

*A Vancini Mafia Dark Romance*



# MADNESS

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Jayla Talbot

Madness

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*To everyone who wanted to give up  
but didn't.*

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# Author's Note

Books can provide a catharsis and a safe place to work through our own personal fears and traumas. But please be mindful of your mental health.

This is a dark romance and will not be for every reader. It is intended as a work of fiction, not a representation of safe sexual practices. Please be advised of the following content warnings.

## References To:

Suicidal Ideation

Drug Use

Child Neglect

## Scenes Depicting:

Kidnapping

Attempted Sexual Assault

Stalking

Murder

Torture

Violence

Dub Con

Orgasm Control

Degradation

Impact Play

Knife Play

Breath Play

Blood Play

# 1

## Maddox

**M**y fingers closed around the collar of his shirt before I threw his body against the wall like a rag doll. His bones made a sickening crunch as they connected with the brick. I closed my eyes to savor the sound, a sadistic thrill racing through my veins.

“Looks like we have an infestation.” I mused.

A dim light from a single bulb on the building lit the alley, and the crumpled body on the ground. I nodded my chin at Sebastian. He roughly yanked the cockroach to his knees. Blood trickled from his nose, dripping onto his white shirt.

I tilted my head and stared at it for a moment. There was something beautiful about the pattern it made. The red slowly overtook the white, like death killing innocence.

Moments like this always made me philosophical. The violence gave me a sense of calm my mind didn't usually have.

“Tell me why you were here tonight?” You would think they’d be anger in my voice, but the sight of his injuries sated my rage.

The night had been boring. Until now. It was time to have my fun. I was worried it would be unsatisfying. It was too easy to spot him. He stood out like a weed among flowers when I saw him sitting at a table in our private gambling club. I didn’t think it was a coincidence he’d snuck in.

He stared up at me, his jaw in a hard line, lips pressed together. Like he was going to fight me. Yes, I loved when they resisted.

I brought my fist down onto his face. Felt the break beneath my knuckles. Another. I relished in the violence. In the shattering of bones. The painful grunts. The split skin.

I reached into my pocket and pulled out the small blade I always kept with me. I saw the slight fear in his eyes as I ran the knife down his cheek, cutting a small line in his skin. Drops of fresh blood mixed with the bruises my knuckles had made. Making his face look like a fucked up mosaic. I moved the knife to the other cheek and repeated the action.

Each bruise, each cut in the skin, calmed my blood. My breathing regulated. I felt the subtle changes as my body relaxed. I wasn’t torturing an innocent man. Not that it would’ve mattered to me. But he wandered into our territory. And to protect the family, I needed to know why.

I stepped back. His blood dripped from my hands, making a soft sound as it fell to the cold concrete. “Let’s try again.

Why are you here?”

“*Vaffanculo.*” *Fuck you.* He grunted and fought against Sebastian’s hold on him.

I slapped him across the face. Embarrassing him as I irritated his injuries. “You’re not really my type. But I bet you have a pretty girlfriend who could use my company.”

The cockroach’s face gave nothing away as he stared at me. I almost laughed. He could fight all he wanted, but he wouldn’t win. Everyone has a weakness that could be exploited. A family member they wanted to keep safe. A debt that needed to be paid. An addiction they craved.

My job was to find those weaknesses. Then exploit them to get what the family wants. And I was damn good at my job.

“No. No girlfriend?” I crouched in front of him. One hand rested on my thighs as the other gripped the knife. I ran it down his shirt. I watched the buttons pop off, pinged to the ground, scattering away in the night. I traced a line down his chest, circling the rosary tattoo. I chuckled as I realized it probably made him feel safe. Protected. I sliced efficiently through the design, ruining whatever illusion he had of safety. “How about a little sister?”

I saw his eyes flash for a second before he schooled his features.

Got him.

People were so easy to read. They didn’t even realize all the subtle things they gave away with just their faces. It made

controlling them simple. And that was before I dug into their lives and found their secrets.

“I bet you do have a sister. That’s probably why you joined this life. To protect her.” I tapped his cheek and watched as he winced. “What will become of her once you’re dead? I suppose I could always pay her a visit.”

His jaw clenched as he looked at me. I wouldn’t actually hurt his sister. There might be a demon inside me that clawed at my insides; begged me to kill and control, but I hadn’t crossed that line. There was no need. Not when I had willing pussy falling at my feet. Worshiping me so they could feel a little of my power.

“Now, if you don’t want me to do that, you’ll answer my questions.”

His eyes drooped, and I knew I’d won. I felt the rush flood my brain. The utter control and elation that came with being on top. Being the best. A feeling I craved. This was my addiction. Only it could never be used against me.

“I was ordered here.”

I smiled at him. “Keep talking.”

\* \* \*

I wiped the blood from my hands as I sat in the backseat, the city rushing by. Looking at the skyscrapers, expensive apartments, and clean streets, it was hard to believe Sayton City was the criminal hub in the Midwest. People tended to believe that all the prominent Mafia families and criminal

syndicates lived on the coast, in LA or New York, but the Midwest proved to have its benefits.

With the proximity to Canada and the waterfront, we were able to traffic whatever we wanted through here with ease. There was none of the heightened security that the larger cities had. It helped that we had members of law enforcement in our pockets.

We weren't the only Mafia family in Sayton City, but we were the most powerful. A power my father had earned years ago with blood. No one had dared to challenge our hold in the city since then.

I glanced at my now clean hands, missing the feel of the blood between my fingers. I already felt the disturbed energy building inside me again. The thrill I'd gotten from the torture was being replaced. It wouldn't be long before I needed another release. But I would control it until the next time it could be used to my full advantage.

"Leif has been informed?" I asked Sebastian as he drove us away from the alley. Sebastian was the son of one of my father's guards. We'd been raised together, and now he served under me in the family.

He nodded. "He called a meeting at the club."

As expected. We needed to handle this threat before it grew. That wasn't why the anger was building quickly.

"Where the fuck is Tristan?" He should have been there to intercept the cockroach before he infiltrated. Tristan was my

uncle's son. He was destined to take over a position as one of the capos, but someone needed to retire... or be eliminated first. Until then, he served with Sebastian.

Sebastian's expression darkened. He didn't like being a babysitter, and neither did I. "I'm not sure."

"Find out. And if he doesn't have a good reason, remind him of his place."

It wasn't an accident that I was born into this life. Born without a heart. Without a soul. Without the ability to feel guilt. To feel anything. I was made for it. Specifically created a little fucked up to survive it.

To thrive.

Rule.

Maybe I should hate it. But I didn't. Not when my body craved the violent release. I couldn't help how I felt. And I long ago stopped trying to figure it out or fix it.

This was the only way to live in the world of criminals. I loved the raw reality of it. Bringing humanity down to its most basic instincts. Survival.

Kill or be killed.

## Kincaid

**T**he crushing weight on my chest was too much. I couldn't breathe. I wanted to claw inside my body and rip it away. Stop it from choking me. I wanted to fight. To scream.

But it lived in me.

It wasn't another person I could shove away. Or an object that was easily removed.

It was the weight of being born into a life I couldn't escape. A life that only led to bad choices. Because they were no good ones.

Sometimes I wondered if it would be better to slit my wrists. To lie in the red. To watch my life drain from my body.

At least the weight would be gone. There would be no more decisions to make. No more pressing forward.

What was the point of this life anyways? We lived for brief, fleeting moments of happiness. Leaving us craving the next one. We walked around like junkies looking for a hit.

For some, it was drugs. Or sex. The lucky ones actually had other people that made them happy. I wasn't one of the lucky few. Not anymore.

I had books. Stories I could get lost in. They gave me a reprieve from this life I didn't ask for—the one I sometimes wanted to end.

But I wouldn't. I couldn't. I'd made a promise.

So instead, I did what I did every time the pain became too much. I wiped the tears as I pushed off the bathroom floor. I stumbled to my bed and grabbed the book I'd left there.

It was an old paperback I'd picked out of the garbage at the library. People didn't realize how many books were thrown away. Libraries and stores didn't have enough space for them and often cleared out the old ones. Good for me because I couldn't afford to fund my addiction.

I inhaled the unique scent. Something I would never be able to describe. But if you loved books, you knew the smell. It brought back the only happy memories I had. Memories of my mother reading to me. Nights snuggled in bed, before I realized our place in this world.

I immediately felt my brain chemistry right itself as the scent washed over me. My chest loosened as I turned the pages. The ink under the pads of my fingers was comforting. Almost as if the pages were wrapping around me in a hug. Soon I was lost in another time and place.

Instead of my city apartment, I lived in a cottage in a small town. Instead of my job as a waitress at a strip club, I inherited my family's bed and breakfast. Instead of being alone, I was married to my high school sweetheart.

Romance novels seeped into my soul, sucking away the bleakness that wanted to consume me. I felt lighter the longer I read. It started to build the strength in me I would need to get up later. I knew it would only last for as long as I could disassociate. My problems would still be there when I was done. But for now, I let myself get lost before I the need to give in won.

## Maddox

The music worked its way under my skin, making my body itchy and restless. Even the sight of barely clothed women dancing around Entice did nothing to calm me. Everything around me was boring; conventional. I craved something more. Something dirty and depraved.

I should have gone to the other club; at least there, I could've found someone to fuck or watch. Wicked was a kink club with a particular client list; I'd rather be there tonight. But what I wanted didn't matter. Leif, the underboss, called a meeting, so here I was. Later I would go find myself some entertainment.

I walked towards the private room; the place looked like every other strip club. Red leather booths sat against back walls; tables and chairs surrounded the stage where a barely clothed woman danced. Scantily clad women walked around serving drinks, and the music was loud enough to drown out your thoughts. Low lights hid the business that was going on.

No one would suspect the place was owned by the Mafia, and that was the point.

Sebastian and Tristan walked on either side of me. Sebastian, or Bash, was broader than I was. He practically had to turn sideways to walk through most doors. If that didn't scare people, his tattoos and buzzed hair usually did the trick. Tristan's blonde hair and fair skin matched his mother's. He was slightly smaller than me, but his usefulness didn't come from his build. He was cunning and ruthless.

They were my most trusted soldiers, not that I needed their protection. But I did need their loyalty and their ears. They got me the information I needed to rise. To stay alive. I had been given my position as a capo in the Vancini family Mafia because my father, Leonardo, was the big boss. But I wasn't going to live on name only.

If I allowed myself to relax, if I allowed weakness, then I would die. And I wasn't ready to die yet. Not that I was scared of death. It didn't fear me. I did fear failure. I feared not being the best. The smartest. I thrived on the domination of being the most ruthless capo in the family.

But my strength was in information, not the physical. I brought down our enemies by using their darkest secrets against them, by twisting their weaknesses until they had no choice but to give in to me. I lived for that high. For the control.

Tristan pushed through the crowd of sweaty male bodies without a care for their well-being. The men hardly noticed as

they ogled the woman on stage. Finally, we reached the door to our private meeting room. Elijah, one of Leif's guards, stood outside the door; Tristan took his place beside him while Bash and I entered.

The low lighting made it nearly impossible to make out the walls covered in black fabric. Leif sat in a booth lined in red velvet, Owen, his second, stood next to the door. Across the table from Leif was Constantine, Dante, Cesare, the other capos. Their guards stood next to Owen as Bash joined them.

I took my seat next to Leif, my older half-brother. We both look like our father. Dark hair and olive skin. But my eyes are blue while Leif got the dark brown of our father's.

I never resented him for getting the underboss position over me. I didn't want the responsibility of being the boss. I liked the freedom I had now. I could use the methods I wanted as long as I got results.

"Maddox." Leif greeted.

"Leif." I tipped my chin down as a sign of respect.

"Now that everyone is present, we can begin." I leaned back in my seat as if I didn't care about the business we were planning to conduct.

In truth, I didn't really. I enjoyed the power of my position. I liked that it gave me a way to use my skills. Where else could I torture people and be praised for it? And for that reason, I kept the family alive and safe. To fuel my own sick needs.

“The Gallo Family is trying to encroach on our gambling clubs.” Leif said. “They’ve set up several rival clubs nearby.”

“*Stronzo.*” Cesare spit onto the floor. He rose through the ranks with my father. He’s smart but has a short temper when crossed. “After we agreed to look the other way on their drug trafficking, they slight us like this.”

As a rule, our family didn’t deal drugs. On the surface, it seemed like a practical business for the Mafia. Customers were always coming back for more, but junkies were unreliable. The prison times were high if you were caught. And the market was diluted; everyone sold drugs these days. All those were reason enough, but the biggest problem was drugs made you weak. Stupid. We couldn’t risk our men getting addicted and it affecting our more profitable businesses.

“We never should have trusted Matteo. He clearly doesn’t speak for Carmine.” Dante added. Dante is ten years old than me. He inherited the position when his uncle was assassinated. He prefers to rule with his fists rather than his head.

Leif raised his hand to stop their outbursts. Unlike our father, Leif knew the advantage of quiet. Father held the belief that you could command with shouts. But silence was often more effective. Silence made your enemies imagine the worst. Humans had an innate need to fill the quiet. Men spilled their guts if silence was used correctly.

“What do you want us to do?” Constantine asked. He’s the oldest of the sitting capos. This will likely be the position

Tristan inherits. He's in his late sixties and has started to show his age. He's lost his vigilance in security. If he became a problem, it would be my job to eliminate him. And I wouldn't feel a thing while I did it.

Leif looked to me. "Maddox, what did you learn from the man you captured?"

I felt the sadistic smile as I spoke. "I was able to persuade him, though he didn't know much. He was sent to spy on us and lure customers away with a promise of less interest on their debts."

Cesare spit on the ground again as the other capos grumbled their displeasure.

"Do you still have your man on the inside?" Leif asked.

I had people everywhere. How else would I find out the secrets I needed to control? I nodded.

"See what he knows. We need to determine if this is isolated or if they plan to come for all our territories." He turned to address the other three. "In the meantime, I want extra security at all our clubs and all shipments. We don't know their plans yet. We can't risk any loss of product."

Each man nodded their head. I was already wondering how I would extract the information I needed. My man on the inside had a nasty drug problem. Perhaps I'd give him his next fix to get the information I needed.

The door opened, bringing with it the noise from the club before it cut off again. A cocktail waitress stood in front of us.

She wore a different uniform than the rest of them. A tight black tank top that hugged huge perky tits, they weren't spilling from her top like most of the other women, but the slight modesty was enough to get my attention. Her round ass was covered in a red leather skirt. I could see peaks of the creamy skin on her legs through her fishnet tights. My eyes finally rested on the black heels she wore.

I did another slow appraisal of her from those feet to the curves in her waist and her full breasts before finally looking at her face. She didn't wear the layer of make-up the others did. I could see her translucent skin. It was so fair the blue of her veins was visible. Her pink lips were plump and unlined. Her white blonde hair was pulled away from her face, but pieces had fallen and clung to her smooth neck. Her eyes were the lightest shade of gray I'd ever seen, like the sky on a cold winter day.

But none of that really interested me. It was the hint of fear in her eyes that had my cock's attention. I could almost smell her apprehension. A smirk tugged at my lips for the first time all night.

I just found my entertainment.

## Maddox

The waitress held a tray in front of her body as if it could shield her from me. Her eyes flicked to mine before focusing back on Leif. She was smart enough to sense who was the leader in the room.

“Trixie sent me in to see if I could get you anything.” Her soft sweet voice called to the demon inside me. It wanted to come out and play with her. To hear that voice as it cried out in pain.

“Whiskey all around.” He dismissed her without a second glance. Good, I didn’t want to fight for her. Although that might have added to the fun.

She nodded before leaving the room again. The conversation turned to each capo’s numbers, but I let it play like a buzz in my head. I had already reported to Leif today. Instead, I pictured the little dove that had just left. She was a bird who’d flown into the wrong cage tonight. And I was going to enjoy trapping her.

I wondered if her fear made her heart race. If the blood in her veins was pumping harder, telling her to run away. That would've been the smart thing to do. How an innocent like her ended up in one of our clubs was a mystery. She clearly wasn't a stripper. And she didn't even have enough sense to hide behind her clothes and make-up.

A weird feeling sunk into my stomach. I didn't like her walking around my club in that outfit. I didn't want all those men out there to see what I did. She was mine to ruin. And I *would* ruin her. None of those men would want her after she broke for me.

The door opened again. My gaze stalked her as she walked to the table. She placed drinks in front of the other capos and Leif, but she had to come to the other side of the table to hand me mine. She leaned over, bringing her body and her scent within inches of me. She smelled clean and powdery, adding to her innocence. My eyes lingered on the view down her top. I could just see the edges of a black lace bra.

Maybe not so innocent.

I smiled at the slight tremor in her hand as she placed the glass on the table. I heard the quiet exhale as she started to pull away. She thought she was safe, free. The monster in me laughed.

My hand struck out, capturing her slim wrist between my fingers. My cock twitched at her fragility. I swallowed her whole forearm, my fingers crossing where I held her. She was so tiny. I could break her without trying too hard.

Her porcelain skin was going to look so good with my mark on it. I was going to bruise every inch of her body. I was going to stare at her ass, where it was red and bleeding from my hand, as I fucked her. I was going to tear that tight little pussy while she screamed for me to stop. Of course, I wouldn't. I didn't have a drop of mercy in my body.

Her wintery eyes widened slightly, but that was the only sign she felt my touch. She looked at me through her lashes like she knew not to make direct eye contact. My blood roared at the subtle yield to my power.

This is what was calling to me. She was innocent, but even from a distance, I could see the quiet submissive that lived in her. She might not even know it existed, but it spoke to me anyways. She wanted to be owned. I could see it in the tip of her chin, in the look in her eyes.

“What’s your name, little dove?” I let my voice come out soft, smoothing the sharp edges.

Her eyes flicked around to the other men like one of them would save her. I almost laughed. Instead, I gave her a charming smile. I knew how to play people. I wasn't only skilled at intimidation and threats. I could use charm and kindness just as easy to get what I wanted.

She cleared her throat before looking back at me. “Kitty.”

My grip on her wrist tightened. For just a fraction of a second, I showed her what would happen if she continued to lie to me. Her breath hitched, but she didn't try to pull away. She was smart. I wouldn't have let her go.

“Your real name.”

“I don’t give out that information. You can call me Kitty.” It didn’t suit her. It was juvenile. She was too beautiful. Too pure for that name.

I leaned forward until my lips met her ear. A shiver passed through her body. An answering rush of arousal coursed through mine. “Don’t make me work for it.”

“I’m not trying to make you work for anything.” Her voice was surprisingly calm. “Now, please let me go so I can do my job.” That little please had my dick hard enough that the zipper cut into my skin. Her pleas were going to be music to my ears.

“I will find out who you are.” I released her wrist. I wasn’t really letting her go, but I’d let her think she’d won. I’d let her feel the relief before I took it away. It wasn’t fear that could ruin someone. It was hope, then finally, the absence of it, that crushed their very soul.

“You do that.” The flash of defiance in her eyes only intensified my interest. I was going to squash that defiance. Feel it disintegrate in my fingers. When I was done, there’d be no light behind those eyes.

Once I released her, she moved to the door again. She didn’t run or give away her fear, but it was there. Permeating the air. Fuck, I could feel it in my bones. I loved that fear. I watched her ass sway as the door closed behind her. That ass was going to look good covered in my cum.

“Looks like Mad found his new toy.” Dante said, and the others laughed.

They only knew some of my depravity. I’d known I was different my whole life. I needed control. Needed to watch others squirm as I pulled their strings. When I hit puberty, those feelings intensified. I couldn’t reach sexual gratification unless I inflicted pain. But even that soon became boring.

Anyone can hit to deliver a wound. It was in my early twenties when I learned the full extent to which I could use manipulation. Now I had very singular taste.

A part of me knew it was wrong. That even other monsters would see me as the demon I was. But it didn’t stop me. When I found a toy I wanted, I took it.

I would break the defiance in the little dove and discard her like the rest. They meant nothing to me. They were just holes for me to use. For me to control. I got off on the pain, but more than that, I got off on pushing them until they broke. I loved to watch them shatter until there was nothing left. Until not even they could look at themselves.

## Kincaid

I let out a long breath as I rushed from the private room. Working that room wasn't even my job, but Trixie had recently made the switch from waitress to stripper. I was told to take over all her tables until they hired a replacement.

I watched Trixie for a second as she wrapped her leg around the pole. Even as a stripper, there was an elegance about her. She was too good to be working at Entice. It was one of the nicest strip clubs in town, but it was still a strip club. I was too good to be working here too. But life hadn't given either of us a choice.

Trixie was my only friend here, of course; that wasn't her real name, just like Kitty wasn't mine. She was actually Tessa. She wasn't just the only one I had here; she was the only person I had in the world. Cancer had finally taken my Mom last year, leaving me all alone.

All alone with a mountain of medical debt. That was how I ended up here. There weren't a lot of places where I could

make \$300 a night. Yes, I had to deal with grabby men. I had to wear this stupid revealing outfit. I had to listen to the same loud music every night, but when the option was this or starving, you did what you had to.

I'd also been able to stay at home with Mom during the day. Our neighbor would check on her at night for me. I was able to be there for her during her last few months, and that was something I couldn't trade.

I checked on the rest of my tables and filled drink orders as I waited for Tessa's number to end. Once the music stopped, I rushed backstage to talk to her. Tessa wore a pale blue robe over her naked body as she leaned over her dressing table and reapplied her lipstick. She went back on again in a few minutes.

Her long black hair fell in curls around her waist. Her legs peaked out of the robe, strong and tan. She was several inches taller than me, and I wished for her height. Her green eyes brightened as she looked in my direction. We'd both had to be tough to survive this world, but we knew we could let our guard down around each other.

"Hey, Kin, how's it going?" She dropped the robe and reached for another set of lingerie hanging behind her. I'd learned to ignore the nakedness around me. It came with working at the club; most of us didn't see it anymore.

"Fine." I rubbed my lips together, wondering if I should ask her. "What's with the guys in the private room?"

Tessa's hands still as she stepped into her panties. She looked up at me, and the color drained from her face. "Why?"

I shrugged, trying to pretend they hadn't bothered me. And most of them hadn't even looked at me. But one did. One of them grabbed my hand, and I felt like my whole body would go up in flames. He tried to smile and act charming, but I'd seen it.

There was a demon behind that mask.

I'd dealt with enough demons in my life; I didn't need another. I'd barely survived the last one. And something told me this guy would be worse than anyone I'd ever encountered.

"I don't know. They gave me the wig."

"The wig?" Tessa raised a brow.

I pursed my lips and put my hand on my hips. "Yeah, you know. They wigged me out. They're scary."

She tipped her head back and laughed before she finished dressing. "Only you would say it like that."

"Whatever. Who are they anyways?" I tried to sound nonchalant, but my heart knocked against my ribs.

One of the bouncers opened the door that separated the club from backstage; the steady bass filled the room around us.

"One minute, Trix."

"I got it, David." Tessa slipped her heels back on before she turned to me and grabbed my shoulders. "They're bad

news. Stay as far away from them as you can. Promise me? Kincaid Collins, promise me.”

“Okay, I promise.” I suppressed the urge to roll my eyes. I knew that much already. I didn’t need her to tell me. The danger in the air around them was like a physical force. I’d have to be stupid or dead not to feel it. She pushed past me and made her way onto the stage.

I took a deep breath and headed back out into the club. I checked on all my tables again. I successfully avoided a guy who tried to grab my ass and turned down another with a gold band on his finger. Gold band or not, I had no interest in dating anyone I met at the club. Not that I was that interested in dating at all.

My last several boyfriends had been duds. I didn’t know if I was picking the wrong men or if I was just meant to be alone. Some people were. I wasn’t sure I had the mental capacity to deal with another person and their problems. I was dealing with enough of my own.

My chest tightened as I thought about the bills that still needed to be paid. I’d shuffled some around, but soon the notices would have ‘final’ stamped on them. The overwhelming responsibility pressed down on me. Sometimes I just wanted to walk away from it all. Leave my life behind and start over.

I wished I was in one of the romance novels I read. Where was my sexy billionaire who would whisk me away? Take all

my problems and solve them. Treat me like a queen and give me everything I asked for.

Getting lost in those stories was the only time the pressure on my chest eased. Suspending reality, even for the few hours I read, made it possible to keep moving forward. To keep putting one foot in front of the other. If I gave in to the dark thoughts in my head, I might never make it out. Some days I didn't want to.

I sighed. That was part of the reason I shouldn't put all the blame for my failed relationships on the men. My books might have given me some high expectations. Even as I thought it, I knew it was a lie. I was a lie. I lied about my desires. It was hard to get someone off when they wouldn't tell you what they wanted. But I couldn't.

I could never reveal what I really wanted. How twisted I really was.

"Kitty." Rodney, the manager, called my name over the music. He was another of the things I didn't like about working here. Trying to keep his hands off me was like fighting an octopus; there was always one more tentacle trying to latch on. But I put up with it for the same reason we all did; we needed the money.

I moved to the bar where he was standing. Precious, the bartender, filled my tray as I waited for Rodney to tell me why he called me over. He was thirty-five, ten years older than me, with light brown hair that was receding. He wasn't overweight, but he wasn't in shape either. He had a hooked

nose and yellow teeth. I crossed my arms over my chest to try and hide from him as his eyes roamed over my body.

I intentionally wore less flashy clothes than the other waitresses. My skirt stopped at mid-thigh, and tights covered my legs. My tank barely showed cleavage, and I always wore my hair up. I didn't put on make-up either. I wanted to fall into the background. I didn't want to be flirted with, even if it meant I got fewer tips. But none of that deterred my boss.

“You look good tonight.” His mouth twisted into a lecherous smile as he looked at me. “You need to check on the private room again.”

I held back the groan that wanted to escape my lips. “Can't someone else do it? I'm really busy—“

“They specifically asked for you. You'll be working that room exclusively all night.”

My heart dropped to my feet. “What? But I need the tips.”

“Would you rather not have a job?” He sneered. He loved to hold the threat of firing us over our heads. “Those men own the club. If they want you, they get you. Don't make trouble.”

The club owners? Did Tessa know that? Was that what she was trying to tell me? These men held my job in their hands. Shit, I didn't want to play nice with them. Well, one of them in particular.

“I got it.” I lifted the tray full of drinks. I could feel Rodney watching me as I walked away, and my skin crawled.

Another man had watched me walk away tonight, but it hadn't felt like this. I didn't want to admit I felt it at all. But I had. His eyes burned my skin just like his touch.

The sound of the music pulsed through my veins. My eyes flicked to the private room. Only two guys were standing outside it now, which meant some of the men had left. But not all of them.

My breath caught in my throat the closer I walked to the room. I tried to calm myself down. He was just a man. I could handle him like I handled the rest of the idiots who came in here.

One of the men peeled away from the wall and approached me. His tattooed hand came to my shoulder to stop me. He had been in the room earlier. He was the more muscular of the two guarding the door, but there was something else about his presence. A calm. I had no doubt he was just as dangerous as the rest of them, but it felt like he had restraint. The others were like caged animals attacking the bars while he prowled in the background, waiting for an opportunity to pounce.

“What are you doing?” He asked.

His height towered over me, and his gray eyes were almost black as he looked at me. His hair was just as dark and buzzed short. He might have been easy to look at if it wasn't for the aura of danger. He had a handsome face with a strong jaw.

But I wasn't going to let him think he scared me. “My job. I was asked to check on the guests in the private room.”

He stared at me for another second, and it felt like he was trying to read my thoughts. Good luck, even I don't want them in my head. "Where's Trixie?"

I pointed to the stage where she was stripping off the leather bustier, revealing a sheer red bra. He looked in that direction. His face seemed to go stone still. I would have missed the tiny tick in his jaw if I wasn't standing so close.

Maybe they preferred her. Most men did. It didn't bother me. In fact, I would've preferred if she was taking care of them. But apparently, I had no choice. Not if I wanted to eat this week.

"Can I do my job now?"

Tattoo guy looked at me like he'd forgotten I was even standing there. He released my shoulder. It was stupid, but I felt like I lost an anchor. I didn't even know him, but he'd been my last hope that I didn't have to go back into that room.

I felt like I was walking to my doom as I moved to the door. Because I knew who was going to be on the other side.

## 6

### Kincaid

**T**he noise from the club immediately cut off as I shut the door behind me. But the heavy bass was nothing to the sound of my heart beating. My pulse jumped as I glanced around the room.

All the men had left except one. The one who'd touched me. Asked for my name. Called me little dove.

He wore a black suit over a white dress shirt, no tie. I could see the hint of a hard chest and tattoos where his collar was undone. His dark hair curled over his forehead, and his olive skin seemed to enhance the blue of his eyes. His face was sharp angles and exuded easy charm. But I saw behind the façade.

There was no charm underneath. His eyes were almost lifeless and hard. Unfortunately, there was an appeal to him. It was dark and dangerous. It called to the hidden parts of me that I refused to give a voice to.

A soft clink drew my attention to the table. His long fingers traced the rim of the glass. Even his strong hands had my mind racing with depraved possibilities. I quickly flicked my gaze back to his face, but it was a mistake. His full lips were pulled into a smile. Only it wasn't a normal smile. It was sinister. Like he knew my secrets and wouldn't hesitate to use them against me.

I locked down my spiraling thoughts as I looked at him. "Is there something I can get you?"

His smile widened as he examined me. "Your name."

"I've already told you. You can call me Kitty." I rolled my lips as I tried to hide my annoyance.

"And I told you I could find out your real name." His deep voice pressed under my skin as if it wanted to make a new home there.

"By all means." I couldn't hide the sass in my tone. I was supposed to be playing nice with this guy, but I knew he'd take advantage if I showed any sign of weakness. "If there's nothing else, I'll be leaving."

"No." The authority in that one word glued my feet to the floor. I wasn't sure why I was listening to his command.

"No?" I crossed my arms over my chest in an act of defiance.

"You were assigned this room and only this room for the rest of the night." He took a sip of the whiskey I'd brought him earlier. I was captivated by the muscles working in his

throat, and it took longer than it should have for his words to sink in.

“If you don’t need anything, then there’s no reason for me to be in here.” I wanted to take a step back. To turn and run out the door, but I knew if I did, I’d only be hurting myself. Something told me I needed to stay. Needed to face him head-on.

“But I do need something.” He smirked again. “Your name.”

I huffed out a breath. I couldn’t figure out what his game was. Why call me back in here? Why send the others away?

“Why do you want to know?” I stared into the dark depths of his eyes. The blue was almost black, as if I was looking into a well. But the well was dry. There was nothing beyond. The only emotion I saw was enjoyment. He was enjoying playing with me as if I was a toy.

“Don’t you want to know my name?” The smug smile on his face probably worked on most people, but I saw behind the look to the darkness beneath.

“Why would I?” I didn’t want to know anything about him. I didn’t want to be brought further into whatever game he was playing. It felt like he knew the rules, and I was two steps behind trying to catch up. I didn’t like feeling off balance. Life had thrown me around enough.

His eyes roamed my body. I wanted to hate it like I hated Rodney’s attention. I wanted my skin to crawl. I wanted my

body to rebel. Instead, the flames I'd felt earlier ignited. My skin felt hot and tight, like I was burning alive from his attention. I was glad my arms were crossed, and he couldn't see the tightening of my nipples.

“So when I pin you down, rip off that useless skirt, and fuck that tight pussy of yours, you know who to beg for mercy.”

My jaw dropped open, and my arms fell. Did he just say that? I was hit on nightly by all kinds of men, but none of them had ever been so crude and blatant in their attention. They'd always alluded to sex. Alluded to how big there were or how badly they wanted me. But this guy was just saying it. He was telling me what he planned to take from me.

But I wasn't going to give it to him even as my thighs clenched and arousal pooled in my panties. My body could do whatever it wanted. It wasn't in control. My mind was, and it was telling me to run. To run far and fast.

I didn't care who he was or what he thought he was owed. I didn't care if he got me fired. At least then, I wouldn't have to put up with him again.

“That won't be happening.” I turned. I took two steps and reached for the doorknob, but before my hand could even touch it, my body was slammed back against a hard chest. He shoved me forward until I was pinned between him and the wall.

One hand gripped my hip while the other fisted my ponytail. His hold didn't hurt, but it was firm, telling me I had

nowhere to go. My mind screamed at me to fight. To push him away. To claw his eyes out.

But my body calmed as if his touch alone had injected me with a sedative. As if my body had been waiting for his touch my whole life.

His large frame dwarfed me even in my heels. I had always hated how short I was. Hated that people underestimated me because of it. And right now, the difference in our sizes made those feelings intensify. I felt how fragile I really was with his body caging mine. He could break me if he wanted. I hated that the thought gave me a rush that went straight between my legs.

I felt his hot breath on my neck as his lips brushed my ear. “That will be happening, little dove. The only question is, how bad is it going to hurt?”

My breathing was erratic as his words bounced around my mind. His fingers dug into my hip for a brief second; any longer, and he would have bruised the skin underneath. This is where I should’ve kicked him. Should’ve run. But my body wouldn’t move.

His lips ran down my neck, causing a shiver to rake through me. It was fear. It had to be. I wasn’t turned on by his touch. The goosebumps on my skin were from fear too.

Without warning, his teeth sunk into the sensitive skin where my neck met my collarbone. I cried out at the intense pain; my nails dug into the fabric on the walls. But I didn’t move away.

Stupid. I should've pushed him. But something in me wanted to see how far he would take this. Would he really pin me down and take what he wanted from my body? I should be disgusted by the idea. Ideas that I only let myself think about when I was alone in bed.

His lips moved to the side of my neck, and he bit down again. But the pain wasn't as intense this time. It had shifted, and instead of crying, I whimpered as pleasure zapped through me. My pussy clenched, and my arousal coated my thighs as I rubbed them together.

What the hell was I doing? Why was I letting this demon touch me? Hold me. Attack me. I tried to tell my limbs to move, to fight, but my nails just dug further into the wall, anchoring me to the spot.

For this brief moment, I was consumed by him. A stranger. I was drowning in his scent. He smelled of smoke and something that was uniquely him. I was paralyzed by his touch. All I could feel was him.

“Now, are you going to tell me your name?” His tongue licked at the marks he'd left on my body, soothing the ache as he waited for my answer. His warm tongue glided across my skin.

I sucked in a sharp breath as my body softened in his hold. The gentle touch, a contrast from the pain, was frying my brain. Someone like him shouldn't be gentle. It shouldn't be a part of him. My body craved his light touch as much as it wanted more of the pain.

Wait, more pain?

No! I didn't want that. I didn't like pain. Who liked pain? Pain was bad. But somewhere deep in my mind, the door rattled and tried to open. The place where I'd locked away my darkest thoughts and desires. The ones that people would judge me for. I didn't want their judgment. Their disgust and disdain. I slammed the door closed and locked it again.

"Not ready to give in yet, little dove?" His deep voice moved through me, sliding under my skin and towards the door in my mind. If he reached it, it wouldn't stay shut. I wouldn't be able to pretend it didn't exist.

"You're hurting me." I hated how soft my voice sounded. It didn't sound like me. It sounded... needy. It didn't come out like the command I'd meant it to be. Instead, it held no conviction. No strength.

"You like it." He nipped my neck lightly again, but there was none of the earlier pain. Disappointment tugged on my stomach. I was disappointed because he wasn't letting me go. That was the only reason. "And you're begging won't work unless you use my name."

I pressed my lips together to stop myself from asking. That was what he wanted. He wanted to pull me further into his darkness. Wanted me to admit I was curious about him. I wasn't going to ask. I wasn't curious. I didn't care who he was as long as he let me go.

His warm tongue swept across my skin, from the bite on my collarbone to my ear. Another shiver ran through my body

as I clung to the wall trying to stop him from seeing his effect on me. His nose brushed my hair, and he inhaled deeply.

“I can smell how much you like this. It’s the scent of fear, anticipation, and the need dripping from your pussy.”

“I’m not wet. I would never be turned on by you.” I said as my cheeks turned red.

His laugh rumbled through my chest. I wanted to hate the sound. The bastard was laughing at me. But something about it was pleasant, as if he rarely laughed, as if it was a treat to hear it.

Before I could pick apart that thought, he moved, pressing his hips further into my back as one hand grabbed both of mine and shoved them above my head. The other pulled up my skirt and yanked down my tights to my knees. His fingers trailed across my pussy, my lace panties the only barrier between us.

His hard cock pressed into my ass. His thick muscles glued me to the wall, my soft body yielding to his strength. I hated the rush of fear and excitement that singed my blood. I hated that it wasn’t just fear.

My teeth sank into the inside of my cheek to hold in the moan that wanted to escape as he roughly brushed my clit. He pinched it through the fabric, and my stomach tightened with desire.

“I don’t like liars, little dove.” He pushed two fingers inside me through the lace, and my knees locked to stop

myself from falling. “You’re panties are soaked for me. I wonder when that happened. Was it when I feasted on this creamy neck?” He bit my skin again, and I couldn’t stop the moan or the way my walls clenched around him. “Or was it before that? I bet these panties have been drenched since I grabbed your wrist earlier.”

“Please.” But I didn’t know what I was begging for. To stop or keep going. His finger pumped in again, but it wasn’t enough. My panties stopped me from feeling his skin. They stopped him from reaching the places I needed to be touched.

“I love hearing those pleas on your lips.” His teeth sunk into my shoulder. “But I told you that won’t work unless you say my name.”

“I’ll scream.”

His chuckle had a hard edge as he pinched my clit again, causing me to whimper. “Go ahead. This room is soundproof, and even if it wasn’t, no one would come for you. Now tell me the truth. This pussy is begging for me, isn’t it?”

“No.” I couldn’t admit he was right. Couldn’t get pulled further into him. I closed my eyes and tried to drown out the sensations coursing through my body.

Maybe I should just ask his name and tell him mine. Maybe this torture would end. Except I knew it was just the beginning. It didn’t matter what I did. He was going to do what he wanted.

“You think you can tell me no?” He growled. “You think I can’t fuck that word out of your mouth?”

The ripping of my panties echoed in the room. My heart pounded on my ribs as I waited to hear the sound of his belt or his zipper. But it didn’t come. Instead, he shoved his fingers inside me.

My back arched at the rough assault, pressing my ass further into his thick cock. I shamelessly rubbed against him as he pumped his hand in and out of me. I barely knew what I was doing.

I had never felt so full, so desperate, before. I could feel my orgasm lingering right on the edges, and I wanted it. I wanted to come badly. I couldn’t remember the last time anyone else had touched me. And it had never felt like this.

This was angry, ruthless, depraved. It was out of my control, so I didn’t try and stop it. I knew I couldn’t.

“Do you fucking hear how wet you are for me? How much you love this?” He grunted in my ear. “Are you going to tell me no now? When your body is begging me to make you come like the little slut you are?”

I whimpered as he bit down on my neck again. I wanted to rage. To tell him no. To tell him I wasn’t a slut. That I didn’t like this. But my mouth only opened on another moan.

My knuckles were white from the grip I had on the wall and his hands. My lungs starved for air as I rocked with his rhythm. I chased my release. He added a third finger filling me

more than I could take. I felt the burn as he shoved the heel of his hand into my clit. My inner walls clamp down on him. The intense pain, mixed with pleasure, shoved me over the cliff.

I cried out as I came, hard. Free falling into nothing. Light burst behind my eyes, and my legs shook with the force of my orgasm.

Before the tremors stopped, he pulled his fingers out and spun me around with his hold on my hands. I stared into unfeeling blue eyes. He'd touched me until I came, and still, there was nothing behind his eyes.

My chest rose and fell with heavy breaths as I watched him bring his hand to his mouth, the one that was inside me. His tongue came out as he slowly traced it along his fingers, licking my arousal from them. His eyes closed like he was savoring the taste before looking back at me.

“The sweetest little slut I’ve ever tasted.” He smiled, and I saw the sadism in his eyes. The cruel torture he was enjoying.

I swallowed thickly as I turned my head away. I refused to cry in front of him. I refused to show him how much he was hurting me. How embarrassed I was at my body’s reaction. Because even though my mind didn’t want to do it, my body loved it. I’d come harder than I ever had.

I didn’t know if it was the pain or because he was forcing me. I didn’t want to know why I enjoyed it so much. I didn’t want to enjoy it. I didn’t want to be like him.

“Can you just let me go?” I whispered.

He released my hands but didn't step back. I used the opportunity to pull up my tights and put my skirt back in place. My ruined underwear sat at his feet, and I didn't bother to pick them up. I ignored the way my fishnets dug into the sensitive skin of my pussy.

“You don't want to stay in here and keep playing with me?” A sick smile twisted his lips. “You should at least return the favor.”

The anger I'd been suppressing roared to life inside me. I raised my hand and slapped him across the face, surprising him for a brief second. His mask slipped, and I saw the demon inside before the smile returned to his face.

The anger clawed at me, forcing me to act. I shoved him in the chest. He didn't move, so I shoved him again. He just smiled down at me like he was enjoying the fight. Like my futile attempts to get away from him were funny.

“This isn't a game to me. It's my life! And you 'playing with me' is costing me tips.” I yelled. “So, thanks for wasting my time and forcing me to eat saltines for dinner this week just so you can get off on wielding your power like every other rich fucker who comes in here.”

Something flashed in his dark blue eyes; for a second, they appeared lighter than they had all night. As if he actually felt sorry for what he'd done. But then it was gone. I'd probably imagined it. Wanting to find some humanity in him.

I whipped around again, and my hand closed around the door. I wrenched it open. The music from the club assaulted

me. Burning into my already overstimulated mind. I started to run away from him. But then a firm hand gripped my ponytail, stopping me mid-step. My heart dropped to my stomach as my scalp burned. He really wasn't going to let me go. His scent surrounded me again, only this time, it was mixed with the scent of my arousal.

Embarrassment and fire flamed my cheeks. I didn't want him to smell like me. I didn't want to smell him on my skin. His lips brushed my ear as he spoke loud enough to be heard over the noise of the club. "I'll see you soon, little dove."

Then he released me. I stumbled forward at the loss of his support. I recovered quickly and raced away from him. I didn't look back. I didn't need to. I could feel his eyes on me as if his hand still gripped my hip. I felt the invisible strings that now tied us together.

I hoped if I ran far enough away, they would snap. But I was afraid I would break before they did.

## Kincaid

I let out a relieved breath as I closed and locked my apartment door behind me. A part of me had been worried the demon would follow me home. After all, he said he'd see me again. I spent the short walk back to my apartment looking over my shoulder and straining to hear any sound in the distance.

I looked around my tiny apartment, checking to see if anything was out of place. I don't know why I thought it would be. Fear did funny things to the mind.

It was all one room. My twin bed was pushed under the window at the back; to my left was the kitchenette that was barely big enough for me to stand in; the door to the right led to the bathroom. My nightstand and bed were the only pieces of furniture. I slept, ate, and watched TV there. This was all I could afford.

I ignored the bills sitting on my nightstand as I stripped off my clothes. I'd taken my tights off at work because I couldn't

walk with the fishnets digging into my crotch without the underwear to stop them. So instead, I had to work the rest of my shift with nothing under my skirt. At least it was tight enough that I don't think anyone could see.

I walked into the bathroom and turned the shower on. I didn't bother waiting for it to warm up. It never stayed warm anyways. The cold water abraded my skin, and I let it. I let the chill wash away the memories from tonight. It dug into my bones and froze my brain. But it wasn't enough.

I kept picturing the stranger's lifeless dark blue eyes. The tattoos peaking out behind his shirt. His strong fingers. His deep hypnotic voice.

I could still smell the smoky scent that clung to him. It wasn't the unpleasant smell of cigarettes. It was the warmth of a fire. The crackling and flames that held happy memories. I could feel his breath on my skin, his teeth biting me. I ran my hand over the marks he'd left.

I grabbed a washcloth and rubbed at them. I knew it wouldn't get rid of them, but maybe if I rubbed hard enough, I wouldn't feel him anymore. After a few minutes, I gave up. It was a wasted effort. I wasn't going to forget him or the way he made me feel anytime soon. I wasn't going to be able to push aside the tremors I still felt from the best orgasm of my life.

I washed my hair and tried to push away the thoughts that assaulted me. I'd let a stranger, a demon, touch me. He could hide behind his expensive suit. Behind the sophisticated mask he wore, but I saw him for what he was. He was dark and

dangerous. He was a monster. And I'd let him take control of me. Hurt me. And...I liked it.

No!

No, I didn't like it. I couldn't like it. I was normal. I couldn't let someone like that into my life. He could destroy all the walls and doors I kept around myself.

Then why had I let it happen? The door in my mind rattled. My eyes flew open, and I stared at the shower wall. The old tiles were stained so deep no scrubbing would get rid of it. The water beat down on my back.

Why had I pushed him? Maybe if I'd given in, he would've let me go. I wouldn't feel this embarrassment if I'd flirted with him like I did the other men. I should feel more than embarrassment. I should feel violated, but I didn't.

I wasn't mad at myself for allowing it to happen; a part of me knew there was nothing that would've stopped him. I was mad because as much as I wanted to hate it, him, I didn't. Instead, I was intrigued. I wanted to know why my body reacted like that. Why I had craved his touch. The pain.

I turned off the water and got out. I stared at my reflection in the mirror as I wiped the water away. My eyes locked in on the bite marks on my neck. My core clenched, and my skin heated. I

let out a long breath as I dressed in a pair of old shorts and a t-shirt. I crawled into bed and pulled the covers up my body.

I brought the blanket all the way over my head as if I was hiding from someone.

The illusion and the quiet of the night gave me the freedom to open the door in my mind. The door I never let anyone see behind. My darkest desires swirled like smoke in my head. Belts, ties, whips, and chains. Pain. Loss of control. A faceless man taking from my body without permission until there was nothing left.

The fantasies I used when I touched myself. The things I would never be able to tell anyone I wanted. But the demon had seen them.

Suddenly the faceless man in my mind wasn't faceless anymore. Instead, he had blue eyes, dark hair that curled on his forehead, and hard muscles. He had strong fingers that wrapped around my throat.

I closed my eyes and pushed the thoughts behind the door again. That would never happen. I couldn't let it happen. Not only because I didn't trust him but because I didn't trust myself. If I let those thoughts come out to play, what would become of me? I was like an addict. I'd ruin my life to make those fantasies come true.

Sometimes I wondered if I should just let the depraved part of me win. It's not like I had much of a life. No family, working in that club, struggling to make ends meet.

But I'd told my mom I'd live for both of us. So I pushed forward. I survived. Even as it slowly killed me.

## Maddox

**T**ristan's cigarette glowed orange in the night. I could just see Bash glaring at him from the shadows. The three of us were waiting for my contact in the Gallo Family. He was supposed to meet us thirty minutes ago, and my patience was thin.

I had been bored all week. There hadn't been any action since I found the cockroach outside the gambling club. Now I was wasting my time waiting for a junkie.

Usually, I would feel a rush knowing I was going to extract information from someone. I would relish the horror on his face while I forced him to make an impossible choice. While I held his life, metaphorically, in my hands. Sometimes literally, but unfortunately, that wasn't the plan tonight.

I needed him alive to keep feeding us information from his bosses. Their play had escalated. Instead of simply stealing our business, they attacked one of our clubs. Killing workers and customers. Our numbers were suffering because customers

were fleeing to other clubs. We couldn't prove it was the Gallos, but we had our suspicions.

But I wasn't interested in serving the family tonight. My mind wasn't here. It was focused on a little dove. On the feel of her silky skin beneath my fingertips. On the noises, she'd made when she came. On the taste of her that exploded on my tongue. She tasted like innocence and curiosity.

Kincaid.

It was funny that she thought she could hide from me. I had her name before I'd even left the club. I also had her address and a basic background check on her. I knew she was an only child, raised by her mother, who died a year ago. Her father was a high-powered political official who had never claimed her as his. I wondered if she knew that. By all accounts, he had no place in her life.

She was twenty-five, only a few years younger than me, had worked at the club for two years, and was only friendly with Tessa. Her favorite color was purple, and she read romance novels in her spare time. All of that had been easy to find out.

What I hadn't found was anything to use against her. She didn't even have a damn parking ticket. She had no skeletons, no secrets. A smile pulled on my lips while she had one secret.

The little dove liked pain.

I didn't find any indication she'd ever acted on those desires before I touched her. I'd looked into all her past

boyfriends. They were a bunch of worthless *Pezzo di merda pieces of shit*. I doubted any of them had seen behind her quiet exterior.

A burning rage simmered low in my gut. I wasn't used to feeling jealous, but I felt it for Kincaid. It had to be because she was a challenge.

She was going to be harder to break than I first predicted. I thought after a little punishment, after I gave her a taste of what could happen when she defied me, that she would've crumbled and told me her name. But she hadn't. She was strong and smart. Smart enough to try and run from me. Not that I was going to let that happen.

The flick of a lighter brought me back to the alley. Tristan placed another cigarette between his lips and inhaled. Acrid smoke filled my senses, reminding me of my mother.

I hated the smell. And the habit. It was a weakness, and I didn't allow myself to have any weaknesses. Tristan shouldn't either.

"Put it out." I growled at him. "You're giving our position away."

"He already knows we're waiting for him." He grumbled but dropped it and ground the last ember between his boot and the sidewalk.

"Doesn't mean we shouldn't be ready." Bash said. I watched as his eyes roamed around us. Unlike Tristan, who was lounging on the wall, Bash was upright. His body tensed.

He must have sensed it too. The change in the air. I no longer felt like we were waiting for a contact. Instead, it felt like we were waiting for an ambush. I wasn't sure what had set it off, but it was there. The tingling of restless energy made the hair on my arms stand on end.

My eyes scanned the alley. We'd chosen to meet on neutral territory, but I wasn't unfamiliar with the area. There were abandoned warehouses on either side of us. The alley ended at the water on one side and an empty parking lot on the other. The buildings weren't high or far enough apart for a sniper. And Tristan had checked them when we arrived.

Still, I sensed the attack coming.

Gunshots rang out, cutting through the silence. The sound of a bullet pinging off the metal dumpster next to us echoed in the alley. Bash moved in front of me and raised his gun as I reached for my own. Adrenaline coursed through my body. Giving me the rush I'd been looking for.

Three figures crossed the parking lot towards us, guns drawn. The darkness concealed their identities, but they moved like they were comfortable with their weapons. Comfortable taking a life. But I wasn't just comfortable with it. I reveled in it. Savored the feeling of controlling someone's fate.

As they closed in on us, the largest of the group centered in the middle raised his weapon, and my hand moved without having to tell it. I aimed and pulled the trigger. I shot the second before the first even touched the ground. I could see

the third's eyes widen slightly as his steps faltered. Bash shot him in the knee before he could fire his weapon. Tristan advanced and kicked the gun away as the third fell to the ground.

Silence descended onto the alley. The smell of gunpowder lingered in the air.

Bash grabbed the live one by the back of his neck, forcing him to meet my eyes. His hair was light brown, and he's features were soft. He might know how to use his weapon, but he wasn't as hard as the rest of us. He obviously hadn't been born in this life. He might even be new. But he wasn't going to have the chance to become old. He'd signed his death certificate when he shot at me.

My steps were measured as I approached him. Enjoying the feel of his fear. I knelt before him and looked into his eyes, letting him see the emptiness in mine. I wanted him to know there was no escape.

“Name?” I asked in a tone that left no room for argument.

He hesitated for a second too long. I smiled internally. I was hoping he would resist. I wanted to play with him a little. It was so much more fun when I could spill a little blood.

I handed Bash my gun, and he placed a knife in my waiting palm. I preferred it. Guns were too quick. A knife could be slow. I could live in the last moments when I killed with a knife.

“Daniel.” He sputtered when he saw the blade glinting in the streetlight.

“Too late.” I sliced a line in his cheek. Daniel yelled at the sharp sting.

I tilted my head and watched the slow trickle of blood down his face. I frowned. For some reason, I wasn't getting the thrill I usually got from inflicting pain. I ran my knife along a ring he had on his right hand. It was a frog. Interesting.

“Did Louis send you?” Whether I enjoyed it or not, I needed information. I needed to know if my contact betrayed me.

“I don't know who that is.” This time he answered right away, and I didn't have to hurt him. Disappointing.

So I did it anyways. I pushed the blade down until I cut through the skin around the ring. I sliced until it fell from his body, dropping to the floor.

He screamed in agony and pulled his hand to his chest. He tried to stop the blood, but it was already soaking his shirt. Still, I felt nothing. No interest in the blood pattern or the sounds of his pain.

What the fuck?

“He's lying.” Tristan said and punched him in the face. The sound of bones crunching was swallowed by Daniel's grunt of pain.

I stared at my cousin. He needed to know his place. If I wanted him to exact pain, I would've told him to. Tristan had

become increasingly reckless lately, and if he didn't get it under control, he was going to lose his chance at being a capo.

But I wouldn't show my annoyance in front of our captive. I couldn't show weakness in the ranks.

"Who sent you then?" I focused back on the man whose nose was now broken. The drip of blood tapped a steady rhythm on the dirty ground.

"I don't know." He said. "We're guns for hire. We were told a target would be here tonight and to take him out."

I nodded at Bash, and he jerked Daniel up. He hissed in a breath and staggered at the pain in his leg. His jeans were soaked dark red from the gunshot wound. His shirt soaked from the wound of his missing finger.

"Do you know who I am?" Daniel's eyes focused on me, and I saw the moment of recognition. If he was afraid before, it had nothing on the terror radiating from him now.

"I had no idea you were the target." He begged. "Please. I wouldn't have taken the job."

He shook his head back and forth. Bash forced his head back until he stilled the movement and exposed his neck. This was why he was my second in charge. He knew exactly what I wanted without me having to say it. We'd trained and lived together for years. If I could form feelings enough to have friends, Bash would be my only one.

I traced a line down Daniel's neck; drops of blood leaked from the shallow cut. I narrowed my eyes at the sight. Why

wasn't I feeling the excitement?

"I-I-" Daniel stammered, and I pulled the blade back.

"Yes?" I stared into his eyes, trying to absorb his fear. To thrive on it. But still nothing.

It was like the last few times I'd fucked someone, which had been months ago. It was boring. I'd been pushing boundaries my whole life, and now there was nowhere left to go. Maybe this was my existence now. If taking a life wasn't going to give me a rush, then what would?

"I know how to get in contact with him." I raised one brow, knowing he'd feel the need to fill the silence.

"I have a phone number." Daniel said. I watched as his eyes flicked to each of us. He lingered on Tristan for a brief second. I turned to look at him and saw why. His face was etched in fury. He advanced, towering over our captive.

"You think a number will save your life. You shot at us." Tristan punched him again. Daniel's head snapped back, and blood sprayed on the brick walls.

"Useless." Tristan shouted as he hit him over and over again. He struck with the precision of a killer.

"*Fermare!*" *Stop.* I commanded, but Tristan was lost in a haze and didn't hear me.

Bash dropped Daniel as he tried to push Tristan back; Daniel's body fell to the ground with a thud. Bash shoved at Tristan, but it didn't stop him from pulling his gun and

shooting our informant. The sound bounced off the brick walls.

“*Stupid0 cazzo.*” *You dumb fuck.* Bash yelled. “How are we going to get information out of a corpse?”

“He didn’t know anything.” Tristan said unapologetically.

I swung before he could prepare for it. My hit landed hard across his cheekbone, causing maximum damage. He slipped in the blood pooling on the ground and fell beside the dead body. I placed my foot on his throat, keeping him in the dirt and filth.

“Remember your place.” I growled. I dug deeper into his throat and watched as his eyes bulged. I didn’t enjoy this. Tristan was my cousin, and I didn’t want to hurt him. But if he couldn’t respect the family, the order, I wouldn’t hesitate to eliminate him. “You don’t kill without my word. You don’t shit without my say-so. *Comprendere?*”

“Yes.” He said through clenched teeth. I pushed again, cutting off his air, to make my point.

“You can explain to Leif that you lost your temper and killed our chance for information.” I released him, and he stood again.

But now, there was a slight rounding of his shoulders. Good, he should be ashamed of his actions. I didn’t care that he’d killed someone. We killed every day. I cared that he couldn’t fucking listen. He wouldn’t make a good capo if he

couldn't fall in line. He'd put the family at risk by losing this chance to gain the upper hand.

“Dispose of the body. Cut off his hands and have it delivered to the Gallos. Let them know who they're coming after.” I picked up the dead man's ring before walking away from Tristan without confirming he'd heard my order. He'd do it or face worse consequences than a punch to the face.

I felt Bash fall into step beside me. We both remained silent until we reached the car. He got behind the wheel after opening the back door for me.

“He's becoming reckless.” He said as we drove away.

“I know.” I was going to have to talk to Leif about his behavior. I might not be the right person to teach Tristan anymore. Or this might not be the place for him. If he couldn't handle the pressure, he was a weakness the family couldn't allow.

I needed more time to figure out what was wrong with him. I didn't want to kill my cousin if I could avoid it.

“Have him followed.” I told Bash. “And take me to Entice.”

I needed to test a theory. To see if I could find the thrill that had eluded me tonight. I was going to clip a bird's wing.

## Kincaid

I tried to ignore the anxiety that pumped through my blood as I locked my purse away and slipped into my heels. The steady beat of music engulfed me as I walked out into the main part of the club. Immediately my eyes flicked to the private room. I let out a long breath when no guards stood outside the door.

It had been a week since the demon had cornered me in that room. Enough time for me to reason away why I reacted to him. It was because my job was on the line. That was the only possible excuse for why I'd let him touch me. Make me come. I had no choice, and my body knew that. I wouldn't have reacted that way if anyone else had touched me.

Other reasons tried to fight their way to the surface, but I shoved them behind the door again. Now that I had some time, the door was firmly shut and wouldn't be opened. I made my way through the crowd to my first table.

Four guys who looked to be a little older than me watched the dancer on the stage. They were all dressed in rumpled business suits and probably worked at some big company. This was how they spent their time away from their boring nine-to-five jobs. Someone else would consider them attractive, but I'd long ago stopped seeing any man who came in here that way. I wasn't looking for a boyfriend. I was here to do a job.

"Hey, guys." I leaned forward so I could be heard over the music. "What can I get you to drink?"

Three of them gave me their orders and quickly moved their eyes back to the show. I dressed down for that very reason. I didn't want their gaze. I showed just enough cleavage to help me with tips. My breasts already drew enough attention I didn't need a low-cut top.

The fourth guy didn't seem bothered by the lack of skin showing. He had styled blonde hair and green eyes. The watch on his wrist could've cleared all my medical debt, and his suit was designer.

Having money wasn't enough for me to hate a person, but his cocky presence would do it. Men with deep pockets thought the world and everyone in it belonged to them. He stared down my tank top as if my face didn't exist. I suppressed the urge to say something. But it was part of the job, so I just ignored it.

"Is there something I can get you?" I asked again.

"Draft beer." Deep Pockets finally looked at my face; a conceited smile tugged on his lips. He probably thought he

was doing me a favor by checking me out. Like someone as sophisticated as him shouldn't even bother with a piece of trash like me.

I moved away from their table and went to the bar to fill their orders. Precious was busy, so I grabbed the drinks myself. Once the tray was full, I walked back over to the four suits. I placed their drinks in front of them. The three guys absentmindedly handed me tips that I shoved into my pocket.

A part of me hated taking money from people like them. I knew it was my job, and I probably should've lost my pride long ago, but it lingered. Telling me, I could've been more than this.

I took a step back to move away when Deep Pockets grabbed the back of my thigh. He pulled me against him like he had every right to touch me. This was the kind of place where you couldn't even touch the dancer, but he thought he could feel me up.

“Where are you going so fast?” His fingers started to travel up the back of my leg to cup my ass, but my hand on his wrist stopped him.

“To do my job.” I forced a smile. He might be an asshole, and I might hate it, but I needed the tips. “I'll check on you later.”

I could hear the purr in my voice that made me want to vomit. But being friendly kept the money coming in. I was used to customers with octopus hands.

Deep Pockets smiled like he was buying my fake flirting act. I didn't have to use it much. My modest outfits kept most guys looking the other way.

"What's your name?" Deep Pockets asked, but he didn't release me.

"Kitty." I smiled again as I played along.

"Come back real soon, Kitty." He released my leg only to bring his hand to my arm, rubbing up and down like we were lovers. "I'd love to talk more."

I internally rolled my eyes. That guy wanted to talk as much as I did. He wanted an easy lay, and he thought he could get it from a waitress in a strip club. He'd probably forget my fake name the second I walked away.

"I'll do that." I said, but he still didn't let me go.

I scanned the room, trying to find any excuse to end this conversation. If another table needed me, I could latch onto that and get away. My eyes locked with familiar blues ones. Eyes that had been in my nightmares for a week.

The blood drained from my body as his eyes narrowed in on Deep Pockets' hand where it was touching my arm. I'd never seen such rage before. I was surprised Deep Pockets couldn't feel the heat of his gaze. It was so intense it felt like it should be burning our skin.

I needed to run. That was the only thought in my mind. I needed to get away from that look. From him.

I smiled at Deep Pockets before pushing his hand off me and stepping back. I walked as quickly as possible through the club, but I felt his eyes on me the whole time. I tried to suck air into my lungs, but my breaths kept getting caught between my ribs. My limbs were awkward as I walked. I was two steps away from the backroom when Rodney stopped in front of me, cutting off my escape.

“I need you to work the private room again tonight.” He looked at me in much the same way as Deep Pockets, like I was nothing, but he still owned me.

My heart was beating so fast in my chest it felt like it would run out of steam. I didn’t want to go back into that room with the demon. His eyes had been scary enough. I had no idea what he would do to me if we were alone again.

“I can’t. I need to—“

“I don’t care. Maddox asked for you specifically.” At least I had a name for the demon now. “So you’ll go and take care of whatever he needs.”

“Whatever he needs?” I swallowed thickly.

“What don’t you understand?” Rodney practically screamed at me. “Get your ass to the private room before I drag you there myself.”

“I’m going.” I stepped back before Rodney could act on his threat.

I knew Rodney liked to give the guests in the private room extra attention. It cost a lot of money to rent that room out, but

this was taking it overboard. Who was this Maddox guy? And why did he have so much power here? I knew he was an owner; had he threatened Rodney's job if I didn't show up? Not that I cared if Rodney got fired. He was an asshole and deserved it.

Rodney's threat or the threat to him isn't what made me walk to the room. It was the look in Maddox's eyes. I knew if I didn't show up, he'd find me. At least here in Entice, I felt like I had some control. I didn't want to face him outside these walls.

The tattooed guard stood outside the door again. He didn't even look at me as I grasped the handle. Guess I wasn't getting any help there.

I opened the door and felt my heart knock as I locked eyes with the demon.

Maddox.

## Maddox

I watched as the little dove closed the door behind her. She was in another of those tight tank tops. The fabric molded to her breasts and showed off her trim waist. A ruffled black skirt stopped mid thigh, and her legs were covered in another pair of tights, black sheer this time. I wanted to rip them from her body so I could see her creamy skin. I wanted to mark those legs so no one would touch her.

“Hello, Kincaid.”

A vicious smile crossed my face as she flinched. She didn’t want me using her real name. I already felt the endorphins filling my body as her fear seeped into my bones.

This is what I needed. I needed to play. That was going to bring me what the beating hadn’t earlier. A high.

“Maddox.” I liked the sound of my name on her lips. I was going to like it even more when she screamed it.

“You figured out my name then. What else did you find out about me?” Her lips pressed together. She didn’t know

anything.

And I thought she was smart. Not smart enough to realize information was power.

“Can I get you something to drink?” Kincaid asked, deflecting my question.

I clucked my tongue at her. “Oh, little dove, let’s not pretend you’re in here to be my waitress.”

“I’m not doing this.” She crossed her arms and took a step back towards the door. “I don’t want to be a part of whatever sick game you’re playing. I need to go back to work.”

“You mean back to the *stronzo* that put his hands on my toy.” I contained the anger in my voice, even as it roared through my blood.

I didn’t like seeing someone else touching her. Normally I didn’t care, and that was pissing me off too. Why did I care if someone had his hands on her? It had to be because I hadn’t broken her yet.

Or maybe because Kincaid smiled at him while she looked at me like I was her worst nightmare. I was, and she was clever enough to know it. But I didn’t like that she saw that so easily. It would make her harder to break.

“I’m not your toy.” She said. “I’m a person.”

I waved my hand in the air, pushing her comment aside. “You shouldn’t let anyone touch you.”

“It’s part of the job. If I’m nice to them, I get better tips.”

“You weren’t worried about being nice when you were here with me.” A smile crossed my lips. “Of course, coming on my fingers was very nice.”

“Don’t.” She raised a finger as if it could stop me. A blush bloomed on her cheeks. She didn’t like being reminded of that. “I’m leaving.”

She turned towards the door. I could’ve got up and grabbed her again. Touched her body like I had before until she crumbled for me. But tonight, I wanted a different kind of fun. I was going to break her mind.

“How much will you make in tips tonight?” I asked before she could open the door.

“About \$300.” Kincaid took a deep breath as if saying the next part was hard. “I really need the money.”

I almost laughed. This was too easy. She was giving away her weakness readily. Maybe she would be easy to break after all.

“I’ll give you \$2,000 if you stay in here with me for the rest of your shift.”

She whipped around, and her wintry eyes widened. I could feel the hope clinging to her skin. She needed the money. I was enough of a monster to use whatever advantage I could get.

I could’ve given her more. I could afford five times that much, and it wouldn’t even dent the wealth I had. But I wanted her at my disposal. I wanted her to keep coming back

from more. Her gaze flicked to where my hand rested on the table. Her ears turned red. From arousal or anger?

I brought my hand to my face and ran my thumb along my bottom lip. She tracked the movement. I could almost hear her thoughts.

Kincaid was remembering how these fingers had touched her. How I licked her taste from them. I could see her nipples tighten behind the top she wore. She might pretend she didn't want this, but she did.

“What will I have to do?” I was almost proud of her for hiding the fear in her voice. And it turned me the fuck on how hard she was fighting.

“What do you want to do?” I licked my lips and watched as she rubbed her thighs together. She was so expressive, and she didn't even know it. I fucking loved it. It made it easier for me. “Does that greedy pussy want my fingers again?”

“No!” Her denial was too quick as the blush crept down her neck. “What I want is to go back to work.”

I wasn't letting her near any of the men out there. At least not until I had all of her. Then when she was addicted to me, I'd throw her away. The last act in crushing her soul.

“Not an option. If you walk out of this room without accepting my gracious offer, I'll just have your boss bring you back. And you won't get any money.” I smiled as Kincaid narrowed her eyes at me. Such defiance. It made my cock hard

as steel. “But if you agree to stay now without knowing what I want, then you’ll get the money.”

“Are you going to hurt me?” Her voice trembled this time.

The sound washed over me, giving me the thrill that escaped earlier. It wasn’t fear I was hearing. It was desire. She wanted to be hurt. And I was going to give it to her. I was going to be the only one who did.

“Only if you ask nicely, like a good little slut.”

“I would never ask for that.” She whispered.

This time I did laugh. This was the second time I’d laughed in her presence. I wasn’t someone who showed their emotions, not like Kincaid. But her lie amused me. She really wanted to believe that was true. But I’d seen inside her mind. Behind the good girl façade.

She loved when I bit her skin. Pinched her clit. She liked feeling the pain as much as I enjoyed giving it to her. I’d make her admit.

Soon.

“Sit down, Kincaid.”

She hesitated for a second before taking the seat across the table from me. As if the table could stop me from touching her. It was fine for now because I wanted to see the reactions on her face. I smiled both at her defiant choice of seat and that I’d forced her to stay.

Kincaid placed her hands in her lap like she wanted to keep every part of her body as far away from me as possible. I looked at her across the table. The dim light highlighted her features. Her cheekbones were high, and her eyes wide, making it easier to read her. She bit into her plump lower lip, giving me visions of those lips wrapped around my cock as I fucked her mouth. Her skin was fair, and I knew how silky it felt.

She was so soft and fragile. So breakable.

I shifted to alleviate the tightening in my pants. It wasn't time for that yet. I wanted to play with her first. Make her beg.

“We're going to play a game.” I said.

Her chest rose with a deep breath. “What kind of game?”

“A game of information. I'm going to ask you a question, and if you lie, you earn a punishment.”

I told myself I was doing this to find her weaknesses. But another part of me was curious about her. Curious about this woman who'd caught my attention when so few did. I hadn't even found someone interesting enough to fuck lately. Just like everything else, it had become routine. Even the pain didn't sedate me.

“What do I get if I tell the truth?” Her soft voice worked its way under my skin. Pumping in my blood.

“What do you want?” I asked. “More money?”

She ground her teeth together and crossed her arms over her chest. “I get to ask a question.”

Was this little dove interested in me? That would be a mistake. For her. It worked to my advantage. If I could charm her, it would be easier to get her to do what I wanted. Women who believed themselves to be in love or infatuated with someone could be manipulated.

Love was the greatest weakness. And I was glad I couldn't feel it. Sure, I felt something for my family. There was a special softness for my sister Alessandra. But, to my understanding, true love meant sacrificing yourself for the other person. And I would never do that.

“Deal, little dove.”

I let our agreement drift in the air for a moment. Let her feel the weight of what she was doing. Her breath was shallow as she waited for me to start.

“Have you always enjoyed pain?” I went right for the kill. I could've started slow and lulled her into a sense of security, but I was short on patience tonight. And with her.

“I don't.” Kincaid's cheeks blushed again as she crossed her arms over her chest.

“That's one. Your mouth can lie, but your body can't. Your pussy clenched on my fingers so tight I thought you were going to break them.”

I smiled as her face flushed. I was going to keep reminding her of her body's response to me. She was ashamed of it, and her embarrassment would be what broke her. I'd make her face

this part of herself until it ate her alive from the inside. This would be her undoing.

“And you lost your chance to ask a question. How many people have fucked that sweet pussy of yours?”

That wasn't what I planned to ask next. I wasn't even sure why I asked it at all. I'd never cared about that with anyone else. I didn't care with her.

Except the longer it took her to answer, the tighter my skin felt. Like my body was trying to crawl out of it. Kincaid rubbed her lips together like she was contemplating whether or not to answer. I decided to give her a little incentive.

“If you fail to answer a question, it's two punishments.”

Her mouth dropped open, and her brow furrowed. “That wasn't part of the rules. You can't just change them.”

“Yes, I can. It's my game.” I smiled as I poured two glasses of whiskey from the bottle on the table. I passed one to her, but she left it where it was.

“I've had three boyfriends.”

Three soon-to-be dead men. I was going to enjoy watching the life leave their eyes. I kept my face neutral, like her answer didn't matter. And it shouldn't because they were boys insignificant to what I could do for her.

“Now I get to ask you something.” I gestured with my hand for her to go ahead. “When did you realize you liked inflicting pain?”

I was surprised by her question. I expected her to want to know about what I did. How I was able to get her back into this room. Or how I knew who she was.

It was foolish of her to waste her question. She should've been trying to gain information that could hurt me, stop me from taking her. Not that there was anything she could find that would stop me.

“Sexually? Since I hit puberty.”

“And not sexually?” She whispered.

“Technically, it's not your turn to ask a question, but I'll consider it an extension of your first one and answer.”

“How gracious of you.” She mumbled.

“I can be nice.” I smiled at her. “Always. I enjoy watching things squirm.”

Kincaid shifted in her seat as if she'd just realized she was the new thing I was trying to make squirm. “Why are you afraid to admit you like pain?”

“I said I-“

“That's two.” She huffed out a breath and crossed her arms, pushing her breasts up. They were practically spilling over the top of her shirt, teasing me with all that creamy skin. I wanted to leave my mark on them as much as I wanted to hear her moan as I took them into my mouth. I didn't normally care about giving pleasure. But Kincaid's moans were still ringing in my ears. I wanted to hear them again.

“Every minute you don’t answer, I’ll add another one.” The time ticked down as she glared at me. I wanted her to fight. The more she fought, the more I could use it against her. “That’s three. Keep going. I’m going to love seeing your skin red from my hand.” She stayed silent. “Four. Now it’s every second you don’t answer; I’ll add another.”

“You can’t keep changing the rules.” She shouted as she jerked in her chair.

“Five. And I can do anything I want. Haven’t you figured that out yet?” I smiled at her and waited another beat. “Six... Seven.”

“Fine!” Kincaid dropped her hands into her lap. She twisted them together as she looked away from me.

“I had a boyfriend.” The jealousy lit in my gut again. “When I told him about my... fantasies, he called me disgusting. He said there was something wrong with me. That I was a freak. A slut. Then he told all his friends, and for months afterwards, I had to listen to their degrading taunts. They sent me rape porn and posted my phone number and email to hookup sites. They pretended to be me and described what I’d told them. So strangers could continue their torture.”

A single tear gathered behind her wintry eyes. It fell from her lashes, making a track down her porcelain skin. A wet streak on her light freckles. I was mesmerized by it. By its path down her gorgeous face.

I couldn’t figure out why.

## Kincaid

I could feel the thick silence pressing down on my skin. He was the one who wanted to play this game, and now he had nothing to say. No snarky comments or crude statements. I could hear my heart beating in my ears as I waited for his reaction. He'd been still since I started talking. His dark emotionless eyes locked with mine. He finally broke the silence.

“Name.” His tone lowered, and a shiver of fear raced down my spine.

“W-why?” I stammered.

“Because I’m going to end their lives. But first, I’m going to dig out their secrets. I’m going to display them for the world to see.” Venom dripped from his voice. “I’m going to watch while their pathetic existence implodes around them. I want them to beg me to fix it. To let them live. I won’t. Then when they think they have nothing left to lose when they want death.

I'm going to kill them slowly. I'll run a knife between their ribs and watch as the blood leaves their body."

What the fuck?

I knew Maddox was a monster. I'd seen it the first time I met him. But this was beyond what I imagined. He talked about killing my ex and his friends like it was the easiest thing in the world. Like it was as simple as taking out the trash.

Maybe it was to him. But it wasn't to me. I hated them, but I didn't want them dead. I didn't want to live with that hanging over my head.

"I don't want you to do that." I said. I was surprised there was no fear in my voice. "Tell me that you won't."

I should be shaking in fear. Adrenaline should have been coursing through my blood, telling me to run, but I didn't feel afraid. My heart was beating fast, and my chest rose with each deep breath. But there was something else. My skin felt hot and something slick pooled between my thighs.

Oh god. I was turned on. His sick, sadistic rant had turned me on. My ex was right. I am disgusting. Who gets turned on when someone threatens to kill for them?

Why would he want to kill for me? I was nothing to him. He called me a toy. Maybe he just liked killing, and he'd find any excuse to do it.

Maddox tilted his head as he looked at me like I was a puzzle he couldn't figure out. He wasn't going to find the answer from me because even I didn't know who I was

anymore. I wasn't this girl. The girl who likes pain. Who gets pleasure from it. Who didn't run when a psycho talked about murder.

Instead of pressing further like I thought he would, he sipped his drink. I watched his throat as he swallowed. Even his neck was muscular. He didn't have the kind of scary muscles like his guard outside. His were softer but no less lethal. His muscles were lean instead of bulky. They matched his striking face.

Of course, he was good looking because demons always were. It was the handsome men you had to be afraid of. It lured you in, hiding what was underneath until it was too late. He licked a drop of whiskey off his lip. My eyes tracked his tongue. His tongue that had been on my body. The one I wanted to touch me again.

I wondered what it would be like to kiss him. He commanded everything, and his kiss probably wouldn't be any different. Letting him take control might be nice. It would be nice to not have to worry about anything for once. To forget the mountain of bills and the fear that came with them.

Wait? No. I had to stay in control. Someone like Maddox would kill me. Literally.

"It's your turn to ask a question, little dove." He smiled like he knew what I had been thinking. It didn't escape my notice that he ignored my plea not to kill my ex.

"Have you ever killed anyone?" I whispered.

I wasn't afraid of the question. I already knew the answer. But I needed to hear it. Maybe if I heard the words out loud, it would scare me enough to run. Because I needed to run. If I didn't, I would get trapped.

"Yes." I waited for the terror. But it still didn't come.

"Why?"

"What answer do you want to hear?" His hand tightened around the glass he was holding. It was the only show of emotion. It told me he didn't like my question. What I didn't know was why? He freely admitted to wanting to kill my ex. He shouldn't be surprised that I wanted to know more.

"Do you want me to tell you I did it because I had to? That's true. Do you want me to say I didn't like it? That would be a lie."

I looked into his blue eyes. I could see the rage from earlier. Like before, the look gave me the fear I'd been searching for. The horror his words couldn't. Maddox was telling the truth, and my question had angered him. I didn't want to see what that anger would get me. Would he kill me when this game was over?

"I'm leaving." I stood so quickly I knocked my chair over.

I watched him as I walked back towards the door. I didn't want to turn my back on him like I'd done the first night. Maddox just watched me, his eyes never softening.

The doorknob jabbed into my back. I reached behind me and felt the cold metal on my hand. Or maybe it wasn't cold,

but my skin was hot. The feel of it should have been a relief, but it wasn't. I started to turn it when his deep voice grabbed me. It worked through my body and sent a shiver down my spine.

“We still need to handle your punishments.” He said in a smooth tone. His voice was like the most expensive whiskey, going down with a slight burn. “If you leave now, you get nothing.”

I'd forgotten about the money. The reason I had stayed, to begin with. I needed it. I hate that I needed it. I hated that it was my excuse.

He knew he had me when I lowered my head slightly. I could feel the shift in the room. A subtle turn from fear to anticipation.

“Take your tights and panties off.”

“What? No!” I shouted, but my stupid demented body clenched at his words. My nipples tightened, and wetness dripped between my legs.

“That's eight. If you continue to argue, it'll only be worse.”

Why was I doing this? Did I really need the money that badly? Shit, I did. I knew I did. I might have been able to live with that if my body hadn't started tingling. Responding to the change in his voice. To the anticipation in the air.

I looked down at the floor. I couldn't look into his eyes while I stripped. As I reached under my skirt and pulled them

down, I briefly wondered what had happened to the other pair I'd left in here.

“Bring them to me.” My head shot up to see if he was serious. Maddox stared at me. His blue eyes shining with that sadistic gleam.

I slowly walked across the room. Each step felt like a mistake. Like I was walking to my death. But I didn't stop. What was wrong with me that I wanted to see what he would do?

I dropped them on the table. Carefully his hand moved to pick them up as if he was touching something precious. He brought them to his face and inhaled deeply. “Drenched for me.”

Embarrassment flushed my face. The same shame I'd been feeling for years since I'd told my ex about my desires. I shouldn't be wet because of the threat of pain or his words. But I was.

Why did he have to keep talking about my body's reaction to him? It was bad enough I had to know it and live with it. But he kept reminding me. Kept throwing it back at me, making me face something about myself I wasn't ready to look at. I might never want to open that door.

“Can you stop?” I asked.

“Stop what?” Maddox tucked my black lace panties into the pocket of his suit, leaving the tights on the table. Is that where my last pair had gone?

“Stop mentioning it.” I said through clenched teeth.

“Mentioning what? How wet you are for me? How I can smell you from here? How I haven’t even touched you yet, but your body is already welcoming me?” He smiled, and it only made his face more attractive.

I stared down at the table. How did he know that? Was I so easy to read?

“Bend over the table.”

I didn’t even pretend to resist this time. I just wanted to get this over with, so I could leave. Take my money and run. And yes, I realized I sounded like a whore. I wouldn’t feel bad about it. I needed the money because of the medical debt. The debt that had kept my mom alive for another six months. I couldn’t regret that, even if it had led me here. To him.

The wood table felt cold on my heated skin as I rested my hands and cheek on the surface. My ponytail fell over my shoulder as I turned to stare at the wall. My breasts pushed into the table with each ragged inhale.

I felt Maddox move, but I didn’t look. His fingers circled my wrists as he stretched my hands above my head. His large hand pressed between my shoulders, pushing me further into the table. His palm covered most of my back.

He was so much bigger than me, stronger. He could manipulate my body so easily. Why did I like how small I felt next to him? Why did goosebumps break out on my skin where he touched me?

My breasts were crushed against the wood, teasing my peaked nipples. A rush of cool air tingled my skin as he flipped up my skirt, exposing me to him. Then his body was gone.

My heart squeezed as I stayed in position. I was afraid to move and add to my punishments. I'd never been in a more vulnerable position. Suddenly a thought flew through my head. I jerked to stand, but a firm hand shoved me down again.

“That’s nine.”

“No, I’m not d-disobeying.” I stammered. “The door doesn’t lock. Someone could come in and see me.”

Maddox laughed as my breath caught in my lungs. “No one will come in here. But if they do, your beautiful pussy will be the last thing they see before I cut their eyes out for looking at you.”

Shit. My core flooded at his words. It was coating my thighs. I tried to rub my legs together to hide it. But he pushed his thigh between mine and kicked my legs apart.

“That’s ten. Don’t hide from me.”

I bit back my response. I laid out for his viewing pleasure for several more minutes. Instead of becoming cold from the air conditioning, my body heated the longer I was bent over the table.

The wait heightened my response. I strained to listen for every little sound. Trying to hear what was coming. But

Maddox was silent. I couldn't even hear his breathing over my own.

Without warning, a sharp slap landed on my ass. I cried out as the sting coursed through my body.

"Count." Maddox said as his fingers brushed the spot where his palm had hurt me, making the hit burn again.

"One." I whispered. I waited. I couldn't tell if it was minutes or hours. My body was so tight I lost all perception of the outside world. Another slap came down in the same spot.

"Two."

There was no wait this time. He switched to the other side, several hits coming in a row. It was like he was purposefully changing what he was doing to build anticipation. I had no idea what would come next. The depraved part of me loved it. Loved not being in control.

"Three... four...five." Each hit forced my body further into the table. My clit bumped the edge and sent a shot of pleasure straight to my pussy.

"You don't like pain?" Maddox questioned as he caressed my ass. His touch wasn't gentle; it sent another round of stings to my abused cheeks. I hissed in a breath as he moved his hand until he was cupping between my thighs. I felt myself dripping onto his fingers. "Because this pussy sure likes it. Your little slut body craves my touch. You're ready to come again just like you did before. You loved coming on my fingers while I hurt you. Didn't you, little dove?"

“No.” I whispered even as my body rocked against his hand, trying to find the friction I needed.

The onslaught of sensations was ramping up my need for release. His touch. His words. The pain. The fear of the unknown. It was everything I’d fantasized about.

It was more. Darker and dirtier than I could have imagined. Because even though I’d thought of the pain before, I hadn’t pictured him.

His presence. His voice. His complete control of my body. His unrelenting need to destroy me.

“Don’t fucking lie to me, or I’ll add to the count.” He shoved his fingers inside me roughly. But before I could get any pleasure from them, he was gone.

His wet fingers slapped my ass again, adding to the pain. “Six.”

He switched to the other side. The sting of wetness slapped my ass. But the burn had started to change into something else. It still hurt, but now there was another sensation. A tightening in my core and nipples. I panted and arched off the table as he hit me again. “Seven... Eight.”

“Tell me you fucking like it.” He shoved two fingers inside me, and I cried out.

My body sucked him in as he pumped in and out of my tight heat. I felt every drag. My only focus was on the burning in my ass, the pleasure in my pussy, and Maddox’s voice. I forgot where I was. Who I was. There was nothing but him.

I shoved my hips back, reaching for more pleasure. I was shameless, needing the euphoria that was just out of reach.

“Oh fuck.” I screamed as my core clenched and electricity sparked in my veins. My orgasm drowned me. I lost all sense of the world as I hung there. It was like I wasn’t in my body anymore.

A sharp slap landed on my ass prolonging the sensation. I sucked air into my lungs. I needed it, but I couldn’t remember why.

“Count.” He grunted as he continued to finger fuck me. To touch my body in a way, I didn’t even know I needed.

“Nine.” I gasped.

“*Cazzo*. You’re so goddamn tight. My cock is going to tear you apart.” He pushed a third finger in, stretching me further as if preparing me for his dick. “Then I’ll claim this ass. I’m going to ruin every inch of you.”

I couldn’t process his words because my body was taut, racing toward my next release. “That’s right, come again like a good little slut. You hate me, fear me, but no one can touch your body like I can. Not that ex or that fucker out there. Only I can do this to you.”

My hands dug into the table, turning my knuckles white. I forced my ass back, pushing him further inside me. He curled his fingers, and I detonated.

“Yes. Yes.” I chanted as I exploded.

I didn't even know what I was saying anymore. I just didn't want this to stop. I had never felt this good in my life. This gone. This free. Like nothing else mattered.

I didn't have bills to worry about. I wasn't forced or paid to be here. I was nothing but a toy for him. Just as I thought it might stop, Maddox slapped my ass again, and it started all over.

"Ten." I whimpered automatically.

"So fucking breakable." Maddox grunted as I felt warm liquid coat my ass and thighs.

I'd been so gone I didn't even realize he'd been fisting his cock. A sliver of disappointment passed through me. I wanted to see him the way he'd seen me, but my body felt weak. I didn't have the energy to lift my head and look at him.

The table was the only thing holding me up as I lay against it. Slowly my breathing evened out. I started to feel my body again. My fingers were cramped from holding on to the table. My ass burned, and sweat clung to my skin.

I felt the stickiness between my legs, a mix of both of us. Instead of hating the feeling, I savored it even though I shouldn't. He had lost his mind over me. He felt a little of what I did for him.

"I need to clean up." I started to stand, but Maddox shoved me down again. His large, hot palm pressing into my cooling skin.

My breath caught in my lungs. I tried to take a deep breath, but his weight pressed into me. Apprehension clawed at my limbs. Why I was afraid now and not when he was hurting me, I didn't know. I should have always been afraid. I should never have let my guard down. "M-Maddox."

"Say it again." His voice was softer than I'd heard it. I wanted to reach out and touch this part of him. This soft part I didn't think he had. "Say my name."

"Maddox." I whispered. "Are you going to let me up?"

"Not yet." I felt his body leave me, but I didn't move.

I had no idea what he was doing, but something told me if I moved, I'd get punished again. As hard as I'd come, I didn't want to be hurt again... right now. I shouldn't want it at all, but it was there. It had happened, and I liked it. I was going to have to deal with that. But not now.

Later. At home. Alone.

I saw his hand reach over me to gather my tights from the table. He grabbed my hips and turned me to face him.

He sat on the chair. His dark hair curled on his forehead. I fought the urge to reach out and brush it away. To feel a part of him between my fingers. His jaw was tight, his brows furrowed. He looked tenser than someone who'd just had an orgasm should.

He wasn't looking at me, and I wanted him to. I wanted to see his eyes. See if the softness I'd heard in his voice was reflected in them. It was a fool's hope. It was a chemical

reaction. The endorphins flooding my brain, telling it to make a connection with the person who'd created them. But there would be no connection to be found. Maddox didn't have that part of him.

His fingers wrapped around my ankle, lifting my foot to his knee. I watched as he slipped the fabric up my calf. "What are you doing? I need to clean up. You'll ruin my tights."

"I don't give a fuck about your clothes." He growled. "Be happy I'm letting you get dressed at all."

I swallowed my protest and panic. I wanted him to let me go. A ruined pair of tights was a small price to pay. As soon as I was out of the room, I would get an extra pair from Tessa and go to the bathroom to clean up.

"You'll wear these the rest of the night." Maddox said as if he heard my thoughts. The tone of his voice left no room to argue with him. "I want every *Figlio di puttana* out there to smell me on you. I want you to feel my dried cum on your skin. Maybe then you won't let them fucking touch you."

My eyes widened as my jaw dropped. He stopped with the tights at mid thigh. I was mesmerized as he leaned forward. His olive skin looked striking next to my fairer complexion. His stubble scratched the sensitive flesh on my thigh. His warm lips set off goosebumps, and I shivered at the contact. Then he closed his mouth around my skin. He bit down. Hard.

I cried out, and my fingers flew to his hair. But the wires in my brain crossed on the way. Instead of pushing him off me, I pulled him closer. His hair was thick and silky in my hands. It

felt incredible between my fingers. I realized I'd barely touched him, and I hadn't seen him at all. How was that possible? And why did I want to?

I watched as his teeth sank into my flesh. After a minute, he drew back. We both stared at the mark he'd left. A purple bruise was already blooming, stark against my pale leg.

Maddox smiled his sick, sadist smile as he pulled my tights up the rest of the way. Then he fixed my skirt and pushed back.

The sudden urge to reach out and grab him passed over me. It was stupid, crazy; I didn't want to touch him. He was forcing me to do this. I didn't want to be here.

I looked down at the floor as I walked towards the door. I was afraid if I looked at him, I would be drawn back in. Or maybe I was afraid that I wouldn't see what I wanted in his expression. I'd see nothing.

He'd brought out a part of me I'd buried, and I wanted it to affect him the way it affected me. But I knew it didn't. So I couldn't look. I stared at the dark wood of the door like it held the answers.

I paused before opening it. My voice was a whisper in the dark room. "What do you want from me?"

Maddox chuckled, but there was no humor in the sound. "I want you to break."

## Kincaid

I walked out of my bathroom wearing a robe with a towel wrapped around my hair. My eyes immediately went to the envelope of cash sitting on my nightstand. It had been shoved under my door while I was sleeping last night. My cheeks burned as embarrassment flooded my body.

I should be more embarrassed about the money. I should feel like a hooker, but I was more upset that I'd liked it. If I could convince myself it was all about the money, that I had done it to pay off Mom's medical bills, then maybe I wouldn't feel so bad. But it wasn't the only reason, and I knew it.

I'd been intrigued by the ideas of pain and submission for a long time. I just didn't expect someone like Maddox to see it in me. Or be the one to touch me. He was a demon; it made sense for him to get off on inflicting pain. But I'm normal. Vanilla.

Could I really keep calling myself that after last night?

Probably not. But I refused to believe this was in my control. I didn't want this. I was forced into it. Even if I didn't need the money, Maddox would've found another way to keep me. Break me.

I wasn't going to break through. He could use my body against me, make me come, come on my skin. Tease out my fears and desires. And I still won't break for him.

I couldn't. All I had was me. There was no one to pick up the pieces if I shattered.

My heart rate kicked up as a knock sounded on my door, but it relaxed again when I remembered Tessa was stopping by. I pulled open the door, and she breezed in, bringing with her the scents of lilacs. She kicked off her shoes and flopped onto my bed.

I opened my nightstand drawer to quickly shove the envelope in before lying down next to her. I didn't want to answer any questions about where the money had come from. I couldn't even answer my own questions about why I'd done it.

"Can we just spend our whole day off like this?" Tessa said.

I stared up at the cracks in my dingy white ceiling. Sometimes when I couldn't sleep at night, when the neighbors were screaming at each other, or my mind wouldn't quiet, I tried to find patterns in the imperfections. Today there weren't any patterns to be found. It was interconnected lines or chaos, just like my mind.

“We might want to eat at some point and use the bathroom.” I said.

Tessa let out a long sigh next to me. “I guess.”

We fell into silence again, lost in our thoughts. This was the kind of friendship we had. We could talk about everything or nothing. We could fill the space around us with empty words, or we could sit in each other’s company, not needing anything but the comfort of her soul quietly next to mine.

From the outside, it might not seem like we shared any similarities. Tessa was raised by a rich aunt who provided for her but didn’t love her. My mother loved me endlessly but couldn’t provide for me. She was strong and confident, where I was quiet and shy. But we both knew the burn of grief. How it lived in you. Never truly went away.

We were both survivors. But I’d survived by making myself invisible. By burying my problems and dealing with them on my own. Tessa shoved her problems in your face and then kicked them in the nuts. She tore through life like it owed her for what she’d suffered. That’s why she was a dancer, and I was a waitress. She wanted to be on display. The attention fueled her. I wanted to hide. Fade into the background.

But in the end, it didn’t matter because we found ourselves in the same place. Alone.

“How’s it going with that guy?” I asked.

Tessa let out a humorless chuckle. “You make it sound like I’m dating him.”

She had an agreement to spend time alone with an older guy who came into the club. He paid her for her company. I had never cared about it before, but now I was curious.

“Do you ever feel...used?” I tugged on the ties of my robe, suddenly nervous. I didn’t want her to suspect why I was asking.

“Why should I?” She said. “I already came into this world at a disadvantage by being born with a vagina instead of a dick. I’m going to use everything at my disposal to keep myself alive and comfortable. Even if it’s my body that gets me what I want.”

I loved her shamelessness. Her ‘fuck the world’ attitude. She was stronger than I was. Tessa would survive. She never would’ve allowed herself to be involved with a man like Maddox. She might have agreed to walk into his cage, but it would’ve been on her own terms. She wouldn’t have gotten herself trapped.

Not like me.

“Do you ever sleep with them?” I didn’t judge her, especially not after what I’d done, but maybe if I understood how she did this, I could find my way out.

“No.” Her voice was hard. “Not that I look down on anyone who does, but I don’t want to be any closer to these Mafia men than I already am.”

“Mafia?” I shot up and stared at her with wide eyes.

Tessa's brow furrowed as she looked at me. "Uh yeah. Didn't you know the Vancini family owned Entice?"

"No! Is that common knowledge?" My voice rose in surprise.

The Vancini family practically ruled this city. They used the ports to bring in weapons. Everyone knew they had cops and politicians in their pockets. They could get away with murder...literally.

Holy shit! Maddox was a Vancini. He was in the Mafia. Of course, he was. That made perfect sense. It explained everything I'd come to learn about him. The guards. The authority. The money he seemed to be able to waste. How easily he talked about killing someone.

I'd let a murderer, a demon, touch me. And I liked it.

I couldn't deny that I did. But I shouldn't have. And I shouldn't let it happen again. I should be disgusted for allowing it to happen. Only I wasn't.

Something was seriously wrong with me.

"Why are you getting so upset about this right now?" Tessa sat up next to me and tilted her head like she didn't understand my reaction.

I should tell her about Maddox. But I didn't know how to explain it. Not why I'd let it happen or why I liked it so much. But I needed to. I needed to tell her so she could pull me out because I clearly couldn't stop myself.

"I think... I think I'm in trouble." I whispered.

“What do you mean?” Tessa’s emerald eyes stared into mine. I could see her confusion and worry.

“Remember the guys in the club you warned me about?” She nodded. “I kinda...hooked up with one of them.”

“What do you mean hooked up?” She asked; there was a hardness in her voice I’d never heard before. “Which one? The guy with all the tattoos?”

That was the guy who’d asked about her. That was interesting. Did they know each other? I made a note to ask her about that later, but I had bigger things to worry about.

“Maddox.”

“You fucked Maddox Vancini?” Her eyes flew open, and her jaw dropped.

“We didn’t have sex.” I shook my hands like they could protect me from the truth. Because the truth was somehow worse than sex.

Sex I could excuse away. I’d slept with guys before. What I’d done with Maddox was deeper. He’d pulled out a part of me that no one but my ex knew about. And it had been more intense than I’d ever imagined it could be.

I’d never come that hard in my fantasies. I never let a monster touch me or come on me. I’d never thought I would like his intense words or threats. But I had.

“Well, whatever it is, you need to get out.” The fear in Tessa’s tone drew my attention. “These guys don’t care about anyone. They have no regard for life. They’ll use you and

throw you away without a second thought. Especially people like us who have no one. You'll turn into a statistic."

"Okay." I nodded as fear tightened my throat.

She'd confirmed exactly what Maddox had told me. He was only interested in me because he wanted to watch me break. I knew I needed to run. I knew it from the moment I met him. But I kept being dragged back into his cage.

Worse, I was afraid I was starting to like the cage.

## Maddox

I reached out and picked up a strand of Kincaid's white blonde hair. The silky feel went straight to my cock, making me hard enough to be uncomfortable. Her pink lips were slightly parted. I imagined how good they were going to feel around my dick. I'd wrap her hair around my fist and fuck her mouth until she couldn't breathe.

She let out a soft sigh in her sleep but didn't move. I'd already pulled down the covers so I could look at all of her. The tiny shorts she slept in showed off her pale legs, the low light making it seem like they glowed. Her shirt had ridden up, exposing the delicate bumps in her spine. So fragile. I wanted to bruise each one of them. Wanted to cover that skin in my mark.

I frowned at the holes in her top. Not that I was surprised based on the way she lived. Her whole life reeked of someone who was struggling. I'd already explored her tiny apartment while she slept. There wasn't much to find. Well-worn clothes were folded into her only dresser, her bed was one step above

a mattress on the floor, and there was barely any food in her cupboards.

I didn't like that. Not that I cared about her well-being. But I didn't want her to break because of an outside source. I wanted to know I was her undoing. That I had found and exploited her weaknesses.

But there was a part of me that remembered that deep hungry. That feeling of worry over where your next meal was coming from. Back when I was just the son of a junkie whore before my father found me. My mother had kept me around as a bargaining chip. She used to tell me every day that I was her winning lottery ticket, and soon she would cash me in.

I never knew why she waited. Why we lived in filth. Why we starved. Why she prostituted herself for her next fix. Maybe because she knew the truth. That my father would kill her for keeping me from him. For how she treated me. And he did.

As soon as he found out about me, he came and took me away. I couldn't feel sorry for her death. She wasted her life and would've wasted mine.

Now I had power. Control. I could wield that power for my father and my benefit. I didn't have to feel the fear of hunger. Or hopelessness. I wasn't that rotting kid anymore. I was a Vancini.

I glanced around Kincaid's apartment again. The only thing in here that showed her personality was the books. She

had hundreds of books stacked everywhere. Mostly used paperbacks with covers adorned with half-naked men.

It seemed this little dove had more than one fetish. I'd flipped through a few copies while I watched her. It was all boring and generic. Historical novels with princes who saved the peasants or billionaires who fucked their secretaries. I knew it didn't truly reflect her desires.

Kincaid shifted, bringing her legs to her stomach as she lay on her side. The position exposed her inner thigh. The mark I'd left on her skin a few days ago was fading. I was going to need to make a new one. I frowned as flashbacks came to me.

The feeling of her coming apart in my hands, her breathy moans, the way she'd said my name. Not during, but after. That's not what bothered me. A strange feeling had passed through me when I touched her. I needed to figure out what had happened that night.

When I touched Kincaid, I felt an overwhelming sense of calm. I was never calm. There was always something under the surface clawing to get out. That's why I craved control; it was the closest I ever got to taming the demon. But when my hands had felt her silk skin, I relaxed. It didn't make sense.

Then I'd lost control and covered her in my cum. I hadn't planned on that. I was going to destroy her with her own body. Make her face the fact that she wanted me to fuck her. That she wanted me to break her. But then I'd remembered that guy touching her and her *stronzo* ex.

The urge to claim her ripped my plans to pieces. I did it because something told me that the calm was fleeting; it would leave me when she did. I needed to make her feel me long after I left. I wanted to be the only man she thought about. I wanted to erase all the others. I wanted to creep my way into her mind. Under her skin. The same way she was under mine.

Why the fuck was she under my skin? Why did I want to know every detail of her life?

Kincaid was supposed to be another toy I broke. A useless object I would discard just like the others. That's what she was. It was just taking longer to break her than I thought. But I loved a challenge.

Especially an innocent challenge who made my cock hard.

I wasn't sure how long I'd been watching her sleep when my phone vibrated in my pocket. I dropped the strand of hair I was still holding and pulled it out. Tristan's name displayed on the screen. I sent the call to voicemail before putting it away. I leaned forward and buried my nose in her hair. Inhaling the clean powdery scent that lingered on her skin.

I needed to leave. I'd been here long enough and hadn't learned anything I didn't already know. I wasn't even sure why I'd come. I'd gone to Entice first but left when I realized she wasn't working. Then I'd tried to go to Wicked across town. It had a more specific clientele. It was full of men and women who had the same sadistic pleasures I did.

But even that hadn't satisfied me. In truth, it hadn't interested me in months. It was full of the same jaded, used

people. I no longer got the reactions I was looking for.

None of them moaned like Kincaid. None of them had the shock or fear in their eyes. *Cazzo*, I'd almost spilled in my pants like a virgin when I slapped her ass for the first time. The surprise and delight in her expression had been so raw. So real.

Just like when she stripped her panties off for me. There was a shyness to her. An innocence but an eagerness. She probably didn't even know it was there. But it was. She wanted this.

Soon she'd beg for it.

## Maddox

The cool night air made my breath fog around my face as I walked towards the car at the curb. Bash opened the back door. The heater warmed my chilled fingers as I pulled my phone from my pocket. I clicked on Tristan's name and waited for the call to connect.

"Report." I said in lieu of a greeting.

I watched Kincaid's building disappear as Bash navigated down the street. I couldn't explain the odd sense of loss and regret that constricted my chest. I didn't feel those things. I didn't feel normal emotions. I was born without them. And nothing in life had shown me that I was missing out on anything. It seemed emotions only brought weakness and suffering.

"Numbers are down." Tristan's voice pulled me back to the present. "I found another spy. Same results as the last."

Meaning another Gallo family member was at the gambling club, and he couldn't extract any information out of

him. I should've been annoyed. Should've cared, but I didn't.

"Is he still alive?" I sighed.

"No, but I was thinking." Tristan went on when I didn't respond. "If they're going to keep hitting our clubs, maybe we should start claiming their territory. If they can steal our gambling customers, we should start selling to their junkies."

"We don't sell drugs." I rubbed between my eyes. I was annoyed now. It was directed at my *coglione* cousin. He was trying to fix his mistakes by making an even bigger one.

"There's a lot of mon-"

"*Non dire cazzate!*" *Don't talk bullshit.* I cut him off before I had to hear this fucking stupid idea again. "It's more of a pain than it's worth. If I wanted your suggestion, I'd ask for it. Do your job." I disconnected before he responded.

I rested my head against the back of the seat as I ran a hand through my hair. I didn't want to deal with business tonight. I wanted to go back to that apartment. I wanted to wake up the little dove and play with her. I could picture the terror in her eyes when she realized how easily I could get to her. I could already feel her tight pussy strangling my cock as I fucked her into the mattress. I could hear her screaming my name.

"*Sei bravo?*" *You good.* Bash's eyes looked at me in the rear-view mirror.

"*Si.*"

I didn't feel like explaining that I didn't know. I felt out of control. I didn't like it. Control was my life. I needed a plan. Needed to figure out how to get this little dove out of my mind.

\* \* \*

Twenty minutes later, we pulled up to my father's estate. The home I'd come to live in when I was ten until I moved out at twenty. Family obligation still brought me back for dinner every other Sunday. Not only to update the boss on numbers but to see my sister.

The two-story stone building looked more like a museum than a home. It was a statement to the wealth we had. To the power, we'd earned. I walked up the front steps at a steady pace. I no longer noticed the armed guards or the towering gates. It had long ago become a part of the background, normalized.

The second I opened the large wooden double door, a small body slammed into my chest. I gathered my little sister into my arms. I didn't like affection. Mostly because I didn't like people. Alessandra was an exception.

*"Occhioni." Big eyes.*

I pulled back to look at her. Her long chestnut hair was in two braids, making her look even younger than twenty-one. She was tiny. Her head barely reached my chest. Her light blue eyes were rounded. They easily showed her every emotion and earned her the nickname.

I'd noticed they'd become sadder over the last year or so, but she would deny it when I asked. As she'd done the last time. Something had changed in her. Maybe it was because her mother had died, caught in an assassination attempt on our father. Or perhaps it was the knowledge that she would soon be married off.

Arranged marriages were still common in the Italian Mafia, especially if you were a girl born into this world. Alessandra had known it since her birth. Lately, she'd been dressing differently. She'd stopped wearing her frilly dresses. Instead, she wore pants and long sleeves in neutral colors. Gone were the colorful prints and patterns she used to favor.

It was like she was trying to hide her beauty. As if it could save her from that fate. Leif had shielded her as long as he could, but she was getting older. Soon our father would ask her to fulfill her role in the family.

"You don't visit enough, *fratello*." She sighed as she looped her arm in mine and led me down the hall to the dining room.

The marble tile clicked under her heels. Like the outside, the inside was made to display what we had. Expensive stone on the floor, opulent chandeliers hanging from the ceiling, famous paintings on the walls, and gaudy statues standing in the hall. It was also heavily fortified with a panic room in the basement. Safety was important, especially with Alessandra in the house. She wouldn't be the first Mafia princess to be kidnapped and used as a bargaining chip.

My father and Leif were already seated at the table. The family resemblance was obvious. The three of us had the same dark, almost black hair, olive skin, and coiled muscles that came from needing to defend our lives if necessary. Leif and my father also had the same shade of dark brown eyes.

The table was set as if we were expecting royalty to join us for dinner. That was how my father saw himself. He was the king of this city. The Boss. The Don. No one questioned his power. His ruthlessness. His brutality.

Until recently.

“Maddox.” My father greeted happily as I pulled out a chair for Alessandra before walking to him. I kissed both his cheeks as a sign of respect.

“*Papà.*” This close, I could see the lines around his eyes. The fatigue of the impending war with the Gallos weighed heavy on him. Not because he cared about the death or destruction it would cause but because he risked losing his power. The only thing he cared about.

From his expression, I knew this would not be just another family dinner. There would be business to discuss. But not yet. Not when my sister was still in the room.

I took my place on his left, Alessandra next to me. “*Occhioni*, tell me, how’s college life?”

Leif had convinced our father to let Alessandra attend school rather than marry at eighteen. He reasoned that no man

wanted a dumb wife. He was almost as protective of her as I was.

“Good.” She answered as we ate the pasta in front of us. “My economics class is harder than I thought, but I’ve found a tutor that’s been helping.”

“A female tutor.” It wasn’t a question our father asked but a command. His eyes narrowed as he looked at her as if searching for a lie. Alessandra was not to be alone with a man. She wasn’t allowed to go anywhere without the presence of her bodyguard, Frank.

Alessandra smiled at our father, but again I noticed it didn’t reach her eyes. “Of course, *papà*.”

Our father’s face relaxed slightly, but I saw the intent in his eyes. If she stepped out of line, he’d kill her. No one was off limits to his wrath, not even his own daughter. She’d be punished mercilessly if she dared to embarrass him by having a boyfriend or disobeying any order. It would hurt him, but in this life, he knew he couldn’t afford weaknesses. If I was evil, it was because of him.

Or it could have come from my mother. It was hard to tell who I got my evil spirit from. That’s what happens when two soulless monsters have a child; there’s nothing good to pass on.

Leif and Alessandra’s mother had been kind, not made for this life, even though she’d be born into it. She passed on her sweet nature to Alessandra and her kindness to Leif. Though our father had done everything he could to beat it out of him.

Their mother having no way to stop it. They'd had an arranged marriage to form alliances with the west coast syndicate. There was no love. Which is how I came to be.

My father liked to visit the local prostitutes. He'd taken a fondness to my mother in particular. When she realized she was pregnant, she ran. She knew he would force her to abort me. My mother didn't save my life out of the goodness of her heart. Or motherly love. She did because she thought one day I could be her meal ticket. Her bargaining chip. She underestimated how ruthless Leonardo Vancini was.

He killed her without remorse right in front of me when I was ten years old. I felt nothing when she died. I'd been born without feelings, and seeing her gruesome murder hadn't changed that. Afterward, my father had taken me home to live with him and his family.

My stepmother had always treated me with kindness even when she could've hated me for being her husband's bastard child. Like I said, she was too good for this life. But her affection couldn't change what I was. I was exactly what my father wanted. An emotionless, ambitious killer. The perfect Mafia son.

Soon dinner was done. My father and Leif were waiting for me in the office as I escorted Alessandra up to her room. She looked up at me as we walked down the hall. Her once twinkling eyes had lost their brightness.

"You can always talk to me, Alessandra." I said. "I'll keep your secrets. I'll hurt anyone who tries to hurt you. Father

included.”

I didn't mind killing people. I enjoyed it, actually. But this was different. Alessandra was her mother's child. She needed protection from this life.

“Some secrets are better left buried.” She whispered before walking into her room and closing the door behind her. I made a note to have Bash look into her life. Something was going on. It was my job to know what.

I walked back downstairs and entered my father's office. The pungent smell of cigars hung in the air as smoke encircled my father's head. I took a seat next to Leif across from my father's desk as they finished a conversation about a weapons shipment. I waited to be addressed.

“Maddox, what have you found out?” My father asked.

“I have a meeting with one of my informants set up this week.” I flicked a piece of lint from my pants. I was ready to get out of here. I'd done my family obligation, and the longer I sat here, the more restless I became.

“Who?” I ignored my father's question as he expected.

I worked for the family, but I knew the value of holding back my cards. Of always knowing more than the person in front of me. The second I wasn't an asset, my father wouldn't hesitate to kill me.

“I believe it's time for Tristan to take his place.” Leif said, changing the subject. I heard the subtle threat in his comment.

Tristan was set to take over for Constantine. The only way for that to happen would be for Constantine to die.

I shook my head. “Tristan isn’t ready.”

“If he isn’t ready, it’s your fault.” My father said. I stared back at him, unaffected by his harsh tone.

I knew there were people, like Leif, who craved their parent’s approval. I wasn’t one of them. It didn’t change what or who I was. As much as my father liked to play that he was in control of me. Ff my actions, but I saw the fear.

He knew I was a psychopath. That I was more emotionless than he was. He’d bred a demon, and there was no controlling me. I did what I wanted to do. I maintained my position in the family because I liked the power. I liked torturing and killing. The second it became boring, I’d find a new way to entertain myself.

And that’s exactly what I’d done with the little dove.

My mind wandered to Kincaid. She was entertainment. A toy. But a war was coming. I needed to break her so I could focus again. I needed to get rid of this distraction. A war would be much more fun.

“Constantine stays for now. We can’t afford a change with the Gallos’ current threats. Continue talking to our contacts. Predict their next move.” My father said, drawing my attention. “Kill any one of them who gets in our way. If they want a war, they’ll get one.”

“Yes, sir.” Leif and I said in unison before we both exited the office.

We didn’t talk again until we were outside. Bash and Elijah stood at our waiting cars.

“How’s it going with the pretty little waitress?” Leif asked.

A flame flicked inside me. Between the dinner, Alessandra, and our father’s useless accusations, I was feeling restless. I needed to find a way to release the energy. I needed to hurt someone.

“She’ll break soon enough.” I smiled as I pictured her sobbing in front of me. Naked.

“You’re sick, Mad.” Leif clapped me on the back before he walked away.

I watched him drive off as I approached my car. I climbed into the backseat, shutting the door behind me. I tried to push away the incessant need to maim and kill, but the call was too loud tonight. I wouldn’t visit the little dove. I was too out of control. I’d kill her. Instead, I had a different prey in mind.

“Did you find him?” I asked Tristan as we pulled away from my father’s house.

Restlessness made my skin itchy. I was ready to inflict pain. To take a life.

“He’s a prominent attorney. Has a fancy apartment downtown.”

Kincaid's ex. Chad Albracht the third. I told her I could find him. His life had prospered while she was barely surviving. He'd kicked her when she was already down.

I might be a demon, but I rarely wielded my power on those who were already beaten my life. Partly because the world would take care of them soon enough. And partly because there was no satisfaction in destroying the weak. It was much more fun to take down the powerful. To watch their perfect lives crumble around them.

I would appreciate taking this man down. The man who'd made the little dove believe her desires were wrong. Who had others attack her. Abuse her. One with his nose so far in the air he'd forgotten how easily it could all be taken away.

He'd forgotten there was always someone more powerful. Someone stronger. He hurt the weak because he didn't have what it took to come for someone like me. I would be his undoing. His demon. Hopefully, it would bury her fears.

"Go." I told Tristan.

It was time to let the demon out.

## Kincaid

Rain poured down, seeping into my thin jacket as I tried to dodge the puddles already forming on the ground. A car was another luxury and expense I couldn't afford, so I was forced to walk to work each night. The rain wasn't the worst of it. Last year I'd had to walk in over a foot of snow. By the time I'd arrived, I thought my toes were going to break off with how cold they were. They weren't doing great right now in my beat-up, holey sneakers, but it wasn't as bad as then.

I only had another block to go. Suddenly a car sped past too close to the curb. The wheel clipped a giant puddle, and a wave of dirty water soaked my legs and feet. I hissed as the cold water clung to my thin tights. Goosebumps broke out along my skin as a bone-deep chill shook my body.

I paused and tipped my head to the sky as a rush of tears threatened to pour from my eyes. I pressed my lips together as I tried to hold them in. It was one of those days when life wanted to show me my place. The landlord had come by earlier to inform me the rent was rising. My rain boots had

finally given out, the sole separating from the boot. I'd found an old locket of my mom's, one I knew I would have to sell if I wanted to eat. Getting soaked by a passing car was the last straw of a spectacularly shitty day. And I still had a shift to get through.

The weight was pressing down on me again. Clawing at my chest, making it hard to breathe. Squeezing my organs with worry. The worry I couldn't survive like this much longer. Something had to give, or I would. The need to end it all poked at my brain, telling me it would be easier. That I didn't have to live like this. I didn't have to live at all.

Whoever said money didn't make you happy obviously had money. They'd never had to starve. Never had to choose to live in a safe place or a cheap place. Never had to watch as the treatment your dying mother needed was denied because of lack of insurance. Money might not make you happy, but it certainly made life bearable.

I tasted bile as I swallowed down my self-pity. I leaned forward and brushed some of the dirt from my legs, but it was a wasted effort. I took two steps to cross the alley when a car pulled in front of me, blocking my way. I didn't know much about cars, but I knew this one was expensive. Sleek and black with tinted windows. It seemed like even the water didn't dare cling to it.

My heart knocked against my ribs because I had a feeling that I knew who was in the car. The back window rolled down, confirming my fears.

Maddox's handsome face stared back at me. His piercing blue eyes cut through me like he could read my thoughts. His full lips were pulled into a small smirk like he was enjoying my embarrassment.

Damn, why did he have to be so good looking? Why couldn't he be a troll? Maybe then it would be easier to walk away from him.

But I had to walk away. I couldn't get caught in his trap again. The longer I stayed, the harder it was to find my way out.

"Get in the car, Kincaid." His deep voice carried over the sound of the rain pelting the ground.

I licked my lips as I shook my head. I didn't want to get in that car. Except I did. It looked warm, and my bones were literally rattling against each other with the cold. I knew the warmth was an illusion. It wouldn't be warm; it would be fire. I would be willingly jumping into the flames with a demon.

"Get in the car, little dove, before I force you inside." He showed me his sadistic smile. "You know how much I love to force you."

I choked on my saliva as he watched me like a predator. The driver's door opened, and the tattooed bodyguard stepped into the rain, opening the back door for me. Like the car, the water wouldn't dare to touch him.

Fear skirted down my spine as I crossed the distance and climbed into the backseat. The door immediately shut behind

me, closing me in with a monster.

“Now you’re harassing me outside of work.” I crossed my arms over my chest, trying to hang onto my shaky confidence.

I didn’t like seeing him outside of my normal environment. Not that I was safe in the club. He’d proven I wasn’t. But the illusion had given me strength. There was no illusion of safety now.

Anxiety forced my heart to beat faster as I stared straight ahead. I watched the bodyguard through the windshield as he stood out in the rain. I didn’t want to look at my demon.

Maddox was turned toward me; his gaze tracked every inch of my body. I felt it like a burning touch to my skin. Heating me from the inside out. He wasn’t even touching me, but I still reacted to him. To his nearness. To his imposing presence.

“You’re not going to work tonight.” Maddox said with easy confidence, as if he controlled what I did.

“The hell I’m not.” My head whipped to him in anger.

“You’re having dinner with me.” He kept talking like he hadn’t heard a word I said.

“I am not having dinner with you.” Acid dripped from my words.

“You’re a cheap date. Should I rip that skirt off you and tear into your tight pussy right here, then?”

My lips parted in shock as he smiled at me. My eyes narrowed as I took in his expensive suit. His fancy car. His condescending smile. I hated him. I hated that he thought he owned me. That he could treat me like a toy.

“I will *never* have sex with a smug piece of shit like you.” I turned away from him, anger boiling my blood. My hand closed around the door handle, but his fingers dug into the nape of my neck. He tugged roughly, forcing me to him.

His hard chest was pressed into my back. His warm skin and smoky scent surrounded me, causing a shiver to run down my spine. His lips brushed my ear as he spoke.

“Never say never, little dove.” I heard him inhale a deep breath as if he was drawing my scent into his lungs. “I will make you beg for my cock. You’ll hate yourself for it, but you’ll still do it.”

“I will never do that.” I closed my eyes, trying to hide from the soft whisper of my voice.

“Yes, you will because you’re a greedy little slut who loves how I touch you. Take you. Hurt you.” His fingers flexed on my neck, and for a second, I wanted him to squeeze. Wanted him to give me the pain.

I wanted to beg him to let me go, but I knew it was what he expected me to do. It was what he got off on. He wanted me to break. To bend to him. I wouldn’t do it. Life was already trying to break me. I wouldn’t let him be the last hit. Instead, I tried the truth.

“I can’t afford to miss work.” I whispered into the dark car. I was glad he was holding my neck because I couldn’t look at him. “I need the money.”

Maddox’s hand moved to the front of my body, his fingers gripping my throat. His thumb pushed my jaw until I was forced to look into his dark emotionless eyes. Something soft flicked in them before disappearing quickly.

He was so close our noses brushed. I wondered if he was going to kiss me. He’d finger fucked me twice. Spanked my ass. Covered my skin with his cum. But he’d never kissed me.

I wanted him to. I wanted to know what his lips would feel like against mine. What he would taste like. I hated that I was curious.

“Same deal as last time.” His lips grazed mine as he spoke. “\$2,000 for you to have dinner with me.”

His hot breath tingled across my skin as he rubbed our noses together. It was a surprisingly intimate gesture. Almost sweet. Or it would’ve been if his fingers weren’t closing around my throat. It was just enough pressure to make breathing difficult. To make my head feel fuzzy. Or maybe it was him making me feel like that.

“Will we play another game?” The words were out of my mouth before I knew what I was asking.

His expression darkened with lust. His jaw ticked. He licked his lips. His fingers squeezed. He liked the idea. He

liked it even more that I had suggested it. Why did I like pleasing him?

I was falling down the rabbit hole.

No.

I was walking towards the door in my mind. My hand was outstretched. I wanted to close my fingers around the handle. Pull it open. Fulfill those depraved desires. Instead, I turned my back to it.

In Maddox's hold, my chest rose and fell. My breath coming out in short pants as I waited for him.

“Yes.” That one word held so much promise even as it dripped with depravity.

I should run. The door was already trying to force its way open. I was already too deep. But I needed the money. And a twisted part of me wondered what would happen next. How far we could take this? How much could I really handle?

“Okay.”

He was right...I hated myself.

## Maddox

**K**incaid sat in the car beside me as Bash drove through the city. Her fingers twisting in the hem of her skirt. The same black skirt I lifted while I spanked her round ass. Her foot tapped, drawing my eyes to her battered shoes. I frowned as I looked at her.

Her jacket was too light for the weather. Her clothes were holey and worn. Her hair was soaked, the ends dripping onto the smooth leather seats. She looked like a drowned rat.

I didn't like it. I didn't like how defeated she looked. Or that I'd even noticed any of it. But I had. It made something twist in my gut.

I worked my jaw back and forth, trying to figure out why it bothered me. I leaned forward to adjust the heater controls and turn the vents towards her. Kincaid glanced at me, the corner of her mouth curling into a small smile.

The shriveled organ in my chest knocked abruptly as if it was trying to come back to life. Impossible. It had died a long

time ago if it had ever worked properly. Which I highly doubted.

I watched her expression as we pulled into the circle driveway in front of my house. It was strikingly similar to my father's, only smaller. Two stories of cold imposing stone, surrounded by acres of woods and lush lawns. It was a well-protected fortress just outside the city. There was no such thing as too much security when your job was to make enemies.

“Where are we?” She asked as she stared at the house.

“My home.” Her body tensed next to me. I could almost taste her fear. I resisted the urge to shove her against the seat and do just that. To suck it from her lips as I fucked her mouth with my tongue.

“I thought you said we were going to dinner.” Her voice had a slight tremble to it, making my cock harder than it already was.

“I didn't say I was taking you out. I said you were having dinner with me.” I smiled as I watched her hands shake. She was caught in my cage again. “Here. At my house.”

Without another word, I exited the car. My shoes slapped the wet ground as I rounded the car to open her door. The rain had finally stopped leaving a fog in the air. Her wintery eyes flicked to me as if she was suspicious of the gesture.

“I told you I could be a gentleman,” I whispered in her ear as I took her hand. My fingers tightened around her, not letting

her go as I walked her to the door. Her skin felt like a brand. Searing me to her.

Bash opened the front door allowing us to cross the threshold. We were standing in my foyer. To the right, a closed door led to my office. To the left were two doors; one leading to a living space, the other a dining room. In front of us was a staircase leading to the bedrooms and a hallway that led to the kitchen, a bathroom, and a second living room I never used.

I tried to look around as if I was seeing it for the first time. The way Kincaid was seeing it. It wasn't as opulent as others. The floors were stone rather than marble. There were no gaudy chandeliers or expensive artwork. Everything was done in shades of gray. It suited me, but I had an overwhelming urge to know what Kincaid thought.

She glanced around with parted lips. "I guess the Mafia business pays well."

"It does." I didn't bother denying what I was. There was a sick thrill with my job that I enjoyed.

I stared at her for another moment. She was so beautiful. Innocent. I wasn't sure why I'd brought her here. I'd never brought a woman to my house before. Not that she'd be staying for long.

It was all part of the game. I wanted her out of the normal space I met her in. Wanted to throw her off balance. There were plenty of places I could've taken her, but then I'd pictured her here. In my house. In my control. A crazy need to make that a reality had tossed aside my common sense.

Taking her hand, I led her up the stairs. “Wait here.”

I didn't stop to see if she listened or what her reaction was. I continued down the hall to my room. I pushed through the doors and headed to the walk-in closet. I grabbed a black button-up shirt off a hanger before returning to the little dove. She stood trembling as she watched me. I thrust the shirt into her hands.

“You can use this room to change.” I pointed to the door behind her. It led to one of the guest rooms that I also didn't use.

“Change?” She scrunched her brows as she looked at the shirt in my hand.

“You're shaking and dripping everywhere. You can't eat dinner like that.”

She bit her lip, continuing to look away from me. “You sound like you care.”

“I don't.” I said too quickly. “Not about you. But you're ruining the carpet.”

Why the fuck did I care if she was shivering? Cold? Wet?

I didn't.

“I'm not wearing your shirt.”

I don't lose my temper easily, but this night was pushing me. It wasn't going how I had expected it to. My mind wasn't working right seeing her in my space. She felt out of place and

right at the same time. I hadn't thought this plan out. I shouldn't have brought her here.

But I knew if I let her go to work, someone would die. I wouldn't be able to watch another man touch her. Flirt with her. I would need to kill him.

“Go in the room and change.” I ordered.

“No.” Her defiant eyes glowered at me.

I stepped forward, forcing her to move away from me. Her back hit the door with a dull thud as she sucked in a sharp inhale. She was afraid. Good. I was back where I needed to be.

“You can go in there and put the shirt on, or you can eat naked.”

I leaned forward until my lips brushed the pulse in her neck. It beat rapidly against my mouth. My hand twitched, wanting to come up to that pulse right now and end her life. To leave a permanent mark on her life. Her soul. She'd never forget the man who ended her.

It would only take a firm squeeze. It would be so easy. People didn't realize how easy it was to kill someone. Or maybe they wouldn't let themselves realize it. Or maybe it was just me.

But I wouldn't kill the little dove tonight because I liked the feel of her pulse. I wanted how it beat and fluttered for me.

“Don't test me. There's nothing I want more than to see every inch of your breakable body.”

She let out a small squeak as she opened the door without looking away from me. She backed into the room, maintaining eye contact until the door closed.

I wanted to open that door. Strip her out of her clothes and fuck her on the floor. I wanted to make her cry out in pain as I slammed into that tight pussy. I closed my eyes, breathing deeply.

The plan. I had to stick to the plan.

Break her. Toss her aside.

Kincaid emerged a few minutes later. My chest constricted. My dick jumped in my pants as my eyes tracked her body. Her bare, petite feet. Her naked legs, my shirt stopping mid-thigh. Her luscious hips. The cinching in at her waist. Her plump tits. The smooth skin at her throat. Finally, stopping on her wintery eyes.

*Cazzo.*

## Kincaid

**T**he fury in Maddox's eyes felt like it was piercing my heart. Stopping it from beating. Why was he so mad? He was the one who brought me here. Gave me his clothes. I didn't want any of this.

Except... It was interesting to get a glimpse of him.

I had expected him to live in a penthouse in the city. In a weird way, this estate fit him. It felt big, imposing, like him. There was a coldness, an aloofness, that mirrored his personality. It would probably be a beautiful house if it had some homey touches. Some art or family pictures. A little color. Maybe a decorative rug.

Why was I redecorating his house?

I swallowed as he stared at me intently for another minute. His blue eyes trying to burrow into my thoughts. He seemed to always know what I was thinking, but I never knew what he was. I didn't even know why I wanted to know.

It had to be to save myself. The more I knew about him, the better I could understand him. Understand his obsession with me. Understand how to get away. Because that was still the plan. I needed to get away.

Maddox's hand closed around the nape of my neck. He didn't hurt or squeeze; it was a possessive touch, letting me know I had no escape. A shiver ran down my spine. I tried to close my eyes and ignore the sensation. Tried to blame it on the chill or my lack of clothes.

"Come." My heart stuttered in my chest as my pussy clenched. "Dinner is waiting."

I was here for the money. Only the money. I didn't like this. Or him.

Only the money. I hate him.

I repeated the words over and over again in my head as he led me back down the stairs and into a massive dining room. Floor-to-ceiling windows covered one wall; another had a door that I assumed led into the kitchen. There was a giant wood table big enough for at least twelve people.

There were two place settings, one at the head of the table and the other right next to it. The rest of the table was bare. I guess I wouldn't get away with sitting on the opposite side as I'd done before.

He pulled my chair out. The surprising gesture made me falter. His lips thinned into an annoyed line as he waited for

me. I quickly recovered and sat down. The last thing I wanted was to gain punishments. I was already out of my element.

It occurred to me that no one knew where I was. Or who I was with. He could kill me and dispose of my body. No one would come looking for him. But even if someone had known, would it matter? Men like him could get away with those things easily. Murder.

Another shiver ran down my spine. Goosebumps raised the hair on my arms. This time it was definitely from fear.

“What are you thinking?” Maddox asked as his blue eyes pierced me, fixed on my reaction.

“That you could kill me, and nothing would happen to you.”

“That’s true.” He smiled as he picked up a glass of water and brought it to his lips.

I sucked a deep breath into my lungs to try and calm my nerves. He said it so casually. Like he’d been thinking about murdering me. Like he didn’t care if I lived or died. Because he didn’t.

That thought bothered me more than dying. Maybe it was because I thought about ending my own life often. But I suspected it was more about feeling worthless. Unimportant.

If you’ve never felt neglect or disinterest, you didn’t know how much it could hurt. Physical abuse was hell, but emotional pain was a special form of torture. It lingered.

Spread like venom until it dissolved everything good in its path. Until only the bad thoughts remained.

It took strength not to act on them. To cling to hope. The hope that the next day could be better. It was a constant battle fighting my own mind. That's why I couldn't let Maddox into it. I was already trying to keep the shattered pieces together. He could crush them to dust.

"If it makes you feel better, I don't plan on killing you... today."

I glared at him. "Not really, no."

He smiled like he enjoyed my fear as the door behind him opened. I saw a glimpse of a beautiful modern kitchen as someone came out, depositing a plate in front of each of us. She was probably in her fifties, with hair graying at her temples and kind eyes. She wore an apron, and her hair was pulled back into a low bun.

"Please let me know if I can get you anything else, Mr. Vancini." The housekeeper or maybe cook said.

"Only privacy, Ava." I expected him to be rude, but there was no hint of malice in his voice. "Please instruct the staff not to disturb us."

"Of course, sir." She bowed slightly as she talked to him.

"You have staff?" I asked as she disappeared again.

He shrugged. "Ava runs the house. She takes care of meals and coordinates the other staff. There's a maid, a gardener, and of course, you've seen my guards."

“Scary tattoo dude and the Draco Malfoy lookalike?”

Maddox raised one eyebrow as he looked at me. “Draco Malfoy?”

“You know, mean kid in Harry Potter. Super blonde hair, kind of weaselly.” A small smile played on my lips. Before a tense silence fell.

Oh shit. Had I offended him? Maybe those guys were closer than guards. Maybe they were friends. And I just called one of them a weasel.

Not that I was wrong. One like at the guy, and you could tell he would ferret his way to the top. I’d learned to read people by working at the club.

The tattooed guard was scary on the outside, but there was a control about him. Maddox was deranged, his eyes lifeless. The other guy was power-hungry but without the smarts to form a plan. It made sense that he was only a guard, not in charge like Maddox.

Finally, Maddox broke the silence when he let out a long laugh. The breath I was holding whooshed from my lungs. I was trying to avoid getting on his bad side tonight.

“Sebastian will love that.” He said.

I chanced another small smile. His face seemed softer, like he needed that laugh. He probably didn’t have a chance to laugh much in his life. “Sebastian is the blonde one?”

“No, that’s Tristan. Sebastian is the...what did you say, ‘scary tattoo dude’.” He smiled at me, but it wasn’t his usual

sadistic smile. It was a normal smile.

My heart rolled in my chest as I squirmed in my seat. My gaze lingered on his full lips before moving to his strong jaw. His face was made more handsome by his olive skin.

He really was beautiful. It was unfair to mankind. People's insides should match their outsides. Someone like him shouldn't be beautiful.

But that was how it worked in the animal kingdom. The most deadly animals drew the most attention. Like poisonous frogs. Or large cats. It made you want to come closer. That's what Maddox was doing to me. I could feel him drawing me into his cage again.

"Why am I here?" I snapped, trying to put distance between us.

His smile fell immediately. His face hardened once again. I regretted my decision to be rude. My stomach tightened, in fear, of course.

"Eat." He slammed his glass back on the table, making me jump when the dishes rattled.

I glanced down at the food on my plate. It was some kind of pasta dish with seafood and a red sauce. It smelled amazing. My stomach grumbled loudly.

I couldn't remember the last time I'd had a full meal. Even longer since I had something I didn't make. Something that looked and smelled...expensive. I lived on peanut butter and ramen.

Tears pricked my eyes as I looked at the plate. I hated to cry in front of people. But my nerves were on edge. Maddox drove me to the edge. I hated him. Hated his blood money. Hated that I would take it. Hated that I felt like I had no choices.

“Kincaid.” If I thought I would find comfort in him, I was wrong. His voice was as dead as he was. “I won’t ask you again. If you don’t pick up that fork and start eating, I’ll tie you down and feed you myself.”

Anger dried my tears as my head whipped to him. “You wouldn’t?”

“I would.” He gave me that sadistic smile again. “Only I’d strip you naked first.”

“You’re sick.”

“If I am, so are you.” His hand reached, shoving roughly between my thighs. Only wearing his shirt, there was nothing to stop him from brushing his fingers along my panty-clad center. “Because that threat soaked your panties. You want me to tie you up. To deliver some pain.”

“No.” He chuckled darkly at my protest. It had none of his earlier softness.

Electricity seemed to arc in the air around us as he watched my face. His fingers brushed up and down, teasing, as I tried not to react.

But I wanted to. I wanted to snap my legs together, trap him there. Lift my hips and lean into his touch. He was right; I

was just as sick as him.

He pulled his fingers back, and I stopped myself from moaning at the loss of his touch. He brought them to his nose and inhaled deeply. As if he loved the smell of me as if he was savoring it. I should be disgusted. Instead, my pussy clenched.

“Eat, little dove.” He picked up his fork and started to eat as he waited for me.

“Why do you care?” I asked as I stared down at the delicious meal.

Why was I fighting so hard? It was like I wanted him to punish me. Like I wanted to push him. Sick.

“You’re starving, and I won’t have you breaking because of it.” I looked into those dead eyes, searching for an explanation. “When you do break, it’ll be because of what I’ve done to you. Not anything else. Only me.”

Sick. There was no other way to describe this. He was sick. And I was sick because I actually thought it sounded like he cared about me. In his own twisted way, of course.

I picked up my fork, bringing the first bite to my mouth. It was just as delicious as it looked. Salty and spicy. I moaned as I went back for more. I was going to eat this whole plate, and I wouldn’t be ashamed of it. It would probably be the only good thing of the night. I moaned again as I took a bite of the garlic bread that was served with it.

It was only when Maddox made a low groan that I looked at him. He was watching me as I ate. His eyes tracking my lips

as my tongue came out to lick a drop of sauce off the corner. I watched as he shifted in his seat as if he was getting hard from this. Suddenly my throat was dry. I picked up the glass of water. I took small sips as I tried to figure out what was going on.

Every interaction with him was weirder than the last one. More intense. Darker. Obsessive. I had no idea what would happen next. It shouldn't be thrilling. But for a sheltered girl like me, it was.

I wanted to know more about him. It was a mistake. I couldn't help it. If I was going to sit here, if he was going to force his company on me, then I wanted to fulfill some of my curiosity.

“So I assume, based on the house, the staff, and the guards, that you're not just a grunt in the Mafia.”

“No.” He continued to watch me eat.

“What are you then?” I asked.

“I'm a *caporegime*.” He grabbed his glass as he sat back to answer me. “I have roughly two thousand men I'm in charge of.”

“What does that mean?”

“Curious about me, little dove.” I could see the happiness in his eyes. He liked that I wanted to know him. He continued before I could give him a sassy response. “I run our clubs, including Entice. I also gather...information.”

“Information?”

“Secrets. Anything I can use to my advantage. To control. Manipulate.”

I swallowed audibly. I believed he could find every one of my secrets. And he would have no problem using them against me. Just like he used my body’s desire. My lack of money.

Our eyes connected, and I knew he was seeing behind the door in my mind. To my secret desires that didn’t feel so secret anymore. My nipples tightened under his gaze. Thank God his shirt was black. Hopefully, he couldn’t see it. I shifted in the chair, trying to ignore my wet pussy.

“Keep eating.” His deep voice felt like a caress ghosting across my skin. But I knew it was a command.

I brought another forkful to my mouth. I watched his expression. His jaw ticked, and his hand tightened around his glass as if he was trying to control himself. But I didn’t understand why. He’d already proven he would take what he wanted from me. So why wasn’t he?

I felt the need to push him. To see if that control would snap.

I licked my lips again. Slowly. Teasing. His eyes never looked away. I swallowed another bite and moaned again. Louder.

That was my mistake. His eyes narrowed as if he realized it was all for show now. He could tell my reactions weren’t genuine anymore. I saw the flip switch. He leaned back in his chair and gave me the sadistic smile again.

“Since I answered your question, you can answer one of mine.”

Shit, I should've known he would do that. He didn't give things away freely. This wasn't a friendly conversation. This was a battle. He was trying to break me.

When I didn't answer, he took it as an invitation to continue. “Why won't you accept you like pain with your pleasure?”

“I-“I started to protest, but his hard gaze stopped the words in my throat.

“I know you like it.” He took the fork from my hand before pulling my chair closer to him. His arms came to the back of the chair on either side of my face as his knees bracket mine, caging me in. Again.

I was aware of his smoky scent. His powerful presence. My bare legs against the chair. My thighs clenched together to try and stop my body's reaction.

But I could feel it. My panties were soaked, and my breath came out in short pants. I turned my head away, but Maddox brought me back with a finger under my chin.

“You were made for pain. Your creamy skin was made to be marked by me. It looked stunning red from my touch.” His lips brushed my cheek as he leaned forward to whisper in my ear. “And your screams. *Cazzo*. I would kill to hear you cry for me again.” His hand trailed slowly up my bare thigh making me shiver.

“I want to make you scream every day. I want to fill up all your holes with my cum. Then I’ll paint it over the bruises I’ve left on your body. Fuck, you bruise so beautifully. You’ll be a perfect mosaic. A beautiful broken toy. And you want that. You want me to use you. Hurt you like a good little slut. So why won’t you admit?”

I shook my head, fighting against his hold as his fingers dug into my chin. “Are you afraid of me? You should be. Because I will break you. Is that what’s stopping you? Fear?”

“Yes. I’m afraid.” I hung my head defeated. Even as my body hummed for him. Cried for his touch. I knew I couldn’t give in. “I’m afraid of myself.”

Maddox’s body stilled. I wasn’t even sure he was breathing. He pulled back until he could look into my eyes again. I don’t know why I told the truth. He already knew too much. Already wanted information so he could hurt me. But I was sick of lying. Sick of hiding.

“I can’t give in because I already want to die. I think about it every day. I think about slitting my wrists. Letting the blood flow from my body. I think about ending the struggle. Seeing my mother again. If I let you hurt me, I don’t think I’d ever make you stop. I’d let you kill me.”

That was what attracted me to Maddox. Danger. It was like cop-assisted suicide. I didn’t have the strength to end my own life, so I would let him do it for me. Eventually.

I wasn’t ready yet, but I knew I would be. Each morning was harder than the last. It was only a matter of time before I

gave up. Why not go out by his hand? Have his beautiful face  
be the last thing I see.

A beautiful demon.

## Maddox

**I** *already want to die... I'd let you kill me."*

A day later, the words were still ringing in my ears. Banging around my head. It surprised me to hear as much as it did for her to say.

I don't think she meant to be that honest with me. To give me more power over her. I was so shocked I didn't even play with her. We'd finished dinner, and I had Tristan take her home. I'd pondered this new information about her all night.

The little dove wanted to die. She was right; I could kill her. I'd killed more people than I could count. I'd never killed anyone I fucked before, but that was mostly because they'd never given me a reason.

I had the image of my hand wrapped around her throat while I buried my cock into her tight cunt. Her body squeezing as I choked the life out of her. I'd fill her body with my cum as she struggled for her last breath. My cock tightened in my pants as the image burned behind my eyes.

Would she fight me then? Would she want to live when she realized it was over?

Maybe that's how this would all end for us. Maybe I wouldn't break her, but kill her. The thought bothered me even as it turned me on. I wasn't ready to kill her yet. I wasn't done playing with my new toy.

I thought over a hundred ways I wanted to hurt her, break her, kill her, as I leaned on the railing overlooking the lake. The sun was just beginning to set as I waited for my contact. The waves crashed violently below, mirroring my mind. A violent lake most would drown in. But Kincaid seemed to be surviving for now.

In addition to gathering the weaknesses of all our enemies, I also gathered informants. Some were forced to work with me. Pushed by what I held over their heads. While others came freely. Wanting our protection or wanting to feel our power.

My eyes tracked a man in his late fifties as he walked towards me. He was dressed in jeans and a leather jacket. His hair was graying at the temples, and his face spoke of someone who'd been living this life for too long. He was weathered.

He ran a pawn shop that was actually a place for stolen goods. He also helped connect people. He always had an ear to the ground. To what was happening in the city. It had saved his life a time or two. Most weren't willing to come after him anymore.

"You have information for me, Mike." It wasn't a question he'd called for this meeting.

“There’s a rat in the Vancini house.” His voice was rough from the multiple packs of cigarettes he smoked daily.

A rat? Who would be dumb enough to betray us? It would be the last thing they did. We took disloyalty seriously. It was certain death. Even if they managed to escape us, the other Italian families wouldn’t put up with it. If you could be a rat to one family, you would be a rat to another.

“What can you tell me about them?” I asked, fighting to keep my voice cool, but an inferno raged inside me. My fists tightened at my side, wanting to crush whoever thought they could turn against us. There might be other families and players in the city. But we were at the top. We ran it. To cross us was to spit in our faces. It was a slight. A question of our power.

“They’re close to the inner circle. The information is good. More than a common guard or man for hire.”

I pondered the possibilities. Constantine had been slacking. I didn’t think he was the rat, but I wouldn’t put it past one of his men. He was a weakness. His attention had been split lately, a fact he thought I hadn’t noticed. Nothing slipped by my eyes. I would start with his men.

My monsters rattled inside me. Fury and the chance for violence making them roar to life. We might have a rat, but I would enjoy hunting him down. Torturing him for answers. I would rip him limb from limb for thinking he could outsmart me.

I pulled an envelope from my pocket. Our agreed-upon amount if his information was useful. Mike didn't dishonor me by opening the envelope to confirm the amount. Smart man.

"I also thought he'd like this." I handed him the ring I'd cut from my would-be assassin's finger.

Mike smiled for the first time since he'd arrived. He had a weakness for frogs. It was a weird obsession I liked to indulge for him. If his information was good, I'd often include a little something extra for him. Loyalty wasn't built on fear alone. It was best to keep him close if I didn't want him spilling our secrets to someone else.

I turned to walk away when Mike's voice slowed my steps.

"I heard you took out some hotshot lawyer recently. What did he do to piss you off?"

I smiled at the thought of Kincaid's ex. Of the pain, I'd caused him. Revenge for making her feel like she was wrong. That her desire for pain should be hidden.

"He kicked a dove."

Mike's laugh followed after me.

Darkness started to descend. The sounds of the day fading as the night came out to play. I knew just where to look to find my new toy.

## Kincaid

I stared at my reflection in my bathroom mirror, trying to figure out who I was. I didn't feel like the same person anymore. The girl who'd given up her life to have her mom for a few more months. The one who read steamy books in the privacy of her home. The one who dreamed that a handsome, wealthy billionaire would save her.

All that was before. Before Maddox had come into my life. Now I was the girl who was disappointed when a demon didn't inflict pain and pleasure on her.

I was disgusted with myself because I'd been disappointed when he'd sent me home last night without touching me. I'd sat in the car with his Draco Malfoy bodyguard and wondered why he hadn't touched me. Why I wanted him to?

Was it the danger? The pain? Because he was the most handsome person I'd ever seen? Or was it worse?

What I'd said to him was true. I knew he could kill me. A part of me wanted to let him. He wanted to break me, but I

was already broken. Damaged beyond repair for even thinking these thoughts.

No.

I was going to stay alive. I promised my mother. Which means I needed to stay away from Maddox. Needed to fight whatever pull I had to him. To his particular brand of danger. Pleasure.

I walked out of the bathroom and dressed for work, ignoring the envelope of cash the bodyguard had handed to me last night. At least the money was helping me pay my rent. And I'd had a full meal last night. I might be able to use some of the money to stock my fridge too.

See, look at me thinking about the positive. Not letting the dark thoughts leak through my mind like venom.

I locked the apartment behind me and headed up the street towards Entice. There was no rain tonight. I missed the scent. It had hidden the death and rot that lingered on this side of town.

I crossed the street where Maddox had found me last night, but no black car stopped. I pushed away the tiny flicker of disappointment. I wasn't going to think about him. He'd obviously decided that I was too broken for him to play with anymore; that had to be why he'd sent me home. It was a good thing. At least, that's what I tried to tell myself.

I pushed through the back door of the club. Dancers walked around half-dressed as they touched up their hair and

make-up. The steady beat of the music was dull back here as I stored my bag in a locker and slipped into my heels.

“Hey, girl.” Tessa’s voice called to me. “Where were you last night? You missed your shift.”

Shit. What was I supposed to say?

*I went home with the Mafia king you told me to stay away from. Also, I think my body wants him to hurt me.*

Yeah, that would go over well.

“Sick.” I blurted out. “I was sick. “

“Oh.” She looked me up and down like she was trying to find what was wrong. My mind, that was wrong. Very very wrong. Sick. “Well, Rodney was pissed. You might want to make nice tonight.”

I groaned as I walked by her. The last thing I wanted to do was play nice with my lecherous boss. But options were limited. I needed the job as demeaning as it was. At least it wasn’t as bad as selling myself to Maddox.

Somehow this job actually felt worse than that, which made no sense, but it was there. Maybe because Maddox seemed to ... care. In his own twisted way, there was something there. Rodney didn’t care about a single one of us. We were just bodies to him. Not people.

The bass assaulted my ears as I walked into the club’s main area. We were packed with our usual Saturday night crowd. Bachelor parties, married men looking for an escape, and shady businessmen looking for a quiet corner.

Without permission, my eyes flicked to the private room. No guards were standing outside the door. My heart knocked before falling into rhythm. Maddox wasn't here. That was good.

I saw Rodney standing by the bar and turned in his direction. I ground my teeth together, preparing to sweet-talk him into letting me keep my job. As soon as he saw me, his expression hardened.

"I'm sorry I missed my shift. I was sick." I said. "It won't happen again."

I gave him an apologetic smile, but fire burned in his eyes. Was he really this angry over one missed shift?

"Let's talk in my office." He grabbed my arm roughly. His fingers digging into my flesh as he dragged me towards the back hallway that led to his office. He flung the door open with such force it smacked into the wall. Then he slammed it close before tossing me into a chair in front of his desk.

"What the hell?" I said. All fear of losing my job overtaken by my anger. I rubbed my bicep where his fingers had bruised me.

"You think you can do whatever you want because the owner took a shine to you." He ground out through a clenched jaw. His face was red, and his breathing heavy.

Had Maddox told him where I was last night? No. Why would he? Then why was Rodney so upset. I'd never seen him

like this. He was an angry asshole, but this went beyond anger. This was rage. At me.

“I don’t know what you’re talking about. I was sick.” I said again, trying to soothe my voice.

“You fucking women. Always looking for the bigger man.” He paced back and forth. “You flirted with me. Showed off your body. But then a bigger fish came along, and you toss me aside.”

What? He was delusional. I’d never flirted with him. He was disgusting.

“I never flirted with you. And I dress like this because it’s my job.”

His eyes locked on me. He stared at the tiny bit of cleavage showing. At my legs covered by fishnets. There was something dangerous about the way he looked right now. This wasn’t his typical lecherous gaze. It was possessive, like he thought I owed him something.

“Don’t fucking lie.” He yelled. In a flash, his hand came out, and he grabbed my face. He squeezed my jaw until my teeth cut into the inside of my cheek. “You’ll be a whore for him, but not me.”

Fear stilled my body as I tasted the metallic blood in my mouth. My heart pounded in my chest, and my mind screamed at me to do something.

“Nothing happened.” I lied because I needed to get out of this. I didn’t know what was going on, but I knew I needed to

calm him down, or I would never get away. Not without losing a part of myself.

“I saw you.” He roared. His spit landed on my face from the force of his anger. “There are cameras in those private rooms.”

Oh, God. My mind flashed to what Maddox had done to me in that room. My body bent over the table as he’d spanked me, touched me, made me come. Rodney had seen all that. Revulsion rolled in my gut.

He smiled at me like he knew exactly what I was thinking. “Since you’re giving it away like a fucking whore I think I’ll have a taste.”

“No.” I acted without thinking. Using all my strength, I pushed him back. Unbalanced, he flew his back, connecting with the corner of his desk.

I shoved from the chair and ran towards the door. I stumbled forward as my heel caught in the carpeting. My shoulder hit the doorframe, but I didn’t let it slow me down. I needed to get out of this room. I was running out of this club and never coming back.

Fuck this job. Fuck this crazy bastard.

I fumbled with the lock when a hand grabbed my hair, yanking me back until I fell to the floor. I landed on my hip. Hard. Pain shot through my side, stealing the breath from my lungs as I tried to roll over and crawl away.

This wasn't the kind of pain I experienced with Maddox. This was real pain. There would be no pleasure. This was real fear. Rodney was going to rape me. In spending time with Maddox, I'd forgotten monsters came in all sizes. Monsters lurked around every corner. That was life.

“Fucking bitch. You're all the same.”

Rodney's body slammed into me, pinning me to the floor.

“No! Stop!” I screamed as I thrashed beneath him, trying to get away.

“Shut up.” He slapped me hard across the face. My eyes watered from the shock and sting. I sucked in a painful breath. The smell of his disgusting sweat choked me. “You'll take it, you stupid whore.”

He held my hands over my head in one arm as I felt the other fumble with the clothes between us. The sound of my tights ripping was loud in the room. Tears ran down my face, but I didn't stop fighting. Didn't stop twisting and trying to kick out. I would never stop.

My muscles ached from his weight and fatigue. My lungs burned from screaming that couldn't be heard over the bass from the club music. I turned my head to try and bite him. To use everything I could.

Suddenly his weight was ripped off me. My eyes flew open. I saw the startled look on Rodney's face before Maddox punched him. Blood splattered from his nose as the sound of bones crunching filled my ears.

“No one touches the little dove but me.”

Maddox’s blue eyes were almost black with rage. That was the only sign he was mad. His tone was even. His body tensed but in control. Rodney tried to sputter a response, but Maddox hit him again.

Punishing blows to his face, his stomach, his side. Over and over. I was paralyzed on the floor, watching it all happen. I should be afraid; instead, I was in shock. Numb.

Maddox kept hitting him until only a bloody whimpering mess remained. His face looked like ground meat. His breathing was a wet, rattling sound.

I tried to feel bad, but I couldn’t muster it. He was a monster. He’d assaulted me. How many more had he hurt?

Maddox might be a demon who liked dispensing pain, but I didn’t believe he’d do this to me. He had touched me because he’d seen that I wanted it. Even when I couldn’t admit it to myself.

He tossed Rodney’s body to Sebastian, who I hadn’t noticed was guarding the door. “Take him to the warehouse and wait for my word.”

“With pleasure.” Sebastian stepped into the room.

Maddox turned to where I was still lying on the floor. Blood dripped from his knuckles; some coated his face and mine. I wasn’t bothered by it. I should be. Maybe I just had nothing left in me. I was shutting down from the shock of the night.

“Come, little dove.” He bent down and picked me up bridal style. My head rested on his shoulder. “Let’s get you home.”

I didn’t nod or protest. Instead, I let him carry me as I listened to the steady beat of his heart. I inhaled his smoky scent. Let the warmth of his body soothe me.

My savior. My demon.

## Maddox

The demon inside me swiped out. Wanting to be released. Wanting to maim and kill as I looked down at Kincaid's bruised face. Only I can bruise her porcelain skin. Only I can touch her. Hurt her.

She's curled in my lap in the backseat of my car as Tristan drives us to her apartment. She hasn't moved since I picked her up from the filthy floor in her boss's office. Former boss. He made a mistake when he thought he could touch what I wanted. When he called the little dove a whore, a bitch.

He'd forgotten who was really in control. In control of his job. His life. They rested in my hands even before he'd touched her. He worked in the business I owned. His power was given to him by me. He'd fed off that power like a fungus believing his association with the family could protect him. Instead, it made him mine to ruin.

Kincaid shifted in my arms but didn't try to escape like I suspected she would. After tonight I thought she'd try to run

harder from me. After she saw what I was truly capable of. What I could do to her if needed. But instead, she clung to me like a lifeline. Like I was her salvation.

I wasn't. Like the man who waited for him, I was her ruin. The demon that would taint her soul crush her until there was nothing left. Bring the death she craved.

Only me. No one else.

The car slowed as we approached the run-down building she lived in. Tristan opened the back door as I lifted Kincaid in my arms. She opened her eyes when I shifted her to open the door to her apartment.

"Maddox."

*Cazzo*. Why did I like my name on her lips so much? Why did it arouse me as much as it soothed the monsters inside?

"Thank you." She whispered.

I walked through the door and placed her on the only piece of furniture in the room, her bed. Neither of us spoke as I stripped off her bloody and ripped clothes.

Any other night she would've fought. I would've used this lapse in judgment to hurt her. To run my hands along her porcelain skin. To sink my cock into her tight body. But tonight, I wouldn't. Couldn't.

Using weakness was what I did, but I couldn't find it in me to do it now. I refused to determine why. Refused to acknowledge that maybe my plan to break her was shifting. Into what... I didn't know.

But I didn't have time to process it when my eyes locked on the marks left on her skin. Fury raced through my veins as I traced the bruises on her thigh. I turned away so she couldn't read the emotions on my face. I'd already scared her enough tonight.

"Sleep." I ordered as I walked back towards the door. I had unfinished business to take care of. I had a fungus to destroy. I heard rustling behind me and her powdery scent reached me before her hand closed around my wrist.

I stilled. This was the first time she'd initiated any physical contact between us. I absorbed the feel of her delicate fingers touching my skin. I inhaled her scent, letting both work their way through my system.

They were like a drug. She was a drug. Calming the rage inside me. Making the demon lie down and sleep.

"W-will you stay for awhile?" She stuttered as if she'd surprised herself by asking.

She knew it was an invitation for me to become closer to her. She was letting me in. She had no idea I'd already been here before. Watched her sleep. I was evil enough to latch onto this momentary weakness. She never would've asked me if she'd been in her right mind. But she wasn't. She was afraid and vulnerable. I'd take the advantage.

I turned to face her to see she'd donned a holey t-shirt that was three sizes too big and a tiny pair of shorts. I wanted to tear them from her body. I wanted her soft skin touching mine.

For the first time ever, I pushed down the urge to have her. To take.

“Sleep. I’ll stay until you do.” She gave me a small smile as she walked back towards her bed, taking me with her.

Kincaid let go to crawl under the thin blankets. Losing her touch shouldn’t hurt, but it did. It was like losing a piece of me. Like someone had cut off my finger.

I narrowed my eyes at the little dove. Why was I feeling this way? Why was I feeling at all? I thought myself incapable of any feelings beyond rage and a sick satisfaction at administering pain.

She tugged my hand until I sat on the bed next to her. She tucked her hand away under the blankets again like she was afraid if she touched me too long, I would corrupt her. She rolled to her stomach, burrowing into the bed. Kincaid closed her eyes and let out a soft sigh of contentment.

“Maddox?” She said after a few minutes of silence while I argued with myself for staying.

“You’re safe from me tonight, little dove.” I sighed.

“That wasn’t what I was going to say.” Her wintery eyes looked up at me. My hand moved before I could stop it. Brushing a lock of her white blonde hair out of her face so I could read her expression.

“What did you want to tell me?”

“R-Rodney.” She cleared her throat like she was fighting down the memories of earlier. The fear of her boss almost

raping her. The flames roared inside me again. I would rip him apart. Cut him into little pieces until there was nothing left. Until even his own mother wouldn't recognize him. "He said there were cameras in the private room."

He'd been watching the little dove. He'd seen her laid out on the table for me. Seen her bare pussy as I finger fucked her. That *Figlio di puttana*. He'd already earned his death, but now he'd earned torture. I'd let him live for a few days, thinking there was hope. Then I would incinerate that hope.

"I'll destroy the videos." I tried to calm her worries. "No one gets to see the things I do to you."

I leaned forward and whispered in her ear. My fingers trailed down her back. "The pain you crave only from me."

I relished the shiver that ran down her spine. If someone else's bruises weren't on her skin, I'd give her my own. But I'd let her heal before I hurt her again.

"Thank you, but that wasn't the only thing that worries me. If you were doing business in there, he knows about it."

For the second time tonight, she shocked me. Kincaid was worried about my business. Was she trying to protect me? Did she care about me?

An unfamiliar feeling tightened my chest. Why would she care? I'd only ever hurt her? Although she wouldn't admit it, she loved the pain. Still, that wasn't enough to evoke feelings.

"I'll take care of it." I said because I didn't know what else to say. "Sleep now."

I continued to trace my fingers up and down her back. Appreciating the delicate, breakable bumps of her spine. Savoring the feeling of her smooth skin. Slowly her breathing started to regulate, coming in a steady rhythm.

I lingered a little longer. Watching her. Trying to understand her. Understand the shifting ground beneath me.

Reluctantly I stood. I took a deep breath flaming the fire inside me. I stalked to the door with purpose. With a need to burn the world down.

## Maddox

**T**he warehouse door rumbled closed behind me. A loud screeching sound in the stillness. The large area was lit by a single halogen work light, the kind construction workers used. It was aimed directly at the man bound to a chair. Blinding him as it cast shadows around the concrete walls.

His face was already unrecognizable from my earlier punishment. Dried blood caked onto his shirt and neck where it had poured down. His hands were tied to the chair, but we hadn't bothered tying his legs. He was in no state to escape. His eyes were closed, and his breath was a wet, rattling sound.

"Wake him." I said to Tristan, who stood somewhere behind him in the darkness. The orange ember of his cigarette lighting his face.

His steps echoed around the vacant space as he walked forward. He took the stick from his lips; a sick smile crossing his face was made more insane by the harsh lights. He placed the hot tip to the back of our captive's hand. The smell of

burning flesh assaulted my nose as he let out a blood-curdling scream.

It was music to my ears. A balm to my soul. I would enjoy every ounce of pain that I took from his body. But information first.

“Rodney, nice of you to join us.” I spoke conversationally as I dragged another chair over to sit before him. The metal scrapping on the cold concrete floors. “I assume you know who I am.”

“M-M.” He coughed, and blood trickled from his lips. “Maddox Vancini.”

“Correct. Do you know why you’re here?”

“It’s that whore’s fault.” Anger leaking into his voice. “She wanted it. She came on to me. Said you weren’t man enough for her.”

Rage licked up my veins. I moved quickly, the knife in my hand without him even seeing it. I sliced off his ear before he knew it was coming. Blood sprayed my white shirt as he screamed again. His eyes closed, and he slumped forward. I slapped his face.

“No passing out on me. We’re not doing talking.” I circled behind him, placing my hands gently on his shoulders. Opposite to the pain I had already caused him. He flinched, expecting the worst. I chuckled at his fear. “I might have been willing to forget that you touched my toy.”

It was a lie. I would kill anyone that touched her. Caused her pain. Even looked at her wrong.

“But then you made the fatal mistake of recording our private business meetings.” I tapped his face again with a little more strength this time. “Who have you been selling the information to?”

He stayed silent as if it would save him. His death was inevitable.

“Rodney.” I warned.

“It doesn’t matter if I talk. I’m dying either way.” He coughed, and more blood dripped down his chin. The steady flow from his body pooling on the floor.

“That’s true.” There was no reason to lie. “But your mother doesn’t have to.”

His battered body tensed beneath my touch. Everyone had a weakness. It had taken no time at all to find his. He supported his eighty-year-old mother, who lived an hour away.

“It would be a shame if her house suddenly caught fire. An older woman like that living alone, she’d never make it out in time. Especially if the doors were mysteriously nailed shut.”

“You fucking bastard.” He whispered. There was no fight left in him.

“True.” I laughed. “So, about those videos.”

I circled around, retaking my seat. “They’re in my office. I never showed anyone the footage. Only sold the information I

overheard.”

That was good. There was a chance he didn't even know half of what was said. The right person would be able to interpret everything. And that meant no one else had seen what I'd done to Kincaid in that room.

“Who did you sell it to?” I tapped my knife against my thigh, his blood soiling my ruined suit.

“The Gallos.”

More confirmation that they were looking to start a war. It wasn't a few isolated incidents. It was an all-out attack on our power.

Carmine Gallo had always been ruthless. Few knew what he'd done to get the throne he sat on. It was my business to know these things. Until now, I'd kept it to myself. It might be time to play that card. I'd have to bring this to Leif and my father; the decision was theirs.

“Anything else you'd like to say before you die?” I glanced at Tristan behind him, inclining my head with the order to kill Rodney.

“All this over some low-class pussy.” He spit blood at my feet. “I should've raped the bitch sooner.”

A red haze filled my vision. I was no longer seeing the man in front of me. Instead, I saw porcelain skin covered in bruises. I saw white blonde hair sprawled on the ground. I saw violence inflicted on her. The blood roared in my ears until it was a loud buzz filling my senses.

Gunshots echoed around the walls bringing me back to reality. I blinked as I looked at the gun in my hand. Rodney's body slumped in the chair. I didn't remember grabbing the gun. Pulling the trigger. I felt no satisfaction from his death. All I felt was a need to protect Kincaid. No one would hurt her.

Except me.

"We've got a problem." Bash's voice came from the entrance. I turned, shaking away the last of my fog. He was holding a young guy by the back of his neck. "I found him lurking outside. He saw everything."

He had long scraggly blonde hair that needed a wash. His clothes were ripped and covered in so much filth I couldn't tell what color they were supposed to be. His face was pale, but I didn't think it was from fear. I didn't feel that from him. His eyes were hard, like he'd resigned himself to his fate.

"There's no problem." Tristan strode toward them, his gun outstretched.

"Wait." I said as he pressed the barrel into the kid's head. "What's your name?"

He tapped his fingers on his pants like he was considering not answering, but he was smart enough to know that wasn't an option. "Henry."

"What are you doing here, Henry?" I tucked my gun away before walking toward Rodney's lifeless body. I wiped my bloody blade on his pants before tucking that away as well.

“Just looking for a dry place to sleep.” He shrugged but didn’t flinch at the gun Tristan still had pointed at him.

“*Mettilo Via.*” *Put it away.* I ordered. Tristan’s shoved the gun into Henry’s skin before letting it rest at his side. “You going to tell the police what you saw?”

Henry shrugged. “Why bother? You probably have them paid off.”

I couldn’t stop the chuckle from escaping. I liked this kid. He was smart. And he was distracting me from my need for revenge. I ended Rodney’s life too soon.

“And it sounded like he deserved it.” Henry said. “I don’t know who she is to you, but I’d do the same thing if someone threatened to rape a girl I cared about.”

“You want a job, Henry?”

## Kincaid

I winced as I shifted in bed. Shit, it hurt to be thrown to the ground. I turned the next page in my book, trying to ignore the memories that wanted to push into my mind. I was doing an excellent job of living in delusion. Reading was helping.

Instead of looking for a new job, I spent most of the morning finishing a small-town romance novel. I wondered if those places really existed. How was it possible that there were towns where everyone knew your name? Knew your parents and helped after their death. I'd never been to a place like that, but I'd never left this city. Not having money hindered the whole 'exploring the world' thing.

I knew I'd have to give this up soon. I couldn't waste away in bed. I was allowing myself to have the day. It would hurt my already meager bank account, but I just couldn't do it. My body needed to heal, and my mind wasn't ready to process what had happened.

It wasn't only Rodney's attack and my obvious lack of employment but also what Maddox had done. He'd beaten a man nearly to death in front of me. And...I wasn't afraid of him. I should've been running for the hills. Packing up whatever I owned and getting as far away from him as possible. But I wasn't.

I knew he killed; he'd told me. It should've been different actually witnessing it. But it wasn't. Rodney had deserved that and more. He deserved a shallow grave where animals could pick at his corpse. I'd never enjoyed violence, but I could admit there were times when it was necessary.

I could've gone to the police, except I knew what would happen. They would ask me what I was wearing. If we'd had a previous relationship. If I'd flirted with him. If I'd actually said no. Then I'd have to live through an embarrassing exam. After, they'd put my file in the bottom of their drawer and move on to the next. Even if they'd arrested him, even if he were convicted, nothing would happen to him. He'd serve six months, maybe. Drug dealers got worse. The system valued a woman's body less than a dime bag.

No, I didn't need that. I already had enough judgment in my own head. Rodney had gotten a beating, and I'd never have to see him again. It meant finding a new job, but I hated working there anyways. A knock on my door drew my attention.

I winced again as I lifted off the bed and crossed the room. Tessa blew into the apartment the second the door opened. I

wasn't bothered by the fact that I was only wearing an old white tank top and boy short underwear; we were the kind of friends where that didn't matter. I'd seen her naked enough times at the club.

"Girl, you disappeared again last night." She said without even glancing at me. "Did you win the lottery and not tell me? How can you afford to miss work?"

"Well I--"

"Oh, my God." She cut me off when she finally looked at my face and saw the finger-shaped bruises on my cheek and jaw. "What happened?"

She pulled me into a tight hug. Even though it hurt, I didn't want her to pull away. I let out a long sigh as I absorbed the loving touch. Other than my mother, no one hugged me. It had been a long time since someone had shown me any kind of affection.

"Rodney corned me in his office." I said when she eventually let me go. I limped over to my bed, and Tessa followed. We put our backs to the wall as we sat side by side.

"I knew he was a creep." She angrily said. "I guess that explains where he went last night. Did you kick his ass?"

"No...um." I cleared my throat. "Maddox kind of beat him up when he caught him on top of me."

"Huh." Tessa ran a hand through her dark locks. "Maybe he's not as bad as I thought."

I laughed. “What? How does that make sense? He beat someone nearly to death, and that makes you like him.”

She shrugged. “Anyone who protects you is okay in my book.”

“He could easily kill me if he wanted.”

But would he?

He kept saying he was going to break me. Kill me. But he'd never hurt me except in a pleasurable way. I knew he was a demon. I saw it in him. I knew he killed. So why did my fear lessen with each encounter with him? Was Tessa right; was protecting me enough for my feelings about him to change?

I was in too much pain to figure it out right now.

“We're all capable of killing under the right circumstances.” There was a heaviness in her voice as she spoke.

She wasn't lying. I would have killed Rodney last night. If it had meant my life or his, I would've hurt him without a second thought. The world was full of people who had killed in self-defense. In fits of passion. But wasn't there a difference between that and what Maddox did?

He killed in cold blood. Because he enjoyed it. He was a psychopath. But he'd been raised that way. Could I really fault him for the situation he'd been born into? Like me, he had no choices.

Was I seriously trying to reason away why it was okay for me to want him? Yes, that's exactly what I was doing. I

groaned and knocked my head back against the wall.

“I’ll let you rest.” Tessa tapped my thigh lightly as she got up again. “Let me know if you need anything while you’re looking for a new job.”

I knew I’d never take her up on that kind offer. She might have more than me, but not enough. I nodded and smiled at her as she walked out the door.

Alone again, I let my mind wander for a few minutes. Let myself drown in my miserable life. The unpaid bills on my dresser felt like a shining red light. The weight of my life, my limited choices, felt heavier than the pain in my body. I thought again of the oblivion of death. Or letting myself succumb to the nothingness.

I rubbed my eyes and reached for the book I’d been reading. Depressive thoughts weren’t going to change anything. I knew it was only brain chemistry. It would pass.

A knock sounded at the door. Maybe Tessa had forgotten something.

“It’s open.” I called, not bothering to get up and feel the aches running through my body.

Instead of Tessa, a beautiful demon walked into my apartment like he owned it. Maddox wore another of his suits; black jacket, no tie, white shirt with a couple of buttons undone, showing off a tattoo I’d never fully seen. He’d touched the most intimate parts of me, and I’d never even seen his chest. That should be weirder than it was.

“You shouldn’t let anyone just walk in.” He said as he stood in the middle of the room. He made my tiny apartment feel even smaller. It was like he was sucking all the oxygen from the air.

“I thought you were Tessa.” I said as I moved to the end of the bed, planning to stand up.

“No.” His hand came to my shoulder to keep me sitting. “You need to rest.”

My brows pulled together as I looked at him. I wanted to say something sassy. Tell him I wasn’t his concern or ask why he cared, but I swallowed down my reaction. He had saved me last night. As much as that and him made no sense to me, I did owe him my life.

“What are you doing here?” A thought popped into my head. “Wait, last night, how did you know where I lived? I never told you, but your driver took us right here.”

Maddox smiled as his hand trailed down from my shoulder to my wrist. His strong fingers wrapped around my delicate bones. I knew he could feel my pulse jump at his touch. I fought the urge to rip my hand away. But I was down, fighting my body’s reaction to him. My mind was conflicted, but my body knew exactly what it wanted. No matter how bad it was for me.

“I thought I made it clear; I can find out anything I want about you, Kincaid.” His voice was like a caress, trying to draw me to his side. I managed to resist.

“Well, thank you again... for what you did last night.” The words weren’t enough. I didn’t know what else to say. What were you supposed to say when the psycho Mafia boss who liked to torture you saved you from another monster who wanted to rape you?

Oh my god, what was my life? It had taken a very sharp turn from rough into complete agony over the last year.

Maddox leaned forward, his smoky scent enveloping me as he placed a soft kiss on the top of my head. “No one hurts you, little dove.” It might have been sweet if he had stopped there. “Except for me.”

My pulse jumped again. I pulled my wrist from his hand and sat further back on the bed. I drew the sheets up to cover my body, only now realizing I was still wearing underwear and my thin tank top without a bra.

“What are you doing here, Maddox?”

“I came to offer you a job.” He stood near the edge of my bed, not exactly towering over me, but also not giving me space.

“A job?” I asked skeptically.

“Continue to keep me company. The same rate will apply. \$2,000 a night.” My nails dug into the sheet I held at my chest as my blood boiled.

“I’m not a fucking whore.” My voice shook with rage. Yes, I might have taken his money before, but those were

isolated incidents. This was a commitment. This was admitting I was selling my body. There was no confusion his intentions.

“I didn’t say that.” His jaw clenched like my response angered him. Fuck him. I was the one who deserved to be angry at his suggestions.

“I don’t need your *job*.” I sneered at the last word. “There are plenty of places that need waitresses. I’ll find something else.”

He stared at me for a minute before speaking again. When he did, his hand came out. His fingers lightly caressing my face. It was the softest he’d ever touched me. But again, his words ruined the gesture. “You could try. But I own this city. No one will hire you once I threaten their lives.”

My mouth parted in shock, he latched onto the opportunity, his thumb tracing my bottom lip before pressing inside. His skin was salty on my tongue, and I hated myself for wanting to suck. Wanting to taste more of him. I jerked my head away from him and looked at the dingy white walls of my disgusting apartment. An apartment I could barely afford.

“I’m not your whore.” I whispered again. He pulled my face back to look at me. I saw the sadism in his eyes.

“You are whatever I want you to be. Right now, you’re a little slut for me to do with as I please. Whether you take the money or not, it’s up to you. But you have no choice in how I use you.”

I stared into his piercing dark blue eyes while possibilities and questions whirred through my mind. I knew he was capable of what he said. If he wanted to, he could make my life impossible. Not once had I been able to avoid him or stop myself from wanting him. Even though I knew what he was. Knew what he would do to me.

I knew he'd come after me regardless of if I took his offer. Maybe if I did, I could have control of the situation. I couldn't pretend the money wasn't tempting. I could make more in a week than I'd make in a month. I could pay off my debt.

Another part of me knew it wasn't only about the money. His touch lit me up more than anyone ever had. This could be my chance to explore the part of me I never wanted to let out. Maddox wouldn't judge me. But would I be able to control it?

He'd get bored eventually and move on. I just had to stay alive until he did. Then I could even leave town. Get away from him and all the memories of my mother that plagued me here.

Still, something in the back of my mind told me not to do this. Told me I'd be making a deal with a demon. There would be no way out.

How could I not do it?

I stared at his handsome face. A predator trapping his prey.

I nodded, unable to form the words. Maddox smiled. Not his sadistic smile, but a true genuine smile like I'd pleased him. A warmth spread in my chest. I resisted the urge to push

back the curl that had fallen onto his forehead. To run my hand through the stubble on his jaw.

Shit. I wasn't going to survive this.

"Tomorrow night. A car will be waiting out front at seven." He said as his thumb traced my lips one more time before he released me and headed towards the door.

"Why are you doing this?" I asked, his retreating back. He didn't look at me as he opened the door. His voice carried across the room.

"I told you. I want to watch you break."

Maddox closed the door behind him. The soft click dug under my skin. It felt loud and final in the silent room.

It felt like my death.

## Kincaid

**M**y chest was tight as I stood on the sidewalk in front of my apartment, waiting for the car Maddox would send. I'd barely slept last night. I kept replaying our conversation in my mind. Trying to figure out if there was a way I could've gotten out of this. I knew there wasn't, but it didn't stop my mind from torturing me. I had to live with this situation now.

I pulled a hair tie off my wrist and put my hair up as I waited. I wore tennis shoes, leggings, and a plain black t-shirt. He might want to turn me into his whore, but I wouldn't dress like one. And I certainly wasn't going to dress up. He forced this on me. He could deal with how I looked.

I knew it wouldn't protect me still; the clothes felt like armor. A little rebellion. I'd also worn the most boring white bra and cotton panties. I didn't have on a single swipe of mascara or any makeup. It was a feeble attempt to get him to lose interest, but it was all I had.

I watched as a sleek black car turned down the street. I knew it was for me. There weren't nice cars in this neighborhood. It looked exactly like the other car I'd ridden in. I didn't know if it was the same one or if he had a fleet of them. Each beat of my heart sounded louder the closer it came. By the time it stopped in front of me, it felt like my heart was going to explode.

Tristan, the Draco Malfoy-looking bodyguard, got out of the driver's seat and walked around to open the back door for me. I'd gotten good at reading people over the years, men especially. I learned who to avoid at the club and who was harmless.

This guy was giving off major 'danger' vibes. It wasn't the same as Sebastian or even Maddox. This was something else. It was... cunning. Deceptive. But I guess those skills were necessary when you were in the Mafia.

He didn't say a word as he waited for me to get into the car, but his eyes tracked me. I felt him looking at my chest as I approached and then his gaze on my ass as I ducked into the car. It made my skin crawl, knowing I'd be alone with him on the way to Maddox's. Like this whole situation, I had no choice.

"You should buckle up." Tristan leaned into the car and reached for my seatbelt. I tried to grab it myself, but he pushed my hand away. I wanted to think he was being nice, but then his hand lingered between my cleavage as he clicked the belt in place.

So this was how it was going to be. I would be a whore that Maddox passed around to his men. I blinked back tears as I watched the scenery go by. I thought things might have been different after he saved me, that maybe he cared. Maybe he didn't want to break me. Kill me. I realized now that a part of me had been holding on to a fantasy that Maddox could actually feel something for me. I shouldn't want it, but I did.

I wanted this person who set my body on fire not to be a soulless demon. To not be a murderer. Or to feel something for me besides the desire to fuck me and destroy me. Maybe that was why I had agreed. I was foolish. Too lost in the stories I read.

I needed to steel my spine. To prepare myself for what this really was. I needed to survive.

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Maddox waited for me on the steps of his enormous house. A mansion, really. I could tell it was heavily guarded. We had to pass through a gate, and armed guards were walking the perimeter. His life was dangerous. But my boss had just attacked me, so I suppose there was always danger.

Tristan opened my door for me. This time he didn't look at me or try to touch me. In fact, he did everything he could to pretend I didn't exist. Had I read the situation wrong?

I didn't have time to think about it because Maddox grabbed my hand and led me to the house. I tried to ignore his

attractiveness as his warmth pressed into my side. I tried not to feel the tingles that his touch set off in my body.

He closed the front door behind us. I listened for sounds in the house. It felt surprisingly empty compared to all the guards outside. No kitchen sounds or footsteps were walking around.

“Do you live here alone?” I asked, curious about him even though I shouldn’t be.

“The guards and staff live in a guest house on the property.” That made sense. “Also, I instructed everyone to stay out while you’re here.”

“What? Why?” I stared up at him. He was so tall and broad that he made me feel small. It was like he was a shield from the world.

“We wouldn’t want them to hear your screams.” His hand on my low back felt like a brand as he whispered in my ear. “Those are only for me.”

He led me to the stairs. I swallowed loudly. I guess we were going to get right to it. This was what I was here for. I’d sold my body, and it was time to pay up. Each breath I took felt harder, like I couldn’t fill my lungs.

Instead of continuing down the hall where I assumed his bedroom was, we stopped outside the guest room I’d used before. Maybe he didn’t take women back to his room. He turned, so I was facing him. His eyes tracked up and down my outfit, frowning slightly. Good. He knew I wasn’t dressing to impress him.

“There’s an outfit for you to change into.” He said and indicated the door.

“What?” I looked around like I’d find the answer in the air around me. I know I’d never done this before, but making me change seemed strange. I guess I really wouldn’t know.

“What you’re wearing isn’t appropriate for dinner?”

“Dinner?” My head was spinning; I was so confused. “I thought we... That you brought me here to...”

Maddox grabbed my hips and pulled me tight to his body. His hard muscles pressing into me everywhere. I closed my eyes, trying to pretend I didn’t like it. But I couldn’t help it.

He was designed to make women fall at their feet. I could feel his hard chest and defined abs through his dress shirt. His strong fingers dug into my hips. And his blue eyes filled with desire as he looked at me.

“I believe I said I wanted you to keep me company.” His lips brushed the shell of my ear as he whispered. His hot breath made me shiver. “What did you think, little dove, that I was going to fuck you? Or is that what you want me to do?”

I shook my head even as my panties dampened. I was so wet I was surprised it wasn’t dripping down my thighs. My mind wanted to fight him, but my body was already giving in. Willing to take him inside me.

“Change. We can talk more over dinner.” He turned me to face the door. I took one step forward before a sharp sting burned my ass. Maddox slapped me and then grabbed my

flesh, rubbing the pain into my body. His lips brushed my neck. “More, later if you’re a good little slut.”

My pussy clenched as I rushed forward, opening the door and slamming it shut behind me. I was so out of my league. What made me think I could do this? That I could become a toy to a man like him and stay alive.

I glanced at the room around me. It was the same as I remembered. Beautifully decorated in soft grays, a king-size bed, two nightstands, a dress with a mirror, and doors that led to a bathroom and walk-in closet. I walked as slowly as possible as if that would delay the inevitable, to the guest bed where a dress was laid out.

It was black lace with sheer long sleeves. A nude underlayer gave the illusion I was naked under the dress. It had a modest V neckline and hit mid-thigh. There were also black wedge high heels with lace over the top and a buckle securing them at the ankle. But my throat dried up when I saw what else was on the bed.

There was a black lace bra and matching thong. I decided quickly there was no getting out of this. This was what I’d signed up for. I stripped off my clothes, including my undergarments, and put on the clothes Maddox had laid out for me. Everything fit perfectly, like it had been tailored made for my body.

The dress was surprisingly modest. It wasn’t far off from the things I usually wore while working. It shocked me. I’d

thought he'd make me wear nothing or something more revealing. He basically owned me at this point.

My gut churned at the thought, but I pushed it away. It was done. There was no going back. I could only go forward.

When I exited the room again, Maddox was waiting for me, leaning against the wrought iron banister that overlooked the foyer. He wasn't wearing a suit jacket today, and the sleeves of his black dress shirt were rolled up, revealing his thick forearms. One leg was casually crossed over the other. A curl fell on his forehead, making his blue eyes seem brighter. Fuck, he shouldn't look good to me. I should hate him.

His gaze tracked me up and down. I tried to ignore the heat that crept across my skin, making me blush. I stood still, not wanting to give away his effect on me. I held my breath as I waited for him to say something. Did I look okay? Was it what he expected?

"Dinner is ready." He placed a hand on my low back again and led me down the stairs. I felt myself deflate as we walked.

Why had I expected a compliment from him? I wasn't his girlfriend. I was a toy he'd bought. I needed to remember what this was. I needed to find a way to take control back. To keep myself from falling into this trap.

## Kincaid

I watched the fork shake in my hand as I sat next to Maddox at his dining room table. It was the anxiety. The worry of not knowing what was expected of me. Of not knowing what was coming next. I needed to figure this out. I couldn't keep living in this confusion.

“Can we talk about this situation?” I asked. His eyes had never left me once since I sat down, but I tried not to meet them. Tried not to look at him.

“I told you. I want your company.” I could feel him smiling beside me.

“Bullshit.” I finally looked at him. I could feel my body shaking with anger now. “You've already told me what you want, so don't try and lie to me now.”

His heated gaze tracked down from my face to the minimal cleavage the dress displayed. I saw him linger at the pulse in my neck that was beating rapidly.

“I’ve never lied to you, little dove.” He took another bite of his food. I tried not to look at his lips as he did.

“Maddox, I can’t sit here in silence; it’s driving me crazy. Can’t we talk or something? Get to know each other.”

He gave me a sly smile. “You want to know more about me?”

My heart rate ticked up at the look on his face. It was calculating like he’d lead me directly down the path he’d planned. But it also lit me up. He was too handsome for his own good. Too beautiful to be this sinister.

“No.” I said firmly. Even though I did want to get to know him. I wanted to pretend it was because knowing him would help me fight against him, but I was also just curious. Curious about a man who I knew was evil but had also saved me. Who caused me pain and forced me to his will. But didn’t want anyone else to hurt me.

It was a disconcerting mix that set me on edge. I never knew what he was going to do. Or why.

“You can ask me anything.” His voice was smooth, but it felt like it was cutting deep under my skin.

“Anything?” I could hear the eagerness in my voice.

“I’ll give you five questions.” He smiled. Of fucking course. I rolled my eyes. Why did I think for a second he wasn’t playing with me? That he would actually let me know him.

“Fine.” I grumbled as I shoved food in my mouth. It was even more delicious than the last meal we had. It was definitely a perk to coming here. One less meal I had to buy myself or skip.

I should have asked what he planned to do with me after dinner. Or how often I was expected to come here. Or when he would let me go. Instead, I found myself curious about him.

“How did you get into this life?” I looked at his handsome face while he answered. Trying to read his expression.

“My father is the head of the family.” He answered easily, but there was something behind his eyes.

“You don’t like him.”

“There are few people I do like.” I believed that. He probably wasn’t capable of liking anyone. It felt like life was a chess game to him, and we were all just pieces.

“Who do you like?” I hated that my stomach twisted. Hated that I wanted him to say me. I shouldn’t want anything for him, especially not his attention.

“My sister.” I saw the flick in his eyes. The... emotion. It wasn’t quite love. But I did believe he cared for her. “Alessandra. She’s twenty. Too kind for this life.”

“It’s good she has you to look after her.”

I wondered what my life would’ve been like if I’d had a sibling. If I had someone to watch my back. Help me care for our mother. Help with bills. Someone to confide in.

But it was useless to wonder. I didn't have those things. I was alone.

I cleared my throat, trying to shove down the emotions that had suddenly swamped me. "And your mother? Is she a part of the Mafia too?"

His expression darkened. Most wouldn't have noticed it. I had the advantage of reading faces. I was also focused on him. I shouldn't be paying this close attention. I should go back to ignoring him. But now I was interested. Who was his mother, and why did he seem to hate her even more than his father?

"Dead." His voice didn't betray any emotions. Like he felt nothing at her death. Maybe he did, but I doubted it. Everyone felt something when an important figure in your life died. Even if it was relief.

"I'm sorry." I said with genuine emotion. He might be cold, but I wasn't. I could empathize even with this demon. "How did she die?"

He rolled his crystal glass around the table like he was considering whether or not to answer my question. I knew he wouldn't lie. He could, however, evade me. Not answer the question or direct his rage at me. I took the risk. Information was worth it. At least for now.

"My father killed her." My chest squeezed even though he didn't seem hurt by this. He took a sip of his drink before continuing. "In front of me. When I was ten."

Without meaning to, I reached out and grabbed his hand. His fingers were warm, as if he really was a demon living off of flames and heat. I curled my fingers around his and squeezed. Trying to show with my touch what I couldn't with my words.

Was this why he was how he was? Cold. Ruthless. A killer. Had he been born this way, or did he adapt to survive this life? Who would I have been if I didn't have a sweet mother that had shielded me from the evils of the world?

I believe people were born with certain traits. Maddox was likely born with less emotion than the rest of us. But maybe he could've changed if he'd had a mother like mine. Maybe he could still change. Maybe he could... feel.

I didn't know what to say, so I just kept my hand in his. I lingered in this moment with him. Finally, he broke the silence. His question surprised me.

"Why did you say yes to my offer?" I dropped my eyes then and brought my hand back into my own lap. Unable to look at him. I feared he'd see the truth. That he could read people like I could.

"I'm not sure." I answered as honestly as I was willing to. "You didn't give me much of a choice."

That was part of it. I also needed the money. But I couldn't deny I was attracted to him. To what he could do to my body. It was dangerous letting myself walk down this path. I might not find my way out. But life hadn't really given me much at this point.

Maybe I needed this little adventure. Needed to stop living in my books. He might hurt my body. But he couldn't hurt my heart. That had already been shattered when my mom died. There was nothing left for him to break. As long as I kept my head clear, I could survive this.

“Careful, little dove.” Maddox practically scolded as if I was a child he was issuing a warning to. “You don't want me to start counting punishments.”

I focused on my food again, trying to ignore the ache between my thighs at his threat. I was sick. But I wasn't going to give him an excuse to punish me. I wasn't going to play into what he wanted. What I feared we both wanted

“How many other women have you done this with?” I whispered.

I don't know why I said it. I shouldn't care. He could fuck anyone he wanted. In fact, it would be better for me if he found someone else to focus his depraved attention on. But part of me wanted a connection, cared. I didn't want to be like anyone else.

I wanted to be special.

It was wrong. I was going to get trapped. I literally just told myself he couldn't feel. But here I was, still hoping. I needed to stop reading romance novels. I'd become a romantic and hadn't even realized it. But this story wouldn't have a happy ending.

“Kincaid.” There was something in his voice. It was that soft voice again. The one that tried to wrap around my insides. That tried to convince me he wasn’t a demon. “Look at me.”

I stared at my now empty plate. I didn’t want to get lost in those piercing eyes.

“Look at me, or I’ll start counting punishments.”

My eyes came to his without my permission. There was a soft shine to his usually hard stare. The breath lodged in my lungs. I wanted him to look at me like this all the time. I wanted to believe he felt for me. I wanted this to be something it wasn’t. Real.

“I’ve never brought someone to my home.”

My chest tightened. I wanted to ask more. Wanted him to say more. “Then why did you bring me?”

“I’m not sure.” He looked genuinely confused, both at his answer and admitting it. “All I’m sure of is I want you. I’ve wanted you from the second you walked into the room.”

The intensity in his blue eyes locked me in place. I couldn’t look away. Couldn’t breathe. I think every woman wishes to have someone look at her like this. Like she’s unique. Important.

Unfortunately for me, it wasn’t a look of love. It was obsession. Madness. And it was coming from a demon.

“I want to touch you. Hurt you. Make you scream for me. Bleed at my hands. Break.”

It wasn't a declaration of love. But it affected me in a way it shouldn't. It shouldn't turn me on. Make my panties wet and my core clench. It shouldn't make my heart race and my mind wander. Wander to an ending that wouldn't happen. An ending where this obsession became something more.

Maybe I could soften him. Maybe he wasn't beyond redemption. He'd suffered. If someone showed him kindness, could he change? If he did, would I still want him as much as I did now?

I glanced up at him and saw the sick smile on his face. He saw it. Saw my resolve weakening. My hope. The crack in my armor. How could it not crack?

How could I not feel something for the man who saved me from being raped? Especially now that I knew more about him. More about his own trauma.

His smile widened as he watched the emotion flick across my face. "You want me."

It wasn't a question. But I lied anyways. "I don't want you. You're paying me to be here."

The statement hung heavy in the air. Both of us knowing it was a lie. Both of us knowing things had shifted inside me.

I felt his rage grow beside me. Felt him hurt at my words. I didn't think it was possible for me to hurt him, but I had. Maybe I had more power in this situation than I thought.

"On your knees." Maybe not.

I looked at the hard edges of his face. His strong jaw was tensed. His blue eyes were almost black. His fists clenched.

Maybe If I went onto my knees for him, I could leave without him torturing my body. Without him giving me the pain and pleasure that my body wanted. Because I was starting to realize how much I craved it.

Craved him.

## Maddox

I pushed my chair back away from the table.

“This is what you agreed to.” I said. “Now, get on your knees.”

I relished the flash of fear and lust in her eyes. I was going to get her to admit that she wanted this. I was done with her playing the money card. Pretending she was forced to be here.

I might have coerced her, but only because I knew she wanted this. Knew she wanted to explore this side of herself. Also, I was enough of a bastard to use anything within my power to have her.

“Don’t make me start counting punishments.”

Kincaid stood from her chair and walked over to me. She was so petite that even though I was sitting, we were at eye level. *Merda*, her tiny frame turned me on. Made me envision all the ways I could manipulate her body. How easy it was for me to control. To break.

Her gray eyes locked with mine as she sank to her knees before me. I heard the dull thud as they connected with the wood floors. She was going to have bruises tomorrow. Good, she wanted the pain.

Once on the floor, she tilted her head down and looked up at me through her lashes. I don't think she even realized these subtle submissive moves she made. Her body did it naturally, even if her mind wasn't aware.

"I've never done this before." She whispered.

Oh fuck, my balls drew tight to my body, and I almost spilled right then. My cock was going to be the first one in her sassy mouth. The only one.

"I'll teach you how to suck me off like the good little slut you are. Take me out."

Her tiny hands trembled as she moved to my belt. I savored her anxiety as she fumbled with it and my zipper. After what felt like forever, I sprang into her waiting palm. Her hands were so fucking soft as she wrapped them around me.

I watched her expression. I watched the apprehension cloud her eyes. I saw the blush of her cheeks as she eagerly touched me. She wanted to make me feel good. She wouldn't admit it, but I could see it on her face.

Without my direction, she leaned forward and licked the slit at the head of my cock. I felt her tentative touch deep in my blood. Before she could pull back, I fisted her white

blonde hair, trapping her with her face in my lap. Her eyes widened as she looked up at me. There was the fear I wanted.

“Open your mouth.” I growled.

“Are you going to hurt me?” She whispered, and her hot breath on my dick sent a rush of electricity straight through my body.

“Yes.” I pulled her hair back, exposing the long column of her neck and forcing her expressive eyes to mine. “And you’re going to fucking like it. Now open your mouth before I do it for you, little dove.”

Kincaid licked her lips before finally parting those perfect pink lips. I pushed her head forward, groaning as her warm, wet mouth surrounded me. She barely had the head in her mouth, and she was already gagging.

Such a sweet sound. She brought her hands to my thighs to steady herself.

“Hands off.” I felt her grumble as she dropped them to her legs. The little vibrations rocked to my balls, and I thrust my hips up.

The head of my cock knocked the back of her throat as she took all she could. She gagged again, and her mouth squeezed me so tight I saw stars. “God-fucking-damn it. *Cazzo.*”

I didn’t normally let women suck my cock. It gave them a false sense of power. But Kincaid’s mouth was the best thing I’d felt. It was perfect. “Rub your tongue against my dick.”

Kincaid whimpered then swirled her tongue. I tilted back and closed my eyes, trying not to come in her mouth this early. Gaining confidence, she started moving back and forth on me. When she reached the head again, she sucked hard. She was learning without my directions. Her mouth was made to suck my cock. I let out another string of curses and thrust into her again.

Suddenly the need to watch her swallow my cum was overwhelming. I opened my eyes to look at her. The sight of my cock disappearing between her lips was my undoing. I gripped her hair tight enough to hurt and rammed into her mouth.

Kincaid's fingers dug into her thighs, and her eyes widened. Tears sprang in the corners, but they only fueled the depraved inferno inside me. I slammed in and out of her. I felt the tingle in my back and my balls.

"Open wider. Take all of me like the good little slut you are." I grunted. "I'm going to coat that pretty throat with my cum." She moaned like that's exactly what she wanted me to do.

I dug my fingers into her scalp, her silky hair trapped in my hands as I fucked her mouth. I couldn't take my gaze away from her. Her wintry eyes lightened as more tears poured from them, mixing with the drool slipping from her chin. The porcelain skin on her cheeks was flushed.

She looked scared and enthralled. Caught in my trap. So fucking pure, waiting to be tainted by me.

She sucked hard, and I spilled everything into her. My vision grayed, and my world narrowed to Kincaid. All I saw was her. Her creamy skin, her soft hair, her swollen lips, her tiny body worshipping at my feet.

I came harder than I ever had before. I pushed to the back of her mouth until she was choking on me. White streaks poured from her mouth, and she cried, but I didn't stop until there was nothing left. With the merciless hold on her hair, I forced her head to stay in place.

My chest rose with ragged breaths as I finally pulled my still semi-hard cock from her lips. I wasn't sure how that was possible since it felt like she sucked every last drop from my body.

"Swallow it all." I saw the soft look in her eyes as I watched her throat work. Something about the movement, or maybe it was the knowledge of what she was swallowing, soothed the demon inside me.

Just like the last time, touching Kincaid calmed me. I let go of the hold on her hair, but only to place her on my thigh. Her cheek resting on me. I brushed my fingers through the silky strands as I stared down at her.

What was it about this girl? How could she do this to me? How could I want her again so soon? Why did I want to ruin her just as much as I wanted to protect her?

The pads of my fingers traced the delicate lines of her face. Over her cheek, her nose, lingering on her swollen, red lips. There was a drop of cum clinging to the corner, and I wiped it

away. Kincaid grabbed my wrist and brought it to her lips. Her soft tongue poked out and licked my thumb clean.

Her eyes sparkled, and the demon roared to life again. I didn't like that look from her. She wasn't supposed to be softening. She was supposed to be breaking.

She'd played me. She thought she could make me come, and she'd gain the upper hand. This fucking innocent dove thought she could suck me off, and I'd leave her alone.

"On your feet." I commanded. "It's time for your punishment."

"Wh-what?" She stammered, and the tremor in her voice had my cock at full attention again. "I didn't earn any tonight."

I traced my fingers down her face again until my hand wrapped around her delicate neck. One snap, and I could end her life. Her pulse beat beneath my fingers in time with my own. She lived because she hadn't broken for me yet. That was the only reason. I tried to convince myself that's what this was.

I caressed her skin, and she smiled at me like she thought she'd gotten away with it. I squeezed. Kincaid choked, and her hands clawed at my wrists. It was a wasted effort.

"Yes, you did. You sucked my cock and swallowed my cum, so I wouldn't touch you." She shook her head as much as my hold would allow. "You thought you could trick me. Take control. But that won't be happening."

I stood and forced her to her feet with my hold on her neck. I dropped my hands to her hips, and she sucked in harsh breaths, no doubt the rush of oxygen making her body tingle. I turned her around and attacked the zipper of her dress. I ripped the fabric from her body. I stripped her of the black lace bra and thong I'd bought, throwing them all on the floor at our feet.

*Cazzo*, her skin seemed to glow like she had an inner light that lit her. I could see her body shaking with each deep breath she took. I loved the terrifying tremor in her limbs. Just to confuse her and fuck with her mind, I gently brushed my fingertips up her spine. Reveling in her graceful body under my hold.

I brought my lips to her shoulder, my tongue coming out to taste her. She shivered before I sank my teeth in. Kincaid cried out as I left my mark on her. Her cry was the best thing I'd ever heard.

“Turn around.” Her body shook as she turned to face me.

This was the first time I saw her fully naked. I'd seen parts of her, felt her, but this sight was more than I envisioned. I could see her blue veins making a path along her skin. Her nipples were pink and tight, begging for me to torture them. She was soft and curvy in all the right places.

So gorgeous.

So fragile.

So pure.

Kincaid was smart enough not to hide from me. I stared at her for long minutes letting her apprehension heighten her body's response. I saw her arousal dripping down her thighs as she rubbed them together. Her pulse went crazy as my gaze lingered.

“Maddox?” She whispered. Why did I like the sound of my name coming from her mouth? I wanted her to say it all the time. I wanted her to scream it. Moan it. Die with it on her lips.

“*Merda*, say my name again.” I growled.

Her eyes came to mine, and whatever she saw in them scared her. She stepped back, and her ass collided with the table. Glasses tipped over and rolled to the floor, but I didn't care.

“Say my fucking name or get on the table for your punishment.”

Her breath hitched, but she lifted up and sat down on the table. She looked even smaller, with her feet dangling above the floor. Her knuckles gripped the wood as her thighs clenched together. I'd let her hide for now.

My gaze penetrated her as I reached for my belt. My pants were still unbuttoned, and my cock strained against my boxer briefs. There was no point in hiding it. She'd seen it, sucked it, and she knew I wanted her. I pulled my belt from the loops and wrapped it around my hand.

“What are you doing?” Her eyes locked in on the belt in my hand as if she could stop me as long as it was in her sight.

“Punishing you.”

“I thought you would spank me again.” She whispered. I could smell her fear and desire. It was the most intoxicating thing. Well, second to the scent of Kincaid.

“That punishment didn’t get the desired results, little dove.”

“What result was that?”

I stepped forward and wrapped my free hand around her throat again. I didn’t cut off her air. I only wanted to feel her. My thumb brushed her plump lips. Her tongue came out and licked me. I narrowed my eyes at her.

Why had she done that? She knew now that I saw through what she’d tried to do. She confused me, and I didn’t like it. She was poking holes in my plans.

“You broken and begging for me.” I whispered. “Lay down.”

Kincaid closed her eyes, and I thought she might cry again. I’d take her tears. I wanted to bottle each one of them up and drink them. I wanted her tears to fuel me. I wanted her to be deep in my body. All of her.

She laid back, and I paused to enjoy the view again. My cock twitched, telling me to slam into her. That I could break her that way. Tear into her pussy until she cried for me, bled for me. But I knew it would take more than that.

“Arms above your head.” She moved slowly as if she could stop what was coming. “Count.”

I brought the belt down on her breasts, hitting her tight nipples. Kincaid’s body jolted, and her mouth parted on a wordless scream.

“One.” I watched as the red mark faded from her skin. I hadn’t hit her hard enough to make it stay. But it was enough to have my blood roaring through my veins.

The leather made a satisfying slap as I hit her skin again. “Two.”

“Open your eyes and watch.” I wanted to see the pain and pleasure in her expression.

“How many more?” She asked, but she didn’t look at me. I slapped her twice more in quick succession. “Three...Four.”

“I was only going to give you four, but the longer you keep your eyes closed, the more you’ll get.” She pressed her lips together and rocked her head back and forth on the table. “Is that what you want? You are a little slut for pain.”

I whipped her skin again, and this time, Kincaid shrieked as the hit came down harder. The demon inside me smiled at the sound.

“Five.” She whimpered, but she wouldn’t open her damn eyes.

I hit her again and again, trying to find satisfaction in her scream of pain. In her moans of pleasure. In the red welts on her porcelain skin. But I couldn’t.

I was turned on as fuck, and my cock was pissed off. But rage shoved the lust aside. She wasn't breaking. She wasn't looking at me. What the hell was wrong with her?

She was a drug. An addiction. I needed to rid myself of her. I needed to break her before I couldn't stand to be without her. Before, I couldn't walk away.

“Open your damn eyes, Kincaid, or I won't stop.” I growled as I hit her again. The sharp slap on her skin bouncing off the walls. “I'll make you fucking bleed. I'll watch all the blood pour from your body if you don't fucking look at me.”

“Ten.” She moaned. “Do it. I'm not afraid to die. You don't own me. I'm not a whore.”

My control snapped. I threw the belt away and stalked towards the table. I wrapped both hands around her throat and squeezed. Finally, I saw those wintry eyes. But there wasn't the horror I expected to see. Instead, they had that same soft look she had when she'd blown me.

“You want to see fucking ownership. I own this body. It comes only for me.”

I released her as I dropped to my knees. I wrenched her legs apart, my fingers digging into the soft skin of her thighs. I stared at her dripping wet cunt. It was so pink and perfect. Begging for me. Her legs shook, trying to close, but she couldn't get past my hold or my larger body.

“This sweet pussy is making a mess all over my table. You can pretend all you want. Close your eyes. Refuse to say my

name, but this—” I shoved my fingers inside her, and a sense of relief passed through me as she moaned and clenched around me. “Tells me the truth. You’ll break for me. You’ll fall apart in my mouth.”

I attacked her. My tongue lapping at her entrance. Biting at her sensitive skin. Sucked until I left a mark. I flicked her clit as I pumped two fingers inside her.

Kincaid’s body went ridged as she arched off the table. Her moans and taste were like a drug, calming the demon inside me. I wanted to live between her thighs. I wanted to hear those sounds of pleasure every day. I didn’t want anyone else to see her like this. This was only for me.

“Say my fucking name.” I growled against her pussy before feasting on her again.

“No.” She screamed as I sucked her clit between my lips.

I felt her reaching her peak. I wanted to hold her there. Torture her until she admitted she wanted this. Wanted me. This would be her undoing. She’d shattered if she had to admit the truth. That an innocent dove like her wanted the demon in me.

But the sound of the door opening ruined my plans.

“Oh, my god.” Kincaid tried to sit up and cover herself, but I forced her back down. I wasn’t done with her.

I quickly grabbed my jacket from the chair and threw it over her body before I stood and pressed into her making sure she was covered from whoever had just walked in.

“Maddox?” Tristan called from the door, but I didn’t take my eyes away from Kincaid.

Hers were widened in panic, and her body trembled beneath me. I didn’t like it. I didn’t want anyway else to scare her. These reactions were only for me.

“For your sake, I hope someone is dead.” My voice was deadly calm, a promise of punishment in my words. He knew better than to fucking interrupt me when I was playing.

“Leif called a meeting. We need to go.”

“I’ll meet you outside in a few minutes.” I heard his steps as he turned to leave. My gaze was still locked on Kincaid. A frown pulled on her lips, and she stared at the ceiling like she was trying not to cry. “And Tristan?”

“Yes?”

“Did you see anything?” I couldn’t hide the venom in my voice.

“No.” But there was a hint of something in his tone. He better not be lying, *stronzo*.

“I hope not. I’d hate to pour bleach into your eyes and blind you. Now get the fuck out of here.”

I heard the door close and pulled off Kincaid.

“Oh, my god.” She whimpered as she covered her face. She tried to move off the table again, but I pried her hands from her face and pinned them above her head.

“Where do you think you’re going?”

“You—I. Home. You have to leave.” She stammered as she searched my face.

“Not before I finish eating your sweet pussy.”

“Maddox, I—.” Now she says my name. I narrowed my eyes as I squeezed her wrists tighter.

“Don’t,” I said through clenched teeth. “I’m on the fucking edge right now, Kincaid. So unless you want me to take the belt to you again until I’m covered in your blood or find someone’s throat to rip out, you better lay here and come in my mouth like the good little slut you are.”

“Tristan saw me.” She whispered, and the shame in her voice twisted my stomach.

“No, he didn’t.” I traced a finger down her cheek forcing her eyes to mine. They swirled with too many emotions for me to decipher. “And if he did, I’ll make good on my threat. No one gets to see you like this.”

I released her and moved between her legs again. I ravished her pussy before she could keep talking. Before I could figure out why I wanted her to feel better. I didn’t like that she was ashamed of what we’d done. Which didn’t make any sense because that was the point. I wanted her to be ashamed, so it would ruin her.

But when I’d seen the crestfallen look on her face, the only thing I could think about was erasing it. The need to make her feel good pulsed inside me. I’d never cared before. Not with

her or anyone else. They weren't people with emotions. They were holes and toys for my pleasure.

Kincaid moaned, and I shoved my thoughts aside. I thrust my tongue in and out of her before replacing it with my fingers. I stretched her and sucked her clit until she denoted in my mouth. I licked every drop of her, letting her luscious taste drug me. Calm me.

A strange voice in my head told me I should let her go. That I shouldn't force her to come back here. But that wasn't going to happen. She was trapped in my cage now, and I wasn't letting her go until she broke. That was the plan.

That was all this was. She was a toy.

Then why did I hate the sound of that?

## Kincaid

I threw the old paperback down onto the bed. I'd been picking up one book after another all day, but nothing kept my attention. I stood and started to pace my small apartment. I took four steps before I had to turn around and walk back. I did it over and over again until a loud bang from below alerted me to the fact that I was annoying my neighbors. I wasn't exactly a quiet walker on a normal day, and today wasn't normal.

My feet slapped the floor as I paced. I went back and forth a few more times before a Spanish curse came through the walls. I flopped back down onto my bed, staring at the dingy ceiling.

Four weeks. That's how long my arrangement with Maddox had been going on. I saw him at least three times a week, sometimes more. It was always the same.

Tristan picked me up, making me uncomfortable as he drove me to Maddox's house. Where Maddox escorted me

upstairs to change. I tried wearing the other dresses he bought, but he had me change every time. I never understood why, and I never asked. He let me keep the clothes too. My closet was now full of expensive dresses I would never wear again. I should sell them.

Except they held memories. It was strange to think. But each dress held a different memory of Maddox. A different way he'd tortured my body. Made me come. Had me make him come. But he never fucked me. And I'd never seen him naked. I'd also never seen any part of his house beside the guest room and the dining room. The whole situation was fucked up.

I changed, we had dinner, and then he'd exact his punishments. Which I could now admit, to myself at least, that I liked. I shifted on the bed and felt the burn in my ass from the cane he'd used last night. I think I figured out why I liked it so much.

It made me feel alive. It was the only time I wasn't worried about bills or my life. Or my loneliness. Maddox was in control. I was his prey. I could just feel. I didn't have to make decisions. I didn't feel the unbearable weight of my devastating life.

I had even started to like him. Or maybe I was just adapting to my new normal. I no longer felt the urge to run away. Instead, anticipation coursed through my veins. It felt like my life was on pause until the next time I saw him.

Oh god! I brought my hands to my face and covered my eyes. This was what he wanted. I was falling into his cage. He was making me think he was okay. He was normal. That what we had was normal. But it wasn't. And I was reminded of that every night after I left.

Tristan took me home again and handed me an envelope full of cash as I exited the car. The burning embarrassment of what I'd done or who I was made my cheeks flush.

I was paid. I was a whore. This wasn't a relationship. I couldn't even look Tristan in the eye. I was pretty sure he'd seen me. That he knew what Maddox did to me. Maybe they all knew. Maybe he lied, and he had a different girl there every night.

I'd let myself become this, and I wasn't sure how to get out anymore. Or even if I wanted to. I knew he was dangerous. To other people, to me. He could get bored of me and have me killed. Once he was done with me, there was no reason to keep me alive. And there was no one who would come looking. Except for Tessa.

Tessa, who I hadn't told what I was doing. She thought I was waitressing at a fancy restaurant downtown and that my employer had bought me the dresses. Technically that part wasn't a lie. Why hadn't I told her?

Because I couldn't explain it. I couldn't explain why I'd said yes. Why I continued to go back. Why I liked what he did to me. Why I liked him.

In my own twisted mind, things made sense. But I was afraid if I said them out loud, explained them to her, it would all fall apart. I was on a thin sheet of ice. She would crack it. I would go tumbling into the cold hard water of truth.

The truth that I should hate him. Be afraid of who and what he was. Be disgusted by my body's needs. That I should end it. Run away while I was still alive.

But I wouldn't. I couldn't.

All I could do now was hope that whatever pain he gave me, I could survive.

## Maddox

I relished the burn of the whiskey as I sipped my drink and waited. The club's music was too loud, reverberating in my bones as I waited for Constantine. I wasn't sure why I'd picked this place for our meeting. My excuse had been to check on the new manager, but the longer I sat here, the more I thought it was because of her.

I still felt Kincaid's presence even though I wasn't in the private room. Even though she hadn't worked here in over a month. A month I'd had her with me. At my house. Under my rule. And I still hadn't broken her. Hadn't fucked her.

The question was, why? What was I waiting for?

Each day with her, I told myself I'd take one more before I broke her. I hadn't fully given up the idea. I still hurt her each night. And it still had no effect on her. She took each of my punishments with pleasure. Her pussy only getting wetter for me. Welcoming me.

I'd hit her with my belt, a cane, a whip. She'd only come harder. I'd made her swallow my cock until she almost passed out from lack of oxygen. Over our time together, I'd bruised every inch of her skin. And she still kept coming. She still wasn't broken.

If anything, she'd softened. She'd taken the punishments with a look of peace. Like it was the only time she could relax. I'd come to crave that look. Crave the feel of her skin. Crave her covered in my marks.

I'd also come to enjoy her company. The conversation she forced at dinner. She challenged me. She wasn't afraid to push back. To dig deeper. She knew things about me no one did. Like how I'd seen my mother die.

No one but my father knew that. I didn't understand why I'd told her other than I had never lied to her. I wanted her to see the dark parts of me. Maybe it would make her break. Instead, it made her reach for me.

She held my hand as if I needed comfort. I'd never mourned my mother, but when Kincaid had taken my hand, I wondered if I should have.

How could she be so kind when life repeatedly tried to drag her down? She was a mystery I needed to figure out. That was the only reason I kept her around. I wasn't sure what I was trying to convince myself of anymore.

"Maddox." Constantine's voice pulled me from my thoughts. "Shall we?"

He gestured to the private room. I got up and followed him. Tristan and Constantine's guard stopped outside the doors as we entered. As soon as I was in the room again, memories flooded me. I could almost smell her lingering in the air. Feel her silky skin. Hear her moans of pain.

"You wanted to meet with me." Constantine said as he took a seat.

I wasn't worried about meeting in here. I'd had all the bugs removed and destroyed any recordings Rodney had saved, including the ones of Kincaid.

A part of me wanted to keep it so I could watch her. Watch her scream and fall apart while I turned her delicious ass red. But she'd already had one man betray her trust. Spill her secrets and desires. For a reason I couldn't explain, I didn't want to do that to her. I didn't want her to put me in the same category as her ex.

"Trust is a funny thing." I said. I watched his eyes narrow as he pondered my words. "Takes forever to build. But one moment...one mistake...one lie, and it's gone."

Constantine cleared his throat and shifted in his seat, visibly uncomfortable with this conversation. "That's true."

"But people are fickle creatures. We can't seem to make up our minds. Can't seem to pick a side."

"I-I don't know if that's true." He stammered. "I've been by your father's side since we were boys."

My face pulled into a twisted grin. I got some twisted enjoyment out of making him uncomfortable. Making him squirm. He was a powerful man. Older than me. He'd been around for a long time, but he feared me. That knowledge gave me a rush of power.

I could feel the fear. I could practically see him running through ideas in his mind. What had he done? What secrets did he have? And how did I know them?

He had at least one, but it wasn't important today.

"You have." I took another sip of my drink before I put him out of his misery. "And he appreciates your undying loyalty."

Constantine let out a visible breath, his chest shaking with it. "However, not everyone is you."

He took a sip of his drink. "What do you mean?"

I decided to stop playing with him. I had somewhere to be. Someone to see. "We have a rat. They're feeding information to the Gallos. That's how they've been able to infiltrate the clubs, stop our shipments."

"Who would betray you? I mean your father." Yes, even though my father was in charge and Leif would take his place, it was me people feared. They knew it would be me who came after them. Me who got my hands dirty. Who knew their secrets.

"I believe it's one of yours."

"I trust my men, im-"

“I don’t.” I slammed my glass onto the table, the sound bouncing off the walls. “You will do an investigation into each man. Who’s having money trouble? Or has a sudden new flow of cash? Who has a drug problem or a sick family member? You will find this rat, or I will come for them. And you. Do we understand?”

He swallowed loudly. “Yes.”

His words were drowned out by the sound of the club as the door opened. A beautiful brunette walked into the room. She wasn’t dressed like the waitresses. She wore a long silk robe and high heels. I barely noticed her. My mind was on a blonde dove that waited for me.

“I didn’t mean to interrupt.” Tessa said, or Trixie as she was known here.

“You’re not interrupting, *cara*. Your presence is always welcome.” Constantine softened as he watched her approach.

“Since Kitty isn’t here to take care of you, I wanted to see if you needed anything.” Kitty, the name Kincaid used while working here. I still hated it.

“We’re fine. Let us finish our meeting and then come back to spend time with me.” Constantine smiled at her. I noted the look between the two of them as if they were used to each other’s company. Information was always useful.

“Of course.” Tessa smiled at him before turning back to me. “And do you need anything? I know Kitty is your favorite, but it seems she’s found other things to occupy her time.”

I narrowed my eyes at her. What did she know? Kincaid had talked about her during our many dinners. She appeared to be the only person Kincaid was close to. Had she told Tessa about our arrangement? Was Tessa trying to discourage her from coming to me?

She must have a death wish if she thought she could speak to me like this. If she thought I'd allow her to keep what I wanted from me, I would eliminate her. If she came between Kincaid and me, I'd end her life. Before I could imagine her gruesome death, Tessa spoke again.

"I love that for her. I just hope she's safe." Her words were soft, but her eyes held a threat. She was threatening me if I hurt Kincaid. Interesting. Maybe she was tougher and more loyal than I thought.

"She's well taken care of...I hear."

Tessa smiled before exiting the room again. Constantine was talking, agreeing to my plan, but I didn't hear him. An edgy restlessness seeped into my bones. Churned my gut.

My mind wandered to how Constantine had looked at Tessa. Weak. Everyone had a weakness. It was often a person. A person they felt for. Is that what Kincaid was becoming to me? My weakness?

Tessa knew about Kincaid. How many more people knew about her? How many would try to use her against me?

I finished my drink and left Constantine with his instructions. Even the burn of the whiskey couldn't stifle the

anger in my blood. I knew it was a mistake, but I needed to see her. Needed to know what this feeling was. Tristan fell in step beside me as I headed for the exit.

“Did Constantine admit it was one of his men?” He asked once we left the music of the club behind. The cold night air did nothing to soothe my nerves.

“He’s looking into it. Let’s go. We have someone to pick up.”

He looked at my expression and smiled. “If she survives tonight, will you give me a chance at her?”

I didn’t know what happened. One second, I was looking at the smug smile on his face; the next, my fist was driving into it. I felt my knuckles split against his teeth. Blood dripped from his mouth as I cocked my arm back and hit him again. He stumbled away from me, falling to the ground. I stalked after him. Needing to feel his pain. His blood.

“Jesus, Mad.” He turned and spat the blood from his mouth. “What is wrong with you? She’s a whore.”

My fingers curled into the lapels of his jacket as I yanked him back up. His face was inches from mine. I could see the fear and confusion. He wasn’t the only one who was confused.

Why did I care if he touched her when I was done? Why didn’t I like how he looked at her? How he’d called her a whore? Technically she was; I was paying her to spend time with me. It hadn’t bothered me before, but now it did.

“She’s off limits. Anyone who touches her dies.” I tossed him back to the ground. “Get yourself cleaned up and head to the gambling club. Make sure the leaks are closed.”

Tristan stared at me for another minute like he was trying to figure out who I was. I had no issue with administering punishment when it was needed. I lived for the torture. But both of us knew he hadn’t earned this. Not that I cared. He’d been failing enough that he needed to be reminded of his place.

He stood on shaky legs and left me standing on the sidewalk. The sounds of the city filled my ears. I tried to calm the anger burning my blood. Tried to understand my reactions. I knew the only thing that would calm me down was more pain. Pain on my favorite toy.

Her. Her presence. Her touch.

It was time to end this. Time to get back the control I’d once had. She was a distraction. A weakness.

Tonight I would break her. I’d stain my hands with her blood. I’d ruin whatever feelings she thought she had for me. I’d wash away whatever this was inside me that wanted to keep playing with her.

Tonight it would end.

## Kincaid

**M**y stomach fluttered as the sleek black car pulled to the curb in front of my apartment. Even the thought of the drive with Tristan didn't stop my excitement. Excitement I shouldn't have been feeling. But instead of Tristan, Sebastian came from the driver's seat and opened my door. Physically he looked scarier than Tristan, but there was something in his eyes. He didn't want me, and he wouldn't hurt me.

“Thank you.” I started to smile, but it died on my lips when I saw Maddox in the backseat.

He never came to pick me up. He was always waiting back at his house. I could feel the rage pumping off his body as I examined him closer. There was blood staining his white shirt. His hair was more disheveled than usual, falling over his forehead. His knuckles were split with blood dried on his hand.

“Are you okay?” I reached for his hand and brought it into my lap as the car drove away.

I gently probed the knuckles, feeling for a break. He didn't wince or make a noise. I reached into my bag and pulled out a few wipes I kept in there. Softly so I didn't aggravate his injured fingers, I scrubbed the dried blood off his hands. After I was finished, he intertwined our hands. I stilled at his touch.

It was rare that I touched him. There was an unspoken barrier. He could touch me. Hurt me. But I didn't initiate contact. It would be like admitting I wanted to touch him. Wanted him to touch me. None of that seemed to matter now.

My chest had constricted painfully when I'd seen he was injured. It was clear I did care about him. I didn't know what to do with that.

Thankfully Maddox didn't question me. He was silent the whole drive. His face set in hard planes. His jaw clenched as his fingers dug into mine. His hold wasn't tender. It was possessive, keeping me linked to him. I could still feel the energy radiating off of him. The air around us was heavy with it. It clung to my skin and made a home underneath. A sense of foreboding.

When we pulled up in front of the mansion, I waited for him to exit and open the door for me. He didn't take my hand again as I got out of the car. My skin felt cold without his. My anxiety ticked higher as I waited for what would happen. I could tell this wouldn't be our normal night. Not that anything we did was normal, but there was an intensity tonight that we'd never had before.

“Dining room. Now.” Maddox said as soon as the heavy wood door closed behind us. I didn’t dare pause or disobey him.

There was something different about him. For the first time since this started, I feared him. Something was wrong. He was out of control. Furious, and I knew he would unleash that on me. I was twisted because I wanted him to.

I wanted him to be able to let go of whatever was bothering him. I wanted to be someone he could come to for peace. For help. Someone who could care for him. Because I knew no one ever had before.

“Maddox.” I turned to him when he entered the room behind me. The table was set for dinner. A dinner I didn’t think we’d be eating tonight.

“Admit you want this. Me.” The intensity in his voice raced through my body. My heart pounded in my ears, and my hands shook as I stared at him.

Could I admit it?

No.

Even though my body craved him. Even though I’d started to understand him. I couldn’t admit it. Being forced here, being paid, was the only thing I was hanging on to. It was the only thing stopping me from completely falling apart. I discovered my body could take the pain. I didn’t think my mind could.

His hands clenched at his sides as I stood silently before him. I couldn't admit that I wanted him, but I also couldn't find my voice to lie to him either. It should've been easy, but it wasn't.

“Take off your clothes, Kincaid.” I complied. Willingly. I stripped off the plain t-shirt I'd been wearing and wiggled out of my worn leggings. I stood before him in a red lace bra and thong. Something he'd bought me. They were beautiful and fit perfectly. Nicer than anything else I owned.

“Did you wear that for me?” I turned my head to the side. I couldn't look into his eyes anymore. I didn't want to lose myself in their intensity. “You act like you don't want me. But you keep coming here. Keep letting me touch you. You dress for me.”

I shook my head, trying to deny the truth of his words. Maddox moved. He pushed off the wall and stalked towards me. My breath hitched as I scurried back. My ass collided with the table; the sound of glasses clinking together and tumbling to the floor filled my ears. I jumped when one shattered on the hardwood near my feet.

Maddox fisted my hair, forcing my head back to look at him as he towered over me. My body quivered with anticipation as I waited to see what he would do. “Open your mouth, little dove, and tell me the words I want to hear.”

I pressed my lips together as I stared at his mouth. He'd never kissed me. Not once in all our time. It was like he was holding back, afraid to give that part of himself to me.

It seemed strange, given the things we'd already done. I'd swallowed his cum; it had covered my skin. He'd licked my pussy until I'd come on his tongue, but still, we'd never kissed.

“So fucking defiant.” He leaned forward, his lips trailing along the shell of my ear before lingering at my neck. Goosebumps broke out along my skin, making my nipples tighten behind the lace. “It’s because you want it. All the pain I’ve given you, and you still push back. Because you want more. You want me to hurt you. Make you come. Don’t you, little dove?”

I let out a shaky breath as my core clenched, but still, I said nothing. His lips closed around my neck. Maddox’s teeth sunk into my flesh as I cried out. The pain mixed with my arousal, heightening it. It wasn’t enough to break my skin. It was just shy of that.

I was so distracted by his lips, by the delicious pain, that I didn’t notice he’d reached down and picked up a piece of the broken glass. He pressed the jagged glass to my inner thigh. I felt it as it dug into my sensitive skin.

“Tell me you want me. You want me to cut up this beautiful body.” His other hand caressed down my side, his touch reverent. As if he was savoring the feeling of me against him as much as I was.

I stared into his eyes. Searching the dark blue pools for answers. Why was he so intense tonight? Why did he want me to admit it? It had been weeks since he’d obsessed over why I

was here. Why he had brought me here. I'd started to think he didn't want me to break. That he wanted me to stay.

But I found my answer in his eyes. This was it. This was the end. He might not kill me, but I would never come back here again. He was pushing me to break because he was ready to let me go.

It hurt.

It hurt more than any of the physical pain he'd given me. I was worthless. Nothing to him. I wanted this to be something. As much as I shouldn't, I did. I wanted it to matter to him, like it mattered to me. I couldn't tell him now. Not when he was ready to throw me away.

Instead of answering, I pressed further into his hold, letting the glass pierce my skin. I felt the warmth of my blood as it trickled down my thigh. The pain sliced into me, but it didn't touch the ache in my chest.

"*Cazzo.*" Maddox swore and tossed away the glass. It shattered against the wall, little pieces glittering in the light. His hand pressed into the cut, crimson red running between his fingers. His eyes darkened as he looked at my blood. It certainly wasn't the first time I'd bled with him. But it was the first time I'd inflicted the wound.

He was mad. Mad that I'd done it. That I'd take away the control. That I still refused to speak. His hand came to my neck, smearing my blood across my body.

He didn't squeeze, just held me in place. His other hand unclasped my bra and tossed it aside. He smeared blood into my breasts, along my stomach. His touch was light, lingering, making me lean in for more.

“Goddamn.” He rasped as he looked at me. “You’re gorgeous.” His thumb traced my nipple, making me whimper. His hands glided over my skin, my blood easing the path. “Too fucking gorgeous.”

His eyes burned into me. The rage was palpable in the air surrounding him. Sparking from his skin. It was like he was angry that I'd caught his attention. Angry that he wanted me. Like it was my fault.

Harshly his fingers tightened around my neck. A strangled sound escaped my lips as my eyes flew wide and all the air pushed from my lungs. He'd choked me before, but this was different. His intent was different. There was no pleasure. No control. His touch was all fury. He was trying to end my life.

And I let him.

I forced my gaze to him. I stared at his handsome face. His raw intensity. If I was going to die, I wanted to look at him while it happened. Black spots danced in my vision as my lungs ached.

I watched his chest rise and fall with heavy breaths as if he was taking in all the oxygen that was leaving me. His fingers flexed as he shook me. My body jerked in his hold as if I was a doll.

My mind was fuzzy as I smiled at him. I placed my hand gently above his heart. I could feel the rapid beat under my fingertips. Feel the war he was fighting.

Maybe I was more insane than I thought. I should've feared him in this moment. Should've been fighting for my life. Enraged at him for trying to end it. But all I felt was peace. Peace and sadness, but not for me. I was sad for him. A deep sadness because this was his life. This was all he'd ever known.

“Fuck!” Maddox roared as he dropped his hand.

My lungs filled, making me dizzy as I sucked in ragged breaths. He gripped my hips and placed me on the table. My head went to his shoulder as I regained my composure. My chest burned as my heart pounded back into a normal rhythm. I felt weak but energized from the lack of oxygen.

“I almost killed you.” He whispered. I could feel a slight tremble in his body. A wavering in his voice. “You were going to let me.”

I didn't say anything. We both knew the truth. But I was surprised it seemed to affect him. I thought this was what he wanted. To see me die. No, not die. Break.

He pushed my shoulder back until I was lying on the table. The wood felt cold against my naked body. I didn't know what he was doing, and I didn't care. He'd already stopped himself from the worst. Now it was just more torture. I let myself submit to him. Let him deliver his delicious brand of pleasure.

Maddox knelt before me. Slowly he pulled my panties from my body. The scrape of the lace making me shiver. The stubble of his jaw brushed my inner thigh as his lips skimmed my skin. His tongue licked a path up my body, tasting my dried blood.

I should've been grossed out. It should've made my stomach turn. But it didn't, not when he so obviously appreciated every part of me. Even my blood.

“Oh, little dove, your taste... *cazzo*... I want to lick you clean. It's the best thing I've tasted. Except for your sweet pussy.”

Then he devoured me. His tongue lashed across my clit, making my body jolt at the sharp pleasure. I moaned as he licked every inch of me. His stubble rubbing along my pussy as his tongue plunged in and out of me.

My body tightened as I reached my peak. My vision blurred, and I forgot where I was. I forgot what happened to lead us here. All I felt was Maddox and the ecstasy he was giving me. He gave me pleasure, like he was trying to apologize for what he'd done. Like he needed to erase the memory from my mind.

I was climbing higher, one more lick, one more push, and I would fall over the edge. My knuckles turned white as I dug into the wood table. I sucked in a deep breath, ready to scream with my release, when he pulled back.

I blinked at the sudden change. At the loss of his warmth. I braced on my elbows so I could look at Maddox between my

legs. His lips were shiny with my arousal as his blue eyes locked with mine.

“Tell me you want me. Tell me to make you come.”

I swallowed loudly. He'd found a new way to torture me. A new way to try and get what he wanted. I wasn't going to break.

“No.” I whispered as my head hit the table. He attacked me again. His lips closing around my clit and sucking hard.

My body arched off the table as I moaned. He groaned as he shoved two fingers inside me. I lifted my hips to push against him. Trying to get more friction. Trying to reach the end before he stopped. My body tightened as I grew closer to the edge. I smiled as he kept going. I was right there, so close.

He pulled back again. I bit my lip to stifle a scream. His fingers stayed inside me, unmoving but adding to the pressure that wasn't allowed to release. My body was taut, tense, vibrating on the edge. I wanted to come. I wanted him to take me there.

“Say it. Say you like the pain, and I'll give you my cock.” His free hand skimmed up my body. He rolled my nipples between his fingers before tugging painfully. I moaned and pushed into his touch. “That's what you want. You want me to fuck you. You want me to break this sweet little cunt with my cock. Say it, and I will.”

I had no idea how he always knew what I wanted. But I wouldn't say it. If I broke, he'd toss me aside. And I

desperately wanted to stay. I didn't know when it had changed, but it did. I wanted to continue to feel alive. And the only time that happened was when I was here. So I refused to break.

“I'll do this all night. I'll keep you on the edge until you tell me what I want. I might not kill you, but I will break you.”

I had no time to respond before he was eating me again. I dug my fingers into his thick hair, trying to keep him there. My hips moved against his mouth. I didn't care how it made me look. I didn't care if I was desperate. I needed this. I rode his face chasing the orgasm that was just out of reach.

He sucked my clit and curled his fingers inside me. Quickly I reached my peak again, but Maddox pulled back. His hot breath brushed my skin as I panted. A sweat broke out as my body overheated. Burning alive with the need to come. With the need for him.

He waited until I was breathing normally, then pushed me again. He brought me to the edge more times than I could count. I had no idea how long we'd been doing this. Time didn't seem to exist anymore. It could have been minutes or hours, or days.

All I knew was him. All I felt was the unbearably need to come. I was a rope stretched tight, ready to snap. My head thrashed back and forth on the table. My throat was raw from when his fingers had squeezed me and the loud moans I couldn't help. My fingers were numb from digging into his scalp. From trying to keep him from pulling away.

Maddox leaned back again, his tongue licking the wetness from my thighs. My skin was soaked in sweat, blood, and my own arousal. I couldn't do it anymore. This felt worse than when he tried to kill me. This was the end.

“Please.” My voice cracked.

He tensed between my legs. Slowly he stood, reaching for my hands and pulling me up until I was pressed into his body. His still-clothed body. As usual. I felt his strength as I sagged against him, exhausted. He cupped my cheeks, pushing aside a strand of damp hair. “What was that little dove?”

“Please let me come.” I whimpered. I stared deep into his blue eyes. I should've looked away. But I couldn't. I was trapped in his hypnotic pull. Trapped in his cage. I knew I'd never find my way out again. And I didn't want to. “Please fuck me. I want your cock. I want your pain. I want you, Maddox.”

Like a man possessed, no like a demon, he crashed his mouth onto mine. Swallowing my words. My whimpers. I clutched his shirt as I tasted myself on his lips. Our teeth clashed as tongues warred with each other. It was everything I thought his kiss would be.

Harsh. Painful. Possessive.

And I took it all. I let him consume me. Take away the last of my resolve.

Even then, it wasn't enough. If this was it, if it was our last night, I wanted it all. I clawed at his shirt; buttons flew,

pinging off the hard floors as I ripped it down his shoulders. My hands roamed the rugged plains of his body. Across the ridges of his abs, down to the V cut just above his belt.

The perfect body to hide the monster inside. A trick of the mind. A predator. He ate my moans as my nails dug into his flesh. I wanted to mark him as he'd marked me.

My mind spun as he jerked back, breaking our kiss. "Say it again."

I pierced his skin with my nails, watching the heat flare in his eyes. "I want you, Maddox."

His strong arm wrapped around my body, pulling me to the edge of the table. His other hand tore at his pants, shoving them, and his boxers, down his legs. His thick, long cock sprang free between us. He didn't waste a single second. Before I took my next breath, he grabbed both of my hips and roughly slammed inside me.

I threw my head back and screamed, hurting my already abused throat. I had been on the edge for so long that the second he bottomed out, I crumbled. I shattered around him as my orgasm swept through me. My fingers and toes curled from the intense pleasure.

"*Cazzo*. Fuck." He stilled inside me, feeling every tremor as it worked through my body. "That's right. Come on, my cock. Show me how much you wanted this, my little dove."

Maddox wrapped his fingers around my throat as he shoved me back down on the table. With one hand gripping

my thigh spreading me for him, he pulled out and slammed into me again.

And again.

And again.

If he hadn't been pinning me to the table, I would've slid off with his brutal thrusts. I felt how big he really was. My body felt split open. It was like I could feel him everywhere. From my pussy all the way to my throat. There was pain, and I moaned quietly at the stretch. His strong body controlled every inch of me. I was at his mercy. Lost in space with only Maddox to ground me.

He groaned as I tightened around him again. "Fuck Kincaid. I've never felt anything better than you. I want to die buried deep inside you. I'll take you with me."

He squeezed my neck, cutting off my air. I didn't fight him. I relished the dizzy feeling from the lack of oxygen. Instead of trying to push his hands away, I brought mine to his body.

I skimmed his arms, his chest, his abs. Feeling him. I never broke our gaze. His hold loosened, letting me take short breaths. I took in enough air to speak.

"Kiss me before you kill me." That soft look appeared in his blue eyes again. "Please."

But if I thought that meant he'd take it easy on me, I was wrong. His lips crashed onto mine. He sucked the remaining oxygen from my lungs as our tongues rubbed together. I ran

my fingers through his thick hair, keeping him close. He plunged in and out of my mouth at the same rapid rate his hips thrust into me.

My clit ground against his groin. Sharp jolts of pleasure coursed through my body. His hold on my neck pulsed, pushing pain along with the pleasure. I'd never felt so consumed. So lost. So utterly alive.

I wanted to live in his moment forever, knowing it was the end. Knowing he wouldn't kill me, but he was done with me. He'd gotten what he wanted. I admitted what I felt for him. I broke. I begged.

"Say my name when you come." Maddox growled, and his hold on my neck loosened.

"Maddox." I managed to moan before his fingers flexed again.

Heat pooled in my stomach as my body strung taut. The lack of oxygen making my fingers and toes tingle. My nails dug into his skin, his blood dripping down as I exploded around him again. A gush of wetness burst between my legs as my vision went black.

I didn't know if it was his hold on my neck or the massive orgasm, but I felt the world drifting away. Or maybe I closed my eyes because I could still hear Maddox.

"Oh, my little dove. You love my pain. You're squirting for me." He groaned as his hips snapped again. His body shuddered above me as he filled me with his cum. His own

release mixing with mine. I wanted it. Wanted the proof that he was as lost as me.

He loosened his hold on my neck but kept his hand there. His head rested on my shoulder, and his hot breath made goosebumps race down my body. Maddox's voice was the last thing I heard before the world went dark.

“My little dove. Mine.”

## Maddox

**A**s many times as I killed, I'd never thought about death. Never wondered what those last moments felt like. If there was peace or fear in the end. If people thought of loved ones or all the mistakes they'd made. If they could tell it was the end or if it surprised them.

I'd thought about it tonight.

When my hands were squeezing the life from Kincaid's body, I'd wondered what she was feeling. Wondered if she was welcoming it. She'd told me she wanted to die. I'd envisioned killing her before. Felt the rush it would give me.

But then she'd smiled and placed her hand on my chest. Those wintery eyes locked with mine. It wasn't because she wanted to die and had accepted it; I could still see the life in her. See the fire to live.

It was like she was accepting this part of me. This disregard for killing. The thrill I got from it. Like she was telling me she saw the demon inside, and she wanted him.

It was then I realized I couldn't kill her. I never would. I still thought I would let her go through. Thought I would break her and toss her used body aside.

Then my world crumbled. She rearranged it.

The second I'd slid into her tight pussy, felt her fall apart for me, it changed everything I thought I knew about myself. I believed I was incapable of feeling emotions. Sure, I felt anger or satisfaction at someone's death. But nothing had prepared me for what being inside Kincaid felt like. Then she begged me to kiss her.

I never wanted to kiss anyone. In fact, I couldn't even remember the last time I had. Kissing was an act of tenderness. It was a representation of affection. A feeling I didn't think I was capable of. But when her lips touched mine, I knew I could. I could feel something.

For her.

I lost control. My chest tightened. The blood stilled in my body. My only focus was her. All I thought about in that moment was Kincaid. Her beautiful blood-soaked body. Her white blonde hair flowing around her. Her moans of pleasure and pain. Her hands on me. Her lips on mine. Emotions I couldn't name clawed at my insides.

It wasn't love; I was too fucked up for that. It was worse. It was obsession. Madness. She was mine. I knew it.

She was made to take my pain. To take my cum. She was designed to give me peace in this world. She was made for me

alone. And I was never letting her go.

If I was someone else, someone who could feel love, I might have let her go. Let her live without my soulless demon tainting her. But if I was a better man, a weaker man, I already would've done that. There was no way out for her now.

I wasn't a good man. I wasn't even an okay one. I was the worst. Probably couldn't even be considered a man with all the depraved things I did. Enjoyed doing.

Kincaid let out a soft whimper as I finally pulled from her body. I hadn't wanted to leave her, but we couldn't stay like this. My cock twitched again as I looked at her, utterly destroyed on the table. Her eyes were closed, her breathing even as if she'd passed out. Her body was damp and flushed. There was dried blood on her skin, and my cum trailed down her thighs. I wanted to slam back inside her. But I wouldn't.

That alone was enough for me to realize the depth of what I felt for her. That I cared enough to not want to hurt her further. That I was willing to delay my pleasure to tend to her.

I scooped her up, cradling her in my arms. Her head lolled to the side, resting on my shoulder. I inhaled her powdery scent that was now ruined by everything we'd done. I didn't bother covering her naked body as I carried her from the room and up the stairs. After Tristan had walked in on her, I'd made it very clear what would happen if anyone disturbed us again.

My bare feet didn't make a sound on the carpet as I placed her on my bed. She probably needed a shower, but I didn't want to wake her. Instead, I went to the bathroom. I soaked a

few washcloths in the sink and brought them back to the bed. I ran the warm cloth over her body, doing the best I could to clean the dried blood from her porcelain skin. I loved looking at it, but she couldn't sleep like that.

I bent forward and licked a drop that had landed on her beaded nipple. It mixed with the taste of her skin, making my cock ache again. Kincaid moaned quietly but didn't stir from her sleep. I wasn't used to holding myself back. If I wanted something, I took it. I already had her. Now I needed to keep her.

I'd pushed her far enough tonight. The cloth caught on a jagged edge of her skin. My eyes were pulled to the cut she'd given herself. I hadn't expected it. Still didn't understand why she did it.

Maybe that was what drew me to her. Her unpredictability. Or maybe it was how she took my pain. Craved it.

There was an undeniable attraction, but I'd fucked a lot of good looking women. I'd never desired a single one in the way I desired Kincaid. I'd become bored of them. I'd never been able to push one as far as I pushed my little dove. And not one of them had looked at me the way she had.

Like she saw what was beneath the mask. Like she saw me. Truly saw how depraved I was, but she didn't care. No, that wasn't right. She did care. She cared about me.

She lit my blood on fire even as she soothed me. She calmed the crazy enough that I could sit here with her naked body and care for her. I'd never taken care of any of the others.

Never brought one home. I hadn't fucked outside of the sex club in years.

My little dove wasn't like the others. She never was, as much as I tried to make her. And because she was different, I needed to be different too. I needed to fight back the demon inside me. I couldn't force her to be here with me anymore. Couldn't pay her. Eventually, she'd find her way out, and I'd lose her.

She'd already admitted to wanting to kill herself. I couldn't risk that my control would push her over the edge to a place I couldn't bring her back from. I'd have to try and understand her instead. Try to convince her she wanted this.

Me.

I tossed the rags in the laundry basket before walking back to the bed. I pulled the blankets down and picked up my little dove. I settled her against my body as I covered us. Still naked, her head rested on my chest, her soft breaths tickling my skin. Her arm sprawled across my stomach. I pulled one of her legs over mine as I tucked her close.

I kissed the top of her head as I whispered in her ear. "You're never going to want to die again. You're mine to protect now. Even from yourself."

## Kincaid

I squeezed my eyes tighter, trying to shut out the bright light that flared behind my closed lids. I didn't want to wake up. My body still felt drained. And the bed was warm. The soft sheets caressing my naked skin.

Wait. Naked? Why was I naked? I never slept naked.

Oh my god. I shot up, clutching the sheet to my chest as I looked around.

I was in Maddox's bedroom. Or what I assumed was his room because I'd never been in here before. The layout was similar to the guest room. To the right was the door to the hallway; to the left were giant picture windows with a beautifully upholstered bench seat underneath and double doors in the middle. I'd love to curl up there and read a book. Directly across from the bed were two open doors, one leading to a spectacularly updated bathroom; the other to a walk-in closet.

I was sitting on a king-size four-poster bed with black sheets. The curtains were also black, and the carpet was a dark gray. The wallpaper was dark with a slight renaissance pattern. It looked like a place a vampire or cruel duke would live in the eighteen century. And it fit Maddox. Dark and dangerous.

Why was I here? He'd always taken me home after... well, just after. Last night was the first time we'd slept together, but I was sure he would toss me aside when he was done. I'd given him what he wanted. I expected to be dragged from the house by Tristan and unceremoniously dropped off at my doorstep.

Instead, I found myself naked in Maddox's room. I needed to find my clothes. I needed to leave. Urgency rushed through me. I didn't want to face him after what we'd done last night. With any luck, he'd already left to do whatever it was he did every day.

Hopefully, there would be clothes for me in the guest room. I'd walk to a busy street and get a cab. Or call for a ride. What time was it? Maybe Tessa was awake. Although she slept late because of her shifts at the club.

My foot landed on the incredibly plush carpet, but before I could put the other one down, the door opened. My breath stilled as Maddox walked in carrying a tray. He placed the tray on the nightstand beside me. He was dressed in low-slung black sweatpants. No shirt.

I couldn't take my eyes away from his rippling muscles as he walked across the room. I'd never seen him in anything

other than a suit. I was too far gone last night to really enjoy the view. But I was enjoying it now.

He was... beautiful. Unfairly gorgeous. Dark, slightly curly hair, piercing blue eyes, olive skin. It was a deadly combination.

“What are you doing?” His voice was sharp. I found myself looking at the floor, unable to meet his gaze.

“I...um... just let me find some clothes, and I’ll leave.” I wrapped the sheet around me as I took a step forward. It was ridiculous to try and be modest now, but it felt like a shield. One I desperately needed. Maddox grabbed my wrist, stopping me.

“Leave?” The question in his tone confused me. My brows scrunched as I looked at him.

“Yeah. Leave. Like I usually do.”

His jaw tensed, and his eyes sparked with anger. Was he angry I was still here? Once again, I was on uneven ground with him. I never knew what to expect. His gaze burned my skin as he looked to where I was holding the sheet against my chest. His strong fingers closed around it, and he ripped it from my body. I let out a screech as I tried to keep myself covered.

“Don’t hide from me. I’ve seen every inch of this body.” His deep voice made me shiver as he whispered in my ear. “I’ve touched it, tasted it, and made it bleed. Now get your ass back in bed and eat breakfast.”

“B-Breakfast?” I tried to blink to clear the confusion. Maybe I was still sleeping, and this was a dream. I’d wake up in my own bed last night, never having had happened. Maybe all of it was a dream, and I’d never met Maddox.

My gut twisted at the thought. It wasn’t a dream. A nightmare? Possibly.

“You didn’t eat dinner last night.”

When I just stood there staring at him, Maddox let out a growl. He grabbed my hips and tossed me back onto the bed before following. He sat with his back to the headboard. I yelped and tried to crawl away, but he latched onto my ankle. He pulled me to him, easily manipulating my petite body.

He placed me on the bed in front of him. His legs caging me in, my back pressed to his front. My breasts filled his palms as he settled me flush against his body.

I moaned, and my head fell against his shoulder as he pinched my nipples between his thumbs. My mind was a confusing swirl of questions with no answers. I had no idea what I was doing, but my body didn’t have that problem. It wanted him. It had always wanted him.

“If you don’t want to eat, I can find something else to fill that pretty mouth of yours.” Maddox’s lips attacked my neck. I jerked as his teeth sunk into my skin. As sore as my body was from last night, I still responded. My pussy clenched painfully as my neck throbbed.

“*Mia amata*, you’re covered in my marks today. You’re like my own beautiful mosaic. Mine to decorate.” He licked where he’d bitten me. “I should leave this abused neck alone. But I can’t help it when your pussy begs for the pain.”

I couldn’t see the marks on my neck, but from what I could see, he was right. There were finger-shaped bruises on my thighs and hips. A dull ache from where the glass had cut my skin. And my fingers felt sore from how tightly I’d clutched the table.

Flashes of last night came back to me. The feel of blood coating my skin. The dizziness from lack of oxygen. The intense pleasure. Maddox’s groans as his warmth filled me. I gasped and jerked in his hold, but Maddox pulled me down again.

“You’re not going anywhere, my little dove.”

“No. I wasn’t—.” I let out a deep breath and forced myself to relax in his hold. “You didn’t wear a condom.”

My words were whispered as my cheeks flushed with embarrassment. It wasn’t solely his responsibility. I was in charge of keeping myself safe, and a condom hadn’t even crossed my mind last night. I’d been so absorbed by him. By the finality, I felt in the air. My only focus was on the pleasure. The pain.

“I’ll never wear one with you.” I tried to turn and look at him, but he wouldn’t let me.

“Maddox.” I felt his growl of approval as I said his name. For some reason, he loved hearing me say it. “We can’t do that.”

“Why not? You’re on the shot. We’re both clean.” He shrugged.

“How did yo-.” I didn’t bother finishing the question. He’d already made it clear he could find out whatever he wanted about me. Apparently, private medical records were within his reach as well. “What if things have changed? I could’ve caught something recently?”

I didn’t know why I said it. I hadn’t had sex in years and never without a condom. But I felt the need to provoke him.

I was angry because he knew too much about me. Angry because I wanted to know him, understand him. Because I knew he wanted to get rid of me. Because he made me want to stay.

Maddox fisted my hair and tugged me roughly until my face was tipped up to his. My scalp burned pleasantly. I could see his jaw working back and forth like he was trying to control his anger. I wasn’t sure why. He’d never tried to tame his rage around me before.

“Who else has filled my cunt with cum?” My eyes widened as his darkened. I could see the demon clawing to get out. Feel the rage pumping off him. He shook me, not hard, but enough for pain to spark along my abused body. “Fucking tell me, or I’ll kill every one of your exes. I’ll kill any man

who's spent time with you. Then I'll come back here and fuck your mouth with their blood still on my skin."

I groaned in my own head because I wasn't as disgusted as I should be. I should've been horrified. Instead, my body tingled at the possessive way he spoke about me.

"Kincaid." His voice was a blade cutting into my skin.

"No one." His eyes narrowed like he didn't believe me. It was wrong, but I wanted to soothe him. I brought my hands to his face running my fingers through the stubble covering his jaw. His eyes closed as I touched him. "I've always used a condom. No other man has ever touched me the way you have."

His eyes flew open again, boring into me. "And they never will. You'll only take my cum. My cock. My hands. My mouth. We're never using condoms. I want to feel you while you shatter around me. I want you to feel what you do to me."

All the air left my lungs. What was happening? He was supposed to be done with me. Yesterday was the end. So why was he saying this? And why did I want it?

Before I could process his words, Maddox's dragged me up his body until his lips crashed onto mine. He took whatever oxygen remained as he sucked my tongue into his mouth. He thrust deeply, tasting every inch of me.

My fingers caressed the thick strands of his hair as I hung onto him, trying to keep myself grounded. I was delirious. Lost in him.

I gasped as he broke the kiss, but Maddox stayed closed. His eyes searched my face as if I held the answers to the universe. His thumbs stroked my cheeks. My lips. My neck. Reverently. Lovingly.

It was so different from how he'd touched me before that I didn't know what to do. So I spoke the words that had been rattling around in my head.

"You got what you wanted." My voice came out as a whimper. I didn't know if I was afraid I was right or wrong. "I begged. Broke."

"That's not what I want anymore."

"Then what do you want?" My eyes flicked back and forth between his. They were so much brighter than I'd ever seen. Almost...alive.

Abruptly he maneuvered my body again. He turned me to face him, burying my face into his neck. My eyes closed as I inhaled the scent that was uniquely him; manly and a little smoky. I felt more than heard his next word. It was a deep rumble in his chest.

"You."

## Kincaid

**Y***ou.*

That one word, spoken in Maddox's deep voice, had been rolling around in my head all day. I'd paced my apartment for so long I was afraid I'd make a hole straight through the floor and send myself tumbling into the rooms below.

Me. Maddox wanted me. What did that mean?

He'd had me. We slept together. He'd broken me. Shattered me to pieces so small, I wasn't sure they'd ever be put back together again. He'd made me admit I wanted him too. Despite the fact that I shouldn't. Despite who and what he was. Despite how I'd come to be in his presence.

What more could he want from me? I was no one. An out-of-work waitress. Or a prostitute if I considered what I'd been paid to do with Maddox. I wasn't made for his life. Not just the violence of it. But the money.

I was born with nothing, and I knew I would die with nothing. Stories of people pulling themselves up from situations like mine were the exceptions, not the rule. And those people had skills and help. I didn't have either of those things. I was utterly ordinary. And utterly alone. I had no one in this world.

A deep ache radiated in my bones. But for the first time in a while, I didn't let it settle. I didn't think about the oblivion of death. My hand went to my neck. Brushing gently along the bruises I knew were there. I'd faced death. Looked it in the eyes. It hadn't brought the peace I'd thought it would. Instead, it had been a thrill. I felt more alive in that moment than I ever had before.

Was I crazy to want to feel it again? For wanting to go back to Maddox?

He'd changed the rules again. I didn't know what was happening between us. Would he still pay me? How long would he want me? Would he get bored? What would happen then?

I couldn't wrap my mind around how different he'd been this morning. After his startling announcement, he'd feed me breakfast in bed as I sat in his lap. He watched intently as I swallowed the eggs and fruit he'd brought up. He had an obsession with watching me eat. I didn't understand that either.

Then he'd taken me into his giant shower; it was big enough for ten people. He'd washed the remnants of our night

from my body. My blood and his cum. He'd tenderly washed my hair before fucking me roughly with my face pressed into the tiles. I'd fallen apart as he'd slapped my ass raw.

Afterward, he'd cleaned me again. Then disinfected the cut on my leg before bandaging it up. He'd even dressed me. It was like I was a doll who couldn't take care of myself. Which is exactly how I'd felt. I don't think I could've gotten ready without him. My mind felt like it was in a fog.

Instead of sending me home with one of his guards, he'd driven me himself in an expensive sports car I'd never seen. The whole way, he'd held my hand against his muscular thigh. I didn't speak.

In fact, I don't remember speaking at all after he'd said those words. He'd kissed me possessively at my door and whispered that he'd see me tomorrow.

Tomorrow. I was supposed to wait until tomorrow to get answers. To figure out what he'd meant when he said he wanted me.

Maybe I should figure out what I wanted. Did I want to be his? Did I want him?

My body craved the pain and ecstasy he brought, but could I overlook who he was? He was a murderer. A Mafia boss. I'd told myself that a hundred times already, and it hadn't stopped me from going back to the private room in Entice. Or accepting his offer of selling my body to him. And I didn't think it was going to stop me now.

Not after we'd finally been together. I knew it would be different than anything else I'd ever had. Knew it would be explosive. But it was so far beyond that I didn't even know how to explain it. Didn't have the words to put together all my feelings.

I'd thought all my books had been lying when they described that moment. The moment where sex was more than just the physical. Where it was a pivotal moment of your life. A turning point in your existence. But that's exactly how it felt. I'd never experienced it before, so I didn't think it existed. But it did. I'd had that with Maddox.

With a demon.

And he'd had it with me. Or at least I think that was why things had changed. He'd changed. I didn't know. The only thing I knew for sure was that whatever this was between us wasn't over. I think it might have just started.

## Kincaid

A dampness hung in the air as I stood on the curb in front of my apartment, as I'd done many times since my agreement with Maddox. I rubbed my arms, trying to push away the chill that wanted to cling to my skin.

Tonight felt like the first night. A mix of fear and anticipation. I didn't know what to expect. Didn't know how his words, his claim over me, would change whatever this was.

The sound of water splashing under tires drew my attention to the car that stopped in front of me. I paused for a moment, waiting to see if Maddox would open the back door and greet me, but nothing happened. The door remained closed. Disappointment settled in my gut. Why did I think anything would be different?

Except it was. Usually, whoever was driving would come to open my door, but tonight no one did. Tentatively I walked forward. My hand closed around the cold, wet handle as I opened the door. My body tensed as if for an attack. Nothing

happened. I released a breath I didn't know I was holding and slid into the seat.

Tristan glared at me from the front. I could see the animosity in his eyes through the rearview mirror. I could also see one of them was swollen with a dark bruise forming underneath. I turned my head away.

He'd always made me uncomfortable, but tonight was different. It could have just been my nerves, but his rage felt personal today. Before, it had felt generalized, like he disliked all women. Though he owned them because of his status. Oddly enough, I'd never felt that from Maddox, even though he'd literally paid me. He should've been the one I was afraid of, not Tristan.

Maddox was physically strong. More powerful. Higher up on the food chain. A predator. But desperation could cause the most damage. I would know. And Tristan reeked of desperation. Even I could tell he was power-hungry. Eager to prove himself.

I stared out the window the entire drive, not wanting to provoke him in any way. Not that we'd ever talked before. But I wouldn't risk tonight being the night he turned his sights on me. I didn't feel strong enough to deal with two monsters. Maddox waited for me. I only had enough in me to handle him.

After what felt like an eternity, we pulled up to the now-familiar mansion. Maddox waited for me on the stone steps. My heart fluttered as my stomach tightened. The reaction was

unwelcome and startling. He opened the door and grasped my hand before I could shove the emotions away.

“*Mia amata.*” He whispered before bringing his lips to mine. He kissed me easily as if we’d been doing it this entire time. Not like he’d only done it for the first time two nights ago. I eagerly kissed him back.

We walked into the house with my hand clasped in his. His body warming my chilled skin. Once inside, I dropped his hand and headed for the stairs. It had become my routine I would go change in the guest room before joining him for dinner.

Maddox caught me outside the guest room door. His arms wrapping around my waist. He pulled me to his chest. Sending a shiver down my spine as he whispered in my ear. “Not there, little dove. My room.”

My lungs seized as we walked further down the hall. He kept me tucked into his side. I didn’t know if I was afraid, confused, or excited. Emotions swirled and mixed together, too hard to identify just one.

“Find something to wear.” He gestured to his walk-in closet. “I’ll meet you on the balcony for dinner.”

He disappeared through double doors leading to what I presumed was a balcony. I blinked at his back a few times before my feet carried me to the closet. I didn’t know what he expected me to find in there to wear. I suppose I could put on another of his dress shirts, but it was a little cold outside to eat dinner with bare legs.

I pushed the door open and sucked in a shocked breath. One side of the closet was full of suits, ties, and men's shoes, all Maddox's. On the other side was a collection of designer clothes. Dresses, jeans, tops, shoes, bags, even jewelry. All of it expensive. All of it in my size.

When? How? Why?

My mind couldn't even form the full sentences. My hand shot out, caressing the soft fabrics between my fingers. Other than the few things Maddox had bought me, I'd never touched anything this beautiful. This luxurious.

Overwhelmed, I settled on a pair of dark gray pants and a black cashmere sweater. It draped off one shoulder, showing off the red lace of the bralette I'd also put on.

It was comfortable and would keep me warm. But there was a subtly sexiness I knew Maddox would like. I decided to leave my feet bare. I didn't even bother to look at the jewelry. I rarely wore any, and I was too stunned to process the sparkly jewels that looked like diamonds.

I pulled my long blonde locks from the sweater as I walked to the balcony door. An intricately carved wrought iron table sat in the middle of the large space. Balcony was a loose term. It was more like an upstairs deck or patio. I didn't know the difference, but the space felt too big to be called a balcony.

It had a magnificent view of the yard I'd never seen before. The rain sparkled on the damp grass. Beyond the vast lawn was a forest. The house was surrounded on four sides by

trees. It seemed to go on forever. From here, I couldn't see a single other house.

I was transfixed by the beauty of it all when my eyes caught on the red light of a camera. Then I noticed the armed guard who patrolled at the edge of the trees, and I remembered where I was. Who I was with. What had been done to get the money to buy all this. I wanted that fact to detract from its beauty, but it didn't.

“Hungry?” Maddox's voice pulled my gaze to him.

He sat at the table which had been set for dinner. It was more intimate than the dining room. Two place settings with a flower arrangement and candles burning in the middle. I stared as the candlelight flickered in his eyes. They made them look more alive than normal. Less black and more blue. Or maybe it was because something was changing between us. I felt it, and now I could see it.

I walked on unsteady feet to sit next to him. The change in our routine, the confusion of not understanding what he wanted, made my limbs shake with nerves. As fucked up as the situation was before, I had come to understand his expectations. I had fallen into a rhythm with him. Now I felt like I was on unsteady ground. It was foolish of me to think I ever had been steady with Maddox.

I picked up my fork, spearing a piece of asparagus and bringing it to my mouth. It was delicious, the flavors exploding on my tongue. We sat in silence for a while.

I didn't know what to do. What to talk about. Before, we had always been at war. It had been a game, each of us trying to outsmart the other. To dig out information and use it to our advantage. Without that, what we were supposed to do?

I glanced up to see Maddox wasn't eating. Instead, he was leaning back in his chair, a glass of whiskey in his hand, as he stared at me. I swallowed the bite in my mouth before addressing him. "You're not hungry?"

"I like watching you eat more." He shrugged like that was a normal thing to say.

"Maddox, what's going on?" The clang of my fork on the table was loud in my ears, setting my nerves further on edge.

"What do you mean, my little dove?"

Wait, *my* little dove? Had he always said it like that? Had I never noticed before? Or was he claiming ownership of me for the first time?

I shook off the thoughts. It wasn't important. I needed to sort through what this was. I couldn't sit here, becoming more and more strung out.

"This." I motioned with my hand in between us. "This isn't what we do. Why did you let me stay the other night? Why are you still bringing me here? Why are there clothes in your closet that are my size, and when did you get them?"

He set his drink on the table, his strong fingers running around the rim of the glass. Were fingers supposed to be sexy?

Because his were. My eyes snapped to his at the sound of his deep voice.

“You stayed, and you’re here because I want you to be. The clothes are yours. I’ll also be providing you with a credit card you can use for any of your expenses. I’ll pay your rent as while.” He tapped his fingers on the glass as if he was thinking. “Although it’s not a good neighborhood, I’d much rather you moved in here.”

I put my hands up and shook my head in confusion. “Wait! What? A credit card? Rent? Move in?”

He wrapped his fingers around my wrists, tugging me forward until I sat in his lap. His hand skimmed up my back, gripping the nape of my neck until his piercing blue eyes stared into mine. “Did you think I wouldn’t take care of you?”

I blinked, trying to understand. “Why?”

His lips brushed along my exposed neck sending goosebumps down my skin and making my nipples harden behind my sweater. I sucked in a harsh breath, trying to calm my reaction. “Because you’re mine.”

“And what was I before?” His face buried in my neck. I heard the deep inhale. I didn’t know if he was absorbing my scent or trying to ignore my question. Maybe all the questions were making him mad.

“A toy.” That one word felt like a slap. Anger boiled my blood. I shoved at his chest and tried to break free of his hold.

I knew it, of course. I wasn't a person to him. I never had been. It was only in my own stupid mind that I'd thought we could be something else. It was my foolishness, my romantic notions, that wanted him to care. But he didn't. He couldn't. Because he didn't feel emotions like the rest of us humans.

It was me who had developed feelings. From my need to connect with the person who'd seen inside me. Who'd seen my desires and made them come true. Who made it okay for me to feel them. The person who'd protected me from another monster.

But all of it had been for him. It was selfish. He'd done it to keep his toy from being broken by another.

"Let me go." I struggled against him. My fists hitting his muscular chest. Weakly. I was weak in body and mind.

Maddox grabbed both my wrists in one hand, shoving them behind my back. My breasts thrust forward into his body. His face was hard with rage, inches from mine. My chest fell with ragged breaths as my lips pressed together.

"Stop!" He growled. "Or I'll start counting your punishments."

"Fuck you." I grit out as I clenched down. My jaw was locked so tight I was worried I'd shatter all my teeth.

He smirked, the sadistic gleam shining behind his eyes. "If that's what you want, my little slut."

## Maddox

**M**y cock tightened as the threat left my mouth. The demon inside me clawed to get out. Raging at her dismissal. As much as I didn't want to admit it, she had started to change me. I wanted to be better for her. But what was life-changing for me didn't affect her. It pissed me off. Made me want to take it out on her flesh.

I wanted this to go differently. I wanted to try and show her how I felt. So I bought her things. Brought her further into my house. My bed. Tried to explain how it would be different. But she was too focused on how it had started.

Fuck it. If I had to cage her to keep her, then I would.

I stood with her in my arms. Kincaid squirmed against my hold and protested, but she would never be able to break free of me. I stalked through the door and back to my bed. She bounced on the mattress as I tossed her down. My hands went to either side of her head, caging her in. My face was inches from hers.

“You are mine. I’ll fuck the truth into you if I have to.” I growled as I attacked her neck. I bit and sucked until she was withering underneath me. Her hips bucking up into mine.

“I’m not an object to be owned. I can’t be bought with pretty things.” I whipped the sweater over her head, exposing her tits encased in lace. I sucked one beaded nipple into my mouth roughly until she screamed in pain. “Stop.”

It was the first time she’d ever told me to stop. But I was too far gone to care. Her words didn’t penetrate my anger. My need to possess her.

“You come on my cock; you’re mine.” I moved to the other side, treating it just as harshly. I wanted her to feel me tomorrow. I pulled back and unbuttoned her pants, roughly ripping them off her body. My fingers skimmed up her porcelain skin until they brushed the lace of her panties. The red lace. That she’d put on for me.

I groaned at the sight and the damp spot forming on them. She could get angry. Pretend she didn’t want to be here. But she did.

“You’re not the only cock I’ve come on.” She whispered, looking away from me.

My vision turned red. Flames ate at my insides. I could hear my blood roaring in my ears. I’d never felt rage like this before. I doubt there was anything else in the world that would elicit this reaction. Anyone else.

I stood before her. I could see the fear in her eyes. The moment she realized she'd made a mistake. That she'd pushed me too far. I glared down at her.

Her chest shaking with ragged breaths. Her thighs wet from her arousal. Her cheeks flushed. Her tongue licking her lips with nerves. I'd never seen anything more beautiful or anything more deserving of my pain.

"This isn't how I wanted tonight to go." I said as I slowly undid my belt. A snap filled the air as I pulled it from the loops of my pants. She flinched at the sound.

I wrapped the belt around my hand as I stepped out of my clothes. I watched her eyes frantically flick around. To my face, the belt, my thick cock aching for her, the door. For the first time, I didn't relish her fear. I was too out of control to enjoy it.

Suddenly Kincaid sat up on the edge of the bed. Her hands shot out. One curled around mine and the belt. The other cupped my jaw. My body locked at her gentle touch. I whipped my head down to look at her. Kincaid's soft white blonde hair floated around her face making her look as innocent as she used to be. Before me.

"Stop. Please." Her soft voice cut into my skin. Kincaid didn't beg. She saw it as a weakness. She wouldn't have said it if she didn't mean it.

Her fingertips brushed my lips. Softly. She rubbed across the pulse point on my wrist. I closed my eyes at the gentle touch, leaning into her. My rage cooled. The demons lay back

down. Something about her calming me in a way only she could.

“How did you want it to go?” Her voice was a whisper barely heard over the pounding of my blood.

“Different. I didn’t want to force you... like before.” I admitted. I didn’t feel bad for what I’d done. I wasn’t capable of those kinds of emotions. And even if I was, I wouldn’t. My ways had brought me my little dove. Kept her this long.

She wrapped both arms around my waist. Her forehead came to my stomach as she slumped forward. It was like all the fight had been drained from her.

“You never forced me.” She whispered. “I wanted it. I wanted every touch. I wanted you.”

The air left my lungs in a rush as the belt dropped for my hands. It made a dull thud as it hit the carpet. I delicately ran my fingers through her hair before tracing down her fragile spine.

“Wanted?” A vulnerability I’d never heard before bleed into my voice.

She tilted her head to look up at me. Her wintery gray eyes round, full of questions and emotions. I saw them all flick beyond her features.

“I don’t understand any of this. I don’t understand what I’m feeling for you. I should hate you. But I don’t. I don’t understand what you feel for me. If you feel for me.” The last

words were whispered almost as if she hadn't meant to say them out loud. "What do you want from me?"

I wanted her to be mine. Only mine. I wanted her to be as consumed by me as I was by her. I wanted her to live and breathe me. I wanted all of her until there was nothing left. "For you to want to stay here. With me."

"Then you can't coerce me."

I could, but I knew I shouldn't. The only way to make her stay was to let her walk willingly into the cage. Otherwise, the parts I craved in her; her strength, her attitude, her emotions, would wither away and die. I didn't want any part of her to die.

I stepped back from Kincaid, missing the feel of her immediately. I bent down to grab her sweater I'd thrown to the floor earlier. The fabric was soft in my hands but not as soft as her. I pulled it back over her head. I moved her like a doll, slipping her arms through the holes until she was covered again. It was long enough that it hit her mid-thigh.

Silently I pulled down the covers on the bed before gathering her in my arms. I sat with my back to the headboard, Kincaid sitting between my legs. My arms were wrapped around her waist as her head rested on my shoulder. She let out a resigned sigh before snuggling closer.

My hands run up and down Kincaid's body. From her shoulder to the dip in her waist over her hip down to her thigh and back again. Her calm soaked into my bones as her silky skin ran beneath my fingertips. Ever since I'd started to feed

her, her curves had become more pronounced. I saw how the confusion furrowed her brow when I watched her eat. She probably thought it had something to do with the way her plump lips closed around her fork. My dick throbbed at the thought too. But that wasn't it. I liked knowing her body was filling out. That she wasn't starving herself anymore. That's what had grown the fetish.

I relished her curves. The feel of them as I thrust into her. How they marked so easily for me. The way they molded against my hard body like she was made to fit with me. Like she was my missing piece.

"I want to take care of you. I want to give you all the things I said. I want you to be mine." I said, placing a kiss into her hair.

It should've felt strange to be gentle with her. Gentle wasn't something I did. My fingers brushed the cut on her thigh. The one I'd put there a few nights ago. But it didn't feel strange. It felt right. Like she was the only person, I could be this way with.

She softened my edges. Made me want to feel things. And I would try. For her. To keep her.

"Don't I get a say in any of this?" She grumbled. She tried to cross her arms, but I captured her hands, intertwining our fingers.

"I should say yes, but I don't know if I could respect your decision if you decided to leave." I brought our hands to my mouth. Nipping at each of her fingers softly. "I'd found you

again and tie you naked to my bed until you agreed. You know I can be very persistent when I want something.”

“And now you want me.” Her voice wavered like she didn’t believe anyone could want her. I hated that she saw less of herself. I hated that I had contributed to it. I’d bought her. I was still trying to buy her. Using circumstances beyond her control to twist her will. And for the first time, I cared.

“I’ve always wanted you. I’ve wanted to touch you. Hurt you. Fuck you. From the moment you walked into that room, little dove. I haven’t thought of anything else since that day. But now I want you to stay. To choose to be here.”

I continued to stroke her body. To try and take away the possessiveness of my words with a gentle touch. I was intense, but I couldn’t stop it. She was mine. I knew it the second I’d sunk into her perfect cunt. She just needed to realize it.

“What do you need, *mia amata*? How can I show you this is different?”

She was quiet for a long time. I wasn’t sure she was ever going to answer. I wondered if I’d lost her. If my outburst, my loss of control, had ruined what I was trying to build. All I could do was wait.

I kept the demon at bay by touching Kincaid. I trailed kisses down her neck. Brushed the hair from her face. Licked her pulse. Inhaled her powdery scent.

“I don’t like Tristan.” I had become so lost in her body that her words felt like they were coming through a long tunnel. It

took a minute for the shock to register. “I don’t want him to drive me anymore.”

This is what she wanted? She could ask me for anything. Money. Power. I could give it all to her. This girl always surprised me.

“He’s one of my best men.” I said.

“You’re the one who asked. If you’re forcing me to stay, then could you at least respect some of what I need?”

“Forcing you? It didn’t seem like I was forcing you the other night when you screamed and came all over my cock.” I nipped at her neck, where the bruises from my fingers still marred her body. Her pulse jumped beneath my lips, making my cock throb in response.

“Maddox, please.” She squirmed against me, only making me harder. But I pushed it aside to listen to her concerns. This is what I had to do if I wanted to change for her. “Tristan touched me the first day he brought me here. It was just a brush, but there was this look in his eyes like he thought he was allowed to do it. I didn’t know then if it was okay or not. I haven’t felt comfortable with him since. And there was that one time when he... saw us.”

I ground my teeth together at the thought of another man touching her. Any man. I might have treated her like I owned her, but no one else was allowed to. She was mine. Her body was mine to touch, no one else. I pictured all the ways I could make him suffer for upsetting her. The images cooled my anger enough to speak.

“He’ll be spoken to.” I could feel her relax as if she didn’t think I’d take her concerns seriously. It was my fault. I hadn’t made her feel safe here. I didn’t know how to do that. But I would try. “He’s not allowed to touch you. None of them are. No one touches you but me.”

Kincaid tilted her head to look at me, a smile on her beautiful lips. “What if I’m dying, and they need to give me mouth-to-mouth?”

“They can save you.” I placed a gentle kiss on her nose. “Then I’ll cut off the lips that touched yours.”

I swallowed her shocked gasp as I devoured her mouth. I poured everything I had into the kiss. I sucked her tongue into my mouth, feasting on her. I nipped her lip until she cried out as I fisted her hair.

I wanted to kiss down her neck. Between her legs. Wanted to hear her scream in pain. But I curbed the urge. I had a feeling fucking her would push her away. So for the first time in my life, I thought about how someone else felt.

## Kincaid

**M**y heart raced as Maddox broke our kiss. His lips trailed down my neck. I expected him to keep going, to finish what he started earlier. But instead, he settled back against the bed with me in his arms.

I had no idea what to make of all this. When I'd taunted him earlier, I'd never seen such rage on his face. I really thought I'd pushed him too far. That he would kill me. That all the words about wanting to keep me and me being his were well-crafted lies.

Then I'd touched his face, begged him to stop, and he did. For the first time since I'd known him, he listened to my words. He was giving me a choice. Asking me what I wanted. He'd looked so vulnerable when he told me he didn't want to force me anymore.

I couldn't let him believe that was the truth. As much as I'd fought him, fought myself, I wanted to be here. Wanted him. I didn't want to want him. But I can't change what I felt.

But we couldn't continue the way it was. If it was going to be more, it had to be honest. I couldn't be something he bought. We had to forge a real connection. Outside of sex. Outside of manipulation.

Maddox kissed the top of my head as he brushed my stomach. Even through the fabric of my clothes, my body tingled from his touch. "What else do you need, my little dove?"

"A connection." I could hear the yearning in my voice. I wanted to know him. Know the man that fought with his demons. The one who was trying to show himself to me. "Tell me something about yourself."

"Like what?" He nipped my earlobe. I didn't know if he was purposefully distracting me, but I wouldn't let it work, no matter how good it felt.

"I don't know." I shrugged. "What's your favorite color?"

"That's the big question you have." He laughed, making my whole body shake. I couldn't stop the smile breaking out across my face.

"I'm just easing you in, boss."

"Boss. I like that." He growled. "You can call me that next time I fuck you, my little slut."

"You wish." He grunted as I lightly elbowed him. He trapped my arms and bit the side of my neck in punishment before soothing the ache with his tongue.

I'd never seen this side of him. I didn't think it was possible for him to be relaxed. Playful. He was always so on edge. He'd only ever been angry or stoic with me. My heart fluttered as I snuggled closer to him.

“Black. My favorite color is black.”

“Shocking.” I deadpanned. “I suppose you already know my favorite color because you know everything about me.”

“Purple.” I rolled my eyes at his quick response.

I turned in his arms until I was straddling his lap. His blue eyes were everywhere, like he was trying to memorize my face. With one hand on his chest, I reached up with the other and pushed a curl that had fallen to his forehead. My hand moved down his face, smoothing a furrow in his brow before running through his stubble. The sharp hair rough along my palm.

“Tell me something we have in common. Something no one else knows.” I rubbed back and forth, surprised when he leaned into my touch for a second. He closed his eyes like he was pulling on a memory. His heart stuttered beneath my palm as if whatever he was thinking about was visceral enough to cause a physical reaction.

“I also know what it's like to be hungry. To wonder where or when your next meal is coming.” His deep voice rumbled through me. “Before my father... found me, I lived with my mother. She was a prostitute and a junkie. She thought she hit it big when she got pregnant with a Mafia boss' baby, but he

wanted nothing to do with her. So she took off before he could make her have an abortion.”

His words tore into my chest, ripping at my own wounds. I wondered if he'd ever told anyone this before. If these stories had been festering in him for years. Eating away at whatever was left of his soul.

Would the world be a better place if he had been aborted? It was a terrible thought. But... he was a murderer. The only thing I knew was that my world would've been less without him in it. I could no longer picture my life free of Maddox. I no longer wanted to.

“I think she always planned on going back. I don't know if she thought she could sell me to him or if he'd take care of her because she was my mother, but that wasn't the case. Like I told you, he killed her. But before that, we lived in decay. Our apartments were barely a step above living on the streets. She'd bring her clients home while I was there, making me hide in the closet while she *worked*. Any money she made went up her nose. I learned to steal from her clients so I could feed myself. She also made it clear every day that she hadn't wanted me. That I was a pawn in this game with my father.”

I could feel my heart bleeding in my chest. Ripping apart for a little boy who had never been loved. Whose parents had looked at his existence as a burden instead of a gift. It was no wonder he was the way he was. He'd gone from an abusive mother to a ruthless father. Not a single person had shown him kindness. Shown him what it meant to care for him.

He'd told me before that he'd been born this way. Maybe that was true. But maybe if he'd had loving parents, he wouldn't have ended up like this. He could've been your everyday psychopath. The coworker who lied for a promotion instead of a Mafia killer.

I wanted to tell him I was sorry. That she didn't deserve to be his mother. But I knew he wouldn't want my pity. Flames roared to life inside me. I'd never wanted to hurt a person more. I wasn't violent by nature, but I couldn't stand the idea that the person who gave life to him valued it so little. I cupped his cheeks as the rage burned in my eyes.

"If she were still alive, I'd kill her for what she did to you." Maddox's eyes flicked between mine before a smirk crossed his face.

"My little dove turning into a monster to protect me." He chuckled as he pressed a kiss to my lips. It seemed crazy to think we'd gone so long without kisses because now he gave them to me freely. "Okay, we've dug through my family history. Your turn."

"What? Don't you know already?" I tried to deflect. It was wrong. I wanted him to open up, but I didn't want to do the same. It wasn't fair to him. I cleared my throat. "My mother was great. My best friend. She died of cancer last year, and I miss her every day."

"I'm sorry, Kincaid." The sincerity in his voice helped soothe the ache.

It seemed silly to not talk about someone I loved so deeply. Why did we do that? Why did we ignore the dead like they hadn't mattered? Was it to protect ourselves? To hide from the memories. It was insane. Memories were all I had. I should be pouring them out. Reliving them every chance I could.

Maybe the loss was still too new. I hoped I could talk about her in time because I didn't want her to fade away. I didn't want to forget the sound of her voice. Or her handwriting. Or the way her eyes crinkled when she smiled.

"And your father?" Maddox's voice ripped me open for a new reason. This was easier to talk about. Anger always was.

"He's never been in my life." My body itched to let some of the anger out. "He's a politician. It wouldn't look good for his image to have a kid outside of his picture-perfect marriage."

"Have you ever spoken to him?" He rubbed up and down my bare legs. His touch calming some of the flames.

"I've always known who he was. But...um." Tears burned my eyes, but I refused to let them fall. "After my mom died, I went to him for money. I didn't have enough for a proper burial. He told me if I ever showed up at his office again, he'd have me arrested for harassment."

I stared down at the tattoos on his chest, unable to meet his gaze. My own father didn't want me; why would Maddox? It seemed so naïve to think any of this was real. I wasn't pretty enough. Rich enough to be with someone like him. Yes, he

was a criminal, but he was also at the top of the hierarchy. He had money and power. Something I would never have.

Maddox brought a finger to my chin, lifting my head until I was forced to meet his penetrating stare. “Do you want me to destroy him for you?”

“What?” I searched his eyes to see if he was serious. To see if he would really destroy someone for me. The hard set to his jaw told me he would. I thought back to Rodney, who I hadn’t seen since he’d attacked me. Maddox already had destroyed someone for me. “You- you can’t kill him.”

He was a bastard, but he was still my father. I didn’t want to be responsible for anyone’s death.

“I said destroy, not kill, *mia amata*.”

“What’s the difference?” The words were out of my mouth before I could stop them. Why was I asking? This was insane. I couldn’t allow this to happen. “Wh-what would you do to him?”

“I’d find his secrets and show them to the world.” His eyes darkened as if he was picturing how my father would crumble before him. “You could watch while he loses everything. See him feel as helpless as you did.”

I thought about the bills still piled up from my mother’s funeral. I thought about all the nights I’d gone to sleep with my stomach eating itself. All the times, I’d wanted to die because I couldn’t face the struggle of one more day.

All of it could've been solved by my father. The man who'd convinced my mother he was single. That he was a good guy. Until two lines had appeared on the test, and he'd never seen her again.

“You'd do that for me?”

“My little dove, there's nothing I wouldn't do for you.” His hands stroked my cheeks as he spoke. “There's no one I wouldn't destroy to protect you. To stop you from feeling an ounce of pain. I promise you'll never have to feel alone again.”

The tears I'd been holding back slid down my cheeks. I buried my head in Maddox's chest to hide them. I didn't know if I could trust him. But I wanted to. I didn't want to be alone anymore. I didn't want to face this uncaring world by myself. For once in my life, I wanted to believe something good could happen for me.

I didn't believe in God or angels. I knew they couldn't protect me from the traumas of the world. I wondered if I could believe in a demon.

## Kincaid

“I got something for you.” Maddox placed a box into my lap before he picked up his drink. We were having dinner out on the bedroom balcony again. It had become a new routine for us.

“Why?” I asked as I stared down at the box in my hand.

“It’s been a month. Aren’t gifts a normal thing people do for anniversaries?” He asked without glancing in my direction. I had a feeling he was purposefully hiding his eyes.

“You bought me a gift for our anniversary?” I whispered in surprise.

I shouldn’t be suspicious of our new relationship, but I still was. It had started unconventionally, and I kept waiting for him to change the rules again. To say he didn’t really want me. But over the last month, he’d been everything a girl could want in a boyfriend and more.

We still had our dinners together. I stayed the night more often than not, and the nights I didn’t, Maddox took me home.

He still wanted me to move in, but I refused. I needed to keep my own space. My sanity.

He hated my apartment, but that didn't stop him from threatening the building manager until all the repairs I needed were done. There were no more leaking sinks or discolored ceiling tiles. And he had someone come over once a week to fill my fridge with food.

True to his word, he also paid my rent and gave me a credit card. I hadn't used it. Maddox had taken care of my most basic needs, and I didn't want for much else. Plus, I was uncomfortable taking his money. Tessa thought I was crazy and that it wasn't any different than when he'd paid me. Which was kind of the problem.

I pulled the top off the box to see a brand new kindle inside. My lips parted as I picked it up and turned it on. I'd never owned one before. It was a luxury, and my life didn't allow for luxuries.

"Do you like it?" I could hear the hint of apprehension in his voice as he reached out and lifted up the edge of my dress so he could rub my bare thigh.

That was another new thing. He was always touching me, not just sexually. There were casual touches while we were in the car or eating dinner. He never let me sleep unless I was pulled tight to his body. Most of the time, he didn't even let me out of his sight unless he had to work.

"I do." I smiled at him, but his lips pulled down in a frown.

“Then why do you look disappointed?”

“I’m not. It’s just—. I like physical books.” I said, feeling like a brat for not liking this expensive gift he bought me. I knew he was trying hard to make me happy. I hated for him to think I wasn’t. “My mom used to write inscriptions on the inside. They remind me of her. The smell. The feel.”

“Hmm.” He looked like he was filing away that information. I was focused on flipping through the books he’d preloaded onto the kindle. I was noticing a theme.

“Wait? Does every one of these books have impact play in them?” He smirked as he sipped from his glass.

I placed the kindle on the table before standing. I walked over to his chair and straddled his lap.

“I love it.” I said before kissing him. I kept the kiss short, knowing where it would lead.

“Can I ask you something?” He nodded as he stared at my lips. His fingers played with the strap of my dress absentmindedly. “Why don’t you take me out?”

“What do you mean?” Maddox said as he pulled the strap off my shoulder and kissed me there.

“Like on a date?” I blushed. Was I really asking my Mafia boyfriend why he didn’t take me out on dates? What was my life?

“There are a few reasons, my little dove.” He said before kissing the other shoulder. “Security is always an issue. Even more, now that I have something to protect.” My heart

fluttered at his concern for me. “Plus, I like having you all to myself.”

Maddox’s hand trailed up my leg brushing the edge of my panties. “If we go out to eat, I can’t fuck you on the table. Not unless I want to kill everyone who sees you coming on my cock.”

I moaned as his lips crashed onto mine again. His tongue devouring me. My fingers threaded through his hair, pulling him closer. Instinctively I started rocking against him, trying to relieve the ache between my legs.

“Take your clothes off.” He growled as his mouth found my neck, licking and biting.

“We haven’t finished dinner.” I tilted my head to give him better access.

He fisted my hair.; pulling on my scalp roughly as he forced my face back to his. “Did you just tell me no, little dove?”

“I know how much you love to watch me eat.” I smiled coyly as I wiggled my ass into his groin. I could feel how hard and thick he was beneath me.

This had also changed. Before, I was defiant because I couldn’t let him control me. But a part of me had always wanted the punishments. Now instead of being defiant, I felt safe to tease him to get my punishments.

“Strip now.” He commanded as he set me back on my feet.

I bit my lip as I slowly brought my hands to the spaghetti straps of my dress. I pushed one down before switching to the other. I caught the fabric around my breasts before it could fall. I knew the longer I disobeyed him, the rougher he'd be with me.

Maddox's eyes watched my every movement. They burned my skin with his intense desire. I hooked my fingers in the top of my dress. I wiggled as I pulled down the tight fabric, knowing it made my breasts bounce and strain against my bra.

I reached behind my back, arching as I unclasped it. I caught the lace before it dropped. I pinched my nipples, moaning as desire pooled low in my belly.

"Take your fucking clothes off before I cut them from your body." Maddox growled. A thrill raced through me at the command in his voice. I dropped the bra and slid my panties down my legs. "Turn around and bend over the table."

I swallowed as I obeyed his command. My elbows and forearms rested on the table, my ass in the air. I could hear the scrapping of metal as he dragged his chair forward. "Spread your legs."

Anticipation coursed through my body as his hot breath skimmed across my skin. But he didn't touch me. Instead, he turned the torture around. I stood there for what felt like hours as he just looked at me. Nerves sparked under my skin, only making my arousal heighten.

"Always so wet for me, my little slut." I let out a shaky breath as he brought one finger to my pussy. Sliding through

me before briefly brushing my clit. It wasn't nearly enough. I squirmed against him, trying to take him inside me.

“Behave.” Maddox slapped my ass hard. I moaned as the shock sent electricity through me. “You want my cock, don't you?”

“Yes.” I whimpered as he continued to stroke me gently. I wasn't afraid to admit I wanted him anymore. I knew it would only bring me pleasure. I jerked at the warmth of his mouth. He took one long lazy lick through me before his hot breath coasted across my skin again.

“Then come sit on my lap.” He bit my cheek hard, making me cry out. I was never without at least one bite mark from him.

As soon as he was gone, I immediately turned towards him. Instead of doing what he wanted, I dropped to my knees. I undid his belt then looked up at him through my lashes for permission. He didn't always fuck me naked, so I wasn't sure what kind of night it would be. He gave me a small nod, so I worked his pants down his body. His huge thick cock jutted from his body. I leaned forward, licking a drop of precum from the head before reaching up to unbutton his shirt.

Then I straddled his lap. His length resting against my soaking pussy. I rocked my hips, sliding him through my center as my hands roamed his strong chest and hard abs. I traced the tattoo there. An Italian phrase I'd never asked the meaning of.

I would never get sick of looking at him. Touching him. His muscles begged to the primal part of me that wanted to be protected. Except I knew those muscles could turn on me just as easily.

Maddox gripped the nape of my neck, dragging my lips to his. I opened for him eagerly, letting him suck the air from my lungs. Without warning, he lifted me with his other arm and slammed me down onto his thick cock. I didn't know if I was more turned on by his hold on my neck or by how easily he manipulated my body. It was as if I really was a toy to him.

“Oh, my God.” I screamed as he split me open.

“No other man exists when my cock is inside you. Not even God.” He said as he trailed kisses down my neck. Nipping at my ear lobe. “Say my name.”

“Maddox.” I dug my nails into his chest, expecting him to keep going, but he stopped.

My chest rose with a heavy breath as he stilled his movements. His lips continuing to kiss me, but nothing else. My body stretched around him, trying to accommodate his huge size. I hadn't gotten used to it, and I hoped I never did. I liked the pain that came with him being inside me. Each time felt like the first time. Felt like a delicious intrusion. I tried to roll my hips, but he gripped my ass tightly to stop me.

“Please. Let me move.” I whimpered.

“It's not the time to beg, my little dove. You haven't had your punishment yet.” My body tingled at his words. “The

question is how to punish you. There are so many things I could use. I could have you reach down and get my belt off the floor.”

My nipples beaded and ached at the memory. “You like that idea, don’t you?”

I might be able to admit I wanted him, but I didn’t want to admit out loud that I liked the pain. It still bothered me for some reason. There was a little nag in my mind telling me it was wrong to like it. Maddox reached forward and grabbed something from the table. The candle flickered off the metal as he brought a knife to my throat.

“Or I could cut up this pretty skin.” He whispered as he trailed the blade between my cleavage. The serrated edge glanced over my nipples. My breath shuttered as my pussy clenched. “You do bleed so beautifully.”

The knife clattered on the table as he tossed it back. I felt myself floating away on his words. Drowning in desire as I waited to see what he would do. “Or I could gag you with the cloth napkin.” He shook his head quickly. “No, I love to hear your screams.”

A smile pulled on his lips as he looked at the table again. I knew he found whatever he was going to use to hurt me tonight. “Rest your elbows back.”

I instantly complied, the metal of the table cutting into my elbows as I laid back. My heart stuttered as I saw Maddox reach for one of the candlesticks in the center. My eyes flew to

his, which watched me with intent. I curled my fingers into my palms as I waited. He flexed his wrist.

The hot wax sizzled on my skin as it hit the swell of my breasts. Air hissed from my teeth as I jerked from the pain.

“Are you going to listen the next time I tell you to do something?” His deep voice burned as hot as the wax.

“Yes.” I sounded breathy as I spoke.

Maddox poured more hot liquid onto my other breast. I jerked again as it hit my skin, making my pussy ache as I rubbed against his cock. I’d almost forgotten he was inside me. A rush of wetness pooled between my legs as he poured more wax onto me, covering all around my nipples.

“Look at you, my little slut. You love the pain. You’re making a mess of my lap.”

My skin felt heated all over. My body tight as my clit throbbed. I panted as he continued to torture me. Each drop sending me closer and closer to the edge. He hadn’t fucked me or even really touched me yet, and I was ready to explode.

“You love the pain so much you’re ready to come, aren’t you?”

“Yes.” I cried as he dropped wax directly across my nipple. The sensation was intense. Painful until it gave way to pleasure. I watched as Maddox put the candle back and picked the knife up.

He brought the tip to the dried wax on my skin, peeling it away. Pain shot through me as he exposed the pink flesh. He

rubbed his thumb along it making it ache. At the same time, my body clenched tighter, desire running through my veins. I moaned as he repeated the action to another spot.

Each burn he revealed sent a jolt through me, making my body tense. Each time I clenched around his hard cock. It was a loop of pain and pleasure. It felt never-ending as my body soared higher and higher.

His eyes were intense as he watched my face. He skimmed another area of my abused skin as he pressed his thumb into my clit. “Come.”

“Fuck.” I screamed as my body convulsed around him.

The pain throwing me off a cliff into oblivion. My breathing stopped as my body tightened. My vision grayed as tremors ran down my skin. I should’ve been embarrassed that I came for the pain alone, but I couldn’t find that emotion in me right now. Not when I felt this good.

Maddox pulled me forward, placing kisses on my chest. Everywhere he’d hurt me as he whispered against my skin. “My little dove, so perfect. Coming from my pain. You were made for me.”

I wanted to agree. The words right on the tip of my tongue, but I couldn’t make myself say it. “Now fuck me, my little slut. Show me how much you love my cock.”

“I love it.” I moaned as I dug my knees into the wrought iron chair and lifted up. I slammed back down on his thick length, finally feeling the friction I craved.

I worked myself up and down. Rocking my hips and pressing my clit into his groin. I relished the bruises I could feel forming on my knees. Savored the burn his thick cock caused in me. Another orgasm started to build already. My body becoming taut with each drag on my walls. Maddox fisted my hair and claimed my mouth as I continued to fuck myself on him.

His tongue controlled mine as he thrust in time with my movements. My fingers dug into his shoulders, leaving crescent-shaped indents behind.

“Maddox.” I moaned as I broke the kiss coming again. I squeezed around him so tight it was almost painful as my limbs shook.

“*Cazzo.*” He groaned as my body tried to take him along with me. But Maddox wasn’t ready for this to end yet. I watched as he locked his jaw and stilled my hips, stopping himself from coming. My inner walls squeezed him rhythmically as aftershocks washed through me.

He brushed a strand of hair from my face as he kissed my lips. “Please.”

“Please, what little dove?” He whispered. “What do you need?”

“You.” I saw his blue eyes flare as he looked at me. “I-I want you to come. To claim me.”

I screamed as he moved so quickly I almost fell to the floor. My legs and arms wrapped around him as he carried me

to the bedroom, still buried deep inside me. We fell to the bed, and then he attacked.

He slammed into my sensitive pussy; forcing me to put my hands on the headboard or risk hitting it. He moved in me like a man possessed. Like doing what I'd asked was the only thing that mattered. Like I was the only thing in his world.

“So fucking perfect.” He groaned as I lifted my hips to meet his thrust. “So fucking mine.”

His hand came to my throat, squeezing the air from my lungs. I opened my mouth instinctively to take a breath, but nothing came. His fingers dig into me, stopping me from breathing. My head started to feel dizzy from lack of oxygen even as my pussy clenched around him.

“You want my cum, my little slut?” I could feel him swelling inside me. His fingers flexed, letting in a tiny amount of air.

“Yes.” I managed to whisper past his hold on my throat.

“*Cazzo.*” He roared as he came. My scream was silent as I shattered with him. My lungs sucked in huge gulps of air as he removed his hand, prolonging my orgasm. His fingers brushed the bruises I knew were forming there.

This was different too. Different than how he'd touched me before. He would never be gentle; it wasn't who he was, and I didn't want him to be. There was still pain because we both craved it. Needed it. But instead of feeling like he was using it to hurt me. Hurt my body. My mind. Using my desire

for it to win against me. It felt like we were working together.  
Connecting.

Somehow it was scarier. Like jumping off a cliff. I was willingly letting myself into his cage, hoping the door would close and he'd never let me out. I didn't want to go anymore.

I just wanted Maddox.

## Kincaid

**M**y legs were crossed as I sat naked on the vanity chair, watching Maddox shave as I drank my coffee. My cheeks were flushed, and I couldn't blame it on the shower I'd just taken. *We'd* taken. The blush was courtesy of Maddox and two orgasms.

Morning light streamed through the windows making his damp, dark hair glisten. He'd made me breakfast in bed again before the shower. I don't think he realized that everything he was doing wasn't normal. Normal men didn't bring their girlfriends breakfast in bed every time they slept over. They didn't buy them expensive gifts or pay their rent. Of course, he wasn't normal.

"I can't take you home today, *mia amata*. I arranged for one of the guards to take you." My chest tightened. This was the first time he hadn't been able to drive me since I'd mentioned my feelings about his guards.

“Tristan?” I took a sip of coffee to hide my anxiety. Maddox looked at me with one brow raised.

“No. I heard what you said. You won’t be interacting with him anymore.”

“Sebastian then?” I asked, feeling better. He really was respecting my wishes. Sebastian might look scarier, but I sensed he wouldn’t hurt me. And it would give me the chance to question him about Tessa. I felt like there was something between them.

“No, someone new. Bash has business to take care of today. Get dressed, and I’ll introduce you.”

“Okay.” I stood and crossed to him. I placed a soft kiss on his lips, being careful to avoid the shaving cream.

I went into the walk-in closet and quickly dressed in a pair of leggings and a simple black sweater. They were probably both more expensive than anything I’d ever owned. I didn’t care about the labels. They were soft and comfortable, perfect for a day filled with reading on my new kindle.

I wondered if I should feel apprehensive with how easily I fell into this role. Into being Maddox’s...girlfriend. That word didn’t encompass what we were, but what else was I supposed to call myself? I wasn’t his toy anymore. I wasn’t paid to be here. I choose it. I was his.

I still feared him. Feared what would happen when he decided he didn’t want me anymore. But it wasn’t enough for

me to run from him. Not when he gave me so much. Not when I only felt alive when he was near.

I also feared his life. What would happen when I was faced with what he truly was? When I couldn't live in our bubble anymore?

Maddox called my name and I decided my worries could wait another day. I'd lived my life a day at a time, sometimes an hour at a time when the pain of existence was too much. I would do the same thing now. Only it was to keep this feeling. Keep the little bit of happiness I'd found in the wrong place.

When I walked back out, Maddox was putting on his suit jacket. His biceps bulged under his shirt. A damp curl fell over his forehead, making his blue eyes pop.

"You really are disgustingly handsome." He laughed as he pulled me to his side and led me out the door and downstairs.

A young guy in a suit stood by the front door. Or maybe he was older, but his shoulder-length blonde hair gave him the impression of youth. He had a kind smile and no visible tattoos.

"This is Henry." Maddox said.

"Hi, Henry." I reached out my hand to greet him, but Maddox yanked me back.

"Henry." His tone was harsh as he addressed him. "This is Kincaid. Do not touch her. I don't even want you to breathe too close to her. I expect you to get her safely to her apartment. If she even has a scratch on her, you'll pay with your life."

“Maddox.” I whisper yelled, but he ignored me.

“Do you understand?”

“Yes, sir.” Henry nodded before opening the door for us and walking out ahead. He checked the surroundings as if he expected someone to jump out and attack at any moment.

“Was that really necessary?” I asked Maddox as he walked me to the car.

“Yes.” He growled. I shook my head; there was no arguing with him.

Maddox spun me and pressed my body against the car door. I bit my lip and glanced at Henry, who had discreetly turned his back before looking to Maddox again. “I wish you would stay here, my little dove. You’re safer. And I like knowing I’d be coming back to you.”

My heart melted as I brought my hands around his neck. “I’m perfectly safe at my place. And you’re picking me up tonight.”

“Exactly, so why leave at all?” He bent forward and ran his nose along the column of my neck as if he was inhaling my scent.

“Jeez, you seem pretty clingy for a big bad Mafia guy.”

I moaned as he bit my neck. The sting worse because of the lingering bruises from last night. “Not clingy. Possessive.”

I laughed and shrugged. “Potato. Poatato.”

His hand replaced his lips around my throat. He tilted my head back and squeezed briefly. “Behave, or I’ll punish you tonight.”

I tried to hide the way my body shivered, and my panties dampened. But Maddox smiled as if he knew. He kissed me possessively before pulling us back and opening my door.

“I’ll see you tonight.” He said as he closed the door behind me. I was too dazed from his kiss to form words.

One man should not be allowed to have the ability to fry brain cells with his lips. It was a power I knew he could abuse. I smiled as I rested back in my seat. I couldn’t remember if I’d ever been this happy.

Even before my mom had died, we struggled. I loved her, and I knew she did the best she could. But if life had ever been easy, I didn’t remember. For the first time, it was. I felt like things might actually work out. Like things might change for me. I wouldn’t have to struggle anymore. To fight every day for a life, I barely wanted.

The gates opened immediately for the car. I was still getting used to seeing armed guards all the time. There were moments where I could forget who he was. Forget I shouldn’t be happy with a man like him. Then there were times like these where it was shoved into my face. Maddox was a bad guy. A villain. A demon.

But... he made me happy.

I decided to distract myself by getting to know Henry.

“How old are you?” I asked.

He glanced at me in the rearview mirror. “Twenty, Miss Kincaid.”

“Whoa, the Miss is not necessary.” I laughed. Already he was treating me differently than Tristan or Sebastian. Maybe it was because he didn’t know how I’d come to be here. I wasn’t a waitress turned whore to him. I was just his boss’ girlfriend. Or maybe he was just a nice guy.

He smiled at me but didn’t say anything. He had a kind, genuine smile. He seemed too young, too naïve, for this life. But I supposed I wasn’t qualified to judge that. I probably didn’t look like what most people pictured when they thought of a Mafia boss’ girlfriend. I was petite and curvy. I didn’t like to dress up or put on a lot of make-up. I was plain, which was fine with me. And apparently fine with Maddox.

“How did you start working for Maddox?”

“I...” He paused like he was trying to find the right words. “I stumbled upon him while he was working one night. I was living on the streets and looking for a warm place to sleep. He could’ve killed me, but instead, he offered me a job.”

My head leaned back in shock. That seemed so...nice. It was weird not considering the man I was sleeping with nice, but he wasn’t. I wondered what had made him decide to take a chance on Henry. I’d have to ask him about that later. Because I could hear the undertone in what Henry was saying. He’d caught Maddox doing something illegal. Something that would get him in trouble if Henry talked.

“Do you have a girlfriend?”

For some reason, I felt like talking. I shifted in my seat, cracking my neck. I wasn't sure what was wrong. It seemed like any typical day, but the farther we drove away from Maddox, the more restless I felt. It was an itchy sensation under my skin. I didn't know why, but it made me want to claw at my chest until it went away.

“Uh... no.”

“How about a boyfriend?”

“What?” He forced a chuckle, but I could see the bead of sweat that had formed on his forehead. The slight pink twinge in his cheeks.

It probably wasn't good to be a gay guy in the Mafia. I bet there was a bunch of sexist bullshit where they didn't like it. Some macho man club ridiculousness. I already liked Henry, and I wasn't going to be the one to out him.

“Never mind. Just being silly.” I waved my hand in the air, but I saw as he released a relieved breath. We spent the rest of the drive making casual conversation. Soon the slightly crumbling brick of my building came into view.

“Thanks, Henry.” I called. “I hope I see you again.”

“Let me walk you to the door, Miss Kincaid.” He quickly exited the car and came around to my side.

“What did I say about calling me Miss? It's Kincaid. Just Kincaid.” I smiled up at him. I hoped he stayed around because I could get used to having someone a little nicer

driving me when Maddox couldn't. "And you don't need to walk me. I know the way."

"Mr. Vancini told me to make sure you're safe, and I won't feel like I've done that unless I see your door closing behind you." I rolled my eyes. "You wouldn't want him to kill me because you tripped on the stairs and scratched yourself."

I wanted to think he was joking, but with Maddox, I was never sure what he would do. "Fine. I don't know what you're both so worried about? This neighborhood isn't that bad."

But I should've known better. Should've known life had never let me have an ounce of happiness, and now wouldn't be any different.

As the words left my mouth, a loud pop sounded beside me. I screamed and covered my ears as the glass on the back car door shattered.

Gunshot.

It registered in my mind the same time Henry shoved me back into the car. My knees hit the seat roughly, sending a jarring pain through my body. Glass covered the leather, cutting into my legs and hands. I tried to sit up and turn towards him as more gunshots rang out. I heard the pinging of metal as they hit the car.

"Stay." Henry said before he slammed the door.

My heart jumped into my throat as I struggled to breathe. I knew the neighborhood I lived in wasn't the greatest, but this had never happened before. I'd spent my whole life living in

less-than-ideal conditions, but I'd never been shot at. It wasn't unusual to hear gunfire on this side of town, but I'd never been this close before.

The screech of brakes cut through the air. I lifted my head up to see better as an SUV stopped beside us. For a second, I hoped it was someone who was here to help. Two men dressed in black long sleeves and cargo pants jumped from the car, guns in hand. These were no cops or anyone else meant to protect. I'd spent enough time around killers to recognize one when I saw him.

That's when I knew. This wasn't random. It wasn't an accident. They were here for me.

Terror expanded in my chest as I scurried back across the seats trying to put space between myself and them. Trying to get away. To run. I felt my heart pulsing through my body as my feet hit the door. Blood made my hands slick, and they slipped on the wet leather as I fumbled to get out of the car.

I yelped in surprise as one of the men ripped open the door in front of me. More gunshots drowned out my scream of pain as he pulled me out by my hair. The burn in my scalp mixed with the agony in my body as I fell to the harsh concrete on my knees, the skin scraping and bleeding.

"Get in the car, or we'll kill your friend." He said as he yanked my shoulder from the ground.

My body broke out in a cold sweat as I tried to look back at Henry. Gunshots were still ringing all around us. The sounds of sirens started off in the distance. When suddenly, it

stopped. I wrenched my arm from his hold and spun around. Henry was lying on the ground in a pool of blood.

“No!” A guttural scream left my lips.

I’d just met him, but I didn’t want him to die. He was so young and sweet. Too good to die bleeding on the street. Before I could take a step toward him, I was pulled off my feet and thrown roughly into the back of the SUV. The scary guys with guns got in, and the car sped down the street.

My body was paralyzed with fear. I couldn’t make my mind speak to my limbs. They were locked at my sides. I hadn’t even fought back. I’d had no time. It was so quick. One minute I’d been joking with Henry; the next, I had a gun pointed at me.

I tried to think. Tried to make myself act. My body ached, and blood dripped from my cuts. I knew it would only get worse. I needed to get out.

“Time to sleep.” I turned to look at the guy who’d spoken, but all I saw was a needle as it plunged into my neck.

My last thought before the world went black was of Maddox. There was only one reason I was in the back of this car. One person responsible. The same one who could save me.

## Maddox

I was seriously contemplating shooting my father. The longer he droned on, the more I pictured how a bullet hole would look between his eyes. I preferred a knife, but a bullet was quicker. I glanced at my watch again.

We were seated around the dining room table at his home. He rarely did business anywhere else. There was always someone trying to assassinate him because of his position. I sat to his left and Leif to his right; Constantine and Dante were also present. Along with a guard for each of us. I had Bash out on a job looking for someone we could torture for information on the Gallos, so Tristan stood leaning against the wall behind me.

“Another shipment has gone missing this week.” Dante said, an edge of anger in his voice. “My buyers aren’t going to accept another late delivery. If this continues, they’ll go to the Perez Cartel for their guns.”

“Double security for the shipments.” My father ground his cigar into the ashtray. “I want you overseeing each one. If another goes missing, I’ll hold you personally responsible.”

I saw Dante clench his jaw as he nodded his head. Everyone was getting frustrated with the war the Gallos were trying to start. I didn’t mind the bloodshed, but it kept me away from more pleasurable pursuits. I was ready to end this so I could focus on my little dove.

“Have we considered a meeting with them?” Leif asked. “I’ve always gotten along with Matteo. I cou—“

“You want to talk peace.” My father’s hand slammed on the table, rattling the glassware. “They’re stealing our clients. Killing our men. They started this, but we’re going to end it. We won’t stop until we’ve spilled every drop of their blood.”

I resisted the urge to roll my eyes. My father liked to talk a big game, but it had been years since he’d actually been out on the streets. I didn’t disagree with Leif. As much as I’d love to cut a few people open, it might be faster to negotiate turns with them. But I wouldn’t go against my father in front of everyone.

My mind wandered again as he went on another rant about the Gallos’ deaths. I pulled my phone from my pocket and tapped the screen. My teeth ground together when I saw I still didn’t have a text from Henry. He was supposed to let me know when he returned to the house. I had things I needed him to take care of today.

He was the newest recruit, but he seemed eager to learn. He also had a boyish quality I hoped made Kincaid more comfortable. I didn't blame her for being intimidated by Tristan and Bash. Tristan now understood who he was and wasn't allowed to touch. My blood still boiled at the fact that he'd thought it was okay. Even if she was just a toy then, she had been *my* toy.

I tapped the screen again, intending to send Henry a text, when the dining room door opened. I resisted the urge to jerk in my seat when I saw Bash enter the room. He was supposed to be on a job. He wouldn't come here unless something had gone wrong. He acknowledged my father with a respectful head tilt as he quickly walked to my side. He crouched next to me to whisper in my ear.

"We have an emergency." His voice was urgent, but his body language gave nothing away. We couldn't appear weak in front of the other capos.

"What kind?"

"Shoots fired over the police scanner." I gripped my phone to stop myself from smacking him in the face. Why did I care if the police were investigating shots fired? He interrupted a meeting for this? Even if it was at one of our clubs, he was equipped to handle it. "Outside of Kincaid's apartment."

I shot from my chair before my mind fully processed his words. All I could think about was getting to her as fast as possible. My hand went instinctively to the gun at my back,

checking it was there. I was halfway to the door when my father's voice cut through the roar of blood in my ears.

"This meeting isn't over." He snapped.

"It is for me." His guard grabbed my shoulder before I could reach the door.

"I won't tolerate this disrespect." My father's voice dripped with contempt, but I was beyond caring. He feared me, and it was time for me to use that to my advantage.

I struck, breaking the guard's wrist and tossing him to the floor. He moaned and clutched his injury to his chest. Weak.

My hand closed around the gun at my back. I pointed it right at my father. Everyone in the room stilled, unsure of what to do. They didn't want to have a shootout in close quarters. More of us would die than live. I was beyond caring.

I needed to get out of this room. I needed to get to Kincaid. She had to be okay. But something in my gut told me she wasn't. And it was my fault. It could've been random. But I knew. Our war had come for her.

"I can leave with all your blood still inside your body, or I can leave with it on the floor." I tilted the gun with a shrug like it didn't matter to me. And didn't. "Either way, I'm leaving."

My father's eyes burned as he stared at me. I could see the resignation in his expression. He didn't want to let my disrespect go, but he knew I'd kill him without a second thought. He knew I was ruthless. Soulless. His death wouldn't even register.

He nodded once. I'd have to deal with him later, but for now, he was letting me go. I turned my back to him as I walked out, letting him know I wasn't afraid.

I raced through the house. My heart beating so hard I thought it would crack my ribs. I collided with Alessandra in the hall. I gripped her shoulders to keep her from falling and ran past.

"Maddox, what's wrong?" She called after me, but I ignored the concern in her voice. I didn't have time to explain.

I barely had the door to my car closed before I was peeling out of the driveway. I ignored traffic lights as I raced down the streets. Buildings were a blur as they whipped by.

My breathing was an erratic rhythm as my knuckles turned white from my grip on the wheel. Sweat collected on my back the longer it took to close the distance between us. I hadn't even made sure Bash and Tristan had made it out of the house.

I had never felt this before. Fear.

I was the cause of people's fear. I didn't feel it. But suddenly, it permeated my veins, making my blood still. My chest tight. And my mind blank.

My body yanked against the seatbelt as I threw the car into the park and shoved the door open. The terror in my veins doubled as I took in the scene in front of me. The car she'd left in this morning was parked at the curb. Both back doors were open. One of the windows was shattered, and the metal was riddled with bullet holes.

Cops crowded the space. Their blue and red lights reflecting off windows and puddles on the ground. My eyes scanned the area looking for her in the people milling around the street, trying to see the action. Bodies lay on the road covered with a sheet. A quick glance told me they were men. My feet pounded the ground as I raced to an ambulance parked further down.

I looked for a glimpse of white blonde hair. For a sliver of her porcelain skin. The sound of her voice. Anything to tell me she was okay. That my little dove lived.

I ripped open the back doors and shoved aside a medic, ignoring his protest, as I looked at the person on the gurney. Henry's face was pale. Blood soaked his shirt, and bandages wrapped around his head.

"Where is she?" I fisted his shirt as I yanked him towards me.

"They took her." He whispered. "There were so many of them. I got at least three before they shot me."

I wanted to blame him. But it wasn't his fault. This was on me. Only me. I hadn't protected her. I'd foolishly let people see me with her. I'd driven to her house countless times. I'd let her stay here unguarded. I'd led my enemies right to her. I felt as Tristan and Bash came to my side as I stumbled out of the ambulance.

"What's the plan?" Bash asked, venom dripping from his words. A red haze clouded my vision as I stalked back to my car. I reached inside and grabbed my knife. The handle felt

good between my fingers. Grounding me. Preparing me for what was to come.

“Find her. Any means necessary.”

What I hadn't realized in all the times I exploited people's weaknesses. All the times I watched them love and protect their families, was that it could be a strength.

They'd taken Kincaid to hurt me. But while she was alive, there was nothing I wouldn't do to get her back. They'd just unleashed the demon inside me. There was no one who could hide from me now. No one who would be exempt from my retribution.

The city would bleed. The water would run red. Anyone still alive would drown in rivers of blood until I found her.

My weakness.

My little dove.

# Thank You

Thank you to everyone who took the time to read this book. I can't tell you enough how much it means to me.

If you enjoyed it, please leave a review and post on social media. You can tag me on Instagram and Tik Tok as Author Jayla Talbot. As an indie author, word of mouth and reviews truly make a difference. We won't be able to keep doing what we love without your support. So again, thank you!

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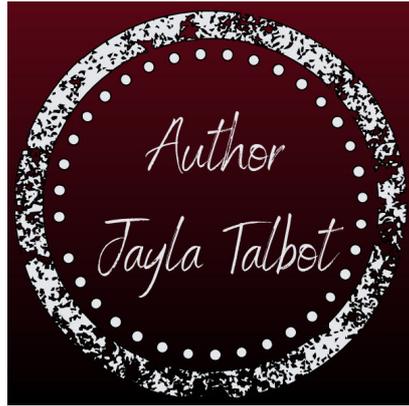
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## About the Author

Jayla lives in Southeast Michigan with her husband and young son. Her love of romance started in middle school and has only grown from there. When she's not writing, you can find her hiding behind her kindle or streaming the latest rom-com.