

MY SECRET
SANTA

My Stalker

CASSI HART

My Secret Santa My
Stalker

—
Stalked Series

Cassi Hart

Published by: Cheeky Publishing LLC

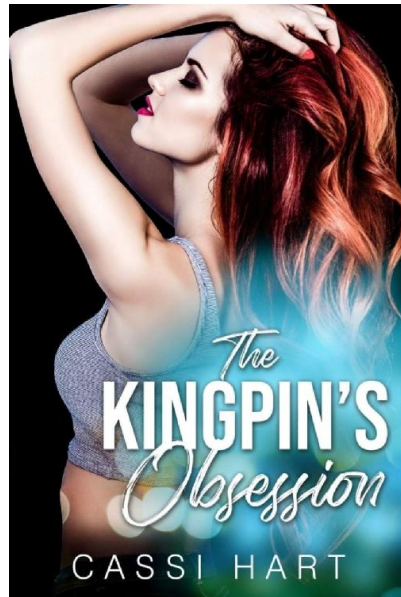
First Edition

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Cheers!



Cassi H   nt

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Prologue

Ella

I almost miss it, the knock on my window.

I lift my head from the pillow and look around, but when the sound doesn't come again, I assume it is probably the wind. My head falls slowly back on the pillow, and my eyes drift to a close when I hear someone pushing my window open. Cold wind filters in, and I shudder before sitting up.

I watch as a shadow climbs into my room, and my lips open to scream, but I stop myself when it registers who the person is. His strong minty scent wafts to my bed, and I reach over to turn on my bedside lamp, filling the room with light.

“Ace?” My words catch when I get a clear view of my best friend.

He has a large purple bruise on his cheek, a split lip, and one of his eyes is swollen shut.

“Ace, oh my God!” I push back the covers and climb out of bed before making my way to him, but he lifts a hand to stop me. He falls against the wall, and he slides down until he is seated on the floor. A wince crosses his face, but it's gone just as fast.

“I just wanted to see you,” he whispers. “I didn't think you'd be up. It's okay, you can go back to sleep, Ella.”

Go back to...is he out of his mind? How does he expect me to go back to sleep and leave him hurting?

Still, it doesn't surprise me that he would say this. Ace has been my best friend for nearly five years, and I know him like the back of my hand. I was seven and Ace thirteen when we were thrust into each other's lives.

Ours is the most unconventional of friendships. We met when his father started dating my mother, but we stayed close even after their messy breakup. My mother's drug abuse and his father's fierce temper ensured that their toxic relationship lasted only three months.

Speaking of his father's temper, I do not doubt that I am staring at his handiwork. Mr. Gray has always been abusive towards his son, but now that Ace is old enough to fight back, the abuse only seems to have worsened.

I turn around, rush out of my room and head for the bathroom, pouring some water in a small basin and grabbing a clean towel before making my way back to Ace. His good eye trails my movements, but I ignore him as I kneel in front of him and dip the towel into the water.

"Ella..."

"Don't say a word," I say, unwilling to hear him refuse my help. He came to me, didn't he? He should have known that I wouldn't just jump back into bed and go to sleep.

Not with him looking like that.

I squeeze the towel before lifting it to his lip and gently wipe away the dried blood. He doesn't wince or make a move as I attend to him.

"I'm sorry he did this to you," I whisper, my eyes filling up with tears when I get a clear view of his wounds. Up close,

the purple bruising is ugly, but what disturbs me even more is the faded scars under his chin.

Ace's dad is infamous in the trailer park as a cruel man who even the adults give a wide berth. No one would dare call the cops on the man. Not that any of the cops would come anyway. Everyone says that the trailer park is littered with drug addicts and criminals, not worth their time. They are not wrong, but...

What about kids, people like me and Ace?

"Hey," Ace's voice is soft as he reaches up and swipes a finger across my cheek, wiping at a stray tear.

"God, I can't wait to get out of here," I say, my eyes meeting his gaze.

"Where would you like to go?" he asks in his deep voice.

"Uhm, I don't know," I say, sitting back and dropping the towel into the basin. We've never really talked about leaving this place, part of me is terrified to hope I'll ever get the chance. "Anywhere far from this trailer park sounds like heaven, but I don't care where I go as long as you're there."

"Me?"

"Yeah," I say, lifting my eyes to his. "You're the only person that makes living here bearable. Remember the first Christmas you snuck me out to see the lights? That was the best night of my life, and I want so many more like those, with you."

"Ella... I..." There is tension in his voice, and I assume it's from what happened tonight.

“What?”

He stares at me for a while without saying a thing before finally letting out a sigh. “Nothing.”

I want to push him on the issue, but he doesn't seem willing to talk about whatever is bothering him, so I decide to let it go. I'll ask him about it tomorrow when he's feeling better.

“Will you still take me to see the lights tomorrow?” I ask, pushing the water basin away and grabbing my blanket to throw it around us. If he is dead set on staying on the floor, I might as well join him.

“What lights?” he asks, confusion crowding his voice.

I scoot closer and let my head fall against his shoulder, borrowing his heat.

“The Christmas lights at the city square, you dummy. Were you not paying attention?”

Ace is quiet for a while, and I lift my head to look at him, but I can't get a clear read on his expression.

“Ace...”

“Christmas, that's tomorrow?”

“Yeah, don't tell me you forgot. We always go to see the lights together. We can go again this year, right?”

He turns to face me, his eye studying me before he finally nods. “Sure.”

“You promise?”

“I promise.”

I let my head fall back to his shoulder and fall asleep to the sound of his heartbeat.

Chapter One

Ace

Seven Years Later

I have never been a fan of crowded rooms. I never understood the need for people to push themselves into a room that is already packed to the gills and suck out all the air, yet... here I am.

Letting myself be elbowed by a man twice my build without so much as a word of protest from my lips.

It's quite laughable. I have killed for much less.

This, however, is a price I am willing to pay just to be close to her.

Ella Turner.

My angel.

This is the first time I am seeing her in four months, and the need to reach out and touch her is overwhelming. This isn't the first time or the longest I have been away from my angel. My work as a contract killer can send me out of the country and away from her for as long as six months. Time I spend thinking about her, worrying...

Would she recognize me if she saw me now? It's been seven years since she last saw me.

The pain of leaving her had been worse than any abuse I'd received at my father's hands, but I couldn't stay. I had left

her while she slept, safe and curled up under the blankets on her bed. That had been our goodbye, and I have no doubt that she hates me for it.

That is, if she hasn't forgotten all about me.

I don't know what which would be worse, having the only person I have ever loved hate me, or forget I ever existed.

I watch her strut around the packed room with a tray of drinks balanced perfectly in her hands. She flashes the men watching her a beautiful smile as she makes her way to a table, easily avoiding the hands reaching for her.

She is beautiful tonight...she's beautiful every night, even with the dark bags visible under her eyes.

She's exhausted, possibly from working so many shifts in this dingy little place. I can see that, and yet...

None of it takes away from her beauty.

My eyes trail down the short length of her tight-fitting, red and green dress, and I struggle between wanting to hide her from the hungry eyes watching her tonight, and appreciating her long, beautiful legs.

The elf costume she has on is no doubt playing into a lot of fantasies tonight, and as much as I want to snap some neck, I can't make any movement that would attract her attention to me.

I shouldn't be here in the first place, but I couldn't stay away. Every few months, I come to check in on her. I sneak into her trailer and leave money in her cash box. Sometimes, like tonight, I watch her work, but I don't stay long enough to be memorable to anyone.

I'm not ready for her to see me just yet.

Not when I am still in the business of killing people. She can't meet this version of me, but maybe in a year or two...

"Turner!" someone in the crowd slurs out her name.
"Turner!"

"I'm coming, Mr. Henderson," she calls out, rolling her tired eyes before heading towards the rowdy man.

"Sara? Sara Turner, is that you?"

"No, Mr. Henderson, I am her daughter. Sara died years ago."

Ella must hate it. She must hate that she works at the same club her mother worked at before overdosing two years ago. Does she think that will be her fate too? I would never let that happen.

I know she is nineteen years old now, my angel, I could take her out and away from this dump, but not yet.

Not yet.

"You look just like her."

Ella forces on a smile, but even from my dark corner, I can see how much it bothers her to be compared to her dead mother. While it's obvious from whom she got her long blond hair and beautiful green eyes, the comparison ends there.

"You need me to get you more beer, Mr. Henderson?"

"Uhm, did I ever tell you that I took your mom to prom? She was the prettiest girl in our class, and she let me take her out. All the boys in our class were so jealous of me."

“Every night, Mr. Henderson, you tell me this every night,” she sighs. “Now about that beer...”

“There was this one time...”

Another patron calls out to Ella, and she jumps at the opportunity to leave the man set on reminiscing his past.

Ella starts to leave, but she stops. Her head turns in my direction, and she looks right at the corner I am hiding in. Although it’s too dark for her to really make me out, her gaze still undoes me.

Can she feel me?

Her brows wrinkle, and her eyes narrow as she looks at the shadows. She is just about to walk towards me when the patron calls out to her again. She nods at them before looking back in my direction.

I watch her shrug before finally returning to serve the patrons and listen to their stories.

My heart hammers in my chest, and my head grows light at the thought of Ella seeing me. Just the thought of her learning that I have been stalking her for years terrifies me more than any contract I have ever taken before.

Contracts I can approach with a cool head, but when it comes to Ella, I’m hopeless.

I need to leave.

I just accepted a contract to take out a corrupt businessman vacationing with his mistress in Paris. I don’t know how long I will be gone this time. Hopefully, not so long enough that I am away from my angel for several months.

I stare at the woman of my dreams one last time, committing her face to memory. Soon I won't have to hide in the shadows.

The loud music drowns out the sound of my heart breaking as I slip out of the pub. I just need to make one more stop, and then I'll be gone.

Chapter Two

Ella

An elf? Really?

I can't believe my boss made me dress up like some stupid elf, with the hat and everything. As if working for him wasn't bad enough.

Just another shitty day at this dump.

Another shitty holiday. Most of the people I serve alcohol to don't give two shits about Christmas and whatever it stands for. For them, this is just another excuse to get drunk and act stupid.

And I'm just the unlucky person who gets to deal with their shit.

Merry Christmas, yeah right.

I drag my feet down the road to my trailer, counting the minutes and seconds until I am home. I've been on my feet all day and night working a double shift, and now, I just want to sleep.

When I finally get there, I stare at the five steps waiting for me to climb and almost sob at the thought of lifting my aching feet.

"It's okay, Ella," I whisper to myself. "You can do it. It's just five steps, and then you finally get to tear off this stinking outfit."

The thought of stripping off my beer-stained elf costume and getting into something warm is enough to propel me forward, but before I can get far, the door of the trailer next to mine is pushed open, and I curse when a man with a large pot belly emerges.

I can't deal with this...not today.

"Turner," the voice is annoyingly high pitched, almost taking off my eardrums. "When am I getting that money? You promised I would have it before Christmas. News flash, sweetheart, it's Christmas."

I close my eyes and count to ten, a technique I heard helps calm nerves, but when I turn to face my late mother's drug dealer, my nerves flare again.

He terrifies me. So of course, he has to live next door to our trailer, and when she passed away a year ago, he wouldn't stop harassing me for the money my mother still owed him.

"Marcus, I don't have any money right now. I promise I will pay you back before the new year. That's when I'll get my next paycheck."

The irony of paying for the same drugs that killed my mother is not lost on me. Still, it needs to be done if I don't want to be terrorized by my neighbor.

"That's what you said last time. Now, little girl, I have been real patient with you, haven't I?" His bushy eyebrows go up as he waits for me to respond.

"Of course. You are very generous for giving me all this time, and I promise you that I'll have your money before new year."

Something sinister glimmers in his eyes as he steps out of his house, his footsteps heavy as he goes down the steps before landing on the snow with a loud hiss at the cold.

“Now,” he huffs, walking closer, and I fight the need to back up. “Before your momma died, rest her beautiful soul, she asked me to look after you. Such a pretty thing.” He raises his hand to my cheek, but I take a step back to avoid his touch.

His eyes flare with anger at the move, but I am not about to let him touch me. I am ready to run if that is what needs to happen.

“I-I promise I’ll give you the money before new year. I just... I don’t have it right now.”

“You know, there are other ways you could pay me.” A chill runs through me as his eyes size me up, and I resist the urge to adjust the elf dress.

There is no misunderstanding what this man wants, but the thought of giving my virginity to him makes me want to retch.

“I’ll get you the money, I promise,” I say weakly, backing away, but Marcus follows me.

“I’m tired of waiting. Your momma kept you hidden all this time, but now that she’s gone...”

His words trail off as he looks at something behind my shoulder. Something must have him distracted, and I figure this might be my opportunity to bolt, but when I turn, I bump into a hard wall of muscle.

“Sorry,” I mumble, my eyes going up to look at the person I just ran into, wondering how much more trouble I’ve

gotten myself in. I'm met with familiar blue eyes, and my heart stops.

No way.

No, it can't be.

There is just no way...

"Ella," he whispers, his voice barely audible. "Are you okay?"

Am I okay?

Of course, I am not okay. Who the hell would be okay after seeing their best friend after close to a decade? Okay, not really a decade, but seven years is close enough.

The memory of waking up in my bed alone with no sign of Ace is rooted in my brain. I can remember the fear I'd felt when I'd walked to his trailer that Christmas morning only to find cops surrounding the place. The rumor was someone had broken in and shot Ace's dad. Ace had been nowhere to be found, and everyone seemed to have forgotten his existence, except me.

Part of me was terrified that someone had kidnapped him, or even worse, killed him.

But here he is...alive and well.

"Ace," the word slips out. The need to hear myself say it out loud and get assurance that I am not actually dreaming is heavy.

"Who the hell are you? You just interrupted a private..."

Marcus's words trail off, and I look back to see his face has gone sheet white. I follow his eyes to the gun Ace is

pointing in his direction, and my blood runs cold.

And yet, the scariest part is not the gun or the coldness in those cobalt blue eyes, but the package I finally notice tucked under his arm.

It's a box wrapped in green ribbons, my favorite color. For the last six Christmases, I've walked into my room to find a similar box waiting for me on my bed. At first, I'd thought the Christmas gift was my mother's way of apologizing for years of neglect. That was the only explanation that made sense.

However, she'd never acknowledged the gifts, and the year she passed, I'd still found a similar box waiting for me on Christmas. It had terrified me.

Not knowing where the gifts came from messed with my head, but never in my wildest dreams did I think it was Ace leaving them.

I look up to meet his eyes.

So, he's been my Secret Santa this entire time.

Ace wasn't dead, no, he's been alive all these years, and even worse, he's been around.

Merry Christmas to me indeed.

Chapter Three

Ace

It's too soon.

I'm not ready yet. It's years too soon because part of me already knew that I wouldn't be able to leave her if she saw me.

I can't abandon her again, not after she's seen me.

And definitely not after realizing how much danger she's in.

Her beautiful green eyes widen when she notices the wrapped box tucked under my arm before looking up to meet my eyes.

She knows.

If she had no idea that I'd been leaving her gifts, she definitely does now.

Ella wasn't supposed to find out that I have been leaving presents on her bed every Christmas. Wrapping them myself with ribbons in her favorite shade of green before sneaking into her trailer and planting them on her bed.

It was the last thing I needed to do before boarding my flight for Paris this afternoon.

"He's gone," I, say if only to take the attention off myself.

"Huh?"

“The man,” I say pointing behind her, and she turns just in time to see the short, stout man who’d been harassing her shut the door to his trailer.

“Oh,” she hums, taking a step away from me, and it takes everything in me to not reach out and draw her closer.

Christ, how long has it been since I was this close to her.

She must use the same shampoo she did back then because the scent is comforting and serves to remind me of a time when I had neither the money nor the power I have now, but...I had her.

Given the choice, I would have stayed behind or taken her with me, neither had been an option I’d been presented with at the time.

“Uhm, thanks for... that. He’s never gotten close before, and I am sure he will back down once I get his money,” Ella says, backing away, but I can tell she doesn’t believe her own words.

She is not so naïve as to think the man will stop until he has her.

Ella turns her back on me and starts walking away, and I find myself following her up to her trailer. When she turns back to look at me, she doesn’t seem surprised to see that I’ve followed.

She unlocks the door and walks in, leaving it open for me, and I take that as a sign that she doesn’t completely hate me, although I can’t be too sure about that.

Ella drops her purse onto the beat-up couch, and I'm expecting her to sit down and tear me a new one when her shoulders begin to shake, her hand going to her lips to curb a sob.

"Ella," I whisper, stepping towards her and drawing her into my arms. I expect her to push me away, but her arms go around my waist and grab at my coat as sobs shake her body.

"You weren't supposed to leave," she chokes out, her voice obstructed by her cries. "I'm too tired to think of all the reasons I should be mad at you."

I could give her a few, but I choose to pull her closer instead, my arms tightening around her tiny frame, and while I enjoy having Ella finally in my arms, I despise the circumstances.

She feels so soft against me. Her supple breasts press against my chest, and I fight the need to grind my erection against her stomach.

It would be easy.

So easy to lean in and bury my face in her neck, push back her silky hair, and kiss a trail down her delicate skin, committing her taste and scent to my mind. The thought of her mouth falling open as I kissed a path down her skin to her breasts has my cock aching in my pants.

God, she's so beautiful.

Ella draws back from my arms and swipes at her cheeks with the back of her hand. Her teary green eyes are so gorgeous and innocent when they look up to meet mine.

“You *left*. I should hate you, but I’m just too damn tired,” she whispers, pushing away from me, and I mourn the loss.

“You can rest,” I say, meeting her eyes. “Get some sleep, and when you’re well rested, then you can be mad at me all you want.”

She chuckles, but the sound is empty of humor. “It’s quite ironic. You left on Christmas morning, and now you are back the same day you left. I don’t know, Ace. Part of me is so sure that when I open my eyes, it’ll be to find you gone. Again. Without so much as a goodbye.”

My heart aches at her words, but I don’t correct her. Spending my last night with Ella had been the goodbye I’d needed, and I had been selfish enough to seek her out before leaving for a new life.

“I promise you that I am not going anywhere. Rest. When you wake up, I’ll be here.”

I can tell she doesn’t believe me, and I don’t blame her for that. I didn’t keep the last promise I made to her, and it almost killed me. Never again.

“Okay, I’ll just grab a shower first, then get some rest.”

I watch her walk away, and a few minutes later, the sound of the shower coming on filters into the small living room. I wait for it to stop and give her a few minutes to get dressed and climb in bed before seeking her out.

Ella is sleeping on her side, facing the window like she always did when she was younger. She told me once it was so she’d see me whenever I snuck over.

I sit next to her on the bed and caress a finger down her cheek, pushing back a strand of hair from her face, and I find that I can't take my hands or eyes off her.

It's been years since I could be close to her like this, close enough to hear the little sighs she makes when she is asleep or see the way her eyelashes flutter when she wakes.

My angel, there is no leaving now. My broker will not be happy when he learns that I missed the flight headed for Paris, but I'll deal with that later. For now, I can't leave.

I don't know exactly when over the years my love for Ella matured. At first, I stalked her because I needed to know she was safe. Then, I did it simply because I needed *her*, in whatever way I could have her.

I lower myself on the bed to lie beside her and draw her into my arms. She sighs in her sleep before burying her face into my neck, bringing my heart a peace I haven't felt in years.

Chapter Four

Ella

I wake up warm.

Warmer than I have felt in a long time, and when I feel arms around me, my first thought is to panic before the memories come flooding back in.

My eyes trail the heavy arm splayed over me and follow it to the man lying next to me.

So, it wasn't a dream?

I find myself staring at familiar blue eyes, except they are not as familiar as I'd initially thought. His eyes are hard and cold, so unlike the boy I used to know.

"It's early, don't you want to get more sleep?" he asks when I don't speak.

"No, I...I'm well rested," I tell him. Ace feels like a stranger to me. He hasn't been my best friend for a very long time, and this man...

"Does that mean we can leave?" he asks, interrupting my thoughts.

"Leave?" I ask confused, sitting up and running a hand through my hair.

"To see the Christmas lights at the city square. They will have them on tonight, I checked."

"You checked," I mutter.

“Do you not want to?”

This feels surreal, talking to him like this. Part of me feels like I am still asleep, and any moment I’ll wake up, and Ace will be gone from my life.

“Ella?”

“Why didn’t you come to see me, tell me you were okay?” I ask, turning to face him.

Ace also sits up and doesn’t shift his eyes from mine when he speaks. “I couldn’t, Ella. It wasn’t safe.”

“What do you mean it wasn’t safe? I woke up that Christmas morning to the news that your dad was dead, shot in the head during a break in, and you were nowhere to be found. I...I thought they’d killed you too.”

I push out of bed and start pacing in the small room. “No one was looking for you, and I couldn’t get anyone to listen. Do you have any idea how long I searched for you? How long I mourned you, Ace? I was sick with worry for you. You should have come to me and told me you were okay instead of leaving your stupid Christmas gifts.”

Hurt crosses his face and guilt floods in at what my words are doing to him, but he has to understand why I’m angry, right?

I would have traded all the Christmas gifts in the world for another minute with him, to get assurance that my best friend, the only person who’d made life bearable, was okay.

“I shot my father, Ella.”

I freeze at his words.

“You mean...”

“I shot him in the head. That night I came over, we had fought because he wanted me to join his gang since I was eighteen. He threatened to use you to make me fall in line, so I shot him. I shot him right in the face with the same gun he’d used so many times to threaten me, and I don’t regret it.”

My lips fall open, and my throat closes up, trapping my words inside me.

“Ella,” he whispers, getting up. “I had to leave before the cops came for me. That night I came to see you, that was my goodbye. The presents were the only way I could stay in touch with you. I knew you wouldn’t know I was sending them, but...I’d hoped you would figure it out.”

Never in my wildest dream...

“I... I...”

“I’m sorry I had to leave the way I did, Ella.”

There are so many questions floating around my head, but I can’t grasp any of them long enough to ask.

“I...I’ll get changed, and then we’ll go see the lights,” I say dumbly.

“Are you okay?”

I don’t know how I feel about any of it, but I am not willing to examine it now.

Ace is back. I can focus on that. For now.

“I’ll get changed into something warm. Give me a minute, okay?”

He watches me for a while before nodding and making his way out. I don't let myself think as I get changed. My eyes move to the window Ace used to sneak through when we were younger.

He'd been so thin back then, so thin that he'd been able to fit through. Years of abuse from his father had done that to him, but now, he wouldn't fit. His muscles are well-defined, I'd felt as much when he'd held me.

He is nothing like the boy I used to know. Even his midnight black hair, which used to flow to his shoulders because he couldn't afford a haircut, is nicely trimmed, his cheeks healthy and full where they'd once been gaunt.

Once I am fully dressed, I join Ace in the living room only to find him staring at an old photo. The only photo I have of my mother. This was long before she'd gotten hooked on drugs, and we'd been so happy back then.

"We can leave now," I say loudly, announcing myself. "You'll have to drop me back later though; I have a shift tomorrow afternoon."

"I was sorry to hear about your mother," he says, but I wave him off. There's no use thinking about it now. My mother had been gone for years before the overdose. She'd been a shell of her former self before finally succumbing to her addiction. I don't want to remember her like that. I'd rather focus on the good memories I still have of her.

"It's fine," I say, heading for the door. "We'll have to take a longer path. The shortcut we used to take as kids was closed off."

“Do you prefer to walk, or should I call a car?”

“We can walk. It’s just twenty minutes.”

Ace follows me out, and I am reminded just how tall the man is when he steps next to me. He always seemed so big to me when we were young, but he’s even larger now, towering over me in every sense and...

It makes my heart speed up.

I don’t understand my reaction to him, but surely, I cannot be attracted to him, right? He has been back only a few hours, and suddenly I am thinking of his muscles...

His eyes.

“Are you cold?” he asks, breaking into my thoughts.

“No, I’m fine,” I respond before lapsing into silence. It never used to be this way between us. Neither of us is really chatty, but we always had something to talk about.

We spend the rest of the walk in awkward silence, and I almost bring it up, when I realize we’ve arrived. There is a crowd gathered around, people taking pictures, and others chattering but they all fade away when I see the huge Christmas tree.

It’s not as tall as I recall, but maybe that’s because I’d been shorter back then. I quit coming to see the lights the year that Ace left.

I grab Ace’s hand blindly before dragging him towards the tree. The lights are bright, and they shimmer and shine in all colors, it’s magical.

“Oh my God, Ace,” I whisper, leaning into his shoulder. “It’s just like I remember it.”

“You don’t still come to see it?” he asks, shock clouding his voice.

“Why would I come to see it without you? I didn’t want to continue our tradition by myself. It was so much better when you were with me.”

Ace doesn’t respond, but I am too distracted by the tree to question his silence. I turn to suggest that we move closer and take a picture together when it starts drizzling.

That is all the warning we get before the skies open and heavy rain pours. People begin to scramble as they run away from the rain, and Ace pulls me closer, his large arms going around my shoulder and pulling me flush against him so we don’t get separated.

“We need to go, Ella, but...”

“What?” I ask, looking up to meet his eyes, blinking rapidly against the rain.

“Your trailer is so far off, and no taxis will be willing to take us into that neighborhood.”

“Well...” I chew my lips as I look around for a place we can seek shelter from the rain, but there are barely any places left as people push and shove each other to grab whatever shelter they can.

“We can go to my place, it’s not very far from here,” Ace says.

“You live in the city?” I ask carefully.

“No,” he responds. “I have accommodations in the city I use when I am in town for a few days every year.”

“Okay,” I say, choosing to trust his words.

Chapter Five

Ace

Ella is silent as I let her into my condo.

It's nothing fancy by any means, but considering where we were both raised, this feels like a palace.

Ella looks around the room, her eyes studying the high ceilings, white walls, and furniture that has not been used for several months before finally stopping on the scissors and left-over green ribbon on the table.

“You wrapped it yourself?” she asks, moving closer and picking up the scissors. “I'm sorry I called your Christmas gifts stupid. Every present you left made my Christmas better.”

Ella turns to face me, and I notice for the first time how soaked from the rain she is. Her hair is still dripping with water, and her coat is just as drenched.

“We need to get you changed so you don't catch a cold,” I say, unzipping her coat and pushing it off her shoulder. I turn to her shirt and stop.

The white top she has on is wet and sticking to her body, revealing her naked skin. She doesn't have a bra on, and her nipples are pushing hard against the wet fabric.

“Ace...”

I can't take my eyes off her. My breath comes in short pants, and my cock hardens in an instant as I fight the need to

reach out and trace her nipples with my thumbs.

“Ace, are you okay?”

Her voice snaps my lagging brain into focus, and I push back from her, focusing instead on her eyes.

“I’ll get you a shirt to change into,” I say, turning for my bedroom, but she grabs my hand, stopping me in my tracks.

“You’re soaked too,” she says. “You should remove your coat.”

I don’t get to respond before she is pushing my coat back, her light fingers going to my shirt, but I stop her before she can unbutton it.

“Stop, Ella...”

“Why?” she whispers, and suddenly I suspect she isn’t oblivious to my desire for her.

Has she seen my erection?

Is she terrified by the knowledge that I want her in a way I didn’t before?

“Ace?” her hand cups my chin and turns me to face her. “I... I don’t understand what it is I am feeling. I’ve never...I feel so wet in places the rain hasn’t touched. You’re my best friend, I can tell you this, right?”

I wet my lips and swallow hard at her words.

Her large green eyes look up at me so trustingly to explain what is happening to her body.

“W-where,” I clear my throat. “Where are you wet?”

Her cheeks flare up in a rosy hue, and she looks away after my question.

“Ella, tell me,” I rasp, my heart hammering in my chest as I lean in and force her eyes back to mine. “Or should I find out for myself?”

Ella bites into her lip, her eyes downcast before looking up to meet mine and nodding once.

That’s all I need to lean in and brush my mouth against hers. Ella opens up immediately when my lips touch hers, and her arms go around my neck. I run my hands behind her thighs and hike her into my arms.

Her legs go around my waist as I deepen the kiss, sliding my lips hungrily against hers. Swallowing her cries as I carry her to the couch.

“Christ, baby,” I whisper, running my lips along her jaw and to her ear before gently nipping at it. Her head falls back, allowing me more access to her sensitive skin.

She’s so responsive to my touch, *my Ella*.

I lower her to the couch, following her down, as I lose myself in her intoxicating taste. I push up her skirt and run my hands over her creamy thighs.

Her lips...Ella has no idea how many nights I’ve lain awake in bed just thinking of her like this, with nothing but the memory of her face to push me forward.

But now, I get to taste her too.

“Tell me you want this, baby,” I rasp, dragging my lips down to her jaw and sucking a bruise on her neck. “Say it.”

“If it’s you, Ace, then I want it. Only with you...”

I lick at her nipple through her top, and she cries out when I suck it into my lips, nipping gently at the sensitive skin.

I push back to watch her, spread out on my couch, her chest heaving and eyes half-lidded as she looks back at me.

My angel.

I run my hands up her thighs and stop when I reach her panties. My eyes are on her when I rub my thumb over her sex. Her back arches, her lips open in a silent cry, and I soak up her reaction.

I’ve had this exact scenario in my head a million times over, but it doesn’t even come close to reality.

My body is buzzing, and my mouth pools with saliva at the thought of finally getting a taste of her.

I grab her panties and pull them down to her ankles, and she gasps when I expose her sex to the warm air.

I look up, and my eyes lock on hers. She looks breathtaking with her damp hair curtaining her slim face. Her sexy tits move with her heaving chest, creating a mouthwatering view from my position.

“I’m going to make you feel good. Do you trust me, baby?”

“Always,” she whispers, watching me from under her lashes.

Her trust shoots straight to my cock, taking away whatever little restraint I had left.

I push back and lift her leg to my shoulder so she is more exposed to me, and my cock throbs in my pants at the move. Her wet little cunt is pink and soaked. The thought that no man has ever seen or touched her like I am now goes straight to my cock, and I almost come on the spot.

I run a thumb over her soaked pussy, and she cries out, her back arching. I soak up her reaction, sliding my thumb along the bridge of her sex.

“Oh God,” she cries out, her eyes fluttering to a close even as her head falls back against the couch.

“No,” I say withdrawing my finger. “I want your eyes on me, Ella. I want you to watch me lick your hot pussy until you are a sobbing mess and not a second before.”

I wait until her eyes are on me before laying a small kiss on her inner thigh.

“You have no fucking idea, do you?” I whisper, laying another kiss on her thigh, this time, a little closer to her wet sex.

My mouth waters at the thought of finally getting to taste her juices. “You have no fucking idea how much...how long I have dreamt of this moment.”

“Ace...”

Her words turn into a moan when I drag my tongue along the wet valley of her pussy. I use my thumb and finger to part her lips before going in for another lick.

Fuck.

Her taste is intoxicating, so sweet and smooth.

“Ace,” she sobs out, her back jolting with every lick. The sound of my name on her lips only pushes me to work harder on her pussy.

I flick her clit with the tip of my tongue, and her back arches as her leg trembles around my shoulder. Her whines fill up the room as I lap at her pussy, licking up her juices like the starved man I am.

I tease her clit with my thumb and drag my tongue over her hole, reveling in the fact she’s a virgin.

Mine!

Years of abuse from my father, and all it took was for him to threaten Ella for me to finally snap.

She is mine and no one else can have her. No one!

Possessiveness crawls into my gut, feeding into my lust. Ella is mine, and so is her virginity.

“Oh God, Ace... I ... Please don’t stop,” she cries out, her hand grabbing my hair and pulling at the roots, but I don’t care about the sting as long as I bring her pleasure.

I rub circles on her clit, and her legs begin to shake before her entire body joins in. Her grip on my hair tightens, and I withdraw my finger, letting her have control.

“Yes. Yes...” she cries over and over again as she drags her pussy across my mouth, chasing her orgasm.

I suckle her clit, and that pushes her to the edge. Her pussy clenches against my lips, and she sobs out my name as her body shudders. I don’t stop licking at her sex until she places a hand on my shoulder and pushes me back gently. I

climb up her body, my hands caressing her soft breasts through the thin material.

My lips find hers, and our tongues drag together in feral need, desperate for her to taste her honey on my lips. I quickly unzip my pants, and it takes just three strokes before I come on her stomach with a long guttural moan.

“Baby,” I rasp, leaning down to kiss her forehead. I can’t believe that happened.

I stroke her hair and push it from her face, watching her for any sign of regret, but she seems as blissed out as I feel.

It’s on the tip of my tongue to tell her that I love her, but I don’t want to scare her just yet. Everything between us is happening way faster than I ever expected, and she probably needs time to adjust.

“Are you hungry?” I ask instead.

“I could eat.”

“I don’t have anything stocked in the house, but I’ll order us some dinner. I don’t know how many places are open now, but I’ll find us something to eat while you take a bath, okay?”

Ella nods, her emerald green eyes staring at me. “You’re not leaving, right?”

I lean down and brush my lips against hers in the softest touch of skin, so achingly intimate it tugs at my heartstrings.

“No, Ella. I’m here to stay.”

Chapter Six

Ella

I come out of the bedroom dressed in Ace's t-shirt.

The man is so tall, that the shirt makes it past my knees, and it smells like him.

My cheeks flare up at the memory of his lips on my body, exploring me in an intimate way no one else ever has.

His, he called me.

Does he remember calling me that?

I can't help but wonder whether he just got carried away by the moment or if that's how he truly sees me.

I want to be his.

If I could belong to one man in the world, it would be him.

I walk into the dining area to find a freshly showered Ace setting up the table. There are all kinds of dishes on display, and the smell has me drooling. I haven't eaten for hours, and I am especially ravenous.

"Is Indian okay with you? I remember how much you used to like spicy food as kids, do you still like it?"

"I do, and it looks and smells amazing. Thank you."

I look away from the food to the man, only to find him staring at me with a strange look.

“What?”

“Nothing,” he says, running his eyes over my body.
“The shirt looks good on you.”

I nod at his words. “It smells like you.”

“Oh, do you want me to find you a different—”

“No,” I hurry to say. “I like your scent. It’s warm and familiar.”

His lips shift slightly in a smile, and I can’t help but flash him one of my own. It really feels like old times to be with him like this.

“Let’s eat.”

He pulls out a chair for me, and I slide into it, ready to eat. This would be the first meal I have had with anyone in ages, and I’m glad it’s him.

I just wish he’d shown up much sooner.

“I missed you,” I say after a while. “I don’t believe I’ve told you this, but I missed you so much, Ace.”

He looks up to meet my eyes from across the table, “I missed you too, Ella.”

“I’m glad you got out of the trailer park and can afford a place like this. It used to feel like a dream, you know.”

“It did.”

“So, what do you do? I can’t imagine you working a corporate job, but then again, you have to make a living somehow. You mentioned you don’t stay here a lot, right? Does your job require you to travel?”

Ace looks away, and I can't help but feel uneasy with the way he is avoiding my eyes.

“Ace?”

“Remember how I told you I had to leave after...you know, after.”

“Yeah?”

“Well, I had to leave because someone saw me shoot my father. He walked in right after the gun went off. He is the only other person who knew what I'd done.”

And now you do too.

He doesn't say the words, but I hear them. Still, I can tell there is more to the story, so I wait patiently for him to continue.

“The man was my father's boss, and he'd come in to confront him about something when he saw me kill my father, so he used that to get me to work for him, and Ella...” Ace reaches over and takes my hand into his. “I didn't have a choice but to give in to his demands. I was going to give ten years of my life to the man, and in exchange, he would keep me out of prison and name me his sole heir to his wealth.”

“It's been seven years,” I mumble.

“I know, baby,” he whispers. “I know, and that's why I stayed away. I couldn't drag you into my world and risk you getting hurt. Staying away was the only way I could protect you.”

My heart breaks for him, and for myself as well. He was going to stay away from me for an additional three years until

he was free of his boss.

“What do you do?” I ask, clued in, but terrified to admit it.

“I am a professional hit man.”

My heart flutters in my chest, and I withdraw my hands from him. Ace is a killer. Marcus too is a killer, except Marcus poisons people’s minds and bodies before they finally succumb to their illnesses.

My mother had been innocent when Marcus introduced her to drugs.

I look up to meet Ace’s eyes and swallow at the vulnerability I see there. He’s given me enough ammunition to take him down, but just the thought of that has my heart clenching painfully in my chest.

“Your boss...” My voice breaks, and I clear it before speaking again. “Is he...is he like your father?”

Ace shakes his head. “He can be tough but he is a reasonable man and treats me more like a son than the killing machine he created.”

I study him, and he does look healthy. He looks way better than he had the last time I’d seen him. Still, I’m not so sure how I feel about his profession.

“I need to think about this,” I say, returning to the food. “Isn’t it ironic that we are both doing what our parents used to?”

“Ella?”

“We swore that neither of us would follow in their footsteps,” I say, chuckling. “I am a waitress in the same bar my mom used to work at, and you work for the same man your dad did.”

“We are nothing like our parents, Ella.”

“Aren’t we?” I ask, not looking for an answer.

The rest of the meal is spent in silence, and when Ace shows me to my room, I smile at him before wishing him goodnight and locking myself in a room that smells of him.

The sheets are cool against my skin, but despite the comfort this room affords me, I can’t sleep. Not when my mind is on the man in the room across the hall.

Ace has been taking care of me from the shadows, looking out for me in a way no one else ever has, so why am I struggling with accepting the one thing he was roped into?

I toss and turn in the bed before kicking at the covers in frustration. I can’t take it anymore.

I push the covers back and slip out of bed before heading out of the room in search of my best friend.

Chapter Seven

Ace

I drop the cigarette blunt into the ashtray before turning to watch the city. I needed the nicotine after my phone call with Blade.

To say he was annoyed to learn that the businessman in Paris is still breathing would be an understatement. Still, there is hardly anything he can do about it.

Even he knows I am not the same eighteen-year-old that would be led on a leash. Things have changed over the years, and he knows I wouldn't hesitate to push back if he forced me to. I am a valuable asset to Blade, and he cannot afford to lose me.

"Ace," a small voice calls out from behind me, and I turn quickly to find Ella standing by the door, watching me and still wearing only the t-shirt she'd put on after her bath.

"Hey, it's cold out here, shouldn't you be resting?"

Ella steps out and joins me on the balcony, her eyes going to the ashtray. "I don't remember you smoking, did you pick up the habit to help with stress?"

"I shouldn't have done this with you around. I know how much you hate drugs."

"I don't hate all drugs, just the hard ones, but you don't need a stress reliever when you have me."

“Ella...”

“I couldn’t sleep, Ace. I kept thinking about you, about us...”

“I know it’s a lot to take in, and you can take all the time you need to—”

“But that’s just it,” she whispers, turning to me. “I don’t need more time away from you. We’ve been separated for seven years, and every other concern than being close to you feels secondary.”

Ella takes a step closer until she is flush against me, and her eyes burn into mine, “You feel the same way, right?”

My eyes stay on her, but I don’t make a move to touch her. A few minutes ago, she was conflicted about my profession. There is no way she just had a change of heart, right?

“Ella, it’s okay to sleep on it.”

“Nothing will change come morning.”

I look past her shoulder and into the city. It’s not raining as heavily anymore, but snow is falling, and the air is chilly. Ella is dressed in just a shirt and socks, and I know they are insufficient in keeping her warm in such weather.

“Let’s get you inside before you catch a cold,” I say, grabbing her hand and leading her back into the warm condo.

“Ace, I know what I want,” she says once we are inside, her hands going to my arm.

“Maybe, but it doesn’t hurt to...”

“No.” Her hand tightens around my arm to the point of bruising. “I don’t need time apart from you to know how much you mean in my life. I’ve been there, Ace. I can accept everything else, but the thought of being parted from you again.”

My heartstrings tug painfully at her words, even as my cock throbs in its tight confines.

“Baby,” I whisper, brushing a hand on her cheek. “Don’t you think this is too fast, even for us?”

Ella blinks up at me in confusion. “How is this fast? You have been in my life for twelve years—seven of which I spent missing you terribly. How much longer do we need to wait, Ace? A few more days? A month? Seven more years?”

My heart clenches at her words, and I fight the need to push her against the wall, lift her shirt, push my cock into her warmth and show her just how much I want her.

“Ella...”

“Please, Ace,” she begs, running her hands over my abs and up my chest, tearing the first buttons of my shirt while taking it off. She leans in and traces her lips over the exposed skin. “Please, Ace... please. Give me some kind of proof that this is not a dream.”

That is all it takes for me to snap. I snake my hand around to grip her nape and take her lips in a bruising kiss. Ella opens up for me, her lips moving against mine just as needily.

“Christ, baby, what are you doing to me?” I rasp against her lips, my harsh breath mixing with hers.

My angel.

I pull back and stare down at her, and when I meet her wide, trusting eyes, I lose whatever control I had left. I've held back for so long, patiently preparing for the right time, but I am done waiting.

I drape a hand around her waist and pull her flush against me. My lips drop to the crook of her neck, hand tunneling into her hair and fisting it.

The beast I've had chained breaks free, and I can't keep my hands off her.

This time, there will be no stopping until I am balls deep inside her tight pussy and pounding my seed into her womb.

"Ace," she cries out when I gently bite into her skin, running a hand over her soft breast through the fabric of her shirt.

"I can't wait to be inside of you," I whisper against her skin before pulling back. I turn her around and gently press against her back until she falls forward, her palms slapping hard against the wall.

"You have no idea how long I've dreamt of this moment, baby," I rasp, my breath hot and heavy against the skin on her nape.

I slip my hands to her front and tear down the shirt before running my hands over her breasts. I pinch the nipples gently between my thumbs and forefingers, and she cries out, leaning into my touch.

I dip my knees and grind my erection against her ass, eliciting a long moan from both of us. I unzip my pants, drawing my cock out and slapping it against her bare, juicy ass.

“Are you wet for me, Angel?” I ask, dropping the other hand down to her stomach before slipping between her legs, and I almost come on the spot when I touch her naked pussy.

“Ace,” she cries when I rub my thumb against her drenched sex.

“I love how wet you are,” I whisper into her ear. “I could easily slide my cock into your pussy and fuck you against this wall.”

Ella whimpers when I kiss the back of her neck, one hand trailing its way to her throat. My cock slides through the valley of her pussy, and I hold back the need to push into her wet hole.

“Goddamn it, baby,” I grit out, sliding my cock hard against her cunt. I have to pull back before I shoot. “I can’t hold back any longer. You’re killing me, baby. I need...”

“Ace?” Ella looks at me over her shoulder, desperation clear in her eyes.

“Fuck,” I curse out, brushing my lips against her skin. “I need to be inside of you, Ella.”

I grab her shoulders and turn her back around so she’s facing me before lowering my lips to hers. Her hands travel up my arms before connecting around my shoulders as she allows me to deepen the kiss.

I trace my hands down her back, grabbing her ass and squeezing the thick mounds in my large hands.

Ella gasps against my lips, allowing me to deepen the kiss, engaging her tongue in a feral duel. I lower my hands to the back of her thighs and hoist her up. She tightens her arms and legs around me as I carry her to the bedroom.

I feast at her lips, our mouths slanting wetly against each other, an insatiable need building in us.

I don't detach my lips from hers until we are on the bed and tearing at our clothes. My lips are back on her once we are both naked.

I lower my head and take her nipple into my wet mouth, sucking gently at the tight bud. Ella cries out, pushing into my touch as I offer the other nipple the same attention.

I let it fall from my lips with a pop before kissing a trail up her neck to her lips. I brace a hand above her shoulder, and grabbing my hard cock with the other, I guide it to her virgin hole but make no move to push into her.

Her beautiful, lust-riddled eyes meet mine, her breath coming in short gasps.

“Christ, baby...”

A hand cups my cheek, and I have to fight the need to just pound into her with the way her eyes stare up at me so trusting...so needy.

“It's okay, Ace. I know it's supposed to hurt.”

Doesn't mean I have to like it.

A gasp slips out when I push a little into her wet hole, hissing through my teeth at the feeling of her warmth.

No one has been inside her little pussy, and no one else ever will be.

That thought has me sliding in another inch, and her hands go around my neck as she braces herself for the pain.

“It’s so big, Ace...” she whimpers when I slide in another inch, stopping when I feel her virginal barrier. “Is it... Is it supposed to be that big?”

“It’s okay, baby,” I whisper, brushing my lips softly against hers and trailing them down her chin. I wait for her to relax before finally thrusting in, muffling her scream with my mouth.

Fuck, fuck, fuck.

I almost ejaculate immediately when my cock is surrounded by her warm pussy, and it takes sheer will not to spill.

She is so wet and so, fucking tight.

“I’m sorry, baby. I don’t want to hurt you, ever.” I whisper, peppering her neck with kisses and giving her time to adjust to the intrusive feeling. “Let me take care of you, okay? Let me love you.”

I look up just in time to catch her nod and see those beautiful trusting eyes. I move a little, watching her face for any trace of pain, but it seems to have faded.

A blinding need to move claws through my belly and sucks up my willpower. I lower my head and take her nipple

before suckling hard at the pink bead. I slide my cock out of her pussy before thrusting back into her.

She gasps, and her body shudders against mine at the move.

I won't last long.

My hand slips down her stomach, and I rub my thumb cruelly against her clit, thrusting hard into her. I watch greedily as her mouth falls open, and her head falls back against the mountain of pillows to reveal delicate skin.

“Oh God, Ace...yes, don't stop.”

I pick up speed, thrusting into her fast until her muscles lock, and her cunt grips my cock hard. I don't give her time to chase her orgasm before pulling out and turning her so she is on all fours and pound deeper into her.

Ella cries out, her face falling into the pillow as I pound my cock into her contracting flesh. She thrashes on the bed even as her body shakes with pleasure, but I don't stop, driving my cock into her with powerful thrusts.

“Fuck, Ace,” she cries out when I fist her hair, chasing the pressure that builds up in my balls and sends heat up my spine.

“So close, baby,” I grunt. “I am going to fill up this wet pussy with my seed and plant a baby in you.”

“Oh, God... Ace...” she cries out as another orgasm wrecks her body, surprising both of us. Her pussy clenches hard enough around my cock to send me over the edge. I groan out as black stars fill my vision and almost black out from the

intensity of it. I come harder than I ever have, filling her warm cunt with thick ropes of my warm seed.

I thrust lazily into her, chasing the dregs of our orgasm until my muscles grow weak, and I fall against her back.

“I love you, Ella,” I whisper against her skin. “I love you so fucking much.”

“I love you too, Ace,” she says, her voice heavy with tears. “I’ve loved you for so long, Ace. Loved you even when you were gone.”

I brush my lips to the back of her neck, basking in her warmth.

“Let me get a towel to clean us up, okay?” I whisper, but when I try to get up, she shakes her head. Ella turns so she is facing me, her beautiful green eyes filled with tears.

“It’s always been just you and me, Ace. Don’t leave again, okay?”

“I promise.”

Chapter Eight

Ella

I wake up to the smell of coffee. I'm not a fan of coffee, but there is something about waking up to the sound of a busy house that fills me with warmth.

My mornings have been lonely for the past two years, and I love that I get to wake up to the company of the man I have loved for so long.

I slip another of Ace's shirts over my naked body and search for said man.

"Ace," I call out as I make my way out of the bedroom.

"In here, baby."

I walk into the kitchen to find him drinking coffee while toasting bread. He is dressed in a white shirt that stretches around his muscles as he moves and gray khaki pants. If I saw him on the streets, I would never make him out for a killer.

He has a polished way about him that comes off as stern, yet non-threatening.

"Did you sleep alright?" he asks, his blue eyes studying me.

"Uhm, yeah. I did."

"Good. I made you breakfast, but I can't stay to have it with you. I need to go check in with my handler, but I'll be back in a few hours, okay?"

Ace walks towards me and leans down to brush his lips against my forehead.

“Will you be, okay?”

“I will be fine, baby. Nothing will happen to me, I promise. Okay?” His eyes meet mine, and he waits until I’ve nodded to move.

“Okay.”

“Good, now stay here until I get back. I won’t be gone for long.”

I nod at him, and he flashes me a smile before grabbing his coat and leaving. I turn to the breakfast he has prepared, already plated and everything.

The house is lonely without him, so I consider making a quick run to my trailer to grab a few things. I know Ace told me to wait for him, but I’m anxious to get back to the trailer. For one thing, all the gifts he’s given me through the years are in the house, and someone could break in and steal them. More importantly, I won’t be able to start my new life with Ace until I’ve put an end to my old one.

With that decided, I finish my breakfast and head back to his room to see if there’s anything I can change into. I find my skirt from yesterday and borrow a coat from his closet since mine is still wet.

I call a taxi and find it waiting for me when I emerge from the building. The driver drops me several blocks from the trailer park, unwilling to venture into my neighborhood, and quite frankly, I don’t blame him. The walk to my trailer is long, but I’ve grown used to it.

I don't intend to stay long, so when I arrive at my trailer, I immediately start digging around for all the things I want to take back to Ace's place.

Ace is back.

It still feels like a dream.

I must be too lost in my head that I don't sense the intruder until I feel a hand on my waist. I jump back, startled, and turning around, my blood runs cold when I see Marcus.

"Going somewhere, Turner?"

"What? No," I say quickly, panicked at being in a room with the one man I despise above all others.

Stupid. I almost smack my head. How could I have forgotten about Marcus and carelessly left the door open?

"You wouldn't be thinking of running without paying me my money, would you?"

"I'll pay you," I say shakily. "I swear. I'll pay you all of it before the new year."

Marcus takes a step forward, crowding me against the wall. His thick mustache moves when he sneers. "I want my money, now. If you don't have it, then you can pay for it some other way. Your momma would never let me near you, and I've been waiting..."

Rage shoots up my body at the mention of my mother before it is overpowered by despair.

"You are the reason she's dead," I spit out. "I would first die before letting you touch my body."

His eyes turn venomous, and his jaw clenches as he lifts his hand to hit me. I close my eyes and brace myself for the impact, but it never lands.

“I knew you wouldn’t listen,” Ace’s voice filters through my panic-riddled brain, and I look up at him in shock.

“H-how did you know?” I ask him, swamped by shock and relief in equal measure at the sight of him holding Marcus back.

“I placed a tracker on your phone last night, so I’d know where you are at all times,” he says, lifting his arm and punching Marcus, who crumbles to the ground in a heavy heap.

“B-but...”

“Ella.” His eyes are hard as they meet mine. “Grab everything you need from this place because you are never coming back.”

I open my mouth to say something, but the look on his face has me shutting up. I pack up my stuff into a bag, rushing through the small space and into my mother’s old room to take some of her stuff with me. She might have been neglectful for most of my life, but she protected me from dangerous men like Marcus and loved me in her own way. I don’t want her memory to die with this place.

I find Ace alone in the living room when I have everything packed. I look around for Marcus, but I don’t see him anywhere.

“Do you have everything?”

“Yeah, but where did he go?” I ask, looking around.

“You don’t have to worry about that,” Ace says grabbing my hands and lifting them to his lips. “All you need to know is that you’ll never see him again.”

“But where –”

“Do you remember what we talked about that last night we spent together? You told me you couldn’t wait to get out of this place, remember that?”

I nod.

“Then this is your chance, baby,” Ace draws a cigarette lighter from his pocket, and I stare at him, wide-eyed at what he is suggesting.

I look around the place I’ve called home for nineteen years and realize that its mere existence only serves to remind me of my painful past.

With my heart hammering in my chest, I grab the lighter and hold it close to the old, worn window curtain and watch in amazement as it’s quickly engulfed in flames. It doesn’t take long for the fire to spread, and Ace grabs my hand, carrying my bag and dragging me out after him.

He leads me to a car parked just outside the trailer and opens the passenger door for me to climb in before throwing my bag into the back seat.

My face stays glued to the car window as smoke begins to pour from the trailer. My eyes lock on the same window Ace used to sneak into my room so long ago as the fire burns away the bittersweet memory.

“Are you ready to go?” Ace asks from the driver’s seat. My hand seeks his, and I tighten my grip as I watch the trailer

burn.

“Yeah, I’m ready,” I whisper.

“Ella.” Ace waits until I turn to him before speaking. “I love you. It’s just you and me from now on, okay?”

“You promise?”

“I promise.”

Epilogue

Ace

Six years later

I stand in the corner of the room and watch my wife interact with a group of women and their children under the huge Christmas tree.

This is a tradition of hers. Every year, she hosts a Christmas party and invites women going through rehab and their families. Sara's Christmas party, she calls it.

The party is in memory of her mother, and she's hosted it for six straight years, without fail. Each year, the number of attendants only seems to grow. So much so, that this year, she had to rent an entire hall for the event.

I watch her as she stops to speak with all the women and their children, her face lighting up with genuine joy at every interaction. She's been this way the entire night. I've watched her for hours, and her face hasn't dimmed even for a second while interacting with the women.

It's as if the universe gifted her to me to balance us out. She's out here making the world a better place, while I'm still taking contracts.

Not wanting to interrupt her time with the women, I leave the party and head home to wait for her. I have been gone for eight days, but it feels like an eternity, and I can't wait to spend time with my wife.

Ella arrives home two hours later and seems genuinely surprised to see me.

“Ace!” she calls out, a beautiful smile lighting her face. “You’re back.”

Her arms go around my shoulders and pull me flush against her. I drop my face to her neck and take in her sweet, rosy scent, letting it ground me.

“I missed you,” she whispers.

“I missed you too, baby,” I breathe against her skin, my voice filled with love for this woman. One would think that years of being married to her would have mellowed my feelings, but I am still just as hooked on her as I’d been the first time I saw her eighteen years ago.

I hate my old man for many things, but I have to thank him for indirectly bringing Ella into my life. Because of his short affair with her mother, I met my angel.

“I want you,” Ella whispers, her hands palming my hard cock through my sweats. “Christ, it feels like it’s been forever.”

The backs of my knees hit the couch, and I fall drop onto it. Ella climbs into my lap and straddles my legs. She strips off her coat to reveal her red dress, and my cock aches at how sexy it looks on her.

I run a hand up her stomach and then to her back to unzip her dress and pull it down to reveal her naked breasts before rubbing them.

“I’ve been thinking about stripping this dress off of you all night,” I whisper, leaning down to brush my teeth against

her delicate shoulder.

A whine slips out, and her head falls to the side to expose her neck to my exploring lips. She grinds her ass against my erection, and I grunt against her skin.

How can I still want her just as much as I did years ago?

“You were there...God, Ace,” she cries out when I take a nipple into my mouth, suckling gently at the soft bud. “Oh, fuck!”

“I dropped by to check on you,” I whisper before giving the same attention to the other nipple.

“You should have—fuck,” she breathes, her hands going to my sweats. “I need you in me, Ace.”

I groan when she takes my cock into her hands and gets up on her knees. She whimpers when the shaft rubs at her wet hole, her hand going around my neck as she slowly lowers herself onto my shaft.

Fuck!

My groan mixes with her moans as she finally sits on my cock. I grab the back of her neck and pull her forward, taking her lips in a long, wet, needy kiss.

She grinds on my lap, and I gasp against her lips, pleasure building up as I grab onto her ass to help with her movement.

“Fuck, baby,” I grunt. “You feel like heaven.”

Her movements on my lap grow frantic as she rides my cock, switching between rotating her hips and bouncing on me.

“Ace!” she cries out, and I don’t have to guess what she wants, but I want her to say it anyway.

“Tell me, baby,” I whisper, my hands tightening around her.

“I...I want it harder.”

“You want me to take control?” I whisper, biting gently into the soft skin under her ear. “You want me to pound into you, don’t you?”

“Yes, please.”

I quickly shift us so she is lying on her back before kicking off my sweats and kneeling between her legs. I grab a leg and lift it to my shoulder before pounding my cock into her and almost breaking the couch.

Ella cries out, her arms stretching over her head and grabbing the edge of the couch to brace herself for the ride, and I don’t hold back as I drive into her, every stroke, harder and faster than the last. Her tits bounce with every thrust, and her cries fill the room.

“Oh my... Ace,” she wails as I plow into her. Her back arches off the couch as the pleasure builds.

My hungry eyes eat her up, craving her orgasm more than my own.

She doesn’t last long as a final cry tears from her lips, just as her pussy clamps down on me hard enough to trigger a shared orgasm that rips through us both.

I pleasure her through the orgasm, letting go of her leg and dragging her up so she’s in my arms.

I stroke her hair as she nuzzles into my neck while we catch our breath.

“This was my last trip,” I breathe into her ear. “I’m retiring.”

Ella freezes in my arms before pushing back to look into my eyes. “Really?”

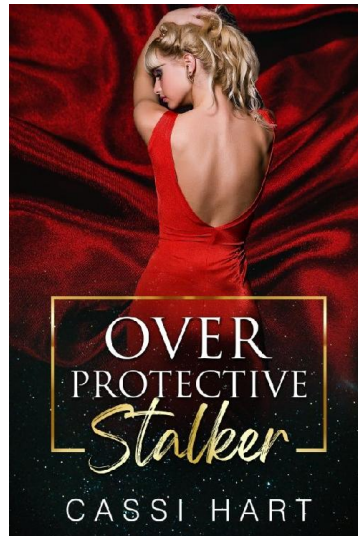
I lean down and kiss her forehead. “Really. We can start a family now, baby, if that’s what you want.”

“Christ, Ace.” Her arms go around me, a sob wracking her body. “I want that so much.”

My arms tighten around her. “Then we’ll have it and so much more.”

~The End

Up Next...



Mia just broke the story of her career, but she's caught the attention of the wrong people. Now, her life is in danger. Before she knows it, dangerous men are after her, and she's fighting for her life. When her mysterious stalker finally steps from the shadows and into the chaos, will he save her or prove to be the an even greater threat?

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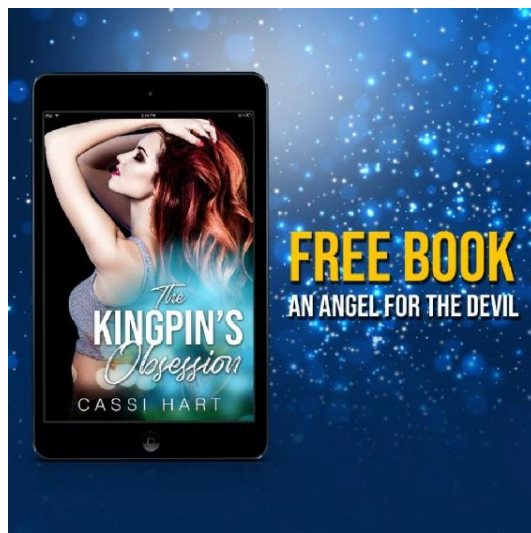
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The Kingpin's Obsession

Alice

I saw something I shouldn't have, and my life is in danger.

The police won't listen, and I have no choice but to seek help at Benedetti's, a bar known for its criminal clientele. But I'm barely inside the door before a dark eyed devil drags me back out and demands to know why I'm there. I shouldn't trust him, but I don't have a choice when he's the only one willing to help me.

Too late, I learn who he really is, and now I'm left to wonder... when this is all over, will he save my life only to break my heart?

About the Author

Cassi lives to write brazen OTT, insta-love, short stories, about possessive alphas and the women they love. Stories that will leave you satisfied, and maybe blushing a little. Cassie loves pedicures, being pampered in any way possible, her darling golden Princess, amazing coffee, and traveling to anywhere warm.



Cassi H♥rt