are you having lunch with her?”

Ryder debated telling the truth, but in the end, he did. “No, she looked too happy with them.”

“Yes, she did.” Luc sounded somewhat amused.

“You fucking stalker,” Ryder snapped. “Where the fuck were you?”

“In the parking lot,” Luc drawled. “You drove past me. You should know, she immediately looked for you when the cousin delivered your childish gifts.”

“Fuck you,” he spat. “I don’t need to impress her with expensive shit.”

“I know,” Luc said quietly. “Is she coming to our home tonight?”

“Wouldn’t you like to know.” Ryder laughed and ended the call.

David shook his head. “You taunt him too much. He’s going to make you pay one day.”

“He’ll find out what we do,” was all he said as his mind filled with the ideas he’d fantasized about for years. “Damn, my girl is older than me. I’m going to have a semi for the whole game.”

“That’s gonna hurt,” David said, ending his call. “The bear is waiting for you.”

Tercero nodded, staying quiet.

Ryder watched him in the mirror, staring off at nothing. “Take her slow,” he told him. Tercero slowly slid his eyes over to meet Ryder’s, but he didn’t say anything. “Make it yours with her, but don’t break her like I do.”

David was tense, but he stayed quiet. They each got alone time with her, and Tercero was being honorable by not taking her.

“She’s your girlfriend, too,” Ryder said, focusing on driving. “I’ll kill you for it later.”

Tercero chuckled. “Of course, big brother.”

David’s fist balled, but he breathed out. “No coming in her. I don’t. Only Ryder.”

Ryder flicked his eyes back to Tercero. “We don’t need to risk getting her pregnant more than what I do.”

“Then should you also not come inside her?” Tercero challenged.

“I shouldn’t,” he agreed. “But she wants me to.”

“She wants all of us to,” David murmured.

Tercero looked away. “We’ll wait, then. When the time is right.”

David nodded. “When we agree this is what we want forever.”

They stayed silent after that, no doubt all thinking about their future with Jane. Now that she was legal, anything was possible. He didn’t know if things would stay this way—with them as her four boyfriends—or if Jane would decide she

could only be with one of them, but he knew she was his. They knew it too. He was going to marry her someday.

Jane frowned, staring at the plastic bag full of rice and her phone. It was her fault for not calling them, yes, but she was certain they'd show up for lunch, or after school. But nothing. Well, not nothing. The bag of food and drink had Ryder, David, and Tercero written all over it, but they'd not stayed.

“Do you want to use my phone?” Wendy asked her. She'd come over with the sweetest gift, a special print edition of *Peter and Wendy*.

“No.” Jane smiled sadly. “I think they're mad about Luc. And they probably found out he showed up.” She toyed with the moon and star charms. She loved his gift, and she was totally surprised her king had taken time from work to come to see her at school. He'd been so calm with all the whispers and stares, and he'd made her teacher melt enough for him to interrupt the class. It was like a dream, and she was happy as hell that he'd kissed her on the corner of the mouth and waited for her to smile before his lips twitched, teasing her with a smirk before he left.

“I thought Ryder was the one to send you to Luc,” Wendy said. “I mean, it's weird, but they kinda prepared you for Luc, if you think about it.”

“I know.” She sighed, tossing her phone aside. Wendy was going to have to leave for a shift, and she didn't want to spend the time pouting about her boys. “Tell me about this guy at work.”

Wendy's face reddened. “It's nothing. He just bugs me.”

“But you said it's like he goes out of his way to bug you.” Jane grinned widely. “That means—”

“He's not Ryder,” Wendy said quickly. “Ryder is a jerk for a reason. You just didn't know it.”

“And this guy isn't?”

“He’s nice to the other girls,” she muttered. “I don’t want to talk about him. It’s your day. Let’s eat our cupcakes because I have to go soon.”

Half an hour later, Jane walked Wendy out. Sylvia was leaving too, it seemed.

“You sure you don’t want me to drop you off at their house?” Sylvia asked, clutching her handbag as she prepared to take the three steps down the porch.

“I’m sure,” Jane said.

Wendy scowled at her. “Nothing good is going to come with you being annoyed with them. Your phone broke, and they were grumpy at school. It’s a big day for Ryder. He probably kept the others from coming to see you if he couldn’t.”

She could totally see Ryder doing that, but it still hurt that not one of them had snuck off to see her.

“You know Kingston offered to transfer you back,” Wendy reminded. “You’re the one who turned him down. They’re going to be confused about that, and they might not know how to approach you.”

“Stop being wise.”

Sylvia patted both of their cheeks. “I am off. Lock the door.”

Wendy pulled her into a hug, whispering in her ear. “If you’re not tied up tonight, call me. We’ll drive to Mexico.”

Jane laughed. “You’re totally getting a trip to Mexico one day.”

Wendy winked, rushing out the door. “I’m gonna be late! Bye, beautiful.”

“Love you,” she shouted after her.

There was a muffled reply as Wendy got into her car, and Jane sighed, leaning against the doorframe.

“She said beyond the stars.”

Jane yelped, almost slamming the door as Tercero pushed off the wall he'd been leaning against. Neither Sylvia nor Wendy had seen him. Or they had and simply didn't say anything.

He held up a bouquet of calla lilies. “From Ryder.” Then he lifted a gift bag filled with a Dr Pepper sticking out and what looked like a book. “From David ... Happy Birthday, Jane.”

She held his dark stare for a few seconds before she told him, “My phone broke.”

“I know.” A faint smile touched his lips. “We came by for lunch, but Ryder decided we should respect your space with the others, so we left.”

“Oh.” She dropped her eyes to the flowers. She loved calla lilies. These were held together by a dull gold thread with a pendant of black angel wings.

“You know,” he said softly, also admiring the flowers, “these symbolize innocence and purity—also rebirth and resurrection.” He smiled faintly and touched the wings. “They are often used for funerals, but many use them for weddings. An end and beginning—much how I view my brother and you together.”

Jane smiled, taking them from him. “I remember, now. Ryder gave me one at my dad's funeral. I don't know how I forgot.”

Tercero reached up, caressing her cheek, letting her feel Ryder's tingles. “Perhaps because my brother wanted you to focus on living.”

She closed her eyes, suddenly seeing a five-year-old Ryder standing on her porch as she'd sat staring across her driveway, waiting for everything to change—for her to wake up from her nightmare and that her dad would pull into the driveway. She'd run out to greet him with a big smile and hug, and he'd

tell her she was his favorite sight. It had been April Fools' Day when the cops had come with the terrible news, after all.

It hadn't happened, though. It hadn't been a cruel joke. Her dad had died on April Fools' Day. He was gone.

And Ryder was there.

He'd talked to her. He'd told her he was sorry. She didn't know why he'd been sorry, and she'd ignored him when he put a pretty flower on her lap. David had given her a blue one at the funeral, and she'd thrown it into the grave as they'd lowered her father. But Ryder had given her a pretty white one. So pretty.

It was only then that she met his eyes and got lost in the green flames there. That's when he reminded her she was still alive. He'd said she needed to live.

Now, she remembered she'd been angry. Being alive was the whole problem. She didn't want it if her dad was gone. She'd thrown the flower at Ryder, furious and hurt that he wanted her to live when her daddy was dead.

Jane's chin wobbled as she saw the anguish on Ryder's little face. He'd wanted to comfort her, and she wouldn't let him.

Tingles enveloped her cheeks as a sweet kiss was pressed to her lips. Tercero nuzzled her, the same way Ryder did, and he murmured, "I believe this is my brother's attempt to connect you with your father today. There is more after death, but you must live. Live and love and be loved—just as your father wished for you."

She nodded, holding his hands in place as Ryder's face came into view. This time, he was *her* Ryder. He was so beautiful, and he was showing her there was still beauty in death—still life. To be careful with it but to also live and love each moment to the fullest.

Tercero kissed her once more, but he let go just as the heat returned to his touch. "David had hoped to let you experience the sweetness you gift us with." He chuckled, holding out a giant red gummy bear candy.

Jane chuckled, inspecting the bear. “So, you gift me with candy?”

“Raspberries, *cara*.” His thumb slid over her lip. “Our Sweet Jane.”

Her body heated, and she swayed toward him, grinning when he held her by the neck.

“He sent this as well.” Tercero withdrew a leather photo album.

She teared up, touching the words on the first page: *David and his Jane*. It was filled with so many pictures of the two of them together from childhood until now.

He’d written little notes on a few with just her—pictures he’d taken in secret. *Your hair is red in the sun. Like you’re blushing for it, just like you do for me.*

Another was of her vacuuming the living area: *You bite your pretty lips whenever you’re cleaning or cooking, and I want to kiss you until you’re gasping my name.*

Jane chuckled, taking in one of her asleep on the sofa. She was smiling in her sleep. *So beautiful, my love.*

The last picture was her dad, and he was pointing at David, Ryder, Tercero, and Luc while wearing a stern look on his face. The boys were dirty and scuffed up. *He told us not to fight over you. We tried to argue that we weren’t, but your dad knew what we were up to when he caught us yelling and wrestling. We were fighting over who got to be your best friend after you told me I was your bestest. You had no idea I’d been fighting to be your bestest already. But your dad knew. He pulled me aside and said, “The bestest doesn’t think of himself, and he makes sure her loves are considered before his own happiness—that his girl is always protected, even if she doesn’t know it.” I will always try to honor you both by being my bestest for you. I love you, baby.*

Happy Eighteenth birthday, my beautiful girl, my kitten, my hazel-eyed goddess. My Jane.

Your David, beyond forever.

She sniffed, touching David's words and then her dad's face.

Tercero caressed her cheek, warming her skin. "He has so much to show you of his *bestest*. You're the reason he wants to be the best. It's always been for you." When she nodded, holding the album to her chest, he added, "I have a gift for you as well."

"You didn't have to get me anything." She was curious as hell what he'd get, though. She loved Ryder kept things simple and beautiful, and he'd even given her the gift of being herself without him. Which was so strange because she felt so connected to Ryder, like they were one. And she knew David liked to be sweet and dirty. A cute gummy bear to show her how she tastes and a photo album showing her how much he'd loved her through the years. It was the perfect gift.

Tercero let her go and pulled something out of his pocket. Jane gasped as he held out a silver locket in the shape of the moon, half dark gray, the other glowing as brightly as it could. "My brother's beloved moon," he murmured, opening the locket to reveal a tiny but beautiful sketched image of her dancing in front of her father, two stars twinkling behind him. "Glowing in darkness like treasure—dancing for all, but she always has a special twirl for the second star to the right."

Her eyes stung as she tried to absorb the details of the drawing. "Neverland."

"As Ryder says, there he waits in the stars. They all wait. So dance for them—live—for it is their favorite sight."

She sobbed, throwing her arms around his neck. He hoisted her up, and somehow the bag, before carrying her into the house.

He cooed words in Italian as he sat with her. She didn't ask what he was saying because it seemed more touching to not know, only that he and her boys had made sure they gave her

the very thing she'd wanted without even asking; her father and them at her side.

Tercero rocked her as tingles kissed her cheeks, following the paths of her tears. And heat, so much heat, and comfort blanketed her.

Jane didn't hold anything back. She let Tercero watch her fall apart, and yet, he only held her—waiting for her to rise on her own.

Lifting her head from his shoulder, she sniffed. "Thank you, Tercero."

"You're welcome." He studied her face, smiling faintly at her as he lifted the necklace his locket was attached to. It was long, and it hung between her breasts. "A reminder for the dark days when you forget he is already in your heart."

She waited for him to clasp it, then she grabbed his face, kissing him with all the passion she had for him. He'd been so patient with her, and she wanted to give herself to him.

He kissed her back, and it only made her hungrier for more. But as she clawed at his shirt and pants, he restrained her. "Not today."

Jane stilled, looking up at him. "You don't want me?"

"Of course I do." His smile came and went as he pressed his palm against her stomach, right over his name. "I want us to know each other more, though. I want you to remember so many smiles and kisses between us when I do take you. I want it to be completely different from my previous experiences. And, as David said, some things are better when dragged out." He kissed her once more. "My brother and David may devour you, and Luc may dazzle you with things we cannot, but I see us more of a long-awaited dessert."

"You just made me so hungry," she said.

"Then I shall feed you before the big game. I would fail as boyfriend number three if I let you become one of the ravenous." He untangled the thread from her flowers and tied the angel wings pendant around her neck. It was much shorter. "His angel." He touched the album. "His Jane." He ran a

finger of the bracelet on her wrist. “His queen.” Now he smiled at her. “And my *tesoro*.”

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TWENTY-NINE

Jane jumped on the bleachers she had been sitting on, screaming at the top of her lungs, “That’s my baby,” as David spiked the football in the endzone. He and Ryder made a killer team. She’d nearly broken her neck as she jumped up and down like a madwoman after Ryder brutally tackled the opposing team’s quarterback, causing a fumble that David recovered. Her beautiful blue-eyed boy then ran the ball, knocking those trying to tackle him to the ground.

“Woo,” she cheered as David and Ryder bumped helmets. “Spank his ass, babe!”

Tercero chuckled, holding her steady so she wouldn’t fall. It was hard to keep her balance whenever Ryder looked her way, which was her current situation.

Her lips tingled now and every time she spied him smiling at her. That gorgeous smile appeared and then his hand flew toward David’s beautiful ass.

Jane cupped her mouth, hollering, “I love you!”

David and Ryder jogged to the sidelines with their team, and Jane felt her face flame as much of the stadium crowd darted their gazes between Jane and the two sexy football stars who waved at her.

“Jane,” Tercero said, tugging her down, “perhaps we should head down to the field before the game ends.”

She bit her lip, nervous about being separated from him.

Tercero leaned down, kissing her sweetly. “I will be with you.”

“Okay.” She smiled, still nervous.

He chuckled, grabbing her hand. “I’m not the only one watching you, *cara*.”

It was then she realized Principal Prince stood at the top of the stairs, his aqua-colored eyes trained on her. He didn’t hide his smile when she caught him. “He’s watching me?”

Tercero pressed a hand on her back, guiding her away from her former principal. “Ryder might’ve made it clear that, should anything happen to you, the world just might end for us all.”

She gave Tercero a coy smile. “And here I thought you were spending the evening with me because you liked my ass.”

That sexy smile of his appeared. “I like more than your lovely ass, Jane. My brother is not why I desire to spend as much time as possible with you.”

Her face heated, and she realized she and Tercero hadn’t really discovered the depth of their feelings for each other. Having him say he liked her had her feeling like a silly girl.

“You should know—it’s quite a bit more than *like*,” he murmured, and her damn heart stuttered.

The game was over and won, and because she and Tercero weren’t the only ones who’d planned to rush the field once the game was over—as it seemed the entire school had been excited as hell to have Ryder on the team again—Jane had opted to watch from the gate as her boys were celebrated at the center of a mob of screaming teenagers.

Ryder and David welcomed the celebration, but they had shoved through the bodies, scanning the stadium until they locked eyes with her. They would blow everyone off to come

over to her, but they were the stars tonight. They deserved to bask in their victory, and if they came to her, it would turn into them celebrating her for being born. Or, as far as the school was concerned, it would become fuel for the rumors about their relationship.

So, to keep the celebration centered on their victory, she'd motioned for them to stay and made it appear she couldn't hold going to the restroom.

Well, the restroom is where she tried to go hide, suddenly emotional her boys weren't just hers to have. She had to share them with their team, with *their* school. Maybe Ryder didn't care, but she wanted him to be included as much as David was. He belonged with his teammates just as much.

It might've been a little easier to say to hell with it, but she couldn't. Not when she'd abandoned her boys to become her own person. She'd have to suck up her emotions and return the gesture by letting them be themselves without her.

That didn't mean it didn't hurt or that she could fully hide her sadness.

But then Tercero was there. He'd followed her into the bathroom when she began to cry, and he'd given her what she needed—a kiss that reminded her of each of them.

Now, he was giving her just himself—sexy looks, a sweet caress just as she felt alone, and kisses that left her hungry yet satisfied.

“Don't hesitate around them,” he murmured, kissing her temple as players began emerging from the locker room. “They want their Jane ... all the time. No matter who is watching. You don't have to worry about what others think, and you most definitely don't have to share us with anyone else.”

She sighed, leaning against him. “I do, though. I left.”

“You left because you belong to more than us.” He squeezed her side gently. “We share, *tesoro*. Not you. We are yours to keep, and we insist you be selfish—even David.”

Before she could reply to his perfect declaration, a freshly showered David Leodegrance walked out of the locker room. His hair was still wet as he ran a hand through it, slicking it back as he licked his lips. *Hot damn.*

Tercero kissed her head. "I'll see you later."

"You don't have to go," she said, darting her eyes between him and David.

He stepped backward, that sexy, faint smile in place. "I promise I'll see you again tonight." He gave David a small nod then walked away.

For a few seconds, she stared after him, but as always, David's presence called to her, and she wanted nothing more than to have his arms wrapped around her. So, she turned, grinning at him before rushing forward.

"There's my baby," he said, lifting her up as soon as she reached him. He didn't hesitate to press a long kiss to her lips, and he didn't hold back when several teammates passed them, howling and cheering for him. "Happy birthday, Jane," he said, chuckling as she gave him a stupid, dreamy grin.

"Hi."

He laughed again before giving her a shorter kiss and a squeeze on her ass. "Hope you realize this pretty ass is going to be painted pink by this night's ends."

"You guys are not spanking me." She laughed when a separate pair of hands grabbed her waist and a tingling kiss was pressed against the side of her neck.

"Babe, don't lie to yourself—you've been fantasizing about our hands on your gorgeous ass all day." Ryder kissed her neck again as David slipped in another kiss. "Stop stealing my kisses," he growled, pulling her away.

David let her go with a smile. "Child."

"Jane doesn't think I'm a child." Ryder smirked down at her as she became completely ensnared by his beauty. "Look at you," he mused, "all dazed just from looking at me."

“She’s still stunned by me,” David quipped, patting her ass. “I’m going to grab our stuff. Meet you outside.”

Ryder never took his eyes off her as he smacked David’s hand off her ass. “Leave, bitch. It’s Jane and Ryder naughty time.”

She couldn’t help but giggle at him as he lifted her up. He didn’t attack her lips, and she beamed even more when David passed, giving her a wink.

“You like your presents, angel?” Ryder situated his hold on her, his forearm under her ass as his free hand came up to cradle the back of her neck.

“I loved them.” Jane suddenly screeched as a lightning-hot smack shot through her ass.

“Happy birthday, gorgeous,” Archer yelled as Ryder quickly tossed her to one of the other players and took off after his brother who thought he was hysterical.

“Well, hey there, baby doll.” The player holding her gave her a little squeeze.

Jane gasped, staring up at a dark pair of brown eyes. He wasn’t as tall as Ryder or David, but he had that same undercurrent of danger all her boys possessed. “Oh, um ...” She didn’t know what to say as he watched her, his strong arms flexing as he rearranged his hold since Ryder had literally tossed her, and his hands were cupping her ass. “I, uh —” she stammered, trying to think of his name. He was the new player, she knew, but she’d never spoken to him before.

With a smirk, he said, “I’m Jason.”

“Jane,” she whispered, unable to look away from his gaze.

His grin turned wicked as he looked behind her. “I hear ‘happy birthday’ is in order.” He gave a swift jerk of his head, moving the dark hair covering his eyes. “Happy birthday.”

“Thank you.” She kept staring; he seemed so familiar. In a good way.

“You’re welcome.” He gave her a sinful smile. “I was wondering if I could have your nu—”

“Jason,” David interrupted, his tone threatening, just like it had been when she started seeing Ryder.

She finally tore her gaze from Jason’s.

“David,” Jason said in the same dark tone.

Her blue-eyed boy’s gaze fell on her. “You okay?”

Nodding, Jane patted Jason’s firm chest—*oh*—as a gesture to lower her. “He caught me.” She glanced over as Ryder came into view, carrying Archer over his shoulder. His head lolled roughly, and it appeared he was knocked out.

“What the fuck, Winters?” Ryder hollered, dropping Archer onto the floor. “Did I say you could hold my girl?”

Jane rolled her eyes as Jason righted her. “Don’t yell at him—you threw me to him like a sack of potatoes.”

David shot a glare at Ryder. “Please stop tempting fuckers that make her all dreamy-eyed.”

Jane smacked his chest as he chuckled, hugging her and walking her toward the exit. “I did not get dreamy-eyed.” She peeked over at Jason as Ryder kept glaring. “Thank you, Jason ... for catching me.”

He winked. “Anytime, Janie.”

Ryder shoved his chest, though it wasn’t entirely mean. “It’s Jane, dumb fuck. And none of this ‘anytime’ bullshit. Not ever, is more like it.”

“Did you say forever?” Jason teased.

Again, Ryder shoved him—harder this time. “Keep it up, fucker.”

Jason held his hands up in surrender. “Hey, I was just taking care of her for you.”

“Oh, I know you’re just dying to ‘take care’ of my girl.” Ryder’s muscles tensed as he crowded Jason.

David kept his grip on Jane when she started to turn around—she didn’t want Ryder fighting with a guy just for

catching her so she didn't bust her ass. "Relax, baby." David checked things out though.

"But Jason did nothing wrong," she said with a pout. "It's not like he was hitting on me."

David shook his head, a teasing smile on his perfect lips. "Oh, my love, you really don't see things clearly, do you?"

Archer stumbled forward, rubbing his jaw as he practically fell into Savaş' arms. "She's blind," he mumbled. "Brother, carry me."

Savaş sighed, lifting his brother over his shoulder as he held the door open for David and Jane. The big guy grinned at her. "It did take you years to realize Ryder was in love with you."

"And David," Archer mumbled. "And Tercero and Luc."

"Okay." She always felt embarrassed when they brought it up. "What has that got to do with the new guy?"

"He was trying to get your number, and it wasn't going to be for emergency purposes." David kissed her head. "Sometimes my baby is so innocent."

"Jason wants to fu—" Archer clamped his mouth shut when Ryder stomped over.

"Motherfucker," Ryder grumbled, snatching her hand though he let David keep her under his arm. "Told you he was gonna make a move. 'A thing for blondes', my ass."

Jane's heart hammered. "He didn't make a move. He caught me so I wouldn't fall."

David chuckled at Ryder. "Maybe he just hasn't found the right blonde."

Ryder grunted as the boys laughed. "Shut the fuck up, all of you."

"You shouldn't have declared her 'forbidden fruit'," came Gareth, jogging forward. "Happy birthday, darling."

Gawain was next to join them as they headed toward the parking lot where students were still celebrating, waiting to

find out where the parties were gonna be. He seemed more disgusted than the others, his face softening, almost brotherly as he wished her happy birthday too.

Archer kept laughing. “Jason has a death wish.”

“So do you, bitch.” Ryder only lost the rage when she squeezed his hand.

“Why are you so uptight?” Jane asked him.

David kissed her head again as he whispered in her ear. “He panics when someone touches you, baby. We all do.”

Now she understood. Her protective boys.

“Archer was just being himself,” she told Ryder. “And Jason only caught me because you lost your cool and threw me at him.”

“He was trying to get your number, babe,” he responded dryly. “Now you’ve got him thinking you’re into him because you were swoony and shit.”

The others laughed, and her face heated with embarrassment. She was such a stupid girl ruled by hormones. *Jason is hot.*

“Not even gonna deny it,” Ryder grumbled. “You’re getting chained to my bed.”

“She is not,” David said, laughing. “Calm down.”

“He just felt familiar.” Jane quickly hugged Ryder’s arm. “Stop being so possessive.”

“How can I not be?” He raised his free arm in frustration. “Damn, babe. You’re already dating two of my brothers and David. I’m husband, and I’m putting my foot down. No more boyfriends.”

“How about just one more—it counts less because I’m your brother,” Archer teased before getting dropped onto the ground. “Ow.”

“No more,” Ryder repeated, his fiery gaze narrowed on her. “I love you. I share you with them because it doesn’t feel like sharing, but I don’t feel that way about everyone.”

David sighed, lifting his arm off her and lightly pushing her toward Ryder.

“What the fuck, Papi?” Ryder snapped. “You better get your ass back over here with her. It’s her birthday, and she gets us both.”

“Sin,” Ryder said, throwing his *friend* a terrifying glare, “what the fuck is this I hear about you calling my girl *ugly*?”

Jane giggled as Sin’s normally tanned face paled. She didn’t mean to throw Sin under Ryder’s radar, but she was high on cake and soda—no one was safe.

“Do you want me to call her sexy?” Sin took a step back as Ryder’s gaze narrowed.

David had been walking past Sin, but he halted, shifting his gaze between Sin, Ryder, and Jane ... before focusing on Sin. “You call Jane ugly?”

Sin held up his hands in surrender. “She knew it was meant to make her smile.”

Ryder relaxed, apparently content with David taking over whatever punishment they wanted to dish out to Sin.

Jane grinned as Sin made up apologies while also complimenting her ass, which had the guys howling and David advancing on him.

“Beat his ass, Papi,” Ryder hollered, holding her hand.

They were sitting on a set of chaise lounges in his backyard. It was the perfect setup with the firepit roaring and the mid-sized group of friends from both schools hanging out to celebrate wins and her birthday. They kept it casual, with Savaş heading up the grill for all the guys, but still ordered takeout and fried shrimp from her favorite restaurant, then topped it off with a chocolate cake with raspberry icing. The cake had been David’s idea, and he was the one who licked it off her lips.

Of course, Ryder pouted, frustrated he didn't understand David's comparison to raspberries. So, she had wiped some icing over his lips and straddled him in front of everyone before kissing him until the icing was smeared over her lips, to which he sucked them clean. He'd been nibbling and sucking her skin ever since, claiming she tasted sweeter.

"Babe, want to see if we can fuck without anyone noticing?" Ryder asked, snatching a blanket from someone's chair and draping it over her body. His green eyes sparkled with mischief as he bundled her up then lifted her, settling her onto his lap. "I'll press in real deep, only the tiniest movements. They'll only know if you scream."

She grinned, pecking his lips. "Cute boy."

"Is this our kinky moment?" He smirked, sliding a hand under the blanket as Sin continued trying to make up excuses for calling her ugly. "Miss Mortaime, what are you doing with young Mr. Godson's hand under your blanket?"

Her stomach hurt as she laughed, holding his hand still because he was trying to get into her pants. "I'm pretty sure you, young man, are trying to seduce my old ass."

"Fuck, yeah, I am. It's a sexy ass—not old at all." He leaned closer, nuzzling her. "Too bad I'm so young—I'd ask you to be Mrs. Godson."

He had her smiling so badly it hurt.

"That is too bad," she whispered, closing her eyes as he kissed her neck. He'd been silly all night about her being older than him and that she was breaking the law with every kiss she gave him. After a while of his teasing, she'd given up and decided to play along. "I can't be a wife from prison, can I?"

Ryder shook his head. "What countries let eighteen-year-old goddesses marry underage bad boys?"

"I think that place only exists in fairy tales," she said with a smile.

"*Hm.*" He tugged her closer, kissing her jaw.

"I don't think we have to worry, though," she told him.

“Why’s that?”

“You won’t be underage for much longer.”

“That’s true.” He nibbled her earlobe then sighed. “Suppose I better see that you get the rest of your presents, then.”

“More?”

“*Mhm.*” Ryder pressed a firm kiss on her lips before standing, somehow effortlessly with her in his arms.

“I can walk.”

He steadied her on her feet and tugged her hand. “Come on.”

Jane realized almost everyone, including David and Tercero, were missing as Ryder led her through the house, toward the front door. “Where are we going?”

“You’ll see.” He opened the door but halted her from seeing what the crowd was. “I didn’t buy it, but I’m gonna be the one who teaches you.” Now, he pulled her forward, and she gasped at the sight of a gold and black 67’ Camaro. Luc was opening the driver’s side door as Kingston climbed out of the passenger side.

“Happy birthday, Sweet Jane.” Ryder kissed her head and wiped her tears. “It’s the same one your dad sold a month before ...”

She whined, nodding because she knew he meant before her dad died. She used to think his car was the coolest thing in the world, and she’d been sad that he was selling it.

Luc strolled forward, holding out a key with a half-moon keychain attached. “Your father’s memories still live in this car, as they do inside you, my queen. Happy birthday.”

Ryder kissed her temple as she accepted the key. “Don’t be afraid to drive. Your dad wanted this. He’ll be with you every time you get behind the wheel.”

“He’s right,” Kingston said, holding out what looked like a snow globe with a suction cup on the bottom. “Your father

hated the idea of parting with this car, but money was tight, so he sacrificed it so your mother could go to school.” Jane darted her eyes over to see her mom standing at the edge of the driveway, her hands covering her mouth as tears streamed down her face. “She knew Eric wanted to pass this car down to you on your eighteenth birthday, and when Ryder proposed getting you a car, she asked Luc and I to help search for your father’s. We all chipped in, even if this one”—he gestured to Luc—“could pay for it with his lunch money.”

Luc leaned forward, kissing the corner of her mouth where he whispered, “Time to be great, Jane.” Then he moved aside for Kingston.

Kingston put the snow globe in her hands, kissing her head as she cried at the image of her dad holding her on his lap as she acted like she was driving. “Happy birthday, our darling flame.” When she cried, he turned it so she could see there was another picture on the other side, one of her mom laughing as she and Jane washed the car, bubbles floating all around because Jane had left the hose in the bucket for too long. “She doesn’t expect you to forgive her,” Kingston murmured. “But she still wanted to give you the best today.”

Jane felt numb as she locked eyes with her mother, her mother whom she had begun to believe hated her guts for as long as she could remember. She’d done this, given her the last bit of her father that she would ever have. “I don’t understand ...”

David came to her free side, his warm hand taking its place on the back of her neck. “She knows it doesn’t change the past or anything between us, but she accepts that I’m one of your boyfriends, and she fully understands she’ll see us together if you allow her to be in your life.”

Dropping her gaze back to the snow globe, her heart warmed at the sight of her mother’s happy face. It was unlike any smile she’d seen on her mom’s face since, and it was for her and her dad.

“There’s nothing quite like a first love,” Kingston said softly. “I love Sarah, and she loves me, but it’ll be our first

love we cherish until the end of time. You are a symbol of your parent's love, just as David is the symbol of mine with his mother.

“Sarah knows it's her fault that she couldn't accept your father still loved her just as much as he had before you. She knows and regrets how she has wronged you. And she knows that 'sorry' won't make up for any of it. She only hopes to show you from this point on that she really does love you, and that she'll support you in any choice you make—as long as it makes you happy.”

Ryder leaned down, whispering in her ear, “Let's go tell her our happy news then—we're getting married tomorrow.”

She choked out a laugh as Kingston glared at Ryder. “He's joking,” she said, grabbing Kingston's hand.

“Good,” he said, still glaring.

“We're only pregnant,” she said, giggling as David kept her from falling and both Ryder and Kingston stared at her in shock.

“She's joking,” David laughed now, kissing her head. “Baby, please stop. You're going to break everyone.”

Jane laughed, turning and pulling Ryder's face closer so she could kiss him. “I'm sorry. It was just too funny to see Kingston's face.”

“Hilarious,” Ryder said dryly, but he smiled and kissed her. “Go see your mom before I put a baby in you in front of everyone. I wouldn't even play the quiet game. I'd make you scream.”

“Jesus Christ,” Kingston muttered.

A dangerous smile spread over Ryder's lips as he shook his head then smacked her ass. “Want me to come with you?”

She knew this was a moment between her and her mom, but she needed to do something. “Always.”

He grinned, taking her hand. “Longer.”

Still smiling, she turned to David. “Forever,” she told him, grabbing his hand.

David lifted their joined hands, kissing her fingers. “And beyond.”

“I’m gonna have my fairytale ending. Or maybe it’s just a new beginning.” Jane nodded, her eyes catching a dark pair and a silvery gray pair. “Never alone and an eternity beside his favorite star.”

Tercero smiled, and only the faintest slip of a smirk came and went on Luc’s perfect lips.

“Follow me?” she asked, already letting David lead her across the driveway to where her mother stood.

“They’ll follow you into darkness, babe,” Ryder said. “Just like David and I will.”

“Perhaps don’t compare meeting her mother as a trip into darkness,” Kingston grumbled as he reached her mother first.

Jane saw wickedness flare in Ryder’s eyes, but he winked at her and said, “Baby girl, I’ll behave. Introduce me to your mom so we can go for a ride with your dad.”

She didn’t think she’d ever really come face to face with her mom like this again, but Jane stared at her teary eyes, her trembling hands each receiving a gentle squeeze from fire and tingles, and she smiled at Sarah Leodegrance. “Mom, thank you for thinking of Daddy today. It means everything to me that you did this.”

Sarah sniffed, nodding. “You’re welcome, honey. He really wanted you to have it.”

Her eyes burned and her throat ached, but she breathed in deeply as she felt Tercero and Luc come to stand behind her. “I’d like to introduce you to my boyfriends: Ryder, David, Tercero, and Luc. I hope you can get to know them and approve of them just like Daddy did.”

Kingston put a hand on Sarah’s back and kissed her head, and it seemed it gave her mother the same strength Jane’s men gave her. Because Sarah smiled as she took them in, and not

just them, but she took in the Helldonna boys and the other Godson brothers, and even the teammates who'd chosen to celebrate with them versus the bigger party with the team. "It's lovely to meet you all. I would say take care of my daughter"—her eyes went to just Ryder, David, Tercero, and Luc now—"but I see she's already protected, loved, and cherished—even given courage I never thought I'd see."

Ryder leaned down, kissing Jane's head as both he and David released her hands, and Jane took the final step to get her mother back, to never let go, even in the bad times. She hugged her mama tightly, crying with her.

"I'm so sorry," Sarah croaked. "And I'm so proud of you."

It meant more than Jane realized she needed it to. "It'll be okay. Thank you, Mama."

Sarah cried harder, kissing her cheek and holding her back. "Let them take you for a ride around the block so you can get back to your party. I know you've only just started."

"Hell, yeah, the party's only just begun," Archer cheered from the porch. "Get in that car, sexy!"

Laughing, Jane wiped her tears and let Ryder pull her away as she smiled at Kingston hugging her sobbing but smiling mom.

"There's my girl," Ryder said, kissing her hand.

Jane shakily got into the car. David stayed by the driver's door as Ryder left to get in on the passenger's side.

"Be brave, baby," David said, helping her adjust the seat so she could reach the pedals. "Just remember Eric is with you." He handed her the snow globe. "Have fun. We'll see you in a few minutes."

Ryder took the snow globe, securing it to the dash. "Ready, angel? We've got thirty more minutes to do kinky older woman and young stallion shit."

She peeked at Luc, to which he nodded and left with Sin and Damon, and she knew he would take care of the things

she'd asked him to earlier in the night. "Let's roll," she said dorkily as she turned the key in the ignition.

Ryder yelled out as the most awful sound erupted from the car. "Fuck, Jane." He covered her hand, returning the key to the off position. "Clutch, babe. You have to press your foot on the clutch." He shook his head as Archer howled with laughter.

David chuckled, leaning in to kiss her no doubt rosy cheek. "Don't worry, baby. Dad did the same thing. Have fun."

Ryder shooed him. "Buckle up, babe, and try again."

"I don't think I can do this." She glanced at the snow globe, memories of her dad showing her how to shift gears playing through her mind.

"You can do everything, Sweet Jane. Now, time to get up and try again. Ready?"

She blew out a huge breath and swore she could hear every instruction her daddy had given her. It had been as though he'd known she'd need to hear those instructions from such a young age.

"He's watching, angel." Ryder put his hand over hers. "Make him proud."

With Ryder's help, she hoped she did just that, and the engine turned over, roaring with the sound of cheers and whistles in the air. And with about five stalls in the driveway and two in the street, she finally went on a ride with her father and the man-boy he knew would always be with her.

THIRTY

Ryder grunted as David laughed at him for a second time. “Shut up, bitch. Don’t act like you wouldn’t be upset that the moment your eighteenth birthday comes, Jane runs off with Luc.”

“Maybe she wanted to thank him for the car—he did pay for most of it.” David chuckled again. “You should see your face.”

“Getting her a car had been my idea. One day I’ll pay the bastard back.” Ryder scanned the yard, frowning when he spotted Sin clearing some of the chairs away from the edge of the pool. “What is this motherfucker doing?”

David shrugged, but he waved Tercero over. “Have you seen Jane?”

“I saw her with Luc.” Tercero strolled over, sitting beside them. “She asked me to come find you.”

Ryder’s protective instinct kicked in. “What for?”

Tercero held up a hand. “She’s fine. I think she just wanted us to—”

Ryder jerked his head around as the pool lights and floodlights went off. He scanned the darkness as people started to panic, and his own dread climbed, only to halt as the tealights at the far end of the pool turned on.

Jane was there with Sin, Than, Damon, and Luc who sat on a chair with a guitar on his lap, his gaze soft as he stared at her. Everyone was staring at her. Her hair was in a loose bun,

and she wore a simple white sundress with gold detailing sewn into the skirt and bodice.

A throat cleared, and Sin held up a hand to silence everyone as he also pulled a guitar in front of him. Than had one too, and they all took seats around Jane with only Damon and Jane standing now.

It was still Sin who spoke. “Tonight, we’ve celebrated the birth of a very special woman. I, as well as my brothers, call her the *Little Moon*.” Sin grinned at Jane, but she stayed still, her eyes closed as she appeared to whisper to herself. “Our *Little Moon* has been half for so long, but tonight”—he pointed upward, a full moon—“she glows her brightest. This is her gift to her world, her prince, her king, and one who protects the key to the treasure they keep.”

Now, Jane opened her eyes, finding Ryder first. She smiled but soon switched her gaze to Tercero. Another smile. Then she looked toward David. A blush.

Ryder chuckled quietly, smiling when that pretty blush deepened at the sound of his laugh.

Then she turned to Luc who sat nearest her. “My king,” she said softly as his brother brought her hand to his lips for a kiss.

“When you’re ready,” Luc said, releasing her hand.

She bowed her head at him before clasping her hands together, clapping a rhythm: two claps with a pause and then a single clap at the very moment Sin and Than played a gentle melody. It was simple, and somehow it reminded him of Jane before they got together; hiding, sad, but continuing every day, just like the melody.

Damon joined Jane’s claps, relieving her. While Sin and Than played, and Damon clapped out the simple rhythm she’d started, Jane elegantly held her arms in a pose, then Luc strummed his guitar in a more dominant yet still *Jane* melody, and their girl danced.

Ryder leaned forward. He’d had his arms resting on his legs, but now he covered his mouth, completely in awe of his

girl as she twirled like a barefoot ballerina under the moonlight with Luc playing a song that was entirely Jane: brave, beautiful, strong, and magic.

Everyone one watched her, unable to tear their gazes away as she cast her spell. She was dancing for him, for them, and she was showing her parents, her mother and her fathers—the one standing with her mom and the one watching from the stars—that she'd survived her pain, that she'd found love, and she was going to fight for it.

Hazel eyes met his, and they roared with gold fire as her hair flowed free of her bun, fanning out with her skirt. She only grinned wider at the mishap, letting the sweet, wild girl he loved free as she twirled, effortlessly gliding over the flat stones that surrounded the pool. She was a fairy, an angel, a goddess. She was his everything.

Every movement was delicate, like water flowing over the earth. She cut her path toward where they sat, going to Tercero first. It almost upset him that she picked his brother first, but he was instantly entranced by the way she'd pulled Tercero up to dance with her.

His brother only held her, dipping her or assisting her with her poses until she cupped his cheeks and kissed him, murmuring happy birthday before she twirled her way to David.

Now, Ryder frowned. It wasn't David's birthday.

His old rival smiled as Jane danced around him. Her pretty face burned pink as David watched her, and she reached up, tracing his lips, beaming when her blue-eyed boy smiled and kissed her fingertips.

The moment she lowered her hand, her eyes met Ryder's, and Luc and Sin stopped playing, Damon stopped clapping, and only Than played the base melody he'd been playing throughout it all. Her rock, he realized. She was telling him he was the very ground she danced on, even if it was the sun and stars and darkness that helped her glow, it was him that she existed for. It was because of him that she glowed at all.

Jane took the most delicate steps closer to him, reaching for his hand to pull him up. He followed her order, sighing as tingles sparked where they touched.

She moved away, making the prettiest turns he'd ever seen from a ballerina. She wasn't as tall or as slim as the professionals, but she was his dancing goddess. Her brown hair glowed from the fire, just the same as the gold in her eyes roared for the emerald flame surrounding it.

Spinning faster, she held her arms out and danced just for him but knowing he was letting her other loves bask in the light she was creating.

Finally, she slowed, daintily twirling her way closer to him. She smiled, placing her hand over his heart, and he moved his hand over his spot, swallowing as the music stopped with her.

“Happy birthday, Ryder,” she breathed as he pushed her hair away from her face.

Ryder leaned down, kissing her as the yard filled with applause and cheers. But he shut it all out and kissed his moon like it was only the two of them in the whole universe. He'd bring her back to the others, always, but right now, she was his.

Hoisting her up and pulling her legs around his waist, he deepened their kiss before pulling back to whisper, “Breathe, angel.”

She gasped, giving him a gorgeous smile as she touched his cheek. “Did you like it? I didn't have money to buy you anything.”

“Sweet Jane, you gave me the moon tonight.” He nuzzled her, still pushing the sound of the crowd away from them. “I was only slightly pouty that David and Tercero got your attention before I did. Especially David—it's not even his birthday.”

Her laugh was loud, but she kissed his face everywhere she could. “Cutest bad boy in the world.”

“Only for my goddess.” He kissed her again, sweeter. “And I love my gift—best one I’ve ever had.”

“I have one more, if you want.”

He grinned. “I have more for you, too. I bet we’re regifting all night.”

She giggled, kissing him again and again. “Best regift I’ll ever have then.”

Ryder chuckled, kissing her as the sounds around them finally cut through. “You better go kiss my brothers and Papi. You did miss David’s eighteenth birthday entirely. I guess I can allow him in on the celebrations. He is my wingman.”

“You’re mine,” David interrupted, but it was Tercero who stole her.

Well, it was Tercero he let love her because he did like that his brother made her feel so much of him, David, and even Luc. And he knew Tercero and Luc had been the ones to help her gain the confidence to finally show off her secret.

So, he sat back, watching her glow for her other boyfriends and her men. She sat taller, welcoming praise when Luc was at her side, she gave and received sweet kisses with Tercero whenever it looked like she couldn’t go another second without one, and she warmed as David wrapped his arms around her.

His brother from another mother kissed her proudly, even in front of his dad, his stepmother, his sorta ex, and teammates. He showed her off like she was his princess, and Jane’s eyes shone with love and admiration each time David smiled down at her.

All through the celebrations, she ruled over her men, even some of the Black Hills boys, and that fucker Jason who had managed to sneak over.

The night went on like that, and Ryder took it all in, loving that his girl was glowing her brightest. Those hazel eyes drifted his way, and she bit her lips as though they suddenly tingled.

Narrowing his gaze, he shook his head, smiling only when she laughed and released them.

“You’ll see that she’s taken care of tonight?”

Ryder looked away from Jane and up to Kingston and Sarah. “I’ll take care of her every night.”

“Not yet, boy.” Kingston huffed and took his wife’s hand in his before leading her toward the door. “And no babies.”

He grinned, hollering, “Okay, I’ll start with one baby. Let you get used to being a grandpa.”

Kingston shook his head, pointing at Archer who was leaning against the doorframe. “You, no. Don’t even think about wooing her.”

Archer’s smug look annoyed Ryder, but he knew his brother only lived to pester all around him. “Papa Bear, don’t be like that. I can’t stay away from that gorgeous ass of hers.”

Kingston turned, giving Ryder a look that said, *you better not let him near Jane.*

Ryder nodded. “I’ll kick his ass later. Scram, Pops. I gotta have naughty time with your daughter.”

The big man’s face reddened with fury, but he merely growled and stalked off with Sarah. The woman had kept her trap shut, and he felt thankful for that. Everything with Jane and Sarah would take time to mend, but he’d see that his girl had her mom the way she was supposed to.

A shivering girl was suddenly crawling onto his lap, sliding her icy fingers under his shirt. He didn’t flinch, never really bothered by heat or cold, and hugged her tightly as David laid a blanket over them.

“So romantic, Papi.” He snickered, sliding his hands up and down Jane’s legs.

David flipped him off as he sat. The bastard was eating that raspberry cake again. “We both know who makes her melt.”

Jane shivered, grinning against Ryder's chest as she snuggled closer. "David is my heating pad."

David winked at her. "That's right, baby. But I know who makes you tingle. I'll warm you up in a bit—let's wait until the others leave."

Now her body flushed with heat, and Ryder peeked down at her. "You want both tonight?"

Her eyes were glassy from fatigue, but they flashed up at him. "What about all of you?"

He flicked his eyes toward David, noting the stiff posture of his old rival, then he glanced at Tercero and Luc; they were sitting in the dark, talking, but they looked over. It was like they knew she'd just made the request for them to join in.

"Never mind," she whispered, ducking her head when she caught sight of David's face.

Ryder sighed, tucking the blanket around her. "Babe, don't hide from us."

"You're mad," she said, closing her eyes. "He's pissed."

"Baby, I'm not pissed," David argued. "I just don't know how to be ready for this."

Honestly, Ryder didn't either. He could see himself with Jane while Tercero was there, which was weird to him, but he was curious to see how she'd react to having not only him and David but then Tercero who gave her his own unique presence as well as reminding her of them all. He imagined her falling into ecstasy like he'd never thought possible. But Luc?

"It's fine," she said. "I'm kinda tired anyway."

Ryder watched his brothers. They knew. He could tell by the way they sat, their muscles stiff, holding back but also ready to flee. They weren't sure about it either. Tercero hadn't been with her, Ryder could tell. He didn't know why his brother was holding back, but he was. And Luc wasn't interested in sharing his queen.

"We can try," David murmured, reaching out to caress her head.

“No, it’s okay.” She gave David a tight smile. “Really.”

“No, it’s not,” David said, caressing her cheek. “I won’t lie—I don’t like the idea of Luc with you, and I’m confused about Tercero, but I want you happy. And I think I need to see they’re good with you.”

“I have a feeling you’re the roughest,” Ryder cut in before Jane could ask what he meant. “They will worship her.”

Jane’s cheeks flushed as David kept staring at her; she liked that her stepbrother was rough. Just like she liked that *he* was sweet with her. Ryder liked to manhandle her, and she loved it, but she was always awed when he’d turn gentle before he’d consume her. But David, the guy she’d dreamed up was a noble prince, proper and polite, he was an animal with her, devouring her. Even though David made sure he never hurt her, the fucker was worried she’d shatter if anyone else was as rough with her as he was, and he didn’t trust that someone else would be able to be rough and careful.

“I think they’d only be rough alone with her,” Ryder added. “Dirty, if she wants it.” He peeked at her as her breaths hitched. David saw it too. She wanted dirty. He squeezed her ass under the blanket, feeling like a king when she moaned the second his pinky grazed her sex. He already felt that beautiful fluttering inside her. “Fuck, babe, fall apart,” he said, shifting her panties so he could sink a finger inside her. And, damn, if she didn’t come right then and there, her whole body tensing as she moaned again.

He reveled in her trembling body as she continued fluttering around his finger. “David,” he muttered, knowing David would need no instruction.

David leaned over, tilting her face up before kissing her senseless, swallowing her cries as Ryder fucked her with his hand.

“Fuck, Jane.” Ryder nearly groaned as she started rocking her hips, practically riding his hand. “It turns you on knowing others are watching, doesn’t it?”

She clenched around him as David chuckled at her strangled cry.

“She said getting caught,” David said before kissing her again.

Her kissing David while in his arms was hotter than Ryder remembered. He wasn't the only one watching. Some of them were full-on staring while others were more discreet.

But Ryder wasn't going to let everyone watch. Sliding his fingers out and fixing her panties, he grinned when she stopped kissing David to growl at him. “I'm not loving you in front of everyone—I know Archer will record and Sin will probably drop his pants and fuck the nearest, willing body. I don't do orgies.”

He spanked her ass and made sure her dress was down but still kept the blanket around her as he got up. “Let's go to our room. Luc and Tercero will watch. If they're willing to join, and you want that, they will.”

“How do you know they'll watch?” She wrapped her arms around his neck, totally unashamed that she'd just had an orgasm in front of her guests.

“Because they already went up to my room.” Ryder carried her toward the door, but he hollered out to David, “Grab some waters.”

“And condoms.” Archer snapped a photo of Jane's post-orgasmic smile. “Thanks for the birthday present, gorgeous. You got me all ready for some lucky gal.”

Ryder shoved him. “Sick fucker.”

“The sickest.” Archer winked, passing by and heading straight for a group of girls who sat with Savaş.

His giant brother waved at them. “Be good to her or I'm breaking bodies.”

David arrived, pushing Ryder and only stopping when Archer threw something their way.

“You're welcome,” his twisted brother shouted once David opened his hand. Lube.

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THIRTY-ONE

Jane swallowed as she shifted on her knees. She was kneeling on Ryder's bed, but she wasn't alone.

A tingle trailed along her shoulder, and she smiled as a new tingle—a kiss—was pressed against the back of her neck.

“You have control in this,” Ryder murmured against her skin as she stared ahead, her eyes locked on David.

He sat at the foot of the bed, emanating confidence and patience, and above all, love. He, like the others, wanted her to himself, but he put her first when he realized she was meant to receive and give more love. ‘I love you,’ he mouthed, making her smile then her body flush with heat when he smirked.

“If there is any time,” Ryder continued, “you want to stop, just say the word. If at any time you want one or several of us to leave, say so.”

Jane darted her gaze to Luc who stood at the foot of the bed with arms crossed. Watching. He was the one making the others uncomfortable. He was the one who didn't want to be there, yet he was. He was there because it was her birthday, and she had asked him to be with her tonight. He'd amazed her by playing a melody to match her dancing like he already knew what song played in her mind when she danced under the moon. She couldn't imagine her life without him, and she hoped to one day be as great as he saw she could be.

Luc's expression went unchanged. He might not want to be there, but now that he was, she saw he wasn't leaving. Even if

she asked, he'd make her take back her words because he'd decided to see this through.

Ryder slid a hand around her side and held *his* spot. "I mean it, Jane. I don't give a fuck if I have to physically remove someone from this room. What you say goes. I'll even remove myself if I have to. I'll be in the hall, listening, but I'll leave if you ask me to."

"Kinky, brother," Tercero said, amused.

She slid her gaze over to her sexy, quiet boy. He sat on a corner of the bed, his ankles crossed but knees raised with his arms around them.

"Baby girl knows I'm into the kinky shit with her," Ryder said, pressing another kiss to her neck. "Now, shut the fuck up and listen because I'm saying this to all of you. I will destroy you if you take her choice away—if you push something on her that she doesn't want. Each of you know you stand no chance against me, even together. So, don't try me."

Turning her head slightly, she nuzzled her bad boy. He deserved so much, sometimes more than she thought she could give him. It would be too much to accept from him, but he always made sure she knew just how much she meant to him. It didn't matter that he was more amazing than she was; she was the one he wanted, and she happily gave him everything of herself and thanked the heavens he offered back more so she could give to the others.

He sweetly kissed her nose then her lips. "You ready?" When she nodded, he smiled. "I'm gonna show you off then."

She shivered at the sudden drop in his tone. So dark. So smooth. Her bad boy was returning for her, and he was going to help her get what she wanted. "Okay," she whispered, gasping at his lips pressing just behind her ear as he breathed her in.

"They're going to touch you," he murmured, sliding a hand along her stomach as the other held onto her shoulder. "I might push them away if I don't like where they touch you just

yet, but you trust me, all right? You understand you're mine before you're theirs, yes?"

Her lips parted as she stared at each of her men across from her; they weren't upset by Ryder's declaration, and she knew in her soul it was true. Even if David had first owned her heart, it was Ryder who was there through everything; she just refused to see him.

David smiled, and it was that smile that won her heart when she was a little girl and the one he'd given to her when he'd started becoming a man. Only recently she realized that smile was showing her he loved her more than she could truly fathom, just the same way Ryder's attitude was there to protect her or to push her to open her eyes and see him.

Luc tilted his head, taking in everything, but it was those silvery-gray eyes that said what he was thinking: *be a queen*.

She shivered again as Ryder nuzzled her neck, and her eyes locked on Tercero's. So many times she'd seen Ryder in him, but he was so amazing, and one of the incredible things about him was that he wanted her to embrace his brother because he knew Ryder was her match. That faint smile her quiet boy often teased her with came and went, and he inclined his head, reminding her that Ryder was waiting for a response.

"Yes," she breathed, trembling as tingles bloomed in her chest. "Yes, I know I'm yours first. I trust you."

He nudged her with his head. "Took you long enough."

"Sorry," she laughed, her whole body buzzing from his presence now. "I'm a dummy."

"Maybe a little bit," he said, bringing his mouth back to her ear and whispered, "but I'm keeping you anyway."

She swore she saw her soul glow and smile for her bad boy, and she leaned into him. "Show me off, Ryder."

He breathed in and grabbed her hips as he moved closer. "There's my girl." His hands dropped to her thighs, slowly pulling the hem of her dress up. "My dancing goddess blessed and teased us with these legs." A hand dropped to her butt cheek and squeezed. "And this ass."

There were no words, only hitched breaths as Ryder slid a hand up and down her thigh as he palmed her ass. Her skin itched for more, for those hands to inch closer to the apex of her thighs, for his touch to seep into her entire being.

“You wore those pretty panties I like,” he said as his fingers grazed the edges.

“I know.” Jane breathed faster as Ryder’s hand skimmed over the lacey fabric, and she whimpered as he kept moving up, to her stomach again.

“Sweet Jane wants to play, *hm?*” He trailed his fingers just under her breasts. “You think we didn’t notice you weren’t wearing a bra?”

Her body screamed for his touch, and she arched out, hoping he’d give her more attention.

“You’re teasing her,” David said, his blue eyes almost black.

Ryder’s smiling lips left a whisper of kisses at the nape of her neck as he finally cupped her left breast. “Thought you said it’s good to drag it out.” Now, he grasped her breast in his palm and squeezed. “Perfect fit,” he said as her breaths skittered out. “Let’s take this pretty dress off before I ruin it.”

Jane nodded, not sure why she was nodding since he didn’t ask, but she leaned forward so he could unzip the back.

“So pretty,” he said, trailing his fingers down her spine. As the fabric fell away, he kissed up her back again. “Come here, babe.” He tugged her by the hips until she was kneeling on the bed, but he also scooted up, bunching the dress as he lifted it over her head.

She knew it was coming, but she suddenly felt nervous about letting the boys watch.

“Easy, *cara,*” Tercero said, still sitting entirely still.

Realizing she’d started to hide against Ryder and cover herself, she breathed out and lowered her arms.

Tercero nodded, though he didn’t gawk at her. Nor did David or Luc. They watched her face.

Ryder wrapped an arm around her breasts, shielding her as he dropped a kiss to her shoulder. “You okay?”

“Yeah.” She hugged his arm, meeting their stares. “I want more.”

Ryder caressed her arm, though he still didn’t lift his from blocking her. “More of me showing you off? Or do you want them to explore with me? Will that make you more comfortable?”

It should’ve been scary. Society didn’t condone this at all. The world expected her to pick just one guy, the amazing guy holding her. But Ryder was her world, and he was offering her everything of himself and what he knew she was meant for. “I want them to touch me with you,” she finally whispered. Her eyes flickered toward David.

“Let me watch, baby,” he said, but he leaned forward, pressing a scorching kiss to her lips. “I need to watch them.”

Ryder chuckled, hugging her and scooting her away from David but motioning for Tercero. Then he eyed Luc for a few seconds. “I’m king with her like this,” he told his older brother. “She’ll be your queen when she’s ready.”

Luc was quiet, then his gaze slid down Jane’s body. “Of course, little brother. I only plan to have my queen in my bed. Certainly not yours.”

The muscles in Ryder’s body jumped, but he nodded, sliding a hand across her stomach to hold it to his spot. It was like a security blanket for him. “She still wants you to join in, and David needs to know you’re not going to hurt her.”

Luc stared into her eyes instead of turning to David. “I’m only going to touch you to let you know I’m here. We’ll learn each other much later, I think.”

Jane tensed at the rejection, but Ryder was there, soothing her with a kiss.

“It’ll hurt less this way, my queen,” Luc said. “You’re not ready for four, especially not two kings.” He smirked at Ryder before walking around the bed until he was closer. His cold fingers caressed her cheek as the emptiest expression stayed

on his face. “It’s okay if we don’t all take you at once, Jane. This isn’t the naughty books I know you read.” His lips twitched as her face heated. “As I said, when you desire me, call. But I will not join in the way you are about to with them. Not tonight.”

“Okay.” What was she supposed to say?

He kept watching her, kept caressing her cheek. “Smile for me.”

She did, leaning her face into his palm for just a moment.

“Beautiful.” He leaned down, breathing in deeply as he pressed the faintest kiss on the corner of her mouth. “Later, Jane. We are not here yet.”

Sighing, she finally understood and agreed; she wasn’t ready to have sex with four guys. She barely handled Ryder and David, and they took turns when she knew they were curious about her taking them at the same time. And she’d not even been with Tercero. In a way, she wanted their first time private, but she also wanted him now. Just like she wanted Luc now.

Before Luc pulled back, though, Jane grabbed Luc’s face and kissed him hard. He didn’t pull away; he kissed her without overwhelming her the way David’s kiss did. He didn’t steal her breath the way Ryder did, and he sure as hell didn’t turn their kiss ravenous the way Tercero often managed, but soothed before she lost all sense. No, Luc kissed her slowly, precisely. He was a drug, dulling the panic and fear of being judged. He brought forward euphoria when she might fall into darkness, but his kiss was a promise to fall with her. Whenever, wherever, Luc would be there. He didn’t need or desire to outdo his brothers or David. He merely requested her smile, her. Just her.

Shivering, she whined as he ended the kiss, though he held her chin and studied her face as Ryder’s grip tightened around her.

“Let my brother lead you now, Jane.” Luc kissed the corner of her mouth and closed his eyes. “That satisfied me

more than you can comprehend.”

Now she smiled, her soul beaming as he opened his eyes and saw her. Then he smiled, a real smile, one she'd never seen before.

“Beautiful,” she whispered, still staring as he moved away and nodded to Ryder and Tercero before finally leaning against the wall. Watching. Again.

“He drugged her. Time to bring her back to life.” Ryder kissed her temple then his arm moved, and his hands were spreading tingles across her body, over her breasts. Squeeze.

She moaned, reaching back so her arms could hold onto the back of his neck.

He didn't disappoint her, immediately turning her enough in his hold that he could kiss her lips. “Breathe.” The command came at the moment a mixture of fire and tingles of ice and oblivion pressed against her stomach, and Ryder's hands were moved from massaging her breasts. Her bad boy tensed for only a second before bringing a hand up to hold her neck as the other slid down between her legs, and he grinned as his brother's mouth covered her nipple, making her cry out. “Beautiful girl,” he said as Tercero helped move her so she was more or less lying with her back against Ryder as he sat against the headboard with her between his legs.

Tercero moved, tugging her thighs apart for Ryder. “Too tight, *tesoro*.”

“Too much,” was all she could mutter as Ryder grinned against her lips.

“Never too much,” he said, but he lifted his head enough to meet David's eyes. “She needs to even out the sensations. Join in; you know he's not going to hurt her, but he'll overwhelm her with me here and not you or Luc.”

Jane had no idea what he meant, but she held out a hand for David. “Baby, please.”

That was all it took.

Fire that no longer burned her, surrounded her with intense heat to protect her. “How did I become baby, too?” He smiled, raising her hand to his lips as Ryder moved his assault to her neck, his hand teasing her as Tercero massaged her trembling thighs.

“Don’t know.” She gasped, pulling him until he knelt on the bed and his lips claimed hers.

Perfect. He didn’t become aggressive or so dominant she feared he hated her for making him share, for not being able to let her go. He loved her with his kiss, with the strong yet tender hold on her cheek as Ryder breathed more heavily against her neck.

Her ass constantly rubbed against Ryder’s erection that begged to be released from his jeans, and she moaned into David’s mouth at the thought of him sliding inside her just like his fingers were now doing.

David chuckled, sliding his mouth across hers but denying the kiss now. “You want us to do a test run?” His fingers skimmed down the center of her chest, past her tummy, right next to Ryder’s hand.

Her legs jerked, and she whimpered, looking down at Tercero; he still massaged her thighs, keeping them from closing because he knew she didn’t *want* to close them.

Ryder eased his fingers out, giving her a full massage before resting his hand on her inner thigh, though he kept teasing her with his fingertips as David did the same. “Tercero, are you wanting to wait, too?”

She gasped when her sexy quiet boy pushed a finger inside her. He was gentle, but she still cried out again, gripping the back of Ryder’s neck.

“I’ll join in, but not everything.” He smirked, adding a second finger and flicking upward to make her scream. “She’s almost there. Let me help prepare her to take both of you.”

“She’ll want your dick,” Ryder said, kissing her cheek as he and David took Tercero’s place, giving her five-seconds in heaven and beyond when all three of them kept their fingers in

her, and they each went for that spot that destroyed and put her back together. “Ah, there’s a good girl.”

“I’m coming,” she screamed, chest heaving, as she gasped and trembled.

“Stretch her out,” Ryder told Tercero. “She’ll take David while I practice making babies with her.” He smiled against her cheek. “You want that, angel? You want us at the same time?” She nodded, and he kissed her cheek, adding, “And you want Tercero to feed you?”

Tercero winked at her as he shifted her enough to massage her back hole. “I always feed my *tesoro*. Relax for me.”

Her body ached, and she moaned again as David’s mouth covered her breast. Then Tercero pushed a single finger in, and they watched her cry for more.

A cold caress had Jane opening her eyes, and she looked up at Luc. He watched her fall apart in Ryder’s arms, watched every dirty thing they were doing to her, and he moved, leaning over and applying a generous amount of lube for Tercero to work in.

Ryder nipped her neck. “Is my big brother going to play?”

“I don’t play,” Luc said.

Ryder chuckled, that deliciously dark and sexy laugh. “I forgot I’m a big boy today.”

David laughed, kissing her chest and leaning back. “So, what are we doing?”

Jane smiled, shaking her head. “We’re playing. You’re just all on my team.”

Ryder smacked her ass as he turned her head to kiss her lips. “College or Pro rules, babe?”

“Fuck, I didn’t know there were different rules?” She yelped as all three boys pulled their hands from her.

“Time to learn then,” he said, pushing her onto her knees. “Ass up, head down.”

“Don’t order her like that,” David said, keeping her steady.

Jane just giggled and leaned over, kissing him. “You play quarterback first.”

Ryder kissed her back, snickering. “Bet Luc is disappointed he gave up the game.”

Jane lifted her eyes to Luc. “Come out of retirement for me.”

Her boys darted their eyes to each other, and she saw it, they were deciding order before the big play.

She wiggled her ass. “Come on. On my team, there’s no penalty for too many players on the field.”

Tercero was the only one who laughed, and he kissed her forehead. “Naughty girl.”

She kissed him back, gasping because three different hands grasped her ass cheeks.

“Hot damn,” Archer yelled from outside the door. “I heard that. Let me in, bro. I’m quarterback—Luc retired!”

It seemed Ryder won the coin toss, because tingles spread over her hips, and his pants were off as he yelled, “I’ll fucking kill you, Archer. Scram!”

EPILOGUE

One Year Later

“You’re gonna wake her up.”

Jane didn’t stir at the sound of Ryder’s voice as she lay with her head on his shoulder, her leg draped over his waist. His warning to whomever he was talking to was clear, but judging by the fact his hand moved to her ass cheek and squeezed, he wasn’t too put off by the idea of her losing sleep.

“She likes waking up like this.” Fiery lips pressed against the single dimple at the top of her ass and scorching fingers teased her core.

“We had her up late, though.” Still, Ryder squeezed the same butt cheek David was caressing, and he helped her blue-eyed boy by spreading her cheeks.

David chuckled, his hot breath spreading heat across her skin. “She had us up late. And we’re both gone all day; I’ll miss her.”

“Pussy,” Ryder snickered, but he hugged her body closer.

David’s lips were smiling as they kissed on the swell of her ass. “You literally checked your gym bag to see if she could fit.”

“Fuck you.” Ryder huffed, shifting enough to where if he wanted to, he could push his joggers down, free his erection that was already swelling, and slide right into her; she loved when he did that. “I’m skipping practice. Both of ‘em.”

She wanted to smile; he was so needy sometimes. And a needy for her Ryder Godson was absolutely adorable. With a whole lot of amazing sex to go with it.

“You’re not skipping,” David said, now teasing her with a finger.

“Don’t tell me what I’m doing.” Ryder’s annoyance instantly turned into horniness as he ground into her. “I’d rather fight underground anyway. I’m tired of classes, too.”

“Well, at least finish football season with me. She worked hard to help you get into the same school as me after you let your grades drop even more last year.” David moved her panties aside. “She’s so fucking wet.”

Ryder sighed, lightly grinding again. “Then move your fucking face so I can wake her up properly.”

“We have to go,” David said, but he slid a finger inside her, just like she always asked them to do to wake her up the night before.

“Motherfucker,” Ryder growled, only quieting when she moaned. “Morning, babe.” He grinned, letting David do as he pleased now and kissed her.

“In me,” she panted, trying to line herself up with him while not releasing David.

“You know I’ll make you sore,” Ryder said, hoisting her up anyway.

“I’ll be fine.” She whimpered as David kissed her neck, never stopping with his hand.

“He’s right, baby.” David nipped her skin and pressed his own erection against her backside. “And we really have to go. We’re almost late.”

“Please,” she begged. It was already hard for her once they started, and she’d been so horny lately.

Ryder stared at her face as she continued her attempt to get him inside her. “Baby girl, we need to go, and you know you’ll want both of us.”

David nodded, but growled as he fought to move away too.

“A quickie,” she pleaded, pushing the waistband of Ryder’s joggers over the head of his cock. “Oh, yes,” she cried as soon as the smooth skin grazed her opening.

By now, David didn’t react to Ryder’s dick touching him, as long as it was preparing to enter her. And he was all kinds of animal as he held her panties aside for Ryder to thrust in.

“Ah, fuck.” Ryder kissed her hard now, fucking her hard and fast as David’s dick slid between her ass cheeks. “Real fast, Sweet Jane. Fuck, you’re extra tight.”

She responded with moans. All she could do was take what he was giving and hope she was giving enough back. By his ragged breathing and his own groans of satisfaction, she was.

“Not her ass,” he growled, pulling out so David could take his place, and her stepbrother did, releasing the beast he hid from her for so long, and he fucked her as she still lay against Ryder. He even put her hand on Ryder’s pulsing cock as her bad boy kissed the life out of her.

“Fuck,” Ryder groaned into her mouth. “Come in her. David, come in her.”

She gasped, crying out as David lost it. Ryder never let the others come in her, but he was demanding it as she pumped her hand around his dick.

They sounded like animals, and David roared as his warmth shot deep inside her, while Ryder released his load onto her tummy.

David pulled out, though, hoisting her into place so Ryder could push back in.

He groaned, hugging her as he gave slow, deep thrusts, giving her the rest so she was full of them both. “Fuck,” he breathed, kissing her forehead as David rolled slightly away but kept a hand on the curve of her waist. It always reminded her of the same way Ryder touched *his* spot.

“We gotta go,” David said, exhausted.

Ryder nodded, but he was holding her face, staring at her, making sure she was okay. “You good?”

She weakly nodded as a dreamy smile plastered over her face.

“I’m sorry I didn’t ask you if he could ...”

“It’s okay,” she told him. “I wanted it.”

David sat up, but he leaned over, turning her face to kiss her. He thanked Ryder and told her, “I love you.”

“I love you,” she said with her words and her eyes.

He grinned, kissing her once more before moving off the bed. “She can’t stay on that bed. Take her and I’ll throw everything in the washer.”

Ryder nodded, growling when he spotted Keanu sitting on the edge of the bed. “Fucking cat! Stop watching us.”

Keanu simply slow-blinked, which had Ryder even more upset.

But he stopped all his growling when she kissed him, and he sat up with her. He kept her legs around him, not breaking their kiss as he carried her out of the room of the apartment they shared. “Promise me you’ll get some sleep, okay?”

“You normally tell me to stop being lazy.”

There was a different sort of spark in his eyes as he said, “And from now on I’m telling you to get some sleep. Now promise.”

“I promise,” she whispered, wondering what he was up to, but it was then she realized he’d carried her to the room down the hall, and the shower was running in the attached bath. She giggled, giddy for what was to come.

Her bad boy spanked her ass and pushed the bathroom door open. Steam billowed around them, and he gave her a pointed look. “He probably came to rub one out after hearing us.”

Jane turned, holding her breath as Ryder entered the shower.

Tercero peered over his shoulder before turning and accepting her from Ryder. “I do not ‘rub one out’, brother.” He wasted no time wrapping her around him and covering her mouth with his. He was starving, and he consumed her, pressing her against the shower wall.

“Be gentle,” Ryder chided, quickly washing. “Let her sleep before she goes to work, too.”

“I’ll give her what she needs,” Tercero said, smirking when he felt how wet and hot she was.

“He let David come in me,” she told him.

His gaze swiftly met Ryder’s, though he stayed silent.

Ryder smirked, finished rinsing, and as he passed, he kissed her shoulder. “Ask her permission.” He gave her one more kiss. “Good morning, my moon.”

“Good morning,” she whispered back, sighing as his presence faded. But it was always temporary when Tercero was there.

Whispering sweet Italian words in her ear, Tercero held her under the spray of water, cleaning away his brother’s come.

This was their somewhat normal routine after a full year together. With David’s and Ryder’s college football training and their class schedules, they left early and came home late. Still, no matter how tired they were, they worshipped her together when they finally made it home.

Only a few nights were spent with only one of them, but she always got mornings alone with Tercero. He worked overnight, but he never told her where it was, only that he was faithful to her and not to worry. Every morning, as he washed his night away, Ryder or David carried her to him, trusting Tercero would keep her safe and happy.

She’d lost a lot of sleep since embracing her role as girlfriend to more than one guy. They made it work with the four of them in the apartment they shared. People judged, but she shrugged off whatever was dished at her. Kingston and her mom were the only people she worried about, but they both stood behind her and David. Kingston had even gotten into a

fight about it with a coworker, which her boys found hilarious. It even strengthened David's relationship with him, and they went out once a month for father-son time. Sometimes Kingston even invited Ryder and all his brothers. Usually, Ryder refused, but he did go on a bros' night out with Kingston and even Luc and Gabriel, but he left Damon and Sin at the apartment with her and Wendy—as well as Jessica and Anica, two cousins Jane had reconnected with.

That had been a fun night for her, and she'd been begging Damon and Sin to have another slumber party with them. Ryder wasn't thrilled, but she knew he'd give in. If only Damon would leave Than's sister long enough.

Justine Messor had Facetimed Damon five times to make sure he was dressed. She had been convinced Jane wanted a fifth boyfriend, and that it was Damon she was eying.

It all changed when Justine Facetimed Damon and saw tiny ponytails all over his head. She'd stared in shock as Jane and Wendy lowered the makeup brushes they'd been using on his face. Even more disbelief filled her expression when she caught Sin in the background. He was with Jane's cousins, and her Aunt Jackie, and they were trying to fit him into a dress they'd bought during their earlier shopping trip.

Now, Jane had shopping trips on the weekends with the girls, and they all trained together with the Hell Boys when Ryder went to his underground fighting practices.

“Permission, *cara*?” He teased her lips with a kiss, his dark eyes staring into her soul. “Your mind is wandering. Stay with me for a while.”

Wrapping an arm around his neck and pushing his hair away from his face, she smiled. “I will. And, yes.”

The smile he'd always worn for her in secret formed, and he turned, pushing her against the wall and entering her with ease. He moved powerfully in and out of her, and she cried out, hanging on to him as he whispered more Italian in her ear.

“Oh,” she gasped, “what's that mean?”

He pressed in deep but turned his face toward hers. “I said I’m crazy about you.” Easing out, he kissed her cheek and murmured, “You are the love of my life.”

Her heartbeat sped up—he’d never said that before, and she breathed, “I love you, too.”

And, grinning, he loved her under the water, then on his bed, then he kissed her with another whisper of love before falling asleep.

Yawning, Jane sat up, momentarily disoriented to find she wasn’t in bed with Tercero. In fact, she wasn’t in his bed at all. “That jerk.” She rolled her eyes and got up, tying the belt of her robe before leaving the room ... office.

“She wakes.”

Jane rubbed her face as she made her way toward Luc where he sat at his desk. Well, she mostly limped because taking three guys in one morning wasn’t easy. No matter how many times they’d made love to her, it hurt—the good hurt—for a few hours. Well, usually, days. But that’s where Luc handled things. He had his own magic, and he knew how to soothe her and still blow her mind.

His secretary had clearly been taking notes, and she gave Jane the stink eye as she took in Jane’s hobbling. “Miss Mortaime, shall I help you with Luc’s schedule, seeing that you think you’re still at home?”

Luc locked eyes with Jane, but he didn’t say anything. He always made sure she fought her own battles, and she had to fight a lot because she was his girlfriend, *and* on his payroll.

“Afternoon, Hela,” Jane said, coming to a stop by Luc. She gave him a look that told him to pull his chair back, and with a smirk, he complied so she could crawl onto his lap. Only when she was situated, an arm around Luc’s neck as he rested his on her leg did she continue. “You can focus on your duties to Luc. Mine are no concern of yours.” Jane peeked at Luc before

kissing the corner of his mouth. “You have a prep-meeting with me, Mr. Godson. I’m ready when you are.”

Luc rubbed her leg before waving Hela away. “Leave us and do not speak to her like you are her superior ever again. She has seniority over you, and she’s my girlfriend. Both titles demand respect. She’s also the only one in my employment who is allowed to address me by my first name. Now go and lock the door. I’m having lunch with my girlfriend.”

Giggling, Jane kissed along his jaw. “I thought we had a meeting.”

He waited for Hela to shut the door to lift her onto his desk. “I’m hungry.” He opened her robe and tugged her to the edge as he flipped his tie over his shoulder. “Spread your legs before I take you to the room and tie you down. You should be punished for letting them make you so sore.”

She laughed, opening her legs because she knew he really would. Her fantasy last year about him having a secret sex room came true when he hired her as his personal assistant. He made her work, but he also said he was her boss and decided when they took breaks. “You really need to stop abducting me from Tercero’s bed.”

“You really need to wake your ass up so we can spend time together.” He skimmed his fingers over her tummy. “Did he figure it out?”

Her soul and heart glowed, and she shook her head. “No, but he let David and Tercero come in me.”

Luc caressed her stomach then stood, kissing her the way a king kissed his queen. “Then he knows.”

She teared up, wrapping her arms around him. “Are you still going to love me?”

“Of course, my queen.” Lying her back, he created a path of icy kisses down her body. “Mind your screams; we have clients on our floor today.”

There was no time to respond with words, he was stealing her soul, and she writhed, grasping his perfectly combed hair as he worshiped her. She knew he’d scold her for ruining his

hair, but he reveled in her touch the same way she did his. He'd never love anyone but her. Just like he knew no one would love him the way she did, every arrogant, controlling, and overprotective bit of him.

"I forgot to ask him if you could come in me too," she breathed, her body tightening as her orgasm crashed down on her.

Luc stood, pulling his tie free and unbuttoning his shirt. He was so breathtaking, and she could only stare in silence at his beauty; he was living art. "He gave me permission to ask you." He handed her his phone and undid his belt.

Jane reluctantly looked away, only to smile as her whole being glowed at the text on Luc's phone.

Ryder: I know she told you.

Ryder: Bastard

Ryder: Love her today.

Ryder: Fully, if she wishes.

Ryder: You can let it slip I know I'm going to be a daddy. I'll spank her pretty ass later.

Ryder: She's mine tonight. But get her cabin ready for all of us tomorrow.

Luc had responded then: *She wanted it to be a surprise, brother.*

Ryder: I knew before she did.

Ryder: She's glowing even in the middle of the day.

Jane sniffed, laughing. Her bad boy saw everything with her.

Luc smiled at her. "Like the moon when the sky's still blue."

She swooned at his words but read the next text.

Ryder: Will I be enough? For both of them?

Luc had responded: *You have always been enough, little brother. Go to practice. I'm picking her up now.*

Ryder: I need a job to take care of my wifey and baby. Give me some money.

Jane laughed, her tummy fluttering as tingles bloomed in Ryder's spot and went down to surround her womb. "He's the sweetest bad boy ever."

Luc took the phone, reading over the texts again before tossing the phone onto his chair. "The sweetest boy ever willingly handed you over to me. Not very sweet, if you ask most."

"Ah, the mean king," she said giggling as she sat up, wrapping her legs around Luc's bare waist. "I've rather liked your kingdom, and your rule. You're not as hard on me as you threatened to be."

"Because all my enemies forget they're under my rule when you enter the room, and I enjoy being soft with you." Luc raised her hand, kissing the inside of her wrist, the same spot he sometimes wrote his name. "The baby will want for nothing, Jane."

And Jane realized what Ryder was doing by letting them be with her this way. "He's asking you to be a part of this, isn't he? All of you. He's not taking me away." She'd wanted to have babies with Ryder since they graduated, but she had stayed on birth control because she feared having his baby would mean losing the others. But it turned out Ryder really was good at everything because he made a baby even though she was on birth control, and she was seven weeks pregnant.

"I'm sure he'll hide you often, my queen." Luc kissed her wrist again. "But, yes, he's allowing us to become one with him and you, to be more than uncles to his child. I'm answering with an eternity. There is no other woman for me, Jane. I will give this child all, as though it is mine."

"Sounds like you love me," she said, utterly dazed by his words.

He gave her a bored look. "You know my feelings for you."

She sulked. "You could say the words."

Of course he didn't respond to her pouting.

Her phone vibrated once, then twice. Then several times.

Luc smirked, pulling it from her robe pocket. "You know I have rules about texting when you're with me."

She bit her lip, nodding as he normally tied her hands behind her back and spanked her—not painfully—until he decided she'd learned her lesson. Or he'd torture her by keeping her on the edge of release all day.

He gave her a sexy smile and handed her the phone. "New rule while you're pregnant: answer your calls and texts from them immediately. Come for me immediately afterward."

"Immediately?"

"Well, give me time to sink my cock inside you, my queen. Now, respond to them. I'd like to have my turn."

"I'll be fast," she said, kissing him then unlocking her phone.

My David: We're having a baby?

She gasped, texting him right back: *It was a surprise.*

My David: I'm surprised.

My David: Are you okay? Happy?

Very good and happy. I'm sorry.

My David: Baby, you don't have to be sorry.

Tears stung her eyes, and she wrote: *But it's his.*

My David: It's yours.

My David: I love you so much, Jane. I'll love this baby like it's mine.

My David: I will consider it mine like he would if it was mine.

Really?

My David: Yes, baby.

My David: I gotta run.

Jane sniffed but smiled as she replied: *I love you, too, baby.*

My David: Beyond forever.

As soon as she read his last text, she jumped to Tercero's.

My Tercero: My tesoro has doubled?

Jane awed at his words and replied: *It's still very small.*

My Tercero: No, cara. He or she is already everything you are. I love you both.

She whined, her panic rising as she feared the truth of Ryder's actions. Her bad boy was amazing, but she didn't know if he'd truly be okay with letting her keep David, Tercero, and Luc.

Her heart sprinted at the next text.

Sweet Ryder: I found out your secret over a week ago, babe.

Sweet Ryder: Your tits are huge.

She laughed but hurried to read on.

Sweet Ryder: I was going to let you tell us, but David caught me reading pregnancy stuff.

Sweet Ryder: He was going to move out, but I told him our baby gets us both. All of us.

With trembling hands, she texted: *I love you.*

Sweet Ryder: And I love you.

Sweet Ryder: I'm already married to you in my dreams so there's no need to say goodbye to your loves.

Sweet Ryder: Enjoy the day with your king. Tonight, we're just Jane and Ryder. A goddess and the bad boy she used to say sassy things to but secretly stripped him naked in her dreams.

Sweet Ryder: Tomorrow we celebrate with the others. We're all daddy for this little pumpkin. I'll be King Daddy.

She texted him: *Really?*

Sweet Ryder: Really.

Sweet Ryder: I'm still yours, baby girl. And you're mine.

She cried, texting him back: *Always.*

Sweet Ryder: Longer.

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EPILOGUE 2

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A voice that sent tingles across her skin to kiss her soul suddenly spoke, rousing Jane from her sleep, “No, Mama can’t play right now.”

“Are you mad, Daddy?” asked the cutest little voice.

“I’m not mad,” he said, his voice drifting as he must’ve walked away.

Another voice—one closer—one that never failed to cause her skin to flush with desire and adoration, spoke after a fiery kiss was pressed onto her shoulder. “Mommy will be out soon. Let us wake her up, okay?”

“Okay, Daddy,” said the cute voice, followed by a door shutting.

“All right, my little queen of monsters,” said the first *man*. He was annoyed, but she felt his amusement in the air as tingles encircled her ankle, and he tugged her to the edge of the bed. “Wake your cute ass up and explain what the fuck just happened.”

Jane opened her eyes, blinking as several flashes of unnatural but familiar light filled her bedroom. David sat beside her; the lines of his handsome face fierce as he watched the others in the room. His room. Her room. Their room.

She darted her eyes to a fiery yet pleased as hell pair of emerald eyes. He was the first *man* who’d spoken. He was taller than the man-boy she’d just left in her dreams—deadlier,

too. Obviously. But there was no doubt about it, he was her bad boy through any existence they found one another in.

He didn't say anything, so she glanced at the other two, surprised as hell—literally—to see her king. Always in his white suit and now his ash-colored hair, his silver eyes cold, more magical than the gray pair that she'd stared into moments ago. *Lucifer*.

Then the black pair of eyes on her.

She swallowed, her throat tightening with thirst as he watched her. He'd been a surprise tonight, and she was going to have a hard time looking at him as just a friend now. *Famine*.

“Sweet Jane.” The Angel of Death tilted his head, his smirk deepening as tingles slid over her lips. “You realize that little dream of yours was more than a dream, don't you?”

“What?” She had been ready for jokes, for a very pissed off husband by the chance she talked in her sleep, but she didn't understand why all four of them were there. Only Death could read her mind, but they all had looks that roared desire, anger, and confusion.

“Was she glowing?”

Jane swung her gaze to Luc's—her king and eternity. “Glowing? I haven't glowed—”

“Like a Christmas tree,” David cut her off. “I fully understand Death, my love, and maybe even Lucifer, but why the fuck is Famine staring at you like you're his favorite snack?”

“Maybe ask him,” Death retorted, though he glared at his brother. “No, you're not fucking her. Or eating her ... out.”

Famine's thoughtful gaze met his brother's. “And what of you, brother? Are we to believe your role as number one was entirely her subconscious taking over? That her soul is kinkier than you?”

Death grinned, sending Jane a wink. “I can't help it if my girl knows I'm King Boyfriend in all existences. I simply

enjoyed the show.”

David grunted, but he didn't direct any wrath or annoyance at her. “So, she pushed that dream to us? Or what are you saying, that it was more than a dream?”

Lucifer answered, “It wasn't just a dream. She created an alternate reality. Everything we saw exists now in an alternate universe of her creation; one we will never walk in as we exist here—but one we exist in, nonetheless. As humans in a polyamorous relationship with Jane.”

“A reverse harem,” Famine provided.

Jane's jaw dropped. “Reverse harem?”

“Your soul, baby girl,” Death said. “She woke while you slept, and she was horny as fuck.” He laughed loudly now. “I can't believe you made Papi your brother.”

“It was stepbrother.” David pinched the bridge of his nose and stood, pacing. “It's not real, though.”

“It is,” Famine said as a new flash of light filled the room.

“Quite real.” Pestilence, the new arrival and First Horseman of the Apocalypse, strolled through the room, his pale eyes on her as he pushed his pale blond hair back. “My only question is why wasn't I number five?”

Death pushed him aside. “Because I'd kill you, even her soul knew that.”

Jane clutched her head as she watched David pace. He was going to hate her for this.

Death's voice filled her mind, “*He doesn't hate you,*”

“*He does,*” she replied mentally as she held a hand over her heart, her eyes trailing after David. “*I kinda made him a bad guy for some reason.*”

“*You're insecure about his past before he knew about you, my love. He knows that.*”

“*Still.*” She sucked in a breath as she was hit with an onslaught of betrayal from David. “*It's like the dreams I had when I was pregnant—with him cheating. It felt real.*”

“He didn’t cheat,” Death soothed. “But you’re gonna be insecure and hurt until you fully accept his past.”

Jane nodded, appreciating that the others were allowing her privacy with Death. He was her world here, just as he was in her dreams. *“I mean, it’s not like I haven’t dreamt about you as a human before, but before we had a reason for you being ...”*

“I am always with you first, babe,” Death said aloud, ignoring David’s sharp look. “And it changes nothing between us here. That was there—here, we are us. We are the originals of our existence. You already know there is more beyond this life.”

“But there, I’m with all of you?” She darted her gaze around the room.

Pestilence winked. “Not me, beautiful. Saw Jason tried to tap that, though. What the hell?”

David stopped pacing, sapphire eyes softening as they caught glimpse of her. “Because they’re forever.”

Her heart warmed, and she reached for him. “I’m sorry, baby.”

That smile. That gorgeous David Leodegrance smile, though he was a full man now, formed on his lips, as he walked closer. “You did nothing wrong.” His warm hands cupped her cheeks, and he leaned down, kissing her the way he always did, dominating and loving. “I’m certainly not upset about Jason. Your beautiful soul knows that man is forever tied to you, just as Death and I are.” He glanced at Luc. “As well as your king.”

“Doesn’t explain Famine hitting it,” Pestilence annoyingly pointed out. He threw his arm around his brother’s shoulder. “It’s the long hair and Death looks, isn’t it?”

Famine sighed, easily escaping from his brother’s hold. “It’s because I am hers in her darkest hour. She was asleep.”

Pestilence snickered. “You certainly saved her from darkness ... with your dick.”

Death raised his hand, and his scythe formed as he pointed it at Pestilence. “Another word, and it’s your dick you’ll be screaming for after I chop it off.”

Though Pestilence held his hands up in surrender, his light eyes sparkled with glee. “Why are you mad at me? Famine is the one who slipped in.”

David lifted Jane into his arms, his hand dropping to her ass as he eyed Famine. “Will your other half cause problems for us?”

She cringed, hugging David. Hunger, Famine’s sorta-wife if angels could marry, was volatile, and she was as close as an angel could come to a soul mate. She also *hungered* for more than Famine, and she strayed from him more often than one would think possible with an amazing man such as he to call hers.

Jane hated that Famine did nothing, not even an expression that he was hurt. All he did was come to her, relieved from pain because he experienced Jane’s love and how much she was loved by his brother.

Her eyes met his dark pair, and she smiled at him, loving that the faint smile he’d given her in the dream appeared before quickly disappearing.

“*Elise*,” Famine said, preferring her more human name than the embodiment of Hunger, “has no right to argue. And, as my brother said, nothing changes here. You and I are still merely ... bonded.”

Something inside her wept at his words, but she didn’t say anything.

David slid a hand down her spine and addressed Famine, “I think you have always been more than bonded. It’s no secret you two are closest out of the other Horsemen, and it is no secret I allow you such closeness.”

Her whole being warmed at his words and at the fact Famine didn’t deny they were closer than she was with Death’s other brothers.

“It could be worse,” Death said. “Lance could’ve banged her.”

Lucifer sighed, closing his eyes. “You did not just say banged. You are the Angel of Death. Act like it.”

She grinned as David actually laughed and kissed her.

“He’s hopeless around her,” David said, sitting on their bed but not moving her from being wrapped around him. “All I care about is that we found each other, and we found a way to be together, even when the universe was against us.”

Death sent his scythe away and sat on the bed. Well, he sprawled out and curled a finger at her. “Daddy Death wants to spend time with his wifey. I say we make our dream baby a reality.”

“Your baby is a reality.” David kissed her shoulder. “Does this impact her world?”

Luc answered, “Our kingdom still grows in Hell’s ruins. Waiting for her.”

Tingles bloomed below her heart and to the side, and Death reached for her. “Don’t fear your future.”

A searing kiss pressed against her neck, and David smacked her butt. “He’ll find you first, and you know I will never stop searching for you. Go to him before he pouts.”

She giggled, crawling off his lap and over to her angel.

“I think it’s Ryder and Jane naughty time,” Death teased, tugging her onto his body so she could lie on his chest.

“Behave,” David said, standing. He walked toward Luc, and the room grew hot. “Are you done here?”

Death kissed her neck as a faint blue hue pulsed around David. “Watch, my love. Papi stirs ...”

Jane held her breath, waiting for Luc to respond. She didn’t see him much anymore, and she missed him. But he was her eternity, not her husband. Not her Death.

Finally, Luc spoke, that elegant way that Jane knew irritated everyone but her. “Considering I am joined with my

queen for an eternity, I am never done.”

The muscles in David’s back and arms flexed, and the blue hue pulsed with power. “Considering this is my home, and she’s in my bed, I say you are.”

Luc smirked. “In this world, perhaps.”

Pestilence laughed suddenly. “Jane’s soul literally had herself some *Fifty Shades of Grey*. She does like the gray hair, brother.”

“Don’t,” Jane said, knowing David would probably do something he wouldn’t be able to stop if he rose to Luc’s taunt and Pestilence’s pestering.

“Say your goodbye,” was all David said before striding toward the door, but he slowed, his aura flickering, and met Famine’s stare.

“There is no need to issue a warning, Prince David,” Famine told him calmly. “Treasure is not always meant to be spent. I am content guarding mine, watching as she is cherished by her heart and soul, and world.” He walked closer to Jane, caressing her cheek, and she sighed as a mixture of those very things spread over her skin. “As always, Sweetest Jane, think of me in your darkest hour. For I am yours to bring.”

She covered his hand, nuzzling it as she felt something shift, something strengthen between them, and it wasn’t just the bond she had with his brothers. “Thank you, Famine.”

“Of course,” he said, smiling, “*tesoro*.” A black mist, then flashes of white instantly erupted, signaling his and Pestilence’s departure.

Death hugged her, waving David away. “The little one is coming.”

“Stay with her,” David said, nodding at Luc, who nodded in return, then he left the room.

“Luc,” she said, holding out her hand. “Are you okay?”

He came closer, taking her hand and raising it. He stayed quiet as he turned her wrist, but he smiled faintly and kissed

the mark there. “Do not ask silly questions, my queen.”

Death reached forward and smacked Luc’s hand away. “Mine.”

“Child,” Luc said as Death chuckled, and those silver eyes landed on hers. “Smile for me.”

Without hesitation, she did as he asked—she’d never deny him again.

He took it in without any reaction, but her heart fluttered anyway. “Now I am okay.”

The tenderness of the moment didn’t last.

Death held up the middle finger. “Leave. Teen, human me had the right idea. I feel like making babies with her.”

“Let’s save further damnation of Jane’s soul for another reality, shall we?” Luc moved away, though he kept staring into her eyes.

“She’s already going to Hell,” Death said seriously. “How about you fuck off and let me have my girl the way I’m supposed to?”

Luc gave her a full smile. “Is that not what she has been doing all this time, little brother?”

Death hugged her, his whole presence pulsing through her. “Is that what you’re doing, angel? Making it up to me?” When she didn’t respond, he nuzzled her with his nose and slid a hand to his spot. Tingles. “There’s nothing to make up. You have me, and I have you. We’re everything. I’m even a daddy, just like the lucky human version you created.”

Boldly, Luc approached again, leaning down and kissing the corner of her mouth. “It was a lovely dream, Jane. The only thing I regret is that I did not experience what that version of myself was permitted with you.”

Death pulled her closer and away from Luc. “Yes, it was lovely. I am certain we will live happily ever after there, Sweet Jane.” He focused on the King of Hell. “It’s not her time ... Not your time with her yet. And you can thank me for ending that glimpse she gave us.”

“You allowed a peek at her and *Tercero*, but you blocked the physical relationship she no doubt had with me?” Luc chuckled darkly. “Cute.”

“*Tercero* looks like me—it was hot.” Death narrowed his gaze at Luc. “You, however, have taken what is mine. It will be a long wait in Hell until you have her.”

Silver sparked in Luc’s eyes. “An even longer wait for you to see her as your wife.”

Jane gasped and prayed they didn’t fight.

Though destruction surged beneath his skin, Death replied in an empty tone, “Goodbye, brother.”

Luc fixed the cuffs of his sleeves. “Until eternity, my queen.”

She ignored Death’s growl and even though she was sore from his words to Death, she smiled for Luc. “Until eternity, my king.”

Brilliant white light erupted, and he was gone, and she was again alone with her bad boy.

“Breathe,” Death whispered against her hair. “I have my rage under control.”

“He didn’t mean it,” she said softly.

“He did.” Death kissed her temple. “Bad boy, huh?” She loved him for changing the subject. “Is that how you see me?”

“Yes.” She covered his hand. “We made a baby. You were happy to be a daddy. Not like now.”

“I was human, babe.” He kissed her head. “The way I wish I could be for you. Apparently, your soul wishes the same when she’s horny.”

“You promise you’ll find me,” she said. Her end, and what it would mean, haunted her daily. “Will you find me in Hell, Death?”

As David entered the room, Death replied, “We will find you, Sweet Jane. No matter where you send us, where you are taken, or where you are lost—we will come for you.”

David gave her that beautiful smile. “You get us both, my love. Beyond forever.”

Jane held out a hand for David, sighing as Death moved her hair and kissed her neck. “Yes, beyond.”

“And?” Death prompted as David leaned down, teasing her with a kiss.

Whimpering, she clutched at her David but pulled Death closer. “And for longer than always.”

“Exactly,” Death said, moving a hand between her legs.

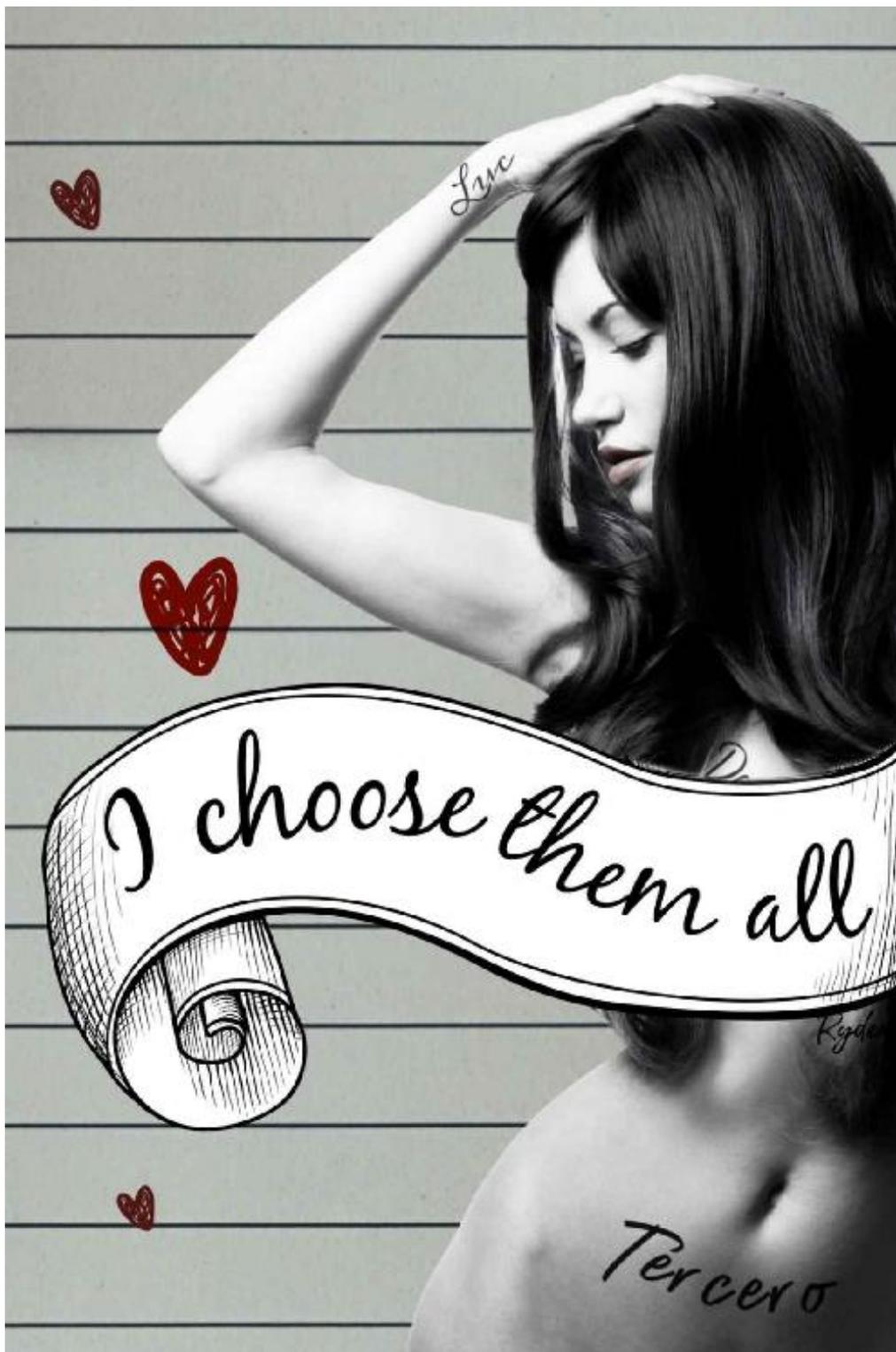
“Mama?” the sweet voice yelled from outside the door.

She laughed, starting to push them away. “Karma is haunting you for cock-blocking, Death. You’ve been cock-blocked by our—”

“Uh-uh.” Death gripped her tightly and responded to the sweet voice, “Go find Uncle War—Mama’s busy.”

An older voice called out, “Mama said she’d take us riding.”

“She’s about to practice riding, then she’ll be out,” Death shouted, snickering as David shook his head. “Now, scram. It’s Sweet Jane’s time with her Ds.”



THIRTY-TWO

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CONFUSED?

Confused by that last epilogue? If this is your first Janie Marie novel, don't worry. You're not alone and it was intended to be a bit confusing.

Epilogue 2 — When the Little Moon Dreams is several things. First, it's an explanation for how this story was created. Jane, in a different reality, had the naughtiest of dreams, and accidentally created another reality where she and the “men” in her life are all human teenagers.

Second, it's a fan service to existing Gods & Monsters fans. If you loved the boys in Jane's Team, you'll swoon for their origins. Those men are to die for, and you get to see how Jane went from broken woman to powerful goddess capable of making some steamy dreams.

Last, it's a glimpse. Because if you did enjoy this story, and you felt at times the story might suddenly reveal something supernatural, you'll understand the little jokes throughout the book.

Example: “*Jesus Christ,*” Kingston muttered, rubbing his forehead.

Ryder grinned at her. “He’s way off.” -Chapter 19

Because Ryder came from the Angel of Death. David came from a prince—I'll let you find out what kind on your own. Tercero is the product of Famine, the third Horseman of the Apocalypse. Tercero means third in Spanish. And that should explain why Jane was so hungry for him. Lol.

And Luc is the King of Hell himself, Lucifer.

The other guys who all seem to have loyalty to Jane are all part of G&M as well. A bunch of devils, wolves, and—well, you'll have to read to meet their original versions.

I do warn all who consider meeting them that G&M is heartbreaking. It's rough. And Jane is frustrating. She was created for a purpose, for those who have suffered abuse, loss, and mental health disorders. Her battle against those things are part of the epic journey to save the world, but it makes for a difficult read. Because she's there to give hope to those who struggle to see the light.

But it's all worth it. You can tell by that epilogue a lot took place for them to get where they are, and they're going to still have many journeys even if the trilogy is over.

So, feel free to jump over. I plan to write more Bizarro realities, and the G&M novels will stretch far beyond the realm of reality as we know it.

Check the next page for more or visit my [Amazon profile](#).

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Thank you to Janie's Sweet Monsters. They're a group of street team supporters, bloggers, ARC reviewers, and fellow authors. You're so amazing, and I can't thank you enough for your support through the years.

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And thank you to everyone who chooses to take a chance on my books.

xx

Janie

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Janie Marie is a native Texan and resides in her hometown north of Austin, Texas, where she devotes her time to family, pets, and her writing.

Much of her life experiences—good and a lot of bad—are where she has chosen to draw inspiration from to create her characters and stories. It's important to her to create the kind of characters she needs or needed at one point in time because she wanted to create something only the saddest souls would recognize as brave and strong.

Be ready for raw, emotional tales, as Janie never holds back. With her darkest thoughts she found light is still possible, that the sad girl can sometimes glow the brightest. Because she is beauty surrounded by darkness.



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