

MY MUSE, MY VALENTINE, MY FOREVER.

Marked With Love

USA Today Bestselling Author

ELLA GOODE

MARKED WITH LOVE

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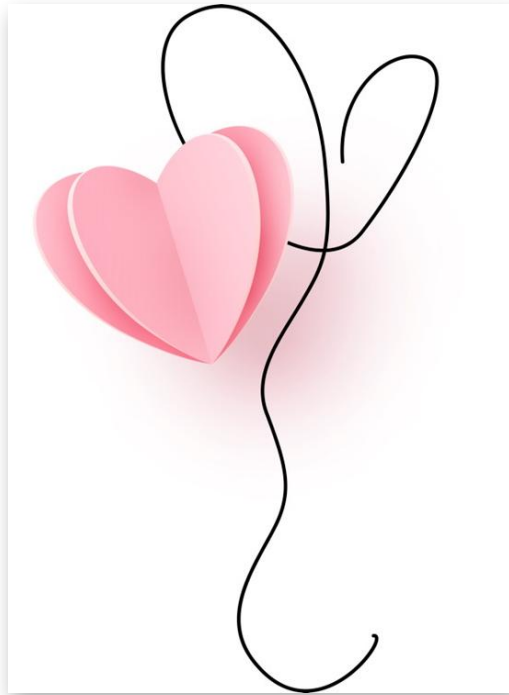
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Eros

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Eros was named by his mother to be a great lover but he has more interest in paint than women. A reclusive artist, Eros spends his days immersed in his art. To stop his mom from hounding him, Eros agrees to go on a blind date...and proceeds to fall in love with the woman the moment his eyes land on her.

Morgan's a free spirit who loves her Grams and her friends, in that order. She stays away from men because they all want her gram's money and while Eros Flynn is too beautiful for words, she's pretty sure he's exactly like all the rest of the guys she's ever come across.

Eros hasn't ever met anyone who hated him on sight but if there's one trait he's known for its persistence. He'll turn Morgan's hate into love if it's the last thing he does. He wasn't named Eros for nothing.



CHAPTER 1

EROS

“NO, MATTY, I’M NOT GOING ON A DOUBLE DATE WITH YOU.” I flip through the television menu. Why do I subscribe to five hundred streaming services and have nothing to watch? I settle on a documentary about vampire myths. It seems like the right sort of background noise for my conversation with my teammate from the basketball pickup league we have on Wednesdays.

“Why? It’s not like you have anything else going on.”

“I’ve got dishes to do.” Huh, Romanians don’t like the vampire stories. I was not aware of this.

“What dishes? You have a dishwasher. Besides, you can’t cook for shit. The only dishes you have are the ones you use to feed Gremlin. You live on takeout and your mom’s mercy.”

My cat, who resembles one of those furry creatures from the movie, twitches his tail at the mention of his name.

“Exactly. I have takeout boxes to dispose of. That takes time. And effort,” I add in case he doesn’t get my point.

“I’m swinging by at six. Wear something with a collar. We’re going to a restaurant that has tablecloths.” Matty hangs up.

I send a baleful glance toward Gremlin. “Do I look like I own something with a collar? I’m an artist, for fuck’s sake. I live in ratty, paint-splattered T-shirts and joggers. Also with paint splatters. Speaking of paint...” I pinch the end of Gremlin’s tail. “I see you have some marks on you, too.” He jerks his tail out of my grip and whips it across my palm a few

times to chastise me for touching him. I think that my naming him Gremlin set us off on the wrong foot. Maybe.

I give the surly cat a pat that earns me a hiss in return and then push to my feet. The truth is I haven't been painting, not in a long while. I've dabbled here and there. I've had a brush in my hand every day, but nothing I've done is any good. In my studio space that runs along the entire back of the house, I stare at the giant canvas hung on the wall and wait for inspiration to strike. What am I painting here? What am I feeling? I bang open a can of paint, dip my brush inside, and then...I don't move. The brush hangs at my side, and paint drips off onto the drop cloth at my feet.

A bell rings overhead, rousing me from my stupor. I check my phone and am surprised to see a half hour has passed. If it wasn't for the doorbell, who knows how long I would've stood here. I toss the brush down and go answer the door.

My mom pushes past me the moment I turn the knob. "Gosh, you took so long. I could've been mugged out here," she calls over her shoulder.

I peek outside but see no one on the street. "It's a gated community," I remind her as I follow her to the kitchen.

"People die in gated communities all the time."

"When was the last time?"

"That we know of?" She puts four glass containers on the kitchen table and then pulls the fridge open.

I inspect the dishes. Lasagna, pork belly, roast beef, and some kind of chicken meal. All of the food groups represented.

"I haven't noticed anyone missing."

Mom stops rummaging in the fridge to give me an *Are you kidding?* roll of her eyes. "Name one neighbor."

Instead of answering, I restack the glass containers.

"Exactly," crows Mom. "You've lived in this house for five years and can't name a single neighbor, so they could be murdered and you wouldn't know."

“The smell would give it away.”

“Only if the bodies were decomposing.”

“You might need to stop watching those true crime shows.”

“I have.”

“Because you’ve run out or because you aren’t interested?”

“Can you believe that they aren’t putting any new ones out? I had to resort to watching fictional crime dramas, although I will say Selena Gomez has some wonderful chemistry with Steve Martin and Martin Short.” Mom slams the door shut. “Anyway, as I was saying, I’m going to set you up with this nice girl whose dad is a detective. I met him at a book signing the other day and he was—”

“No.” I shudder. The last setup that I had was with an actual cop, and she took out her phone and showed me crime scene photos. I didn’t need to see that. I’m an artist! I’m sensitive! I like to paint with color! I ended up using black for an entire month as if I was Jackson Pollock in his 1950s era.

“Yes.” Mom is adamant. “You’ve been alone too long. It’s probably why you’re blocked. You need to clean out all your chambers.”

I grow queasy. “Please stop talking about my sex life.”

“What sex life? I know you’re celibate. It’s all anyone can talk about these days. Eros Flynn, the genius painter who pours all of his passion onto the canvas. I didn’t name you Eros to have you live the life of a monk!”

“No one calls me Eros, Mom.” I finger my broken nose. Not since the fourth grade, at least. Peter Rozniak made fun of my name as we were getting off the bus. I punched him in the nose and then later that night, his sixteen-year-old brother came to my house and cracked me across the face with a bicycle pump. Mom wanted to call the police, but Dad wouldn’t let her. Later that night, he took me over to Pete’s house, and I stuffed eggs into all the holes of his older brother’s car. I don’t think he ever figured out why his car smelled like a whole football team held a farting contest in

there, but he wasn't able to get another girl to date him his entire high school career.

“I'm not calling you Jack. That's boring. Now about this girl—”

“I'm actually going on a blind date tonight, Mom. With Matty. We're doubling.”

“Oh?”

“Yeah.” I nod enthusiastically. “In fact, I better go change. He's going to be here soon.”



CHAPTER 2

MORGAN

“I CAN’T BELIEVE BLAKE TALKED YOU INTO A BLIND DATE.” My grams chuckles. She’s finding this hilarious. At least someone is enjoying my predicament.

“I didn’t have much of a choice. I still owe her for the whole getting her arrested thing.” I roll my eyes. I don’t think it even counts as being arrested. I *might* have punched some frat boy who was making catcalls at Blake. Of course, being my best friend, Blake jumped in, trying to break it up. We all ended up in handcuffs in the back of a police car. “It’s bullshit,” I mutter.

Those frat boys always underestimate what they are getting into with me. I think it’s the pink hair and the blue eyes. Blake has compared me to a feisty fairy before. Talk shit, get hit. At least that’s my policy when it comes to boys.

“She is being a bit hard on you about it. A lot of women enjoy being cuffed.”

“Grams!” I burst into laughter. We were cuffed for a total of about five minutes. Once the cops started running our IDs, I was uncuffed the second they realized who my father was. I couldn’t say I was surprised. My father’s name carries a lot of weight. At least the name he inherited. It was my grandparents that really made what some would call the family’s legacy.

I have no clue if Dad ever heard about the incident or not. We don’t chit-chat much. He and Mom stay in their fancy high-rise in the city while I stay on the Hoffman estate with Grams because she is awesome and doesn’t have a stick up her ass like the rest of my family. It’s just the two of us here, and

Alfred, of course. It's not really his name but he lets me get away with calling him that. He's our butler. Alfred sounds so much cooler than Stewart. I started calling him that a while back, and now it's stuck and no one calls him by his given name.

"Lady Blake has arrived," Alfred says, entering the kitchen. I'm sitting on the kitchen island, my legs swinging back and forth. I went out of my way to do my makeup and even styled my hair for this blind date. I figured if I am going out, I might as well get dolled up. Plus, I just got the pink ombre refreshed in my hair, so I kind of want to show it off.

"She lives here now. You don't have to announce when she gets home, Alf."

Blake and I had been roommates in college. We graduated a few months ago. I talked her into coming back home with me. When we first met, I was sure we'd never hit it off, but I suppose opposites do attract. She got a degree in business while I got what my mother referred to as a useless degree in fine arts.

I didn't expect any other reaction from either her or my dad, though. They had a certain idea of what they wanted for me as a future, so anything that didn't fit that was going to be a disappointment to them. But I had Grams' support, and to be honest, that's all that mattered to me.

Grams doesn't lay out a lot of ground rules, but one is you must get a degree. She doesn't give a shit what it's in, but you get it, nonetheless. I think it's even in the whole trust thing. I've known since I was ten I wanted to be a tattoo artist, but if college was the one thing Grams was asking for, I knew I would go.

"Alfred," he corrects. I fight a smirk. He's always trying to keep things so formal.

"Is that what you're wearing?!" Blake asks, her eyes taking in my outfit.

"What?" I glance down at myself. I'm in black pants that have a million and one cuts across them and a buttoned-up

shirt. It's even tucked in. She told me the place we're going to is nice, so this shirt should work. Meanwhile, my bestie is in a frilly dress, her blond hair in waves, reminding me of one of those porcelain dolls.

"Did you have that embroidered on your top?" Over my top left breast, the words *dead inside* are stitched in rather nicely, if you ask me. I know between my own pink hair and bright gray-blue eyes, my dark outfits can confuse people, but I don't care to be labeled. I wear what I want.

"Juliette did it for her. I've never known a better seamstress than her," Grams chimes in. "Her work is impeccable."

"You heard Grams. Impeccable. Like me." I hop off the kitchen island. Alfred grabs a cloth and wipes the spot I'd been sitting on.

"There is no time to change, is there?" Blake looks to Alfred. He shakes his head no.

"Security said Mr. Matty is pulling up the drive now."

"Matty? That's his name?"

"Don't start." Blake points one of her perfectly painted pink nails at me. "You promised."

"All right. I give." I grab my bag and kiss Grams on the cheek before we head toward the front door.

"I'm to open it," Alfred calls after us, but it's too late.

I swing one of the giant double doors open to see a man in a suit. He's pretty basic but not terrible. Definitely Blake's type. She's been going on about this guy for a few weeks. They've been chatting it up on some dating site, but still, she didn't want to go alone. Hence me being pulled into this mess.

Blake and Matty do their cute little hellos. "Where's mine?" I glance toward the Land Rover, trying to get a glimpse of whomever it is that I'm supposed to be hanging with tonight.

"We're going to pick him up." I read between those lines. This guy didn't want any part of this date either.

I should have asked Blake if she'd given Matty a picture of me and he showed it to this man, and that's why he's being pulled into this mess. "This is your place?" Matty glances around. I step out, closing the door behind us.

"Yeah, it's super old. Can get drafty. I swear it's haunted, but no one wants to believe me."

"She's joking." Blake forces a laugh.

"Am not." Okay, maybe I just want it to be haunted 'cause that sounds badass, but whatever.

"What was your name again?" Matty asks.

"Morgan" is all I give. "Shall we get this show on the road? I'm hungry." I make my way over to the SUV and let myself into the back seat. Matty opens the door for Blake to get in before he jogs around to the driver's side, and we're off and through the gates headed toward the city.

"Do you mind if I ask what you do for a living, Morgan?"

"I'm a tattoo artist."

"A very sought-after one," Blake is quick to add. "You have to send in a request, she has to review it, and then maybe she'll do the art for you. But she only does females."

"Interesting," Matty responds in a tone I'm not sure how to take.

"Yeah, it was a hard toss-up for me. I was swinging between being a mortuary cosmetologist or tattoo artist, but tattooing won in the end. I suppose I could change careers one day. I'm still young."

"She's joking!" Blake rushes to say. I don't need to see her face to know her cheeks are flushing. "Morgan loves being a tattoo artist. She doesn't even have any tattoos herself. She will only do tattoos that she feels have meaning behind them. It's part of the form you have to fill out to even get an appointment to meet with her." Blake turns to look back at me, beaming with pride.

God, I love her. Otherwise, I'd be back at the Hoffman estate grooming Grams' three Welsh corgis. All of which don't

like me. I try not to take it personally. They only like Grams.



CHAPTER 3

EROS

“OH HELL,” I CURSE WHEN I SEE THE TEXT MESSAGE FROM Matty that he’s five minutes away. Time had gotten away from me.

“You’re not going on a blind date dressed like this, are you?” Mom cries in dismay. “It’s Valentine’s Day!”

“I’m going to put on a different shirt,” I yell as I bolt down the hallway. What do I even have to wear on dates? Even when I go to the gallery, I show up in jeans and a T-shirt. I’m an artist. I can wear whatever I want because people expect me to be edgy and different, when the truth is I don’t pay attention to shit that doesn’t interest me. Clothes do not interest me. I rifle through my closet and find a plain white shirt with an actual collar. While I’m buttoning it, I hear my doorbell ring. I tuck the tails in, belt my jeans, stick my wallet in my back pocket, and head to the front door. The bell rings again.

“Yeah, I’m coming,” I shout.

Mom is already apologizing for me when I arrive in the foyer. Unsurprisingly, Matty is dressed in a sharply tailored blue suit. At least he’s not wearing a tie.

He gives me a once-over and shakes his head. “I’d curse you out, but this time, I think it’s a good fit. Let’s go. I’ve got reservations at Chez Louis, and if you’re late, they give your table to someone else. See you later, Mrs. B.”

He grabs my arm and drags me out of the house. “I thought you weren’t going to answer the door,” he says as he hurries me to his Land Rover.

“I wouldn’t have, but my mom was about to marry me off to some banker’s daughter, I think. You’re the least worst option at the moment.” I’m saying this as I open the door without realizing someone inside could hear me. I meet the eyes of a knockout gorgeous woman with pink hair and immediately regret my entire life. “Ah, I did not mean you. Definitely not. You could not be the least worst option. Obviously, the best option.” Matty hits me on the back of my head, and I don’t retaliate because I deserve it.

The woman, my dream woman, just stares at me like I’m an alien life form just materialized from some gray anti-matter she’d like to jettison back into space. I climb into the buttery leather seat and lean my head back against the rest. This is why I don’t date. Too complicated.

“Morgan, this is Jack Flynn.”

“You look familiar,” says the blonde from the front seat. I guess this must be the girl Matty’s been chatting up. “Are you in the bond business too?”

Matty’s a day trader.

“No. I’m a work from home guy.” I don’t tell strangers that I’m Eros B, art savant. It’s too tiring to explain, and I’d have to field a ton of weird questions.

“This is quite the home you have. Real estate in this area is very coveted,” Blake remarks.

“Family home,” I answer.

“This is Blake, and no, Flynn inherited it from his grandparents,” Matty explains. “Crap. I think we’re going to be late.” He reaches for his phone to call the restaurant.

“Don’t worry about it,” I say. Louis Bodycomb wouldn’t refuse me a table. He likes my art too much.

“You sure?” Matty eyes me in the rearview mirror.

“Yeah.” Through this whole discussion, the woman—my date—has remained silent. Covertly, I take in her black pants with a million strategically placed cuts in them and her button-down shirt that has *dead inside* embroidered in red over the

left breast. It's a fire outfit. The woman is a mix of fire and sweetness. She is trying to hide the sweet part, but it's there.

I feel extra shitty that I didn't put in more effort for my own appearance. I drag a hand over my jaw and feel the stubble. I should've taken this more seriously, but who would've expected Matty to find such a treasure? He's kind of superficial although a super nice guy. I figured anyone he would set me up with would be plastic and cold instead of this amazing woman with the pink hair and the sexy as fuck black pants.

I decide to try again, looking slightly over her left shoulder to be respectful. I can't be staring at her fine tits. "So, Morgan, what is it that you do?"

"I'm a tattoo artist." She says it with a challenge in her voice like there's something wrong with that.

"Amazing."

"And you?"

If I say I'm an artist, will she think I'm trying to one up her or that I'm a douchebag braggart?

"Can't you tell by his jeans?" jokes Matty.

"You're a designer then?" she guesses.

"Something like that," I hedge.

Matty pulls up in front of the restaurant and brakes. I hop down and hold out my hand for Morgan, who avoids touching me and instead uses the side pillar of the Rover to steady herself as she steps down. I let my untouched hand drop to my side. She joins the blond woman, and they move toward the restaurant, arm in arm.

"You better not be shitting us about the restaurant reservation. They're strict here, and it's Valentine's Day," Matty whispers under his breath.

"Uh huh." I wonder what the girls are talking about. The two of them are really night and day.

When we get inside, the maître d' gives us the nastiest look while Morgan and Blake hang back, whispering something to one another. "You're fifteen minutes late. The reservation has expired."

Matty glares at me and then switches on his trader smile. "Carl, can I call you Carl? The traffic was a bitch." He holds out his hand to offer the maître d' some cash. "I see a four-top in the corner there that would be perfect."

"No."

"Is Louis here?" I intervene before Matty's head blows off.

"Chef Louis is—" The maître d' cuts himself off. His eyes widen. "Eros, I mean, Mr. Flynn. It has been quite a while since you've been here. I think the last time was when we installed—I mean, yes, of course we have a table for you. You should have reserved it under your name. We would've put you in the chef's room where your work—"

"It's fine. Whatever table you have is great." The rule is when you buy one of my works, you can't mention me. I don't like the fame, the notoriety. I don't paint for that reason. I paint because if I don't, it'll kill me.

Carl leads us over to the four-top that Matty had pointed out earlier. I pull out the chair for Morgan, who ignores it and sits in the chair that Carl pulls out. I've never had a woman hate me in an instant. I must be a masochist because it only makes me want her more.



CHAPTER 4

MORGAN

I WASN'T TRYING TO BE A TOTAL BITCH WHEN I DIDN'T TAKE the chair Eros pulled out for me. I mean, I want to be one after the rude comment he made when he'd gotten into the car, and it also annoyed me how the maître d' was falling all over himself to give Eros a table. But the reality is, it really had nothing to do with those two things; it was just a matter of me wanting my back to the restaurant.

I might not go to all the events my parents do, but sometimes I do get roped into a few. It's not uncommon to run into people. My mom and dad might have sticks up their asses most of the time, but I do still love them. It's just that our love is a bit different than a lot of other kids have with their parents.

Well, normal kids. The kids I went to boarding school with before I got to break away to college understood. A lot of them had the same kind of relationship with their parents. This world is so strange. I want to get up and walk out of here, but I stay put for Blake. Plus, Eros might be a jerk or maybe we got off on the wrong foot, but either way, he's handsome. That's not a word I use often, if ever, unless we're talking about a cat.

Blake doesn't understand how things can be with my parents. They are polite to her, but I believe that's only because I drew a hard line in the sand for them when they came out for a weekend visit during my freshman year of college. I made sure they understood that Blake was off-limits to any comments that weren't anything but nice.

That is one plus to my relationship with my parents. We both have boundaries we've set in areas, and we do our best to

respect those. Plus, I can be a bit of a snitch to Grams when I don't like something they do. What?! I tell Grams most things, so they should already expect it.

Blake, however, can make me feel guilty at times with how I avoid my parents while she has none at all. She'd only ended up at the same fancy ass college as me because she worked her ass off and got scholarships. I shelter her a lot from the bullshit my parents can dish out at times. Blake has gone through enough in life. She doesn't need their uppity crap.

I know she'd give anything to have a day with her parents again. It's part of the reason why I'd talked her into moving back to the Hoffman estate with me. Grams can be like a mom, and really, everyone should have a Grams in their life. I can feel my phone vibrating in my bag, and I know it's her texting me. Getting her that iPhone was the worst and best thing I've ever done in my life. I bet you she tracked my location and is laughing her ass off at where I'm at.

It's funny how Eros thinks he's the only one that can get a table here. Little does he know that my parents are investors in this restaurant. When I realized where we were heading for dinner, I wasn't too excited about it.

This date is going downhill quickly. I'm pretty sure no one will recognize me. That is as long as Chef Louis doesn't come out. The last time I met him, I think my hair had been a cherry red. I was here for the opening of the restaurant and for my father's birthday six months ago, so I've only met the man twice.

"Good evening. I'm Porter, and I'll be your server tonight. Can I start you all off with some wine?" The waiter arrives, handing the wine menu over to Eros, who takes it but passes it right over to me. It's actually a sweet gesture. I might have a wine cellar bigger than most people's homes, but wine has never been my thing.

"I'm not really a wine girl." I hand the menu back.

"Me neither."

“A girl or wine?” I smirk. He smiles at my teasing, a dimple forming in his left cheek.

Damn, do I have a thing for dimples? His is mostly covered in a nice layer of scruff. He hadn't shaved for the date. I'm not sure what to make of that. Either he thought he didn't need to because he was charming enough to get laid without trying, or he is only being himself. I'm having a hard time reading which one it is.

“Neither,” he says with a chuckle before offering the menu to Matty and Blake.

“I'd love some champagne,” Blake says without looking at the menu.

“The Moët & Chandon Brut Imperial,” I tell the server for her. It's Blake's absolute favorite.

“I thought wines weren't your thing?” Eros tries to tease me back.

“They aren't, but knowing my best friend is.” I lay that right out on the table for both of them. Fuck with her, that means you fuck with me.

“Shall we do a glass or bottle?” Porter asks.

“Bottle, I'll have it with you,” Matty offers. Point for him. Blake beams over at him. They really do match well together. This is the first time in a long time that I've seen Blake look this happy.

“And for you two?” Porter asks us next. Eros waits for me to answer first.

“I'll take a Scotch. Glenfiddich but eighteen-year-old, please.”

“I'll take the same,” Eros says, his eyes never leaving me. I fight not to fidget under his gaze. That's new for me.

I'm not really one to get nervous. I mean, I grew up with my parents. Having a backbone is a requirement. But there's something about this man that has me off-kilter. Why is he staring so intensely? More than that, who is Eros? He doesn't

scream money from the way he's dressed, but the maître d' knew him. I'm not buying the whole designer thing.

I might not be into high fashion, but I'm around it enough to know what's in and recognize the names. Grams buys me crap all the time to wear when I have to show up to some family event or charity. I just put it on because she has impeccable taste. We don't even have to go shopping. They deliver the clothing and everything else right to our front door. Grams shuffles through what she wants to keep and tells them to come back and collect whatever is left. Eros is a name I would remember. I can't place it, but the name does sound familiar.

"I'll get those drinks right in. Would you like sparkling water or still?"

"Whatever comes out of the tap," I respond. Eros chuckles under his breath again. His chuckle is sexy. How is that a thing? A chuckle being hot? "What? It's weird when the water is sparkling. It doesn't taste right."

"Tap all around," Eros tells Porter. A boy in all black rushes over to fill our water glasses while Porter removes the wine glasses from the table.

"Are there any food allergies or such I should let Chef Louis know about?" Porter asks.

"I'm a vegan." The table goes quiet.

"She's joking." Blake kicks me under the table while shooting me a glare.

"Ouch, it was only a joke," I tell Porter, hoping Louis doesn't actually come out to the table. I've been dodging his sister's request for a tattoo. Honestly, I was doing the girl a favor after I saw what she wanted done.

She'll thank me in five years. I'm just not sure Blake is going to thank me after tonight.



CHAPTER 5

EROS

SHE'S WARMING UP TO ME. SHE SPOKE MORE THAN TWO words, and she smiled in my direction. Progress is being made. I'm not texting my mom and telling her to prepare the wedding party, but it's better than the cold shoulder I was treated to earlier.

"A scotch drinker?" I tilt my head to get a better look at Morgan. She's so pretty it makes my teeth ache. And other body parts.

"Is that odd? A girl can't drink scotch?"

"Booze is gender neutral in my book and goes well with beef bourguignon, which is what I intend to order. You?"

"Snails."

"Solid choice. It's a French restaurant, and no one does snails better than the French."

"You hate snails," Blake interjects.

"I'm acquiring a taste for them," Morgan declares with a sweep of her chin. "Besides, Eros says that they're great here."

"Flynn, please," I say. I can't have my future wife calling me by that dumb name.

"The maître d' can call you Eros, but the rest of us have to call you by the name of a Disney prince?"

Disney prince? I cast a plea for help in Matty's direction, but he can only shrug in ignorance.

"Flynn Ryder!" exclaims Blake. "The hero in *Tangled*."

Matty and I stare at each other blankly.

“God, cretins,” Blake sighs in what looks like disgust.

“I liked *Coco*,” Matty tries to save himself. “I watched that three times with the nephews.”

“Flynn’s my middle name,” I add, trying to salvage my own situation. “And it was my great-grandpa’s name, and we don’t have any princes in our family tree.”

“I’m not saying it’s a bad thing,” Morgan replies. She pauses as our drinks are delivered. “It’s just Eros is cool.”

I press a finger against my broken nose. “That’s one perspective.”

“Is everyone ready?” the waiter asks.

Everyone places their order. Morgan does not get snails but instead opts for scallops in a butter sauce. I order the beef, as does Matty. Blake gets snails.

“They sound good.”

“They are a specialty here,” the waiter preens.

“Where do people like getting tattoos?” I ask when the waiter leaves.

“Arm is the number one spot. Women like to do their backs or ankles. Men seem to love the biceps.”

“Is it painful?”

“Do you want to get one?”

“Will you be behind the needle?”

“You have to fill out a dissertation,” Matty inserts.

I slide him an annoyed look.

“Sorry,” he replies. “I was trying to save you some pain.”

“What kind of dissertation?” I ask.

“I only tatt women, and while I don’t mean to judge a book by its cover, your cover screams man.”

“I can’t tell if that’s an insult or a compliment, so I’m going to take it as a compliment.”

“Do you have any tattoos?”

“What’s my best answer here?”

“An honest one?”

“I feel like I’m watching a tennis match. Blake, do you want to go look at the wine bottles with me?”

“I’d love to, Matty.” The two get up and leave us.

“Was it something I said?” Morgan wonders.

“I’m sure it was me.”

“Are we fighting over who is the more offensive dinner partner?”

I open my mouth to say something like, “Of course it’s me,” and then snap my mouth shut when I realize I would be proving her point. “I have no tattoos. It seems pretty permanent to me, and I haven’t found anything I’ve wanted to have inked on my skin forever.”

The corners of her lips quirk up. “Same.”

“Same?” I don’t follow.

“I also have no tattoos for the same reason. It’s actually why I ask for the so-called dissertation. I want people who come to me to really know why they’re getting a tattoo. In fact, I have a lot of women who ask me to do cover-up tattoos because they regret the ones they got early on. We talk about what they want the art to look like, what it means to them. Sometimes we do big pieces of art across their backs or along their arms. It’s a means of expression, a story they tell themselves and sometimes to the world.”

The whole time she talks, her face is lit up. Her eyes are bright, and her cheeks have color. She’s passionate about this topic, passionate about her work. It makes me wonder what else she could be passionate about. A person? A man?

I’d want the lights on when I made love to her. I’d want to see her face change as I stroked her, licked her, fingered her.

How rosy would her cheeks grow? How glittery would her eyes become? Would she smile or scream or laugh? Would tears form? Would they be salty or sweet?

I haven't painted a portrait in years, but my hands itch to put her face on a canvas. There's something unique and vital about her that I need to capture. I'd paint her in bright, primary colors, full of life and vibrancy. The painting would never go up for sale. I'd hang it in my studio, and it would light up the space enough that I wouldn't even need the sun.

"Would you make an exception to your no man rule?" The words come out husky, slightly hoarse. My throat is dry with need.

Her eyes widen as if she senses she's in danger. She could run from me, but I'd chase her. I'd haul her to the ground, onto the needle-covered forest floor. I'd tear her clothes off and feast on her body, sucking at her tits, tonguing her delicate cunt, driving my massive hard-on into her tight channel. Her screams would send the birds soaring and me over a cliff.

"Are we still talking about tattoos?" she asks in a shaky voice.

"No. We're not, and I'm glad you know it."

I fist my hand on the table. I'll have this woman. Even if it takes me a lifetime to conquer her, I'll make her mine.



CHAPTER 6

MORGAN

I LICK MY LIPS THINKING ABOUT WHAT IT WOULD BE LIKE TO spend the night in Eros' bed. I've already sized up his hands. There is a rough texture to them, and I itch to reach out and run my finger down his palm to feel it for myself.

Well, fuck me. I think I might actually be enjoying this man's company. I glance at the scotch in front of me. What if he slipped me something? A happy pill or something? Is that still a thing? I have no clue about any of this. I was an art major.

"We haven't even had dinner yet and you're inviting me back to your place?" I tease. At least I think I'm teasing. I'm in a very new territory. I tend to be bold and speak out for myself. I don't often give a shit what others think of me.

Especially when it comes to men. The boys at boarding school did not help in my like of the opposite sex. They were the worst of the worst. But I was no pushover, and they hated me for it. I was always the one pushing back against them when they tried their little tricks on some of the girls. That put a target on my back. In a messed-up way, they kind of won. I've spent my adult life avoiding most men. I'm sure that's some inner trauma they instilled into me.

"You are more than welcome into my home anytime you wish." I pick up my drink to take a sip to hide my smile. His responses are smooth and really on point. He's either really good at this or we're actually connecting on some level. One I don't think I've ever had with a man before.

“We’ll have to see what you pick for dessert.” I set my glass down. “That says a lot about a man.” I’m full of shit. I’m making this up as I go. I have no clue about men. I’ve never even been on a date before.

“That’s a lot of pressure.” He pulls at the collar of his shirt, making me laugh.

“You’re laughing!” Blake says, reappearing at the table. “She’s laughing.” She glances at Matty to make sure she’s not seeing things.

“I laugh. Remember that time you—”

“Don’t you do it.” Blake gives me the best glare she can muster. I wasn’t really going to spill any secrets, but it’s fun to work her up. Matty pulls out Blake’s chair for her as the server shows up with a few appetizers.

“Compliments of the chef.”

“That’s a damn good charcuterie board.” I pluck an olive off the tray before I pull my phone out of my purse. Blake does the same, but we’re taking pictures for two totally different reasons. Hers is going onto her Instagram.

“Don’t send that to Alf,” Blake scolds me.

“Alfred,” I correct before I hit send on the picture.

“You know how competitive he is about charcuterie boards. I swear you live to drive him insane.” Nah, I love Alfred. He’s like an uncle to me. He’s been with me my whole life. It was him that read me my first Batman comic and why I started calling him Alfred.

“You should be thanking me. Now we’ll be getting one every night for the next week because he’ll be trying to prove he is better.” Matty and Eros’ eyes bounce between the two of us. My phone buzzes in my hand with a message from Grams. I hadn’t opened it and read the others yet.

Grams: Oh you can text Alfred but not me?!

I scroll through and see the ones she sent before laughing about the restaurant we’re at and asking me about my date.

“Should I be worried about this Alfred guy?” Eros asks.

“Nope. I mean, older men can be hot, but that’s like grandpa territory. Now Grams, that’s who you should worry about. Say cheese,” I say, not really giving Eros a chance to pose for the picture. I send it to Grams so she’ll leave me be for a little, but damn she texts fast.

Grams: I wouldn’t be upset if you didn’t come home this evening. That’s all I’m saying.

I can’t hold in my laugh. She’s too much. God, I love her.

“What?” I can tell Eros is really curious about what I’m texting. I did take a random picture of him.

I scroll down so he can only see Grams asking for a picture of my blind date and griping about me texting Alfred along with her comment about me not coming home tonight after she sees his picture.

“I think I like your Grams.” He smiles, and that dimple pops out again. “You live with your grandmother?” I can tell there is no judgment in his question. Matty already filled me in with his random comment about Eros’ home being one that was passed down through family.

“Yeah, since I left college. I’m not sure living in the city is for me. It’s nice being on the outskirts. People aren’t always my thing.”

“Her grams is the absolute best. Morgan talked me into moving back here when we graduated, and Violette opened her doors right up to me,” Blake says sweetly. I’ve never met a more thankful person in my life. I don’t know how she grew up in the system and I grew up in a fancy-ass private boarding school and she’s the one that turned out utterly sweet. I’m not really sure what I am, to be honest.

“I didn’t talk her into moving here. I kidnapped her,” I retort.

“I don’t think it would take much to kidnap anyone back to that house,” Matty jokes.

“It’s been in the family a long time” is all I give. Everything always changes when people realize who I am.

“This cheese is amazing.” Blake changes the subject away from the topic for me.

Though I think it might be too late. Out of the corner of my eye, I spot Chef Louis heading toward our table. Our eyes lock, and I know he recognizes me. Then I remember not only had he asked about a tattoo for his sister but he’d asked for a date too. How the hell did I forget that? Then again, I forget most men.

I don’t think I’ll have that problem with Eros.



CHAPTER 7

EROS

“MORGAN, IT’S BEEN TOO LONG,” CHEF LOUIS GLIDES forward and places his ass in my face.

I literally have to lean around the man to see Morgan’s face. She’s way too smiley for my liking. I frown.

“Hey, Louis. I was meaning to bring my grams in, but she’s on a pasta fast. No pasta because it keeps her up at night.”

I can’t tell if she’s serious or making shit up because she doesn’t want to eat here.

“I have other dishes here such as the scallops that you ordered. I’ll make an extra order, and you can bring it home for her to taste.”

“She’s got a shellfish allergy.”

“The beef dishes have been proclaimed the best in the city.”

“Morgan’s grams is a vegan.” Blake enters the fray.

If the bestie is making an assist, it means that Morgan has no interest. Time for me to stop sitting here like a dumb rock and help my woman out. “Chef, your scotch is top notch. Both Morgan and I are enjoying it.”

That seems to be clear, but the ass literally does not move. “Come over tomorrow, and I will prepare a special meal for you both. No pasta, no meat.”

“No eggs, no butter,” Blake adds.

I see Louis' shoulders stiffen. "I know what vegan entails. I wasn't aware Ms. Hamilton had given up animal-based products, but it does have undeniable health benefits, and we in this city want Ms. Hamilton to live for a long time."

Ms. Hamilton? He says her name with such reverence. The only people in this city that have that last name who could be worthy of Louis' devotion are *the* Hamiltons, of the shipping magnate Hamiltons. They've been rich since before this country was established. The Hamiltons make my family look poor, and my bank account is eight figures.

I don't remember hearing about a granddaughter, though. Or maybe my mom has told me and I tuned her out since I've been trying to avoid getting married off for at least a decade. I should probably pay more attention to the things she talks about. I send her a silent apology and get to work. I get to my feet and go to stand behind Morgan's chair.

"Louis, not to be that guy, but we're on a date, and you're really cramping my style. How can I convince Morgan that she should go out with me again if you're hogging all of her time?" I smile benignly even though I kind of want to punch him in the face.

"You?" Louis frowns. "Since when do you date? You told me you had one passion, and it wasn't people."

"I said that because I thought you were hitting on me and I wasn't interested."

"Why would I ask you out?" Louis looks offended. "You're a *man*. I'm interested in Morgan. I think we have a connection."

"The connection is dead," I say.

"I'm really sorry, Louis, but I am on a date with Eros here." Morgan's voice is a little more apologetic than I'd like.

"Is it because he has money? I have money, and you have more than both of us."

"Hey, friend, what kind of bullshit is this? No need to insult Morgan because she didn't want to date you. It's not that serious. Take your L and move on." This time I move from

behind her chair to step between her and Louis. She doesn't need to hear this crap.

“It's an insult to your family. I was complimenting Morgan on her family's good fortune.”

“That's not better. First you implied that she only has interest in money, and second, you're making a fool out of yourself. Everyone in here is watching us and wondering why their chef is making passes at customers instead of chopping onions. Don't make this worse for yourself.” Has this guy lost his marbles? I suppose if one was to lose their marbles, it would be over a beauty like Morgan.

Louis ignores me. “Morgan, I'll stop by your house tomorrow with food for you and your grams. Be prepared. I won't take no for an answer.”

Morgan sighs heavily. “Louis, please. Your food is great, but this is embarrassing.”

Louis loses it. “You're what's embarrassing! You could've had me, but instead you're throwing me away for some guy who holds a paint brush?”

“Some guy?” Now I'm fucking offended.

I march over to the far wall where my painting hangs and pull it off the wall.

“What the hell are you doing?” Louis yells.

“You don't get this anymore.” I jerk my head at Morgan. “You coming?”

She hesitates, looks at Louis, and then walks in my direction.

“You can't take that. It belongs to the restaurant.” Louis' head is about to explode.

“Read the contract.” The painting is large and bulky, and I practically knock a couple people over as I carry it toward the door. Matty and Blake race ahead to get the car. They seem like a good pair.

“Sir! You can’t leave with that.” The maître d’ attempts to halt my progress.

I start to lower the painting across my knee.

Louis shrieks, “Not the painting. Leave him alone! Let him go!”

“Thought I was just some dude with a paintbrush,” I call. Satisfied, I march out with Morgan in tow.

“Can you really take that?” she asks when we reach the sidewalk.

“I did, didn’t I?”

“Why?”

“Louis is an ass and doesn’t deserve this.”

“It is a beautiful piece. The colors are vibrant. I’m usually not a fan of modern art because it’s often so cold, but this work has energy and warmth. Like I’m standing in the sun.”

I beam at her. “It’s yours then.”

“I can’t.”

“You better take it,” Matty advises. He’s arrived with the Rover. “Otherwise, we’re going to be here all night. He’s stubborn like that.”

“I get that.”

“Not dickhead stubborn like Louis, though,” I hurry to clarify. “Just regular stubborn.” That sounds dumb as hell. I clamp my mouth shut. I shove the painting in the back of the Rover and usher Morgan back into the car.

“Where to?” Matty asks.

“My place,” Morgan and I both respond at the same time.

“At the risk of sounding crazed, see how in sync we are?” I hold out my hand to Morgan. She smiles and places her fingers on top of mine. “You can drop us off at my place, Matty. Thanks for the invite. I owe you one.”

“I’ll drop by on Monday and let you know my price.”

I think everyone in the Rover knows I'll pay whatever he asks.



CHAPTER 8

MORGAN

“ARE YOU REALLY STAYING?” BLAKE ASKS WHEN WE SLIDE out of the back of the Rover at Eros’ place. I can see she’s a bit skeptical. I mean I can’t blame her. I didn’t even want to go on this date, and now I’m being dropped off at the man’s house. If the shoe was on the other foot, I’d be asking her the same thing.

“Yeah, I think I am. How about you? Should I let Grams know that you won’t be making it home tonight?” Blake’s cheeks pinken. She’s really into this guy.

“I think I’m going to go home with him.”

“Good for you. Don’t do anything I wouldn’t.” I kiss her on the cheek.

“So I can murder and cause mayhem but must keep my chastity belt intact?” she teases me.

“Fine, you’re a free woman. Burn your bra and panties.”

“I have a fireplace,” Matty chimes in from the driver’s seat, listening to our whole conversation. Not that we’re hiding it well. I’m standing at the passenger door. Blake had rolled the window down to talk to me while Eros wrangled his painting out of the back of the vehicle.

“Text me later,” Blake and I say at the same time as I step back from the vehicle.

“You need some help with that?” I ask Eros.

“Can you grab my keys for me? Front left pocket.”

“Is that a line? Is this a trick?” I wiggle my brows but reach into his pocket for his keys since he has his hands full at the moment.

“It’s not a line, but feel free to grab anything you want while you’re in there.” I can’t help but laugh. I can’t remember the last time I’ve enjoyed a man’s company this much.

Plus, him getting all territorial over me was pretty hot. That is not something I’d ever in my life thought I’d be into, but Eros had gone from cool and collected to *Don’t fuck with my date* in two seconds. It was pretty badass.

I find his keys, pulling them out. We head up to his place. I unlock the door, and he even gives me the code to turn the alarm off. “Can’t wait to rob you later.”

“You get off on that kind of thing? The thrill?”

“Just call me Winona Ryder.” Eros sets the painting down against the wall. I start to wander into his home, unable to help myself. “I will be stealing from your fridge. I only ate two olives and one piece of cheese. I don’t know about other women you date, but this one eats.”

“I don’t really date,” he says from behind as he follows me. I’d heard Louis mention something about that. My ear might have perked up a bit on that one.

His place is pretty modern but with a rustic feel to it. The countertops in his kitchen are pretty neat. They’re a pure black quartz from the looks of it but matte. The place does scream bachelor pad to a degree but a cool one.

“I fear what I’ll find,” I say when I grab the handles of his fridge before I pull it open and find it fully stocked. There are glass Tupperware containers lining one side while the other is filled with a variety of drinks. “You cook?” I glance over my shoulder at him. I expect him to be checking out my ass or something, but really he’s taking in every inch of me. I’d almost swear he’s memorizing every detail.

“I do okay in the kitchen, but that is my mother’s doing.” An almost bashful expression crosses his face. As for me, my chest warms.

“She comes over and stocks your fridge?” He nods, still seeming a bit embarrassed about it.

“That’s really cool, Eros. Your mom sounds like a good one.” I glance through the selection and grab the one I think is lasagna. There is even a little note on the top stating what temp to cook it at and for how long. “Lasagna work for you?”

“Yeah, it works for me.” He walks over and turns the stove on.

“You mind?” I motion toward my boots, wanting to take them off.

“Make yourself at home.”

“Don’t have to ask me twice.” I toe my boots off before I wander over toward the TV. When I grab the remote, I see a paused documentary about vampire myths. “A non-believer?” I turn back around. Eros is slipping the dish into the oven.

“I mean, you can bite me and prove the whole thing wrong if you want.” Again, I burst into laughter. That is until a cat suddenly appears, jumping onto the back of the sofa.

“You have a cat?” I whisper, not wanting to startle it.

“He can be a bit feisty.”

“You clearly have a type.” I wink at him. I’m not bad at this flirting thing, if I do say so myself.

“Clearly.” I turn around and ignore the cat. “You’re not going to try and pet him?”

“No way. If I want his attention, I need to ignore him. Then he’ll come to me.” Eros folds his arms over his chest and watches, giving me a nice view of his biceps. I haven’t seen many thickly built artists in my day, and I don’t mean in a way that he hits the gym every day. He’s just naturally built this way. He’s all man.

I’m leaning up against the back of the sofa. Out of the corner of my eye, I watch the cat slowly come closer. Soon he’s butting his head into my side. I offer the little guy my hand, letting him smell it before I go in for my first pet.

“Well, I’ll be damned.”

“I’m a woman of many skills. Cat wrangler, appliance invader, art thief, tattoo artist... I could keep going, but I don’t want to bore you.”

“Promise you. I’m never going to grow bored of you.”

I don’t think I am going to either. Eros is starting to be a little too good to be true.



CHAPTER 9

EROS

AS MY TRAITOROUS CAT KNEADS HIS PAWS ON MORGAN'S LAP, I take the opportunity to drink her in. The tips of her fingers are slightly dark, likely ink-stained. Even in the lamplight, her skin looks golden and warm, like she said my paintings exude. I wonder if she knows how sexy she is, how attractive she is to other people or whether she's clueless. Louis had come on hard, but Morgan doesn't act like a woman who recognizes her own appeal. She probably attributes the attention sent her way to the money her family has.

Gremlin allows himself to be picked up and hugged to Morgan's chest. The shirt pulls tight by the motion and outlines her braless chest, something I'd noticed earlier but pushed out of my head because I'm too old to be sporting a hard-on in public. The timer dings and saves me from further embarrassment. I'm not a sixteen-year-old anymore. I can handle the outline of a nipple in a woman's shirt.

I plate the food and bring it out to her. "I don't have eighteen-year-old scotch, but I do have new milk and beer."

"I'll take the milk. I don't think beer mixes well with lasagna." She puts Gremlin down, and he immediately jumps back into her lap.

"Really, Gremlin?" I reach across to shoo him away, and my arm inadvertently brushes her tit.

She sucks in a swift breath.

"Sorry. Really wasn't making a pass there."

“I know.” She laughs a little. “I don’t know why I acted like a Victorian maiden. Even Winona is getting it on with Daddy Jim.”

“I can wait until you get some food into you before throwing you on the floor and ravishing you, so eat in peace.” I hand her a fork and the plate of lasagna. “Thoughts on what you want to watch? I usually flip until my thumb gets tired and then watch whatever is on screen. That’s how I ended up on the real story behind vampires, the truth about mermaids, and how to blow glass. Not gonna lie, the mermaid one had me fucked up.”

“I haven’t seen it. What’s it about?”

It seems like we’re both agreeing that we’ll table the sex stuff, the possible Daddy interest she has, to move on to safer things. It is our first date and not even a solo one. I’m feeding her food my mom made. The least I can do is buy her a full dinner or cook her something with my own hands before tying her to my bed posts and having my lustful way with her.

“Mermaids and whether they’re real or fake. This is not a real documentary. There’s a warning at the beginning, but by the end of the show, you’re thinking, wait a sec, maybe Hans Christian Anderson was actually writing a documentary and not a fairy tale.”

“Okay, I need to watch this.”

Obediently I put it on, and for the next hour, Morgan is transfixed. At the end, after she’s eaten two servings of my mom’s delicious pasta, drank three beers, and is slightly—maybe even more than slightly—tipsy, she turns to me with her red lips parted and her eyes wide. “I think I believe.”

I can’t laugh because I was in the same state of confusion after watching the “documentary”. “You need another beer,” I answer. I hand her a fresh one.

“Are you trying to get me drunk and take advantage of me?”

My brows crash together. Have I been saying my intrusive thoughts out loud? About how I wanted to tie her up and

ravish her? “Hey, I’m on my fourth one, too. Maybe I should be worried about you taking advantage of me.”

“Hmmm.” She tips the beer back as if she’s contemplating this. “I think you’re too big for me to take advantage of.”

“I could tie one hand behind my back.”

“Kinky. But only one?”

“I have to have one hand free. How else am I supposed to touch you?”

“You have a tongue.”

Said tongue is feeling thick as hell. This sexy talk is getting to me. I shift slightly and breathe through my nose. *First date, asshole. Do not fuck this up.*

“Not to ruin the mood and all but, Morgan, if you keep going down this route, we’re going to have sex. If you’re ready, so am I, but if you’re not, you might want to move down about two feet.”

She doesn’t move, and I spend a long moment where a dozen scenes race through my head where she’s naked and I’m balls deep inside of her. Gremlin jumps between us and breaks the spell. Morgan gets to her feet and gives me an unsteady smile. “I think I better call an Uber.”

“Or you can stay here. I promise not to touch you.”

The corner of her lips quirks up. “Sure, but who’s going to save you from me?”

“I don’t want to be saved. Please, take me.” I hold out my arms.

She just laughs again. It’s a breathy one and goes straight from my ears to my cock, but I know hesitation when I see it. When Morgan and I do have sex, it’s going to be something we’re both one hundred percent into, particularly if it involves ropes, a little Daddy play, some spanking, and who knows what else.

The car service arrives way too quickly for my liking. “I’d kiss you goodbye,” I say, “but when I do get my mouth on

you, I'm not going to stop." I reach across and buckle her in. "Take good care of her. She's precious," I tell the driver.

"Got it, man. I promise to deliver her with only a few scratches," he jokes.

"If you do, I'll come and shove the gear shift down your throat," I reply, deadly serious. The driver shuts up immediately.

I stand on the sidewalk and watch the car until the taillights disappear and the dark night swallows her up. I stay out there with my hands in my pockets for a long time. Funny how your life can change in an instant. One day, you're struggling with inspiration, and the next moment, you find the one person you can't live without.



CHAPTER 10

MORGAN

“LADY MORGAN, YOUR PRESENCE HAS BEEN REQUESTED IN THE study.” I groan when Alfred’s voice fills my bedroom through the smart system.

“Stop calling me a lady. It’s an insult,” I shout, and regret it instantly as the pounding in my head persists. I don’t have a full hangover, but I need some water or food in me. A couple of Advil should really do the trick.

“I know,” Alfred responds. I suppose I had that coming.

“Can we make my presence required in the kitchen instead? I need orange juice and toast.”

“I’ll bring both to the study.”

“I take it we have a guest?” Why else would we be headed to the study?

“Yes.”

“It’s not—”

“No, it’s not your parents.”

“Did Blake make it home last night?”

“I do not meddle in people’s affairs.”

I would burst into laughter if I felt better.

“You’re such a liar.” He knows everything that happens in this place.

“Blake is not home at the moment. Now please make your way to the study.”

“Fine.” I yawn, rolling out of my bed. “Give me ten.” I need to at least freshen up a bit before going to see anyone.

Grams making this house a smart home really takes away from the whole rustic-haunted feeling. My grandmother is way too good with technology. Who am I kidding? The woman is amazing at everything she puts her mind to.

I stumble toward my bathroom and get myself together the best I can. I pile my hair on top of my head and then pop a few Advil and chug a bottle of water before brushing my teeth.

I snag a pair of jean shorts and an oversized shirt before pulling on a pair of sneakers. The second I enter the study, I turn around to leave.

“Get your butt back here,” Grams orders.

“I don’t like George.” I motion to the man in the impeccable suit. “He’s my archenemy.” My words don’t faze George, nor does my death glare, but I don’t think much does faze lawyers. “I’m not talking about gravestones or family jewels.” I hate this shit.

“This isn’t about my impending death.”

“Grandma!” I shout. I know she’s joking, but still it irks me, which is saying a lot. I’m the first person to use gallows humor.

“Oh, she’s mad. She called me Grandma,” she tells George.

Alfred walks in with a tray of toast and orange juice and heads straight for me.

“I love you today, Alf. Even if you woke me up.”

“You weren’t supposed to come home last night,” Grams points out.

“Can’t all be hussies like you, Grams.” I snag the orange juice and chug half of it back before I take a bite of the toast. “So if this isn’t about death, it’s about the family trust.” Their silence is all the answer I need. It’s too early in the day to talk about all this.

“Your boyfriend stole a piece of art last night.” George finally speaks.

“He’s not my boyfriend. I’m not twelve.”

“Well, he wasn’t a one-night stand either.” Grams smirks. Alfred tries to keep his face impassive, but he’s failing miserably.

“It’s his art or whatever.” I take another bite of my toast.

“A piece of art that was sold and bought for three million dollars.”

“Damn, his art goes for that much?” I hadn’t realized the extent of how sought-out Eros actually is.

“That was the original retail. It’s one of Eros Flynn’s earlier works. I’m sure it appraises for several more million in today’s market.”

“Don’t we like own that place or something?” I don’t know how all this trust stuff works. I drop down into one of the chairs. “We should sell all these businesses we have and make gold bars with the cash. How cool would that be? I’ve always wanted a safe with a gold bar in it. Doesn’t that sound badass?”

“Your birthday is around the corner.” Grams scribbles something down on the paper in front of her.

“I’ll need a built-in safe for it. I could slide an Eros painting in front of it to hide it,” I suggest. “See, that adds to the coolness of this place. Not this smart house crap.” I glance around the room. It’s watching me even now, I bet.

“Louis Bodycomb went to the police station this morning to press charges against the thief.”

“Wait a second.” I hold up my hand. “Louis’s last name is Bodycomb?” I laugh so hard it hurts. I know I should be worried about what’s going to happen to Eros, but I can’t help it.

“Morgan, the police are going to arrest your....” George trails off, not sure what to call Eros when it comes to me.

“Lover,” Grams fills in. I roll my eyes. “As the executor of the Hoffman Trust and the successor trustee, the art belongs to me.” She’s not wrong. It might have been my father who pulled the trigger to invest in the restaurant, but all roads lead back to Grams.

“Where are you going to hang it? It’s a pretty good piece,” I tease. Grams gives me a serious look, letting me know now is the time to shut my mouth.

“Your parents are going to hear about this. Being as your father believes he owns the restaurant, I’m sure he’ll have plenty to say about it.” Of course, he will. My father has invested in many restaurants. Well, not so much he owns them, but the family trust does.

Chefs are typically the face of the restaurant. It’s rare a chef truly owns a restaurant. It’s usually the investors, for the most part. The chef will help in the design and menu, and if a profit starts to turn, from my understanding, they will get a percent on top of their salary.

“Hey, he’s your son.” He does think he owns everything when in reality it’s all Grams, and she keeps his leash tight.

“Give her the folder,” Grams instructs George. I take it. “Go save your lover before they cuff him. I’ve turned the restaurant over to you.”

“What! No! Can’t it just be the art piece? Don’t give me a restaurant, Grams,” I start to beg. “I can’t even cook. I still don’t know which fork is for what.”

“Sell it for some gold bars,” Alfred suggests.

“You with the jokes today.” I stand. “Is he really trying to get Eros arrested?”

“Yes,” George answers. “Go show your proof so that it doesn’t go any further.”

“Can’t we fax it or something?”

“Fax it?” Grams gives me a look like I’m crazy. “Who faxes things?”

“I mean email it over to the police or something? I don’t know.”

“It will be faster if you go, or he’ll end up in jail for a few hours.”

“Shit.”

Alfred hands me my bag and car keys.

“Did you just pull that out of your ass?”

“Maybe this place is haunted, and I’m a ghost with magical powers,” Alfred retorts.

“You win this round, Alf,” I say as I head out.

As I drive by Eros’ place, I see police cars outside. My first order of business as the new owner of the restaurant shall be to fire Louis.

When I make it to the restaurant, I already see cops inside. It’s too early for the place to be open yet. I motion for someone to come open the door for me. A tall blond woman I recall walking around the restaurant last night comes over to crack the door open for me. I think she’s a manager.

“We’re not open.” She eyes me up and down. “Weren’t you with that man last night that—” I cut her off. I’m sure the pink hair gave me away.

“I’m a Hoffman.” Her eyes widen at that. She’s not sure if she should believe me or not, but I don’t think she’s willing to chance it, so she steps back, letting me in.

“Morgan?” Louis says my name as I walk over toward him and the officers.

“I hate to break it to everyone, but that piece of art belongs to me.” I hand the folder over to one of the cops. “Also, you’re fired,” I tell Louis. His eyes widen as his face starts to turn red. “I hope you have a good sous chef because he or she has just been promoted,” I tell the blonde with a smirk.

Look at me not being the damsel in distress. I better get my kiss this time.



CHAPTER 11

EROS

“YOU HAD YOUR GIRLFRIEND FUCKING FIRE ME?” LOUIS screams into the phone. I hold the receiver at arm’s length from my ear, and I can still hear him.

To be honest, I didn’t know chefs could be fired. I thought they left or retired to some farm. Actually, I’ve never really thought about chefs and their careers at all. This is all news to me. Also news that I have a girlfriend. I’m assuming that’s Morgan. I hated having to let her leave last night, but even if she had stayed, I would have ended up on the sofa. We’d both drunk too much. The car service was for the best.

“Are you listening to me? You owe me!”

I wipe the paint brush off with a cloth rag and scrape red and white onto the palette. This piece needs some pink but with a light blue undertone. I add a bit of black and then blue.

“I’m talking to you!”

Has Louis always spoken in exclamatory phrases? If he does, that sucks for his co-workers. His voice gets kinda high-pitched when he’s mad. If I had to color it on my canvas, I think it would be chartreuse, heavy on the neon so that it sets your teeth on edge.

“Sorry, Louis. I’m hanging up on you. You’re killing the vibe for me. Maybe we can talk when I want to do something with a darker, more frenetic energy. Sorry about your job. Good luck on finding a new one.” I disconnect the call and dip a clean brush into the mixed paint. On the canvas, the hue doesn’t look right. I need to get the original in my studio to paint match it.

I glance at my phone and try to dial Morgan but realize I don't have her number. That's dumb of me.

I dial Matty.

"Yo. What's up? It's not Wednesday, if that's what you're asking about."

I rub the ridge on my nose. "Why would I be asking about Wednesday?"

"Because that's when we have league, and you never remember."

"What day is it?"

"This is the problem with you creative types. You don't work set hours. You have no concept of time or place."

Matty seems out of sorts. "Did you not have lunch? Did Blake tell you she'd rather eat toe fungus than kiss you on the lips?"

There's a beat of silence. "Why do I even talk to you?"

"Because I'm the only one capable of scoring during league, and sometimes my connections help you get better dates. Basically, I'm your life's assist."

"You make me sound like a loser."

Well...I'm the one who put it like that.

"Fine," he sighs. "Today is Saturday. For normal people, it's the weekend. You clean your house, water your plants, run errands, plan your night out."

Morgan tattoos for a living, so she's a creative. I don't see her cleaning her house, watering her plants, or running errands.

I swipe another brush stroke on the canvas, but the pink hue is eluding me. I remember why I called Matty in the first place. "Do you have Morgan's number?"

"Didn't you get it last night or was it a bust? Talk too much about paint?"

"We watched a mockumentary."

“A what?”

“A—you know what, never mind. What’s her number?”

“I’d be worried for you if I didn’t know that you have some ungodly pull with the women. It’s why we have such a good league team. Everyone wants your leftovers.”

“What leftovers?” I hold the brush against the canvas waiting for him to spit out the fucking numbers.

“Right. You don’t even notice there are women at the court. You’re weirdly blind to all the women that stuff their numbers into your gym bag. You probably treated Morgan like a buddy, and she went home thinking you friend-zoned her. She went to your place to get laid, Flynn. Not to watch TV. That’s for losers.”

Huh. Had I missed some signals? “I’ll ask her when I call her.”

“I don’t have her number.”

“Then why are you talking at all?” I scowl at the phone and hang up. That was a useless call. I guess I’ll drive over to her house. It’s not as if I can paint. I don’t have the right color. I wipe my brushes, make sure Gremlin has fresh water, and then get into my Audi R8 and speed over to Morgan’s home. There are big black gates blocking my way. On the left side, there appears to be a talk box. I pull close and roll down my window.

“Yes?” comes an unfriendly voice.

“I’m here to see Morgan.”

“Whom shall I say is speaking?”

“Flynn.”

“Hmmm” is all he responds. I wonder if this is the butler Morgan and Blake joked about when she’d taken the picture of the charcuterie board last night.

“I don’t mean to be a stick in your ass, but I’m not leaving until I see Morgan. You’re going to get real tired of me. Best decision you can make is to let me in now. If I don’t get in, I’ll

have to bring out the big guns.” Not sure what I’ll do to carry out the threat, but the gates start to creak open, so I don’t have to. “Thanks, man.”

At the top of the stone steps, the grim-faced butler holds the door open. “Lady Morgan isn’t here at the moment, but Lady Violette is. She would like to see you in the drawing room.”

“This feels like the inquisition where heads are chopped off if I don’t answer the questions right.”

I swear the butler mutters *I wish* under his breath. The drawing room is a fancy room with colorful furniture that looks like it was bought at Louis XIV’s estate sale. Lady Violette is seated in a high-backed chair behind a large mahogany desk. Small spectacles are perched at the end of her nose. Even though she’s seated, she manages to look as if she’s peering down at me.

“I’d sit down, but I think I’d get paint on your expensive chairs. Morgan okay?”

“Is that why you’re here?”

“Yeah, why else would I be here?”

“To return the painting you stole? Louis Bodycomb tried to call the police.”

“Louis’ last name is Bodycomb? Is his first name even Louis?”

A corner of Lady Violette’s mouth twitches up. “Morgan saved you.”

“I should thank her, but I don’t have her number, which is why I’m here.”

“Is her number all you want?”

I look up to see if the guillotine blade is above my head. This feels like a loaded question. “No. I want a lot more, but I’ll start with her number.”



CHAPTER 12

MORGAN

RAMONA AND I STARE AT EACH OTHER ACROSS THE TABLE. “You always here this early?” I ask, trying to make small talk.

The police left, taking a very pissed-off Louis with them. He was shouting about some contract which would have to be paid out or I guess I can cut him from the non-compete clause. I don’t know. That’s a George thing.

“Louis wanted me here as a witness and to pull the tapes.” Ramona’s tone is flat. I cannot get a read on her to save my life.

“You and him have a thing?”

“God no!” she rushes to say. “He’s a pig.”

“Then you’re cool with the whole firing him thing?” She lets out a long sigh.

“Layla the sous chef is great, but I don’t know.” Her brows furrow together. I can tell she is freaking out but trying to hide it.

“What’s the worst that can happen?” I mean really. It’s a restaurant.

“Food could go out slowly, people could complain and so on.” She closes her eyes, I’m sure coming up with a million other things that could make this place implode.

“You still get paid either way,” I remind her. “I mean, I’m not saying do a shit job, but I am saying don’t lay so much of someone else’s business on your own shoulders.” While I appreciate a dedicated employee, I don’t want her to be stressed out about things that she doesn’t have control over.

There is only so much one person can do, and this mess isn't all hers.

"Should we call John?" she suggests.

"Oh God, no. I'll give you a ten percent raise if you don't."

"Can you do that?" She cocks her head to the side. I'm sure she's wondering how a girl with pink hair, smudged makeup still around her eyes, and clothes with a few holes in them is now her boss. I bought them with the holes in them, for the record.

"I think?" She snorts a laugh.

"Louis is a pig. You get a new head chef in Layla. She's been promoted. Doesn't sound so bad to me." I have no clue what I'm talking about, but I'm not laying this mess at this woman's feet. "I mean woman power. We need more women chefs."

"She'll be excited." Ramona finally gives me a full smile that meets her eyes.

"And she cooks well?"

"Yeah, I think Louis stifled some of her potential."

"Then I think Ramona and Layla are going to kill it here at..." I glance around, having forgotten the name of the restaurant.

"Catch 37." Ramona fights a laugh.

"Right. Catch 37." I smile. "So, you got this? Do what you need to. Hire more people, or I can try to call in some favors if you need them. My grams knows everyone."

"Violette Hoffman, right?" She perks up at the mention of my grandmother. People think of her as royalty. It's kinda cool and kinda ridiculous.

"The one and only."

"I've heard stories of her, but she's never come in." I get the silent question she is putting out there.

“All true. Good or bad.” Ramona laughs again. Okay, I like her. “I’ll drag her in one night.”

“Oh gosh, would you warn us, please? We’d want to make sure everything was prepared and perfect.”

“Forget Grams. If she brings Alfred, he’s the one that will be the pain in the ass.”

“Alfred? Is he her companion?”

“Now wouldn’t that be interesting.” I stand from my chair. “Here is my number if you need anything.” I scribble it down for her. “I’ve gotta go gloat and pick up my painting. And maybe I’ll sneak in a few pets of Gremlin while I’m at it.”

“I don’t understand half the things you say, but I think this will work well.”

“It will work better the longer my parents don’t know about any of this.”

“I’ll try my best.”

“Thanks,” I tell her before I head out. It’s only a matter of time before my father is blowing up my phone. The second I slip into my car, it’s already going off. The hell. Louis. That snitch! But when I glance at the screen, I don’t recognize the number. It’s not my father, but I answer it anyway.

“Morgan.” Eros’ voice fills the inside of my car. I know I didn’t give him my number. That means he tracked it down. Normally, I would find it creepy, but with him I’m impressed and flattered.

“I’m not looking to update my car’s warranty.”

“I’d hope not. How many miles could it possibly have on it?”

I glance at the screen. “Two thousand.”

“Forget a warranty. I think you need a trade-in.”

“But that looney tunes, Musk, hasn’t released anything newer than what I drive unless he’s done with that spaceship and wants to give it to me. But that would kind of defeat the

point of me getting this Tesla since I got it to help the planet. Not leave it.”

Eros’s deep, sexy chuckle makes my body warm in places it never has before. What is it about this man that makes me feel this way?

“I don’t want you leaving the planet either. I want to see you.”

“What a coincidence. I want to see the Gremlin. Plus, I need my painting. I know we teased about tying one of your arms behind your back, but cuffs are two,” I tease. “I’ll be there in ten.”

I end the call without waiting for a response. It’s rude, but I’m trying to be mysterious. Wait, or am I supposed to be flirty? I try to think what Blake would do. She could seduce any man she wants. I glance at myself in the rearview mirror. Shit, maybe I should have said later and gone home to put myself together better.

Fuck it. This is me most of the time. He’s either into it or not. I pull up to his place at the same time he does. He beats me by opening my own door.

“I don’t think the painting will fit. Guess you’ll have to make a second trip another day.” He snags my hand, leading me up to his place. It’s hard not to smile like a goon. What is this man doing to me?

He opens the door, letting me in. I spot Gremlin stretched out on the back of the sofa. He sits up when we enter. I go straight for him.

“Hello, darkness, my old friend. We meet again.” I scratch his head.

“And who is this?” I spin around at the sound of a woman’s voice to see a tall blonde in the kitchen.

The mom.

Well, shit.



CHAPTER 13

EROS

“SORRY, SHE CAME OVER WITHOUT WARNING.” MORGAN IS surprised and not in a good, *My god let me rip your clothes off* kind of way.

“That’s no way to talk about your mother. You’re going to give Morgan the wrong idea.” Mom strides over and takes Morgan by the shoulders. “You look sturdy. I know wide hips aren’t in fashion these days, but you need hips for childbearing.”

“I thought it was ovaries and a womb that were necessary for childbearing,” replies Morgan.

She hasn’t run away yet. I take that as a positive sign, but since I don’t know what will come out of my mother’s mouth next, I opt to shut this whole operation down.

“Mom was leaving. She just stopped by for the containers.” I reach over and lift Mom’s hands away from Morgan’s shoulders and then gently nudge the older woman toward the front door. Mom moves reluctantly and slowly.

“Your lasagna was delicious,” Morgan makes the mistake of saying.

Mom halts in her tracks and turns back to her. “I can teach you how to make it if you like.”

“Morgan doesn’t cook. It’s against her religion.”

“What religion is that?”

“It’s not a religion. It’s more laziness. Or maybe that is a religion. Like, the house of lazy with the patron saint—who’s really lazy?” she wonders.

“Sloth?” I suggest.

“I think that’s one of the seven deadly sins. Can you have a religion based on a sin?”

“That does seem a bit profane. How about alligators? They just float around all day. That seems lazy.”

“Patron Saint Alligator, House of Lazy.” She wrinkles her nose. “It doesn’t really flow off your tongue.”

“I’m going to go now,” Mom says. “I’m definitely not needed here.” She slips out the door with a big smile on her face.

“Alone at last,” I quip. Now I’m the one wearing a smile. “I stopped by your house to see you this morning. That’s how I got your phone number.”

“What a coincidence. I came over here to see you.”

We stare at each other for a hot, awkward second. I move first, but she’s fast. Our mouths collide somewhere between the entry and the camel-colored leather chair I bought at an art fair. It was made in the ’20s and is sturdy as a rock. I slide my hands under her ass and settle her on the back of the chair. Her legs bracket my hips, making space for my engorged cock to press against her jean-covered pussy. Heat sears through the layers of our clothes.

With a small tug on her hair, I angle her head back to deepen our kiss. Need prickles along the surface of my skin. I want her. So badly. Her mouth is hot and velvety soft, a preview of what her pussy must feel like.

I rock against her, desperate to have more. My hands find the hem of her shirt. I skim my fingers just under the fabric and along the bare skin above her waistband. She moans into my mouth. With her hands on my biceps, she tries to lift her body to get closer to me. She’s got an ache between her legs that needs appeasing.

“I’m gonna paint you,” I growl as I tear away from her mouth.

“Yes.”

I reach between us and press the heel of my hand against her pubic bone. She gasps.

“More?”

“Yes. Right now.”

Demanding and greedy. My kind of girl. I slip my hands up inside her shirt and cup her tits. “I’m gonna suck on these first.”

“Okay.” She wriggles in excitement, nearly falling off the edge of the chair. I grab her and haul her upright.

“Hang on to me, Button.” I stroke my thumbs over her nipples and tease them into hard points.

“Button?”

“Seems cuter than Paintbrush or Turpentine.”

“Yeah, I don’t like Turpentine at all. Have you really called someone that?”

“I think it’s obvious that I have zero experience with pet names so no, I’ve never called anyone a term of endearment. Arms up.” I pull her shirt over her head. Her bare tits glow under the light. I rub my tongue against the bottom of my lip. I’d seen countless nudes, both in my life art classes and in paintings and sculptures, but no one has ever been more beautiful than Morgan. “Damn. You’re so fucking sexy right now. I’m torn between wanting to immortalize you on my canvas and wanting to devour you.”

“I vote for the devouring.”

“Same.” I latch on to the right tit, engulfing the juicy plum. She clutches my head to her chest. I suck hard enough that my cheeks hollow out. I’m dizzy with want. When the right nipple is eraser hard, I move to the left nipple and give that the same special attention until she is panting and shaking.

“More, Eros.” She draws my name out, elongating the syllables, making it sound sexier than a name should. Fuck, though, even the sound of her breathing is driving me crazy.

I pull at the waistband of her jeans. She nearly tips over as we strip her jeans off, but I catch her ass in my palms and jerk her straight against my mouth. The taste of her stuns me. The sensation of her soft, slick heat sends my head spiraling. My cock strains against its denim prison.

I have to have more. I part her folds with my tongue and pierce that hot channel. Her juice coats my chin and jaw. I press forward. This is not enough. My tongue in her pussy is not enough. I need more. I want more. I want her. I want her to come in my mouth, to cover me with her arousal. I want to be consumed by her. I want to be burned up by the flame of her desire and mine. I eat her out, clamping her hips in my large hands, holding her still while she screams above me. This is heaven. I can die a happy man.

“Hey, Flynn, do you have a minute? I got Morgan’s num —” Matty’s voice is drowned out by Morgan’s shrieks. She jerks out of my grip and falls backward off of the chair. I straighten up, and my fist is flying before a cogent thought forms.



CHAPTER 14

MORGAN

“AHHH!” I SCREAM AS I FALL BACKWARDS. I SIT THERE stunned and naked on the ground for a second, not really sure what to do.

I don't have a stitch of clothing on, but I'm pretty sure there is a fight happening between two friends. I glance around, trying to find a piece of my clothing, but it's on the other side of the chair and out of my reach. Fuck me. Of course, this would happen to me the one time I throw caution to the wind. *Think on your toes, Morgan!*

“Eros!” I scream his name, hoping that will get his attention, but they keep going at it. I raise my voice louder. ”Stop or I'll stand up from behind this chair butt-ass naked.” It's a bluff.

I'm not ashamed of my body, but I'm also not used to being all naked in front of a man. Let alone two of them. I'm sure my face is still flushed from my orgasm that I only got to partially enjoy before all hell broke loose.

“Don't move!” Eros lets out a deep, sexy growl. “Look at her and I'll cut your eyes out,” I hear him say. A second later, Eros is there with a throw blanket. He wraps it around me. He's got a cut just above his eyebrow while Matty has a busted lip.

“Y'all are a mess.” I try to make a joke. Gremlin is sitting on the kitchen island, so he had a terrific view and looks to have enjoyed the fight. I hope he didn't see the pre-show.

“He hit me first.” Matty tries to defend himself.

“You walked into my house while I had my face buried between my woman’s thighs,” Eros shouts back. His woman? I think if anyone else said that I’d be pissed off, but I think I like it coming from him. Scratch that, I’m pretty sure I love it. I’m also rather enjoying this rough side to him too. It’s interesting the things I find appealing in him that I don’t much care for in other men. Maybe it’s because he’s my man.

“I always walk in here! You never have women here.” My ears really perk up at that. “You didn’t have her number a few hours ago and now you—”

“Don’t finish that sentence.” Eros cuts him off.

“You just said what you were doing two seconds ago, but I can’t repeat it?”

“I can say what I want when it comes to *my* girl. You can’t.” Matty holds his hands up in surrender while taking a few steps back.

“Interesting,” Matty says as he starts to smile but winces when the cut on his lip pulls tight. “When did you become so violent and possessive?” he asks.

“So this behavior is new?” I ask my own question.

“Very new,” Matty responds.

“Stop talking to her,” Eros orders next. I snort a laugh.

“Now he can’t talk to me? He’s dating my best friend.” I glance at Matty. “You two are still dating, right? Or do I need to drop the blanket so Eros cuts your eyes out?”

“You better not. I swear I’ll spank your ass.” Holy crap. A thrill rushes through my whole body. The hell did that come from?

“You two are quite the pair.” Matty laughs. “And yes, I’m still seeing Blake.”

“Is that a good or bad thing?” I pull my attention back to Eros. “That we’re quite the pair.” He shrugs like he doesn’t give a shit what anyone else thinks of us.

“I’m not sure,” Matty answers instead. “I guess I should go.” He takes a few more steps back. “Wait, I saw your mom pulling out. Did she leave anything good in the fridge?”

“Get out,” Eros orders.

“Be nice. We’ll have to double-date with them, and he’s your friend.”

“Yeah, Eros, be nice to me,” Matty teases but only ends up hurting himself again when he tries to smile, making his lip bleed more. Eros takes a step toward him.

“Dropping the blanket!” I bluff. Eros stops moving.

“I’m leaving. Shit, man. I’ll text you later.” Matty turns, heading back out the door. Eros follows after him but only to flip the lock and put the chain on.

“So do you have a sofa I can lie out on? We can do my Titanic moment,” I tease. Eros doesn’t laugh. His mood feels almost dark. I walk over toward him, letting the blanket drop when I get to him. I wrap my arms around his neck and pull him down for a kiss.

All the tension in his body melts away as he kisses me. “How about it be your turn?” I say against his mouth.

“My turn?” I let my hand slip free from around his neck before I drop to my knees in front of him. His hand shoots out to brace himself on the wall as I undo the buttons of his jeans and give them and his boxers a small tug down. His cock springs free. Holy crap. His cock is as thick as the rest of him. “Eros.” I lick my lips.

“Button.” The nerves that were starting to build inside of me because I’ve never done this before fade away with him calling me by the adorable nickname he gave me earlier.

“I have no idea what I’m doing,” I tell him.

“Neither do I.” He groans as I wrap my mouth around this cock. His words shock me for a moment, but I push them to the back of my mind. I have a job to do, after all.

At first, I taste and explore. I didn’t think it would be so smooth and hard at the same time. Slowly, I work more of him

deeper into my mouth. The grunts and groans that come from him are so erotic that without a thought, I slip my hand between my own thighs to rub my clit as I suck him off.

Eros' breathing grows heavy as he watches me. He doesn't know where he wants his eyes. On me sucking him off or me playing with myself. Either way, I must be a fast learner because it doesn't take long before I'm swallowing down every drop of his release. My own orgasm triggers when I feel him explode against the back of my throat.

It only makes me want more of him.



CHAPTER 15

EROS

VIOLENT AND POSSESSIVE AREN'T WORDS USED TO DESCRIBE me, but I'll burn this whole world to dust if any harm comes to Morgan. I completely understand people becoming villains after losing their loved one. That should be considered the norm, not this kumbaya shit. If someone even looks at her crosswise, I'm coming for their family and their family's family.

I lift her from her knees and wipe a drop of cum off the corner of her mouth. "You did good, Button. Now it's time for you to ride me."

I shouldn't still be hard—not after I blew that load into her mouth. Medical science can't explain it. I guess that's why they call it love. It makes you able to do inconceivable things.

"This is...why are you so big?" Morgan whimpers as I lower her slowly onto my cockhead.

"Because I gotta satisfy you. Can't leave you wanting more." I hold her hips firmly in my hands, waiting for her tight cunt to adjust to my massive erection.

"I think half your size would satisfy me." Her fingers tighten around my shoulders. A very serious expression covers her face, as if she's concentrating hard.

"Good thing you don't have to settle for someone half my size. You get all of me. You can take me, Button. You're a good girl." I give her a light tap on her ass.

She sucks in a breath and takes another half inch inside of her. Her wet, needy flesh surrounds me. I grab her hair and

bring her mouth down to mine. Our flavors are mixed on her tongue, creating an intoxicating elixir that nearly sends me over the edge again. She bears down, taking more and more of me until my cock is completely subsumed. She lets out a small whimper of pain that kills me. I let her settle and her body adjust as I keep kissing her. It's hard to hold on to control knowing I'm the only man that has been inside of her. The only one that ever will. Now I know why I've held myself back all these years. I've been waiting for her. My muse.

Slowly I widen my legs, pushing her knees outward until she has almost no leverage and her body is open for the taking. I stroke her slowly at first, easing her into the sensation of having my shaft moving in and out of her pussy.

She whimpers against my mouth. I draw back. "You okay?"

She nods. "Yeah. You fit...barely." She gives me a weak, shaky smile.

"I'm going to be careful with you." I swipe the hair away from her face. "You're precious to me. I only want you to feel good. Tell me if it's too much."

"It's not, and it is, but don't stop. Don't you dare stop." She pushes on my shoulders and lifts herself up and then falls again. I take over from there, thrusting into her. My groans mingle with her cries and the wet suck of her cunt as she takes every inch of me.

I press my heels into the floor and drive upward, each thrust more powerful than the last until her orgasm seizes her. She throws her head back and screams her release. I let myself go, my cum shooting through my cock and into her ripe cunt.

She collapses in my arms, and we both struggle to regain our breath. On unsteady legs, I rise with her still clutched around my body. I make it over to the sofa and then collapse, drawing a blanket over us. "We're going to rest here for five and then I'm taking you upstairs to clean you up and put you to bed."

She nods and then passes out. She barely rouses when I finally get a little of my strength back and am able to get to my feet.

“Taking you upstairs, Button.”

She rubs her chin against my chest, more kitten-like than Gremlin has ever been. My cat greets us at the top of the stairs with an unhappy meow. The little bit is hungry. I gently lay Morgan on the bed. “In a sec, Gremlin. Gotta take care of your new mistress.”

In the bathroom, I run a couple washcloths under hot water and take them back to the bed. One of them I place between her legs and the other I use to wipe the sweat off her body. Her eyes flutter open while I’m cleaning her.

“I feel like a baby,” she says softly. “My arms are like noodles.” She raises one arm and lets it flop back onto the mattress.

“You are mine to baby, and your arms don’t have to be strong. That’s why I’m here.” I remove the cloth between her legs, pull the blankets up to her chin, and give her forehead a kiss. “I’m going to feed Gremlin before he claws my Achilles in half, and then I’ll be back up here with some food for you.”

I give her another kiss, this time on her sweet lips. Gremlin bats at my ankle as I reach the stairs. “I’m moving,” I tell him. He meows and motors down the stairs in excitement. Or hunger. After I’m done tending to the cat, I heat up a carton of chicken noodle soup and bake some biscuits from a can. A glass of milk for her and a beer for me finishes off the tray. When I return to the bedroom, Morgan grips the blanket to her chest as she scoots upright.

“The soup smells amazing. Did your mom make that?”

“Affirmative. Homemade soup is outside of my skill set.” I lay the tray across her legs and then drag a chair over. I dip the spoon into the soup. “Open up.”

“I can feed myself,” she protests.

“I know, but this is part of me taking care of you.” I wait until her lips part. She lets me feed her, alternating between

the soup and the biscuits. I steal some for myself but make sure her belly is full. By the time we are scraping the bottom of the bowl, her eyelids start to droop. She slides back down and tucks her hands under her cheek. She might not be a baby, but she's as sweet and innocent as one. My heart swells as I think of the gift she gave me. She's mine to protect now, and I'll mow down anything that stands in the way of us being together.



CHAPTER 16

MORGAN

WHEN I WAKE, IT'S DARK OUT, BUT EROS LEFT THE BATHROOM light on with the door cracked open so that I could see. I bet he worried I would wake up and forget where I was. The man is very thoughtful. I watch him sleep knowing it's creepy, but I don't care. He's this puzzle I can't work out in my head. Grams always told me that one day I'd find a man I couldn't resist. I used to always laugh, thinking she was being ridiculous. She'd been right, as always.

Now what? A weird panic starts to rise inside of me. My mind begins getting away from me, wondering what it is that Eros sees in me. I'm a bit odd. There is no denying that. I'm not your typical girl. Plus, I have strange family baggage that I try to avoid myself. I'm sure he'd want no part of it either.

He probably thinks I'm hip and fun all the time with my pink hair and ripped-up clothes. That I'm a rebel or something. I suppose at times I can be, but what happens when the thrill starts to fade and the expectation of who he thinks I am or wants me to be starts to settle in?

There are always expectations. Believe me, I know firsthand from growing up with my parents. The only person that has never put them on me was Grams. Even Blake was a little intimidated by me at first, but then I grew on her. I mean, she kinda had no choice, considering we were stuck in a room together. There was no other option but to get to know the real person. Thankfully, we loved who that other person was. In a weird way, Blake and I fit even with us looking opposite.

If I really think about it, Eros and I actually do fit from the outside glancing in. Two artists who have a few quirks. But

really, I don't think I'm that quirky. In fact, I love watching scary movies and knitting in my free time with Grams.

I'm in two online romance book groups even though I tell everyone that love is for suckers. It's not my fault that I can't stop reading them. Eros doesn't really know me at all. I'm afraid when he finally does, I won't be so unique anymore. I think part of my style is me and another part is to rebel against my mom and dad. They still somehow have this control over me. Those damn expectations are always lurking around every corner.

I'm going to get my heart broken. The one I've spent most of my life protecting. I've got loving trust issues, a therapist once told me. Obviously, I never went back 'cause what she was laying down is that I don't think my own parents really love me so I don't think others can either. Who wants to own having Mommy and Daddy issues? Plus have to pay to have someone tell you that you have those issues? No thanks.

Ever so slowly, I untangle myself from Eros' hold and get out of the bed. I give a small wince at the tenderness between my thighs. The man really gave my body a workout. The way he couldn't seem to get deep enough, how he took over. It was all so consuming. I let go and allowed him to take over. The first time was dirty and raw.

The second time I woke to his mouth between my legs. He brought me to orgasm twice. I tried to return the favor, but he wouldn't let me, saying my pussy needed rest. I tried to protest, but he started rubbing my back, and it had been lights out again for me.

Now I'm doing the walk of shame, I suppose, but I don't feel shame over it. I enjoyed every second of it, but I know that I've got to let this man go. I pull on one of his shirts then find my pants and shoes. My bag sits on the floor completely forgotten about. I'm sure my phone is filled with messages.

"I'll miss you." I pick up Gremlin and give him a kiss on top of his head. I wish I could add water and get one for myself. I should think about going to the shelter and adopting one of my own. It might be fun to have a cat to drive Grams'

fancy Welsh corgis crazy. I place him back on the counter before heading out the door.

I pause when I see a pretty, dark-haired woman coming out from her place next door. She gives me a glare. I'm sure she has a crush on Eros, so I can't blame her, but still jealousy unlike I've ever felt before bubbles up inside of me. It's worse than when the other kids' parents would show up to visit at school and mine never would. Grams always did, but my parents' visits were few and far between, and I think the times they did come were only because Grams put some pressure on my father.

When I make it to my car, I freeze when I see a flash followed by another. I turn, trying to see who the hell is taking pictures of me. Fucking great. I look around but don't see anyone. They must have taken off, and I didn't get a good look. The hell? It's either some creep or I'm going to be on page five of one of the local blogs. I have no clue how they still pull me into the social world when I never go out and play, but they do at times.

I'm not shocked when I walk into the house as the sun is finally coming up and Grams is sitting in the kitchen drinking her morning tea. Both she and Alfred give me knowing looks.

"It's not a walk of shame," I blurt out.

"We didn't say it was," Grams responds gently before taking a sip of her tea. "I think it was more a walk of fear."

"What's that supposed to mean?"

"You're a runner," Alfred supplies.

"I am not! What do I run from? I don't even work out." I smirk, trying to distract them with my joke. I don't know why I do it. These two see right through me.

"From people, sweetheart."

"I don't run from people. I once punched someone in the face," I remind them.

"Your best friend lives in forced proximity. Then you have Alfred and me. You like your little bubble you've created." I

stand there as Grams drops that reality bomb on my head.

“It’s too early for this.” I walk out of the kitchen. “I’m getting a cat!” I shout over my shoulder as I go, knowing it’s a lie. Gremlin holds my heart. I think his owner might too.



CHAPTER 17

EROS

“MAYBE THE SEX WAS BAD,” MATTY UNHELPFULLY SUGGESTS.

“It’s not that.” She came—multiple times. She cried once because she came so hard. She wanted to have sex again even though her poor pussy had taken a beating before. Maybe she was mad I said no. She fell asleep almost immediately afterward, so I thought she was satisfied. But then she left—without a word.

“Men don’t know. We’re dumb fucks, okay? Women can fake orgasms and make you think you’re the greatest lover in the world, but in reality, they’re reliving the chocolate episode of the *Great British Bake-off*. If you’ve ever watched that show with a woman, you’d know. So, what do you think about this?” He holds up a red purse.

“I think if you can’t tell if a woman enjoys you in bed, you shouldn’t be buying her a purse.”

“I’m not one of those boring assholes that buys flowers. Any schmuck can do that. She likes purses and has had a new one every time we’ve gone out. This is a knock-it-out-of-the-park kind of gift. A deal closer.”

I have not bought one thing for Morgan. Maybe Matty has the right idea. I start scanning the racks. What color purse would she like? Does she even like purses? I think back to the times I’ve been with her. She had a black one with an embroidered flower on the front when we ate at Louis’ the first time. When she came over the first time, she had the same purse. The second visit, she had no purse. Do I buy her the same kind of purse with embroidery?

“Earth to Eros. Come in, Eros.” Matty’s hand appears in front of my face. “What about this one?” This one is a different bag but in brown.

“Ugly. What happened to the red one?”

“That was three suggestions ago. Why? Wait, are you buying that? That was my idea.” Matty tries to grab the bag out of my hand, but I push him away.

“And now it’s mine. It has a flower here, see?” I point to the hand-painted decoration. “It matches her other bag.”

“I don’t care. I saw it first.” He lunges for me. I side-step, and he crashes into the table and sends several bags to the floor. An attendant comes racing over.

“Sir! What are you doing? You can’t fight here.”

Matty ignores her and attacks me. I duck his fist and shove the bag into the saleswoman’s hands. “I’ll take this one.”

“The hell he will. That’s mine!”

The saleswoman freezes, her eyes darting from Matty to me and back again. I pull out my black card and stick it between her fingers. “Mine.” She gets the message and scurries off.

I turn toward Matty with a triumphant smile and get a fist in the eye.

“You deserved that one,” he pants. “Payback for the other day.”

“You walked into my house unannounced and saw my woman without her clothes on.”

“Maybe don’t have sex in the living room,” he shouts.

It’s probably that exchange that resulted in Matty and me getting kicked out of the store by four burly security guards. In the cab, Matty glares at me.

“You should let up the pressure on those flowers,” I suggest. “You’re about to snap the heads off.”

“You smug bastard,” he snarls.

“Hey, I suggested we buy those. You should be thanking me or you’d show up on Blake’s doorstep emptyhanded.”

“That’s my red purse.” He tries to reach for the white box on my lap. I fend him off.

“I don’t think red’s your color.” I tap the cab driver’s shoulder. “Turn here.”

“I’m going to pay you back.”

“I let you punch me. Isn’t that enough?”

“Here?” the driver asks at Morgan’s big black gate.

“Yep. Take this one home.” I hand the driver a couple of bills. “Keep the change.” To Matty, I say, “No need to thank me for paying for your cab ride.”

I only get a middle finger in return.

“Sir? Do you need an ice pack?” says the gate guard. He brings his finger up to his eye.

“Nah. It doesn’t really hurt.” I start up the drive and then turn back. “Does it look bad?”

“It looks painful.”

“You think that’s a bad thing or a positive thing?”

“For Miss Morgan?”

“Yeah.”

“I can’t say, sir.”

“It just adds character, right?”

The guard nods. At the house, though, my confidence slips in the face of Alfred’s disapproval.

“Another fight?” he says through pursed lips.

My jaw drops open. “She told you about the one at the house?” I can’t believe she shared with this butler dude that Matty and I got into a fight because he saw me going down on her. How did she explain that?

“The house?” His brows crash together. “I was referring to the restaurant.”

“Ahh.” Of course, she didn’t discuss that. Maybe the fist to my face has rattled my brain. “Right. The restaurant.” I heft the box between us. “I’m here with a gift for Morgan. She around?”

“What did you do wrong?” he asks, not moving from the front door.

“Why are you assuming I did anything wrong?” The truth is, I don’t even know what I did to piss her off. That’s what I’m here to find out, but Alfred doesn’t need to know that.

“You’re here with a black eye and a big box from Chanel. A man would have to be dumb and blind not to see that this is an apology gift.” He sniffs. “I’d be remiss in my duties to Lady Morgan if I allowed you in and she did not want to see you. Wait here.” He slams the door in my face.

I wait for a half second before I decide to take matters into my own hands, and by that, I mean I find a window, pop it open, and climb through. A woman shrieks and throws something soft and warm in my face. It’s a towel fresh out of the dryer. I must be in the laundry room. I hold the towel above my head and wave it like a surrender flag. “I come in peace.”

The woman, dressed in black pants and a white top, brushes her hair down. “Are you here to rescue me from a life of drudgery? Because I’m ready to be whisked away, particularly by you.”

“Ahhhh, actually I’m here to see Morgan.” I tap the white box. “I’ve got a present for her.”

The woman sighs. “Of course, you are. She’s probably with her grandma watching TV.”

I dig into my back pocket and hand her all my cash. “This can’t free you completely, but maybe you can buy yourself a spa day.”

The woman’s eyes grow wide as she eyes the money. “Let me take you right to Morgan. You seem like a good egg.”

“I’m the best egg ever,” I confirm.



CHAPTER 18

MORGAN

I FIGHT A YAWN AS WE WATCH *THE FINAL GIRLS* FOR THE millionth time. It's part scary movie and part comedy. It's been one of my favorites since it came out.

"You'd be one of the first to go now," Grams teases me as she knits a whole freaking blanket, not taking her eyes off the TV.

"The virgins being safe in scary movies isn't true anymore. Everyone knows that," I rebuff.

"What are you making?" Her nose scrunches at my own creation.

"What? It's a tiny hat." I hold it up to show her my yellow creation.

"For an elf baby?"

I snort a laugh. "Or a cat."

"Ah, the one you're getting?"

"I might gift it or something." I shrug it off.

I wasn't thinking about Gremlin or his owner at all when I started making the little hat. In fact, I left my phone in my room so I'd stop checking to see if had Eros texted or called. It was no use because he never did. I guess he didn't care that I snuck out on him. It might have been a big relief to him, for all I know. That thought sours my mood.

"And whose cat would you be gifting it to?" Grams asks, breaking me from my thoughts.

“Is this an interrogation?” I jump up from the sofa. “This is supposed to be knitting and scary movies. Do I need to call George?”

“George is my lawyer,” Grams points out. “You hate him, remember?”

“Yes, I remember. I dislike most people, so it’s not hard to recall who I hate.” Grams’ phone starts to go off. She shoves her glasses up her nose before she picks it up.

“Google alert,” she says as she clicks the screen.

“You get Google alerts?”

“It’s set up for the Hoffman names.”

“Did that come with this smart house stuff?” Grams is more tech savvy than me.

“Oh my.” Grams’ gray brows lift at whatever it is she’s reading.

“What is it? Did Dad do something?” I try to glance at her screen, wondering if there is juicy gossip. “Oh.” I cringe when I see a picture of myself. How had I forgotten someone had taken a picture of me when I snuck out of Eros’ place? “What does it say?” I brace myself for what’s about to come out of her mouth.

“It says that—”

“Wait!” I shout, stopping her. “Maybe I don’t want to know.” I chew on my bottom lip. Has Eros seen this? What if he thinks I set this up? Maybe that’s why he hasn’t gotten in contact with me. I know a lot of socialites like to pull crap like that. They leak their own pictures so they are talked about. To them, there is no bad publicity.

“It’s not that bad.” Grams waves me off. “Says the equally mysterious Morgan Hoffman is dating Eros, who has never been caught out with a woman before.”

“Well, he wasn’t caught. I was.” I groan, dropping back down on the sofa. “How do they know that I wasn’t coming from the place next door? A pretty brunette lives there too.” People and their assumptions.

“It goes on to talk about what happened at the restaurant. There are a ton of details about *that* outing.” Grams’ lips purse. We both know where that would have come from. “There are pictures from the security cameras in the restaurant as well.” I’m guessing Grams is going to be making a call to George herself. To be honest, she probably doesn’t even have to because I bet he’s already on it. “He has no right to sell that footage,” Grams snaps.

Oh shit. She’s pissed. An upset Grams is few and far between, but when she comes out, get the hell out of the way. It’s also how I know I’m a Hoffman. I can see where I get some of my attitude. The apple truly didn’t fall far from the tree.

“He’s here,” Alfred announces, appearing in the doorway suddenly.

We’re tucked away in our movie room. There is a bigger one downstairs, but this one has all my favorite snacks, a fireplace, and our knitting supplies. It’s kind of like Grams and my shared special space. Plus, not going to lie, it’s creepy to watch scary movies in the basement of a house you want to be haunted. I’m not that badass. Even if it’s daylight out still.

“George is here? Damn that man is fast. No wonder you keep him on retainer.”

“Not George.”

“Oh God, is...” I put my hand to my chest. “My father?”

“No, he’s calling me now.” Grams holds up her phone to show me. She declines his call. God, I love her.

I’m sure I’ll be getting an earful about all of this. He has to know now that Grams also handed ownership of the restaurant to me. I hope Ramona and Layla are killing it. Actually, now that I think about it, this might be just the kind of press they need to get some foot traffic over there. Then once people try the food, I’m sure they’ll be back. Maybe this isn’t such a bad thing after all.

“Eros,” Alfred says dryly.

“He’s here?”

“Of course, he’s here, dear. You ghosted him.”

“He didn’t call or text. Who just shows up? That’s so 1920s.” I glance at Alfred. “No offense to your era.” Grams cackles at my joke.

“I’ll bring him right in.” Alfred turns to leave.

“No, I’m sorry! It was a terrible joke. Tell him I’m like ah, not here.” Why did it take me so long to come up with that? He really has me flustered.

“He knows you’re here. I told him I would go see if you were available.”

“This isn’t a whorehouse. People aren’t just available whenever someone stops by,” Grams says without missing a beat.

“When you two are together, I find—” Alfred trails off.

“Find what?”

“How did you get in here?” Alfred ignores my question.

“It’s him.” I try to jump over the back of the sofa and snag my foot and hit the ground with a hard thud.

“You have a knack for falling over furniture,” I hear Eros say. Slowly I pop my head up from behind the sofa.

“Oh, hey, Eros, didn’t know you were here.” Does Eros have a black eye, or did I hit my head too hard when I fell over and I’m seeing shit?

“Do you have a cat?” Grams asks him. Eros nods his head. “Makes sense.”

“None of this makes sense,” Alfred mutters.

Isn’t that the damn truth.



CHAPTER 19

EROS

“YOU’RE JUST IN TIME. DO YOU ENJOY SCARY MOVIES?” MRS. H pats the cushion beside her. Out of the corner of my eye, I see Morgan making an x with her arms. She doesn’t want me to settle in. Ignoring her, I take my place beside Violette.

“I love scary movies. They’re my favorite.”

“Are you saying that because you’re sucking up or because it’s true?” The grand dame arches an eyebrow toward the sky.

“I’m saying it because I’m sucking up. To be honest, I don’t really watch movies and don’t really have a preference, which is good because if scary movies are this home’s favorite, they can be mine, too.”

“What if I said that I hate scary movies but Morgan loves them?”

“Seems like a trap. You and Morgan obviously watch a lot of television together or movies or whatever, and so I suspect your tastes are aligned, so this is like a trick question. Sort of like the one where if both of you were drowning whom would I save first, and the answer is I wouldn’t have to choose because I’m fit enough to save you both at the same time. If I didn’t save you both, I might as well drown in the ocean with you because if one of you passed, the other would be distraught, and my life wouldn’t be worth shit then.”

Mrs. H purses her lips and nods slowly. “That was a lot of words to not answer my question, but I’ll let it go because it was a good response.”

Point for me.

“Are you going to hover behind the sofa the whole time or are you gonna join us up here?” I direct over my shoulder to Morgan.

“Why do you have a black eye? And what’s in the box?”

“The box is for you.” I pat the top of it. “I hadn’t seen you for a few hours. It’s a *been thinking about you* box.”

“In a horror movie, somebody’s body part would be in there.”

“That’s just my heart.”

Mrs. H claps in delight. At the door, Alfred snorts. I might not win him over, but Mrs. H is definitely coming around.

“She ran. You chased. I like it.” Mrs. H grins.

“I’m not a runner,” shouts Morgan.

“This won’t be the last time she runs,” Mrs. H warns me, ignoring Morgan’s outburst. “You have to stick with it. Persistence is not a quality common in your generation.”

“I’m in my early twenties. What generation are we talking about?”

“Every generation after mine. You all lack gumption.”

Alfred sniffs loudly.

“Not you, Alfred. You’re exempted. Let’s leave these two children alone. I suspect they have some things to talk about.” Mrs. H gets to her feet.

After Mrs. H drags Alfred out of the room, awkward silence hangs in the air.

“Are you gonna come over and take a look at what’s in the box? I fought Matty for it.”

She moves around the end of the sofa and stops about six feet away. “Are you two even friends? Every time I see you, you’ve gotten into some kind of fistfight with him.”

“That’s how you know we’re good friends. Because we can fight and make up and fight again and make up.”

“Have you considered that the relationship you really want is with Matty and not with me?”

“Is that what you told yourself when you got up and ran away?” I counter.

She wrinkles her nose. “The box looks familiar and expensive,” she comments and avoids my question.

I let her change the topic. “I don’t know how much it cost. I was fighting Matty and gave the lady my credit card, and as soon as it cleared, I ran out. He was trying to buy something for Blake.”

Morgan slides the remaining distance and settles into the cushion next to me, making sure we’re not touching as if contact with me will strip away all the defenses she’s erected. She gives the ribbon securing the box a small tug, and when she lifts the lid off, a gasp escapes her.

I cough into my fist to hide my smug smile. That little sound made all the pain go away. I’d fight a lion for her.

“It’s beautiful.”

“I know you carry around that black one with the red embroidery, so I didn’t wanna get you another black one, but I thought this would be a nice contrast. The red makes me think of you.” Fiery, passionate, welcoming.

“I think it’s too expensive.”

“Now, I didn’t go to all that trouble just for you to turn it down. Besides, red is more your color than mine. I’m a blue sky guy myself.”

A reluctant smile comes to her mouth. “Aren’t you worried that giving me this pretty, expensive gift encourages me to run?”

“There are better things if you stick around. Like breakfast in bed, and I don’t mean just early morning sex but like waffles and strawberries and whip cream and then sex.”

Slowly, Morgan places the bag back inside the box and folds the tissue paper so only a hint of the red shows through the opaque white paper. “I don’t know,” she starts to say, and I

know whatever comes next is not something I'm gonna want to hear. "I don't think I'm made for these kinds of relationships. I don't have good experiences with long-term connections."

"Other than your grandma and Alfred."

"Grandma won't give up on me." A rueful smile tilts the corners of her lips up.

"And you think I will. That's fair. You haven't known me for very long, plus, you're scared of my dick. Don't worry." I pat her hand. "You're going to get used to me and my dick all in good time."

She bursts out laughing, which is what I wanted. "Aren't you supposed to say that your dick is gonna get smaller?"

"No. Why would I ever say that? Obviously, you are going to adjust, and by that, I mean I'll be around so much, you won't remember what life was like when I wasn't part of it. I'll be around so often you'll be sick of me."

Her face remains skeptical. I squeeze her hand. "You don't have to be sure of me today, tomorrow, or, hell, even fifty years from now. I'm just gonna be there, wherever you are. That's my place in this world. Next to you."



CHAPTER 20

MORGAN

“BABE, YOU TOLD ME I COULDN’T LET YOU GO BACK TO sleep,” Eros reminds me.

I woke to his mouth between my legs giving me an amazing orgasm. After he’d made me come for him, he flipped me over and pulled my ass into the air and had his way with me before making me come again with him. I’d melted back into the bed, ready to go back to sleep.

“I don’t wanna,” I complain. A furry face nudges against mine, and I open my eyes to see Gremlin wanting some pets. I can’t resist. I scratch the top of his head before I move to under his chin.

“I see how it is. You have no problem waking up for him?” Eros kisses the side of my neck from behind. I’m lying on my side.

“Jealous?” I tease.

“When it comes to you, always.” He gives me another kiss. “But I swore I’d make sure you were out the door by ten.”

“Do I smell bacon?” I perk up.

“I might have made breakfast, but you’d have to get out of bed to find out.”

“I thought men wanted their women in their bed,” I huff, pretending to be annoyed. I’m not. The only thing I’m mad about is having to get up. For the past five days, I’ve been held up in Eros’ place. I’m shocked he hasn’t kicked me out yet.

I didn’t realize how messy I was until I didn’t have a cleaning crew on staff or neat freak Blake as my roommate to

pick up after me. I'm noticing a few things about myself that even annoy me, but Eros never says a peep. He merely picks up my clothes that I leave lying around or my purse that is usually dumped out on the coffee table because I was trying to find something.

"If I could tie you to this bed, I would, but your grams is a powerful person. She'd likely hire a mercenary crew to blow in my front door to find you."

"I wouldn't be so sure about that," I mutter, making myself get out of the bed. Grams is so team Eros. It's why she hasn't said a peep about me not having been home for a while. Eros offers me his hand. I take it. He pulls me into his arms and kisses me sweetly. He lets out a groan, stepping back.

"Go or you'll make me a man not of my word." He turns me toward the bathroom and gives my ass a smack.

"Hey!" I shout but get moving.

"You enjoy it," I hear him say from behind me. He's right. I do. I find when it's only Eros and me, him bossing me around is a turn-on. I think because I know he's not only a good man but whatever he's doing is always guiding me toward something I want. Each day I spend with him only has me relaxing more and more.

It's scary, and I know I'm past the point of no return when it comes to him. No *I love yous* have been said, but I'm pretty sure I'm there. There is no point in running from him. I'd be brokenhearted either way. So here I am trying to appear like I'm not turning into a stage five clinger.

Quickly, I get myself together, even putting on some makeup and doing my hair. I stare at the mess I've left on the bathroom counter.

"I'll get it later," Eros says, suddenly popping up behind me.

"I'll clean up when I get back tonight."

"Don't worry about it. I want you to eat because I'm guessing you won't eat again until dinner." He grabs my hand,

leading me out to the kitchen, where he's made me a bacon, egg, and cheese sandwich. A mug full of coffee sits next to it.

"Maybe we should reschedule the dinner?"

"I'm not hiding from your parents."

"You're a hermit by nature. I read about it online. Now all of a sudden you want to go out to dinner at some fancy restaurant?" Eros hadn't given two shits that our relationship was leaked on some gossip blog. In fact, he grunted and said good. I hid the thrill I'd gotten over him wanting everyone to know I was his girl.

"My woman owns a fancy restaurant." I roll my eyes.

Should I be checking in on that place? I'm glad my father didn't request that our dinner be there. That might have made things more awkward. They demanded to meet Eros after the subject of him and me hit the papers. I actually can't get a feel for what they think of him. He's not some bum off the street. The man has skills, and I don't mean only in the bedroom. His art is priceless, if you ask me.

But if I had to guess, my parents want me to be with some banker or someone with a family last name that holds weight. It's stupid, but I agreed to go to dinner because the little girl inside of me is still always hoping for a bit of their approval.

"So, what are your plans?" he asks, standing beside the kitchen island in a pair of low-riding sweatpants that are covered in old paint. He is really making it hard to leave.

His chest is bare unless you count the love-bite I left on it. I noticed I do that a lot. I think it's because I want to mark him, and it's how I can do it without using my ink. Which is something I very badly want to do. I've never put ink on a man before, but there is this need inside of me to put it on him. I shouldn't be surprised.

The man makes me feel things I've never felt before with anyone else. Even the love I have for him is different. It's wrapped all around my heart like ivy that's gotten out of control and has now slithered its way inside of it. There is no undoing it.

“I’m going to Mick’s shop to finish a tattoo I’ve been working on for Kelsey. Today it should be complete. I’ve been doing it in stages. I only have some coloring left to do. Then I’ll head back home and find something that is suitable to wear for dinner and meet you at the restaurant. That work for you?”

“I’d rather pick you up.”

“It’s out of the way.” I check my phone to see the time. “Plus, if the ink takes longer than I think, which it normally does, I’ll be running behind, and I’m not sure if Grams is coming.”

“All right,” he agrees, but I know he doesn’t want to. “Who’s Mick?”

“She owns a tattoo shop. I use her space sometimes. Getting jealous again?” I smirk. I should not be eating that up, but I am. Every drop of it. It shows me that he’s as into me as I am him. And that he’s not growing bored of me.

“Always.” He gives me the same answer he usually does when I tease him with the question.

“Here.” I open my phone and share my location with him. His whole face lights up when his phone goes off and he sees what I’ve done. It’s a bigger deal than most might realize, but Eros gets it. I’m a runner, and now I’ve given him a way to always find me.

“All right, I’ll see you tonight.” He leans down and kisses me. His fingers sink into my hair to deepen the kiss. I really hope my parents don’t ruin this for me. They really are the final test. Sometimes I can barely tolerate them, and I love them. I don’t know how Eros will do. His mom is a sweetheart. The kind of mom you dream about having.

I’m not sure he really knows what he’s getting himself into.



CHAPTER 21

EROS

“A PAINTER,” HELENA HOFFMAN SAYS IN A VERY unimpressed tone.

“Yup.” I push the chair in for Morgan and take a seat beside her. Dinner is at the Fourteen Hundred Club situated on the 114th floor of the city’s biggest high-rise. I took the chair with my back to the windows, and I think Helena is fantasizing about pushing me through the plate glass. “Started when I was in high school, studied it in college—”

“—But you did not get your degree,” Helena interrupts. “You dropped out after what? Six semesters?”

“It wasn’t for me.”

“I learned nothing in college,” Morgan chimes in for support. Her hand finds mine under the tablecloth. I don’t know if she’s squeezing me for reassurance or support. Maybe a bit of both.

“That’s because you got a ridiculous degree in fine arts,” her dad counters. “Now all you can do to support yourself is that tawdry tattooing.”

Morgan’s mom shudders. No wonder she lives with Violette. Even Alfred, who has never smiled a day in his life, exudes more warmth. I flip my hand over and cradle hers. No matter what her parents say to me tonight, it amounts to nothing compared to what she’s apparently had to endure for years. Commitment to another person would be scary if this is the kind of environment you grew up in.

“Morgan’s work is unique and beautiful, like her. People from all over the world pay to have something permanent etched into their skin by her hands. It has more meaning than anything I’ve done.”

“No one was suggesting that anything you’ve done has value,” Helena says.

Ouch. That was a pointed barb.

“Mom,” chides Morgan.

“Don’t worry about it,” I interject. No need for us to have a fight before even the breadbasket is laid on the tablecloth. “My art is not for everyone. It sells well, though, so some people find it appealing.”

This is met with silence from the Hoffmans. Morgan sighs and begins to change the subject when John pulls a sheaf of papers out of his pocket. “For the record, Helena and I strongly disapprove of any union between the two of you. You have known each other for little more than a week, which is hardly enough time for a person to get to know a dog let alone decide on a marriage. This is a contract stating that in exchange for two million dollars, you will leave our daughter alone forever.”

“Dad!”

“Hush, Morgan, your father is doing this for your own good,” chastises her mom.

“I think your daughter’s worth more than that.”

“I’m going to cause a scene,” Morgan warns.

John glares at his daughter, but the threat works because the paperwork disappears inside his coat. “Fine, but this won’t be the last time we discuss this.”

“Oh, it will be because we’re done here.” Morgan throws down her napkin and gets to her feet. “Come on, Eros. We don’t have to waste our time here.”

I stand and tuck her arm into the crook of my elbow. Her parents remain at the table, fuming but not willing to say a word because that would cause a scene.

At the elevator, Morgan presses a hand to her stomach. “I’m going to be sick.”

I grab a passing waiter. “Where’s the bathroom?”

At their direction, I hustle Morgan down the hall.

“I just need a minute,” she says, giving me a wan smile. “This is why I hate meeting my parents. They always do something that makes me feel terrible.”

“Maybe you’re pregnant.”

Her eyes widen. She hadn’t thought of that possibility. “Already?”

“At the rate that we’re going, it would be more of a shocker that you weren’t.” I smooth the hair away from her face. “I’m happy either way. Why don’t you sit in the women’s lounge, have a glass of hot water, and wait for me to get the car? When I’m out front, I’ll text you. How’s that sound?”

“Perfect.”

I kiss her on the forehead. “Wait here. I’ll send someone in with some bread and water.”

Before heading downstairs, I take a quick look inside the restaurant and see Morgan’s parents still at their table. I signal for the maître d’, who comes over. “Here. My girl is in the lounge. She’s not feeling great. Can you take her in a hot water and some bread? Also, this is to make sure that those two don’t bother her.” I hand him two Benjamins. “That enough?”

“Consider it done.” He pockets the money. “What is your car? I’ll call the valet for you.”

“I didn’t park with the valet. They were occupied, and I didn’t want to be late.” I’d actually worried about making a bad impression on the Hoffmans. The elevator is quick considering the height of the building, and I’m deposited on the parking level in no time. My mind is focused on getting the car, which is why I don’t notice the four men that appear out of the shadows when I step outside the glassed-in elevator lobby.

They have me surrounded before I can even step onto the paved parking lot. One of them grabs for me. I swing at him, striking his cheek. I manage to get another punch in to another guy and a kick in the gut to a third, but two more men appear, and suddenly I'm on the ground. I punch and roll and head butt, but they manage to truss me up and carry me into a waiting van. The door slams shut and zooms forward. I break free from one of my captors and lunge for the driver when the blunt end of a gun strikes me on the side of the head. My vision blurs. I blink and try to shake it off.

“Careful, don't kill him,” I hear a voice shout.

“He's killing us!”

I elbow someone in the eye. They scream, and that's the last I remember.



CHAPTER 22

MORGAN

“THANK YOU, REALLY I DON’T NEED ANY MORE BREAD,” I tell the server, who has once again come to check on me. I have been here for over thirty minutes now.

She brought me warm water and bread. I’d tentatively sipped the water and ate the bread, but after a few minutes I ended up drinking and eating all of it. My stomach had finally settled. But now where is Eros? I thought he’d be back by now. Maybe I should head down and meet him out front. Oh God, what if he ran into my parents and they are having it out?

I scratch that off the list quickly because Eros might make a scene, but my parents would not. They would quickly leave before he could. I wouldn’t even be mad at him if he did make one. Not after my father had offered him money to stay away from me. I don’t know if I was more pissed that he made the offer or that the amount was so small. Two million? Really? That’s like pocket change to a man like my father.

It was clear my father did some research on Eros if he knew about his schooling, but he must not have checked what his artwork goes for. Besides, if I’ve learned anything about Eros, he couldn’t care less about money. He’s the kind of man that would call love priceless because it truly is.

Why do I do this to myself? Agree to these stupid dinners? I must be a masochist. I’m definitely insane because I keep doing the same thing and hoping for a different outcome. I huff, leaning back in my chair.

No, I’m wrong. I knew how this would go. I never thought for a second my parents would give Eros a chance. I wasn’t

even shocked about the offer of money. I think it was a lowball number but still. Not shocked. All my worry has been over what Eros' reaction would be to them. Would it send him running?

I don't think so. He'd teased about me being knocked up, which I think is far-fetched, but he was smiling when he did it. He also didn't bat an eye when my dad brought up the idea of Eros and me getting married. I don't know where my father got that idea to begin with. Like he said himself, it's only been a week.

Who am I kidding? I'm the girl that would run off and marry Eros after how tonight played out. He stuck by my side. I pull my phone out of the purse that Eros bought for me to check the time. What the heck could be taking him so long? I text him.

Me: Everything okay?

I watch the dots appear and then disappear. Then they reappear like he's debating what he's going to text me but deletes the message and types it out again.

Eros: I can't do this.

That sick feeling from earlier comes rushing back to me. I stare at the text expecting him to say something else, but nothing comes.

"Morgan." I jerk my head up from my phone to see my mother standing there. "You're crying." For once her voice isn't as cold as it normally is.

"He left me." I swipe at the tears that are streaking down my face. I hate crying. Hate it! The last time I did it was when I was dropped off at a stupid boarding school. I'd called Grams in tears. She immediately came to pick me up. From then on, I always stayed at the Hoffman estate and not with my parents in their city home.

"Then it's for the best."

I stand. "Thanks, Mom," I mutter even though my heart is breaking.

“Morgan.” She grabs my arm, but I shake her off. “Listen, if he scares that easily, he’s not worth it. That’s the truth whether I care for the man or not.”

“But it’s not like him.”

“Men are never what you want them to be.” She gives me a half smile. I’m not sure what to make of it. She married into the Hoffman family, but she came from a prominent family too. Her family wasn’t as rich, but she wasn’t some random girl off the streets. She never stands up to my father even when I can tell she doesn’t agree with what he might have said. A lot of the time they are on the same page. Their relationship has always been odd to me, but it works for them.

“Yeah, well, I’m going to give him a piece of my mind.” I walk out of the women’s lounge on a mission. I always run. Not this time. I’m going to go over to Eros’ place and let him know exactly what I’m thinking before I collect my things. He doesn’t get to run away.

He hadn’t let me. If he wants to break my heart, he’s going to do it to my face. I have the valet grab me a cab and head straight for Eros’. I let myself use the keycode he’d given me. The more time I have to think about the text, the more it doesn’t make any sense to me.

I come up short when I see Eros’ mom standing in the kitchen replacing the Tupperware.

“Oh, honey, what is wrong?” She rushes over to me the second she sees me, engulfing me in a hug. “Is everything okay? What happened?” She pulls back, her eyes roaming over me trying to see if I’m injured or something.

“Eros broke up with me.”

“Right.” She snorts a laugh but stops when I don’t join her. “Eros did not break up with you.”

“He did. You’d tell him to break up with me too if you’d met my parents tonight. They offered him two million dollars not to be with me.”

“He didn’t break up with you.” She shakes her head adamantly. “He’s likely in jail. He punched your father, didn’t

he?" I can see where she might come to that conclusion, but that's not the case.

"No, he just left me. Said he was getting the car and then texted me." I pull out my phone and show her the message.

"No." Still she doesn't believe it.

"How are you so adamant he didn't break up with me when you see it in text right here?" I point down to the message.

"Something has to have happened." Worry takes over her expression. "I know because he's told me some things. Bought something. He's not breaking up with you. He'd be more likely to kidnap and keep you if you tried to run on him." I wince.

"He told you about that?"

"He told me some." She gives a small shrug. I adore that he's close to his mom, and the more I talk to her, the more I think she might be right.

Something is wrong. But where in the hell is Eros?



CHAPTER 23

EROS

WHEN I COME TO, MY FIRST THOUGHT IS THAT I HOPE MORGAN is okay. My second thought is where the hell am I? It looks like a mobile office with vinyl walls and a few old metal desks that were scavenged from some World War II bunker. There's a dry erase board across from me, and as I swivel my head to my left, I spot the door and—Is that Louis over there tied to another chair?

“What the hell are you doing here? I thought you were behind all this.”

Louis looks like he's been through the wringer. His face is all bruised up. His hands are tied behind his back, and his feet are tethered to each leg of the chair. I look down to see that I'm in the same situation. Under my feet and running the length of the trailer is a long plastic sheet. The area around Louis is stained copper color as if someone tried to mop up blood but didn't do a good job of it.

“I don't like the looks of this, Louis. What have you gotten into?”

“Where is the painting?” he rasps out.

“I don't have the painting.”

We don't have any other conversation because the door suddenly bangs open. In walks a man no taller than Morgan wearing a custom-made navy suit. He has a cigarette in his mouth and two scars on his cheek. He drops the smoke onto the plastic and grinds it with his heel. “Mr. Flynn, I am Mr. Wray. You have something of mine.”

“Is this about the painting? Because as I was just telling Louis here, I don’t have it.”

He comes over to my chair and leans down close enough that I can smell the onion from his lunch burger on his breath. “Then you need to get it.”

“Okay. I mean you could’ve just asked instead of kidnapping me and dragging me into this mobile office setup. You’re going to scare my family.” Morgan is probably thinking I abandoned her. I’m not supposed to be adding to her pain. I’m supposed to be reducing it.

“I don’t really care about your family, and if you actually do care for them, you’ll tell us where the painting is.” He stands up and walks over to a table behind Louis that has a hammer and a wrench. Simple tools, but effective. I’m not a fan.

“I have a feeling if I tell you, you’ll kill me. How about you and I get into a car and we’ll drive there together.”

Wray ignores me, turning back with the hammer in his head. “We’ve made quiet requests through Louis to return the painting, but you were uncooperative and now we’re forced to do this.”

“I don’t think I understood the urgency. But I do now, so let me deliver it like you want.” I can’t tell these losers that the painting belongs to Morgan because I can’t have these dogs running to kidnap her. “I have to say that all of this over the painting seems a little over the top. I’m happy to paint you another one just like it, but I suspect that it’s not really the painting you were after. What did you stuff behind it?” I try to think back. The canvas back was still attached, but it did feel a little heavier than when I first sold it. I attributed that to the frame, but now I’m thinking that there was something inside. “Are you storing some drugs back there?”

Louis rolls his eyes. “That’s all you guys can think of.”

“I’m sorry I’m not up on my criminal enterprises.” If it’s not drugs, what could it be?

Wray steps in. “Restaurants like Louis’ do a significant amount of their transactions in cash.”

Oh, he’s a money launderer. “Great. I think that’s fantastic. I’m no cop lover, and I’m happy to let you go and do your fun criminal activities, so I’ll get your painting, and we can call it even.”

“I don’t believe you.” Wray shakes the hammer toward me.

“That’s because we’ve just met and haven’t developed a relationship, but you can ask anybody. I’m a pretty trustworthy guy.”

“It’s counterfeit plates,” Louis blurts out. “I’m not laundering money.”

This earns him a wicked slap across the face. I wince in sympathy.

Wray pivots toward me. “Your turn.”

I struggle against my bonds, but they hold firm. Fucking hell. I guess I’m in for a little pain. I brace myself and then nearly fall over when the door flies off the hinges. A stream of black-clad figures with long guns suddenly fill the trailer. At the very back, I spot Violetta, Alfred, and Morgan.

“What the hell is going on? And why is Morgan here? It’s dangerous.”

“Hi.” She waves at me.

Violetta nudges Alfred. “Isn’t that sweet? He’s about to be pummeled, and his first thought is of our Morgan.”

Alfred grunts. I guess that’s his way of agreeing. I’m taking it as a positive sign.

“I’m here to save you,” Morgan announces. She rushes over and pulls at my bonds.

“I think you’re going to have to cut them off.”

“Who has a knife?”

Alfred appears at her side with a switchblade in his hand.

“You’re really prepared for anything, aren’t you, Alfred?”

“It’s in the job description,” he replies in a flat tone. He bends down and slices through the plastic zip ties.

“What’s this all about?” Violetta wants to know.

I rub my wrists and explain. “Louis promised Mr. Wray the painting to settle some gambling debts, so I think to make it right, you should give the painting back to Mr. Wray, and I’ll cover your loss.” The thing is I don’t want Violetta and Morgan in danger. I don’t know if Mr. Wray is the top of the food chain or some flunky. It’s best to play this off as something simple.

“Thanks for saving me.” I give Morgan a simple kiss on the forehead. “And not believing I stood you up and ran off.”

“I did actually doubt you. I went over to your house to give you a piece of my mind, but your mom convinced me that you wouldn’t have done that. I checked your location on your phone and came over here to confront you. When we got here, there were all these black cars and sketchy men outside, so I called my grandma, and she put the team together.”

“I’m impressed.” I grab her hand and usher Morgan and her grandma and Alfred out of the trailer, leaving the commandos to deal with Wray and Louis. When we get into the car, Violetta turns around from the front seat and spears me with a glare. “Gambling debts? Do you really expect us to believe that?”

“Probably not, but I think it’s best if we continue on with that pretense so that everyone remains safe.”

“Hmmmph.” She crosses her arms but doesn’t question me further.

I reach for Morgan and hug her tightly. “Sorry about leaving you hanging like that.”

“Don’t ever do it again,” she mumbles against my chest.

“I won’t.”

“I was so scared for you.”

“Not gonna lie, I was a little nervous myself. I think you better take me home and give me some tender, loving care.”

She rubs her cheek against my shirt. “I will.”

“Glad we’re on the same wavelength.” I lean back against the rich leather car seat and wait for my heart rate to go down. I almost lost Morgan, but we’re both safe now.



EPILOGUE

MORGAN

Almost a year later

“RISE AND SHINE, MY LITTLE PINK VALENTINE.” I PEEK ONE eye open to see my husband looming over me, a giant smile on his face. He looks more like a kid on Christmas morning than someone excited over Valentine’s Day. Eros brushes some of my pink hair out of my face.

I’m sure he has something up his sleeve. My humor might be dark, but Eros knew that under all of it, I was a romantic at heart. I only tried to hide it. Not so much anymore. Eros has slowly melted away the fears I tried so hard to not let anyone see. My husband isn’t going anywhere. I know he loves and adores every inch of me and never asks me to be anything I’m not.

Oddly, when I finally let go of trying to cater to my parents in any kind of way, it was them that changed. It might not have been giant changes, but they accepted Eros. I think not getting invited to our small wedding that Grams hosted in the back of the Hoffman estate was a wakeup call for them. I didn’t need them to live my life. I could go on without them. I had people that wanted to love me for me.

“Do I smell bacon?”

“Of course.” His hands slip down to the small baby bump that has formed. “Let’s get you fed. I have something I want to show you before we need to head over to Grams’.”

“Fine.” I stretch my arms out. Today is going to be a long day. Blake and Matty are getting married today. It’s one year from their first date. I suppose that applies to myself and Eros too. It’s crazy how much life can change in a year.

Blake’s wedding is going to be a whole lot different than mine. It’s a giant one with over a hundred guests. Grams is hosting this one too. Mine had only been a handful of people. Both Eros and I wanted ours to be small and intimate. I also wanted it to happen quickly. That brief moment when I

thought Eros had been taken from me for good shook reality into my bones.

It didn't matter if Eros had left me back then or twenty years from now, that loss would break me. I was running from something you couldn't get away from. I was already in deep with him. So, I let myself fall, and Eros caught me instantly. I think he was in just as much, if not more, of a hurry to get hitched as I was. It took him a bit longer to get me knocked up. Not for lack of trying, but he pulled it off. I'm now four months pregnant.

Eros pulls me from the bed, dropping a kiss on the top of my head, his hand again caressing my stomach.

“Need you to put clothes on or we'll be late.”

“It's only eight.” I let out a yawn. He insisted we stay in the city last night. I knew he was up to something. The wedding is literally in our backyard at the estate. We split a lot of our time between the condo in the city and the Hoffman estate. The Hoffman estate will always be my home.

That was a little nugget I learned when my father had brought up the fact that Eros and I didn't do a prenup and was pushing for a postnuptial agreement. Grams went and shocked both my father and me when she said that she did have a few things she wanted Eros to sign. It had to do with the Hoffman estate. It was to be mine.

My father almost lost it but controlled himself when Grams told him he had no idea how to keep any kind of family home. I didn't want to have any paperwork drawn up about a potential divorce, but Eros had been team Grams. That the Hoffman estate was always to remain my home and one day would be passed down to our children regardless of what happened between Eros and me.

“Yes, but we have a wedding to get to, and it's our Valentine's Day too, and I have something I want to show you.”

“You can't show me here?” I reach for the front of his pants. He jumps back so I only graze my hand across his hard-

on.

“Babe, if you start, I won’t be able to stop.”

“That’s not what you want to show me?” I tease.

“Dressed,” he pleads with me. We both know I can get him back into the bed if I want.

“So, we have to leave the condo for whatever this is?” My curiosity is really peaking now.

“Yes, but it’s not far.”

I threw on some sweats and ate the breakfast Eros made for me before he led me out of our place. We moved from his to a new one that offered a bit more privacy. Our place takes up the whole top floor of the building with roof access.

“Where are we going?” I ask when we cross the street after we exit our building.

“Only around the corner.” My breath catches when I see it. “It’s small, but it’s only meant for you. It’s close to our place.” Eros opens the door to the tattoo shop. I gasp when I get a peek inside.

“How in the hell?” I run my fingers across one of the two adjustable tattoo chairs.

“I might have asked Mick to help me,” he admits. The shop has everything I could need. I grab my husband and kiss him before I push him into the chair and straddle him. “I take it you like it?”

“I love it.” I kiss him again. “I think it’s time. I want my mark on you and yours on me.”

“Funny you should say that.” Eros pulls out a piece of paper with a drawing on it. It has an infinity sign with his name signed within it. I might ink it on myself, but it’s his artwork.

“You’ll be my first,” I tease. I still have never put ink on a man before. My mind has played with so many ideas of what I’d put on him when the day finally came.

“Your only,” he reminds me in that stern tone of his that makes my knees weak. I wouldn’t want it any other way.

Our marks on each other are permanent in more ways than one.

MY LOVES!

I’m back after a small vacation. Thank you for waiting for me. This year, I hope to have a slightly increased production so I hope you all have a little extra time for me every month.

Stay warm or cool depending on your situation. *Kisses*

Ella

ALSO BY
Ella Goode

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Chasing Series

Chasing You

Chasing Us

Swiped for His Taking

Claiming His Bride

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Knocked Up by Love

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Princess and the Cowboy

Billionaire and the Cowgirl

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Insta Holiday

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I wrote a few motorcycle romances when I first started out.

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